

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 8, 2023

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, George Barros, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 8, 2023, 6:30pm 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 8. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 9 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Five hundred days ago Russia launched an unprovoked war of conquest against Ukraine. The Russian military intended to take Kyiv within three days but failed to accomplish any of its intended objectives in Ukraine. Determined and skillful Ukrainian resistance has forced the culmination of multiple Russian offensives including the one aimed at Kyiv and has liberated Sumy and Chernihiv oblasts, as well as the parts of Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Kherson oblasts that Russian forces had temporarily seized. Ukrainian forces have secured and retained the initiative and are conducting counteroffensive operations along most of the frontline with Russian forces focused almost entirely on trying to hold on to the Ukrainian lands they still occupy. With Western assistance, Ukraine has ensured its independence but faces the critical task of liberating the strategically vital territory still under Russian control.

Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on July 8. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 7 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than 1km on the southern flank of Bakhmut, and Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian troops attacked Russian positions southwest and northwest of Bakhmut.[1] Russian sources additionally claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in western Donetsk and western Zaporizhia oblasts.[2] Ukrainian military sources confirmed that Ukrainian forces are continuing offensive operations in the Berdyansk (western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast) and Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) directions and are having partial success in unspecified areas of these directions.[3]

US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl noted on July 7 that current Ukrainian operations across the front are the “beginning of the middle” of the wider counteroffensive and that it is therefore “too early to judge” how the counteroffensive is going.[4] Advisor to the Head of the Ukrainian President's Office Mykhaylo Podolyak also emphasized on July 8 that Ukrainian forces are focusing on the destruction of Russian manpower as part of the first phase of counteroffensive operations and noted that the initial phase of the counteroffensive is focused on shaping the battlefield.[5] ISW continues to assess that the current pace of Ukrainian counteroffensives is reflective of the deliberate and strategic effort to create an

asymmetrical attrition gradient to conserve Ukrainian combat power and attrit Russian manpower and equipment at the cost of slower territorial advances.[6]

The United States announced a new military aid package for Ukraine that includes cluster munitions on July 7. The \$800 billion aid package includes dual-purpose improved conventional munitions (DPICMs), and more ammunition for Patriot air defense systems and HIMARS MLRS systems.[7] US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl stated that the US is providing cluster munitions to Ukraine due to the “urgency of the moment” to equip Ukrainian forces with artillery ammunition to use against Russian military targets during the counteroffensive.

Russian forces conducted another series of Shahed 131/136 drone and missile strikes against Ukraine's industrial and infrastructure facilities overnight from July 7 to 8. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces launched an unspecified number of Shahed drones, of which Ukrainian forces shot down five. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the rest of the drones struck industrial and infrastructure facilities in Dnipropetrovsk and Kirovohrad oblasts.[8] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces also used S-300 ground-to-air missiles against unspecified facilities.[9] A Russian milblogger claimed that some of the Russian drones struck storage facilities in Kryvyi Rih.[10]

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that Ukraine “deserves NATO membership” ahead of the July 11 to 12 NATO summit in a press conference on July 7 in Istanbul with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.[11] Erdogan also noted Turkey’s support for extending the Black Sea grain deal between Ukraine and Russia and stated that he would discuss prisoner-of-war (POW) exchanges with Russian President Vladimir Putin during Putin’s visit to Turkey in August.[12] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on July 8 that there is no confirmed date for the meeting between Putin and Erdogan.[13]

Zelensky returned to Ukraine from Turkey with five Ukrainian commanders involved in the defense of Azovstal Metallurgical Combine in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast whom Ukraine, Russia, and Turkey had previously agreed would remain in Turkey until the end of the war.[14] Peskov claimed that both Ukraine and Turkey violated agreements by returning the five commanders to Ukraine and insinuated that the West forced Turkey into releasing the commanders due to claimed Ukrainian failures in the war.[15] Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian government questioning why Russia would allow POWs to reside in a third country that is not sympathetic to Russia and why the Russian government would exchange defenders of the Azov Metallurgical Combine for former Ukrainian politician and Kremlin ally Viktor Medvedchuk.[16] Erdogan’s statements regarding the Ukrainian bid for NATO membership in addition to the release of Azovstal defenders is a notable shift in the Russia-Turkey relationship, although the depth and permanence of Erdogan’s apparent support for Ukraine are not clear at this time.

Ukrainian intelligence indicated that Russian authorities are capitalizing on the fear of a provocation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) to drive out Ukrainian personnel and increase the Russian presence at the ZNPP ahead of the upcoming NATO summit. Ukraine’s Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Presidential Administration Sergei Kiriyenko and Zaporizhzhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky discussed providing Russian ZNPP personnel with housing seized from Ukrainians who fled occupied Enerhodar. The GUR also noted that Kiriyenko and Balitsky aim to

increase the Russian presence in occupied Enerhodar by 4,500 Russian personnel.[17] The GUR reported that Russian occupation authorities continue to mine various areas of the ZNPP, including technical and machine rooms.[18] The Kremlin may seek to take additional physical control over the ZNPP operations to falsely portray Russia as the only safe operator of the ZNPP and Ukraine as a threat to the security of the plant to discourage Western support for Ukraine at the NATO summit.

