

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 5, 2024

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March 5, 2024, 8:15pm 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 see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

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 cut-off for this product was 1:30 pm ET on March 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Please be advised:** *An expert analyst called our attention to the fact that we have not been using the doctrinal expression "Close Air Support" (CAS) in connection with Russian air operations around Avdiivka accurately. The analyst rightly pointed out that CAS requires close coordination with the maneuvering ground units, which ISW has not observed and does not assess has occurred. We used the expression (incorrectly) because the glide-bomb attacks were clearly meant to shape and support tactical actions, which is one of the purposes of CAS. But Russian air operations around Avdiivka were not properly CAS, and we were mistaken to use that expression. ISW apologizes for this mistake.*

**Ukraine destroyed the Project 22160 *Sergei Kotov* large patrol ship of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) off the coast of the Kerch Strait on the night of March 4-5.**[1] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on March 5 that GUR special unit "Group 13" conducted the attack against the *Sergei Kotov* using Magura V5 naval drones, inflicting severe damage on the port and starboard sides of the ship, killing seven sailors, and wounding six.[2] GUR noted that Russian forces were likely able to evacuate 52 other crew members, but that the loss of the ship cost Russia a total of \$65 million.[3] Ukrainian sources noted that the *Sergei Kotov* had either a Ka-29 or Ka-27 helicopter on board, which Ukrainian forces destroyed along with the ship.[4] A Russian insider source claimed that after the initial naval drone strike, BSF forces tried to tow the ship back to port, but that the damage was so severe that the ship sank five kilometers off the coast of Cape Takil, southeastern Crimea.[5] The *Sergei Kotov* was one of the BSF's newest vessels and only entered service in January 2021.[6] The Ukrainian Amed Forces Center for Strategic Communications (StratCom) reported that Ukrainian forces had disabled about 33 percent of the BSF's warships as of early February 2024, including 24 ships and one submarine.[7]

**Russian milbloggers responded to the sinking of the *Sergei Kotov* by decrying the Russian military command's lack of response to the incident and mounting a wider critique against the bureaucratic inertia of the Russian military apparatus.** Russian milbloggers alleged that this is the fourth Ukrainian attack on the *Sergei Kotov* since Russia's full-scale invasion began and that the crew managed to repel similar Ukrainian attacks in July, August, and September of 2023.[8] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger noted that the *Sergei Kotov* was inadequately equipped to defend itself against such an attack, and many milbloggers questioned why the ship did not have systems to defend against naval drones considering the crew had experienced similar attacks before.[9] One prominent milblogger stated in a post published on March 5 (which has been viewed 1.7 million times as of this writing) that the Russian military command has no response to the sinking of the *Sergei Kotov* because no one likes to tell the truth to the military command and that the military command refuses to learn important lessons from past experiences to improve the military.[10] Another milblogger emphasized that it would be very important for the Russian command to listen to the crew of the *Sergei Kotov* to improve and modernize naval vessels and defensive procedures in the future.[11] Another milblogger responded to this assessment and claimed that the Russian command is extraordinarily unlikely to do so because of an "administrative guillotine" in the Russian military bureaucracy that prevents such learning and innovation, as well as the command's larger cultural proclivity to cover up mistakes instead of addressing them.[12]

The ire expressed by Russian milbloggers towards the Russian military apparatus represents a longstanding source of discontent for pro-war military commentators. Miroslava Reginskaya, the wife of imprisoned ultra-nationalist and former Russian officer Igor Girkin, posted on March 5 an archival letter written by Girkin in 2018 wherein Girkin complained about the incompetence of Russian commanders causing the deaths of Russian soldiers and called for "Stalinist level repressions" against such commanders.[13] Girkin emphasized that all echelons of the Russian command are filled with such "scum" that contribute to "thousands of large and small disasters, based on incompetence, stupid immense greed, and disregard for people." Girkin's 2018 critique about the inability and lack of willingness of the Russian command to address its mistakes, internalize lessons learned, and disseminate them across the Russian military remains a central component of Russian information space critiques against the Russian military machine nearly six years later in 2024.

**Russian aircraft appear to be continuing to conduct a relatively high volume of glide bomb strikes in Ukraine despite Ukrainian officials' reports that Ukrainian forces have downed several bomber aircraft in recent weeks.** *Forbes* reported on March 4 that Russian Su-34 aircraft, escorted by Su-35 aircraft, are conducting one hundred or more sorties per day to conduct glide bomb strikes on Ukrainian positions at a range of 25 miles (about 40 kilometers).[14] The *New York Times* reported on March 5 that Russian tactics are shifting to intensify operations in the air domain and that Russian forces' "more aggressive" air support on the front lines has helped Russian forces to advance recently in eastern Ukraine.[15] These reports suggest that the Russian Air Force is maintaining a high tempo of fixed-wing air missions in Ukraine and is possibly willing to tolerate risks to fixed-wing aircraft, likely because the Russian command may have decided that the positive effects generated by such air operations outweigh the costs associated with flying such missions. Russian forces used glide bomb strikes to tactical effect in their seizure of Avdiivka in mid-February and are likely attempting to replicate such effects to support

ongoing offensive operations elsewhere on the front. ISW cannot independently verify Ukrainian reports of the shootdowns of several Su-34 aircraft in recent weeks.

*Forbes* also reported that Ukrainian forces are using French-provided AASM Hammer glide bombs after France started supplying Ukraine with 50 of these bombs per month in January 2024.[16] *Forbes* noted that Ukrainian forces previously conducted strikes with US-provided Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) glide bombs, but the supply of these bombs has halted due to the recent lack of US aid provisions to Ukraine.

**Russia and China are deepening their strategic space cooperation, including cooperation on satellite surveillance and space exploration.** Russian space agency Roscosmos Head Yuri Borisov stated on March 5 that Russia and China are considering delivering and constructing a nuclear power plant on the moon in 2032-2035.[17] Though Borisov's proposal to create a nuclear power plant on the moon is odd, Borisov's statement is indicative of warming relations and Chinese willingness to foster a long-term strategic partnership with Russia to posture against and possibly threaten the West. The Russian government approved a Russian-Chinese cooperation agreement on space cooperation through 2027 in November 2023 that Roscosmos and the Chinese National Space Administration (CNSA) initially signed in November 2022.[18] The agreement outlines three phases to develop and build the International Scientific Lunar Station and jointly explore the moon's surface. Roscosmos and CNSA also signed an agreement in September 2022 on the joint placement of Russian GLONASS and Chinese BeiDou satellite navigation system stations in six Russian and Chinese cities.[19] Russia is reportedly developing a space-based anti-satellite weapon, and a strategic space partnership with China suggests that Russia would be unlikely to use this or similar technology against China and that both states would mutually benefit from Russia's posturing against the West through space and satellite technology.[20]

