

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 25, 2023
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April 25, 7pm 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.

Senior US and EU officials assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin would remain unwilling to negotiate in response to a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on April 24 that a senior European official stated that the chances of Putin “backing down” in response to a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive are “less than zero.”[1] The official stated that Putin would likely mobilize more soldiers to fight in Ukraine. US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Celeste Wallander said that there is “very little evidence” to suggest that Putin would alter his strategic goal of subjugating Ukraine “politically, if not fully militarily.” US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby told *Voice of America* on April 25 that the US is increasing security assistance to Ukraine because the US expects that Russia will attempt to go on the offensive as the weather improves.[2]

A Ukrainian military official claimed on April 25 that Ukrainian forces are achieving “impressive results” in counter-battery combat against Russian forces on the Russian-occupied eastern (left) bank of the Dnipro River.[3] Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Southern Operational Forces Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Ukrainian forces hit and destroyed Russian artillery systems, tanks, armored vehicles, and air defense systems. Humenyuk added that Ukrainian forces are working to clear the frontline on the east bank in a “counter-battery mode.” Humenyuk added that Russian forces are evacuating civilians from the Dnipro River bank area to move in Russian units, which is simplifying Ukrainian operations.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin denied ISW’s April 22 assessment about limited improvements in Wagner’s relations with the Russian military command ahead of the planned Ukrainian counteroffensive. ISW previously assessed that the Russian military command may have partially repaired its strained relationship with Prigozhin to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin to halt offensive operations ahead of the planned Ukrainian counteroffensive.[4] ISW had also observed a dramatic change in the nature of Prigozhin’s public interactions with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Kremlin as early as beginning of April.[5] Prigozhin stated that ISW’s assessment is a “fake,” noting that he would not “exchange ammunition for [his] guys even for friendship with God.”[6]

Prigozhin’s continued instance on his distaste for the Russian military leadership contradicts the change in Prigozhin’s rhetoric as well as the sudden influx of artillery ammunition after months of reported shell hunger in Bakhmut.[7] Russian independent outlet *Mozhem Obyasnit* (We Can

Explain) also reported that Prigozhin's companies earned a record amount of income in 2022 from their contracts with the Russian MoD despite his feud with Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu.[8] Prigozhin has repeatedly acknowledged cooperation with troops subordinated to the Russian MoD and is receiving mobilized personnel to reinforce his flanks. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov confirmed that his eldest son fought in the war with Wagner, which ISW assessed to be an information operation to mend the relationship and possibly increase or demonstrate Prigozhin's loyalty to the Kremlin.[9] All these factors indicate that Prigozhin – despite his claimed independence and pride – needs to retain the favor and support of the Kremlin and the Russian MoD to sustain his operations.

Russian ultranationalists are continuing to advocate for the Kremlin to adopt Stalinist repression measures. Russian State Duma Parliamentarian Andrey Gurulyov – a prominent Russian ultranationalist figure within the ruling United Russia Party – stated that Russia needs to reintroduce the concept of the “enemy of the people.” [10] This concept designated all the late Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's opposition figures as the enemies of society. Gurulyov frequently shares extreme opinions on Russian state television but the rhetoric among the ultranationalists is increasingly emphasizing the need for the targeting and elimination of Russia's internal enemies. Former Russian officer Igor Girkin and Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin often echo similar calls to prosecute Russian officials who are hoping to end the war via negotiations with the West. Such attitudes indicate that the ultranationalist communities are expecting Russian President Vladimir Putin to expand repression and fully commit to the war.

The Kremlin continues to avoid adopting overtly repressive measures likely out of concern for the stability of Putin's regime. The Russian government withdrew a bill from the Russian State Duma that would have increased taxes from 13 to 30 percent for Russians who have fled the country.[11] Russian ultranationalists have repeatedly called on the Kremlin to nationalize property belonging to Russians who had “betrayed” the country by fleeing, but the Kremlin appears to remain hesitant to introduce such unpopular measures. Unnamed sources told Russian independent outlet *Verska* that the Russian presidential administration does not support the return of capital punishments in Russia – another issue that recently reemerged in Russian policy discussions.[12] The Kremlin could use the threat of the death penalty to scare Russians into supporting the war effort (or remaining passively resistant to it), but Putin likely remains hesitant to destroy his image as a diplomatic and tolerant tsar. ISW previously assessed that Putin relies on controlling the information space to safeguard his regime much more than the kind of massive oppression apparatus of the Soviet Union and that Putin has never rebuilt an internal repression apparatus equivalent to the KGB, Interior Ministry forces, and the Red Army.[13]

