

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 17

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April 17, 3pm ET

Russian forces likely captured the Port of Mariupol on April 16 despite Ukrainian General Staff denials, reducing organized Ukrainian resistance in the city to the Azovstal factory in eastern Mariupol. Russian and DNR forces released footage on April 16 confirming their presence in several key locations in southwestern Mariupol, including the port itself. Isolated groups of Ukrainian troops may remain active in Mariupol outside of the Azovstal factory, but they will likely be cleared out by Russian forces in the coming days. Russian forces likely seek to force the remaining defenders of the Azovstal factory to capitulate through overwhelming firepower to avoid costly clearing operations, but remaining Ukrainian defenders appear intent on staging a final stand. Russian forces will likely complete the capture of Mariupol in the coming week, but final assaults will likely continue to cost them dearly.

Russian forces continued to amass on the Izyum axis and in eastern Ukraine, increasingly including low-quality proxy conscripts, in parallel with continuous – and unsuccessful – small-scale attacks. Russian forces did not take any territory on the Izyum axis or in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in the past 24 hours. Russian forces deploying to eastern Ukraine reportedly continue to face significant morale and supply issues and appear unlikely to intend, or be able to, conduct a major offensive surge in the coming days.¹ Deputy Ukrainian Minister of Defense Anna Malyar stated on April 17 that the Russian military is in no hurry to launch an offensive in eastern Ukraine, having learned from their experience from Kyiv – but Russian forces continue localized attacks and are likely unable to amass the cohesive combat power necessary for a major breakthrough.²

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces likely captured the Port of Mariupol on April 16 despite Ukrainian General Staff denials.**
- **Russian forces likely seek to force the remaining defenders of the Azovstal factory to capitulate through overwhelming firepower to avoid costly clearing operations, but remaining Ukrainian defenders appear intent on staging a final stand.**
- **Evgeny Prigozhin, financier of the Wagner Group, is likely active on the ground in eastern Ukraine to coordinate Wagner Group recruitment and funding.**
- **Russian forces continued their build up around Izyum but did not conduct any offensive operations.**

The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 16 that the Kremlin is increasingly arresting Russian and proxy officers for failures in Ukraine.³ The GUR reported Russian military authorities established a commission intended to run from March 2 to April 24 in occupied Horlivka to identify the reasons for personnel shortages among Russian forces. The GUR reported that Russian investigators discovered the commanders of Russia's 3rd Motor Rifle Brigade was 100% staffed at the beginning of the invasion when it in fact only had 55% of its personnel and arrested two battalion commanders in the brigade. The GUR also reported the FSB arrested DNR Defense Spokesperson Eduard Basurin for his "careless statement" on April 11 revealing Russian intent to use chemical weapons in Mariupol, though there is still no independent confirmation of the Ukrainian claim of Russian chemical weapons use.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 17, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those 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 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.

ISW has updated its assessment of the four primary efforts Russian forces are engaged in at this time:

- Main effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate supporting efforts);
- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv and Izyum;
- Supporting effort 2—Southern axis;
- Supporting effort 3—Sumy and northeastern Ukraine.