A Wagner commander stated that the Wagner Group will go to Belarus after completing rest and recuperation through August 2023. A Russian milblogger published an interview with Wagner Group commander Anton “Lotos” Yelizarov on July 7, who stated that Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin had personally ordered all Wagner personnel in Ukraine to take leave to rest until an unspecified period in early August before the Kremlin may be attempting to ensure that it has control over Wagner leadership and personnel in Africa and the Middle East. The implications of the Wagner armed rebellion for Wagner forces and Prigozhin remain unclear, but Ukraine has already benefited from the rebellion and may gain further benefits. Wagner Group has to undertake “big work” — the move to Belarus.[19] Yelizarov stated that Wagner’s Commanders’ Council needs to rotate Wagner personnel in “distant directions” (presumably meaning Wagner Group forces in Africa and the Middle East) to prepare and organize logistics for its new bases in Belarus. ISW previously reported that the status of the Wagner Group’s reorganization and possible redeployment to Belarus may not be clear until fall 2023.[20]

The status of the deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prigozhin is unclear, and the deal may be in flux. Yelizarov stated that Putin promised that Russian law enforcement would not prosecute the Wagner Group, though it remains unclear why the Kremlin has not either aggressively integrated Wagner forces into the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) or immediately exiled them to Belarus.[21] Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko’s July 6 confirmation that Wagner forces are not in Belarus ran contrary to the public understanding that Wagner fighters should already be signing contracts with the Russian MoD, going home to retirement, or moving to Belarus.[22] Yelizarov’s interview suggests that Wagner fighters and commanders are still able to move about freely within Russia and associate with each other and that Russian authorities are not otherwise interfering with Wagner affairs beyond conducting an information operation to separate the Wagner Group from Prigozhin. The rotation of Wagner’s non-Ukraine expeditionary forces could give Prigozhin access to a cadre of loyal and capable lieutenants, presumably within Russia, if Prigozhin is controlling the rotation. ISW has seen no evidence that Russian authorities are exiling or detaining Wagner commanders or fighters who participated in the rebellion.

Putin continues to allow Wagner and Prigozhin to operate in Russia and potentially pose a threat to his regime. Allowing Prigozhin, his commanders, and as many as 25,000 Wagner fighters who led and participated in the armed rebellion apparent full freedom of movement and communication in Russia shows that Putin has either remarkable (and unwarranted) confidence in their renewed loyalty, desperation to lure as many as possible to his side, or an inability to take action against them.

The Kremlin may be attempting to ensure that it has control over Wagner leadership and personnel in Africa and the Middle East. *Reuters* - citing Syrian security officials, sources based near deployed Russian forces, and regional officials – reported that Syrian and Russian military commanders undertook swift measures to prevent the Wagner armed uprising from spreading among the Wagner forces in Syria.[23] Syrian and Russian officials reportedly cut phone lines, summoned

around a dozen Wagner commanders to the Russian military base at Hmeimim in western Latakia Province, and ordered Wagner forces to sign contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) or leave Syria. A regional military source close to Damascus and two Syrian sources noted that a group of Russian military officers was quickly dispatched to Syria to take charge of Wagner forces after Prigozhin announced the start of the armed rebellion. Three sources indicated that the Russian MoD cut pay for Wagner personnel and noted that dozens of Wagner personnel were flown out to an unspecified location on Russian planes when they refused to sign contracts with the Russian MoD. Syrian officials noted that they expected more Wagner personnel to refuse to sign contracts with the Russian MoD. ISW previously reported on unconfirmed reports that Russian military police detained four Wagner commanders and visited Wagner forces in Syria.[24] The Kremlin's swift action in Syria may indicate that the Kremlin is not confident that Wagner personnel would not pose a security risk to the Russian forces in Syria.

NBC News obtained footage that appears to show more than 600 Wagner forces departing from an airport in Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR).[25] *NBC News* observed that a regional newspaper also reported the departure of hundreds of Wagner personnel on July 6 and noted that it is unclear if these departures are part of a routine rotation of troops or a Kremlin-orchestrated purge of Prigozhin loyalists. A CAR official claimed that there has been no change in Wagner's presence in the country, and senior Wagner representative Dmitry Sytii implied that Wagner forces have not been ordered to return to Russia at this time. It is possible that some Wagner personnel in CAR may be leaving after refusing to sign contracts with the Russian MoD given reports of similar departures of Wagner personnel from Syria.

The implications of the Wagner armed rebellion for Wagner forces and Prigozhin remain unclear, but Ukraine has already benefited from the rebellion and may benefit even further. Putin's handling of the Wagner Group – Russia's most effective fighting force at this time – following the June 24 rebellion will likely keep them from fighting in Ukraine for the duration of the current Ukrainian counteroffensive and may permanently degrade Russia's overall capability to wage war in Ukraine. The Wagner Group's hasty withdrawal from Bakhmut disrupted Russian positions in the area and has facilitated the tactically significant gains that Ukrainian forces have been making around Bakhmut.[26]

A prominent Russian milblogger speculated that the Russian military leadership may be in the process of making the decision to replace Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, suggesting that the implications of the June 24 Wagner Group rebellion may still be having ramifications on the highest echelons of military command. The milblogger claimed on July 7 that several factors suggest that Shoigu may be replaced, specifically citing the fact that Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyashenko met with Vietnamese Deputy Defense Minister Hoang Xuan Tien in Moscow on July 6 instead of Shoigu.[27] The milblogger suggested that it is "unprecedented" for the Russian MoD to not send a representative to such negotiations, which, the milblogger asserts, suggests that the Russian military leadership may be moving to sideline Shoigu.[28] The milblogger noted, however, that it is unlikely that the final decision has been officially made yet due to Shoigu's personal ties with regional leaders and powerful oligarchs, including within the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations.[29] ISW cannot independently confirm rumors of Shoigu's replacement and has, in fact, previously assessed that it is unlikely that Putin will replace Shoigu or Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov soon, and the Russian MoD appears to be actively interested in presenting Shoigu as an effective defense minister

and posted footage of Shoigu visiting Russian contract servicemen at Southern Military District (SMD) training grounds on July 8.[30] Milblogger speculation about Shoigu's fate indicates that the Kremlin will have to continue to balance widespread discontent with Shoigu's and the MoD's leadership and conduct of the war with the desire to avoid seeming to capitulate to Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's demands following Wagner's armed rebellion.