**The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for two senior Russian commanders for their responsibility in perpetrating Russian war crimes – the first time the ICC has charged Russian military commanders.** The ICC issued arrest warrants on March 5 for Lieutenant General Sergei Kobylash, the commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces' Long-Range Aviation, and Admiral Viktor Sokolov, the former commander of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF), for their role in the war crimes of directing attacks at civilian objects and causing excessive or incidental harm to civilians or damage to civilian objects and the crime against humanity of inhumane acts under the Rome Statute between at least October 10, 2022, to at least March 9, 2023.[21] The ICC last issued arrest warrants for Russian officials' involvement in war crimes in Ukraine in March 2022 against Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kremlin-appointed Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova for the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.[22]

**Russian forces are reportedly operating a "black market" to sell Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs), including to Russian paramilitary groups that may be conducting their own POW exchanges with Ukraine.** British outlet *The Times*, citing Ukrainian Spokesperson for the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs Petro Yatsenko and a Ukrainian POW, reported on March 4 that Chechen paramilitary groups are buying Ukrainian POWs from other Russian military units on a black market for trafficking POWs.[23] The Chechen units are reportedly then using the Ukrainian POWs in exchange for Chechen POWs held by Ukrainian forces. *The Times* stated that Chechen units are likely turning to the black market because Chechen units are currently largely acting in policing or logistics roles in rear areas of Ukraine where there are fewer

opportunities to capture Ukrainian POWs and exchange them for Chechen POWs. *The Times* stated that although there are no articles in the Geneva Convention that explicitly prohibit the POW trades, this practice is likely in violation of the clause that “no special agreement shall adversely affect the situation of prisoners of war.” Reports of Chechen units apparently conducting their own POW exchanges with Ukraine suggest that some paramilitary units within the Russian military, like the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz units, are likely not included in wider, higher-level Russian-Ukrainian POW exchanges. Russian milbloggers have repeatedly criticized Chechen forces for their incompetence and lack of involvement in Ukraine, and Chechen forces have been relegated to rear areas or less active sectors of the front after participating in major Russian offensive operations in 2022.[24]

**The director of the Moldovan Intelligence and Security Service, Alexandru Musteata, stated on March 5 that the Kremlin has begun to conduct multi-year hybrid operations aimed at destabilizing Moldova and preventing its accession to the European Union (EU).** Musteata stated that the Kremlin is conducting an “unprecedented level” of hybrid operations aimed at preventing Moldova from joining the EU and keeping Moldova in Russia’s sphere of influence.[25] Musteata stated that the first stage of Russian hybrid operations began with attempts to compromise local elections in 2023 and that Russia intends to also interfere in Moldova’s upcoming presidential election in late 2024 and parliamentary elections in the summer of 2025. Musteata stated that pro-Kremlin Moldovan politicians with ties to the Kremlin, either directly or through Russian and Moldovan organized crime groups, will try to promote pro-Russia policies in the Moldovan Parliament. Musteata warned that Russia plans to provoke protests and incite inter-ethnic conflict and economic and social crises in Moldova, including in the pro-Russian autonomous region of Gagauzia and the pro-Russian breakaway republic of Transnistria. Musteata stated that Moldovan authorities have already observed an increase in the use of social media platforms to spread anti-EU sentiment. ISW previously warned that the Kremlin could intensify hybrid operations aimed at destabilizing and further polarizing Moldova ahead of Moldova-EU accession negotiations and the 2024 presidential election or a suite of other courses of action against Moldova that are not mutually exclusive with hybrid actions.[26]

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Ukraine destroyed the Project 22160 *Sergei Kotov* large patrol ship of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) off the coast of the Kerch Strait on the night of March 4-5.**
- **Russian milbloggers responded to the sinking of the *Sergei Kotov* by decrying the Russian military command’s lack of response to the incident and mounting a wider critique against the bureaucratic inertia of the Russian military apparatus.**
- **Russian aircraft appear to be continuing to conduct a relatively high volume of glide bomb strikes in Ukraine despite Ukrainian officials’ reports that Ukrainian forces have downed several bomber aircraft in recent weeks.**
- **Russia and China are deepening their strategic space cooperation, including cooperation on satellite surveillance and space exploration.**
- **The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for two senior Russian commanders for their responsibility in perpetrating Russian war crimes – the first time the ICC has charged Russian military commanders.**

- **Russian forces are reportedly operating a “black market” to sell Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs), including to Russian paramilitary groups that may be conducting their own POW exchanges with Ukraine.**
- **The director of the Moldovan Intelligence and Security Service, Alexandru Musteata, stated on March 5 that the Kremlin has begun to conduct multi-year hybrid operations aimed at destabilizing Moldova and preventing its accession to the EU.**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Donetsk City amid continued positional engagements along the entire line of contact on March 5.**
- **Russian authorities are reportedly disbanding elements of the former Wagner Group that were supposed to join Rosgvardia or are currently in Belarus.**
- **Russian law enforcement is likely intensifying crackdowns against Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 5, 2024, 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.

