

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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March 20, 2024, 6:30pm ET

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

Click [here](#) to 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 12:30 pm ET on March 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Several Russian financial, economic, and military indicators suggest that Russia is preparing for a large-scale conventional conflict with NATO, not imminently but likely on a shorter timeline than what some Western analysts have initially posited.** Russian President Vladimir Putin met with the leaders of Russian State Duma factions on March 19 and outlined priorities for his fifth presidential term.[1] Putin emphasized the importance of developing the Russian economy and expanding the social programs announced in his February 29 address to the Federation Council.[2] Putin claimed on March 19 that he personally witnessed how corporate interests fueled appointments to legislative bodies while he was working in Leningrad and later St Petersburg, although he himself likely made substantial commissions from illegally endorsed contracts and licenses while serving as St. Petersburg Deputy Mayor and Head of Committee.[3] Putin urged the Russian State Duma faction leaders to act in the interest of the state instead of corporations or parties and emphasized the importance of appointing people based on skill and competence. Putin similarly criticized the Russian “elite” in his February 29 Federation Council address by claiming that the individuals who “lined their pockets” in the 1990s are not the elite, but that the “real elite” are workers and military servicemen who proved their loyalty to Russia.[4]

Putin is likely attempting to set conditions to stabilize Russia’s long-term financial position at a higher level of government expenditure and is signaling that Russia’s long-term financial stability will require imposing at least some pain on some wealthy industrialist *siloviki* (Russian strongmen with political influence). Putin likely understands that financial crackdowns against industrialist *siloviki* could risk the political rapport Putin has built with them and is trying to mitigate those consequences. Russia does not appear to be facing imminent financial crisis, and increased military spending has been the most significant change in Russian budgetary policy, so efforts to secure Russia’s financial future are much more likely intended to set long-term conditions than to address immediate financial concerns.[5] Russia continues efforts to circumvent international sanctions, and the International Monetary Fund assessed that Russia’s GDP will grow by 2.6 percent in 2024 and reported that Russia’s GDP grew faster

than all Group of Seven (G7) countries' economies in 2023.[6]

Polish President Andrzej Duda emphasized in a March 20 interview with *CNBC* that Putin is intensifying efforts to shift Russia to a war economy with the intention of being able to attack NATO as early as 2026 or 2027, citing unspecified German research.[7] Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen stated on February 9 that new intelligence indicates that Russia may attempt to attack a NATO country within three to five years, an accelerated timeline from NATO's reported assessment in 2023.[8] The timeline for the reconstitution of a significant Russian conventional military threat depends heavily on the financial resources Putin is willing to put against military efforts. In the absence of other explanations for Putin's apparent preparations to risk damaging his relationship with wealthy Russian clients and in the context of continuing announcements of plans to expand the Russian military considered below, Putin's attempts to set conditions to stabilize Russia's economy and finances are most likely part of Russian financial and domestic preparations for a potential future large-scale conflict with NATO and not just for a protracted war in Ukraine.

**The Russian military continues to undertake structural reforms to simultaneously support the war in Ukraine while expanding Russia's conventional capabilities in the long term in preparation for a potential future large-scale conflict with NATO.** Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu addressed the Russian MoD board on March 20 and discussed ongoing Russian military reforms intended to increase the Russian military's combat capabilities.[9] Shoigu reported that Russia has formed the "Dnepr River Flotilla" and a "brigade" of boats as part of the flotilla. The Dnepr River Flotilla is the historical name of various special military river units that were active during the Russo-Turkish wars in 1735-1739 and 1787-1792, the Russian Civil War, and World War II, but this is the first time that Russian military officials have confirmed the formation of the Dnepr River Flotilla in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine.[10] The Dnepr River Flotilla would most likely be deployed along with the Dnepr Grouping of Forces in Kherson Oblast and will likely defend against Ukrainian cross-river raids and counteract Ukrainian efforts to sustain a limited presence in left (east) bank Kherson Oblast. The size and level of equipment of the Dnepr River Flotilla remains unclear, but the Russian military command may also intend to use it to support Russian cross-river raids and attempts to land in Ukrainian-controlled west (right) bank Kherson Oblast. Russian and Ukrainian sources confirmed that Russian forces were able to conduct a limited raid and temporarily land in west bank Kherson Oblast on March 13, and the Dnepr River Flotilla could feasibly support further such cross-river attempts.[11] It is unlikely that the Dnepr River Flotilla has the manpower and equipment necessary to establish an enduring large-scale Russian presence in west bank Kherson Oblast or credibly threaten to re-occupy significant territory in Kherson Oblast at this time, but the presence of a new formation in this area may force Ukraine to commit manpower and scarce materiel to an axis that has been relatively inactive since November 2022. The deployment of the Dnepr River Flotilla may force the Ukrainian command to make challenging decisions about resource attribution as it husbands limited stores of artillery ammunition and other critical military equipment.

**Shoigu outlined several ongoing efforts to bolster Russia's conventional military capabilities, more likely as part of Russia's long-term effort to prepare for a potential conventional war with NATO than as part of the war against Ukraine.** Shoigu stated that Russia has formed an army corps (AC) (likely either in reference to the AC currently forming in Karelia or to the 40th AC, which has deployed to Kherson Oblast) and a motorized rifle division (potentially in

reference to the 67th Motorized Rifle Division, which is committed to the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast line as part of the new 25th Combined Arms Army).[12] Shoigu also claimed that the Russian military plans to form two combined arms armies (CAAs) and 14 divisions, and 16 brigades by the end of 2024. Russia formed two new CAAs — the 25th and the 18th — in 2023, and it is unclear if Shoigu is suggesting that Russia intends to stand up two additional CAAs over the course of 2024.[13] Shoigu initially announced in January 2023 that Russia would also create three new motorized rifle divisions, two new air assault divisions, and reorganize seven motorized rifle brigades into motorized rifle divisions, and Shoigu's March 20 speech did not differentiate between air assault and motorized rifle divisions, so it is likely that Shoigu is suggesting that Russia will stand up two new divisions in 2024 in addition to the 12 divisions (air assault and motorized rifle, inclusive) he announced in January 2023. ISW continues to assess that Russia currently lacks the manpower, military infrastructure, and training capacity to properly staff several entirely new divisions to army-level formations to full end strength in the *immediate to medium-term*.<sup>[14]</sup> Such reforms, however, are more likely intended to build out Russia's *long-term* military capabilities vis-a-vis NATO, as opposed to immediately creating and staffing new formations up to the army level.