Russian civil rights groups OVD-Info, Memorial, and Rus Sidyashchaya (Russia Behind Bars) issued a legal challenge to the Russian censorship law against discrediting the Russian military on April 25. OVD-Info announced that its lawyers filed 10 of 20 planned complaints against the law to the Russian Constitutional Court in hopes that the court will rule the law unconstitutional.[14] The complaints centered around individual cases of alleged discreditation, including one case wherein authorities fined a man 50,000 rubles (about \$612) for holding a sign calling for peace.[15] A fringe group of at least 20, mostly smaller, pro-war Russian milbloggers amplified a call for the Russian government to repeal the censorship laws on April 11 following the prosecution of a Russian medic for telling battlefield truths.[16] OVD-Info and other human rights organizations are most likely to face prosecution under Russian censorship laws. The Russian

government is unlikely to repeal or strike down these laws without direction from the Kremlin, but challenges like OVD-Info's demonstrate continued resistance to domestic censorship and repression.

Key Takeaways

- **Senior US and EU officials assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin would remain unwilling to negotiate in response to a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive.**
- **A Ukrainian military official claimed on April 25 that Ukrainian forces are achieving “impressive results” in counter-battery combat against Russian forces on the Russian-occupied eastern (left) bank of the Dnipro River.**
- **Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin denied ISW’s April 22 assessment about limited improvements in Wagner’s relations with the Russian military command ahead of the planned Ukrainian counteroffensive.**
- **Russian ultranationalists continue to advocate for the Kremlin to adopt Stalinist repression measures.**
- **The Kremlin continues to avoid adopting overtly repressive measures likely out of concern for the stability of Putin’s regime.**
- **Russian civil rights groups OVD-Info, Memorial, and Rus Sidyashchaya (Russia Behind Bars) issued a legal challenge to the Russian censorship law against discrediting the Russian military on April 25.**
- **Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks on the Svatove-Kremmina line.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks in and around Bakhmut and along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline.**
- **Russian milbloggers continued to issue vehement denials that Ukrainian forces established sustained positions on east (left) bank Kherson Oblast.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is attempting to financially incentivize Russian prisoners to fight in Ukraine, offering them compensation equivalent to that of Russian volunteers.**
- **The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Ukrainian partisans detonated a Russian military checkpoint near Oleshky.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 25, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

