

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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March 13, 2024, 7:45pm 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 1:30pm ET on March 13. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 14 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian shortages of ammunition and other war materiel resulting from delays in the provision of US military assistance may be making the current Ukrainian front line more fragile than the relatively slow Russian advances in various sectors would indicate. Ukrainian prioritization of the sectors most threatened by intensive Russian offensive operations could create vulnerabilities elsewhere that Russian forces may be able to exploit to make sudden and surprising advances if Ukrainian supplies continue to dwindle. Russia's retention of the theater-wide initiative increases the risks of such developments by letting the Russian military command choose to increase or decrease operations anywhere along the line almost at will.

German outlet *Der Spiegel* published interviews with unnamed Ukrainian commanders on March 12 who stated that almost all Ukrainian units and formations have to husband ammunition and materiel because of the overall ammunition shortage and that some Ukrainian units with limited ammunition and materiel can only hold their current positions if Russian forces do not "attack with full force."^[1] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi warned that there is a threat of Russian units advancing deep into Ukrainian formations in unspecified areas of the frontline.^[2]

Ukrainian forces are likely attempting to mitigate problems caused by ammunition shortages by prioritizing the allocation of ammunition to sectors of the front facing larger-scale Russian offensive operations. The lower intensity of Russian offensive efforts against currently de-prioritized sectors likely obscures the risks to Ukrainian forces in those areas resulting from ammunition shortages. ISW continues to assess that Russian forces have the theater-wide initiative and will be able to determine the time, location, and scale of offensive operations so long as they retain the initiative.^[3] Syrskyi's and the Ukrainian commanders' statements suggest that an intensification of Russian offensive operations in an area where Ukrainian forces have not prioritized allocating already limited ammunition supplies could lead to a Russian breakthrough and destabilization along a previously stable sector of the

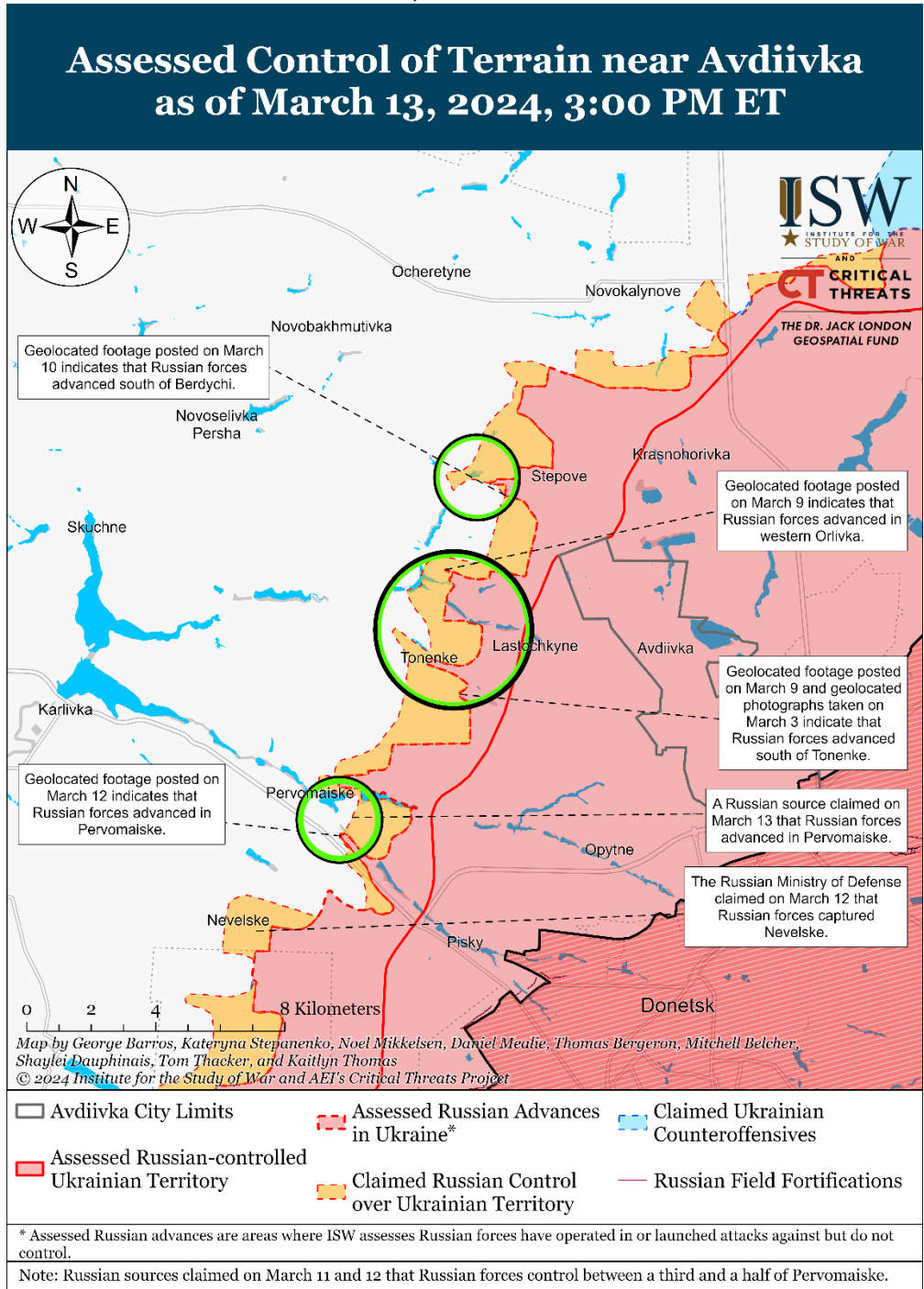
frontline in a short period of time. The current frontline is likely thus not stable, and timely Western resourcing of Ukrainian troops is essential to prevent Russia from identifying and exploiting an opportunity for a breakthrough on a vulnerable sector of the front.

The rate of Russian advance west of Avdiivka has recently slowed, although Russian forces likely retain the capability to intensify offensive operations in the area at a moment of their choosing. Russian forces seized Avdiivka on February 17 after roughly four months of attritional offensive efforts to take the settlement and proceeded to maintain a relatively high tempo of offensive operations in the area to exploit tactical opportunities initially offered by the Russian seizure of the settlement.[4] Russian forces made relatively quick tactical gains west of Avdiivka in late February and aimed to push as far west as possible before Ukrainian forces could establish more cohesive and harder-to-penetrate defensive lines.[5] Ukrainian forces appear to have slowed Russian advances along positions near the Berdychi-Orlivka-Tonenke line in early March, however, despite speculation that these positions would be insufficient to receive oncoming Russian offensive operations.[6] Russian forces likely sought to make the Russian Central Grouping of Forces (comprised of mainly Central Military District [CMD] and Donetsk People’s Republic [DNR] elements) the exploitation force to take advantage of the seizure of Avdiivka.[7] The Russian military command likely intends for CMD elements to continue offensive efforts in the Avdiivka area in the near and medium term.[8]

