

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 19, 2023

Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, and Mason Clark
October 19, 2023, 6pm ET

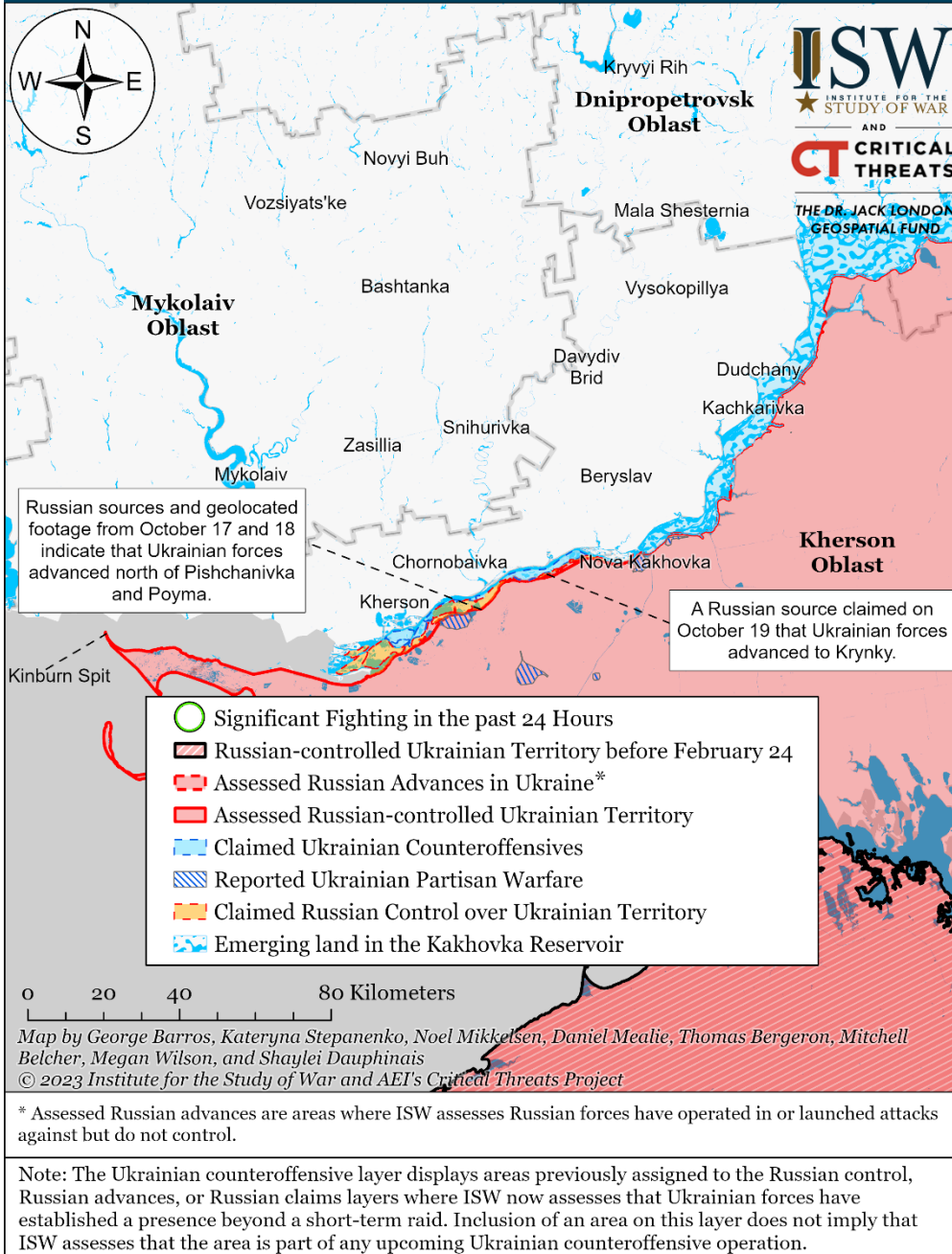
Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

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 cut-off for this product was 1:30pm ET on October 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian sources continued to discuss larger-than-usual Ukrainian ground operations on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on October 19, and Ukrainian forces likely maintain a limited presence in some east bank areas near the Dnipro River shoreline and the Antonivsky railway bridge. The prominent Russian milblogger who initiated Russian discussion of Ukrainian assaults on the east bank on October 18 claimed on October 19 that two Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups of a Ukrainian naval infantry brigade crossed the Dnipro River, overwhelmed the Russian troops in the area, and gained a foothold in the village of Krynky (30km east of Kherson City and about 2km inland from the Dnipro River shoreline).[1] The milblogger claimed that Russian infantry counterattacked and pushed Ukrainian forces back towards the outskirts of the village but noted that Ukrainian troops still control some houses in Krynky and are waiting for reinforcements to arrive in the area.[2] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces used more manpower in attacks on Krynky than in previous attacks.[3] Several Russian sources, including Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo, claimed that Russian forces managed to push Ukrainian forces back from the Poyma-Pishchanivka-Pidstepne area (15km east of Kherson City) to the Dnipro River shoreline and to positions under the Antonivsky railway bridge, where they claim Ukrainian forces are trying to rest and regroup under constant Russian air and artillery strikes.[4] The Ukrainian General Staff also notably tacitly acknowledged Ukrainian operations on the east bank and reported on October 19 that Russian airstrikes hit Pishchanivka, implying Ukrainian forces were operating in the town.[5] While Russian sources continue to offer slightly diverging claims about the scale of the Ukrainian attacks on the east bank, ISW continues to assess that current Ukrainian actions appear to be larger than previously observed tactical raids, and available geolocated footage indicates that Ukrainian forces maintain a presence along the shoreline and near the Antonivsky railway bridge despite Russian counterattacks.[6]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of October 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Satellite imagery published on October 18 suggests that the Ukrainian ATACMS strike on the Luhansk City airfield likely damaged several helicopters on October 17. Ukrainian and Russian sources amplified satellite imagery showing the aftermath of the Ukrainian strike on the Luhansk City airfield.[7] A Ukrainian reserve officer analyzed the imagery and suggested that the Ukrainian strike damaged at least five Russian helicopters and may have affected other vehicles at the

airfield.[8] The officer stated that scorch marks on the airport apron (ramp) confirmed the Ukrainian strike with cluster munitions and noted that multiple helicopters remained at the Luhansk City airfield, mirroring the pattern at the Berdyansk airfield (the other location struck with ATACMS on October 17). Ukrainian military sources previously reported that the Ukrainian strikes destroyed nine helicopters, one anti-aircraft missile launcher, special equipment, ammunition depots, and runway infrastructure, although ISW cannot fully confirm these Russian losses at this time.[9]

