Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 26, 2023

Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 26, 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 12:30pm ET on July 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces launched a significant mechanized counteroffensive operation in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 26 and appear to have broken through certain pre-prepared Russian defensive positions south of Orikhiv. Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and several prominent milbloggers, claimed that Ukrainian forces launched an intense frontal assault towards Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv) and broke through Russian defensive positions northeast of the settlement.[1] Geolocated footage indicates that Ukrainian forces likely advanced to within 2.5km directly east of Robotyne during the attack before Russian forces employed standard doctrinal elastic defense tactics and pushed Ukrainian troops back somewhat, although not all the way back to their starting positions.[2]

Russian sources provided a wide range of diverging claims as to the scale of both the attack and resulting Ukrainian losses, indicating that the actual results and Ukrainian losses remain unclear. The Russian MoD claimed that up to three battalions engaged in a "massive assault" near Orikhiv, but ISW has not yet observed visual evidence to suggest that such a large number of personnel (a full brigade) were involved in the attack.[3] One prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces used over 80 armored vehicles, and other milbloggers more conservatively claimed that the number was closer to between 30 and 40.[4] Various Russian milbloggers additionally made disparate claims about how many armored vehicles Russian forces destroyed.[5] ISW has also not yet observed a large number of heat anomalies from NASA's FIRMS / VIIRs sensors in this area of the frontline of the sort that have historically accompanied large, mechanized pushes.[6] The disagreement amongst several prominent Russian sources, who have generally tended to offer more mutually consistent claims about the size of and losses resulting from previous Ukrainian attacks, indicates that the situation remains less than clear and that Ukrainian forces may have been more successful than assessed by Russian commentators.

The battlefield geometry around Robotyne, as well as the force composition of the Russian elements defending there, offer important color to speculation surrounding the Ukrainian attack and gains. Geolocated footage from July 27 shows two Ukrainian Bradley infantry fighting vehicles and a T-72 tank either disabled or abandoned about 2.5km due east of Robotyne, which is a point that is about 2.5km south of the current frontline.[7] This geolocated point

is beyond the forward-most pre-prepared Russian defensive fortifications in this area, indicating that Ukrainian forces managed to penetrate and drive through tactically challenging defensive positions. This kind of penetration battle will be one of the most difficult things for Ukrainian forces to accomplish in pursuit of deeper penetrations, as ISW has previously assessed. The defensive lines that run further south of Robotyne are likely less well-manned than these forward-most positions, considering that Russian forces have likely had to commit a significant portion of available forces to man the first line of defensive positions that are north and east of Robotyne.

Ukrainians appear to have rotated fresh forces into this area for the operation whereas Russian forces remain pinned to the line apparently without rotation, relief, or significant reinforcement in this sector. Russian milbloggers and unnamed Pentagon officials additionally noted that the Ukrainian units that participated in the July 26 attack are reserves that belong to older and more established Ukrainian brigades.[8] These reports indicate that Ukraine may now be employing fresh and generally more experienced units in the battle, whereas the same Russian 58th Combined Arms Army elements (particularly the 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division) have been engaged in defensive operations in this very area continually since the beginning of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in early June without relief.[9]The introduction of fresh Ukrainian reserves to the effort, together with the geometry of Russian defensive lines and the likely degraded overall state of Russian forces in this area, may allow Ukraine to begin pursuing more successful advances south of Orikhiv in the coming weeks.

Western and Ukrainian officials suggested that the attacks towards Robotyne mark an inflection in Ukraine's counteroffensive effort. The *New York Times* reported on July 27, citing two anonymous Pentagon officials, that the "main thrust" of the Ukrainian counteroffensive has begun in earnest.[10] The Western officials noted that this is an opportune moment for Ukrainian efforts given recent gradual Ukrainian operations to clear Russian defensive positions, Russian command changes following the dismissal of 58th Combined Arms Army Commander Major General Ivan Popov, and continued Ukrainian artillery strikes against Russian concentration areas in southern Ukraine, which are all elements that are consistent with ISW's assessment on the state of play in southern Ukraine.[11] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also cryptically stated in his nightly address on July 27 that Ukrainian forces "had very good results today" and that he will provide more details at a later date.[12]

Today's actions around Robotyne are likely the start of any "main thrust" Ukrainian forces might be launching, if the US officials are correct, rather than the sum of such a thrust. Even accepting the high estimate of three battalions as the Ukrainian force offered by the Russian MoD, three battalions comprise a single brigade, whereas Ukraine is known still to have in reserve multiple uncommitted brigades readied for the counteroffensive.

Western officials are unhelpfully raising expectations for rapid and dramatic Ukrainian advances that Ukrainian forces are unlikely to be able to meet, as well as offering forecasts of the likely Ukrainian avenues of advance that should probably not have been shared publicly. ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces can make significant gains in their counteroffensive operations, but that such gains are likely to occur over a long period of time and interspersed with lulls and periods of slower and more grinding efforts as the Ukrainians come to successive Russian defensive lines and themselves require relief and rotation.

Russian forces conducted a large-scale missile strike largely aimed at rear areas in Ukraine on the night of July 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched 40 missiles, including three Kalibr cruise missiles and four Kh-47 Kinzhal air-launched ballistic missiles.[13] Ukrainian air defenses shot down at least 36 missiles, including all three Kalibr missiles.[14] It is currently unconfirmed if Ukrainian air defenses shot down the four Kinzhals.[15] The Ukrainian Air Force Command reported that missiles were recorded over Kharkiv, Poltava, Kirovohrad, Vinnytsia, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Ternopil, Lviv, Kyiv, Zhytomyr, and Khmelnytskyi Oblasts.[16] Various Russian sources claimed that the strikes hit the Starokostyantyniv Air Base in Khmelnytski Oblast.[17]

The Russian Black Sea Fleet is increasing military posturing in the Black Sea, likely in an attempt to set conditions to forcibly stop and search civilian vessels and exert increased control in the area. The Ukrainian Military Media Center and UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that Russian forces are preparing vessels on the Black Sea to "enforce a blockade on Ukraine."[18] The Ukrainian Military Media Center reported that the Black Sea Fleet is increasing combat training for its surface forces and naval aviation.[19] The Black Sea Fleet is unlikely to attempt a full blockade of Ukraine despite increased measures against civilian vessels, however. A full Russian blockade of Ukraine in the Black Sea would mean that Russian forces could fire on all vessels attempting to reach Ukraine. Russia is highly unlikely to attempt to enforce such a complete blockade lest it trigger military conflict with Black Sea littoral countries including NATO members Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey that the Kremlin has hitherto worked hard to avoid. Current Russian posturing in the Black Sea more likely suggests that Russia is setting conditions to search civilian and commercial vessels while posturing for a blockade as a means of gaining additional leverage. The UK MoD reported that the Russian corvette "Sergei Kotov" is patrolling the shipping lane between the Bosphorus Strait and Odesa Oblast and that the "Sergei Kotov" corvette may be part of a task group to intercept commercial vessels that Russian forces assess are headed to Ukraine.[20] The Russian MoD claimed on July 20 that Russian forces would consider all vessels en route to Ukraine as potential carriers of military cargo.[21] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on July 24 that the Russian State Security Service (FSB) announced that it searched a foreign cargo ship heading from Turkey to Rostov-on-Don and denied its passage through the Kerch Strait.[22] The FSB claimed that the ship could be delivering explosives to Ukraine because the ship's crew included 12 Ukrainian citizens and announced that it would search other vessels crossing Kerch Strait.[23]