**Ongoing personnel changes within the Russian MoD may be further indicators of Russia's preparations for a conflict in the long-term.** Shoigu introduced Lieutenant General Andrei Bulyga as the Deputy Defense Minister for logistics support during the MoD address on March 20, confirming the Russian MoD's initial announcement of Bulyga's appointment on March 11.<sup>[15]</sup> The Russian Armed Forces Headquarters of Logistics Support, which Bulyga now heads, is intended to organize and coordinate logistical support for Russian troops in both peacetime and wartime.<sup>[16]</sup> Bulyga's appointment is unlikely to remedy logistics and support issues faced by Russian troops in Ukraine in the immediate term, but Bulyga may spearhead reforms to the logistics headquarters that will have more noticeable impacts in the medium to long-term. Bulyga will likely task his department with addressing logistical issues to support the ongoing conventional military reforms, setting conditions for longer-term efforts to build out Russia's conventional capabilities.

**The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reportedly conducted a drone strike against a Russian air base in Saratov Oblast on March 20 amid further indications that Ukrainian drone strikes within Russia are achieving limited asymmetric effects against Russian military assets and economic output.** Ukrainian and Western media reported that the GUR struck unspecified targets at the Engels air base in Saratov Oblast with Ukrainian-produced drones.<sup>[17]</sup> Satellite imagery indicates that there were 11 Russian aircraft present at the air base on March 19, although ISW has yet to observe any visual confirmation that Ukrainian forces struck Russian aircraft at Engels-2 Air Base.<sup>[18]</sup> The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces destroyed four Ukrainian drones over Saratov Oblast, and Saratov Oblast Governor Roman Busargin claimed that the strikes did not cause any damage.<sup>[19]</sup> Geolocated footage from Engels includes the sound of loud explosions from nearby but is unclear if the footage depicts strikes against targets in Engels or the sound of Russian air defense striking aerial targets.<sup>[20]</sup>

Recent Ukrainian drone strikes against oil refineries within Russia may have significantly disrupted Russia's refining capacity. *Bloomberg* reported on March 20 that Ukrainian drone strikes may have disabled up to 11 percent of Russia's total refining capacity.<sup>[21]</sup> Torbjorn Tornqvist, Chief Executive Officer of multinational energy commodities trading company Guvnor, estimated on March 18 that

Ukrainian strikes have taken 600,000 barrels of daily Russian oil refining capacity offline, and American multinational financial institution JPMorgan Chase and Co. estimated that the strikes have taken 900,000 barrels of daily refining capacity offline.[22] The decline in Russia’s refining capacity appears to have prompted a surge in gasoline and diesel prices on the St. Petersburg International Mercantile Exchange, but only a marginal increase in the cost of domestic fuel prices within Russia.[23] Russian Energy Minister Nikolai Shulginov stated on March 20 that the Russian Energy Ministry expects refining volumes to remain roughly the same in 2024 as in 2023, although Russian Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin stated on March 14 that a possible reduction in primary oil refining in 2024 would likely lead to increases in Russian crude oil exports (since Russia would not be able to refine as much as it usually does).[24] Tornqvist estimated that offline Russian refining capacity will likely immediately impact Russian distillate exports (petroleum products produced in conventional distillation operations).[25] ISW has yet to observe reports of decreased Russian crude oil and petroleum product exports following Ukrainian strikes on Russian oil refineries in recent weeks. Russia relied on oil revenues to buoy federal budgets amid increased spending on its war in Ukraine in 2023, and significant constraints on Russian oil exports could have substantial impacts on Russia’s ability to balance a record level of defense spending in 2024 with its commitments on social spending.[26]

Ukrainian drone strikes against targets within Russia are also likely increasing pressures on available Russian air defense assets. Director of the Russian Energy Ministry’s Department for the Development of the Gas Industry Artem Verkhov stated on March 19 that the Russian Energy Ministry is working with Rosgvardia on proposals to deploy Pantsir-S1 air defense systems to strategic energy facilities within Russia.[27] GUR spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated that Russia has already deployed Pantsir air defense systems at energy facilities, however, and that Russian claims about the planned deployments are meant to reassure the Russian public.[28] Previous Ukrainian drone strikes against strategic targets in Moscow and Leningrad oblasts may have fixed Russian short-range air defenses along expected flight routes, and Russian ultranationalists have recently complained about a lack of available air defense assets in other Russian federal subjects in deep rear areas.[29] **The Ukrainian ability to target Russian military infrastructure within Russia, threaten Russian oil refining and exports, and increase pressure on Russia’s air defense umbrella demonstrates that Ukraine can achieve asymmetrical impacts through strikes with limited numbers of mostly domestically produced drones.**

**Kremlin-affiliated actors in the pro-Russian Moldovan autonomous region of Gagauzia are invoking narratives that mirror previous Russian claims about Ukraine in the years leading up to Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, likely as part of the Kremlin’s wider hybrid efforts to destabilize Moldova.** Yevgenia Gutsul, the governor of Gagauzia, stated in an interview with Russian outlet *Izvestia* published on March 20 that she would like Gagauzia to receive “zashchita” (a word that means both “defense” and “protection”) from Russia so that Gagauzian residents can have the right to a prosperous life, Gagauzian farmers can export their products to Russia, and Gagauzia can receive gas at a lower price — points Gutsul recently claimed she spoke about with Russian President Vladimir Putin.[30] Gutsul also claimed that Gagauzia is not considering leaving Moldova but wants the Moldovan government to observe the 1994 law on Gagauzia’s “special legal status” and implied that Gagauzia would consider leaving if this condition was not met.[31] Gutsul has recently drawn increased attention to the fact that Moldovan President Maia Sandu has not signed the decree to confirm Gutsul as a member of the Moldovan government, as required by the 1994 law.[32]

Sandu stated in September 2023, however, that she would not sign the decree until the Moldovan Prosecution Service completed its investigation regarding corruption and bribery in the Gagauzia gubernatorial elections that brought Gutsul to power.[33]