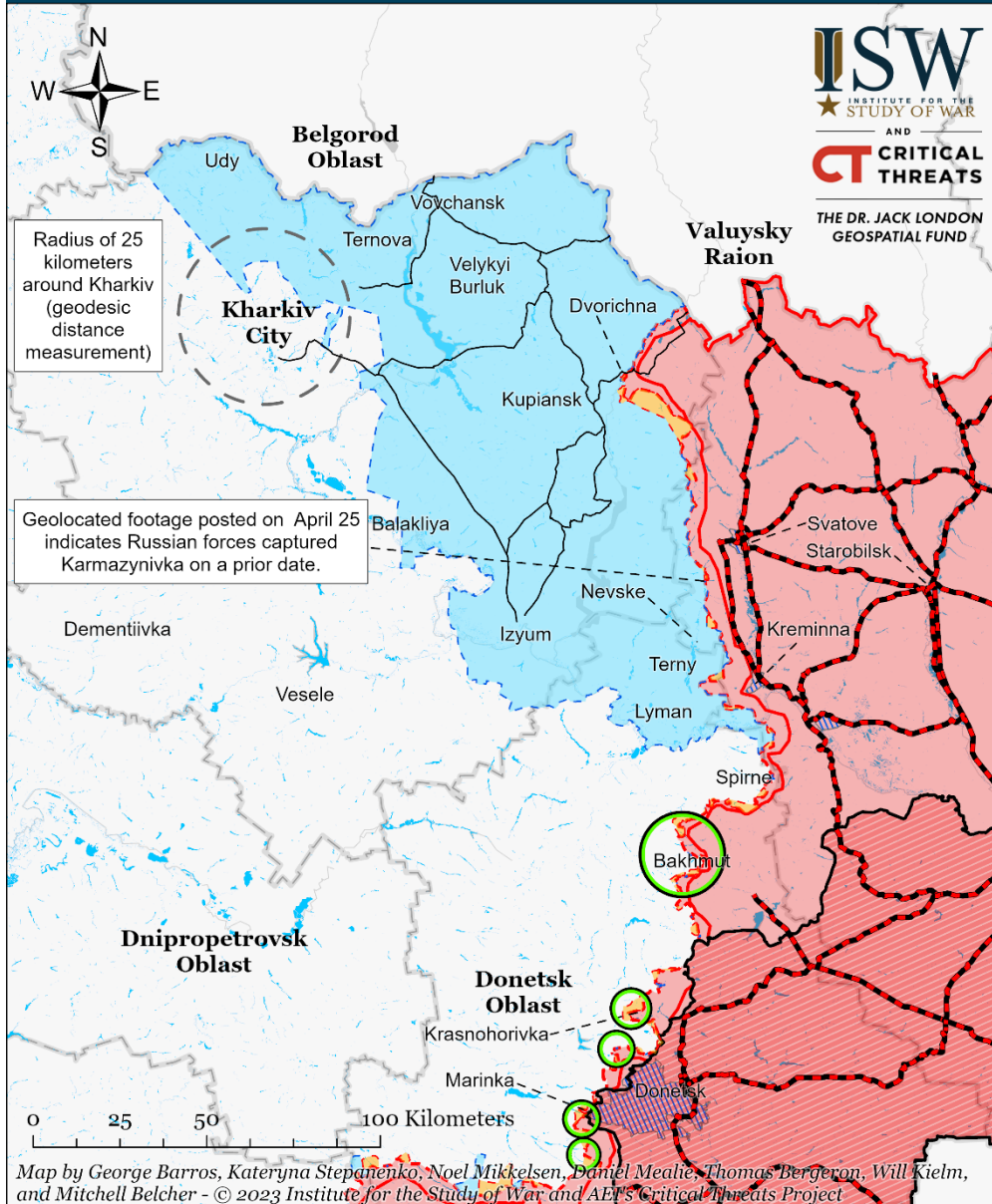
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

Russian 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 sources claimed that Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks on the Svatove-Kreminna line on April 25. Russian milbloggers claimed on April 24 that Russian forces advanced toward Nevske (17km northwest of Kreminna), Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna) and east of Spirne (25km south of Kreminna).[17] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continue to fortify positions in the Kupyansk direction and did not conduct ground attacks in the Lyman direction.[18] Geolocated footage published on April 25 indicates that Russian forces likely captured Karmazynivka (13km southwest of Svatove) on an unspecified date.[19] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported on April 25 that Russian forces are attempting to push Ukrainians forces out of their positions in the Serebrianska forest area (11km south of Kreminna) in order to set conditions for further attacks in the Lyman direction.[20] Syrskyi also reported that Russian forces in eastern Ukraine formed “Storm” infantry units from each brigade or regiment reinforced with tanks, thermobaric artillery, and mortars and anti-tank units.[21]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of April 25, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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Radius of 25 kilometers around Kharkiv (geodesic distance measurement)

Geolocated footage posted on April 25 indicates Russian forces captured Karmazynivka on a prior date.

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 AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Key Ukrainian Roads
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled 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 Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

