

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 22, 2023
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April 22, 9pm 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.

Russian milbloggers have provided enough geolocated footage and textual reports to confirm that Ukrainian forces have established positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast as of April 22 though not at what scale or with what intentions. Geolocated footage published by a Russian milblogger on April 22 shows that Ukrainian forces have established positions on the Dnipro River bank north of Oleshky (7km southwest of Kherson City) and advanced up to the northern outskirts of the settlement on the E97 highway, as well as west of Dachi (10km south of Kherson City).¹ This footage also indicates that Russian forces may not control islands in the Kinka and Chaika rivers less than half a kilometer north of the geolocated Ukrainian positions near the Antonivsky Bridge. Russian milbloggers claimed on April 20 and 22 that Ukrainian forces have maintained positions in east bank Kherson Oblast for weeks, established stable supply lines to these positions, and regularly conduct sorties in the area—all indicating a lack of Russian control over the area.² Another milblogger’s battle map claimed that Russian forces do not control some Dnipro River delta islands southwest of Kherson City as of April 22, suggesting possible Ukrainian advances on these islands.³ Some milbloggers complained that the slow rate of Russian artillery fire due to the over-centralization of the Russian military command allowed Ukrainian forces to land on the east bank.⁴ Russian forces may be prioritizing maintaining defenses in urban areas such as Oleshky and Nova Kakhovka, leaving the islands in the Dnipro River delta unmanned. The extent and intent of these Ukrainian positions remain unclear, as does Ukraine’s ability and willingness to maintain sustained positions in this area. ISW is recoding territory on the east bank of the Dnipro River to Ukrainian-held only now because this is the first time ISW has observed reliable geolocated imagery of Ukrainian positions on the east bank along with multi-sourced Russian reports of an enduring Ukrainian presence there.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin is likely attempting to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin to go over to the defensive ahead of a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive. Prigozhin argued on April 21 that Russia needs to “anchor itself in such a way that it is only possible to tear out [Russian forces from their positions] with the claws of the opponent.”⁵ Prigozhin’s comment followed a discussion of the Ramstein meeting results, Western commitments to train more Ukrainian personnel and continuous military support for Ukraine. Prigozhin also noted that Ukraine will try to “tear” Russian forces apart and that Russia needs to resist such attacks. Prigozhin has been increasingly alarmist in his recent rhetoric and has made similar statements about the uncertain future of Russian offensive operations in Donbas.⁶ Prigozhin’s calls for strengthening Russian defenses in occupied territories and frequent discussions of the prospects of Ukrainian counteroffensives are notable as they indicate that he is trying to amplify the discussion in the Russian

domestic information space. Russia, however, continues to conduct offensive operations in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Prigozhin is also advocating for Russia to focus on holding the current frontlines rather than seeking more gains so that Russian forces can regain their combat effectiveness for later offensive operations. Prigozhin is not arguing for Russia to end the war and negotiate with Ukraine and the West as some Russian and Western sources reported, as ISW previously observed, but is instead condemning the faction within the Kremlin that is hoping to end the war in negotiations.⁷ Prigozhin is actually arguing that Russia needs to meet the upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive at full strength and try to hold the current frontlines without ending the war or entering into peace negotiations.⁸ He argues that a pause after the Ukrainian attack culminates would allow Russia to regain combat power and build nationalist support within the Russian society for renewing the fight even in the event of a defeat.⁹ Prigozhin is also attempting to redefine and undermine some of Putin’s key maximalist goals in Ukraine—namely the “denazification” and “demilitarization” of Ukraine—likely to minimize the informational impact that might result from going over to the defensive and abandoning efforts to gain more ground now.¹⁰ Russian far-right paramilitary formation Rusich (Sabotage Assault Reconnaissance Group), which facilitates recruitment of Russian ultranationalist and irregular forces, echoed Prigozhin’s rejection of the “denazification” and “demilitarization” goals.¹¹ Rusich noted that Russia is fighting Ukraine to avenge Donbas, for living space, and for combat experience—rather than fighting claimed Ukrainian “fascism” and “Nazism.” By reframing Putin’s goals, Prigozhin and some factions within the ultranationalist community may be attempting to condition the Russian domestic information space for the prospect of frozen frontlines, potentially near the initial lines of February 23, 2022.

The Russian military command is likely attempting to convince Putin to turn to defensive operations as well—but may be unable to bluntly deliver this message to Putin. Some ultranationalist figures argued that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) signaled efforts to recruit 400,000 contract servicemen to ensure that Russia has enough military personnel to defend existing frontlines and to efficiently freeze the current frontlines in Ukraine.¹² The Russian military command is also reportedly transferring conscripts to hold Russian lines in Crimea and may be planning to prepare other resources to ensure that Russia can retain some lines once the potential Ukrainian counteroffensive culminates.¹³ Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov are likely sensible to the threat of the Ukrainian counteroffensive but are likely continuing to send contract servicemen to reinforce senseless offensive operations at Putin’s insistence.¹⁴ Kremlin sources previously revealed that Putin favors loyalty over competence, and this sentiment likely prevents Shoigu and Gerasimov from focusing on setting optimal conditions for an efficient defense by refusing to expend Russian elite units in grinding attritional battles for marginal gains.¹⁵ ISW previously observed that Shoigu and Gerasimov were likely unable to convince Putin to conduct mobilization in May 2022—despite the fact that Russia needed such a measure to reconstitute forces necessary to maintain offensive operations in Ukraine.¹⁶