Gutsul's claims that the Moldovan government is not adhering to the law on Gagauzia's special status parallel the Kremlin's previous accusations that Ukraine did not adhere to the Minsk Agreements' stipulations on the "special status" for the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR).[34] Kremlin officials and mouthpieces and Transnistrian authorities have also similarly claimed that Moldova abandoned the 5+2 negotiating process that aimed to resolve the decades-long conflict in Moldova's other pro-Russian region, the breakaway republic of Transnistria.[35] The Kremlin has notably claimed that Ukraine's alleged violations of the Minsk Agreements "forced" Russia to launch its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.[36] The Seventh Congress of Transnistrian Deputies on February 28 formally requested unspecified "zashchita" from Russia in response to alleged increasing pressures from Moldova.[37] ISW previously assessed that the use of a word that means both "defense" and "protection" was likely intended to set conditions for the Kremlin to interpret "defense" in a military sense if it so chooses.[38] Gutsul's use of "zashchita" and the fact that both Transnistrian and Gagauzian authorities have invoked narratives that mirror those surrounding the Minsk Agreements in a major Russian publication suggest that the Kremlin is orchestrating a wider effort between pro-Russian actors in Gagauzia and Transnistria as part of the Kremlin's ongoing hybrid operations to destabilize Moldova from within.[39]

Moldovan Interior Minister Adrian Efros stated on March 20 that the recent footage of a single drone allegedly flying from the direction of Odesa Oblast and striking a helicopter on the territory of a military unit in Transnistria is a video "montage" meant to cause panic and fear and that there was actually no explosion.[40] The Transnistrian Ministry of State Security (MGB), which is reportedly a "department" of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), responded to Efros' statement and stated that it will present all available "evidence" of the incident to Interpol for assistance in an investigation.[41] ISW previously assessed that Russia or Russian-linked actors would likely be the beneficiaries of the alleged drone strike in Transnistria.[42] Russia or Russian-linked actors would also likely benefit from the dissemination of fake footage of a drone strike in Transnistria that heightens tensions between Transnistrian and Moldovan authorities and that the Kremlin could use to justify any future Russian activity in Transnistria. ISW cannot independently verify the details of the singular drone strike in Transnistria, but it is consistent with the way that Russia staged provocations in Donbas leading up to the 2022 full-scale invasion.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Several Russian financial, economic, and military indicators suggest that Russia is preparing for a large-scale conventional conflict with NATO, not imminently but likely on a shorter timeline than what some Western analysts have initially posited.**
- **The Russian military continues to undertake structural reforms to simultaneously support the war in Ukraine while expanding Russia's conventional capabilities in the long term in preparation for a potential future large-scale conflict with NATO.**

- **GUR reportedly conducted a drone strike against a Russian air base in Saratov Oblast on March 20 amid further indications that Ukrainian drones strikes within Russia are achieving limited asymmetric effects against Russian military assets and economic output.**
- **Kremlin-affiliated actors in the pro-Russian Moldovan autonomous region of Gagauzia are invoking narratives that mirror previous Russian claims about Ukraine in the years leading up to Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, likely as part of the Kremlin's wider hybrid efforts to destabilize Moldova.**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Kreminna and Donetsk City on March 20.**
- **The Russian military continues to train drone operators for operations in Ukraine.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 20, 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**

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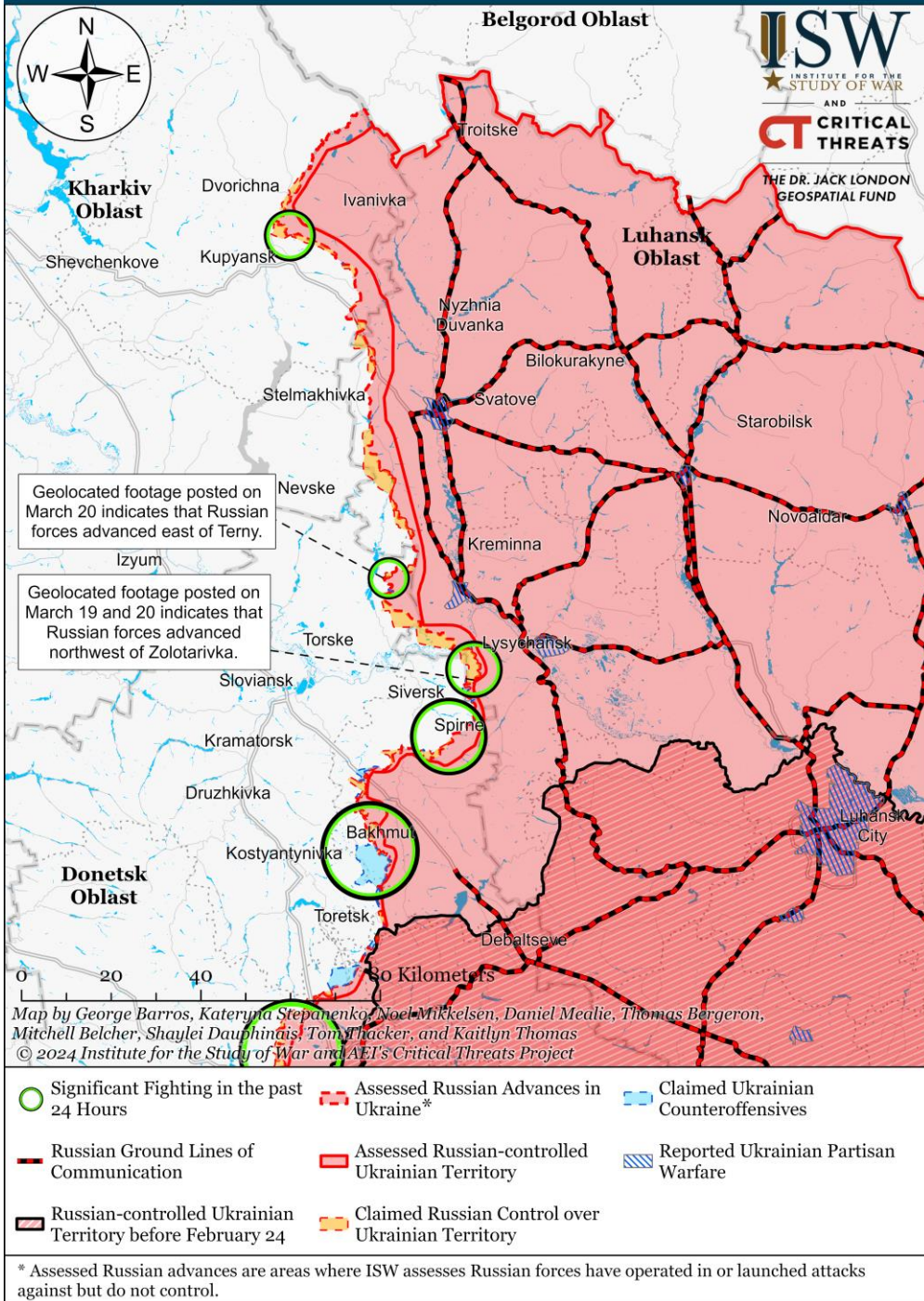
**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 — Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian sources claimed that the intensity of limited all-Russian pro-Ukrainian cross-border raids into Belgorod and Kursk oblasts decreased on March 20. The Russian MoD and a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces completely pushed the Russian volunteers out of Kozinka, Belgorod Oblast, and are now clearing the settlement.[43] Other Russian milbloggers claimed that pro-Ukrainian forces continued attacks in and around Kozinka.[44]