The Central Grouping of Forces notably has yet to commit elements of select formations in the area to offensive operations west of Avdiivka as far as ISW has been able to observe.[9] Russian President Vladimir Putin previously credited the 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], CMD); 35th, 55th, and 74th motorized rifle brigades (all of the 41st CAA, CMD); 1st, 9th, and 114th motorized rifle brigades and 1454th Motorized Rifle Regiment and 10th Tank Regiment (all of the 1st DNR Army Corps [AC]); and the 6th, 80th, and 239th tank regiments (all of the 90th Tank Division, 41st CAA, CMD) with capturing Avdiivka.[10] Elements of the 2nd CAA’s 15th and 21st motorized rifle brigades, the DNR 1st AC’s 110th Motorized Rifle Brigade, and the Russian “Veterany” private military company (PMC) also heavily participated in Russian offensive operations near Avdiivka beginning in October 2023.[11] ISW has observed reports of elements of all three of the 2nd CAA’s brigades; elements of the 41st CAA’s 55th and 35th motorized rifle brigades, and elements of the DNR’s 1st, 9th, 110th, and 114th motorized rifle brigades attacking northwest, west, or southwest of Avdiivka since February 17.[12] ISW has not observed reports of any elements of the 90th Tank Division committed to fighting following the Russian seizure of Avdiivka, however, and Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on March 2 that elements of the 90th Tank Division were reconstituting and resting in Horlivka (northeast of Avdiivka).[13] Mashovets stated on March 2 that the Russian military command committed elements of the 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade from reserve to offensive operations west of Avdiivka, although ISW has not observed wider subsequent reporting about the 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade fighting in the area.[14]

Elements of the 90th Tank Division, the 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade, the DNR’s 1454th Motorized Rifle Regiment and 10th Tank Regiment, and the “Veterany” PMC likely represent a sizeable uncommitted operational reserve that the Russian command can commit to continue and intensify

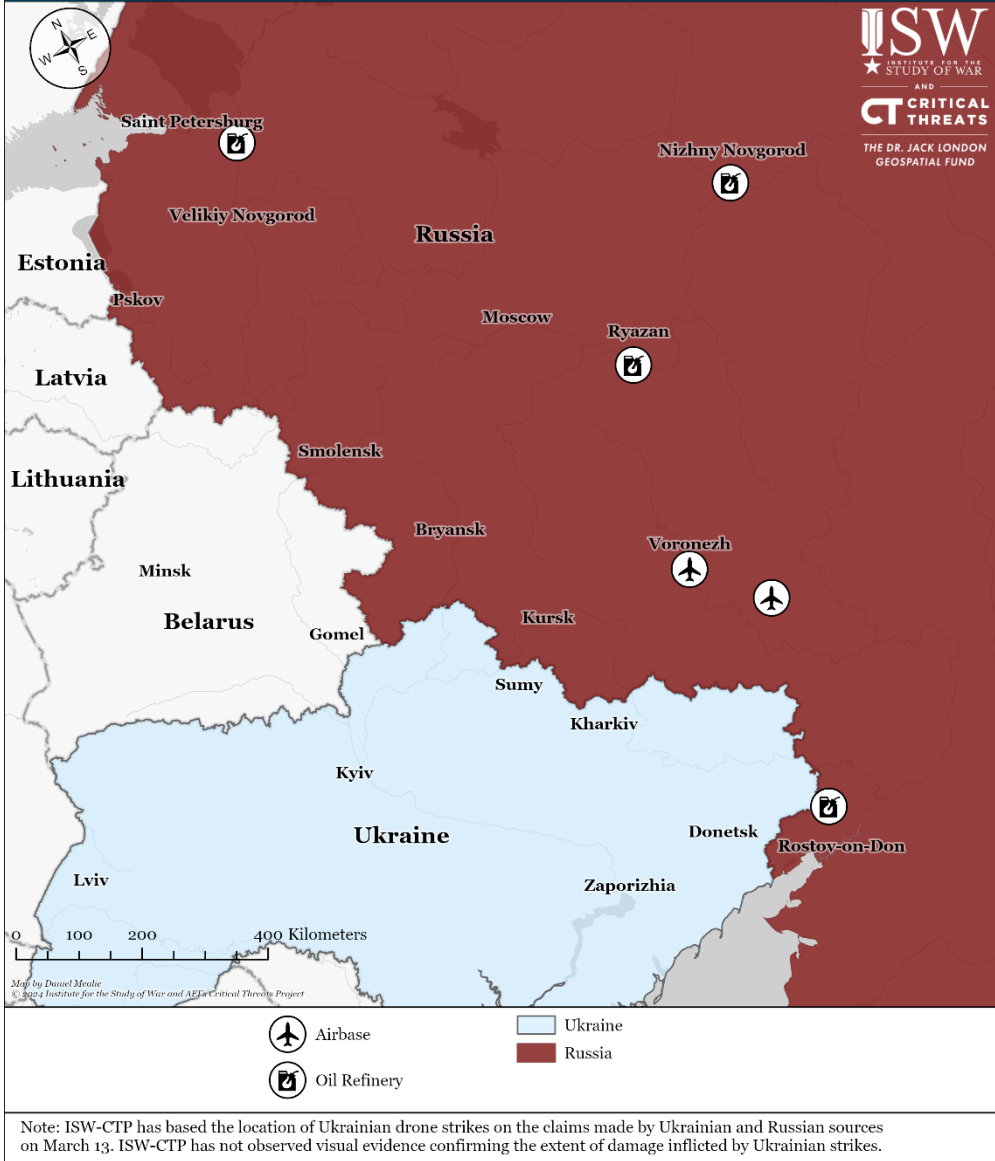
efforts to push west of Avdiivka. These elements likely suffered heavy casualties in offensive operations between October 2023 and mid-February 2024, but a month or more of rest will likely allow Russian forces to replenish these elements and restore their degraded combat capabilities to the low-quality levels that Russian commanders appear willing to accept. ISW previously assessed that the Russian offensive effort in the Avdiivka area would eventually temporarily culminate at least until or unless Russian forces reinforced their attacking elements.^[15] **The Russian forces apparently reconstituting in the Avdiivka area can serve as operational reserves and let Russian forces prevent the culmination of their offensive operation and intensify efforts to push further west of Avdiivka, if or when the Russian command chooses to do so.**



Russia's theater-wide initiative in Ukraine will likely allow the Russian military command to dynamically reprioritize offensive operations throughout the frontline. The theater-wide initiative allows Russia to determine the location, time, intensity, and requirements of fighting along the frontline, and the flexibility this opportunity provides will allow the Russian military command to reprioritize efforts dynamically to take advantage of perceived opportunities occasioned by Ukrainian materiel shortages or other factors.[16] The reprioritization of offensive efforts and the commensurate transfer of materiel and manpower to various areas of the front can result in decreased offensive activity, operational pauses, or the temporary culmination of offensive operations in the area from which attacking forces are drawn. Substantial decreases in the tempo of offensive operations, operational pauses, or outright culmination are typically risky as they relieve pressure on defending forces and offer them opportunities to counterattack to regain the initiative in that sector of the frontline. The Russian military command may believe that delays in Western security assistance and growing Ukrainian materiel shortages will reduce these risks and allow Russian forces to reweight efforts without significant risk anywhere in the theater. Russian forces will continue to leverage the advantages of the theater-wide initiative in Ukraine, and ISW assesses that it would be unwise for Ukraine to cede this advantage to Russia for longer than is necessary, although continuing and increasing shortages of materiel will likely leave Ukraine with few choices.[17]