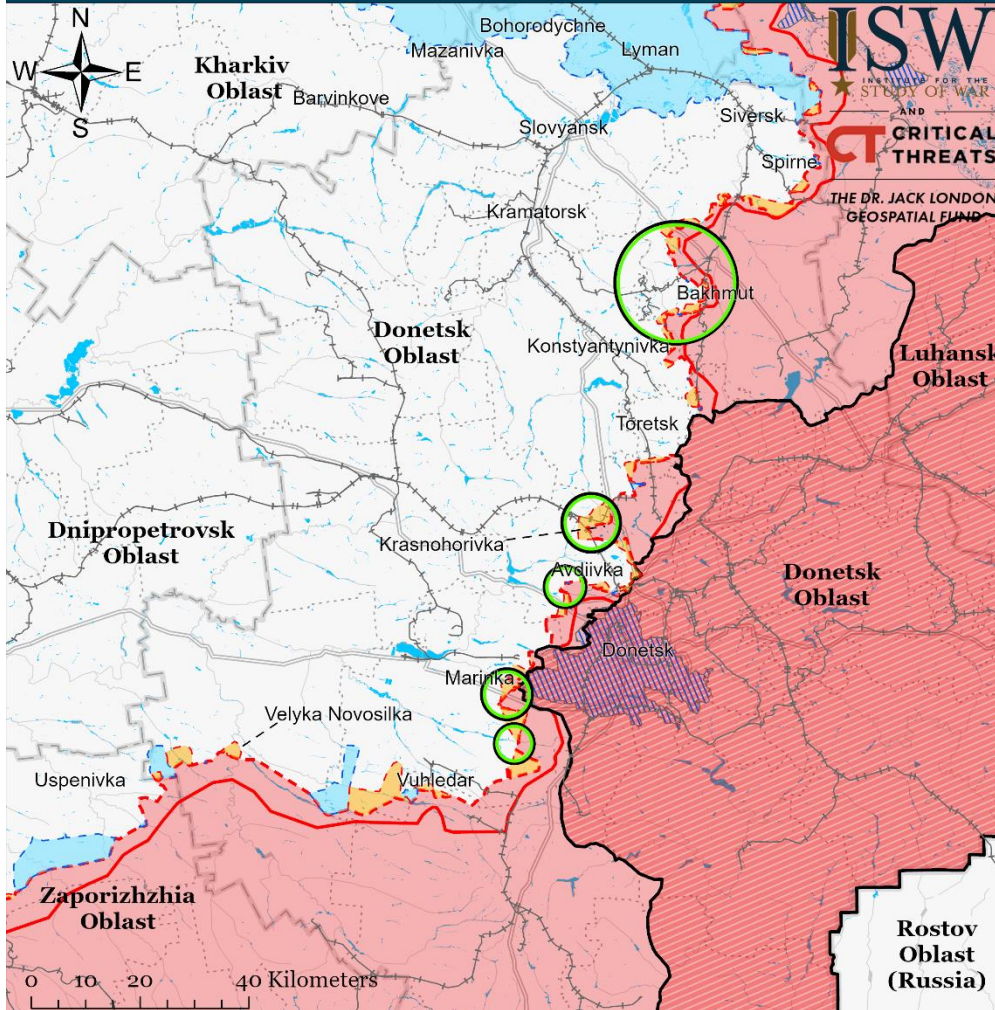
Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks in and around Bakhmut on April 24. Geolocated footage posted on April 24 shows that Wagner Group forces made marginal advances southwest of the Bakhmut-2 rail station in western Bakhmut.[22] Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner forces advanced in southern and western Bakhmut, where the fighting is heaviest.[23] Some milbloggers claimed that Wagner forces advanced further west from the Bakhmut-2 rail station.[24] One milblogger claimed that fighting is intensifying northwest of Bakhmut near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest) and Novomarkove (12km northwest).[25] The Ukrainian General Staff reported continued fighting in Bakhmut, and that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks near Bohdanivka (5km northwest of Bakhmut), Novomarkove, Khromove (immediately northwest of Bakhmut) and Klishchiivka (5km south of Bakhmut).[26] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that Wagner Group forces can no longer conduct combat operations without support from Russian Airborne (VDV) and special purposes units, which Cherevaty characterized as becoming increasingly active in the Bakhmut area.[27]

Ukrainian forces conducted a localized counterattack northwest of Bakhmut, likely to alleviate pressure against the logistics line passing through Khromove. Geolocated footage posted on April 25 shows Ukrainian forces overtaking Russian positions north of the O0504 Khromove-Chasiv Yar highway.[28] A Russian milblogger claimed that the Ukrainian counterattack was unsuccessful, however.[29]

Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on April 25. Geolocated footage from the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) People’s Militia on April 21 shows that Russian forces advanced east towards Nevelske (14km southwest of Avdiivka).[30] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks near Novokalynove (9km north of Avdiivka), Stepove (3km northwest of Avdiivka), Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka, Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), Marinka (immediately west of Donetsk City), and Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).[31] A Russian milblogger’s battle map claimed that Russian forces advanced west of Kamianka (4km north of Avdiivka) and south of Vesele (5km north of Avdiivka) as of April 25.[32] Geolocated footage from the DNR People’s Militia shows the DNR 1st Slavic and 110th Motorized Rifle brigades (1st Army Corps) operating south of Sieverne and near Nevelske, respectively.[33]