***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 Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.***

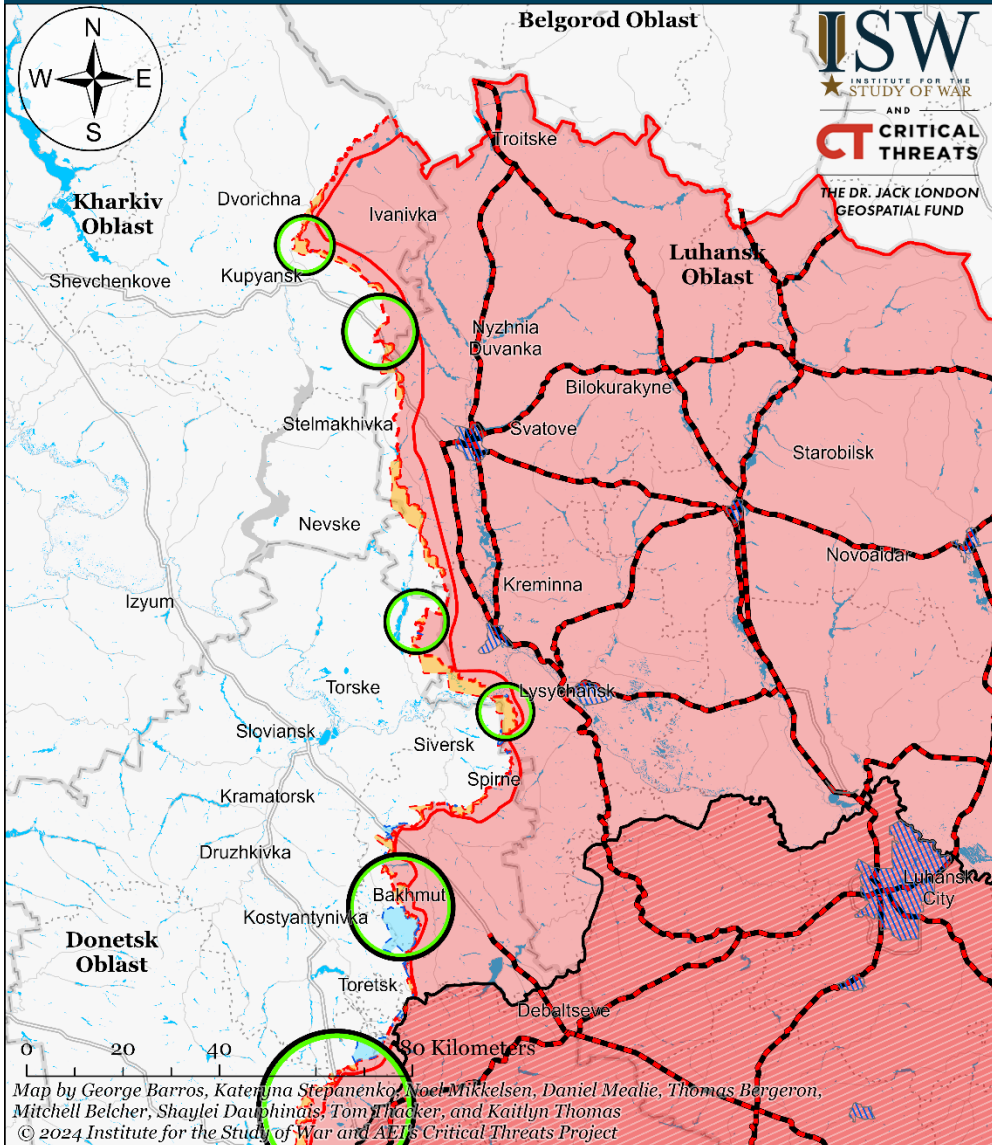
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

### **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)**

Positional fighting continued on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 5, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Positional fighting continued near northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Tabaivka; west of Kreminna near Terny and Yampolivka; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.[27] Elements of the Russian 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] Army Corps) continue to operate near Bilohorivka.[28]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of March 5, 2024, 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.

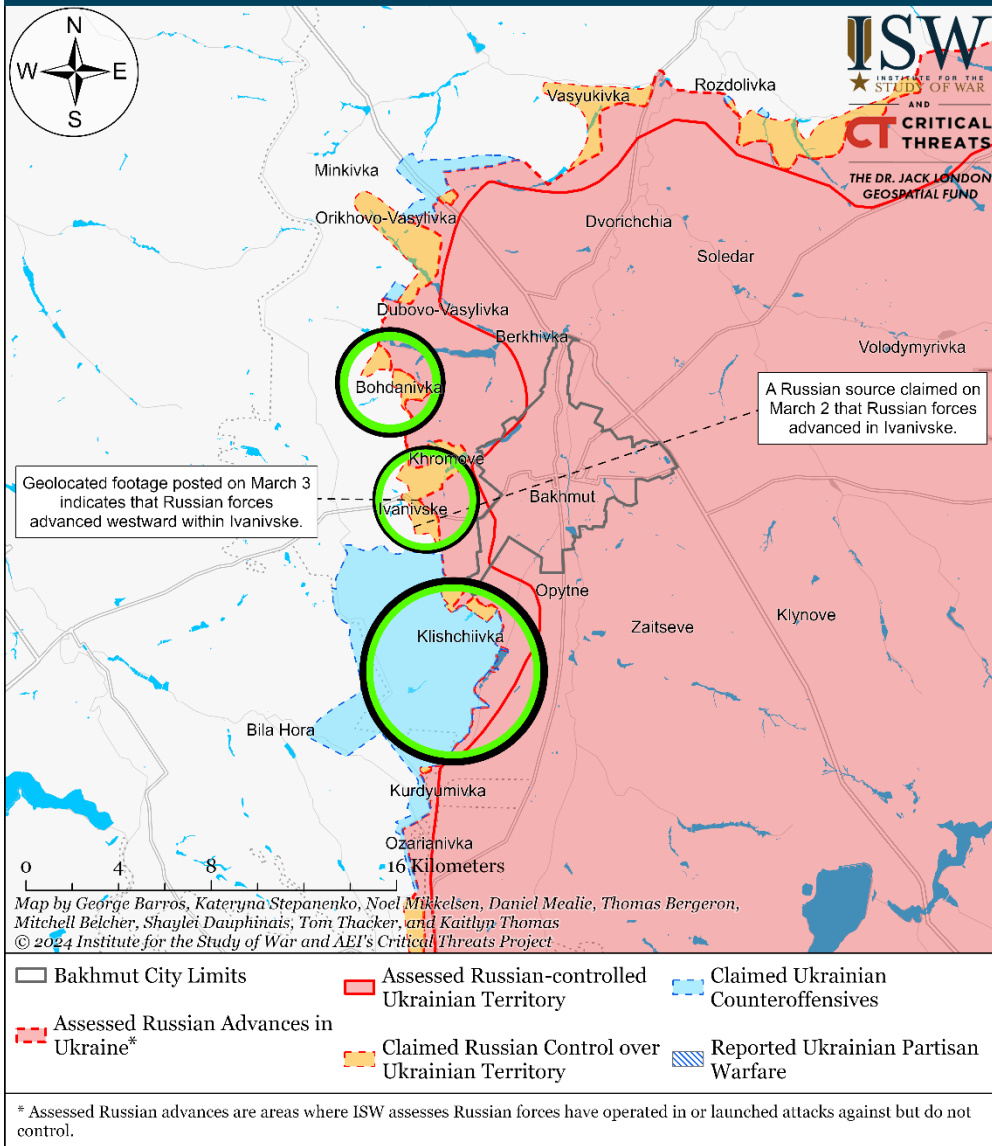
Note: A Russian source claimed on March 3 that Russian forces advanced 200 meters north of Synkivka.