Ukrainian actors conducted large-scale drone strikes against energy infrastructure and military assets within Russia on the night of March 12 to 13. Ukrainian outlets *Suspilne* and *RBC-Ukraine* reported on March 13 that their Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) sources stated that SBU agents conducted drone strikes against oil refineries in Ryazan, Nizhny Novgorod, and Leningrad oblasts and military airfields in Buturlinovka and Voronezh City, Voronezh Oblast.[18] Ryazan Oblast Head Pavel Malkov confirmed that a drone struck the Ryazan oil refinery, starting a fire, and footage shows a plume of smoke rising from the oil refinery area.[19] At least three Ukrainian drones also targeted the Novoshakhtinsk oil refinery in Rostov Oblast, reportedly causing the refinery to temporarily stop operations.[20] Some Russian sources additionally claimed that one drone struck a Federal Security Service (FSB) regional building in Belgorod City, but Russian opposition media noted that Russian state media later deleted reports of this particular strike.[21] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian air defenses destroyed 58 drones on the night of March 12 to 13: 11 over Belgorod Oblast; eight over Bryansk Oblast; 29 over Voronezh Oblast; eight over Kursk Oblast; one over Leningrad Oblast; and one over Ryazan Oblast.[22] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger reported that Ukrainian drones specifically targeted the Ryazannefteprodukt Rosneft refinery in Ryazan Oblast, the Kirishi Petroleum Organic Synthesis (KINEF) refinery in Kirishi, Leningrad Oblast, and the Novoshakhtinsk refinery in Rostov Oblast, but claimed that Russian air defense and electronic warfare (EW) systems destroyed and neutralized all the drones.[23] A Russian aviation-focused milblogger claimed that Ukrainian drones mostly targeted military airfields in Voronezh Oblast.[24]

Reported Ukrainian Drone Strikes into Russia between March 12 and 13, 2024



SBU sources told *Suspilne* that these strikes are intended to reduce Russia’s economic output and reduce oil revenue and fuel supplies that Russia uses directly for its war effort in Ukraine.[25] Ukrainian actors have continually conducted similar drone strikes against several major Russian oil refineries in 2024 thus far and successfully struck oil refineries in Krasnodar Krai and Volgograd Oblast in January and February.[26] Russian outlet *Kommersant* reported in February that Russian refineries reduced their output by 4 percent in January 2024 compared to the same period in 2024, and by 1.4 percent compared to December 2023.[27] *Kommersant* stated that this reduction was partially a result of increased drone attacks on refinery infrastructure. This reported decline in refinery production is not large, but it shows the potential for Ukraine to generate asymmetrical effects against critical Russian energy and military infrastructure by targeting high-value assets with a few relatively inexpensive drones.

The governor of the pro-Russian Moldovan autonomous region of Gagauzia, Yevgenia Gutsul, claimed on March 13 that her recent meetings with Russian officials in Russia led to deepening economic ties between Gagauzia and Russia, which the Kremlin likely hopes to exploit as part of its wider efforts to destabilize Moldova and prevent Moldova from joining the European Union (EU). Gutsul gave a briefing on her meetings in Russia during her visit from March 1 to 8.[28] Gutsul claimed that her meetings focused on three “key” topics that are of the “most concern” to the Gagauz people — a “special gas tariff” for Gagauzia, opening accounts for Gagauzian businesses and individuals remotely in the Russian “MIR” payment system, and the details about excise taxes and duties so Russia can open its markets to Gagauzian companies. Gutsul claimed that Gagauzian businesses exporting goods to Russia “will most likely receive very serious advantages compared to other regions of Moldova.” Moldova’s other pro-Russian region, the breakaway republic of Transnistria, has long enjoyed free supplies of Russian gas from Russian state-owned energy company Gazprom to an electricity plant in Transnistria.[29] Moldova is still heavily reliant on Transnistrian-produced electricity, despite Moldovan efforts to limit its dependence on Russian energy since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[30] Russian gas supplies to Gagauzia would likely hamper the Moldovan government’s efforts to move away from its decades-long dependence on Russian energy as it turns instead to European suppliers and would create another avenue through which Moldova is vulnerable to Russian “energy blackmail” schemes, which the Kremlin has already employed against Moldova in the past.[31] Russia could also use reduced gas prices for Gagauzia to stoke domestic discontent against the backdrop of higher gas prices in Moldova as compared to previous years when Moldova imported Russian gas.[32] Sergei Ibrishim, the Head of the Main Directorate of the Agro-Industrial Complex of Gagauzia, sent an appeal to Kremlin officials in January 2024 claiming that Gagauzian businesses have been unable to sell their products to Russia since Moldova’s July 2023 decision to leave the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Interparliamentary Assembly and asked Russian officials to abolish excise taxes and customs duties for Gagauzian exports to Russia.[33] The opening of Russian markets to Gagauzian products and the likely tax benefits that would accompany this opening are likely meant to dissuade Moldova from leaving the CIS, which Moldova plans to do by the end of 2024, and create inconsistencies in Moldova’s economic relations that would complicate or derail its progress towards accession into the EU.[34]

The Kremlin is likely trying to use cooperation between Gutsul and other pro-Russian actors and parties in Moldova as part of wider Kremlin hybrid warfare operations in Moldova ahead of upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. Gutsul claimed that she will soon meet with Igor Dodon, Vladimir Voronin, Ilan Shor, and the leadership of the Moldovan Revival Party to discuss “possible cooperation.”[35] Dodon is the former pro-Russian president of Moldova who preceded the current president, Maia Sandu.[36] Voronin is also a former Moldovan president and current member of parliament. Dodon, as the leader of the Moldovan Socialist Party, and Voronin, as the leader of the Moldovan Communist Party and a current member of Parliament, formed an electoral alliance in parliament in 2021.[37] Ilan Shor is a US-sanctioned, pro-Kremlin Moldovan politician who recently met with Kremlin officials in Russia and is currently living in Israel after Moldovan authorities sentenced him *in absentia* for fraud and money laundering in April 2023.[38] The Revival Party is affiliated with Shor’s now-banned Moldovan political party, the Shor Party, and multiple parliamentary deputies from Dodon’s Socialist party have recently joined the Revival Party.[39]

Gutsul, who ran as a candidate for the Shor Party in Gagauzia's 2023 gubernatorial election, does not have an extensive political background. Gutsul is a lawyer by training, reportedly worked as a telephone operator from 2012–2014 and then as a telecommunications operator, commercial representative, and archivist.[40] Gutsul reportedly started working as a secretary for the Shor Party from 2018–2022. Russian Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) leader Leonid Slutsky and Russian cultural figures supported her gubernatorial campaign.[41] Gutsul's plans to meet with multiple Kremlin-linked politicians and parties, despite the fact that these actors are not directly involved in Gagauzian politics and do not have previous ties to Gutsul, suggests that these meetings are Kremlin-orchestrated and aimed at furthering wider Kremlin, not Gagauzian, objectives. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is trying to use both Gagauzia and Transnistria as part of its hybrid operations aimed at sabotaging Moldova's EU accession process and keeping Moldova within Russia's sphere of influence.[42] The Kremlin may hope to create and exploit a coalition between Dodon's Socialist Party, Voronin's Communist Party, and various Shor-linked parties, such as the Revival party, to counter Sandu's pro-Western Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) party ahead of the upcoming Moldovan presidential elections in late 2024 and parliamentary elections in 2025.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled another limited cross-border incursion by the all-Russian pro-Ukrainian Russian Volunteer Corps (RDK), Freedom of Russia Legion (LSR), and Siberian Battalion in Belgorod and Kursk oblasts on the night of March 12 and the morning of March 13. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled all-Russian pro-Ukrainian forces that attempted to conduct a limited incursion near Kozinka and Mokraya Orlovka, Belgorod Oblast and unspecified areas in Kursk Oblast.[43] The LSR posted footage on March 13 and claimed that it seized part of Tetkino, Kursk Oblast, although the footage was geolocated to Ryzhivka, Sumy Oblast.[44] The RDK, LSR, and Siberian Battalion issued a joint statement on March 13 stating that they are targeting Russian military positions in Belgorod and Kursk oblasts and calling on civilians to leave.[45] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov acknowledged the joint statement.[46]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian shortages of ammunition and other war materiel resulting from delays in the provision of US military assistance may be making the current Ukrainian front line more fragile than the relatively slow Russian advances in various sectors would indicate.**
- **The rate of Russian advance west of Avdiivka has recently slowed, although Russian forces likely retain the capability to intensify offensive operations in the area at a moment of their choosing.**
- **Ukrainian actors conducted large-scale drone strikes against energy infrastructure and military assets within Russia on the night of March 12 to 13.**
- **The governor of the pro-Russian Moldovan autonomous region of Gagauzia, Yevgenia Gutsul, claimed on March 13 that her recent meetings with Russian**

officials in Russia led to deepening economic ties between Gagauzia and Russia, which the Kremlin likely hopes to exploit as part of its wider efforts to destabilize Moldova and prevent Moldova from joining the EU.