The Russian military command may have partially repaired its strained relationship with Prigozhin to persuade Putin to halt offensive operations via the Russian information space. ISW has observed a sudden improvement in Prigozhin’s relations with the Russian MoD and the Kremlin since early April. The Russian MoD, for example, began to directly acknowledge Wagner forces in its daily situational reports and provided Wagner with ammunition and mobilized personnel as reinforcements in early April 2023.¹⁷ Prigozhin and Kremlin-affiliated

milbloggers amplified claims that Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's son Nikolai Peskov is reportedly serving with Wagner in Ukraine—likely an information operation to publicly mend the relationship and possibly elevate Prigozhin's loyalty to the Kremlin.¹⁸ Prigozhin had previously been able to impact Putin's decision-making by engineering the appointment of Wagner-affiliated commanders and the dismissal of inept military officials and breaking through Putin's close circle with his critiques of the progress of the war.¹⁹ A Russian political expert observed that different Kremlin officials have historically voiced their plans and projects publicly to convince Putin to implement changes, and it is likely that Prigozhin follows the same model of influence.²⁰ The Russian military command and select Kremlin officials who are advocating for Putin to freeze the war may have reapproached Prigozhin to influence Putin one more time.

Putin's continued insistence on Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine suggests that the group that wants to freeze the war along the current front lines has not fully persuaded Putin. Russian forces are continuing attritional offensives to capture Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Marinka in Donetsk Oblast as well as limited offensive operations in Luhansk and western Donetsk Oblast, despite increasing Russian fears about the threat of a potential imminent Ukrainian counteroffensive.²¹ The Russian winter offensive failed to achieve the Kremlin's ambitious goals of seizing the Donetsk and Luhansk oblast administrative borders by March 31, but it appears that Russian forces have not subsequently deemphasized their operational focus on tactical gains, no matter how marginal and costly those gains are.²² Russian forces suffered significant manpower and equipment losses during the winter offensive campaign that are currently constraining their abilities to maintain offensive operations along more than one axis and that will likely limit the Russian military's ability to respond to possible Ukrainian counteroffensive operations.²³ Russian forces have not responded to these constraints by prioritizing one axis or by conducting an operational pause along any axis that would allow Russian forces to replenish and reconstitute for a decisive defensive effort. Russian forces are continuing to deploy contract servicemen and remaining combat-effective units to support offensive operations in eastern Ukraine instead of conserving this critical pool of combat power to respond to a Ukrainian counter-offensive.²⁴ Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Marinka offer no significant operational benefits to Russian forces, and any marginal tactical gains along any axis are unlikely to improve the Russian military's ability to defend against a Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Putin may be hesitant to commit to a ceasefire due to the influence of select unknown pro-war figures or out of concern for the implications for his regime's stability. The insistence on tactical gains suggests that the pro-war camp advocating for maintaining offensives at any cost is likely still influencing Putin's decision-making for the war. A possible shift to preparing for defensive operations ahead of a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive would likely indicate that Putin had finally rejected the pro-war camp's views in favor of the more pragmatic group's. The possible success of the upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive could determine the outcome of this struggle for influence over Putin's decisions.

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to oppress Roman Catholics in occupied Ukraine, likely in an effort to suppress Ukrainian religious institutions beyond Moscow's control. Head of the Ukrainian Berdyansk City Military Administration Viktoria Halitsina reported on April 22 that Russian forces seized the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in occupied Berdyansk.²⁵ Halitsina stated that Russian propagandists accused the clergy of hiding weapons and collaborating with Ukrainian forces because of their previous service as chaplains for the Ukrainian Armed Forces in 2015. ISW has also reported on two other instances of Russian occupation authorities

persecuting Roman Catholics in occupied Ukraine.²⁶ ISW has previously reported on Russian authorities' weaponization of religion in occupied territories as part of an ongoing cultural genocide.²⁷

Russian authorities continue to arrest personnel associated with the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) likely to justify crackdowns and further conceal DIB activities. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) announced on April 22 that it arrested the deputy head of the testing laboratory at the Promtekhlogiya weapons plant in Moscow on suspicion of treason.²⁸ The FSB did not provide additional details about the alleged treasonous act. The Promtekhlogiya plant participates in the development and modernization of high-tech weapons. The Promtekhlogiya plant claimed that it had not employed the arrested employee since March 2021.²⁹ ISW has reported on other recent arrests that are part of an ongoing crackdown using the pretext of threats to Russia's DIB.³⁰

A Russian fighter-bomber accidentally bombed Belgorod on April 21 with two FAB-500 bombs, one of which likely malfunctioned. Russian authorities announced on April 22 the presence of a second, undetonated bomb that landed in Belgorod.³¹ Belgorod authorities evacuated 3,000 civilians from the city while sappers extracted and later detonated the bomb.³² Russian authorities have so far provided no further explanation as to the cause of the accidental bombing. The Russian fighter bomber either intended to drop the bombs on a different target and one bomb failed to detonate, or the fighter bomber did not arm the bombs to drop them, and one bomb improperly detonated.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian milbloggers have provided enough geolocated footage and textual reports to confirm that Ukrainian forces have established positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast as of April 22 though not at what scale or with what intentions.**
- **Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin is likely attempting to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin to go over to the defensive ahead of a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive.**
- **The Russian military command is likely attempting to convince Putin to turn to defensive operations as well – but is unable to bluntly deliver this message to Putin.**
- **The continued insistence on Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine suggests that the group that wants to freeze the war along the current front lines has not fully persuaded Putin of its views.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are continuing to oppress Roman Catholics in occupied Ukraine, likely in an effort to suppress Ukrainian religious institutions beyond the Kremlin's control.**
- **A Russian fighter-bomber accidentally bombed Belgorod on April 21 with two FAB-500 bombs, one of which likely malfunctioned.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and near Siversk.**
- **Russian forces continued to advance around Bakhmut on April 22, although Russian forces have not completed a turning movement around the city.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk front and conducted a limited ground attack in western Donetsk Oblast.**