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on July 26 that it authorized another presidential drawdown to provide an additional $400 million of security assistance to Ukraine.[24] The DoD stated that the package will include ammunition for HIMARS, munitions for Patriot air defense systems and National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), and other critical military equipment.[25]

Angry Patriots Club members may be attempting to align their movement to free former Russian officer and prominent ultranationalist milblogger Igor Girkin with outrage at an anti-war sociologist's arrest in order to appeal to a broader audience. Russian opposition news outlet *Meduza* reported on July 26 that Russian authorities arrested Director of the Institute of Globalization and Social Movements (which the Russian Ministry of Justice designated as a foreign agent in 2018) and professor at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences Boris Kagarlitsky on charges of "justifying terrorism" in a post on Telegram about the Ukrainian strike on the Kerch Strait Bridge in October 2022.[26] The Angry Patriots Club

published a Telegram post expressing solidarity with Kagarlitsky and claiming that both Girkin's and Kagarlitsky's arrests were politically motivated.[27] The Angry Patriots acknowledged that Girkin and Kagarlitsky hold different political views but called for the freedom of political prisoners.[28] Girkin's supporters may be attempting to frame Girkin's arrest as a fight against political repression in order to galvanize support for Girkin from beyond the narrow confines created by his ultranationalist ideology and difficult personality. ISW continues to assess that the Angry Patriots Club movement is relatively isolated in the Russian ultranationalist information space, and the Angry Patriots Club may be attempting to make Girkin's arrest more palatable to a general audience in order to increase support for the movement to free him.[29]

Russia continues to find ways to remind Armenia and Azerbaijan that Moscow's military and diplomatic presence in the South Caucasus is necessary. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov met in Moscow for bilateral and trilateral negotiations regarding Nagorno-Karabakh on July 25.[30] Lavrov walked a careful balance between mediator and participant during the trilateral negotiations, signaling Russia's support for various Armenian and Azerbaijani positions while continuing to delay any real discussion of a long-term, effective peace agreement. A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger highlighted that an assistant was caught on a live microphone, likely intentionally, telling Lavrov not to refer to Nagorno Karabakh as the "former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast" because the Azerbaijanis would not appreciate it.[31] The milblogger noted that this was a simple, yet effective manipulation tactic that signaled to Armenia Russia's desire to please Azerbaijan.[32] Lavrov managed to cater to Armenia as well by stating the importance of "direct dialogue between Stepanakert and Baku" and "guaranteeing the rights and security of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh" supporting Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's most recent rhetoric about these issues.[33] It is likely Lavrov also secured Azerbaijan's approval for the Armenian government to send 400 tons of humanitarian aid to the residents of Nagorno Karabakh through Russian peacekeepers during the July 25 trilateral negotiation.[34]

The Russian government may have intended for the Russia-Armenia-Azerbaijan trilateral meeting to reduce possible Iranian efforts to supplant Russian influence with Armenia by providing Shahed drones to Yerevan.[35] Israel-based *i24News* claimed on July 16 that Armenia has used Iranian Shahed drones in several recent clashes with Azerbaijan.[36] The American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project previously assessed that Iran may expand its military support to Armenia in response to Russian "negligence" towards the Caucasus.[37] The trilateral meeting may have been an attempt to reassert Russia's influence over Armenia vis-à-vis Iran, influence that has become particularly fragile following Russia's redeployment of elements of its "peacekeeping force" from Nagorno-Karabakh to Ukraine in March 2023.[38]

A prominent Kremlin-linked milblogger expressed his incredulity that the US has not provided Ukraine F-16 fighters yet and did not assess Russian deterrence or escalation cycle dynamics to be a factor. The milblogger expressed surprise at the West's lack of progress in giving Ukraine F-16s, stating it is "not entirely clear why Washington is dragging its feet."[39] The milblogger laid out at length several hypotheses and potential explanations for the lack of progress in approving the final policy on giving Ukraine F-16s.[40] The milblogger notably did not include the threat of Russian nuclear escalation or other deterrence factors in his list of hypotheses of why Western policymakers have not yet sent the fighters to Ukraine.[41] ISW continues to assess that the risk of nuclear escalation remains extremely low.[42]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces launched a significant mechanized counteroffensive operation in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 26 and appear to have broken through certain pre-prepared Russian defensive positions south of Orikhiv.**
- **Russian sources provided a wide range of diverging claims as to the scale of both the attack and resulting Ukrainian losses, indicating that the actual results and Ukrainian losses remain unclear.**
- **The battlefield geometry around Robotyne, as well as the force composition of the Russian elements defending there, offer important color to speculation surrounding the Ukrainian attack and gains.**
- **Western and Ukrainian officials suggested that the attacks towards Robotyne mark an inflection in Ukraine's counteroffensive effort. Today's actions around Robotyne are likely the start of any "main thrust" Ukrainian forces might be launching, if US officials are correct, rather than the sum of such a thrust.**
- **Russian forces conducted a large-scale missile strike largely aimed at rear areas in Ukraine on the night of July 26.**
- **The Russian Black Sea Fleet is increasing military posturing in the Black Sea, likely in an attempt to set conditions to forcibly stop and search civilian vessels and exert increased control in the area.**
- **The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on July 26 that it authorized another presidential drawdown to provide an additional $400 million of security assistance to Ukraine.**
- **Russia continues to find ways to remind Armenia and Azerbaijan that Moscow's military and diplomatic presence in the South Caucasus is necessary. The Russian government may have intended for the Russia-Armenia-Azerbaijan trilateral meeting to reduce possible Iranian efforts to supplant Russian influence with Armenia by providing Shahed drones to Yerevan.**
- **A prominent Kremlin-linked milblogger expressed his incredulity that the US has not provided Ukraine F-16 fighters yet and did not assess Russian deterrence or escalation cycle dynamics to be a factor.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, in Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, in western Donetsk Oblast, and in western Zaporzhia Oblast on July 26 and have made advances in certain areas.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations along at least three sectors of the front on July 26 and have advanced in certain areas.**
- **Ukrainian military sources reported that Russian forces have begun using Russian-produced Shahed drones against Ukraine.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue to pursue infrastructure projects in occupied areas to facilitate the economic integration of occupied Ukraine into the Russian system.**