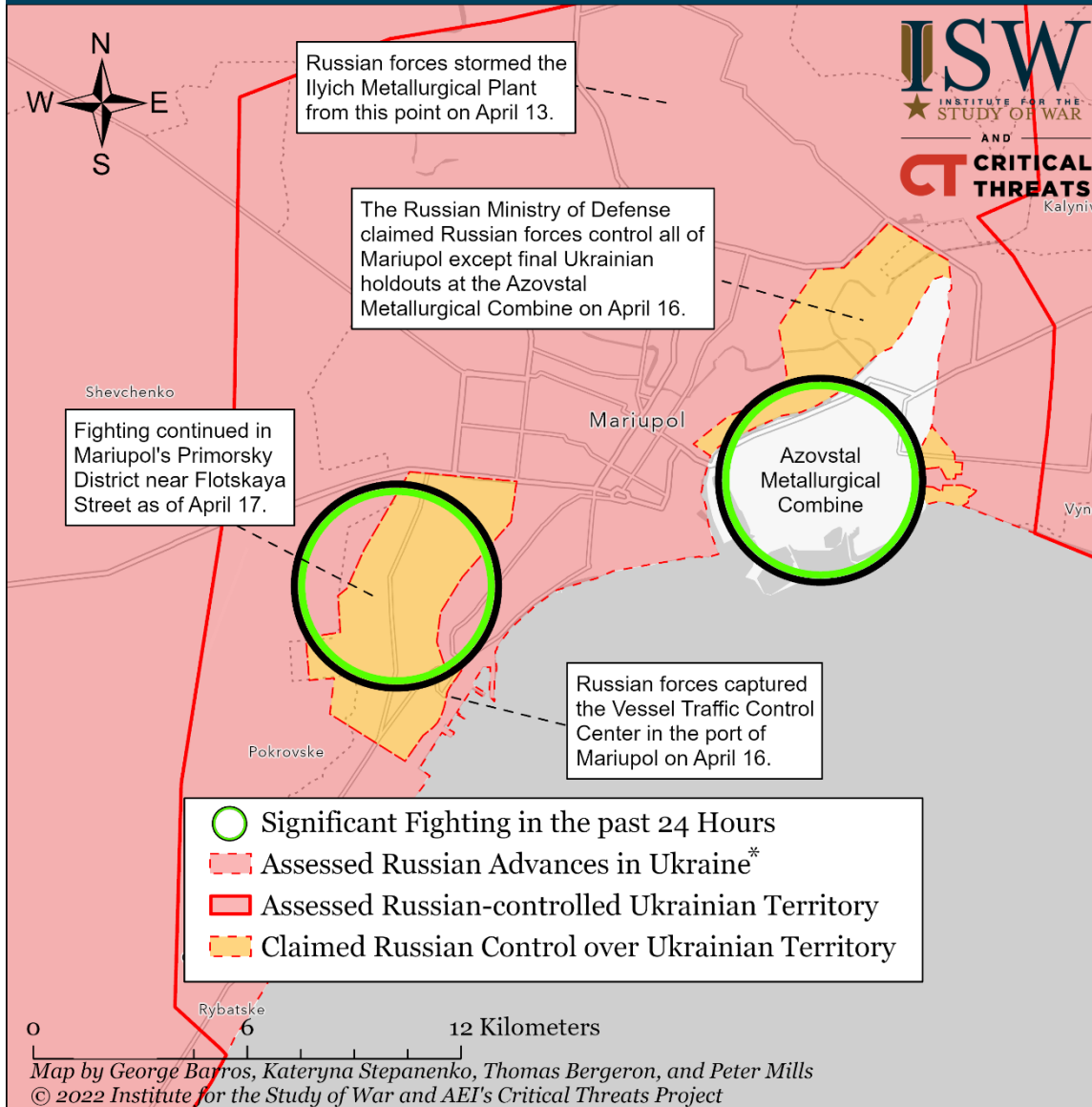
Main effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate main effort – Mariupol (Russian objective: Capture Mariupol and reduce the Ukrainian defenders)

Russian forces likely captured the Port of Mariupol on April 16 despite Ukrainian General Staff denials on April 17, and Russian forces have reduced Ukrainian positions in the city to the Azovstal factory and a few isolated pockets. Russian and DNR forces released footage on April 16 confirming their presence in several key locations in southwestern Mariupol – including the traffic control center of the port, the prosecutors building, and the Main Directorate of the National Police in Donetsk region – and have likely reduced the center of Ukrainian defense in southwestern Mariupol.⁴ The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed on April 16 that Russian forces cleared the entirety of urban Mariupol and that “the remnants of the Ukrainian group are currently completely blocked on the territory of the Azovstal metallurgical plant.”⁵ Isolated groups of Ukrainian troops may remain active in Mariupol outside of the Azovstal factory, but they will likely be cleared out by Russian forces in the coming days and the Ukrainian General Staff’s claim at 6pm local time on April 17 that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault on the port is likely false.⁶

Russian forces likely seek to force the remaining defenders of the Azovstal factory to capitulate through overwhelming firepower to avoid costly clearing operations, but remaining Ukrainian defenders appear intent on staging a final stand. Russian forces conducted heavy air strikes in Mariupol, including by Tu-22M3 strategic bombers, in the past 24 hours.⁷ Ukrainian forces in the Azovstal factory refused a Russian ultimatum to surrender by 1pm local time on April 17.⁸ The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed Kyiv denied Ukrainian forces the option to surrender and ordered Azov Regiment troops to shoot surrendering Ukrainian personnel, part of the Kremlin’s ongoing information operation to falsely portray the Ukrainian military as a minority of “nationalists” forcing the rest of the military to fight on.⁹ Russian forces will likely complete the capture of Mariupol in the coming week, but final assaults will likely continue to cost them dearly.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of April 17, 2022, 3:00 ET



Russian forces continue their grinding advance into Mariupol, which they have encircled and are bombarding. Russian forces began penetrating Mariupol's city center on March 24. Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade reported escaping encirclement at the Ilyich Metallurgical Plant and reuniting with the Ukrainian Azov Regiment on April 12, prompting Russian reports of mass Ukrainian surrender. Russian forces advanced toward the Port of Mariupol from southern and northern directions on April 15 and April 16, likely to encircle the remaining Ukrainian forces. Russia's Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces control all of Mariupol except the Azovstal Metallurgical Combine on April 16. Mariupol's remaining defenders refused a Russian ultimatum to surrender by 1300 local time on April 17. Mariupol's Ukrainian defenders will likely fight to the last man at the Azovstal Metallurgical Combine in the coming hours and possibly days.