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed or claimed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on April 25.[34] Ukrainian Tavriisk Direction Defense Forces Spokesperson Colonel Oleksiy Dmytrashkivskyi stated that the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) reappeared in the Vuhledar area, implying that the brigade left the front line on an unspecified date to rest and reconstitute.[35] Dmytrashkivskyi assessed that the 155th is likely not at full combat strength.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of April 25, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

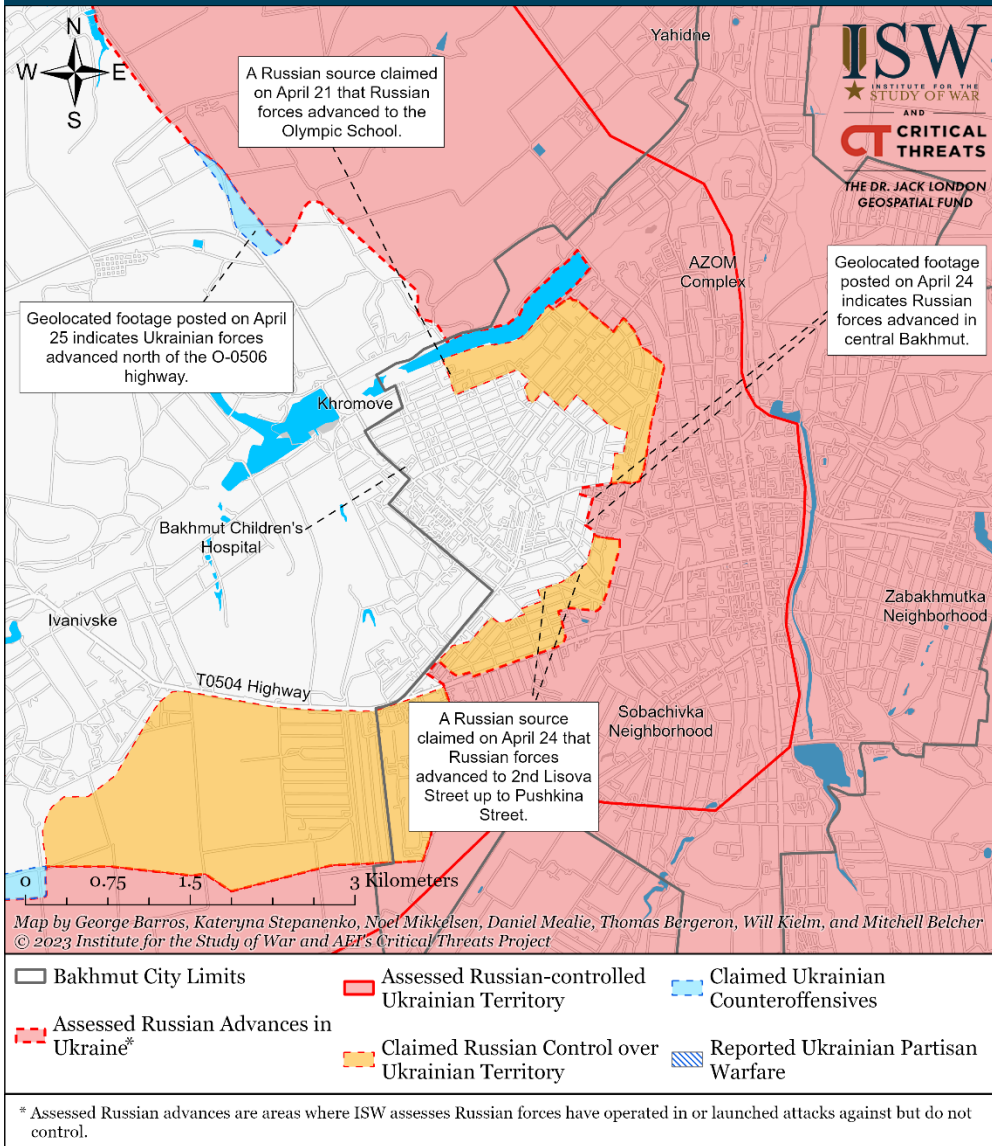


Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiellm, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory | Major Railroads |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare |
| 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.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of April 25, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