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

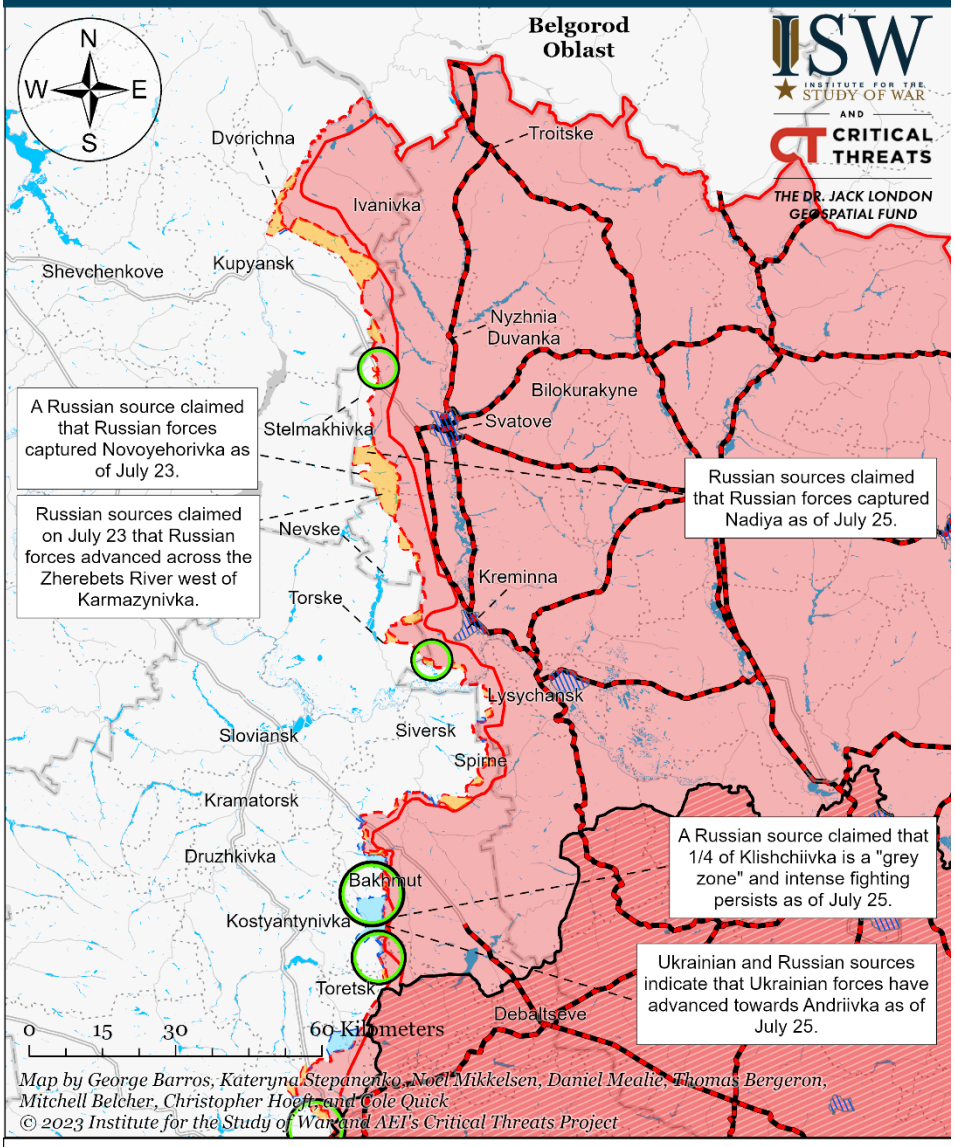
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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 near Svatove and made claimed advances on July 26. Russian sources claimed that elements of the Russian 7th Motorized Rifle Regiment (11th Army Corps, Baltic Fleet) conducted successful offensive operations in the direction of Kuzemivka (13km northwest of Svatove).[43] The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) continued offensive operations near Serhiivka (12km southwest of Svatove) and advanced along a front three kilometers wide to a depth of 2,700 meters in the area.[44] Some Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Nadiia (16km west of Svatove), whereas another milblogger claimed that positional battles continue on the Nadiia-Novoyehorivka (15km southwest of Svatove) line and that there is no confirmation that Russian forces have taken Nadiia.[45] ISW has not observed visual confirmation to suggest that Russian forces have captured Nadiia. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations south of Novoselivske (14km northwest of Svatove).[46]

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Kreminna and made gains on July 26. Geolocated footage posted on July 25 shows that Russian forces advanced south of Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna).[47] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced westward in the Serebryanske forest area (10km southwest of Kreminna) and that Russian forces attacked Ukrainian forces from Shypylivka (9.5km southeast of Kreminna) in the direction of Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).[48] A Russian milblogger claimed that positional battles continue near the Zhuravka Balka gully (northwest of Kreminna) and the Torske ledge (15km west of Kreminna).[49]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 26, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



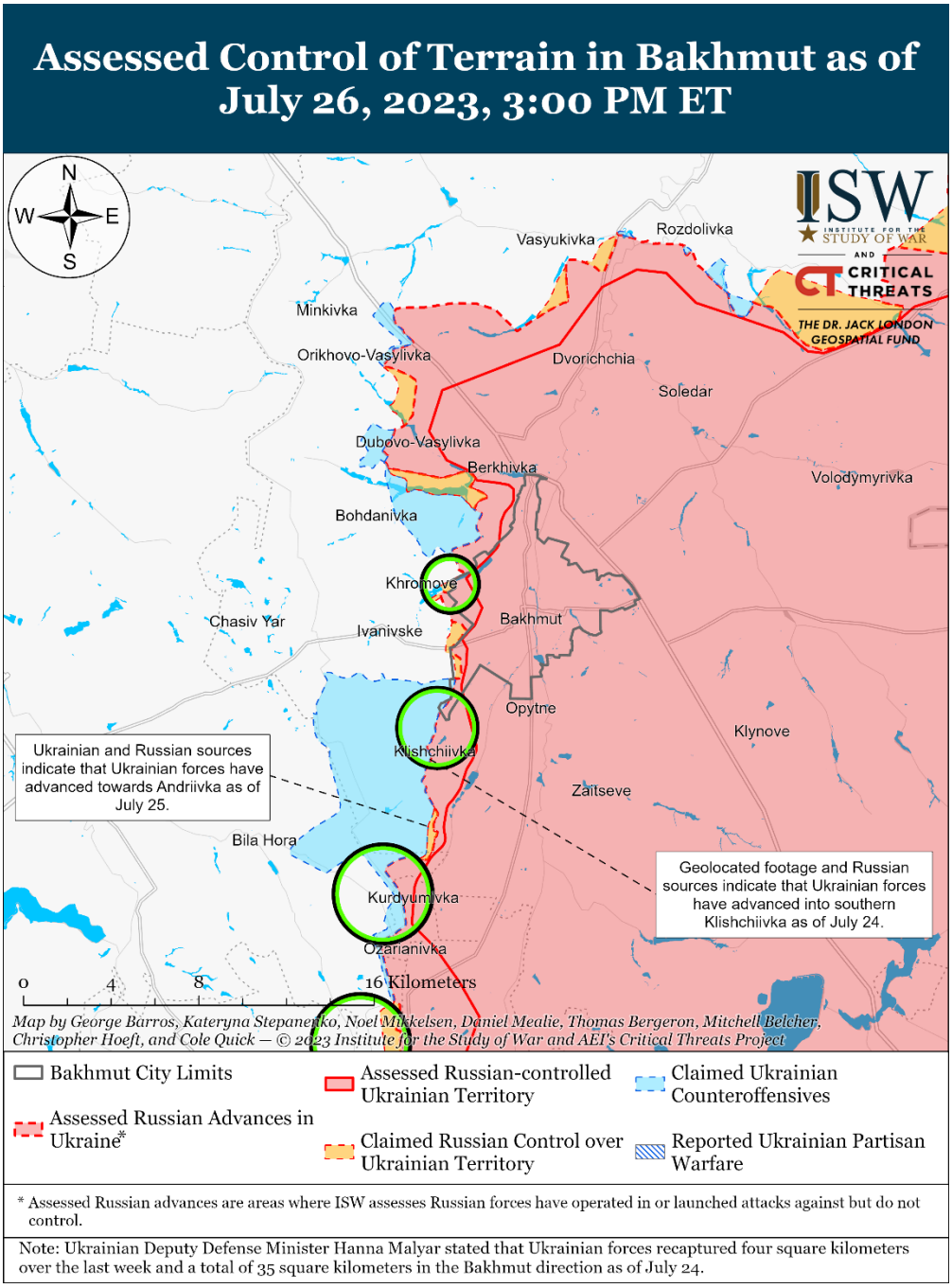
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 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: A Russian source claimed Russian forces advanced along a three kilometer wide front and penetrated 2,700 meter deep into Ukrainian defenses near Serhiivka. Russian sources claimed on July 26 that Russian forces advanced along a eight kilometer deep and seven kilometer wide front on the Svatove-Kreminna line. A Russian source claimed on July 25 that Russian forces expanded their control near Novoyehorivka. Russian sources claimed on July 23 and July 24 that Russian forces captured elevated positions on the right (west) bank of the Zherebets River and established a three and a half kilometer deep and five to seven kilometer wide bridgehead.