Ukrainian officials reported on October 19 that Ukrainian forces have downed five Russian fixed wing aircraft within the past 10 days in Donetsk Oblast amid high Russian ground vehicle losses near Avdiivka.[10] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy reported on October 19 that Ukrainian forces shot down five fixed-wing aircraft, including at least one Su-25 fighter jet, in Donetsk Oblast.[11] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Oleksandr Shtupun stated that Russian forces primarily use attack aircraft to conduct airstrikes but that the aircraft are ineffective at range, forcing Russian aircraft to fly closer to the front line and resulting in the loss of five aircraft in 10 days.[12] Shtupun stated that there are unconfirmed reports that Ukrainian forces damaged additional Russian aircraft.[13] Shtupun reported that Russian forces also operate Su-34 and Su-35 fighters in the Tavriisk direction but that Russian forces do not fly these aircraft close to the front line out of fear of Ukrainian air defenses.[14] Russian forces notably suffered vehicle losses of likely at least 45 tanks and armored vehicles, at least one battalion tactical group's (BTG) worth, in the initial days of the offensive effort near Avdiivka.[15] Tarnavskiy's announcement indicates that Russian forces continue to pay a high materiel cost to support the ongoing Avdiivka effort, and continued materiel losses will likely continue to slow down the Russian pace of advance in the area.

Ukrainian forces reportedly advanced south of Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast amid continued counteroffensive operations on October 19. A Ukrainian soldier stated that Ukrainian forces achieved unspecified success near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut) and advanced into the Russian defensive line towards Opytne (3km south of Bakhmut).[16] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated on October 18 that Ukrainian forces have advanced across the railway line in unspecified areas south of Bakhmut.[17] Russian sources also claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced across the railway line in Klishchiivka on October 18.[18] ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Ukrainian troops operating beyond the rail line east of Klishchiivka. The Ukrainian General Staff and other Ukrainian military sources reported that Ukrainian forces were successful south of Robotyne and southwest of Verbove (10km east of Robotyne).[19] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces back from positions near Verbove and advanced between 1.5-1.6km into Russian defensive lines in an unspecified part of the Robotyne front.[20]

Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of October 18 to 19. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched five Iskander-M ballistic missiles, one S-300 missile, one Kh-59 cruise missile, another unidentified missile, and nine Shahed-131/136 drones at Ukraine.[21] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down the Kh-59 missile and three drones.[22]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui in Pyongyang, North Korea on October 19, likely part of an ongoing Russian

effort to procure additional munitions from North Korea. Lavrov stated that Russian-North Korean relations have reached a “qualitatively new strategic level.”[23] Lavrov also stated that a Russian-North Korean intergovernmental commission will meet at an unspecified date in November to discuss mining/geological, energy, trade, economic, and technical cooperation.[24] ISW previously assessed that Russia may be interested in some forms of technological and defense cooperation with North Korea in exchange for the provision of artillery ammunition as long as such cooperation does not trigger secondary sanctions against Russia.[25]

A Russian milblogger observed that Ukrainian forces are successfully and asymmetrically attriting Russian reserves in ongoing offensive operations. In a series of long Telegram posts on October 19, the milblogger noted that Ukrainian forces are purposefully conducting offensive operations to attrit limited Russian reserves while preserving their own reserves to the utmost possible extent.[26] The milblogger claimed that the state of Russian infantry is at its lowest point in the war and emphasized that Ukrainian forces are exploiting the fact that Ukraine knows Russia will not conduct a general mobilization.[27] These observations are largely consistent with ISW's assessment that Russian forces largely lack high-quality reserves and are struggling to generate, train, and soundly deploy reserves to effectively plug holes in the frontline and pursue offensive operations, instead relying largely on tactical-level lateral redeployments.[28] ISW has also previously observed that Ukrainian forces have engaged Russian troops in an asymmetrical attrition gradient along many critical sectors of the frontline.[29] Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) analyst Dr Jack Watling similarly observed on October 19 that as long as Ukrainian forces can continue inflicting a high casualty rate on Russian forces, “it becomes possible to suppress Russia’s ability to train sufficient new troops to the standard needed to effectively conduct offensive action.”[30]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly continues efforts to push remnants of the Wagner Group out of Syria. A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger amplified claims on October 19 that the Russian MoD and Syrian forces allegedly acting under the Russian MoD’s influence are trying to push Wagner forces stationed near Palmyra out of Syria.[31] A Russian insider source claiming to have connections to the Wagner Group claimed that ISIS and other extremist groups will likely take advantage of Wagner’s withdrawal from Syria, further destabilizing the region.[32]

A prominent Russian information space voice targeted two members of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s inner circle with accusations of corruption. Russian lawyer Kirill Kachur, whom the Russian Investigative Committee charged in absentia for embezzlement and bribery in 2022 and who claims to have insider knowledge about internal Kremlin politics, accused Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head Sergei Naryshkin and Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin of causing over one trillion rubles (\$10.3 billion) of damage to the Russian economy through bribes and tax breaks from Russian businessmen since Mishustin’s appointment as head of the Russian Federal Tax Service in 2010.[33] Kachur also criticized businessman Alexander Udodov, Federal Security Service (FSB) General Ivan Tkachev, and FSB Colonel Sergei Natarov for enabling and protecting Mishustin.[34] Kachur’s complaint notably focuses on the current poor state of the Russian economy and the negative impact of such a high monetary loss amid a broader Russian focus on the federal budget.[35] Kachur claimed that the Russian Investigative Committee and FSB are currently investigating Mishustin and Naryshkin; ISW has observed no corroboration of Kachur’s claims from other Russian sources, and Russian officials have not commented on these claims.[36]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian sources continued to discuss larger-than-usual Ukrainian ground operations on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on October 19, and Ukrainian forces likely maintain a limited presence in some east bank areas near the Dnipro River shoreline and the Antonivsky railway bridge.**
- **Satellite imagery published on October 18 suggests that the Ukrainian ATACMS strike on the Luhansk City airfield likely damaged several helicopters on October 17.**
- **Ukrainian officials reported on October 19 that Ukrainian forces have downed five Russian fixed wing aircraft within the past 10 days in Donetsk Oblast amid high Russian ground vehicle losses near Avdiivka.**
- **Ukrainian forces reportedly advanced south of Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast amid continued counteroffensive operations on October 19.**
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui in Pyongyang, North Korea on October 19, likely part of an ongoing Russian effort to procure additional munitions from North Korea.**
- **A Russian milblogger observed that Ukrainian forces are successfully and asymmetrically attriting Russian reserves in ongoing offensive operations.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly continues efforts to push remnants of the Wagner Group out of Syria.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, around Avdiivka, south of Donetsk City, in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced in some areas.**
- **A Russian federal subject is attempting to compensate for labor shortages in its defense sector by spearheading an initiative to allow some minors to work in hazardous conditions.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of October 19, 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 Information Operations and Narratives