- **Russian authorities have made headway in their attempts to compel international recognition of Russian ownership over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).**
- **Continued Russian efforts to block evacuations of wounded soldiers, likely to prevent soldiers from leaving the combat zone, have contributed to the deaths of some Russian soldiers.**
- **Russian occupation officials are expanding patronage networks in occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 22, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn 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 Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

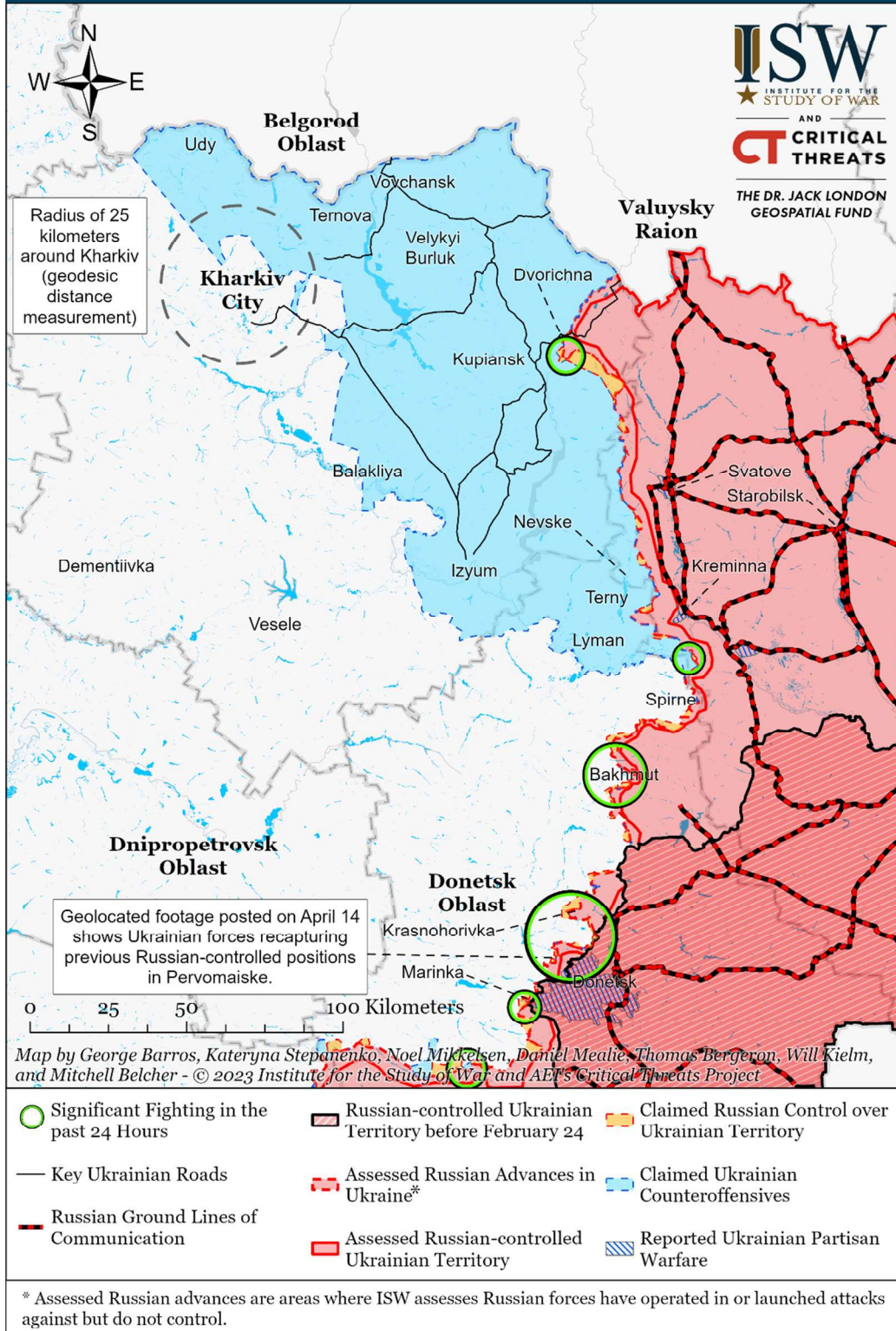
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on April 22. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks near Lyman Pershyi (12km northeast of Kupyansk) and Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).³³ Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division advanced in the forest area near Kreminna.³⁴ Milbloggers claimed that Russian forces conducted ground attacks towards Terny (16km west of Kreminna) and Nevske (19km northwest of Kreminna), and near Kuzymivka (13km northwest of Svatove) and Bilohorivka.³⁵

A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted ground attacks in the Siversk area on April 22. The milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted ground attacks near Vasyukivka (14km southwest of Siversk), Rozdolivka (12km south of Siversk), Vesele (12km southeast of Siversk), and Spirne (11km southeast of Siversk).³⁶