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

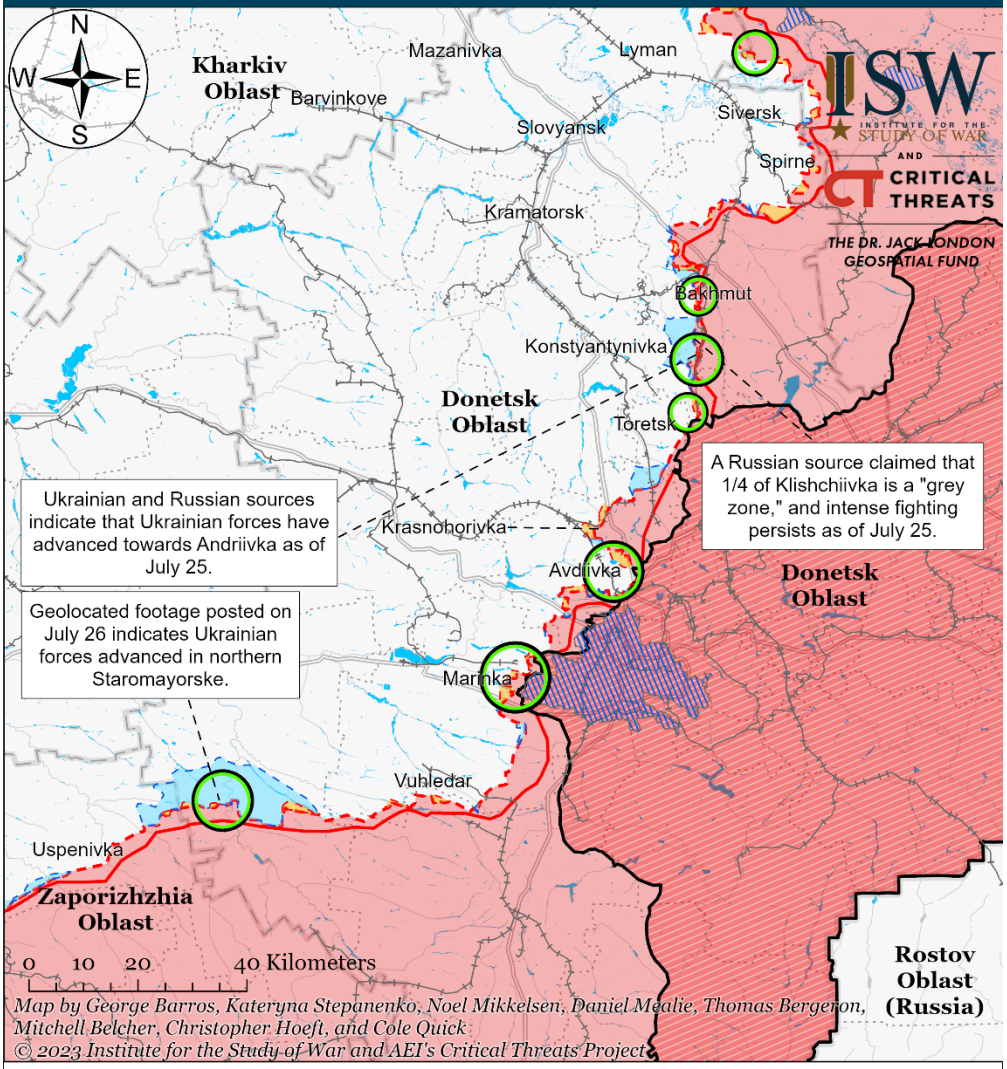
Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations near Bakhmut and did not make any confirmed advances on July 26. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported that Ukrainian forces continue to conduct successful offensive operations on the southern flank of Bakhmut.[50] Malyar and Ukrainian Donetsk Oblast Military Administration Head Pavlo Kyrylenko reported that fighting is ongoing near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).[51] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting is ongoing for the heights west of Klishchiivka, but that Russian forces still control the settlement itself.[52] A Russian milblogger claimed on July 25 that one-quarter of Klishchiivka is contested and that elements of the 83rd Airborne Assault Brigade (VDV), 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps), and Southern Military District artillery units continued to repel Ukrainian attacks near Klishchiivka.[53] The Russian MoD and a Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Bilohorivka (20km northeast of Bakhmut), Berkhivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), and Rozdolivka (18km north of Bakhmut).[54]



Russian forces conducted ground attacks around Bakhmut and did not make any confirmed or claimed advances on July 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks north of Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut), north of Klishchiivka, east of Stupochky (12km southwest of Bakhmut), near Dyliivka (15km southwest of Bakhmut), and east of Druzhba (18km southwest of Bakhmut).[55] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut), Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut), and Klishchiivka.[56] Geolocated footage published on July 26 purportedly shows Ukrainian forces striking an unspecified Chechen infantry unit north of Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).[57] Footage published on July 26 purportedly shows elements of the "Lynx"

(Rys) Special Rapid Response Unit (SOBR) evacuating wounded Russian personnel near Bakhmut and elements of the 58th Separate Spetsnaz Battalion (1st Donetsk People's Republic Army [DNR] Corps) operating in the Bakhmut direction.[58]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 26, 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.