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- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka amid continued positional engagements along the entire frontline on March 13.**
- **Russian authorities continue efforts to censor protests of wives and mothers of mobilized soldiers ahead of the Russian presidential election.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 13, 2024, 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 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)

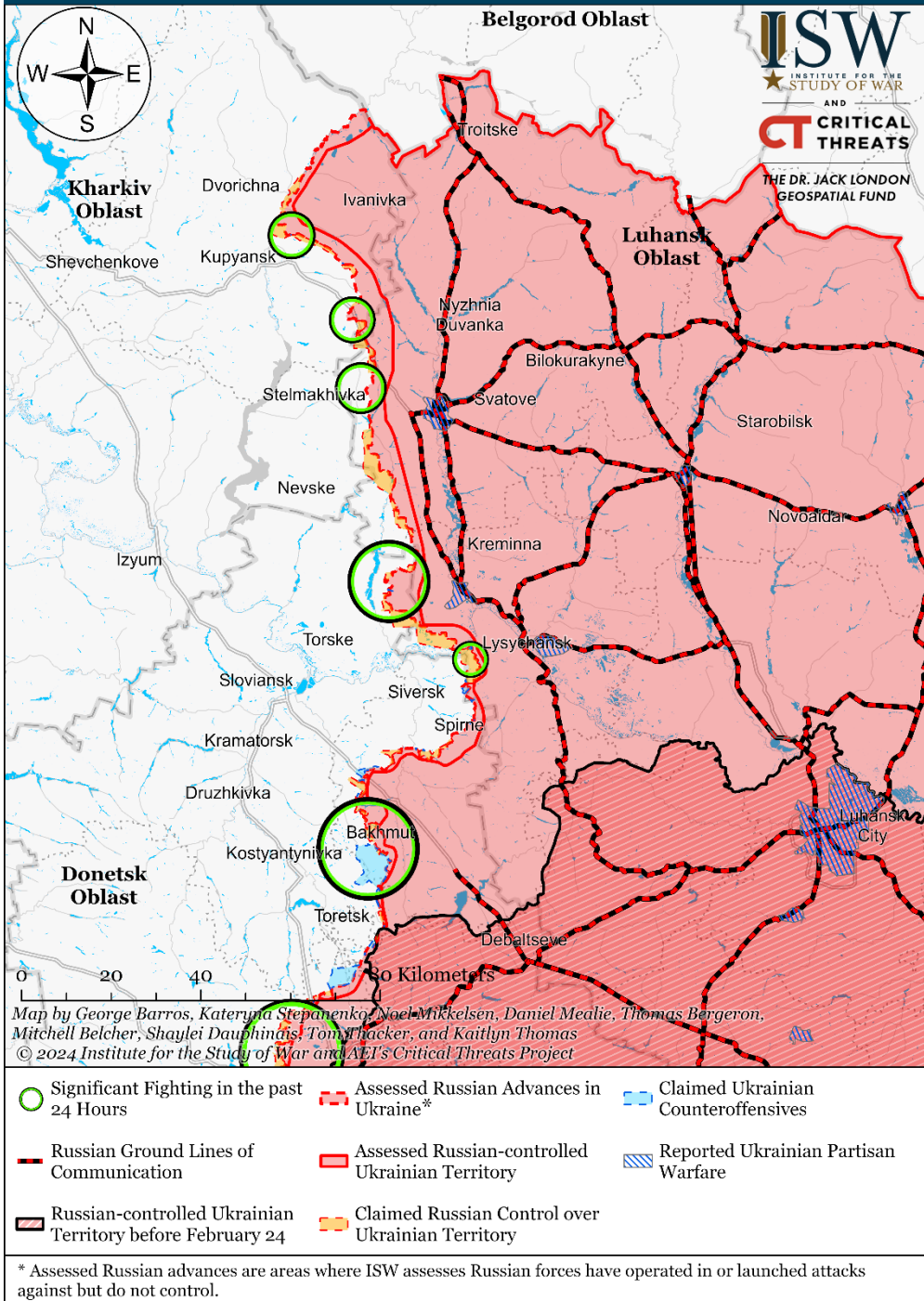
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, 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 along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 13. Positional fighting continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; northwest of Svatove near Tabaivka and Stelmakhivka; west of Kreminna near Terny and Yampolivka; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).[47]

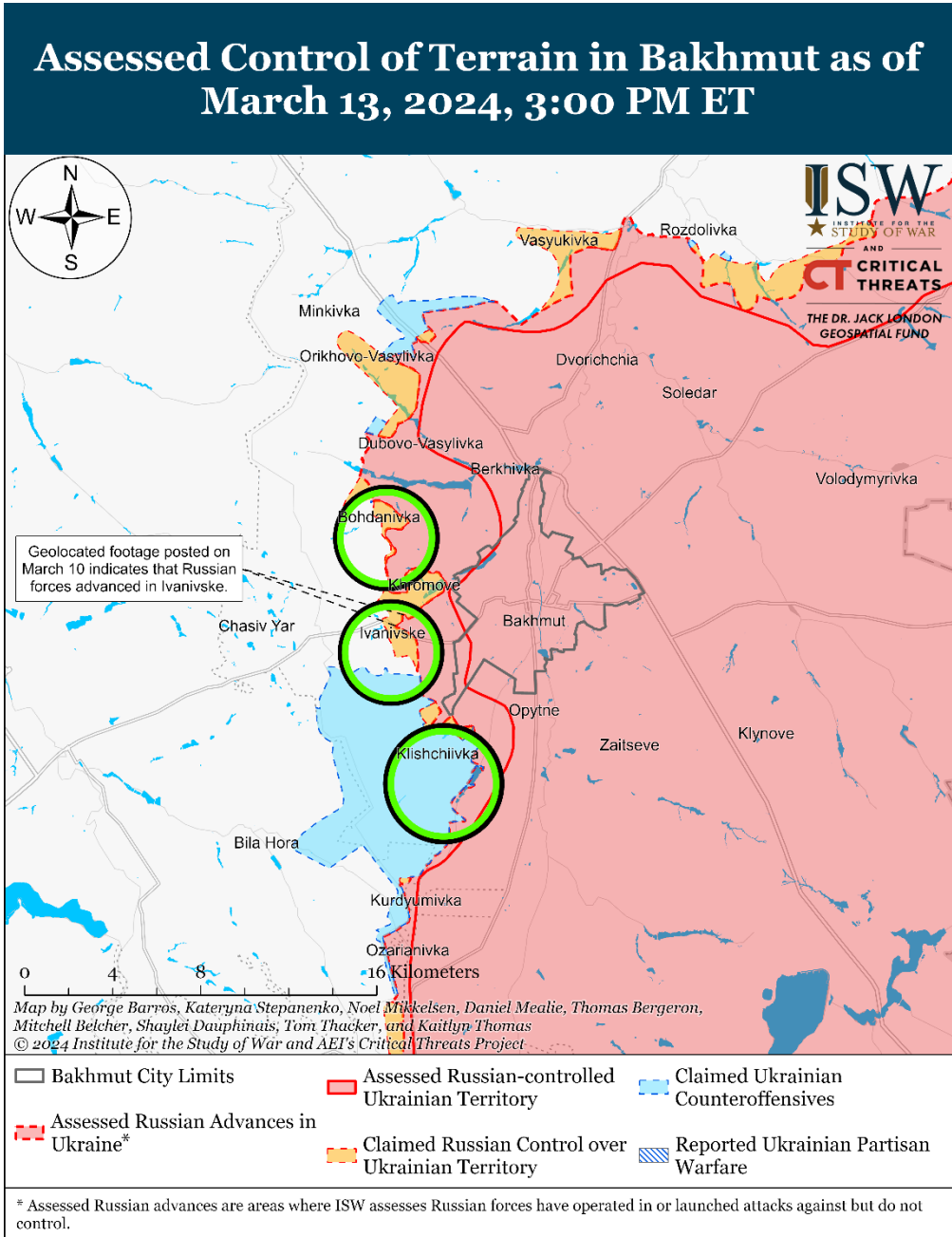
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of March 13, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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 in the Bakhmut direction on March 13 but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have