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



Positional engagements continued northwest, west, and southwest of Bakhmut on March 5. Positional engagements occurred northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Andriivka, Klishchiivka, Bila Hora, Pivnichne, and Shumy.[29] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces continued to clear positions in eastern Ivanivske and attempted to drive Ukrainian forces out of their positions within the settlement.[30] The Russian 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division claimed that the Russian Air Force is striking Ukrainian positions on the outskirts of Chasiv Yar (west of Bakhmut) with FAB-500 glide bombs and S-8 and S-13 unguided rockets.[31] Elements of the Russian 11th Separate Guards VDV Brigade and Spetsnaz elements of the 3rd Army Corps are reportedly operating in the Bakhmut direction.[32]

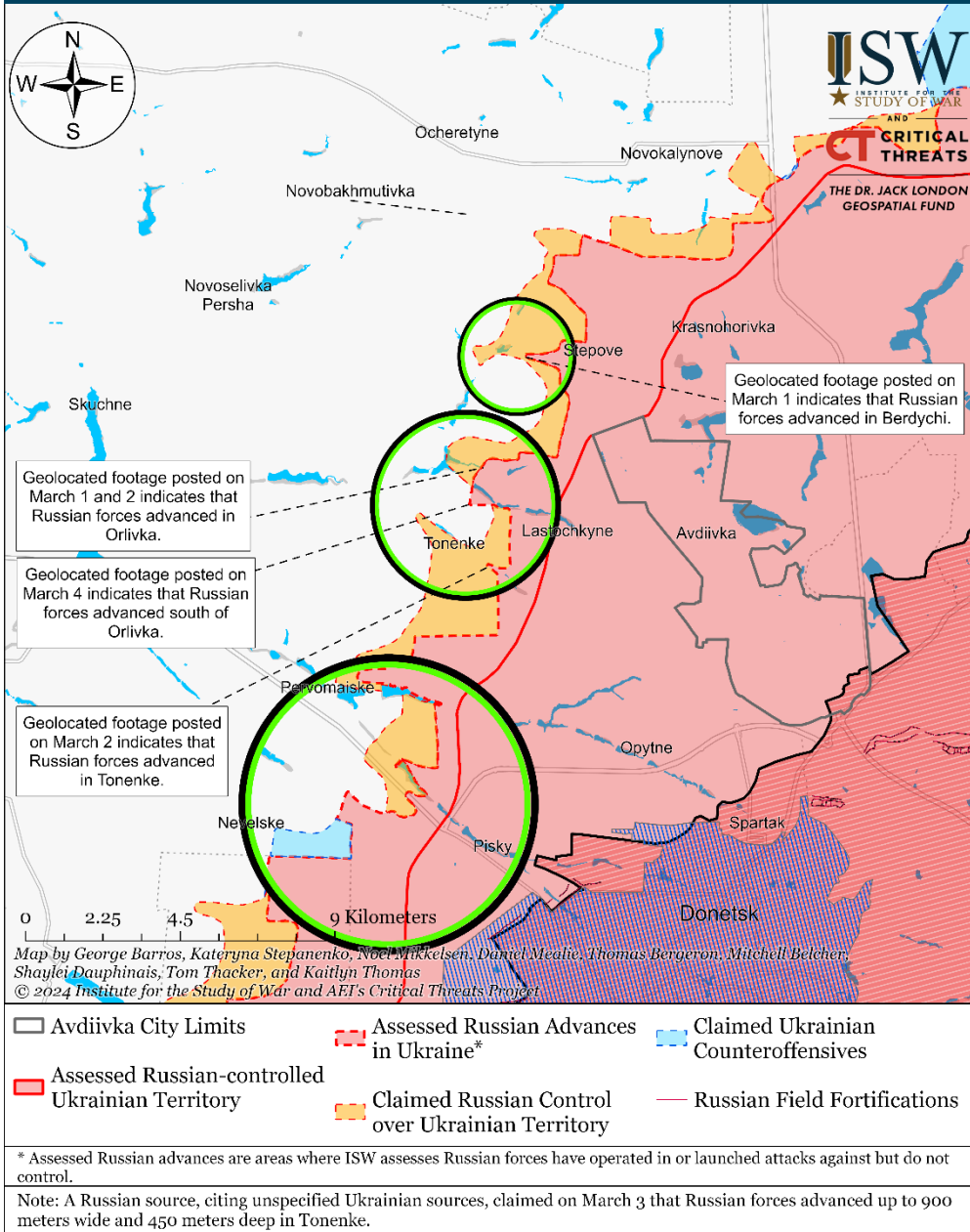
# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of March 5, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces continued to attack Ukrainian positions around Avdiivka but did not make any confirmed advances on March 5. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported continued fighting northeast of Avdiivka near Novoselivka; northwest of Avdiivka near Semenivka; west of Avdiivka near Berdychi, Orlivka, and Tonenke; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske and Nevelske.[33] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces captured most of Orlivka, half of Tonenke, and half of Pervomaiske, although ISW has not observed visual evidence proving these claims.[34] A Russian milblogger implied that Russian forces are attempting to rapidly capture Orlivka, Tonenke, and Berdychi while Ukrainian forces are trying to delay Russian advances and strengthen defensive positions between Ocheretyne (northwest of Avdiivka) and Tonenke.[35] The milblogger added that Russian forces conduct over 100 airstrikes against Ukrainian positions per day

near Avdiivka. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Dmytro Lykhovyi stated that Ukrainian field fortifications in the Donetsk direction (likely in reference to the Avdiivka area) do not consist of a single continuous wall or a single trench line and that Ukrainian forces are currently constructing fortifications leveraging natural terrain in the area, especially accounting for water features.[36] Lykhoviy stated that Ukrainian forces have prepared tank ditches, bunkers, and revetments. Elements of the Russian 24th Guards Spetsnaz Brigade (General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate [GRU]) and 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Guards Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) are reportedly operating in the Berdychi area; and elements of the Russian 21st Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd CAA, CMD) are reportedly operating in the Avdiivka direction.[37]