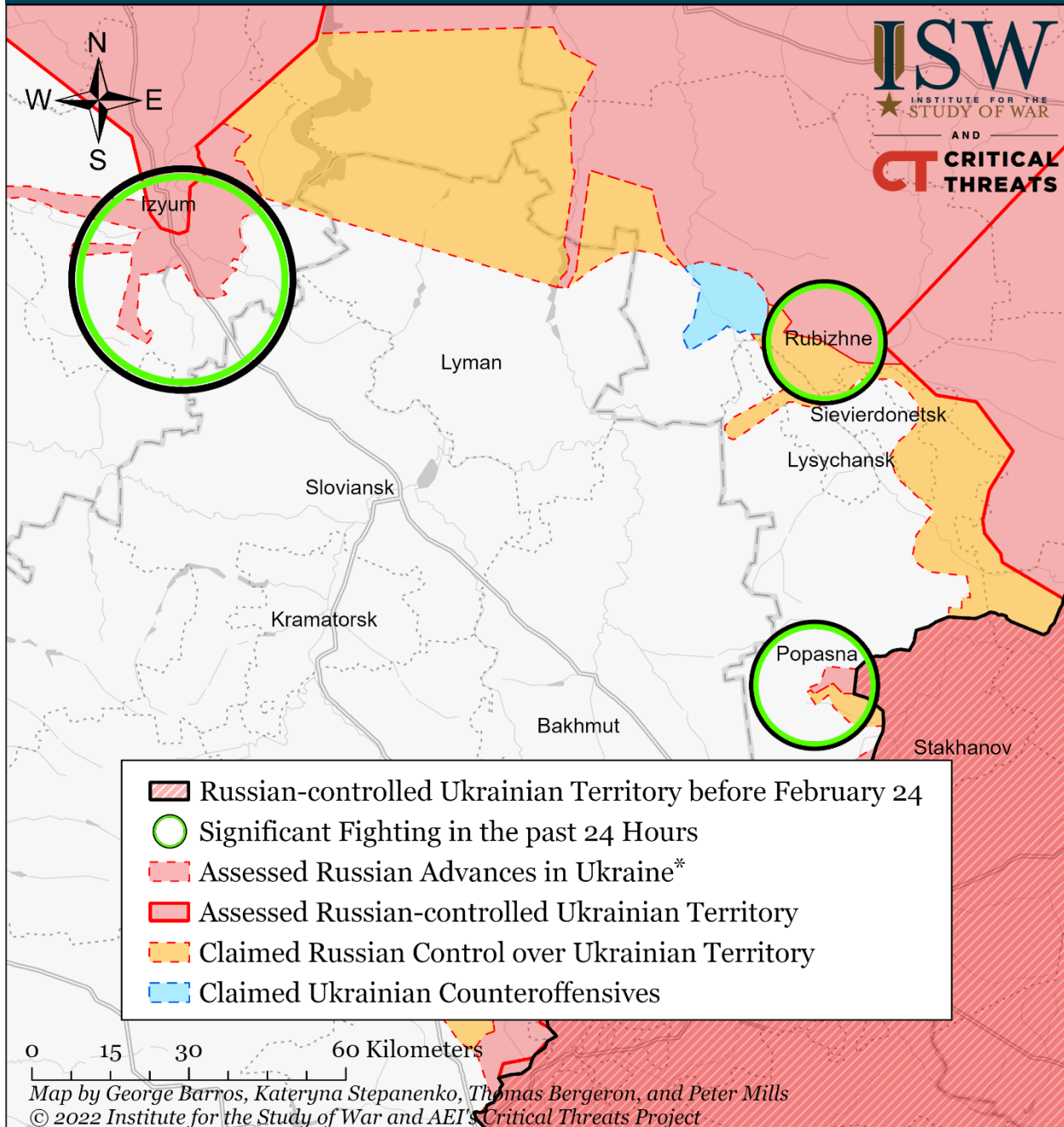
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Subordinate main effort – Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian troops continued attacks against Rubizhne Popasna, and Severodonetsk on April 17 without success.¹⁰ Russian forces did not make any significant territorial gains in the last 24 hours.