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted limited counterattacks near Kreminna. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian ground attacks near Torske (14km west of Kreminna) and Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna).³⁷ A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conduct periodic counterattacks near Chervonopopivka (6km northwest of Kreminna).³⁸

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of April 22, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



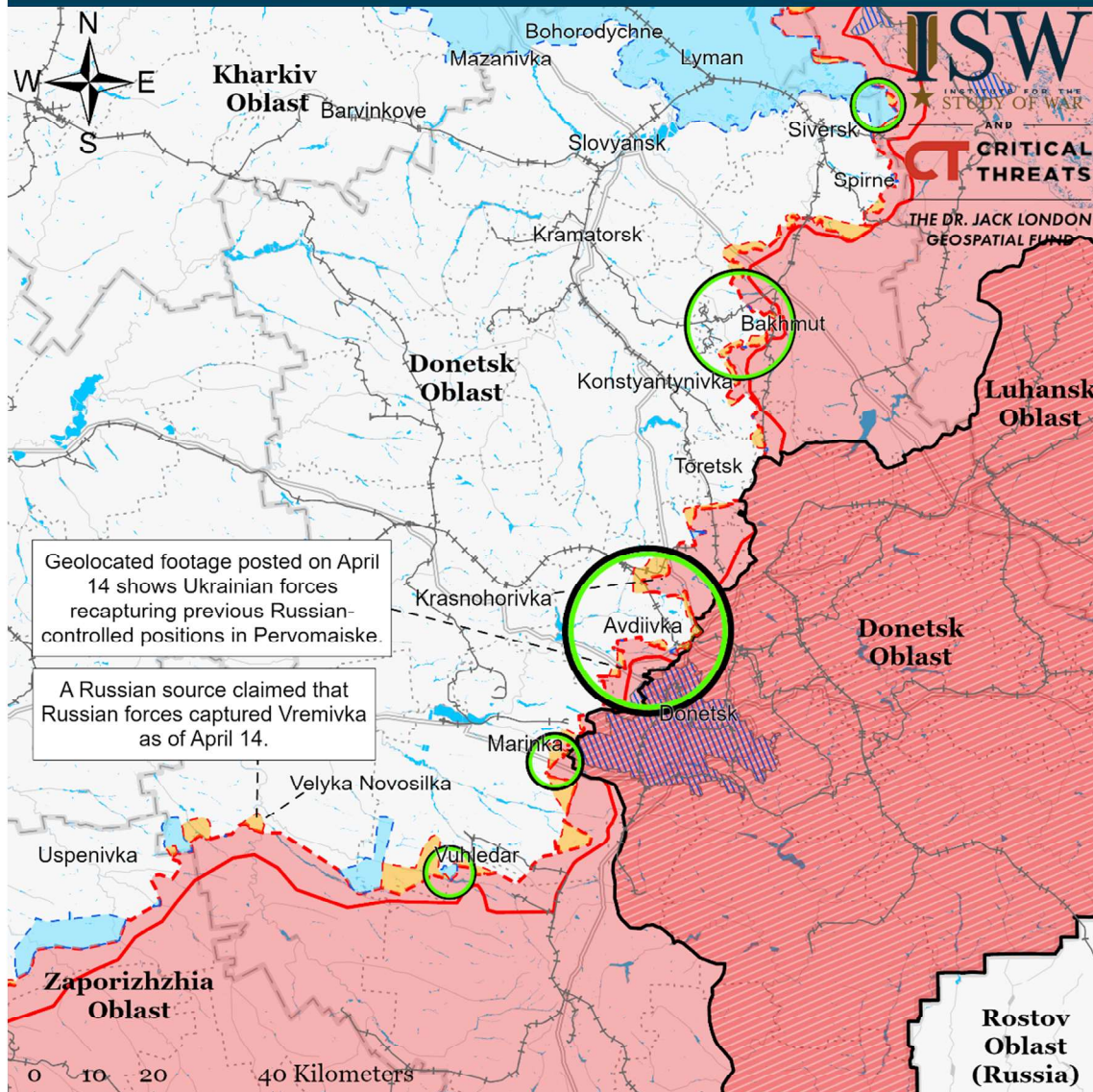
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued to advance around Bakhmut on April 22, although Russian forces have not completed a turning movement around the city. Geolocated footage published on April 21 indicates that Russian forces have advanced up to a section of the O0506 highway northwest of Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut).³⁹ Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group fighters are conducting assaults along the road in the area but reiterated that Russian forces have not encircled Bakhmut as of April 22.⁴⁰ Russian and social media sources claimed that Ukrainian forces have not been using the O0506 highway for some time because Russian forces have been heavily interdicting the road.⁴¹ Russian and social media sources claimed that Ukrainian forces rely on roads that pass through Ivanivske and on numerous field roads in the area to supply the Ukrainian grouping in Bakhmut.⁴² One Russian milblogger claimed that heavy rains washed out Ukrainian controlled dirt roads into Bakhmut making withdrawals from the city impossible.⁴³ Another Russian milblogger continued to claim that heavy rains are preventing wheeled vehicles from using field roads but asserted that Ukrainian forces are able to use tracked vehicles along these roads into Bakhmut.⁴⁴ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Wagner assault detachments captured three blocks in western Bakhmut.⁴⁵ Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in southern and central Bakhmut as well as closer to the Olympic reserve school in western Bakhmut, although ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of further Russian advances within the city.⁴⁶ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Hryhorivka (9km northwest of Bakhmut), Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), Khromove, and Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut).⁴⁷

Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk front on April 22. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Novokalynove (13km north of Avdiivka) and within 27km southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Marinka.⁴⁸ Russian milbloggers claimed that the main battles in the Avdiivka area are occurring west and north of Krasnohorivka (8km north of Avdiivka) and that elements of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) 132nd Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade conducted a positional attack on Ukrainian positions east of Novokalynove.⁴⁹ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces thwarted Ukrainian attempts to regain lost positions west of Novobakhmutivka (13km northeast of Avdiivka) near the H-20 highway between Donetsk City and Kostyantynivka.⁵⁰ Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces conducted assaults northwest of Vodyane (8km southwest of Avdiivka) and near Paraskoviivka (36km southwest of Avdiivka).⁵¹ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are increasing pressure on Marinka and have recently reinforced the area.⁵² Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Defense Forces in the Tavriisk operational direction Colonel Oleksiy Dmytrashkivskiy stated on April 22 that Russian forces have deployed poorly trained assault detachments to the Marinka area with orders not to retrieve wounded personnel from the battlefield or to keep track of the number of dead.⁵³

Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack in western Donetsk Oblast on April 22. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations around Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City).⁵⁴ A Russian milblogger claimed that battles near Vuhledar are positional in nature.⁵⁵ Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Alexander Gordeev claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian reconnaissance-in-force operation in an unspecified location in western Donetsk Oblast.⁵⁶

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of April 22, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Geolocated footage posted on April 14 shows Ukrainian forces recapturing previous Russian-controlled positions in Pervomaiske.

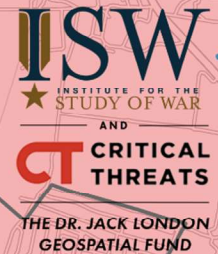
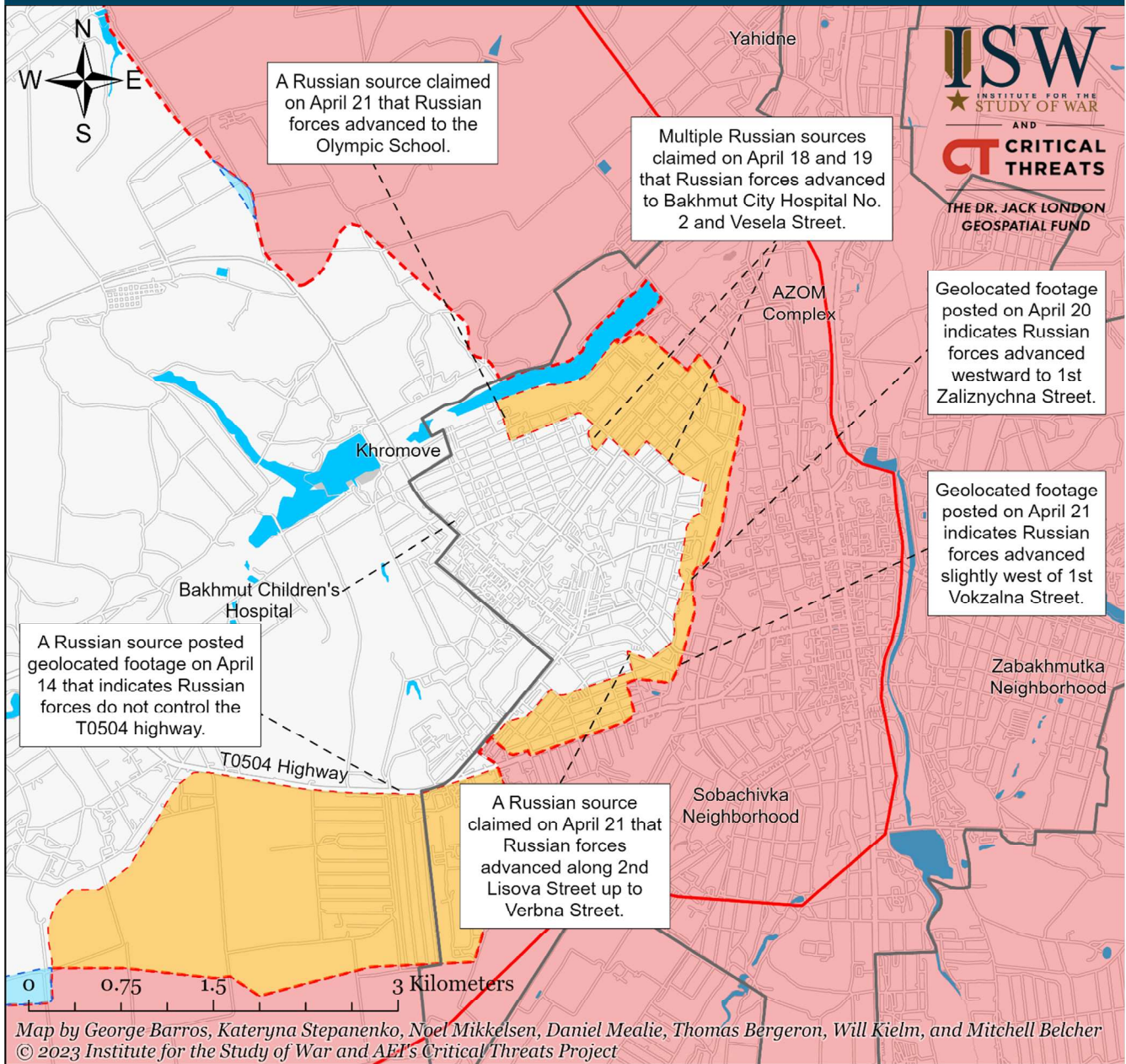
A Russian source claimed that Russian forces captured Vremivka as of April 14.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiern, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- 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
- Major Railroads
- 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.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of April 22, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AET's Critical Threats Project

Bakhmut City Limits	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	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.