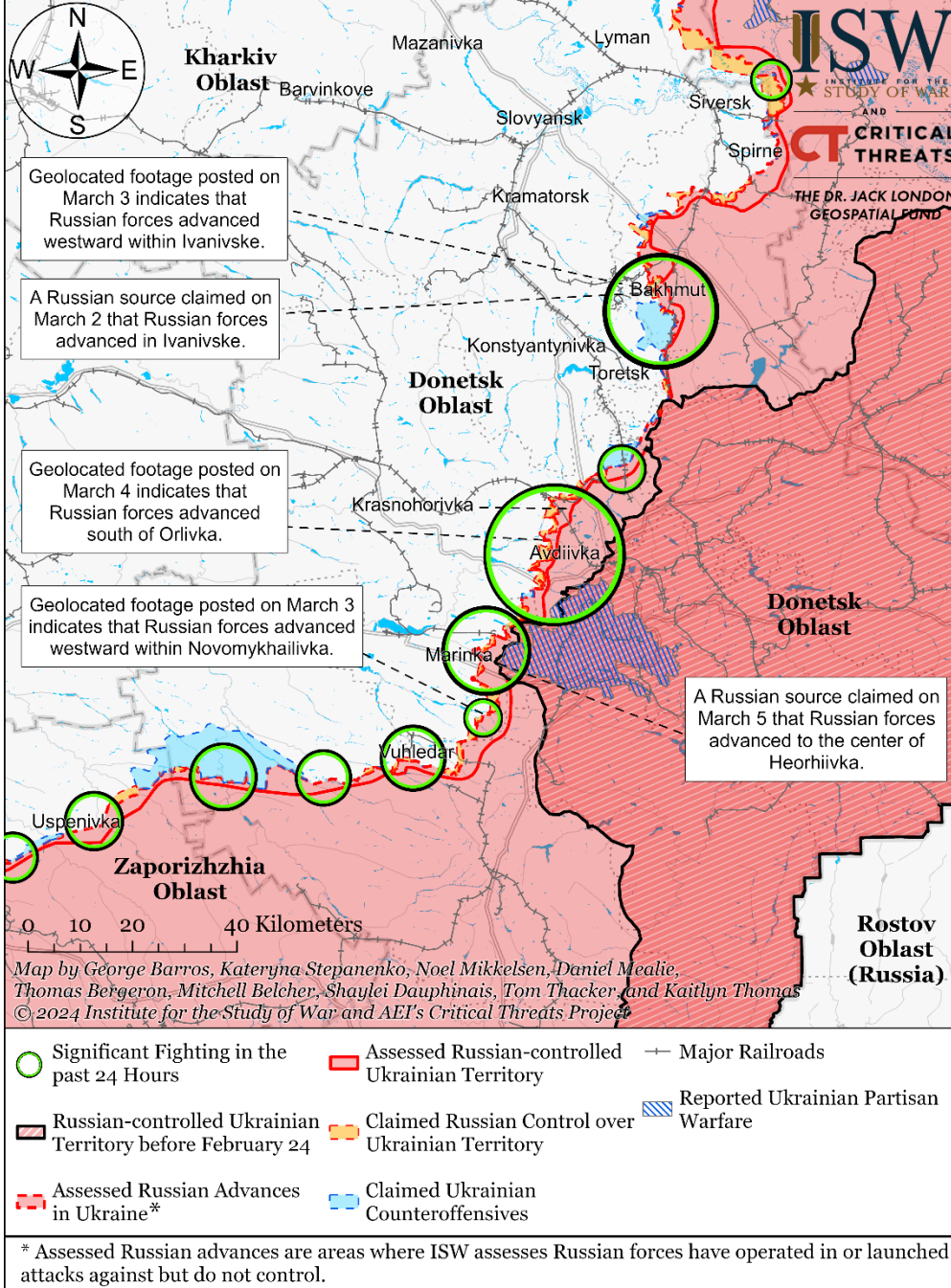
# Assessed Control of Terrain near Avdiivka as of March 5, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Donetsk City. Geolocated footage published on March 5 shows that Russian forces advanced in the fields south of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[38] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger also claimed that elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) were advancing from the east in Novomykhailivka, while elements of the 68th Army Corps (also of the Pacific Fleet) captured a dairy farm north of the settlement.[39] The Kremlin-affiliated milblogger also claimed that Russian forces advanced in central Heorhiivka west of Donetsk City on March 5, but ISW cannot independently verify this claim.[40] A Russian milblogger

claimed that Russian forces advanced 420 meters in width by 320 meters in depth in Novomykhailivka.[41] Positional battles continued west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and Krasnohorivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka and Vodyane.[42] Elements of the Russian 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka; and a tank battalion of the 103rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (8th CAA, SMD) is operating near Heorhiivka.[43]

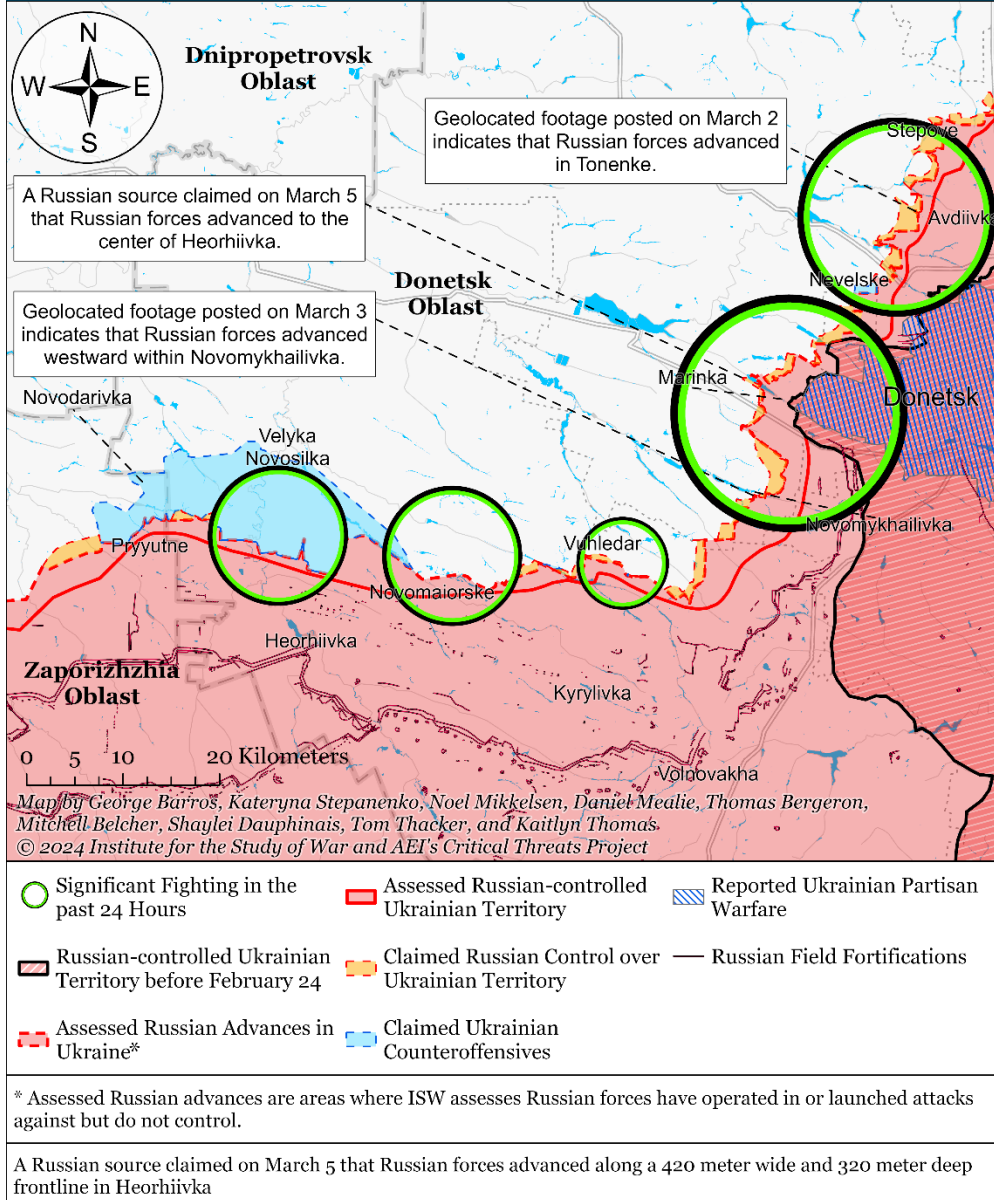
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 5, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Positional engagements continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on March 5 but did not result in frontline changes. Positional engagements continued south of Velyka Novosilka near Urozhaine; and southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Prechystivka; and southwest of Velyka Novosilka