Russian State Duma deputy Vitaly Milonov published a photo on VKontakte (a Russian social network) with Putin's close ally and financier of the Wagner Group Evgeney Prigozhin on April 17.¹¹ While ISW cannot verify the exact location of the photo of Milonov and Prigozhin, Milonov has shared photos of himself in Donbas in the past several days, and he presumably met Prigozhin somewhere in Donbas or near the Russian border. Prigozhin, who has no military experience and is the financier and organizer of Wagner Group rather than its military commander, is likely in Donbas to coordinate recruitment and financing of Wagner Group operations rather than to command combat operations.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of April 17, 2022, 3:00 ET



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

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum: (Russian objective: Advance southeast to support Russian operations in Luhansk Oblast; and fix Ukrainian forces around Kharkiv in place)

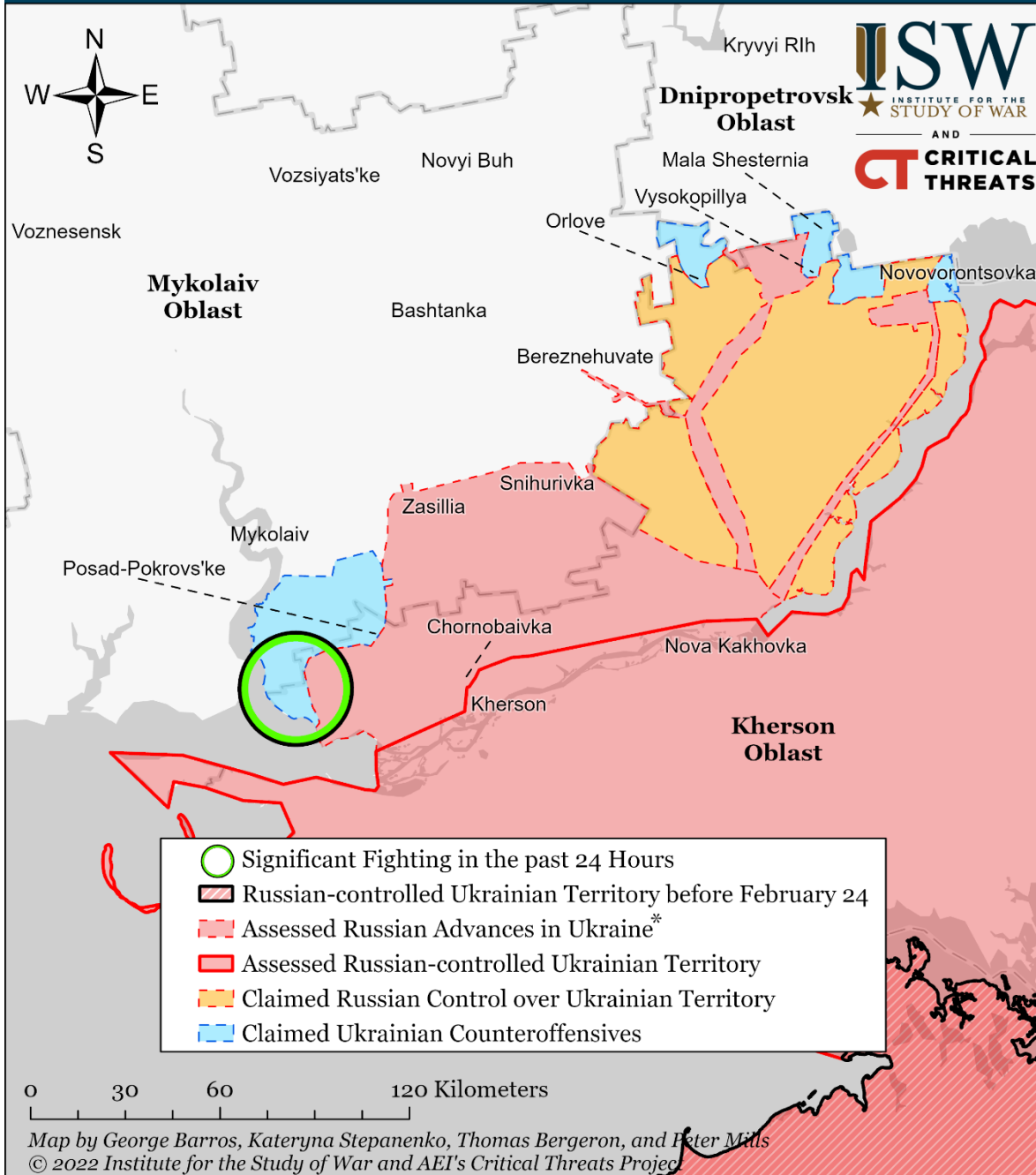
Russian forces continued their build up around Izyum on April 17 but did not conduct any offensive operations.¹² Russian forces are increasingly attempting to leverage conscripts and proxy units in Izyum, indicating continuing challenges generating the forces necessary to encircle Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine. Social media users shared photos on April 16 of LNR personnel in Izyum, the first confirmed use of proxy troops (as opposed to the conventional Russian military) on the Izyum axis.¹³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported on April 17 that Russian forces are attempting to mobilize Ukrainian civilians in Izyum (likely for manual labor rather than combat operations, as they have done elsewhere in occupied Ukraine), though ISW cannot independently confirm this report.¹⁴ Russian forces continued to shell Kharkiv city in the past 24 hours, and Ukrainian forces did not conduct any counterattacks.¹⁵