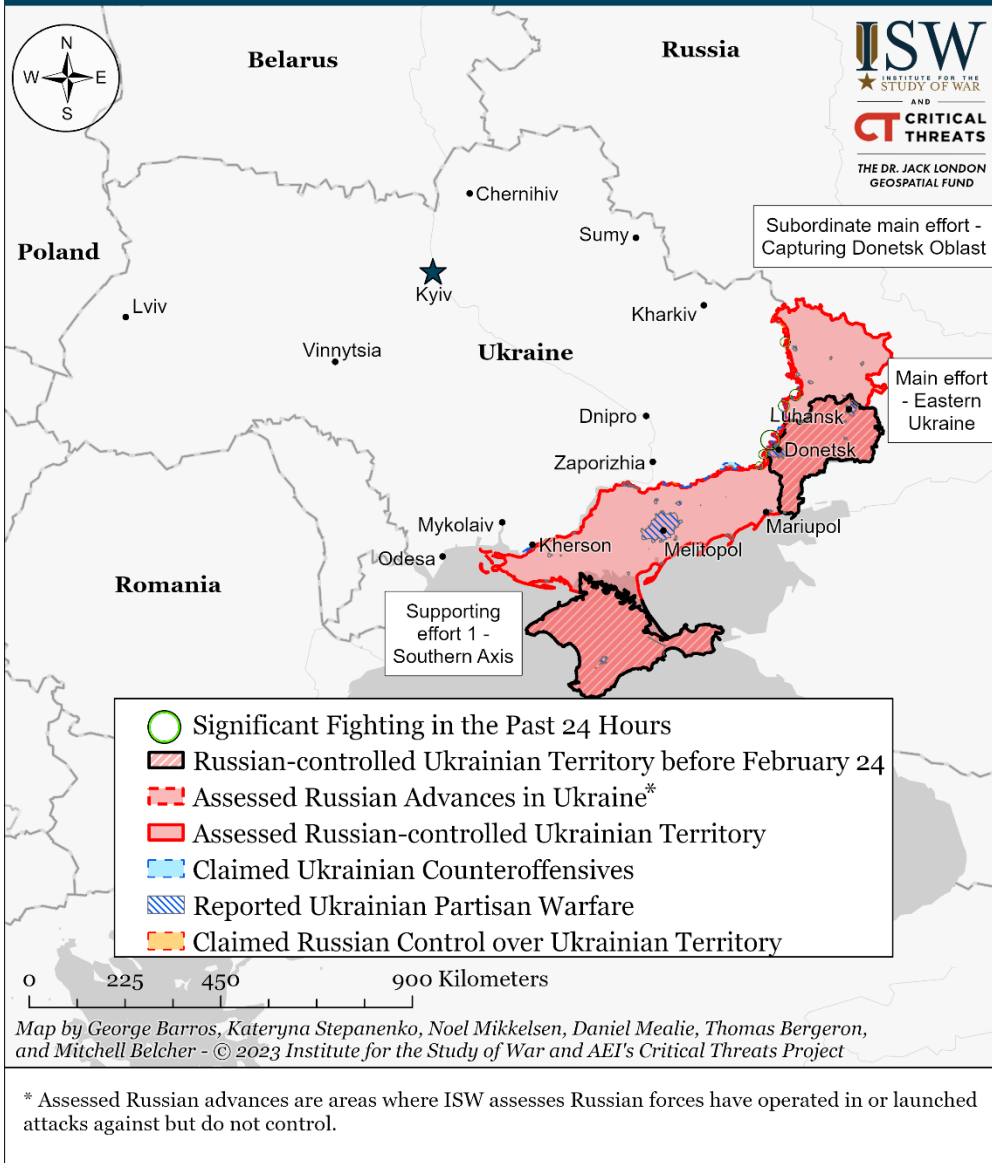
Russian authorities reportedly prevented former Russian officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin from holding a talk about the Wagner Group rebellion. St. Petersburg bookstore Listva claimed on July 8 that St. Petersburg police illegally raided the bookstore to prevent Listva from hosting Girkin's talk on the rebellion and gave the store an official warning for hosting the talk without coordinating the event.[31] Listva claimed that this raid was illegal because Russian law does not require registering events of fewer than 50 people.[32] Listva claimed that St. Petersburg authorities frequently target the bookstore, including arresting an employee for an altercation on July 7 that the bookstore describes as protecting "a Russian man who was threatened by a crowd of Tajik migrants." [33] Girkin briefly condemned the law enforcement action, sarcastically asking whether authorities would criminally charge him for condemning the Wagner rebellion or calling for Russian victory in the war in Ukraine.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- **Five hundred days ago Russia launched an unprovoked war of conquest against Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on July 8. US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl noted on July 7 that current Ukrainian operations across the front are the "beginning of the middle" of the wider counteroffensive and that it is therefore "too early to judge" how the counteroffensive is going.**
- **The United States announced a new military aid package for Ukraine that includes cluster munitions on July 7.**
- **Russian forces conducted another series of Shahed 131/136 drone and missile strikes against Ukraine's industrial and infrastructure facilities overnight from July 7 to 8.**
- **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that Ukraine "deserves NATO membership" ahead of the July 11 to 12 NATO summit in a press conference on July 7 in Istanbul with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Zelensky returned to Ukraine from Turkey with five Ukrainian commanders involved in the defense of Azovstal Metallurgical Combine in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast whom Ukraine, Russia, and Turkey had previously agreed would remain in Turkey until the end of the war.**
- **Ukrainian intelligence indicated that Russian authorities are capitalizing on the fear of a provocation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) to drive out Ukrainian personnel and increase the Russian presence at the ZNPP ahead of the upcoming NATO summit.**
- **A Wagner commander stated that the Wagner Group will go to Belarus after completing rest and recuperation through August 2023. The status of the deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prigozhin is unclear, and the deal may be in flux.**