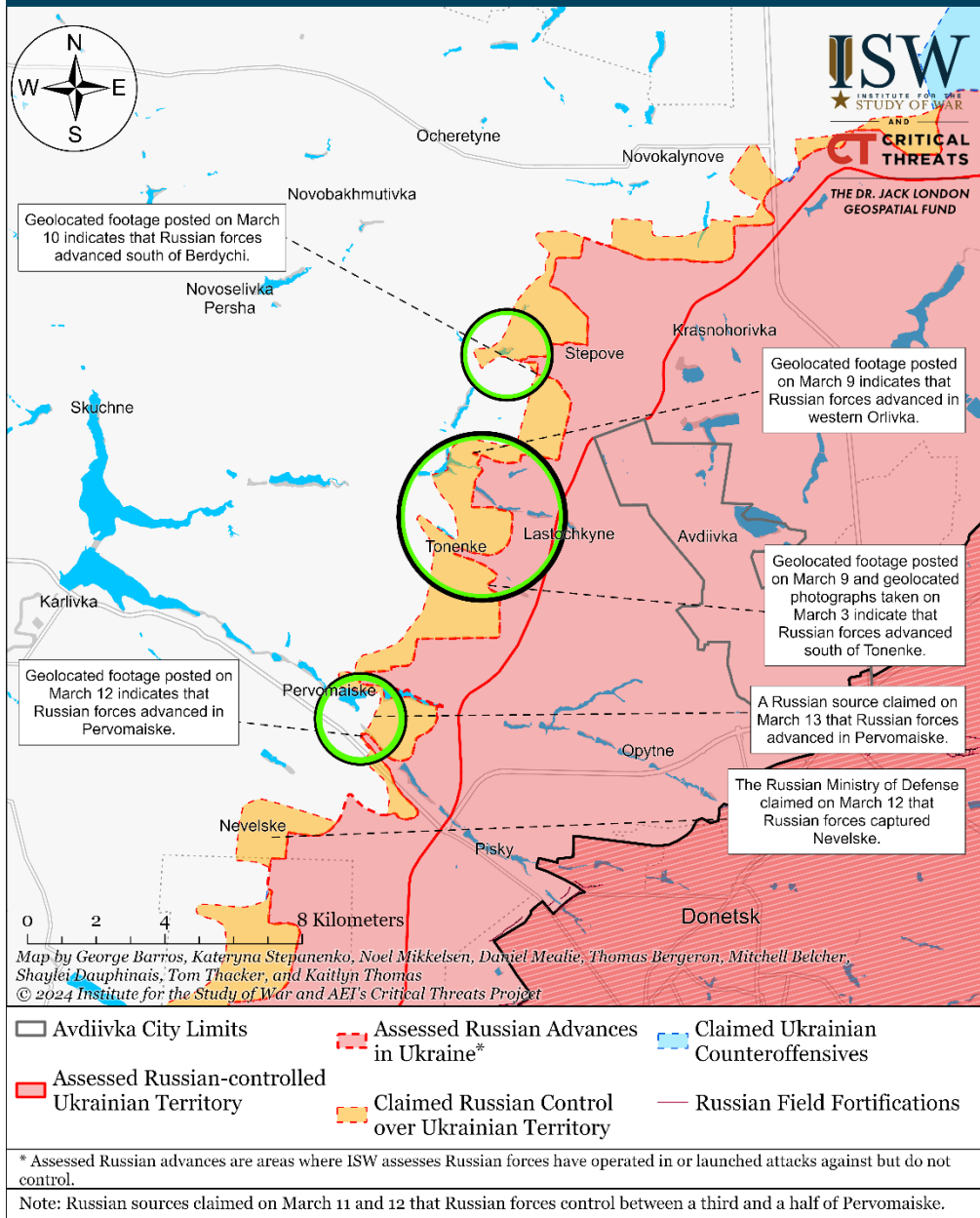
captured unspecified tactical positions near the railway station in Klishchiivka (southwest of Bakhmut), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these Russian gains.[48] Milbloggers also claimed that there is heavy fighting ongoing in Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut).[49] Ukrainian and Russian sources reported positional engagements northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske and east of Chasiv Yar; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[50] Elements of the Russian 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division are continuing to operate northwest of Bakhmut.[51]



Russian forces recently advanced northwest and southwest of Avdiivka. Geolocated footage published on March 12 indicates that Russian forces advanced on the eastern outskirts of Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka).[52] Additional geolocated footage published on March 12 shows that Russian forces recently advanced along Pershotravneva Street in Pervomaiske (southwest of Avdiivka).[53] Russian