near Malynivka and Hulyaipole.[44] Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov claimed that Ukrainian forces struck Zorya (about 35km south of Polohy) with HIMARS systems.[45] Elements of the Russian 29th CAA (Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area; elements of the Russian 69th Covering Brigade (35th CAA, EMD) are reportedly operating in the Hulyaipole direction; and reconnaissance elements of the Russian 5th CAA (EMD) are reportedly operating near Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka).[46] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 11th Air and Air Defense Forces Army (Russian Aerospace Forces and EMD) launched airstrikes on Ukrainian forces in Vremivka salient in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.[47]

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Donetsk Oblast as of March 5, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

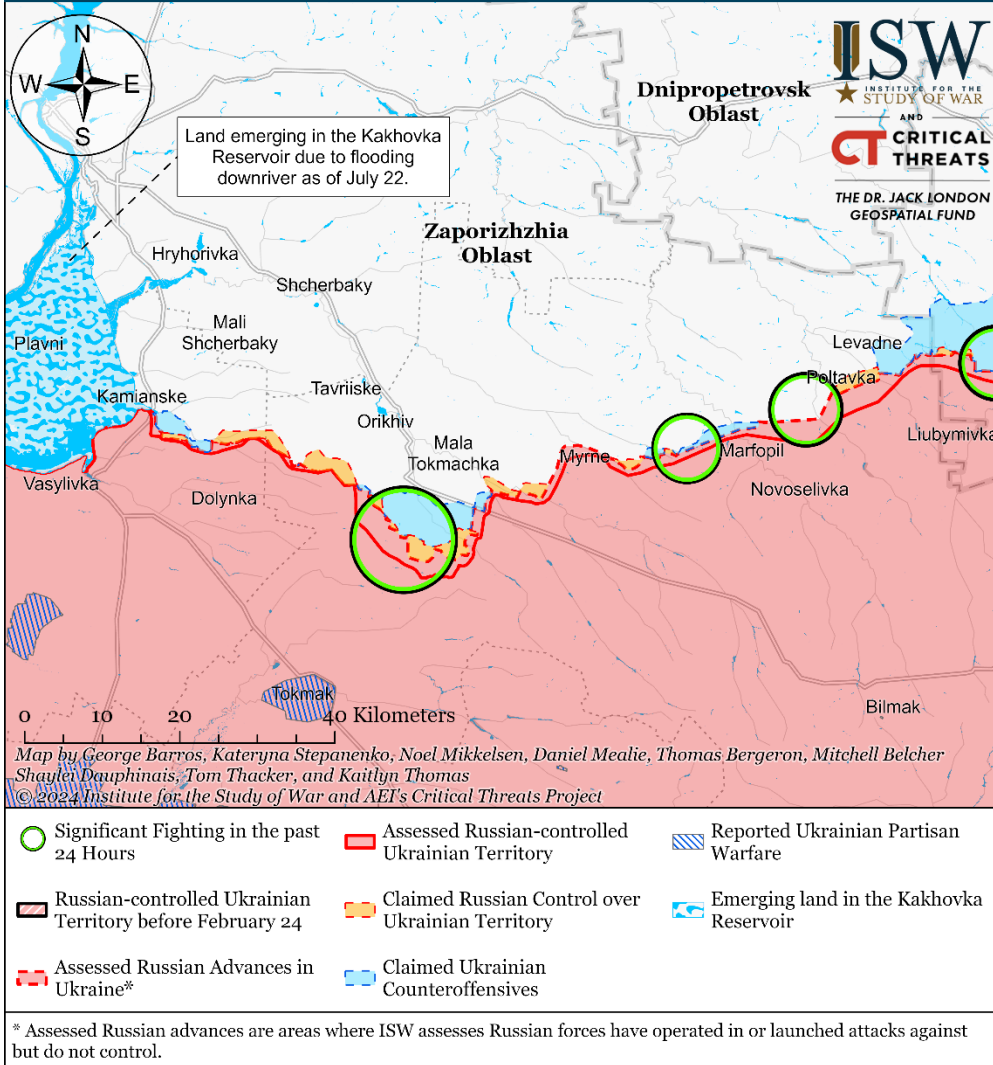
Russian forces continued localized offensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on March 5, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that fighting continued in and around Robotyne, particularly on the eastern and western outskirts of the village.[48] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces have been able to deploy reserves



to the Robotyne area and conduct counterattacks.[49] One milblogger complained that Russian forces are struggling with insufficient electronic warfare (EW), counterbattery, and drone capabilities in Robotyne.[50] Elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) and the South Ossetian “Alania” volunteer battalion are operating near Robotyne.[51]