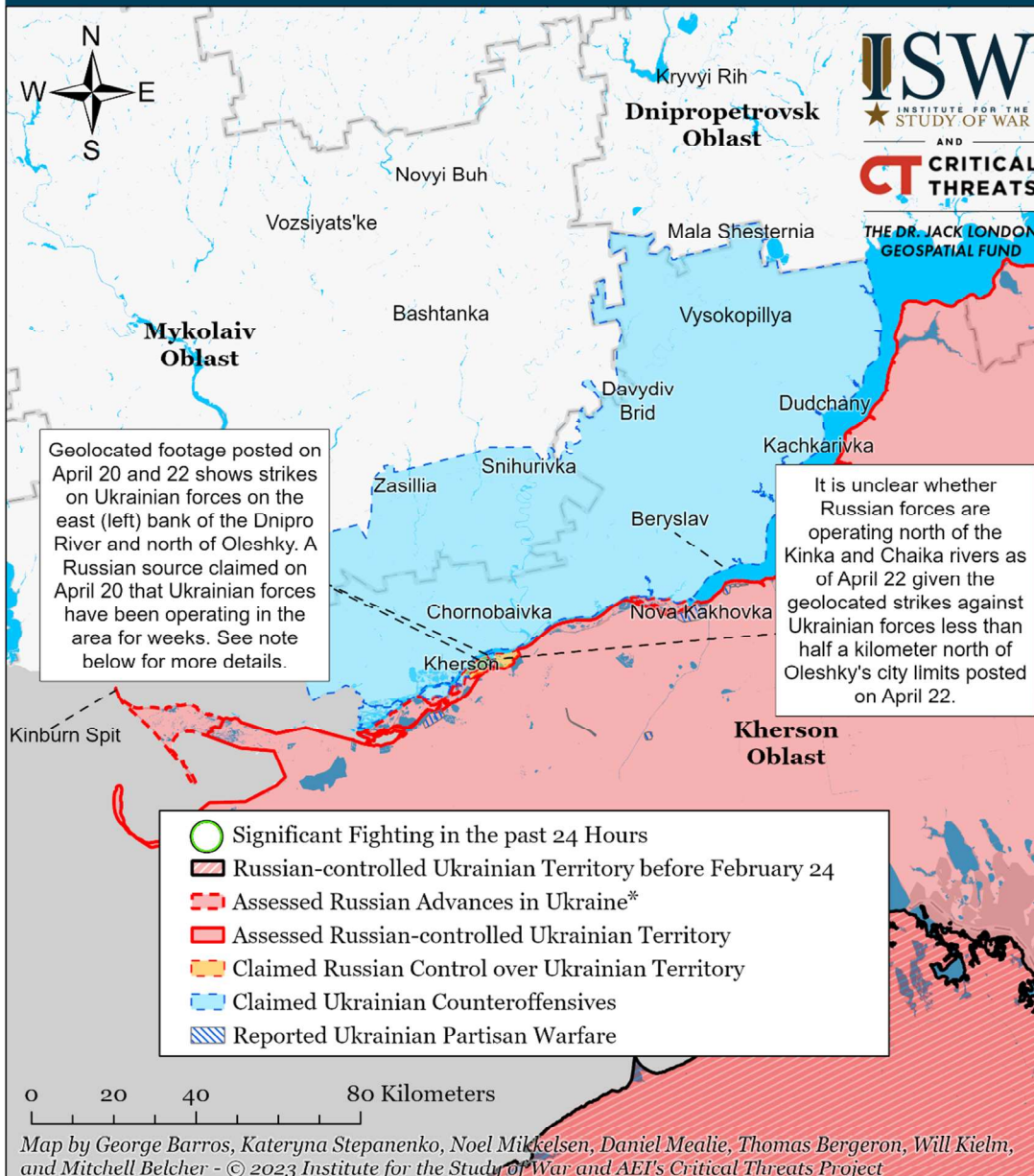
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian authorities have made headway in their attempts to compel international recognition of Russian ownership over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi stated on April 21 that maintenance at the ZNPP has suffered under occupation and noted that Rosenergoatom, the Russian state nuclear company that occupies the ZNPP, may undertake measures to perform maintenance tasks.⁵⁷ Grossi also stated that Ukraine has not repaired a ZNPP power line in Ukraine-held territory damaged in early March, while Russia is working to restore three powerlines connecting the ZNPP to Russian-held territory. The IAEA's messaging resists formally acknowledging Russian ownership over the ZNPP while carving out space to acknowledge without complaint that Russian authorities are performing essential work for the ZNPP, work that Ukrainian authorities are unable to perform while Russia continues to occupy the plant. Grossi also noted damage to windows in the turbine hall of Reactor No. 4 at the ZNPP that is inconsistent with prior reports of landmine explosions.⁵⁸ Russian authorities used Grossi's statements about the damage to claim on April 22 that a Ukrainian UAV attack damaged the turbine hall, implying that Russia is the only safe operator of the ZNPP.⁵⁹