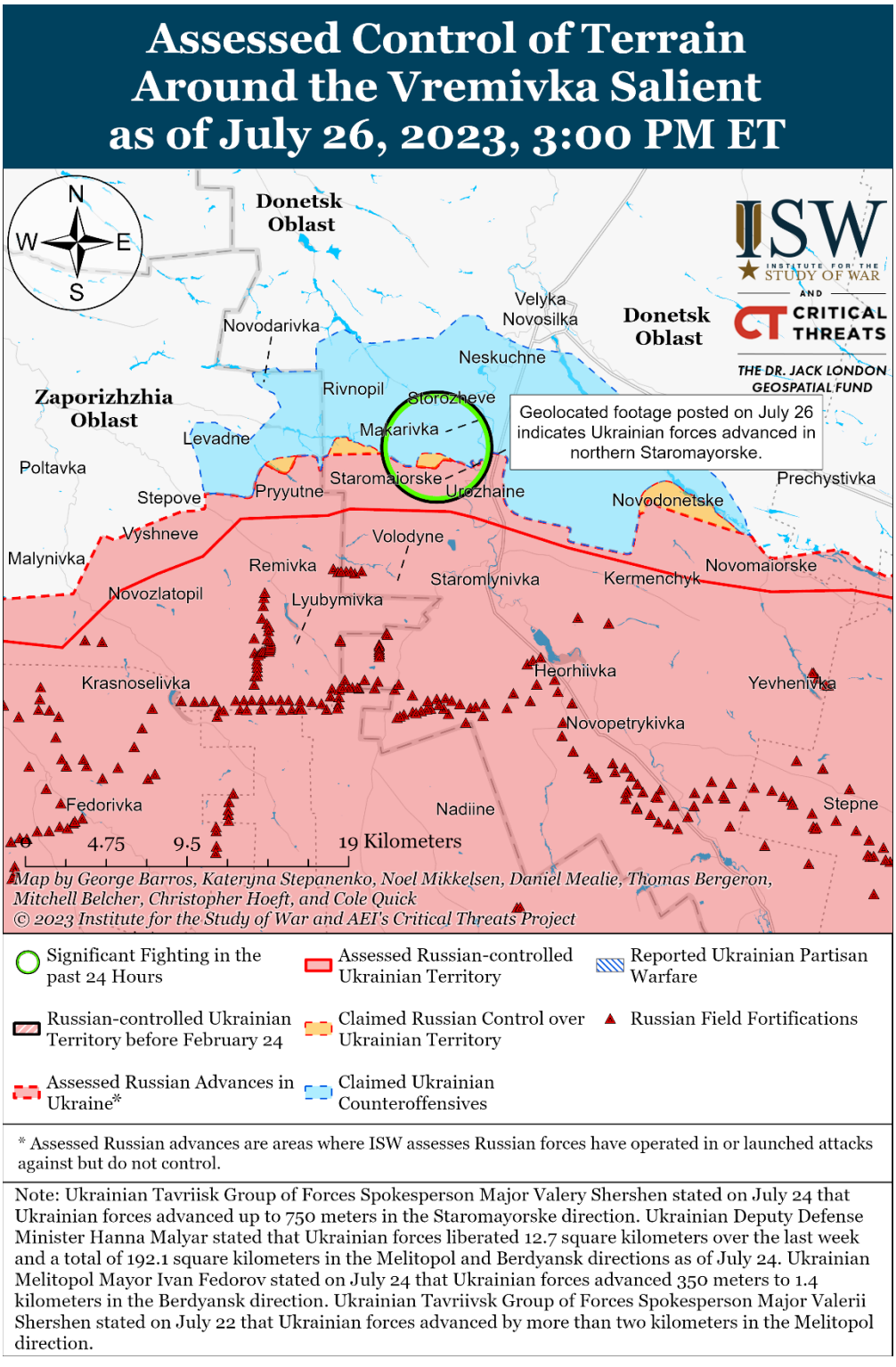
Note: Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valery Shershen stated on July 24 that Ukrainian forces advanced up to 750 meters in the Staromayorske direction. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that Ukrainian forces liberated 12.7 square kilometers over the last week and a total of 192.1 square kilometers in the Melitopol and Berdyansk directions as of July 24. Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated on July 24 that Ukrainian forces advanced 350 meters to 1.4 kilometers in the Berdyansk direction.

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line and did not make confirmed or claimed advances on July 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Avdiivka and Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[59] A Russian milblogger posted footage on July 26 from an unspecified date and claimed that assault units of the 1st DNR Army Corps recently captured a Ukrainian position near Avdiivka.[60]

The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line and that Ukrainian forces did not make any advances on July 26. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka), Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka), and Marinka.[61]

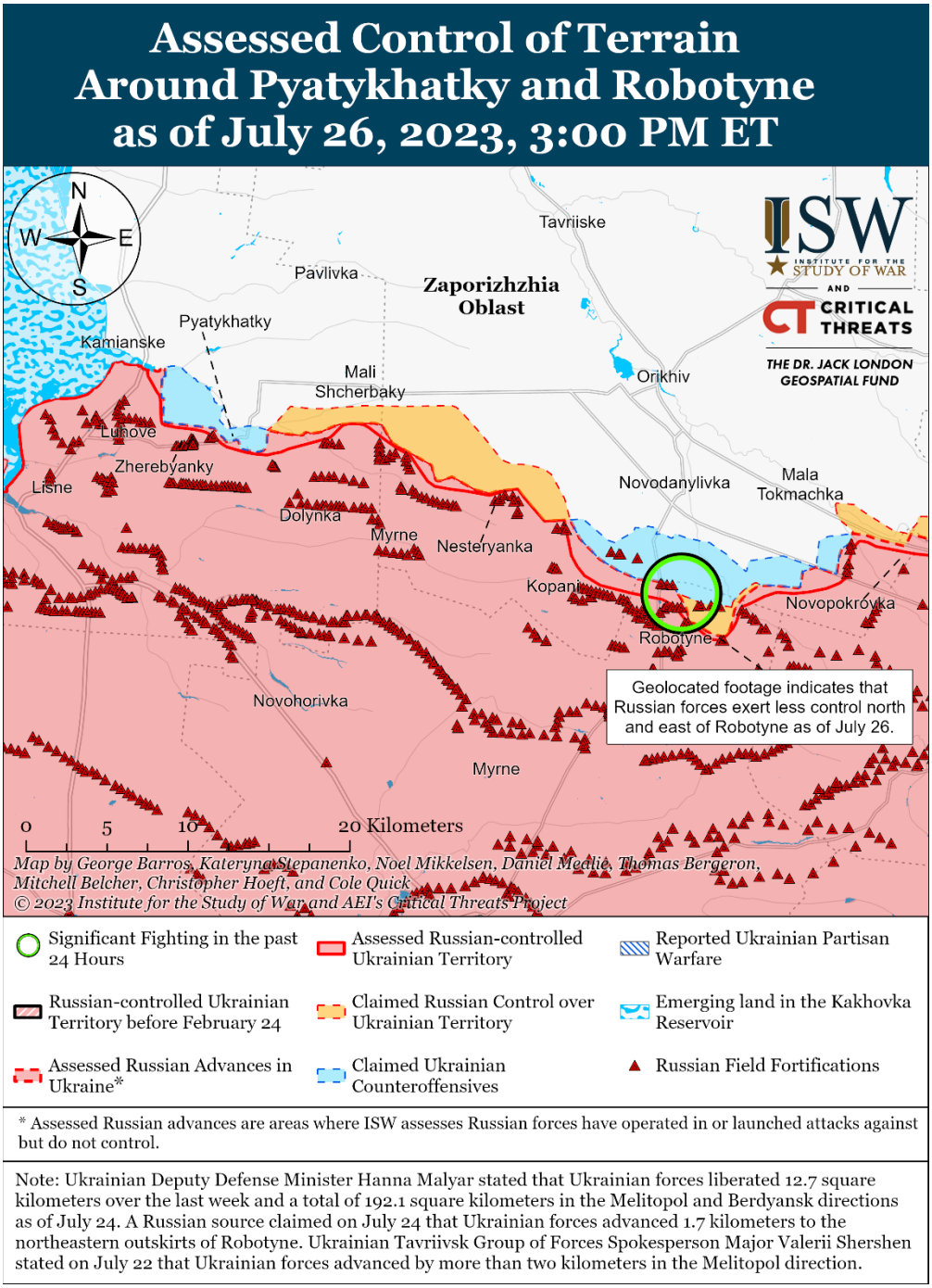
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast on July 26 and have made gains south of Velyka Novosilka. Geolocated footage of Ukrainian forces capturing prisoners from the 247th Guards Air Assault (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) in Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) shows that Ukrainian troops have advanced to the northeastern part of the settlement.[62] Ukrainian military officials confirmed that Ukrainian forces have had success near Staromayorske, and Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen reported that Ukrainian assault units advanced along the frontline near Staromayorske along a front half a kilometer in width and 750 meters in depth.[63] Russian milbloggers also reported that Ukrainian troops conducted assaults toward Staromayorske, but claimed that the situation is complicated and denied reports of Ukrainian advances.[64] The Russian "Vostok Battalion," which is actively committed in western Donetsk Oblast, warned that there is a chance that Ukrainian forces could fully capture Staromayorske and use new positions to threaten to envelop Urozhaine (directly to the east).[65]