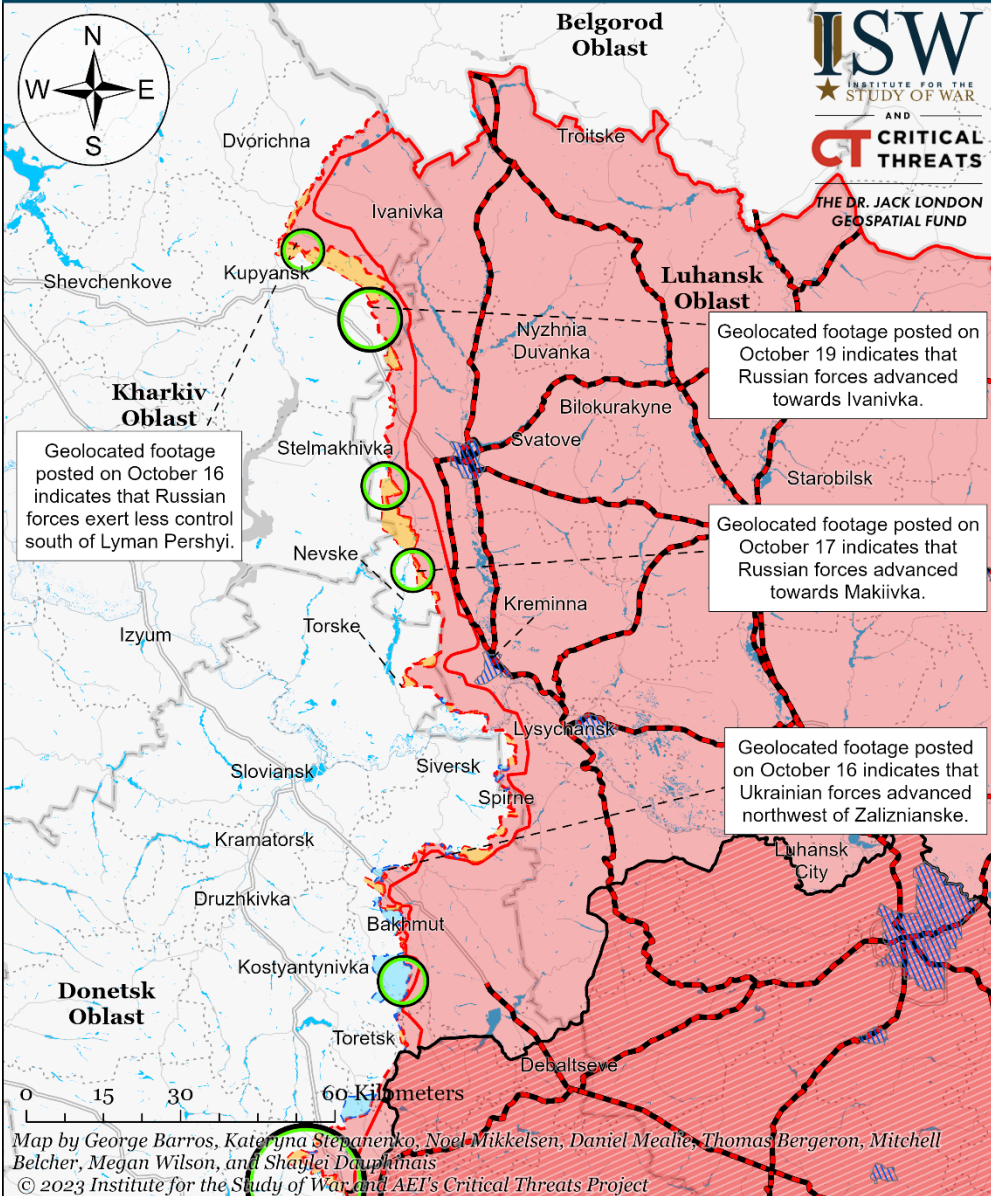
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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 attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on October 19 and made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on October 19 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of Ivanivka (19km southeast of Kupyansk).[37] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces achieved unspecified “tactical success” near Ivanivka.[38] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces continued to advance west from Svatove towards the Oskil River and made unspecified progress near Makiivka (20km southwest of Svatove).[39] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces advanced near Makiivka on October 18.[40] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on October 19 that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Synivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk), Ivanivka, Kyslivka (21km southeast of Kupyansk), Nadiya (15km southwest of Svatove), and Makiivka.[41] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces also fought near Lyman Pershyi (12km northeast of Kupyansk) and Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk).[42] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated on October 18 that Ukrainian forces have prepared powerful fortifications in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction that Russian forces are unlikely to break through despite constant attacks. [43]

The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Synkivka and Ivanivka in Kharkiv Oblast and Novoyehorivka (16km southwest of Svatove), Makiivka, and Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna) in Luhansk Oblast.[44]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of October 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealle, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Megan Wilson, and Shaylei Dauphinais
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