- **The Kremlin may be attempting to ensure that it has control over Wagner leadership and personnel in Africa and the Middle East.**
- **A prominent Russian milblogger speculated that the Russian military leadership may be in the process of making the decision to replace Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, suggesting that the implications of the June 24 Wagner Group rebellion may still be having ramifications on the highest echelons of military command.**
- **Russian authorities reportedly prevented former Russian officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin from holding a talk about the Wagner Group rebellion.**
- **Russian forces conducted ground attacks along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border and south of Kreminna, and Ukraine likely continues to conduct strikes on Russian concentration areas deep within the rear of occupied Luhansk Oblast.**
- **Ukrainian and Russian forces conducted ground attacks around Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks along the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts on July 8.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reportedly observed combat training of Russian contract servicemen at the Southern Military District (SMD) training grounds on July 8, likely in an attempt to favorably portray Russian formalization efforts and incentivize personnel recruitment.**
- **The Ukrainian government has indicated that Russian occupation authorities struggle to compensate staff in critical industries, resulting in staffing shortages that could hinder the Russian war effort.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

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

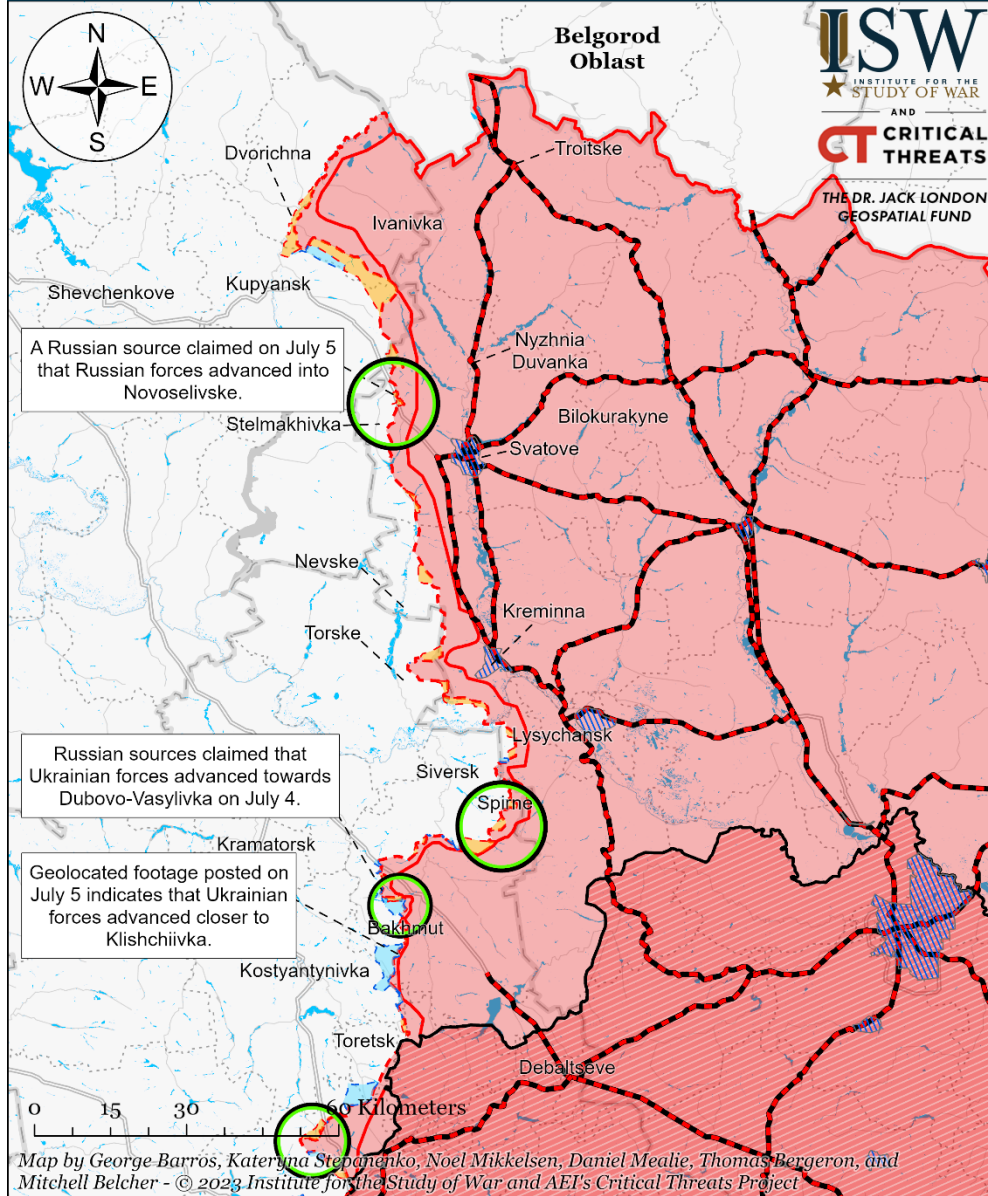
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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