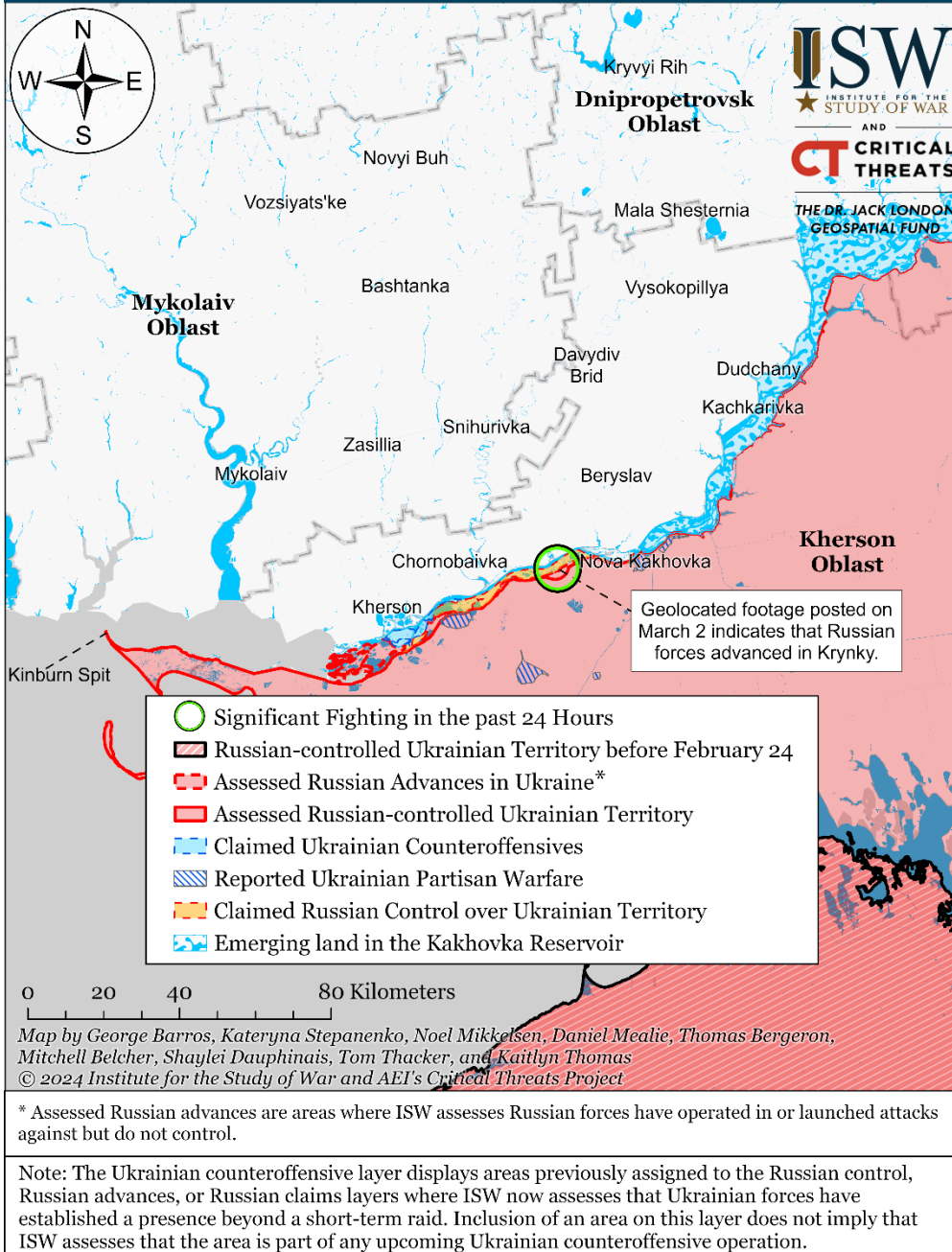
Russian forces have now been in control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) for over two years and continue to improperly and unsafely operate the plant.[52] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated on March 5 that Russian forces have committed “more than 150 gross violations” of operating procedure at the plant over the two years of Russia’s occupation of the ZNPP.[53] Ukrainian nuclear energy operator Energoatom noted that there have been eight complete blackouts and one partial blackout at the ZNPP since Russia’s occupation—five in 2022 and three in 2023.[54] Energoatom Head Petro Kotin noted that the actions of Russian forces are leading to the degradation of equipment at the ZNPP, which is exacerbated by the fact that Russian forces have blocked access to the ZNPP for qualified Ukrainian specialists who have not signed contracts with the Russian occupation administration of the plant.[55]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of March 5, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Limited positional engagements continued in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on March 5.[56] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are striking small Ukrainian groupings in the dacha area near the Antonivsky roadway bridge and warned that Ukrainian forces may be strengthening their grouping on the east bank of the Dnipro River.[57] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a substation in Russian-occupied Kakhovka.[58] Geolocated footage posted on March 5 also shows the first confirmed Ukrainian use of French-provided AASM Hammer glide bombs against Russian positions in Kozachi Laheri, east bank Kherson Oblast.[59]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 5, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



## **Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign (Russian Objective: Target Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure in the rear and on the frontline)**

The Ukrainian Air Force stated that Russian forces launched 22 Shahed-136/131 drones from occupied Balaklava, Crimea and that Ukrainian forces shot down 18 of the drones over Odesa

Oblast.[60] Ukrainian officials also stated that Ukrainian forces shot down a Kh-59 missile over Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[61] Russian sources claimed that the Russian strike targeted Odesa Oblast and that targets included port infrastructure.[62]

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

Unspecified Russian authorities are reportedly disbanding elements of the former Wagner Group that were supposed to join Rosgvardia or are currently in Belarus. A Russian insider source claimed that unspecified actors decided to disband the former Wagner base in Kazachi Lageri, Rostov Oblast, which Wagner retained control over when operating as part of the Rosgvardia Volunteer Corps.[63] The Russian insider source claimed that Wagner Commander Anton Yelizarov (call sign “Lotos”) could not reach an agreement on financing the Wagner Group and that unspecified actors forced Lotos to hand the base over to Rosgvardia. The insider source claimed that Wagner personnel began to disperse to different units after long periods of inactivity. Wagner personnel are reportedly criticizing Lotos for disbanding the Wagner base and voicing complaints about Lotos’ previous decisions, such as his handling of malaria outbreaks during Wagner combat missions in the Central African Republic (CAR) or the fact that Lotos did not want to fight at an unspecified frontline. The insider source also claimed that Wagner will also disband its forces training Belarusian forces in Belarus after the completion of this training.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu continued to highlight that ongoing Russian military restructuring efforts are meant to prepare for a potential future large-scale conventional war with NATO. Shoigu stated on March 5 that the Russian military is strengthening its forces in the northwestern and western direction, including by creating the Leningrad Military District (LMD) and Moscow Military District (MMD), in response to Finland’s and Sweden’s accession to NATO.[64] ISW continues to assess that Russia would likely use an increased military presence on NATO’s eastern flank to intensify threats against NATO to further Russia’s long-term goal of weakening and containing the alliance.[65]

Russia has reportedly nationalized 180 private companies, including within the Russian defense industrial base (DIB), in the past two years.[66] Russian exiled opposition outlet *Novaya Gazeta Europe* reported on March 5 that the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office filed 40 demands for the nationalization of 180 companies since February 2022, as compared to three claims per year in 2020-2021 and almost no claims in the 2010s. The total assets of the 180 nationalized companies in 2022-2024 reportedly amounts to about 1.04 trillion rubles (about \$11.4 billion), which is about 0.6 percent of Russia’s GDP. *Novaya Gazeta Europe* reported that Russian authorities mostly targeted DIB and mechanical engineering companies, food and fishing industries, ports, and real estate. The Russian Prosecutor’s Office reportedly most often files its nationalization demands under claims that the company illegally possesses property or violated anti-corruption laws but refrains from publishing or declassifying all of the demands so some of the reasons are unknown. *Novaya Gazeta Europe* reported that only two of the demands did not result in nationalization or ended in a settlement agreement.