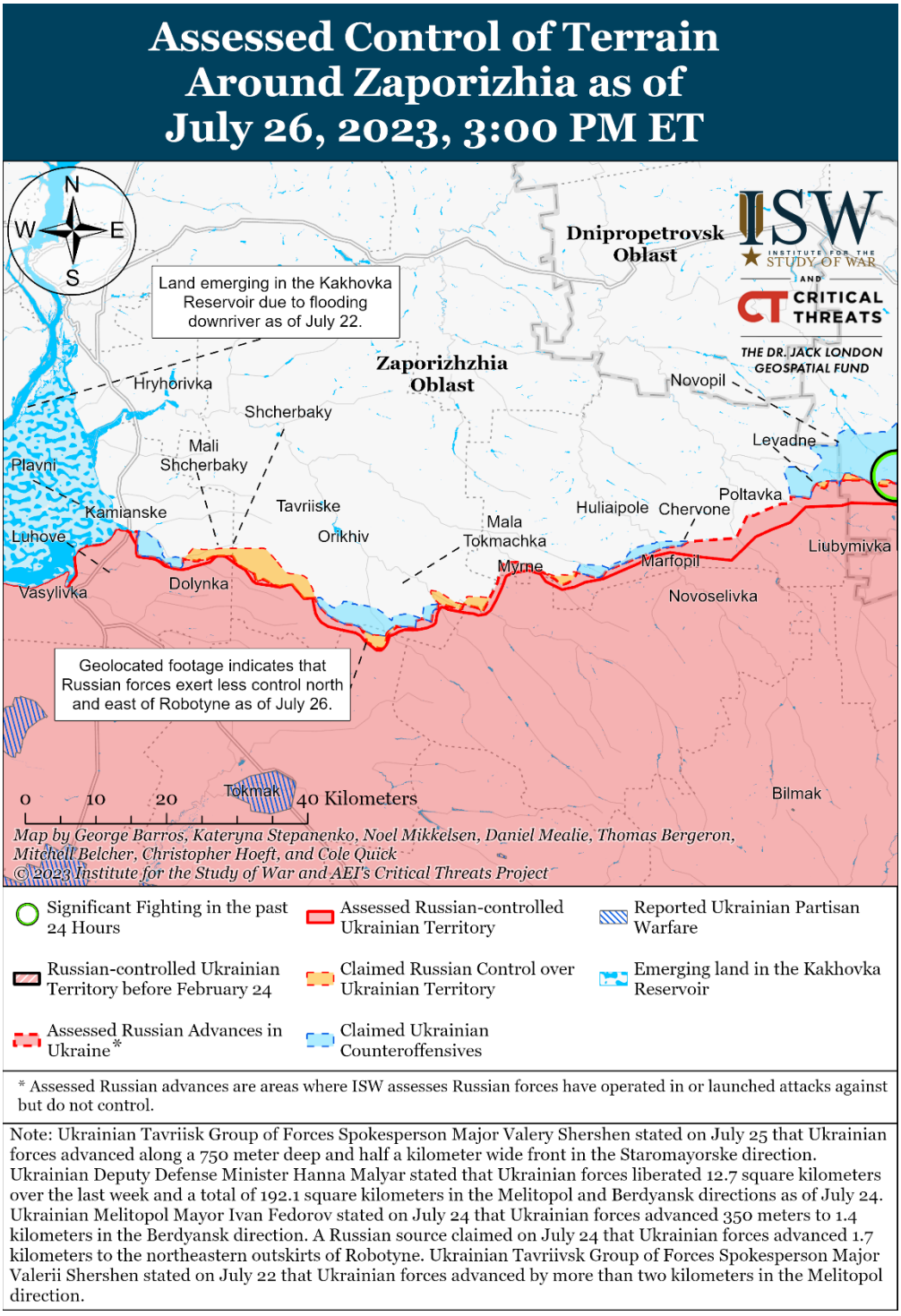
Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks to restore lost positions in western Donetsk Oblast on July 26 but did not make any claimed or confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attempts to regain lost positions near Staromayorske.[66] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces counterattacked towards Rivnopil (10km southwest of

Velyka Novosilka) but failed to advance.[67] Another Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces immediately counterattacked following a Ukrainian attack near Staromayorske and pushed Ukrainian troops back to their original positions.[68]



Ukrainian forces launched a significant mechanized counteroffensive operation in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 26 and advanced south of Orikhiv. The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces launched a "massive attack" with three battalions reinforced with tanks in the Orikhiv direction, and one milblogger claimed that the attack involved over 80 armored vehicles, although ISW cannot

confirm that the attack occurred on this scale, and Russian claims are likely exaggerated.[69] Several Russian milbloggers similarly claimed that Ukrainian forces launched a mechanized attack towards Robotyne that managed to penetrate the Russian defensive lines in multiple areas before elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) and "Osman" Spetsnaz formation repelled the attack and stabilized the situation.[70] Geolocated footage shows that Ukrainian forces have advanced to within about 2.5km northeast of Robotyne, and additional geolocated footage shows abandoned Bradley armored fighting vehicles further south and within 2km due east of Robotyne.[71] Russian sources notably widely disagreed on the size of the Ukrainian attack and the resulting losses, claiming that anywhere between 30 and 80 armored vehicles were used in the attack.[72] The wide discrepancy in Russian claims about the scale of the operation suggests that the results of the attack are still unclear and that the tactical situation on the ground remains very complicated. Russian sources additionally claimed that Ukrainian troops unsuccessfully attempted to advance southwest of Orikhiv near Luhove and that Russian forces continue holding the defense in the Pyatykahtky-Zherebryanky area.[73]



Russian forces conducted limited and unsuccessful ground attacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully tried to restore lost positions northeast of Robotyne.[74]

* 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 and Ukrainian forces continued routine shelling in Kherson Oblast on July 26.[75]

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

Russian Defense Minister General Sergei Shoigu met with North Korean Defense Minister General Kang Sun Nam in Pyongyang, North Korea, on July 26. Shoigu laid flowers at several memorials to the Korean War, Kim Il Sung, and Kim Jong Il in honor of the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War.[76] Shoigu stated that he is convinced his talks with Nam will "help strengthen cooperation between our defense departments."[77]

Ukrainian military sources reported that Russian forces have begun using Russian-produced Shahed drones against Ukraine. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk reported on July 26 that Ukrainian forces found Cyrillic markings on Russian-launched Shahed drones, indicating that Russian forces are already using Russian-produced Shaheds.[78] National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby stated on June 9 that Russia's drone factory in Yelabuga, Republic of Tatarstan, Russia could be operational by early 2024.[79] US intelligence officials warned on July 25 that Russia's drone support will dramatically increase after the completion of the Shahed drone manufacturing facility in Yelabuga.[80] Humenyuk's report indicates that Russia is likely further along in the drone production process than publicly available Western intelligence suggests. Russia's drone strikes against Ukraine have previously been dependent on the number of drones it has been able to procure from Iran.[81] It is unclear at this time how Russia's ability to produce Shahed drones will impact its relationship with Iran or its ability to increase the frequency of Russia's drone strikes against Ukraine.

Russian government officials continue efforts to advertise and incentivize military service while presenting themselves as interested and engaged in the war effort. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin visited the Unified Selection Point in Moscow to speak with servicemen preparing to leave for Ukraine.[82] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Sobyanin stated that 10,000 Muscovites are signed up for contract service with the Russian MoD and that another 20,000 are already fighting in Ukraine.[83] The milblogger claimed that Sobyanin also gave his personal pistol to a soldier being promoted to lieutenant.[84] Sobyanin stated his gratefulness to the "guys" for their choice to serve and for their selfless work.[85]

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 pursue infrastructure projects in occupied areas to facilitate the economic integration of occupied Ukraine into the Russian system. Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik claimed on July 26 that the occupation administration adopted a program for housing and infrastructure restoration in occupied Luhansk Oblast from 2023 through 2030.[86] The program operates under the Russian Federal program for "Comprehensive Development of Housing and Communal Services" for occupied regions.[87] Such infrastructure programs promote the integration of occupied territories in part by generating dependency on Russian structures for development assistance.