Russian forces conducted ground attacks along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border and south of Kreminna on July 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops tried to advance northwest of Svatove near Berestove (19km northwest), Novoselivske (14km northwest), and Stelmakhivka (15km northwest) and south of Kreminna near Berestove (30km south of Kreminna) and Vesele (32km south of Kreminna).[35] Russian Western Group of Forces spokesperson Sergey Zybinsky claimed that elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army (Western Military District) struck Ukrainian equipment near Pishchane (25km northwest of Svatove).[36] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to cross the Zherebets River between Svatove and Kreminna and attacked from Karmazynivka (12km southwest of Svatove) towards Chereshchyna (20km southwest of Svatove).[37] Russian sources reported that elements of the 285th Guards Artillery Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) and 24th Separate Guards Special Purpose Brigade (Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation [GRU]) are fighting in the Kreminna area.[38] The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Center Group of Forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Torske (15km west of Kreminna).[39] Geolocated footage posted on July 8 shows that Russian forces have additionally made gains near Spirne, 23km due south of Kreminna.[40]

Ukrainian forces likely continue to conduct strikes on Russian concentration areas deep within the rear of occupied Luhansk Oblast. Footage posted by local sources on July 7 shows fires and the aftermath of an explosion near Sorokyne, about 35km southeast of Luhansk City and 130km away from the current frontline.[41] Several sources suggested that Ukrainian forces struck an ammunition depot using Storm Shadow missiles.[42] The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) occupation administration has not yet commented on the strike.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

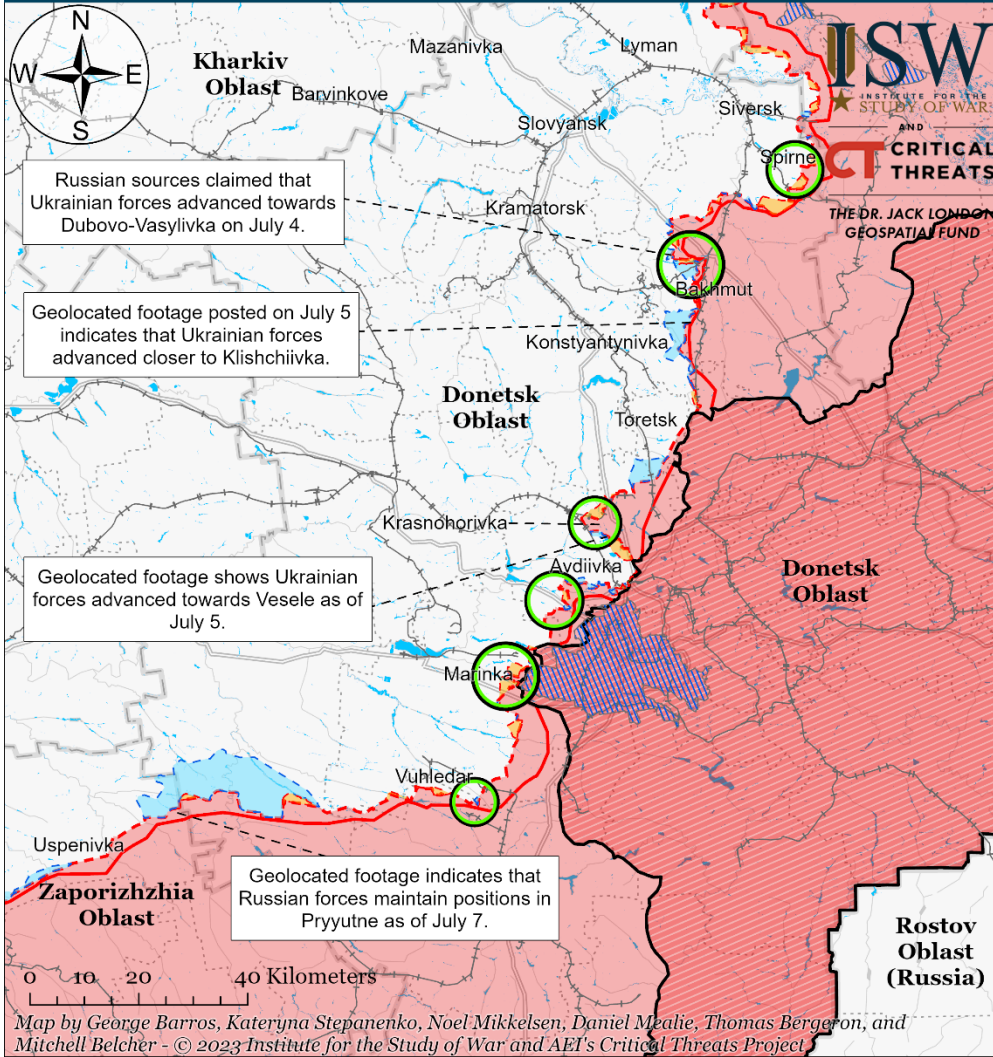
Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 7 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than one kilometer in different areas on the southern flank of Bakhmut. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

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 and Russian forces conducted ground attacks around Bakhmut on July 8. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 7 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than 1km in unspecified areas south of Bakhmut.[43] Malyar noted that battles are ongoing north of Bakhmut without changes to Russian or Ukrainian positions and that Ukrainian forces are making it difficult for Russian forces to move out of Bakhmut itself. ISW has not observed visual confirmation of Russian forces experiencing difficulties moving personnel out of Bakhmut. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Berkhivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut) and Kurdiuvivka (12km southwest of Bakhmut) and that fighting is ongoing for the heights north and west of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[44] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces continue to operate on the western outskirts of Bakhmut City.[45] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Berkhivka.[46] Russian State Duma deputy from the Republic of Sakha Sardana Avksentyeva sent a complaint to Russian Defense Minister Shoigu on July 8 about the treatment of personnel in the 83rd Guards Air Assault Brigade (VDV) who are operating near Klishchiivka.[47] Elements of the 83rd Guards VDV Brigade have likely only been serving in the Bakhmut direction for about two weeks, as ISW reported on June 21 that Russian forces deployed elements of the 83rd Guards VDV Brigade to the Klishchiivka area to replace elements of the 31st Guards VDV Brigade that had suffered heavy losses.[48]