Kremlin newswire TASS stated on March 5 that deputies from the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia submitted a bill to the State Duma to provide five-year deferments from military service to young

workers at ammunition and chemical production enterprises within Russia's defense DIB.[67] The Duma deputies explained that the new deferment policy is necessary as significant increases in the Russian state defense order for 2022-2025 have aggravated labor shortage problems in the Russian DIB.

**Russian Technological Adaptations (Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)**

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed that Russia is continuing efforts to revitalize its defense industrial base (DIB) to sustain its war efforts in the medium to long-term. Shoigu claimed on March 5 that the United Aircraft Corporation is developing designs for an Il-212 military transport aircraft with a PD-8 turbojet engine that will replace the An-26 and An-72 transport aircraft.[68] Shoigu claimed that the Il-212 will have an increased payload and range and would be able to operate on unpaved runways and in the Arctic. The United Aircraft Corporation plans to have a prototype by the end of 2026. Shoigu also claimed that the Ural Civil Aviation Factory is developing the serial production of D-18T aircraft engines, scheduled to begin in late 2027.

**Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)**

**Note: ISW will be publishing its coverage of Ukrainian defense industrial efforts on a weekly basis in the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. ISW will continue to track developments in Ukrainian defense industrial efforts daily and will refer to these efforts in assessments within the daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment and other ISW products when necessary.**

*ISW is not publishing coverage of Ukrainian defense industrial efforts today.*

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

**Note: ISW will be publishing coverage of activities in Russian-occupied areas twice a week in the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. ISW will continue to track activities in Russian-occupied areas daily and will refer to these activities in assessments within the daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment and other ISW products when necessary.**

Russian law enforcement is likely intensifying crackdowns against Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea. Ukrainian Presidential Representation in Crimea warned on March 4 that Russian law enforcement began conducting illegal searches on the homes of at least four Crimean Tatars in Staryi Krym and Zhuravky and that Russian law enforcement also searched the mosque in Staryi Krym.[69] Ukrainian Presidential Representative in Crimea added that Russian law enforcement has

illegally detained 125 Crimean Tatars as of March 4. Crimea-based human rights organization Crimean Solidarity reported on March 5 that Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) agents conducted searches against the homes of Crimean Tatar activists and religious figures in Bakhchysaray and Dzhankoi.[70] Crimean Solidarity stated that FSB agents detained several of the activists and religious figures and that the FSB is detaining some of them on criminal charges in Simferopol. Ukraine's Permanent Presidential Representative in Crimea, Tamila Tasheva, stated on March 5 that Russian occupation authorities in Crimea are persecuting religious minorities in Crimea and have already opened at least 100 cases against Crimean Tatars on religious grounds in 2024 alone.[71] Russian occupation authorities in Crimea frequently weaponize allegations of religious extremism to illegally persecute and detain Crimean Tatars and neutralize sources of opposition and community organization.[72]

Russian occupation administrations continue to prepare for Russian presidential elections in occupied areas of Ukraine. The Russian occupation officials in occupied Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts amplified footage and reports of the initial stages of early voting in the occupied parts of the four oblasts.[73] Ukrainian sources noted that Russian officials are engaged in multiple schemes to artificially inflate voter turnout numbers, such as conducting door-to-door polling, employing various electronic and remote voting options, allowing people to vote without Russian passports, using law enforcement agents to intimidate people into voting early, bribing residents into voting, and importing Russians to occupied areas to vote in the elections.[74] European Commission External Affairs Spokesperson Peter Stano emphasized on February 29 that Russian early voting in occupied Ukraine is a "clear violation of international law" and that the European Commission will never recognize the elections.[75] Russian occupation officials will continue efforts to portray widespread local participation in the upcoming presidential election to cast the occupation of Ukraine in a veneer of legitimacy, as is a common tactic in the Kremlin's occupation playbook.[76]

Russia continues efforts to Russify Ukrainian children by co-opting the school system and encouraging various youth outreach programs. Kherson Oblast occupation governor Vladimir Saldo reported on March 1 that the Kherson Oblast occupation administration had sent 30 young men and women from Kherson Oblast to Sochi, Krasnodar Krai, to participate in the World Youth Festival, in which Saldo claimed that youth representatives from 180 countries will attend.[77] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on March 4 that the World Youth Festival is essentially a Russian propaganda forum that Russian officials are using to create a new generation of pro-Russian collaborators amongst youth in occupied areas of Ukraine.[78] The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) militia Telegram channel also stated on March 4 that Russian occupation authorities are teaching "All-Russian" civics and history courses to children in occupied Stanytsia Luhanska, and Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Artem Lysohor reported that occupation officials are inspecting schools in occupied Luhansk Oblast to ensure that educators are complying with Russian curricula requirements.[79]

### **Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

Russian sources are reamplifying a longstanding Russian information operation seeking to weaponize religion and discredit Ukraine. Russian sources accused Ukraine of religious repression after the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy recommended adopting a bill that would ban religious institutions associated with the Kremlin from operating in Ukraine.[80] Verkhovna Rada Deputy Volodymyr Viatrovykh stated that the bill explicitly bans the

Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and all its affiliated activities and structures.[81] The bill also simplifies Ukrainian churches' transition to the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine.[82] The Russian claims are part of a longstanding information operation aimed at painting Ukraine as religiously intolerant to discourage further Western support of and security assistance to Ukraine and to informationally justify Russia's illegal invasion and annexation of Ukraine.[83] Russia has used Kremlin-controlled religious structures, including the ROC and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP), to internally destabilize Ukraine and conduct a campaign of systematic religious persecution and cultural genocide in occupied Ukraine.[84]

Russian officials continue to exploit a leaked recording of German military officials discussing the possible provision of Taurus missiles to Ukraine in order to deter further Western military aid provisions to Ukraine.[85] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova insulted German officials and forwarded a Russian information operation aimed at degrading domestic trust in the German government.[86]

A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger continued efforts to portray Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as weak and a threat to Armenian security in response to Armenia's efforts to distance itself from Russia and Russian-led institutions.[87]

### **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)**

Union State and Belarusian officials are highlighting avenues for cultural integration between Russia and Belarus. Union State Secretary Dmitry Mezentsev proposed on March 5 that the Union State create a list of shared Belarusian-Russian cultural heritage, using the analog of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).[88] Mezentsev noted that the focus on Union State cultural heritage would emphasize the "scale and age-old depth of the culture of Belarus and Russia." Belarusian Ambassador to Russia Dmitry Krutoy also emphasized individual relations between Belarusian oblasts and Russia and highlighted Belarusian efforts to make Belarus an attractive tourist destination for Russians.[89]

**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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