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).

The Wagner Group reportedly has a second operational field camp in an unspecified area in western Belarus. A Wagner-affiliated Telegram channel announced that Wagner fighters are deploying to Wagner's "second field camp" in an unspecified area in western Belarus closer to Poland.[88] A Ukrainian government source reported that the Wagner Group has a field camp for approximately 300 Wagner personnel at the Domanovo Training Ground in Ivatsevitsky Raion, Brest Oblast, as of July 22.[89] The Wagner-affiliated source also reported that Wagner's "assembly area" in Russia - presumably the camp in Molkino, Krasnodar Krai - permanently closed on July 26 and that Wagner is preparing to open a new assembly area in Belarus close to Wagner's "point of temporary deployment" in Belarus - presumably the field camp in Tsel.[90] ISW will continue tracking the Wagner Group's growing footprint in Belarus.

The Wagner Group still currently does not pose a significant threat to Ukraine or NATO.[91] Independent Belarusian monitoring organization The Hajun Project reported on July 25 that the 11th Wagner Group vehicle column that deployed to Belarus included six "shchuka" armored vehicles.[92] Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian sources noted that this marks the first time that Wagner deployed any form of armored vehicle to Belarus.[93] The shchuka (also known as the "Wagner wagon") is an anti-mine-protected vehicle built on a modified Ural-4320 truck's chassis.[94] The shchuka is not an armored fighting vehicle and does not provide the significant firepower or maneuver capabilities necessary for mechanized warfare.

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.

---

[1] https://t.me/mod_russia/28630; https://t.me/rybar/50081; https://t.me/bayraktar1070/1442; https://t.me/epoddubny/16864; https://t.me/sashakots/41227

[2] https://twitter.com/TuiteroMartin/status/1684116414733451264?s=20; https://twitter.com/klinger66/status/1684142865335697411?s=20

[3] https://t.me/mod_russia/28630

[4] https://t.me/rybar/50081; https://t.me/dva_majors/22166'; https://t.me/bayraktar1070/1442; https://t.me/wargonzo/14010; https://t.me/wargonzo/14009

[5] https://t.me/rybar/50081; https://t.me/ZA_FROHT/20115; https://t.me/dva_majors/22171; https://t.me/dva_majors/22175; https://t.me/epoddubny/16855; https://t.me/mod_russia/28630

[6] https://twitter.com/georgewbarros/status/1568026781235437570; https://twitter.com/georgewbarros/status/1568218260448940034

[7] https://twitter.com/TuiteroMartin/status/1684116414733451264?s=20; https://twitter.com/klinger66/status/1684142865335697411?s=20

[8] https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/07/26/world/russia-ukraine-news; https://t.me/rybar/50081; https://t.me/rybar/50088

[9] https://isw.pub/UkrWar060823

[10] https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/07/26/world/russia-ukraine-news

[11] https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/07/26/world/russia-ukraine-news?smid=url-share#us-officials-describe-a-3-point-rationale-for-ukraines-new-push; https://isw.pub/UkrWar071823; https://isw.pub/UkrWar071623; https://isw.pub/UkrWar061023;

[12] https://www.president.gov dot ua/news/duzhe-vazhlivo-sho-zuhvalist-ciyeyi-ataki-rosijskih-terorist-84521

[13] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dBmqta4wivoAN3jLbAcwdqX8KQ8tdkVcEBPPDGwPJAAb4w9MQrLFeibT4VVVTDsol

[14] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dBmqta4wivoAN3jLbAcwdqX8KQ8tdkVcEBPPDGwPJAAb4w9MQrLFeibT4VVVTDsol

[15] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dBmqta4wivoAN3jLbAcwdqX8KQ8tdkVcEBPPDGwPJAAb4w9MQrLFeibT4VVVTDsol

[16] https://t.me/kpszsu/3651 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3653 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3663 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3654 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3656 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3657 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3659 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3660 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3661 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3662 ; https://t.me/kpszsu/3655

[17] https://t.me/rybar/50119 ; https://t.me/bbcrussian/50035

[18] https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1684075524396668880?s=20; https://t.me/militarymediacenter/2658; https://armyinform.com dot ua/2023/07/26/rf-gotuye-korabli-ta-aviacziyu-dlya-blokuvannya-rajoniv-chornogo-morya-pislya-vyhodu-iz-zernovoyi-ugody/

[19] https://t.me/militarymediacenter/2658; https://armyinform.com dot ua/2023/07/26/rf-gotuye-korabli-ta-aviacziyu-dlya-blokuvannya-rajoniv-chornogo-morya-pislya-vyhodu-iz-zernovoyi-ugody/

[20] https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1684075524396668880?s=20

[21] https://t.me/mod_russia/28459

[22] https://t.me/astrapress/33300

[23] https://t.me/astrapress/33300

[24] https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3470064/biden-administrationannounces-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/

[25] https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3470064/biden-administration-announces-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/

[26] https://meduza dot io/en/news/2023/07/26/anti-war-sociologist-boris-kagarlitsky-arrested-for-justifying-terrorism-over-post-about-crimean-bridge-explosion; https://t.me/kagarlitsky/1010; https://t.me/severrealii/18742

[27] https://t.me/KRPRus/147

[28] https://t.me/KRPRus/147

[29] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-23-2023; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-22-2023

[30] https://t.me/MID_Russia/30129

[31] https://t.me/rybar/50089

[32] https://t.me/rybar/50089

[33] https://t.me/rybar/50089 ; https://t.me/rybar/50062 ; https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1898433/; https://t.me/MID_Russia/30128 ; https://www.politico dot eu/article/armenia-vow-recognize-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-tensions/

[34] https://t.me/rybar/50087 ; https://ru.armeniasputnik dot am/20230726/erevan-napravlyaet-400-tonn-pomoschi-v-blokadnyy-karabakh-u-mashin-sobralis-posly-63495110.html

[35] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-july-17-2023 ; https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-july-19-2023 ; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-july-24-2023

[36] https://www.i24news dot tv/en/news/analysis-opinion/1689501192-gallant-s-visit-to-azerbaijan-underlines-iranian-threat-to-regional-security ; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-july-17-2023

[37] https://www.tehrantimes dot com/news/486803/Velayati-Stresses-Vigilance-regarding-NATO-Plot-Future-of-Caucasus ; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-july-17-2023

[38] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-16-2023

[39] https://t.me/sashakots/41225

[40] https://t.me/sashakots/41225

[41] https://t.me/sashakots/41225

[42] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-4-2023

[43] https://t.me/mod_russia/28630 ; https://t.me/sashakots/41227

[44] https://t.me/mod_russia/28629

[45] https://t.me/wargonzo/13995 ; https://topwar dot ru/222418-forsirovav-reku-zherebec-vs-rf-osvobodili-sela-novoegorovka-i-nadezhda-v-lnr-i-voshli-v-izjumskij-rajon-harkovskoj-oblasti.html ; https://t.me/rybar/50096

[46] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02aX2DYw52xDgabrwWXgvLU3WxRs2rZxHQaw1AyiVpxiu022SPRM4eJLpVUvrRbnfjl

[47] https://twitter.com/JagdBandera/status/1683928501768933376?s=20 ; https://www.facebook.com/100092260697855/videos/275042221790511