Russian forces recently made confirmed advances west and south of Kreminna on March 20. Ukraine’s Ground Forces reported on March 20 that Ukrainian forces repelled a “massive” Russian assault in the Lyman direction (west of Kreminna) and published geolocated footage from the assault showing that Russian forces advanced towards Terny (west of Kreminna).[45] The footage shows Ukrainian strikes damaging or destroying several Russian armored vehicles in this area, but the full extent of Russian losses and the size of this assault remains unclear. Additional geolocated footage published on March 19 shows that Russian forces recently advanced north of Zolotarivka (about 17km south of Kreminna).[46] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; west of Kreminna near Terny; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka and Zolotarivka.[47] Elements of the 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th CAA, Western Military District [WMD]) are reportedly operating in the Kupyansk direction.[48]



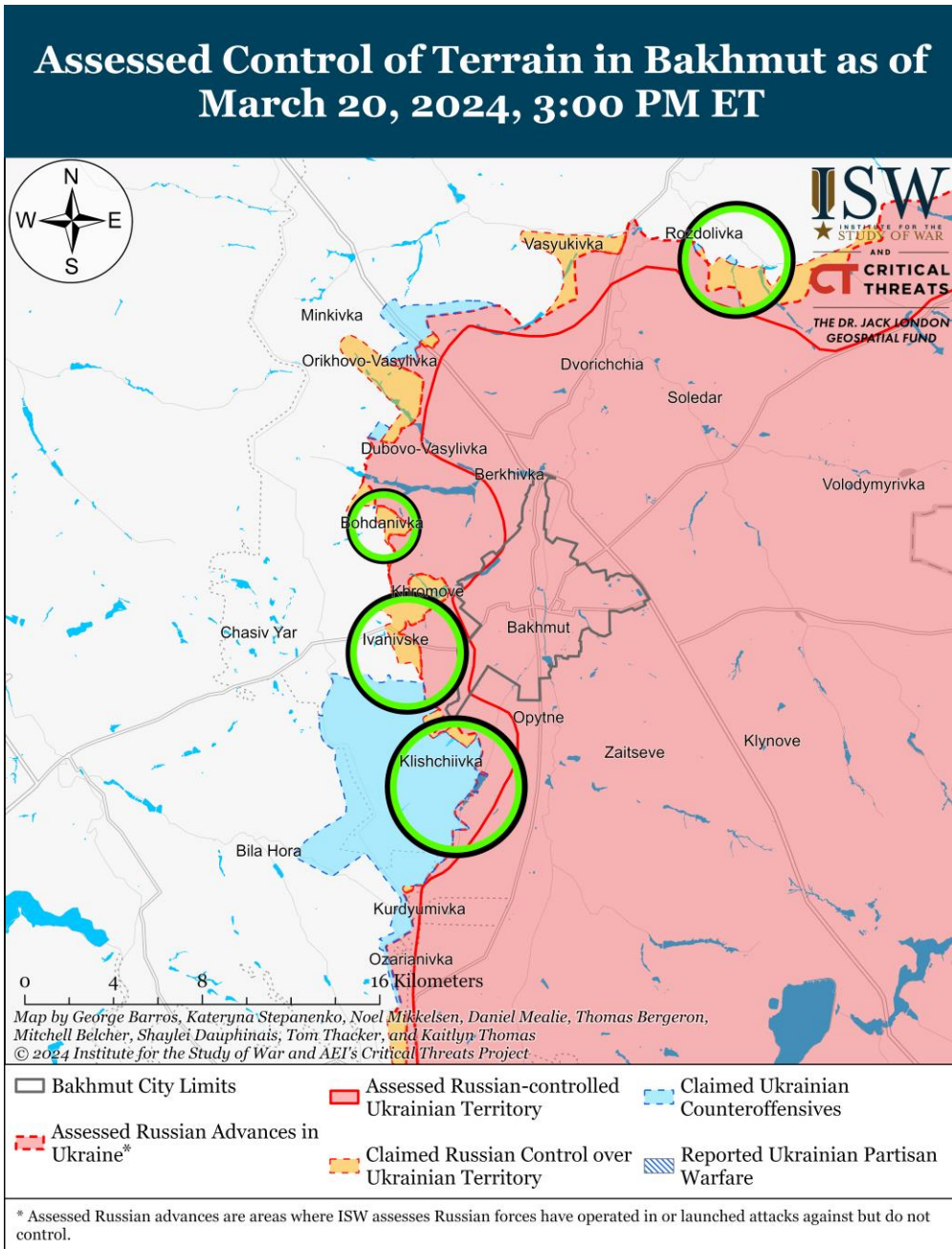
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of March 20, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



## **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 near Bakhmut on March 20, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements