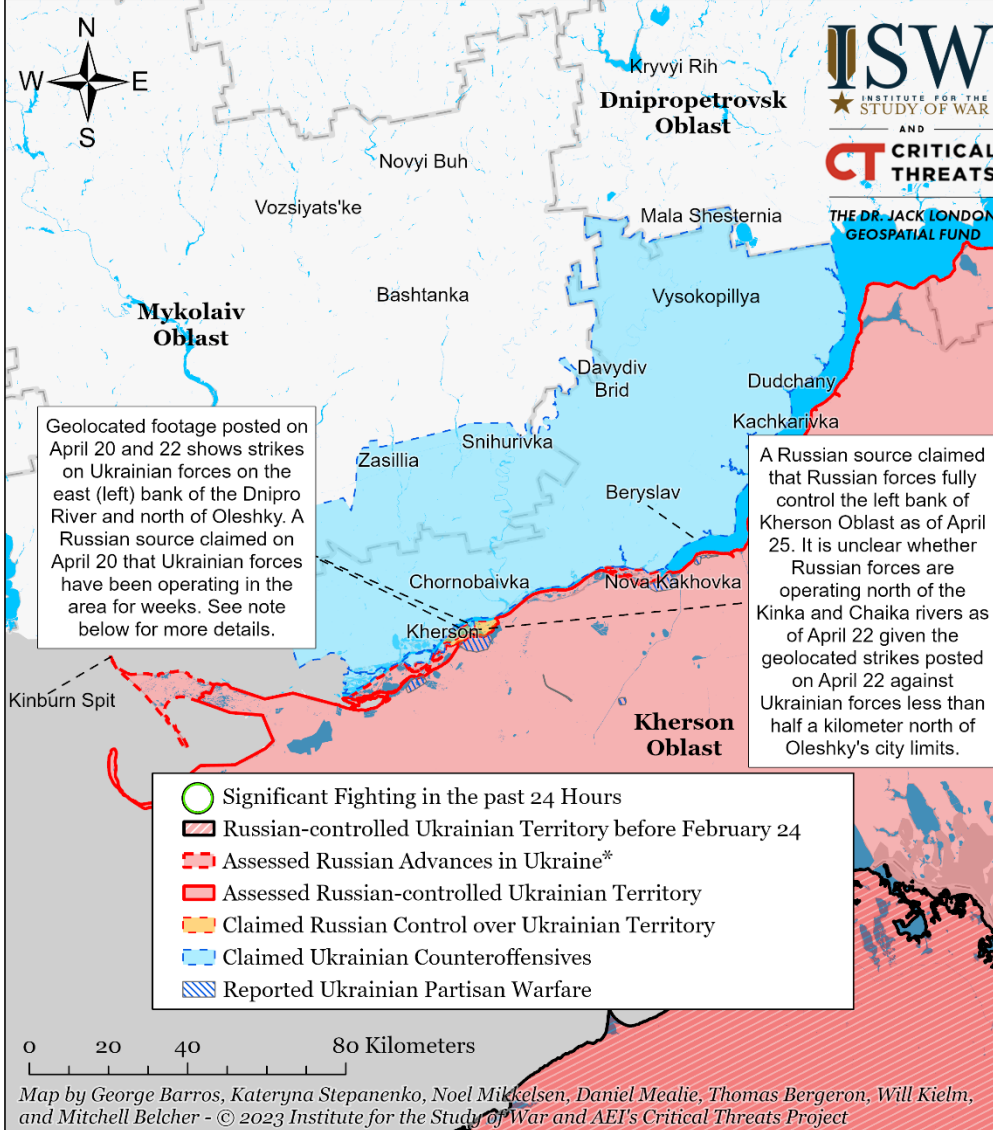
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian milbloggers continued to issue vehement denials on April 25 that Ukrainian forces established sustained positions on east (left) bank Kherson Oblast. The milbloggers amplified textual reports and video claims from Russian military personnel claiming that Ukrainian forces are not on east bank Kherson Oblast and that the situation is under control.[36] One such video features personnel from the Union of Donbas Volunteers, which is affiliated with Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov.[37] One milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces seized many of the Dnipro River delta islands, however.[38] Russian milbloggers also seized the chance to amplify claimed Russian military successes, including that Russian forces shot down a Ukrainian Su-25 that had supported