[48] https://t.me/rybar/50096

[49] https://t.me/rybar/50096

[50] https://t.me/annamaliar/962

[51] https://t.me/annamaliar/962; https://nv dot ua/ukr/ukraine/events/andrijivka-zvilnena-vid-okupantiv-kirilenko-zayaviv-pro-seryozne-prosuvannya-zsu-novini-ukrajini-50341689.html

[52] https://t.me/wargonzo/13995; https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonoV/27917; https://t.me/sashakots/41211; https://t.me/dva_majors/22163; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/12357; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/93155;

[53] https://t.me/RVvoenkor/49977; https://t.me/RVvoenkor/49976

[54] https://t.me/mod_russia/28629; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/93160

[55] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02aX2DYw52xDgabrwWXgvLU3WxRs2rZxHQaw1AyiVpxiu022SPRM4eJLpVUvrRbnfjl; https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid08Gk47AifqiRxRvQq2BnxVxrSbDiwpY8trQzyqRSYYkvwQJfMuwU6HJHzNm8QZcKFl

[56] https://t.me/wargonzo/13995

[57] https://t.me/supernova_plus/22338 ; https://twitter.com/markito0171/status/1684134105032847361?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/mon_mon_1064552/status/1684144201666277378?s=20

[58] https://t.me/negumanitarnaya_pomosch_Z/9082; https://t.me/nm_dnr/10715; https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonoV/27942 ; https://t.me/basurin_e/4219

[59] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02aX2DYw52xDgabrwWXgvLU3WxRs2rZxHQaw1AyiVpxiu022SPRM4eJLpVUvrRbnfjl; https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid08Gk47AifqiRxRvQq2BnxVxrSbDiwpY8trQzyqRSYYkvwQJfMuwU6HJHzNm8QZcKFl

[60] https://t.me/RtrDonetsk/19341 ; https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonoV/27943 ; https://t.me/basurin_e/4225

[61] https://t.me/mod_russia/28629

[62] https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1684189696979509248?s=20; https://t.me/AFUStratCom/19150 ; https://twitter.com/auditor_ya/status/1684193250163281920?s=20 ; https://www.facebook.com/3po1k/videos/844403876677113?locale=uk_UA ; https://t.me/ukr_sof/659

[63] https://armyinform.com dot ua/2023/07/25/za-mynulu-dobu-na-tavrijskomu-napryamku-syly-oborony-ukrayiny-vykonaly-1289-vognevyh-zavdan-valerij-shershen/; https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0u6VPCupmX6eytW8PGs9yaMRNQRTGTQnbQVV2P8AkqRJyGgFoUJdTPn5uZ1Qzoqtml; https://t.me/annamaliar/962

[64] https://t.me/wargonzo/13995; https://t.me/rybar/50086; https://t.me/batalyon15/2403

[65] https://t.me/batalyon_vostok/79; https://t.me/batalyon_vostok/80

[66] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02aX2DYw52xDgabrwWXgvLU3WxRs2rZxHQaw1AyiVpxiu022SPRM4eJLpVUvrRbnfjl

[67] https://t.me/wargonzo/13995

[68] https://t.me/rybar/50086

[69] https://t.me/mod_russia/28630; https://t.me/rybar/50081

[70] https://t.me/rybar/50081; https://t.me/rybar/50088; https://t.me/dva_majors/22197; https://t.me/ZA_FROHT/20115; https://t.me/dva_majors/22171; https://t.me/dva_majors/22175; https://t.me/dva_majors/22166; https://t.me/rusich_army/10104; https://t.me/rusich_army/10105; https://t.me/bayraktar1070/1442; https://t.me/epoddubny/16864; https://t.me/sashakots/41227; https://t.me/rusich_army/10105; https://t.me/rusich_army/10107; https://t.me/rusich_army/10109; https://t.me/rusich_army/10103; https://t.me/rusich_army/10102; https://t.me/wargonzo/14010; https://t.me/wargonzo/14009; https://t.me/dva_majors/22201; https://t.me/romanov_92/40714; https://t.me/vrogov/11171; https://t.me/vrogov/11175; https://t.me/batalyon15/2403; https://t.me/anna_news/53341 ; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/93173; https://t.me/RVvoenkor/49990; https://t.me/RVvoenkor/49997;

[71] https://twitter.com/TuiteroMartin/status/1684116414733451264?s=20; https://twitter.com/klinger66/status/1684142865335697411?s=20

[72] https://t.me/wargonzo/14010; https://t.me/wargonzo/14009; https://t.me/rybar/50081

[73] https://t.me/wargonzo/13995; https://t.me/batalyon15/2403; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/93148 ; https://t.me/marzoev_oleg/4402

[74] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0u6VPCupmX6eytW8PGs9yaMRNQRTGTQnbQVV2P8AkqRJyGgFoUJdTPn5uZ1Qzoqtml

[75] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02aX2DYw52xDgabrwWXgvLU3WxRs2rZxHQaw1AyiVpxiu022SPRM4eJLpVUvrRbnfjl; https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid08Gk47AifqiRxRvQq2BnxVxrSbDiwpY8trQzyqRSYYkvwQJfMuwU6HJHzNm8QZcKFl; https://t.me/mod_russia/28630; https://t.me/dva_majors/22163; https://t.me/rybar/50103; https://t.me/khersonskaODA/8363

[76] https://www.interfax dot ru/russia/913347; https://meduza dot io/feature/2023/07/26/severnaya-koreya-privetstvuet-tovarischa-ministra-oborony-rf-sergeya-shoygu

[77] https://t.me/mod_russia/28624

[78] https://armyinform.com dot ua/2023/07/26/narazi-v-chornomu-mori-perebuvayut-15-korabliv-voroga-ale-raketonosiyiv-poky-shho-ne-sposterigayetsya-nataliya-gumenyuk/; https://suspilne dot media/536869-pid-cas-ostannih-atak-okupanti-vze-zapuskali-sahedi-vigotovleni-u-rosii-ok-pivden/

[79] https://apnews.com/article/russia-iran-drone-factory-ukraine-war-dfdfb4602fecb0fe65935cb24c82421a?taid=648332c1137e400001afdb25&utm_campaign=TrueAnthem&utm_medium=AP&utm_source=Twitter

[80] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-25-2023

[81] https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/russia-is-seeking-more-attack-drones-from-iran-after-depleting-stockpile-white-house-says ; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-26-2023

[82] https://t.me/mos_sobyanin/6210

[83] https://t.me/vysokygovorit/12361 ; https://t.me/rusbrief/139873

[84] https://t.me/vysokygovorit/12361

[85] https://t.me/mos_sobyanin/6210?single

[86] https://t.me/glava_lnr_info/1391

[87] https://t.me/glava_lnr_info/1391

[88] https://t.me/prigozhin_2023_tg/2491; https://t.me/prigozhin_2023_tg/2485

[89] https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-22-2023

[90] https://t.me/prigozhin_2023_tg/2485

[91] https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-25-2023

[92] https://t.me/Hajun_BY/7153

[93] https://reform dot by/v-novoj-kolonne-vagnerovcev-zamecheny-broneavtomobili; https://overclockers dot ru/blog/Xmerc/show/100439/v-11-oj-kolonne-chvk-vagner-vpervye-zamechena-voennaya-tehnika-broneavtomobili-schuka; https://www.pravda.com dot ua/rus/news/2023/07/25/7412873/

[94] https://mil.in dot ua/en/news/in-ukraine-armored-vehicle-chekan-of-the-wagner-s-mercenaries-was-neutralized/