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on July 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Avdiivka, Novokalynove (11km northwest of Avdiivka), Stepove (3km northwest of Avdiivka), Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), Nevelske (13km southwest of Avdiivka), and Marinka (immediately southwest of Donetsk City).[49] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Novomykhailivka (36km southwest of Avdiivka).[50] Prominent Russian milblogger and former Russian officer Igor Girkin characterized the Russian attacks near Avdiivka as “meatgrinder assaults.”[51] Chechen Head Ramzan Kadyrov published footage on July 7 and claimed that Chechen forces, possibly “Akhmat” Spetsnaz units, use loitering munitions to strike Ukrainian underground fortifications in Marinka.[52]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

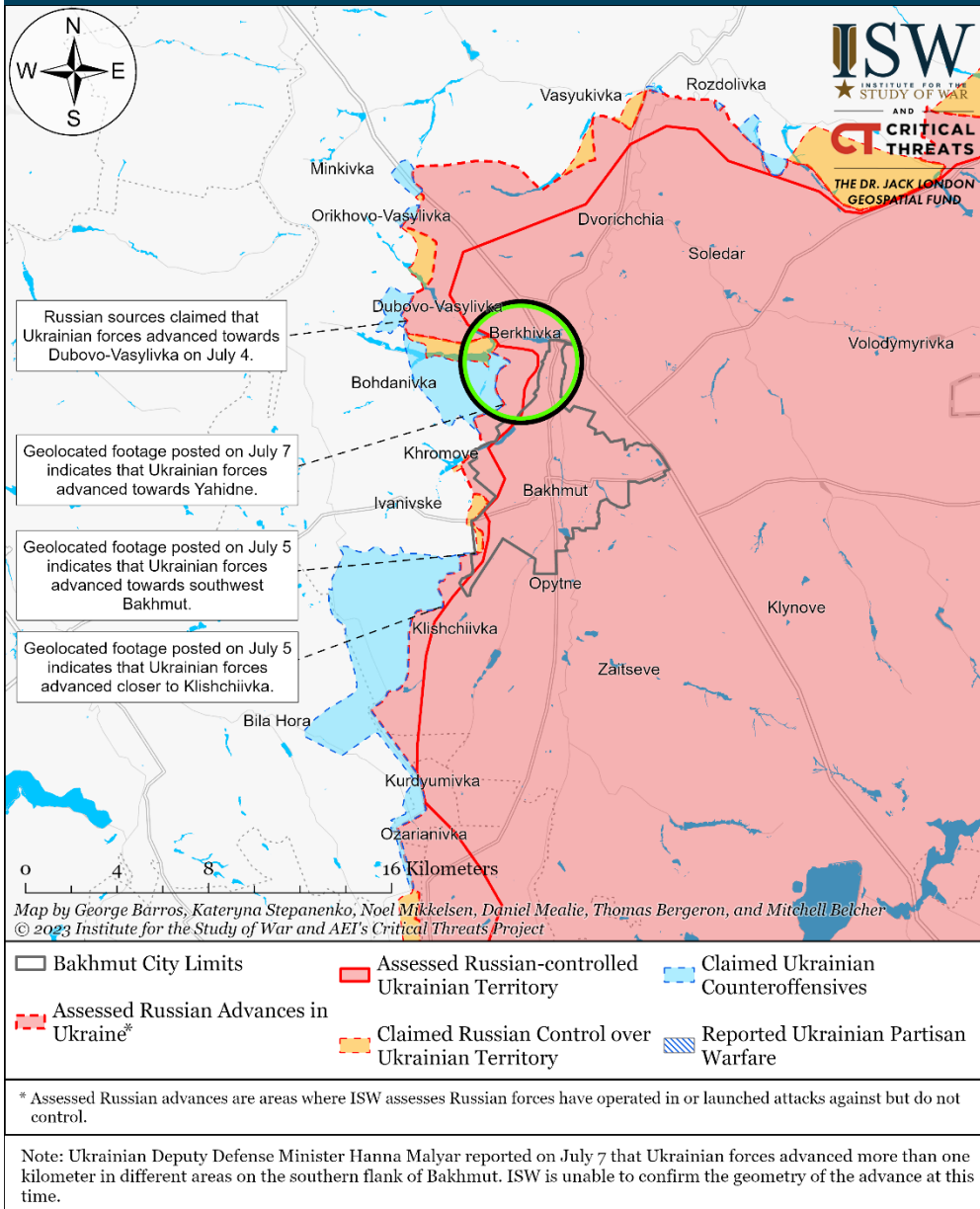


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Ukrainian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

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

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Chief of the Main Operational Department of the General Staff Oleksii Hromov reported on July 5 that Ukrainian forces advanced up to 7.5 kilometers deep in the Melitopol and Berdyansk directions. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of July 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