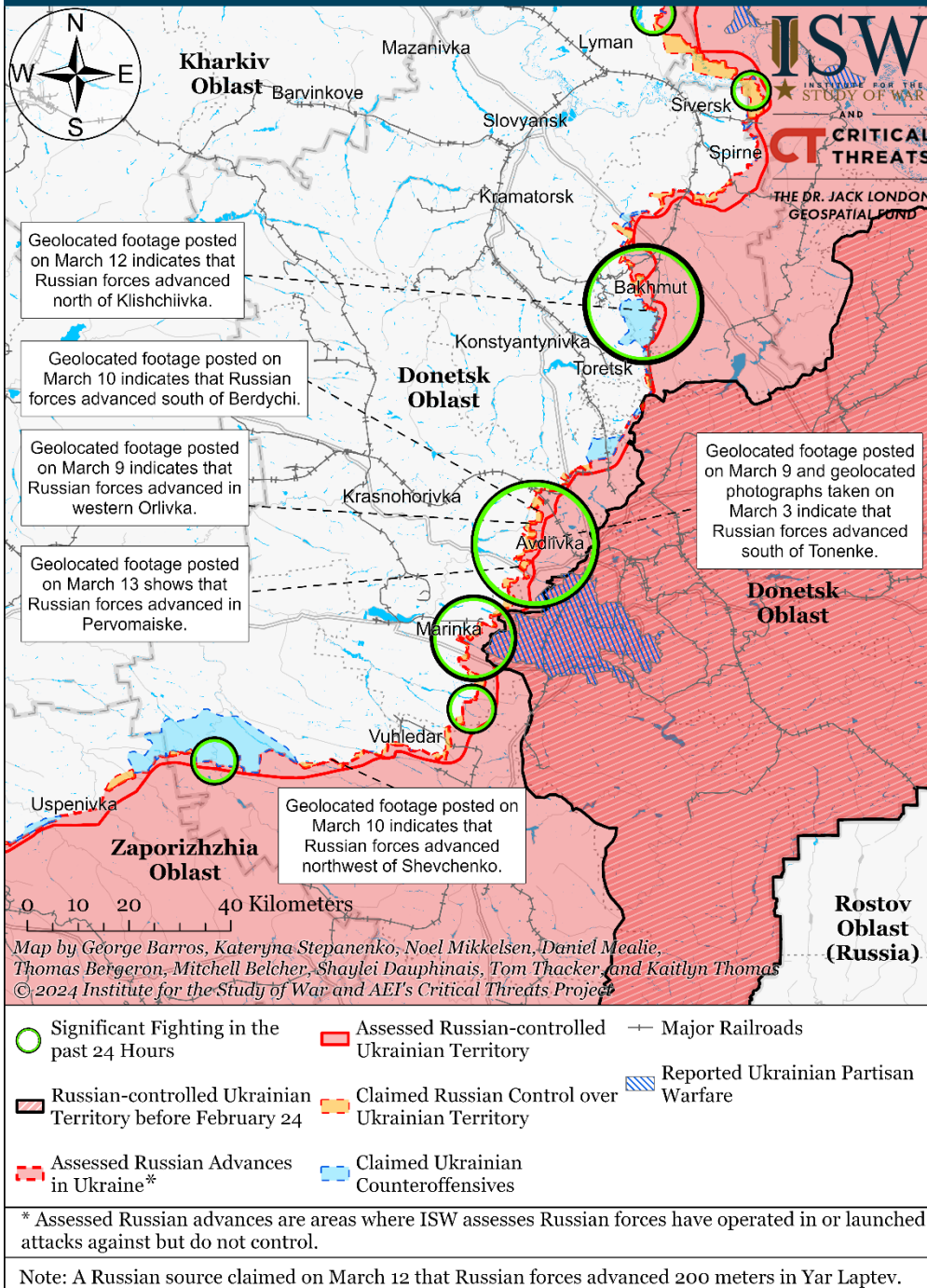
milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are continuing to make gradual tactical advances towards central Pervomaiske.^[54] Russian milbloggers additionally claimed on March 12 that Russian forces expanded their control in Tonenke (west of Avdiivka) and captured new positions in forest areas between Orlivka (west of Avdiivka) and Tonenke.^[55] One milblogger noted on March 13 that the most intense fighting is ongoing between Berdychi and Tonenke (northwest of Avdiivka), but another Russian source noted that fighting overall has slowed down in this area.^[56] Ukrainian and Russian sources reported fighting northwest of Avdiivka near Berdychi and Novobakhmutivka; west of Avdiivka near Orlivka and Tonenke; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske.^[57] Elements of the 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) are reportedly fighting in Pervomaiske.^[58]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Avdiivka as of March 13, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



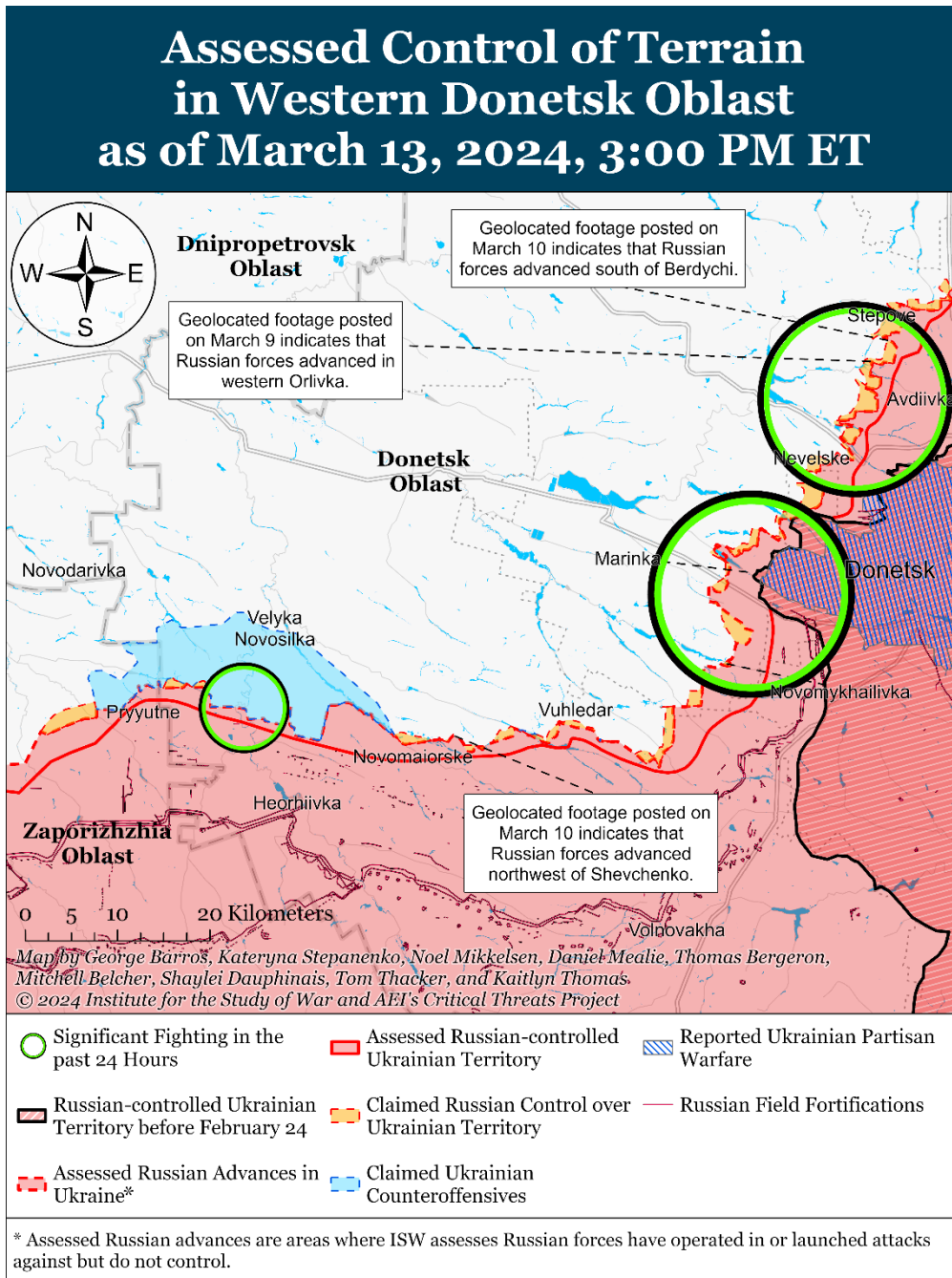
Positional engagements continued west and southwest of Donetsk City on March 13, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are continuing to make gains south of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City) but that the terrain north of Novomykhailivka is making it more difficult for Russian forces to advance.[59] Ukrainian and Russian sources reported continued positional fighting west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka and Pobieda.[60] Elements of the Russian 238th Artillery Brigade (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka.[61]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 13, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Limited positional engagements continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on March 13, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported fighting southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Novodonetske and Shevchenko and south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske.[62] Elements of the Russian 143rd Motorized Rifle Regiment