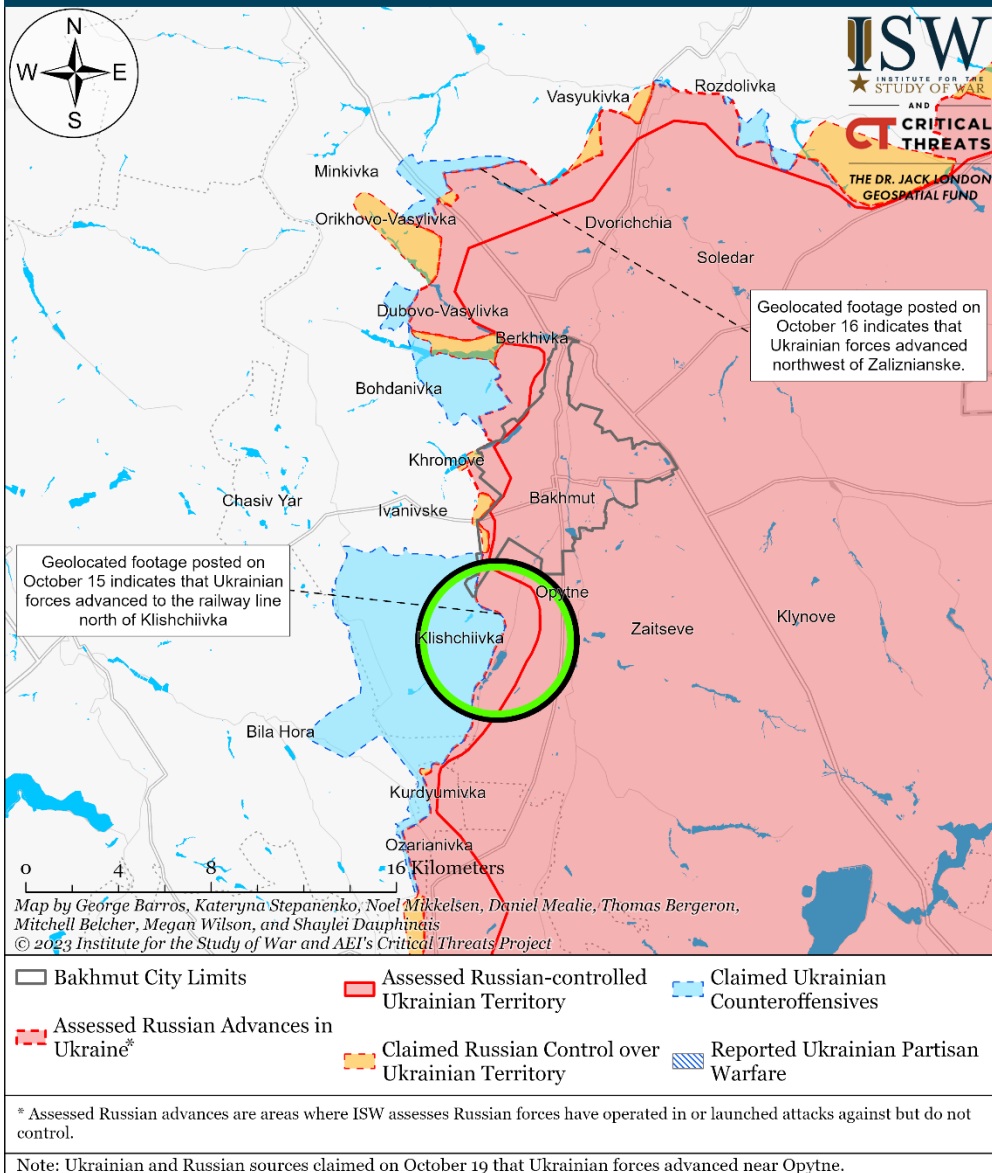
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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 on October 19 and reportedly advanced. A Ukrainian soldier stated on October 19 that Ukrainian forces were successful near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut) and advanced into the Russian defensive line toward Opytne (3km south of Bakhmut).[45] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated on October 18 that Ukrainian forces have advanced behind the railway line in various unspecified areas south of Bakhmut.[46] Several Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced behind the railway line near Klishchiivka and in the Klishchiivka area, but a different Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces were unable to advance past the railway line.[47] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Klishchiivka.[48] ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Ukrainian forces operating beyond the railway line east of Klishchiivka. A Russian milblogger claimed that fighting is also ongoing near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (10km northwest of Bakhmut).[49]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Bakhmut on October 19 but did not advance. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Klishchiivka.[50] Yevlash stated on October 18 that Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to regain lost positions near Andriivka.[51]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of October 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

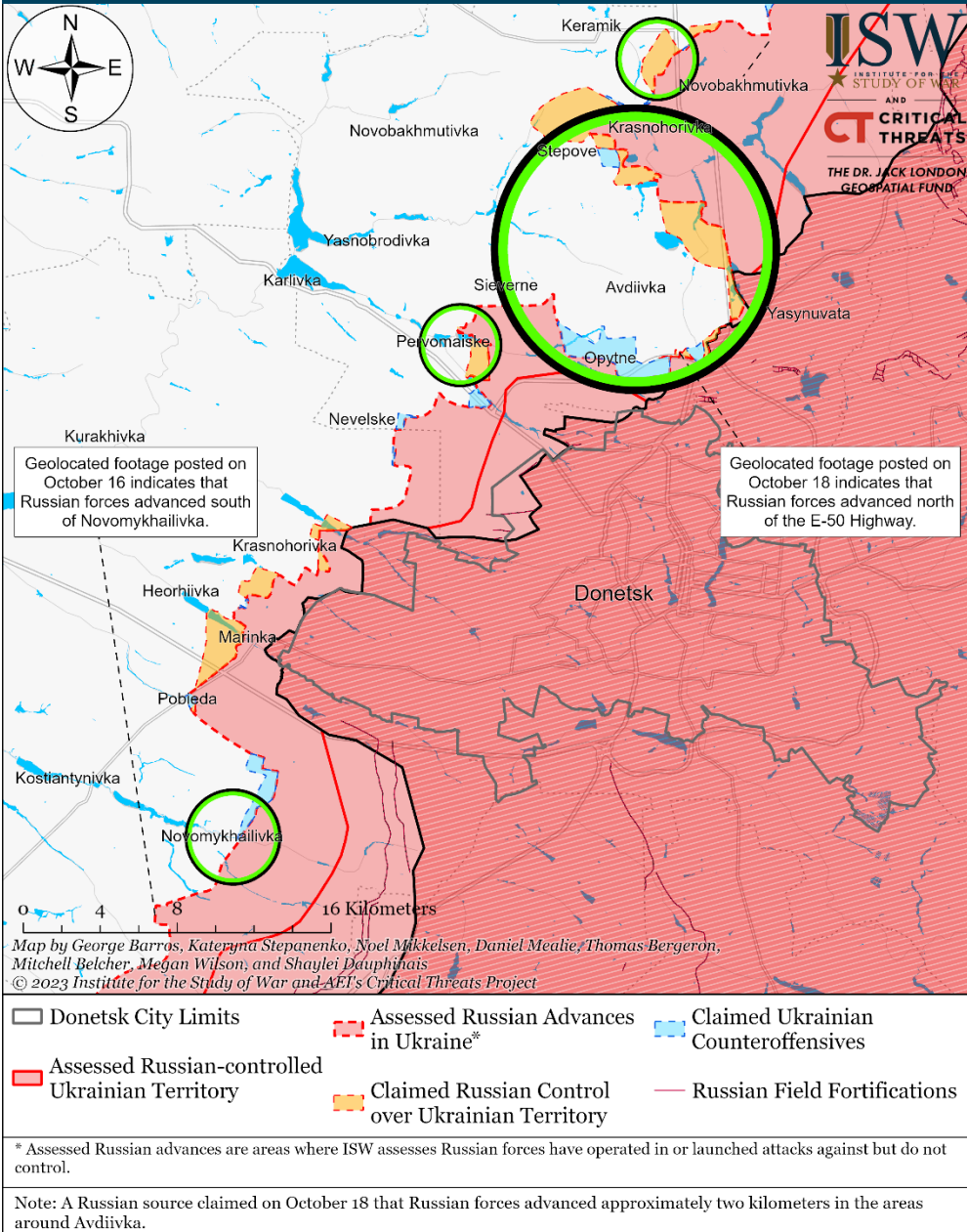


Russian forces conducted offensive operations around Avdiivka on October 19 and made a marginal confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on October 19 indicates that elements of the Russian “Kluny” Sabotage, Assault and Reconnaissance Detachment (likely of the 1st Donetsk People’s Republic [DNR] Army Corps) made limited advances north of Spartak (4km south of Avdiivka).[52] A Russian milblogger claimed on October 18 that Russian forces have advanced about 2km in unspecified areas around Avdiivka.[53] A Russian milblogger claimed on October 18 that Russian forces achieved unspecified success near an unspecified section of the E50 highway southeast of Avdiivka and are advancing near Sieverne (5km west of Avdiivka), though ISW has not observed visual evidence supporting this claim.[54] Ukrainian military observer Yuriy Butusov stated on October 18 that Russian forces captured a position north of Avdiivka and an unspecified part of

Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka), though ISW has not observed evidence to support these claims nor have official Ukrainian sources confirmed them.[55] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on October 19 that elements of the Russian 1st Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) advanced several hundred meters in the “Tsarska Okhota” restaurant area and that elements of the Russian 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) advanced several hundred meters in the Vodyane-Netaylove direction (7-14km southwest of Avdiivka).[56] Mashovets also stated that Russian forces advanced several hundred meters in the Vodyane-Tonenke area (5-7km southwest of Avdiivka).[57] ISW has not observed visual evidence of Mashovets’ latter two claims nor have Ukrainian official sources confirmed them. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Avdiivka, Novokalynove (11km northwest of Avdiivka), Stepove (7km northwest of Avdiivka), Sieverne, and Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka).[58] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces attacked in unspecified areas south, west, and northwest of Avdiivka.[59] Mashovets reported that elements of the 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) and 277th Infantry Battalion (likely of the 1st DNR Army Corps) attacked near Stepove and that elements of the Russian 1454th Motorized Rifle Regiment (Russian Territorial Defense) and 21st Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) attack near Kamyanka (5km northeast of Avdiivka).[60] Mashovets also reported that units of the Russian “Pyatnashka” and “Yugra” volunteer battalions attempted to advance to the N20 highway east of Avdiivka from positions near Kruta Balka (5km east of Avdiivka).[61]

Ukrainian forces conducted limited counterattacks near Avdiivka on October 13 and reportedly advanced. Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces south of Sieverne and repelled Russian elements of the 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade from reaching the railway line near Stepove.[62] A milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Krasnohorivka (5km north of Avdiivka) but did not state the outcome of the attack.[63]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of October 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

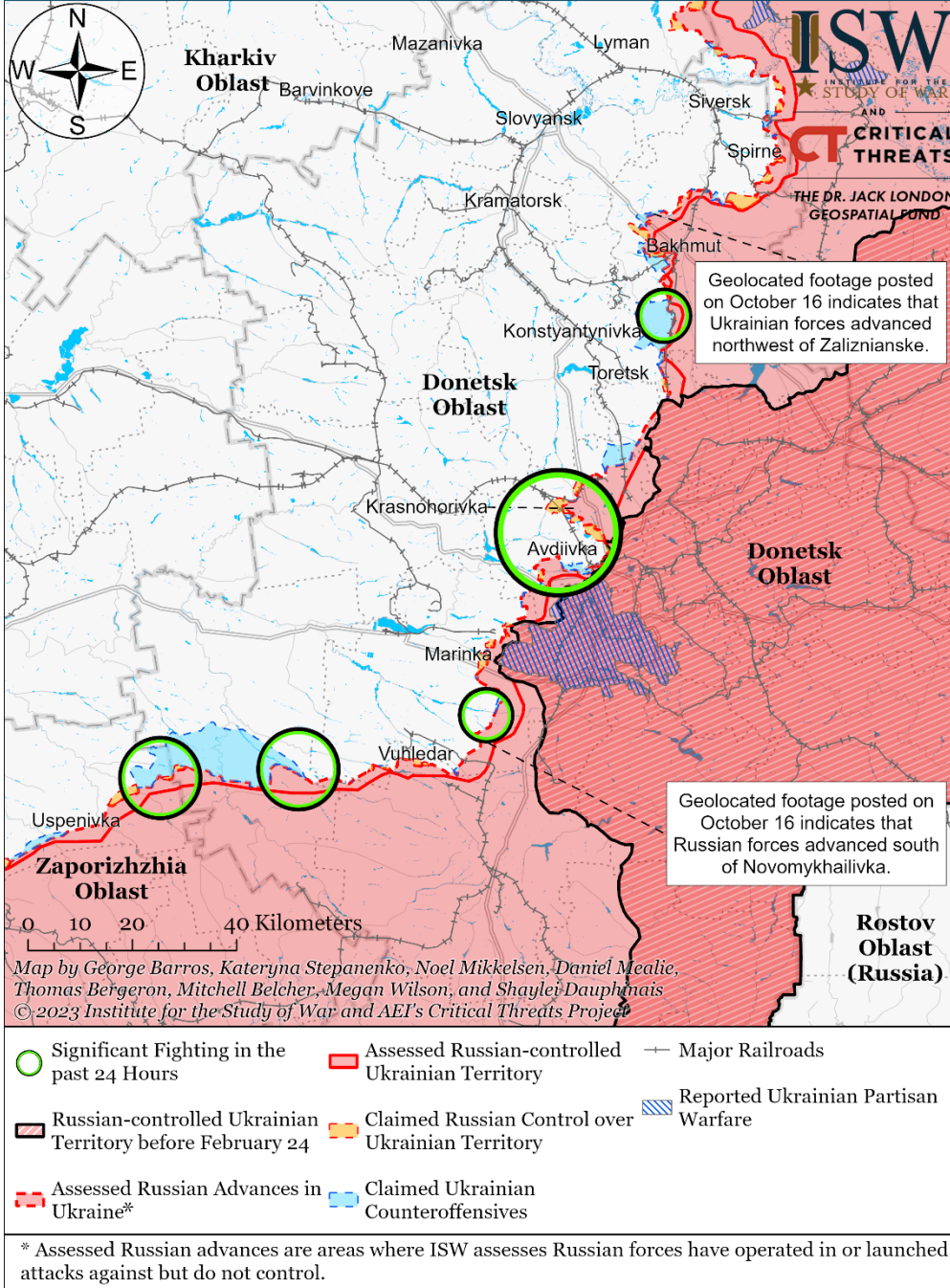


Russian force conducted offensive operations southwest of Donetsk City on October 19 and made confirmed advances. Geolocated footage published on October 18 indicates that Russian forces advanced northeast of Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).[64] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Marinka and Novomykhailivka.[65] The Ukrainian military observer reported that elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) and 103rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th

Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) unsuccessfully attacked near Marinka.[66]

Ukrainian forces did not conduct any claimed or confirmed ground attacks southwest of Donetsk City on October 19.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of October 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

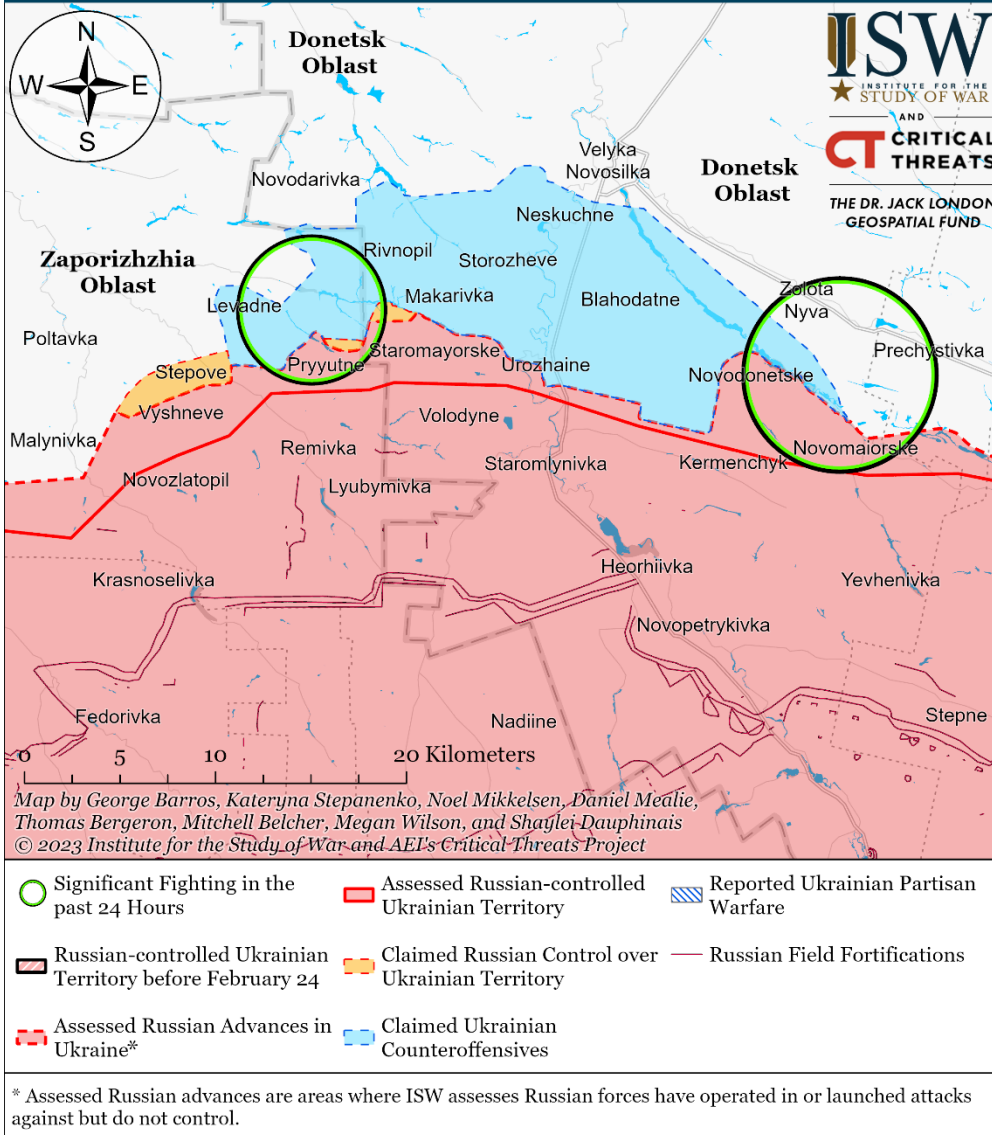


Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted an unsuccessful ground attack in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on October 19. The Russian MoD and another Russian source claimed that Russian forces repelled two small Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups in the forest area near Pryyutne (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[67] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are defending along the Staromayorske-Urozhaine line (about 10km south of Velyka Novosilka) but are not conducting active attacks to gain new positions in the area due to heavy Russian air and artillery strikes.[68]

Russian forces conducted limited counterattacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on October 19 but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Zolota Nyva and Novomayorske (12km and 19km southeast of Velyka Novosilka, respectively).[69] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have set sufficient conditions to resume successful attacks on this sector of the front.[70] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets noted that the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces has transitioned to more active offensive operations in the Berdyansk (Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area) direction and reported that advanced units of the Russian 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) attempted to cross the T0509 Velyka Novosilka-Vuhledar road towards Novoukraiinka from positions in Shevchenko (18km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[71] Mashovets also stated that elements of the 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) unsuccessfully attacked from Novodonetske (12km southeast of Velyka Novosilka) towards Zolota Nyva.[72]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of October 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