Ukrainian forces and likely partisans continue to target Russian logistics nodes in rear areas in southern Ukraine. Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov claimed that Russian air defenses shot down an unspecified weapon targeting the Kerch Strait Bridge, causing no damage to the bridge or any casualties.⁶⁰ Russian sources made conflicting claims whether the weapon was a Ukrainian UAV or a missile from a Hrim-2 short-range ballistic missile system, indicating that Russian authorities may not know or will not disclose the weapon type.⁶¹ Russian occupation authorities also accused Ukrainian partisans of bombing a railway depot in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁶²

Russian forces continued routine fire west of Hulyaipole and in Kherson Oblast on April 22. Geolocated footage posted on April 21 shows that Russian forces made marginal advances south of Myrne (12km southwest of Hulyaipole).⁶³ One Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a reconnaissance-in-force near Dorozhnyanka (6km south of Hulyaipole).⁶⁴

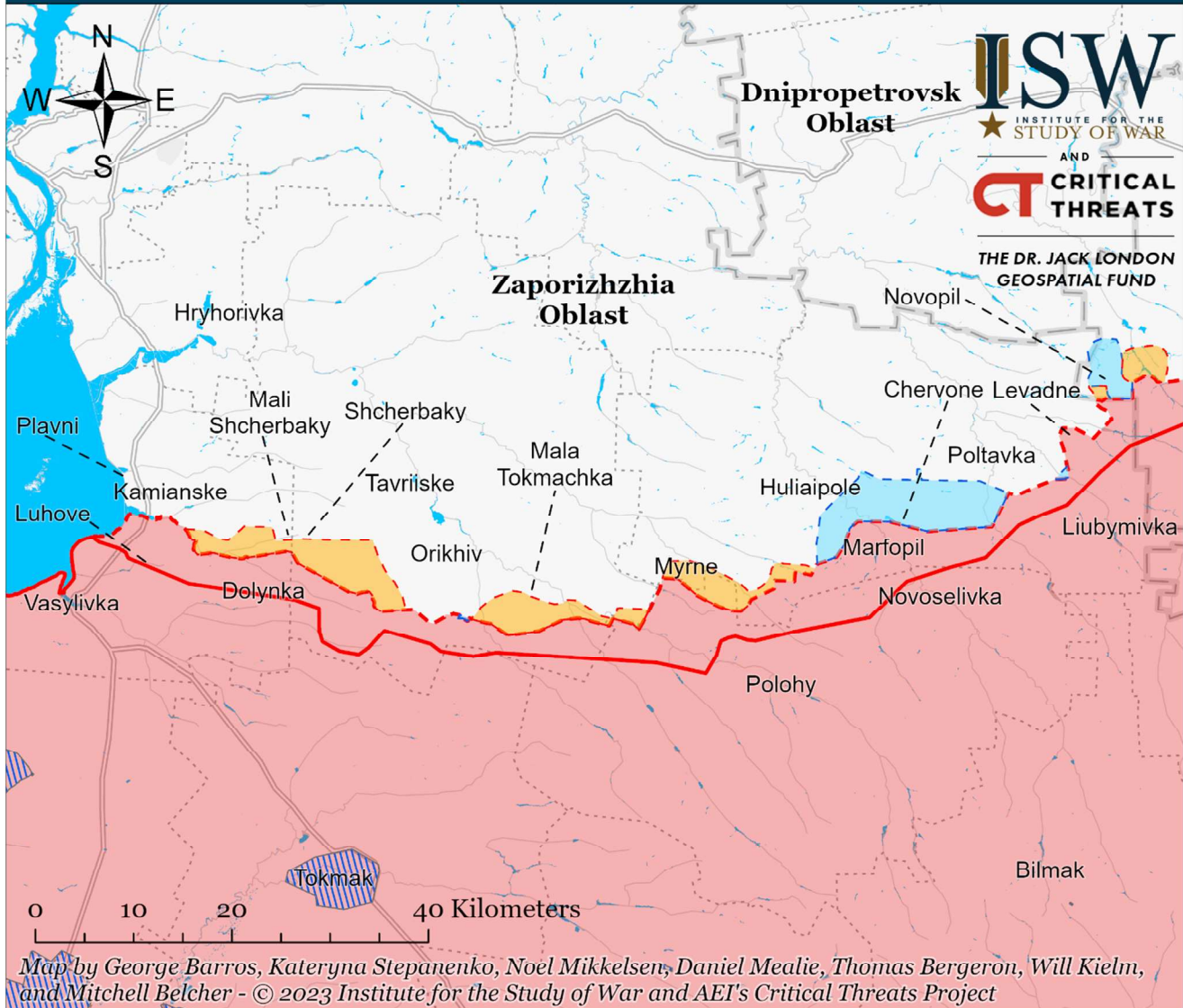
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 22, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: Geolocated footage posted on April 20 and 22 shows Russian forces striking Ukrainian forces on the east (left) bank of the Dniro River and near the E97 highway less than half a kilometer north of Oleshky's city limits. Russian milbloggers Rybar and "Thirteenth" claimed on April 20 that unspecified Ukrainian forces successfully landed on the left (east) bank of the Dniro River and established positions west of the Antonivsky bridge, and have established stable supply lines to these positions. Russian milblogger "Thirteenth" claimed on April 20 that Ukrainian forces have been operating in the area for weeks and that Russian forces control an area 1.5 kilometers behind the Antonivsky bridge, but that Ukrainian forces control the rest. It is still unclear whether Russian forces are operating north of the Kinka and Chaika rivers given the geolocated strikes against Ukrainian forces less than half a kilometer north of Oleshky's city limits.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of April 22, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