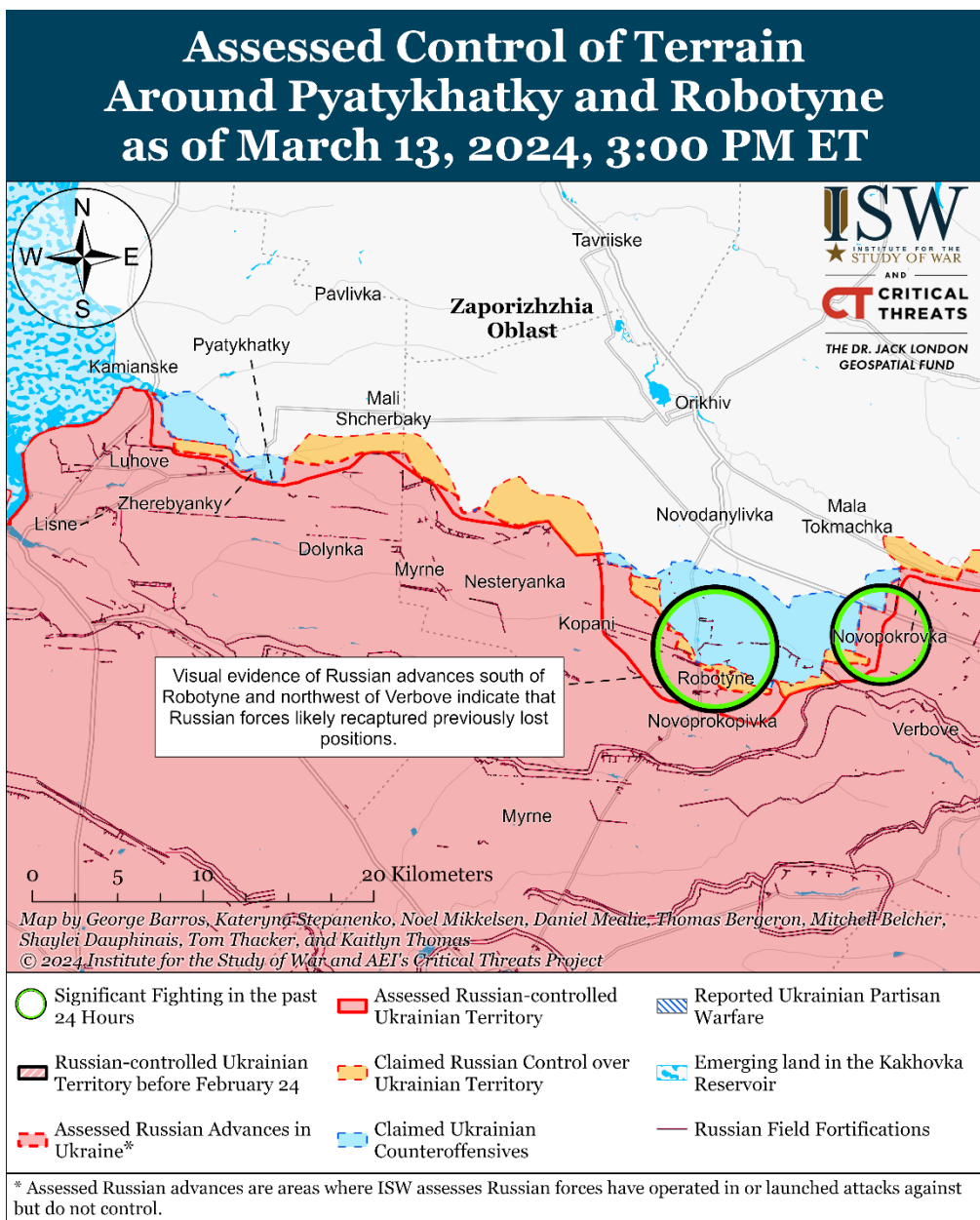
(127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) and 336th Naval Infantry Brigade (11th Army Corps, Baltic Fleet) are operating in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.[63]



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

Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhia Oblast on March 13, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued near Robotyne and Verbove (east of Robotyne).[64] Elements of the Russian 22nd Spetsnaz Brigade and 1430th Motorized Rifle Regiment (Russian Territorial Troops [TRV]) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhia direction.[65] Elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle

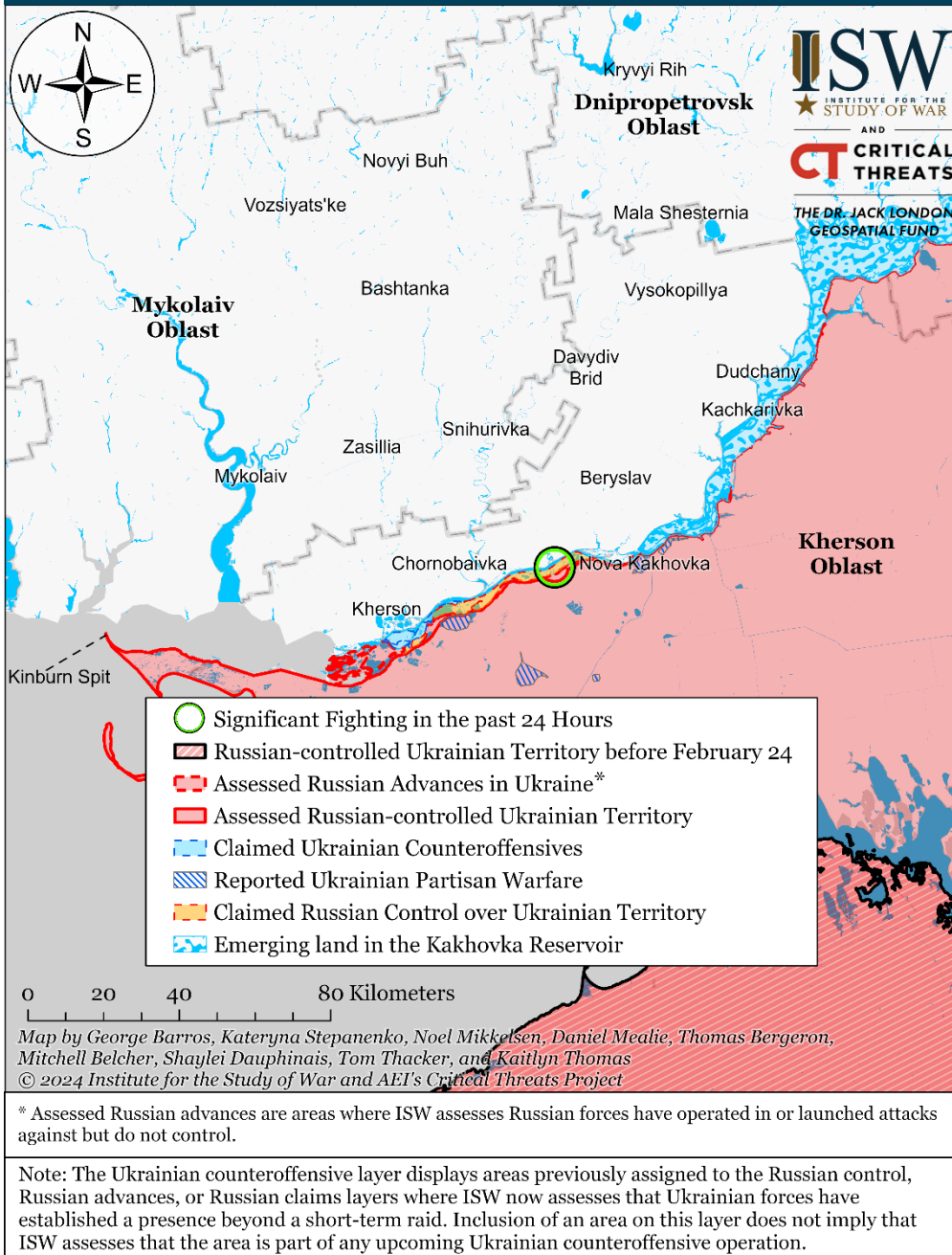
Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Robotyne.[66]