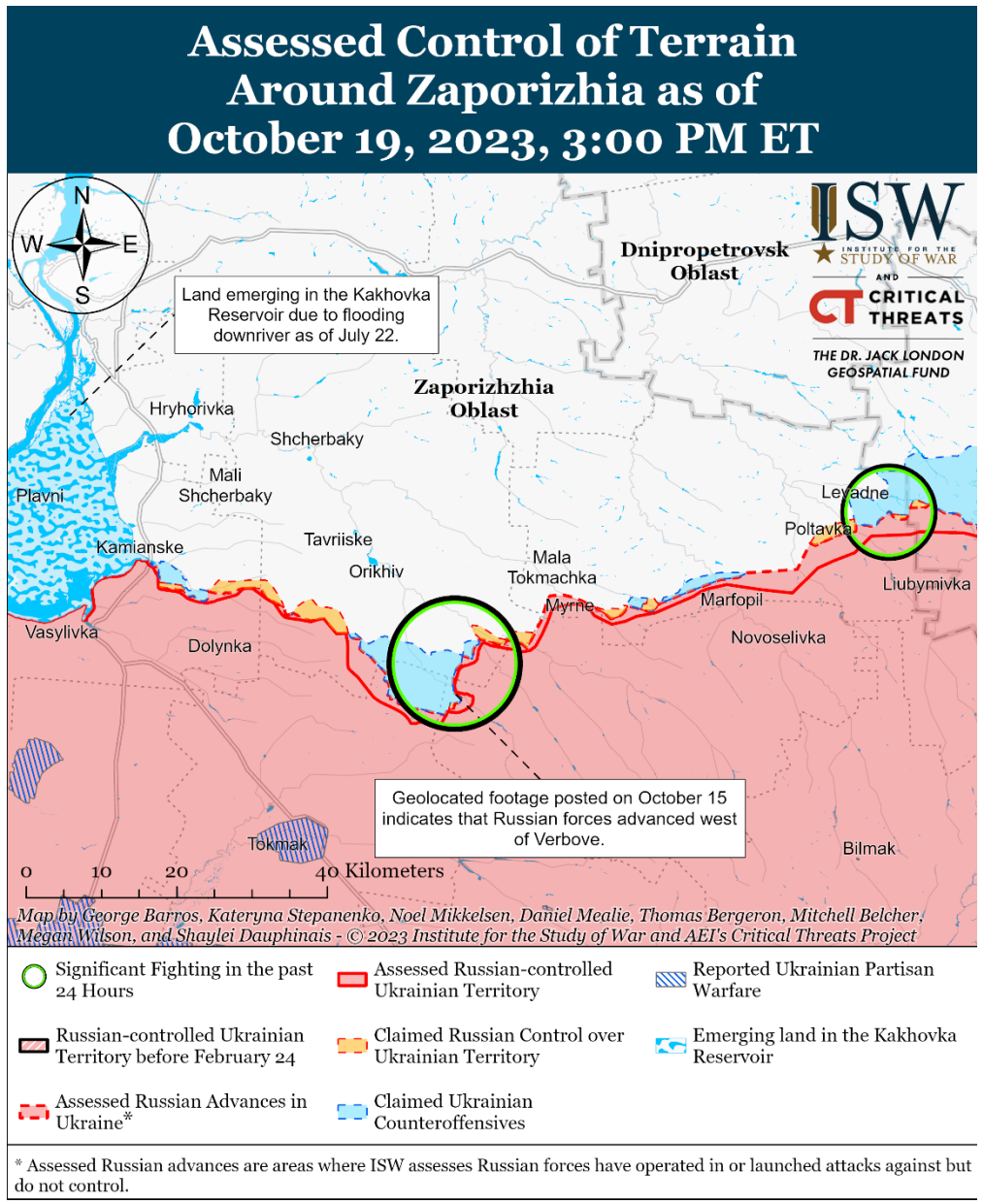
Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on October 19 and reportedly advanced. The Ukrainian General Staff and other Ukrainian military sources reported that Ukrainian forces were successful south of Robotyne and southwest of Verbove (10km east of Robotyne) and advanced up to 400m in an unspecified part of the western Zaporizhzhia front.[73] Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces back from positions near Verbove and advanced between 1.5-1.6km into Russian defensive lines in an unspecified part of the Robotyne front.[74] The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted two unsuccessful attacks near Verbove.[75] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Novoprokopivka (2km south of Robotyne) and maintained pressure along the entire Robotyne-Verbove line.[76] One Russian milblogger claimed that the situation northwest of Robotyne

on the Zherebyanky-Pyatykhatky line remains largely unchanged but reported that Ukrainian forces are trying to shift the frontline eastward towards Mali Shcherbaky (about 22km northwest of Robotyne).[77]



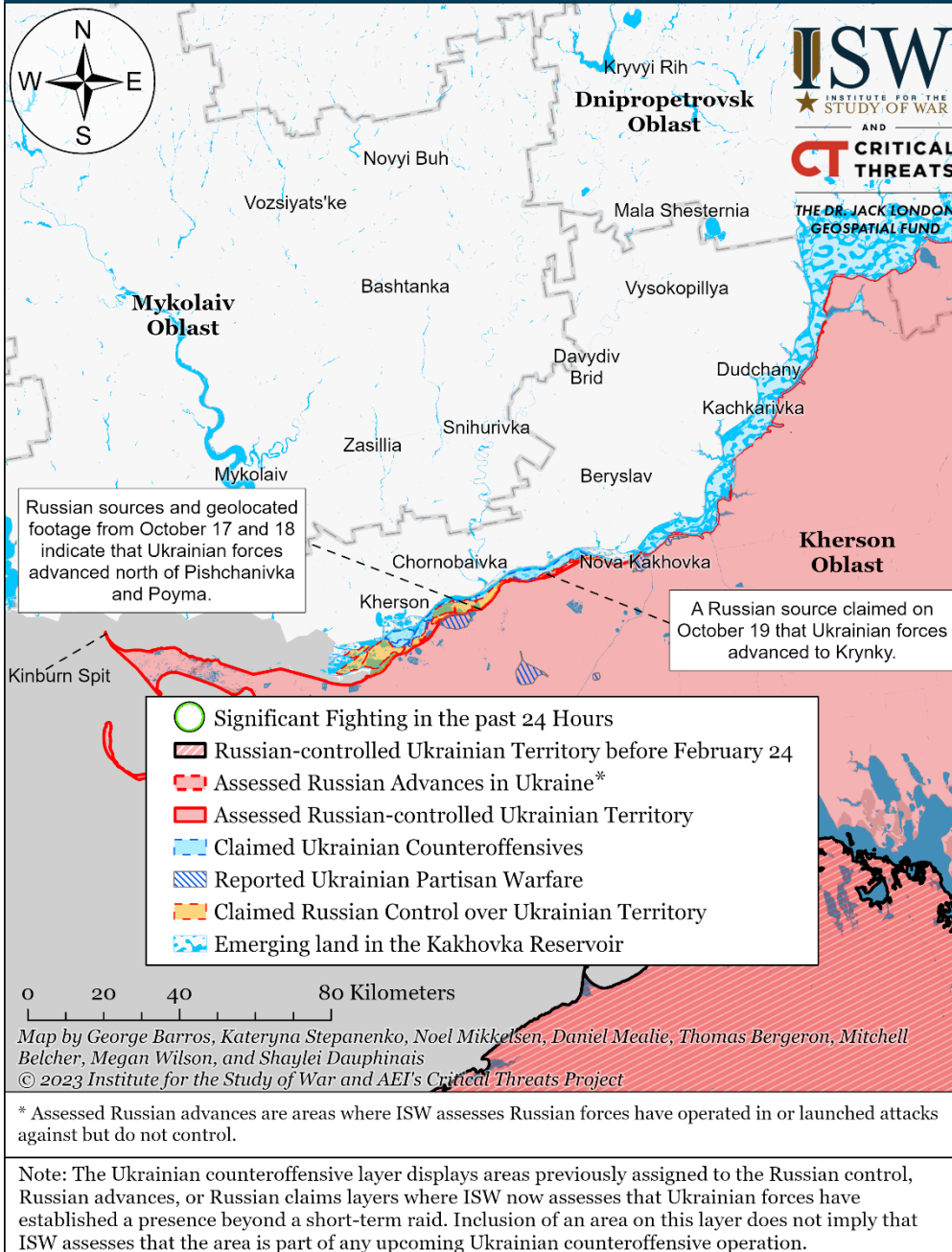
Russian forces continued counterattacks in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on October 19 and made a marginal confirmed advance. Geolocated footage posted on October 19 shows a Russian tank and BMD-4 infantry fighting vehicle operating about 4km east of Novopokrovka, indicating that Russian forces hold positions in the area.[78] Russian milbloggers claimed that the footage suggests that Russian forces successfully counterattacked near Novopokrovka.[79] Russian milbloggers additionally claimed that Russian forces attacked west of Robotyne, towards Novodanylivka, and near Verbove.[80] Mashovets noted that the Russian command is constantly deploying tactical reserves

comprised of reorganized tactical groups of mobilized troops to the area to support Russian counterattacks on Ukrainian flanks in the area.[81]