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

Continued Russian efforts to block evacuations of wounded soldiers—likely in a blanket effort to prevent soldiers from leaving the combat zone—have reportedly contributed to the deaths of some Russian soldiers. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on April 22 that soldiers on the Russian border turned back a 14-truck medical evacuation convoy from Luhansk Oblast and that some soldiers died in transit (presumably to overflowing Luhansk Oblast hospitals) due to a lack of proper medical care.⁶⁵ ISW has previously observed Russian efforts to redeploy wounded soldiers and prevent their evacuation.⁶⁶ Russian command likely intends to prevent the significant number of demoralized soldiers from faking injury to escape combat and is not very concerned about soldiers' fitness for combat, as many soldiers are used in human-wave style attacks. This reported incident at the Russian border is further notable because it suggests that there remains a clear set of checkpoints blocking traffic and dividing Russia from its “annexed” territories, undermining Russian claims that it has integrated occupied Ukrainian territories.

Several Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin critiqued on April 21 the recent creation of what he presented as a slew of Russian private military companies (PMCs), including Gazprom's “Potok” PMC. Prigozhin claimed there now exists “a couple of them for each creature,” referring to several major Russian groups each launching its own PMC.⁶⁷ Russian milblogger Igor Girkin responded on April 22 that non-Wagner PMCs are not a new phenomenon. Girkin quipped that the other PMCs have much lower combat capabilities than the Wagner Group did before the Wagner Group began its assault on Bakhmut but that alternative PMC commanders are Prigozhin's equals in all other aspects.⁶⁸

Russian State Duma Parliamentarian Stanislav Naumov acknowledged on April 22 that Russian forces are struggling to supply soldiers with necessary components for equipment. Naumov stated that he would create a private military company (PMC) or an online “hypermarket” for military equipment to support Russian force provisioning if there were no restrictions on such activity.⁶⁹ Provisioning remains a major issue for the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), and soldiers often purchase elements of their own gear and medical supplies.⁷⁰ Milbloggers and volunteer groups frequently collect items such as basic equipment, vehicles, and component parts for Russian soldiers, indirectly demonstrating many shortcomings in official military logistics and supply efforts.⁷¹

Russian officials are likely struggling to fund benefits and support programs for Russian soldiers despite ongoing discussions about new ways to increase the appeal of military service. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) published on April 21 an intercepted call from a Russian soldier in which the soldier claimed that the Russian command retroactively transfers soldiers to other units or files them as missing to avoid making cash payments for soldier injuries or deaths.⁷² Russian opposition news source *Mobilization News* reported on April 22 that Russian recruiters removed mention of issuing microcredits from advertising booklets in Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai.⁷³ A prominent Russian news aggregator claimed on April 21 that Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Sergey Kiriyenko met with the Defenders of the Fatherland Supervisory Board to discuss organizing social support and assistance for veterans and their families, however. The news aggregator claimed that the meeting emphasized that the fighters are the “new elite” of Russia.⁷⁴ This is likely a continuation of efforts to increase the appeal of military service and cater to the growing veteran electorate.

Russian authorities continue to illegally and indefinitely detain soldiers who refuse to fight in Ukraine. Russian opposition news sources *ASTRA* and *Mobilization News* reported on April 22 that authorities in Pakino, Vladimir Oblast are detaining 40 mobilized and contract soldiers in a military unit without a court order or initiated case.⁷⁵

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

Russian occupation officials are continuing to expand patronage networks in occupied territories. Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik announced that United Russia launched the “Our Control” project that will allow local occupation heads, representatives of public organizations, members of the LNR council, and residents to inspect infrastructure restored under patronage arrangements with Russian federal subjects.⁷⁶ Pasechnik stated that occupation officials have already carried out the first inspection in Markivskiy Raion east of Starobilsk with Voronezh Oblast specialists. The Kremlin is likely extending Russian-style corruption systems to occupied territories in Ukraine.

Russian occupation officials are continuing to announce plans for infrastructure projects in occupied Ukraine. Chairman of the Kherson Oblast Occupation Government Andrey Alekseyenko claimed that Russia will start operating electric trains in May from Henichesk in southeastern Kherson Oblast to Dzhankoi in Crimea.⁷⁷ Occupation officials are reportedly planning to open additional train routes from Henichesk to Simferopol, and a railway line between Vadym station in Preobrazhenka, Kalanchak, Myrne, Armyansk, and Simferopol. Both claimed infrastructure projects are located along Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) and are likely part of ongoing Russian efforts to reinstate railway connections in southern Ukraine—possibly to improve Russian logistics networks.

The Kremlin is reportedly allocating 410.7 billion rubles to sustain Russian-occupied territories in Ukraine.⁷⁸ Russian state-affiliated outlet *RBK* reported that the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) will receive the largest subsidies of all occupied territories—more than 171 billion rubles.⁷⁹ Russian subsidies to DNR are larger than previous transfers to annexed Crimea in 2014.

Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.)

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on April 22 that Belarusian units that conducted training exercises in Russia on how to operate Russian-provided Iskander-M missile systems returned to Belarus.⁸⁰

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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