The Russian government responded to the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) March 7 resolution calling for the urgent withdrawal of all unauthorized Russian military and other personnel from the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and the return of the ZNPP to full Ukrainian control.[67] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) claimed on March 13 that any resolutions or statements from officials and international organizations that call for the return of the ZNPP to Ukraine or the establishment of international control over the ZNPP are “attempt[s] to encroach on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia.”[68] The Russian MFA also claimed that Russian forces are taking all possible measures to protect the plant and that Ukrainian forces threaten the plant’s safety. ISW previously assessed that the IAEA’s resolution undermined ongoing Russian efforts to use the IAEA and other international organizations to legitimize its occupation of the ZNPP.[69]

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted a limited raid in west (right) bank Kherson Oblast on the night of March 12–13, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian sources, including Kherson Oblast occupation governor Vladimir Saldo, claimed on March 13 that Russian naval infantry, airborne (VDV) troops, and volunteer servicemen conducted a limited raid on Ukrainian positions on the west bank of the Dnipro River near the base of the Antonivsky Bridge.^[70] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 45th Spetsnaz Brigade participated in the raid.^[71] ISW has not observed any visual confirmation of Russian activity on the west bank and there are no confirmed changes to the frontline in west bank Kherson Oblast. Saldo claimed that all Russian personnel involved in the raid returned to their east (left) bank positions, indicating that Russian forces did not seek to establish an enduring presence in west bank Kherson Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that positional engagements continued near Krynky.^[72] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and elements of the 126th Coastal Defense Brigade (22nd Army Corps, reportedly part of the forming 18th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating in the Kherson direction.^[73]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 13, 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)

Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes against Ukrainian rear areas on March 13. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed one Russian Kh-31 missile over an unspecified location.[74] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces struck Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast with an unspecified missile; Novyi Korotych, Kharkiv Oblast with an unspecified number of S-300 missiles; and a residential building in Sumy Oblast with Shahed-136/131 drones.[75]

Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces launched unspecified missiles from tactical aircraft towards Odesa Oblast in the morning and afternoon and that Ukrainian forces shot down the first missile over the Black Sea and that the second missile malfunctioned and fell on an open area.[76]

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

Russian authorities continue efforts to censor protests of wives and mothers of mobilized soldiers ahead of the Russian presidential election. Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* reported on March 13 that Russian police visited "Way Home" movement leader Maria Andreeva's home to issue a warning that she could be participating in "extremist activities." [77] The "Way Home" movement's participants recently claimed that they would not vote for Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Russian presidential election and accused him of not caring about them or their mobilized relatives. [78] The "Way Home" movement nevertheless called for people to vote on March 17, suggesting that the movement is encouraging Russians to vote for a candidate other than Putin. [79] ISW has observed continued Kremlin attempts to censor and discredit the "Way Home" movement since December 2023. [80]

A Russian insider source claimed on March 13 that the Kremlin intends to transfer powers away from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and remove MVD Head Vladimir Kolokoltsev at an unspecified date in 2024. [81] The source claimed that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) will be involved in rotating personnel out of the MVD, but that the new MVD head may be one of Kolokoltsev's current deputies. ISW cannot independently verify any of the insider source's claims.

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

Nothing significant to report.

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.

ISW is not publishing coverage of activities in Russian-occupied areas today.

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kremlin officials continue to feign interest in negotiations to prompt Western concessions on Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Putin stated in an interview published on March 13 that Russia has never refused negotiations and reiterated accusations that Western officials previously coerced Ukraine to reject an agreement favorable to Russia.[82] Putin asserted that it would be “ridiculous” for Russia to negotiate when Ukraine is “running out of ammunition” and that Russia will proceed with negotiations if the negotiations take into account Russian security guarantees and forbid Ukrainian rearmament.[83] Putin’s focus on Ukrainian “rearmament” is a reference to his call for the “demilitarization” of Ukraine, which he hopes will allow him to enforce his will upon Ukraine without any substantial military resistance.[84] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated on March 13 that Russia will not participate in the Ukrainian Peace Formula Summit in Switzerland in 2024, even if Russia was invited, and denounced the summit and Switzerland as biased.[85] Zakharova similarly stated that Russia is open to negotiations that take into account “legitimate” Russian interests.[86] ISW continues to assess that Russia is not interested in good faith negotiations with Ukraine and has no interest in ending the war on anything but Russia’s articulated maximalist terms of destroying Ukraine’s sovereignty and eradicating the notion of a unique Ukrainian national identity.[87]

Putin also reiterated boilerplate nuclear rhetoric that aims to deter Western support to Ukraine over fears of Russia potentially using nuclear weapons. Putin stated that Russia is always in a state of nuclear readiness and that Russia will only use nuclear weapons to protect the existence of the Russian state.[88] Putin’s continued appeals to Russian nuclear capabilities do not reflect any changes in Russian nuclear doctrine, and Putin likely refers to these capabilities to try to raise Western fears of nuclear escalation. ISW continues to assess that Russian use of a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine remains highly unlikely.[89]

The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) warned that the Kremlin intends to intensify an information operation called “Perun” ahead of the Russian presidential election on March 17 that aims to discredit Ukraine among Russians and the West.[90] The GUR stated on March 13 that Russian special services, including Rosgvardia and the Russian Main Directorate of the General Staff (GRU), have received instructions to discredit Ukrainian and pro-Ukrainian politicians in the West while continuing efforts to portray Ukrainians as “Nazis” among Russian and Western audiences.[91] The GUR reported that the Kremlin information operation will peak around the Russian presidential

election and culminate by the end of June 2024.[92] The Kremlin is reportedly conducting a parallel information campaign called “Maidan-3” that aims to sow panic and discontent in the Ukrainian population and drive a wedge between civilians and military and political leadership in Ukraine.[93] Russian actors will reportedly intensify the “Maidan-3” information operation in May 2024.[94]

A Kremlin-affiliated prominent milblogger continues to accuse the West of bribing and blackmailing Armenian officials to pursue anti-Russian positions.[95] ISW assesses that the Kremlin is likely preparing a harsher and more concerted response as Armenia continues to take measures to distance itself from Russia and signal interest in strengthening relations with the West.[96]

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 Secretary Dmitry Mezentsev, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk, Russian Ambassador to Belarus Boris Gryzlov, and Smolensk Oblast Governor Vasily Anokhin participated in a meeting of the Union State’s Council of Ministers High-Level Group on March 13.[97] Overchuk stated that Russian companies from 72 Russian federal subjects entered 5,236 trade contracts with Belarusian companies from March 2022 to February 2024. ISW continues to assess that Belarusian companies assist Russian businesses in sanctions evasions schemes.[98]

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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