Ukrainian raids across the Dnipro River.[39] The milbloggers also claimed that Russian air strikes, particularly with modified guided FAB-500 bombs, improved Russian forces' ability to repel Ukrainian forces from east bank Kherson Oblast.[40]

A Russian occupation official claimed that Ukrainian forces are operating a Hrim-2 short-range ballistic missile system in Zaporizhia Oblast. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov claimed on April 25 that Ukrainian forces deployed a new Hrim-2 missile system to Zaporizhzhia City.[41] The Hrim-2 reportedly has a maximum range of 400-500 kilometers.[42] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces targeted the Kerch Strait Bridge with a Hrim-2 missile on April 22.[43]

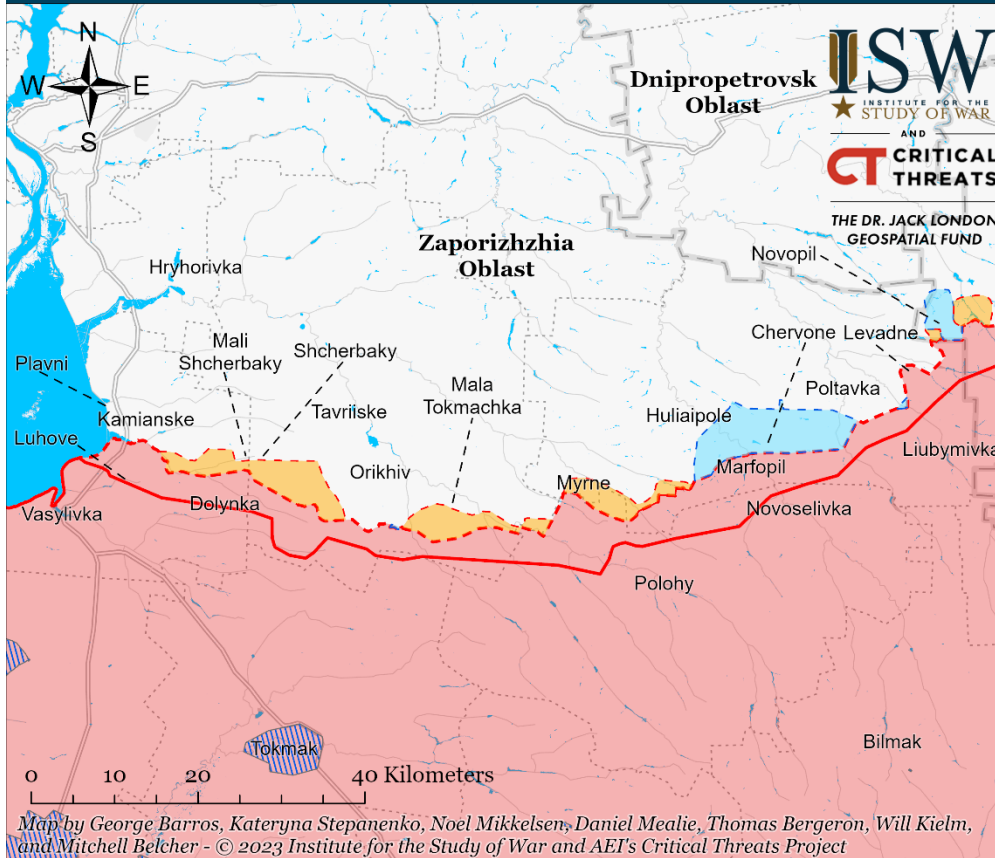
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 25, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: A Russian source claimed that Russian forces fully control the left bank of Kherson Oblast as of April 25. Geolocated footage posted on April 20 and 22 shows Russian forces striking Ukrainian forces on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro 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 Dnipro 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 25, 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)