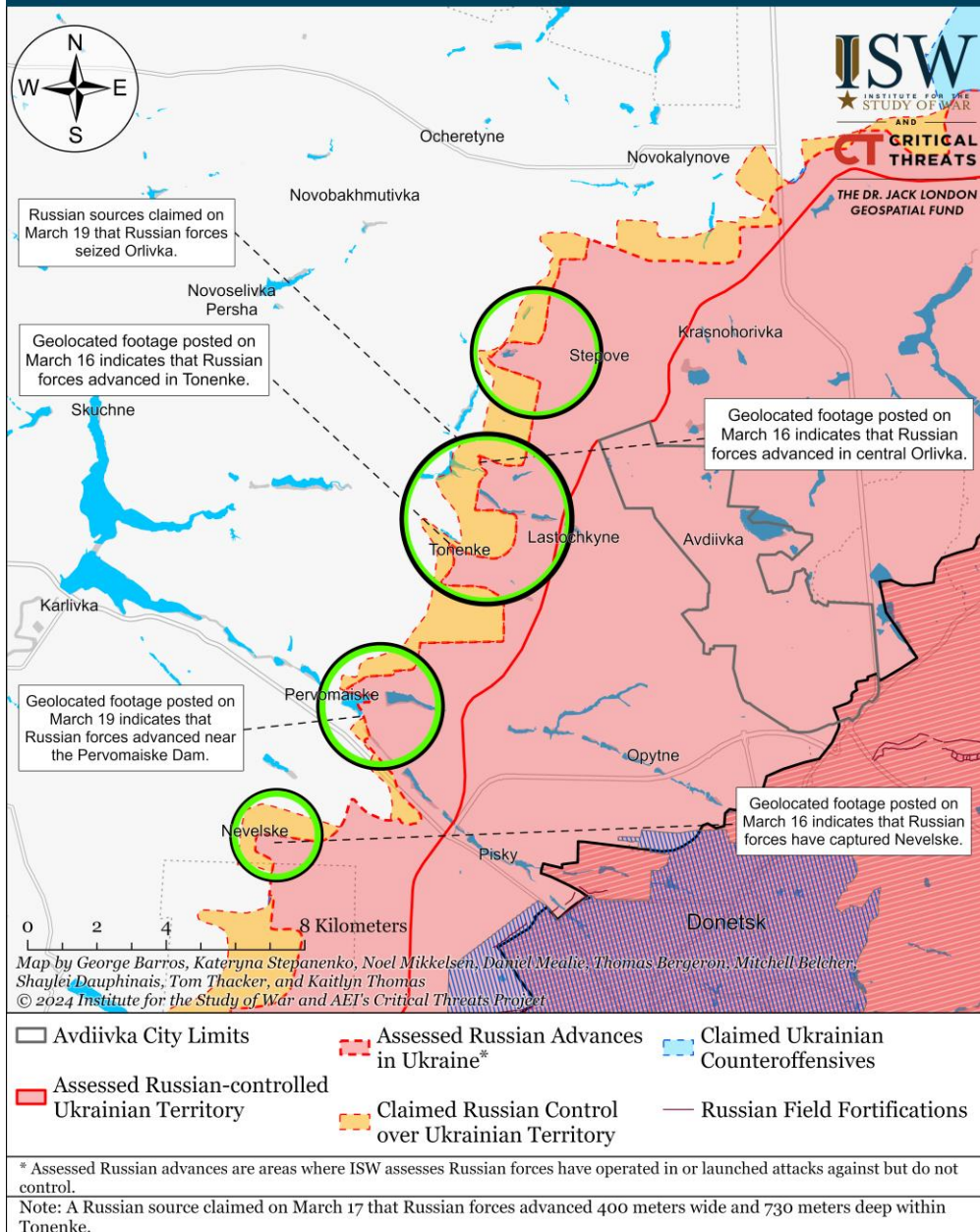
continued northeast of Bakhmut near Rozdolivka, Vesele, and Spirne; northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Predtechnye, Klishchiivka, and Bila Hora.[49] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division are reportedly operating west of Bakhmut near Chasiv Yar.[50]



A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Oleksandropil (southwest of Horlivka) as part of an effort to gain access to Kostyantynivka (west of Bakhmut) from further southwest along the H-20 Donetsk City-Kostyantynivka highway and to move the frontline further away from the Horlivka-Donetsk City line.[51]

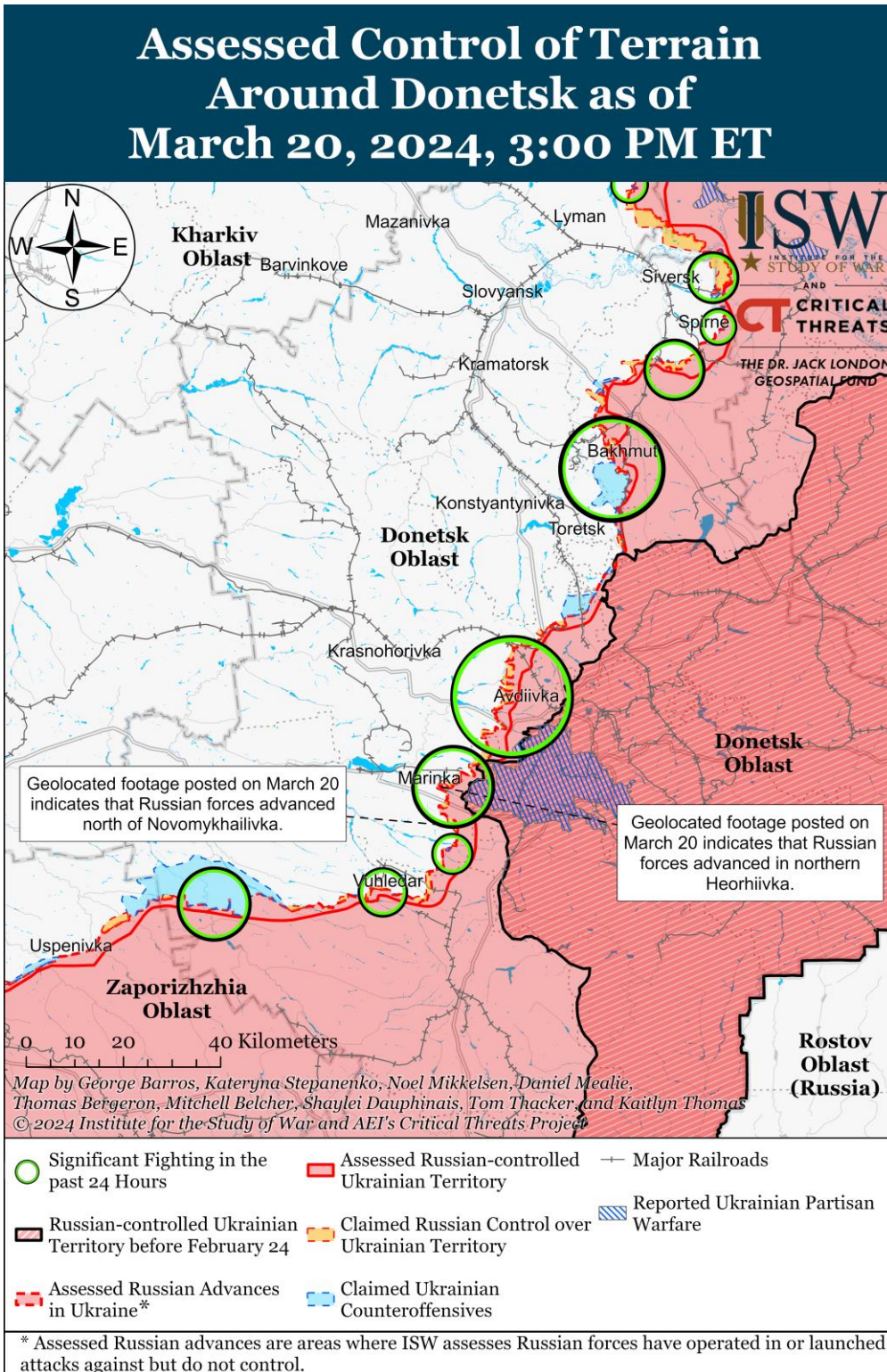
Positional engagements continued near Avdiivka on March 20, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued northwest of Avdiivka near Berdychi, Semenivka, and Orlivka; west of Avdiivka near Tonenke; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske, Netaylove, and Nevelske.<sup>[52]</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces completely cleared Orlivka and that fighting is ongoing north of the settlement, but ISW has yet to observe visual confirmation of claims that Russian forces seized the settlement on March 19.<sup>[53]</sup> Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced near Pervomaiske and Tonenke, but ISW has also not observed visual confirmation of these claims.<sup>[54]</sup> Russian sources claimed that Russian forces have established fire control over the Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) connecting Berdychi and Orlivka to Umanske (west of Orlivka and southwest of Berdychi).<sup>[55]</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain near Avdiivka as of March 20, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