Supporting Effort #2—Southern axis: (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

The Ukrainian Resistance Center (the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense's headquarters to coordinate operations within Russian-occupied territory) reported on April 16 that Ukrainian artillery targeted and destroyed ten railcars of Russian ammunition in Tomak using intelligence provided by Ukrainian civilians.¹⁶ ISW cannot independently confirm this claim, and will be unlikely to be able to confirm similar Ukrainian claims of partisan activity in the future, but increasing Ukrainian reporting on partisan actions in southern Ukraine at minimum indicates increasing Ukrainian *attention* to these operations.

There has been no significant change around Kherson in the past 24 hours, though minor fighting is reportedly ongoing in Oleksandrivka.¹⁷

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 17, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: Ukrainian authorities claimed on April 14 that the Ukrainian 80th Airmobile Brigade (which previously operated near Mykolaiv) liberated unspecified villages in southern Ukraine, but did not name those villages for operational security reasons. We will update our maps to reflect this data when we collect more data on this claimed counterattack.

Supporting Effort #3—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine: (Russian objective: Withdraw combat power in good order for redeployment to eastern Ukraine)

There was no significant change in this area in the past 24 hours.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces concentrating around Izyum will continue small-scale offensive operations to the southeast and southwest and may begin larger scale offensives.
- Russia and its proxies may declare victory in the Battle of Mariupol.
- Russian forces could launch a new offensive operation from Donetsk City to the north through Avdiivka toward Kramatorsk.
- Russian attacks on Severodonetsk, Popasna, and Rubizhne will continue.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296519492661136>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296519492661136>.

² <https://t.me/stranaua/37038>.

³ <https://gur.gov.ua/content/okupanty-represuiut-komandyriv-iaki-ne-vypravdaly-ochikuvan-u-viini-z-ukrainoiu.html>.

⁴ <https://twitter.com/miladvisor/status/1515702676788551690>; https://t.me/nm_dnr/7644;

<https://twitter.com/miladvisor/status/1515704678763347974?s=20&t=xvazq-6bVB27bnfSEeGvMw>;

<https://twitter.com/miladvisor/status/1515703739147038727>; <https://t.me/vorposte/19180>.

⁵ <https://ria.ru/20220416/mariupol-1783914274.html>.

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296912139288538>; <https://t.me/s/andriyshTime>.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296912139288538>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296519492661136>

⁸ <https://lenta.ru/news/2022/04/17/mariup/>; <https://telegra.ph/Srochnoe-zayavlenie-Mezhvedomstvennogo-koordinacionnogo-shtaba-Rossijskoj-Federacii-po-gumanitarnomu-reagirovaniyu-ot-16-aprelya-04-16>.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/mod.mil.rus/videos/316032857259329/>.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296519492661136>;

https://twitter.com/Blue_Sauron/status/1515666618097016832?s=20&t=fleP3xp58DII9_rKcoH6zQ;

¹¹ <https://t.me/meduzalive/57633>; <https://focus.ua/voennye-novosti/512528-povar-putina-evgeniy-prigozhin-i-deputat-gosdumy-rf-vitaliy-milonov-priehali-na-donbass>.

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296519492661136>.

¹³ <https://twitter.com/samotniyskhid/status/1515517360643448833>.

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296912139288538>.

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296912139288538>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296519492661136>; <https://t.me/suspilnekharkiv/11356>.

¹⁶ <https://t.me/savelifeua/737>; <https://sprotyv.mod.gov.ua/2022/04/17/nevidomi-patrioty-uspishno-skoryguvaly-vogon-po-okupantah-v-zaporizkij-oblasti/>.

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/296519492661136>;

<https://www.facebook.com/100064555155257/posts/350039877157848/?d=n>.