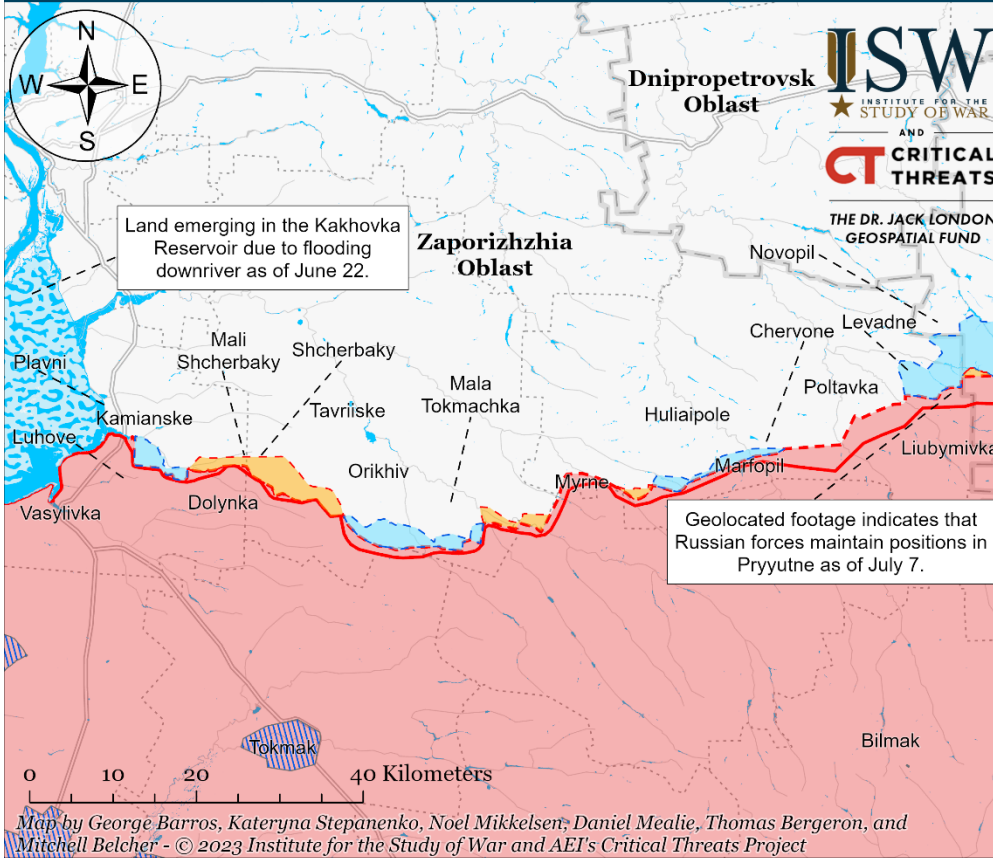
Russian and Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks along the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts on July 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Blahodatne (5km south of Velyka Novosilka).^[53] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Pryyutne (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka), Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka

Novosilka), Rivnopil (8km southwest of Velyka Novosilka), and Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[54] The Russian Ministry MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Eastern Group of Forces repelled a Ukrainian attack and destroyed a Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group near Urozhaine.[55] Russian milbloggers amplified footage claiming to show units of the Russian 305th Artillery Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) repelling a Ukrainian attack and destroying Ukrainian equipment near Novodarivka (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[56]

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 8. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that Ukrainian forces are continuing offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction.[57] Malyar stated that Ukrainian forces are destroying Russian equipment, weapons, and ammunition depots in this direction to significantly reduce Russian capabilities.[58] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valery Shershen stated that Ukrainian forces have achieved partial success and advanced in the Melitopol direction.[59] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from the Pyatykhaty-Zherebyanky area, about 25 km southwest of Orikhiv.[60] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled two Ukrainian reconnaissance units near Marfopil (9km south of Hulyaipole) and Robotyne (12km south of Orikhiv) and stopped a Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group near Dorozhnyanka (6km south of Hulyaipole).[61]

Russian milbloggers continue to contradict the Russian MoD's official narrative regarding the claimed defeat of a Ukrainian presence near the Antonivsky Bridge on July 1. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces still have observation posts or hold other limited positions on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River.[62] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces are working to remove Ukrainian forces from the area and continue to repel Ukrainian attempts to land reinforcements on the east (left) bank.[63] Another milblogger claimed that Russian reporting that Ukrainian forces have been cleared from those positions is a "blurring" of reality.[64]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of July 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