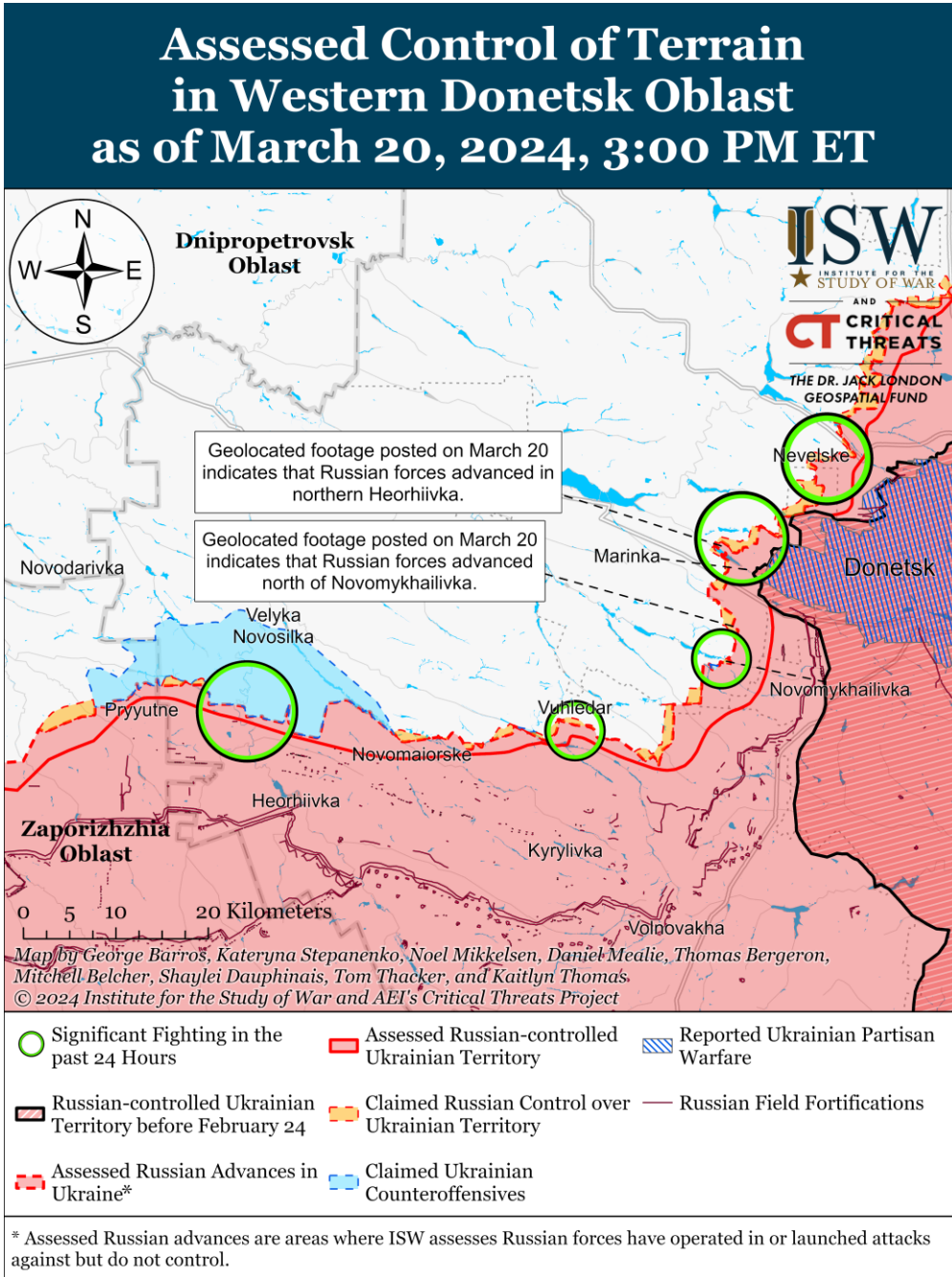
Russian forces recently made confirmed advances west and southwest of Donetsk City amid continued positional engagements in the area on March 20. Geolocated footage published on March 20 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of the dam in Heorhiivka (west of Donetsk City).[56] Additional geolocated footage published on March 20 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[57] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka.[58] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian counterattacks have greatly reduced Russian forces' presence in Krasnohorivka but that Russian forces retain positions on the southern outskirts of the settlement.[59] Elements of the Russian 238th Artillery

Brigade (8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Marinka (west of Donetsk City), and elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka.[60]