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is attempting to financially incentivize Russian prisoners to fight in Ukraine by offering them compensation equivalent to that of Russian volunteers. Perm Oblast human rights activist Oksana Asaulenko reported that the Russian MoD representatives visited a prison in Gubakha, Perm Oblast, and offered prisoners the option to serve in Ukraine for a six-month term.[44] The Russian MoD reportedly offered prisoners a monthly salary of 205,000 rubles (about \$2,510). The Russian MoD is also reportedly offering prisoners compensation of three million rubles (about \$36,720) if they are injured or five million rubles (about \$61,200) to prisoners' families if they

are killed on the battlefield. Wagner Group servicemen revealed to a Russian opposition outlet that many Wagner convicts died within the first three weeks on the frontline and that it is unclear if their families ever received compensation for their deaths.[45] The MoD's efforts to financially incentivize prisoner recruitment indicates that the Russian MoD cannot lure prisoners to war solely with pardon promises. ISW previously reported that pay discrepancies among Russian volunteers and mobilized servicemen have sparked conflicts, and payments to convicts serving on the frontlines may further aggravate the tensions among the members of Russian conventional and irregular forces.[46]

A Wagner Group convict told the *New York Times* that Wagner recruited prisoners by offering them HIV treatments. An HIV-positive Wagner mercenary revealed to the *New York Times* that Russian prisons treat HIV-positive prisoners with ineffective drugs, which prompted him to sign up for military service with Wagner in December 2022.[47] The convict claimed that Wagner promised him a pardon and effective HIV treatments and claimed that quick death on the battlefield was more appealing than a slow death in prison. He added that he did not have prior military experience and witnessed most of his unit die during an attack near Bakhmut. Head of the independent Russian human rights organization "Rus Sidyashchaya" (Russia Behind Bars) Olga Romanova claimed that approximately 10 percent of all Russian prisoners have HIV – and that Russian recruitment officials likely use the promise of medical treatment as a recruitment incentive.

Russian federal subjects, private military companies (PMCs), and proxy military formations are continuing to advertise contract service and form new military units. Bashkortostan Administration official Maxim Zabelin announced that the republic formed a new medical company that will support regional volunteer battalions.[48] The company is currently training in Patriot Park in Kubinka, Moscow Oblast before deploying to Ukraine. A Russian milblogger amplified a series of recruitment ads including: Wagner recruiting men for a six-month contract in Ukraine or a 9 to 14-month service in Africa; Moscow City recruitment of contract servicemen; and the 60th "Veterany" Separate Air Assault Brigade recruiting volunteers to fill its fourth volunteer battalion.[49] The Republic of Tatarstan is allocating approximately 18 million rubles (about \$220,300) to organize military-patriotic camps to train children ages 11 to 16 on basic military and survival skills.[50]

The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) assessed that Russian daily casualty rates decreased by over 30 percent in April after Russian forces suffered heavy casualties between January and March.[51] The UK MoD analyzed casualty rates from Ukrainian General Staff's calculations, which ISW cannot independently confirm. The UK MoD assessed that Russian forces are preparing for Ukrainian counteroffensives, which is likely leading to fewer casualties.

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)

The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on April 24 that Ukrainian partisans targeted a Russian military checkpoint in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack near Oleshky, Kherson Oblast. The center reported that partisans from the Atesh movement blew up a Russian military checkpoint located near military infrastructure, killing an unspecified number of Rosgvardia servicemen and destroying military equipment on the evening of April 23.[52]

The Kremlin continues to integrate Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine into the Russian healthcare system. Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko claimed that Russian authorities are restoring 172

healthcare facilities in occupied Ukraine – 80 of which are already operating – and that Russian doctors will complete performing “preventative examinations” of children in Russian occupied Ukraine in the coming weeks.[53] Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin claimed that that Russian doctors have already examined over 200,000 children.[54] ISW has previously reported on Russian efforts to integrate occupied regions of Ukraine through health care initiatives.[55]

Russian forces continue to use children’s facilities for military purposes. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on April 25 that Russian forces continue to establish military facilities in educational facilities turning children and teachers into “human shields.” [56] The Ukrainian General staff reported that up to 200 Russian mobilized personnel occupy a children’s camp in Urzuf in Mariupol Raion.

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.

Russian forces maintain a presence along Ukraine’s northern border in Belarus and Russia. Ukrainian Commander of the Joint Forces Lieutenant General Serhiy Nayevev stated on April 25 that 17,000 Russian forces divided into two formations are deployed along the southern border of Belarus and along the border in Bryansk and Kursk oblasts.[57] Nayevev reported that about 2,800 Russian forces are at unspecified training grounds in Belarus.

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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