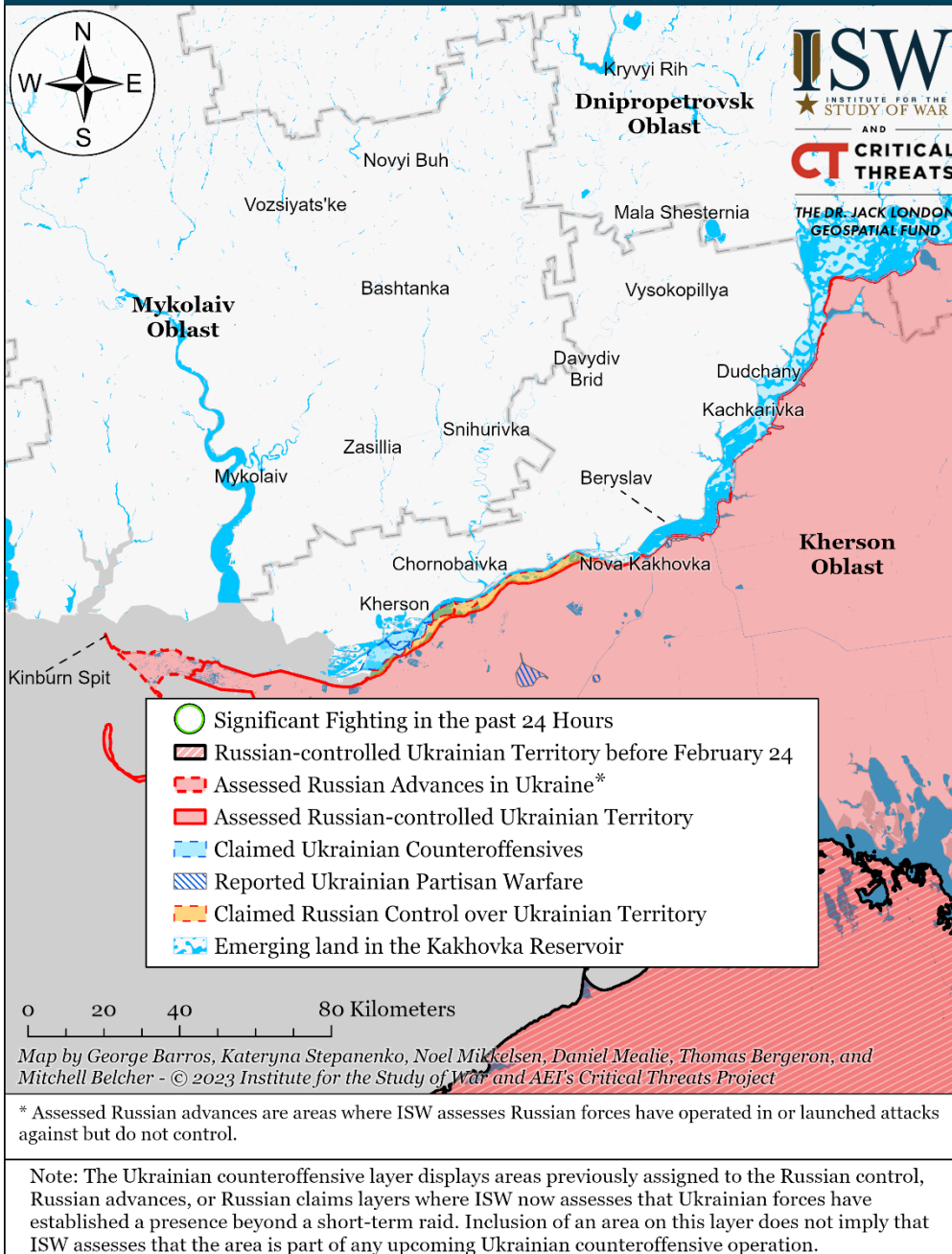


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian 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 Chief of the Main Operational Department of the General Staff Oleksii Hromov reported on July 5 that Ukrainian forces advanced up to 7.5 kilometers deep in the Melitopol and Berdyansk directions. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reportedly observed combat training of Russian contract servicemen at the Southern Military District (SMD) training grounds on July 8, likely in an attempt to

favorably portray Russian formalization efforts and incentivize personnel recruitment.[65] The Russian MoD announced that Head of the Russian Main Combat Training Directorate Colonel General Ivan Buvaltsev reported to Shoigu about the training progress of the new formations, and Shoigu inspected the driving and firing exercises of T-90 tank crews. Russian state media showed Shoigu inspecting a row of Russian tanks.[66] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian contract servicemen are currently undergoing a 38-day intensive training course that trains personnel in urban warfare, combat coordination, and other military skills such as combat driving and special equipment. The servicemen reportedly underwent two weeks of individual training before beginning the 38-day program. The Russian MoD is continuing its efforts to incentivize Russian volunteers to sign military contracts with the Russian Armed Forces, and Shoigu's visit to the SMD training camp was likely an advertisement attempt to facilitate further recruitment.

Elements of the 83rd Guards Air Assault (VDV) Brigade are complaining about a lack of rotations and expressing low morale after being recently committed to Bakhmut's southern flank. Russian State Duma Deputy for the Republic of Sakha, Sardana Avksentyeva, sent a written appeal to Shoigu on July 8 regarding the complaints she received from families of the servicemen serving in the 83rd Guards VDV Brigade.[67] Avksentyeva asked Shoigu to provide information on the provision of holidays and on rotation procedures and asked Shoigu to initiate an inspection into the command of the 83rd Guards VDV Brigade. Avksentyeva's appeal likely indicates that elements of the 83rd Guards VDV Brigade – who are currently fighting and losing ground near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) – have expressed concerns over the lack of personnel rotations to their families. The lack of rotations likely supports other indicators that Russian forces lack operational reserves. The unit's complaint about holidays also indicates low morale as these forces appear to be less concerned with repelling ongoing Ukrainian counterattacks than about returning home.

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)

The Ukrainian government has indicated that Russian occupation authorities struggle to compensate staff in critical industries, resulting in staffing shortages that could hinder the Russian war effort. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities pay poor wages to railway workers in occupied Ukraine, resulting in 1,600 workers leaving the occupation-run Donetsk Railways enterprise in 2022 and 750 so far in 2023.[68] The Resistance Center noted that the new Russian effort to restructure occupied rail companies into the "Railways of Novorossiia" structure will further decrease railway staffing levels. The Ukrainian Resistance Center also reported that poor Russian salaries and reorganization efforts, as well as forcibly mobilizing civilians in occupied territories, have reduced the number of miners in occupied Ukraine by over 50 percent.[69]

Russian occupation authorities continue fostering patronage networks with Russian federal subjects to bolster infrastructure projects. The Kherson Oblast occupation administration reported that Ryazan Oblast is providing building materials to the Kherson Oblast occupation administration.[70] The Kherson Oblast occupation administration also reported that the Republic of Mordovia is leading restoration efforts of the Kalanchak Raion multifunctional center.[71]

Russian occupation authorities continue efforts to repopulate areas of occupied Ukraine with Russians. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* reported that Russian civilians are purchasing land and real estate in occupied Mariupol.^[72]

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

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

See topline text.

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

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