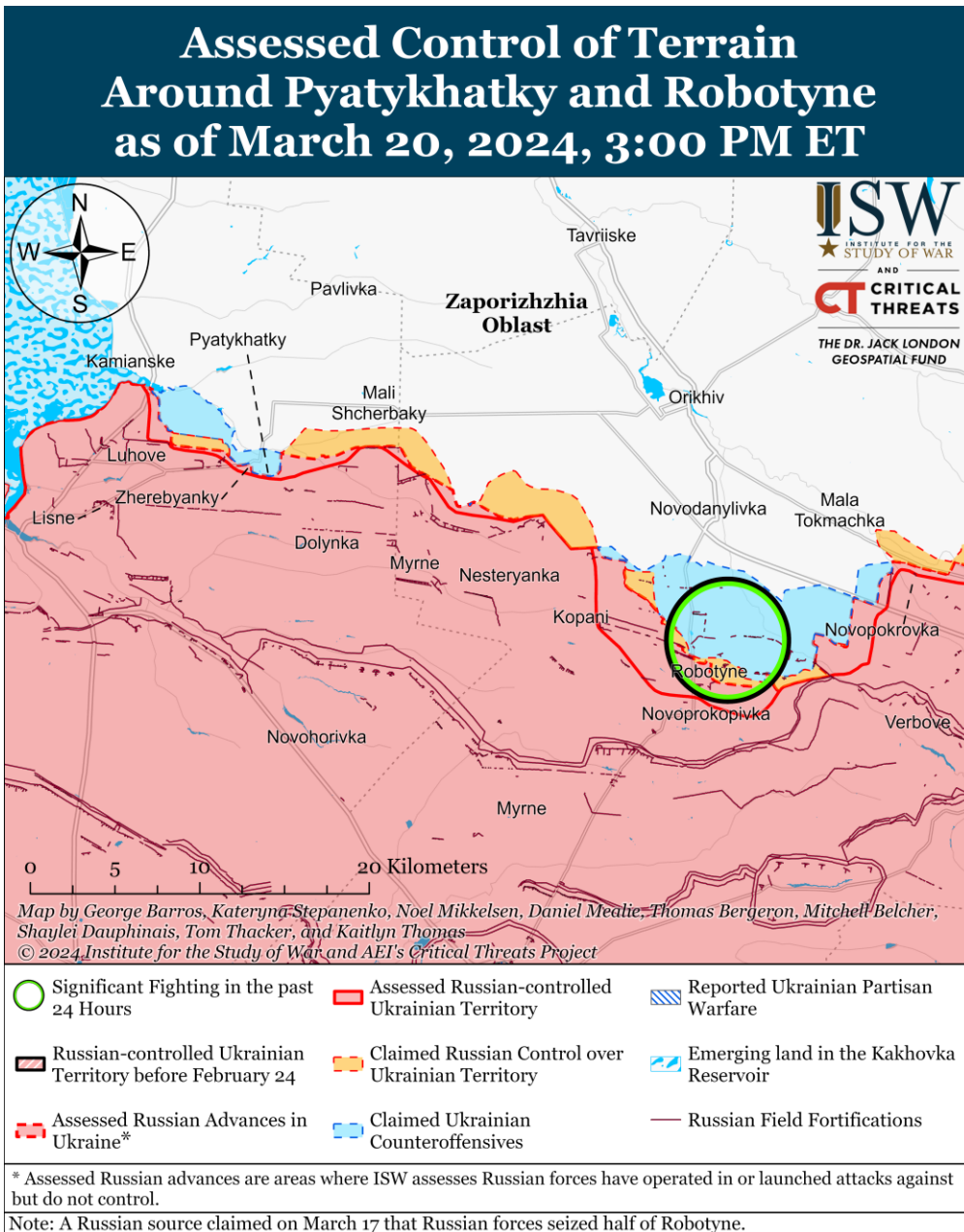
Positional engagements continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on March 20, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in the area. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that

Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked northwest of Vuhledar near Vodyane and south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske and Urozhaine.[61] Elements of the Russian 57th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating north of Vuhledar; elements of the Russian 14th Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff's Main Directorate [GRU]) are reportedly operating near Pavlivka (southwest of Vuhledar); and elements of the Russian 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, EMD) are reportedly operating in the Vremivka direction.[62]

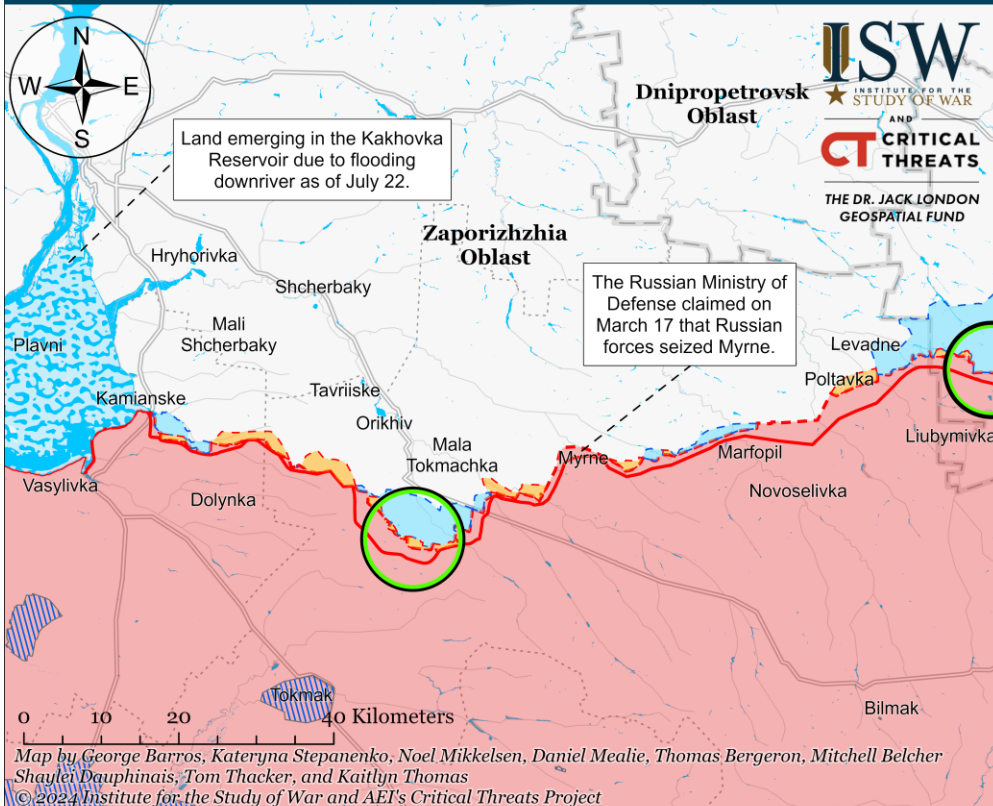


### **Russian Supporting Effort — Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on March 20, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Positional engagements continued near Robotyne and northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[63] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have a shortage of electronic warfare (EW) capabilities along the entire frontline in Zaporizhzhia Oblast.[64] Elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD) reportedly continue operating near Robotyne, and elements of the Russian “Russkiye Yastreby” (Russian Hawks) detachment of the 503rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (19th Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhzhia direction.[65]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of March 20, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir

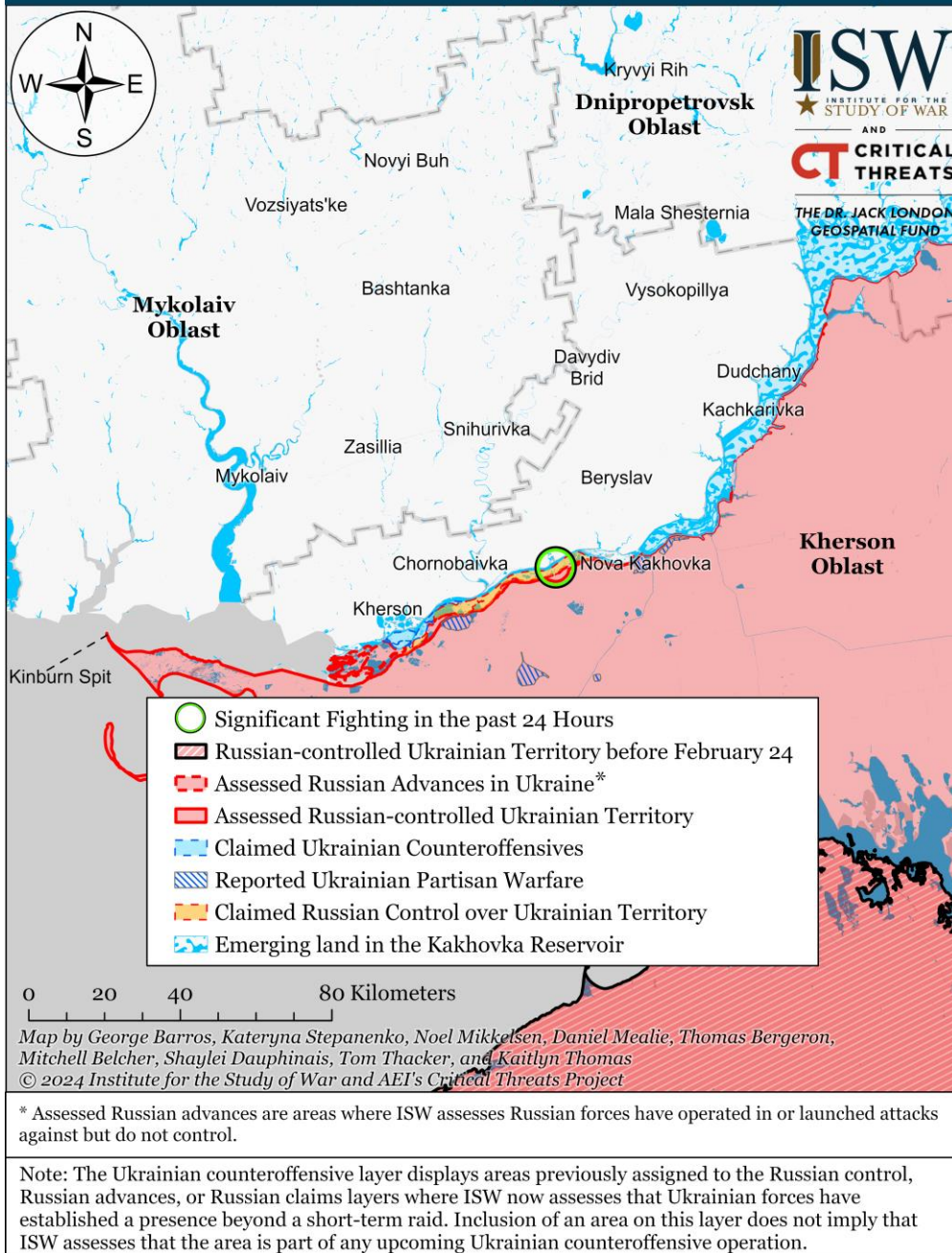
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: A Russian source claimed on March 17 that Russian forces seized half of Robotyne.

Positional engagements continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast, including near Krynky, on March 20.<sup>[66]</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces continue to operate in dacha areas near the Antonivsky roadway bridge (north of Oleshky).<sup>[67]</sup>



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 20, 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)**

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces struck Kharkiv City with an unspecified number of unidentified missiles and Kozacha Lopan, Kharkiv Oblast with two S-300/S-400 missiles on March 20.[68]

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

The Russian military continues to train drone operators for operations in Ukraine. The Russian MoD stated that drone instructors in the Russian Central Military District (CMD) have trained more than 100 first person view (FPV) drone operators since the start of 2024.[69] The reported number of new drone operators within the CMD is relatively small in the context of heavy Russian and Ukrainian FPV drone use in Ukraine and suggests that there may be training constraints on the Russian military’s ability to generate new drone operators.[70]

The Russian MoD is reportedly systematizing the apparatus for issuing benefits to Russian veterans. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated on March 20 that the MoD will issue electronic identification cards for Russian veterans and that the Russian government signed a corresponding order on March 16.[71] Shoigu stated that the electronic identification cards will allow Russian combat veterans to receive MoD, federal, and regional payments and special privileges at banks.[72] Shoigu stated that the MoD has already received 70,000 applications for the electronic identification cards.[73]

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

Kremlin newswire TASS reported on March 20 that Russian company HiderX delivered “invisibility suits” to Russian units operating in Ukraine that camouflage and shield Russian military personnel from Ukrainian thermal imaging equipment.[74] HiderX told TASS in January that the suit is coated in an unspecified chemical composition, weighs roughly 350 grams, can fit in a pocket, and is based completely on Russian technology.[75]

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

*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)**

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

**Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

Ukraine’s Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on March 20 that Russia is intensifying an information campaign aimed at discrediting Ukraine and the West in the Middle

East.[76] GUR stated that the Kremlin is leveraging its intelligence networks, propaganda tools, and diplomatic missions to conduct this hybrid operation in the Middle East and noted that the Kremlin has tasked the Russian Embassy in Cairo, Egypt with carrying out anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western disinformation operations.[77] Russia is likely using such information operations to manage its reputation in the Middle East against the backdrop of the war in Gaza and its increased cooperation with Iran.

Russian officials continue to threaten escalation over French proposals to send military personnel to Ukraine in order to constrain Western discussions about support for Ukraine. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev threatened that a French deployment to Ukraine would result in significant French deaths and that this would generate domestic upheaval within France “tantamount to the guillotine.”[78] Medvedev also posted his threat in French on his X (formerly twitter) account, likely hoping that French actors will use it to argue against the French proposal.[79] French President Emmanuel Macron has recently discussed proposals to send Western troops to Ukraine but has stressed that the current situation does not require it, and these proposals are part of Macron’s wider calls for the West to expand the level and types of security assistance it sends to Ukraine.[80] Russia has not significantly responded to Western security assistance to Ukraine that Russia has previously labeled as significant escalations.[81]

### **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)**

Nothing significant to report.

**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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