See topline text for updates on Kherson Oblast.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of October 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted a missile strike on Russian military assets in occupied Crimea on the night of October 18. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian air defense downed two Ukrainian-modified S-200 missiles over occupied Crimea on the evening of October 18.[82] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukraine launched two Hrim-2 missiles at Crimea, one of which fell near the Black Sea Fleet Repair Base in Inkerman, southwest Crimea, and the other of which fell near the northwestern part of Sevastopol.[83] The milblogger also claimed that

Russian air defenses shot down a modified S-200 missile near Kara-Koba (just northeast of Sevastopol).[84]

The Russian MoD claimed that Russian aircraft intercepted NATO and British aircraft over the Black Sea. Russian media reported on October 19 that two Russian Su-27 fighter jets scrambled in response to the presence of an RC-135 radio-technical reconnaissance and electronic warfare aircraft and 2 British Typhoon multirole fighters over the Black Sea.[85]

Russia likely deployed naval-trained dolphins to northwestern Crimea. Open-source intelligence analyst HI Sutton reported on October 18 that Russia has moved pens containing trained dolphins to Novoozerne, northwestern Crimea, as of August 2023.[86] Sutton noted that the Russian Navy uses trained dolphins to defend critical naval bases against special forces divers and suggested that their deployment to northwestern Crimea indicates continued concern over the potential for Ukrainian raids on the western coast of Crimea.[87]

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

A Russian federal subject (region) is attempting to compensate for labor shortages in its defense sector by spearheading an initiative to allow some minors to work in hazardous conditions.[88] The Republic of Tatarstan is preparing a proposal to amend its labor code to allow Russian minors aged 16-18 to work in hazardous conditions under a fixed-term contract due to personnel shortages.[89] The Russian State Duma Committee on Labor, Social Policy, and Veterans' Affairs Yaroslav Nilov expressed support for allowing some teenagers to work at defense enterprises and noted labor shortages across the industry, including at aircraft manufacturing plants and at small-arms manufacturer Kalashnikov Concern.[90] Russian newswire *Kommersant* noted that the proposal calls on the Russian federal government to resolve contradictions in federal child labor policies, and such a resolution would likely allow other federal subjects to pass similar legislation to the Tatarstan proposal.[91] Tatarstan also notably houses a Shahed drone production plant, and there have been reports that college students are working at the plant. This law may allow Russian authorities to exploit child labor for the production of Shahed drones. [92]

The Russian MoD-affiliated “Redut” private military company (PMC) is reportedly comprised of Russian veterans of Afghanistan and former Spetsnaz personnel. A prominent Russian milblogger claimed to have spoken to Redut PMC personnel who reportedly served in Afghanistan or as Spetsnaz and that these fighters claimed that Redut largely operates without official military ranks and personnel instead only hold positions.[93] The personnel claimed that there are no significant pay disparities between roles; the least experienced fighters reportedly receive salaries of 230,000 rubles (\$2,369) while a deputy brigade commander receives a salary of 260,000 rubles (\$2,678).[94] The milblogger claimed that Redut PMC also has its own subordinate “Storm-Z” company of penal recruits.[95]

The Russian military command likely transferred 45 mobilized Russian personnel to “Storm-Z” units as retaliation for refusing to fight following a public complaint. Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Artem Lysohor reported that the Russian military command transferred 45 mobilized personnel of the Russian 12th Guards Tank Regiment (4th Guards Tank Division, 1st Guards Tank Army, Western Military District) to a “Storm-Z” unit after imprisoning them on October 7 for refusing to fight in the Kupyansk direction.[96] Lysohor stated that public outcry prompted the Russian military command

to release the personnel after a week of imprisonment. ISW recently reported on October 14 about the wives of these personnel complaining about their imprisonment after the unit suffered 300 casualties during a failed assault in the Kupyansk direction.[97]

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)

The Belarusian government announced on October 19 that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree granting Belarusian citizenship to 262 Ukrainian civilians, including 16 children.[98] The Belarusian government stated that Belarus has provided citizenship to 6,814 Ukrainian citizens since August 9, 2021.[99] ISW has previously reported on Belarus' and Lukashenko's personal culpability in forcibly deporting Ukrainian civilians to Belarus during the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[100]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian state media is falsely attempting to portray Ukraine as oppressing religious liberties to publicly discredit Ukraine. Russian state media outlets are reporting on the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada's October 19 vote to ban the Russian state-affiliated religious organizations and claimed that the vote is part of the "persecution" of the Russian state-affiliated Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP).[101] As ISW has previously reported, the UOC MP is not an independent religious organization but an extension of the Russian state that has provided military support for Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and the full-scale invasion in 2022.[102] The Kremlin has notably sought to portray itself as religiously tolerant while actively persecuting Ukrainian Orthodox Christians and religious minorities in occupied Ukraine.[103]

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

A Russian official claimed that perceived Western aggression prompted recent decisions about Russia's nuclear arsenal, including the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Department of Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Director Vladimir Ermakov stated on October 16 that Russia's deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus and withdrawal of the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty will level out the "imbalance in the strategic sphere" that the US created.[104] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russia's transfer of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus does not violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaties because Russian forces still control the nuclear warheads in Belarus.[105] ISW has previously assessed that the Kremlin uses nuclear rhetoric in an attempt to coerce the United States and its allies to pressure Ukraine to negotiate and that Russian nuclear weapon use in Ukraine remains highly unlikely.[106]

Belarusian maneuver elements conducted exercises on October 18 and 19. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) posted photos showing elements of the Belarusian 19th Separate Guards Mechanized Brigade and 120th Separate Guards Mechanized Brigades participating in combat readiness exercises in Belarus.[107] The Belarusian MoD claimed that Belarusian Security Council State Secretary

Lieutenant General Alexander Volfovich and North-Western Operational Command Commander Major General Alexander Naumenko observed some of the exercises.[108]

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko dismissed the Belarusian ambassadors to Ukraine and Estonia from their posts on October 19.[109]

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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