

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 17, 2023

Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan  
August 17, 2023, 7:30pm 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.

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**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:00pm ET on August 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**“Vostok” Battalion commander Alexander Khodakovsky suggested that Russia freeze the war in Ukraine along the current frontlines, reintroducing a narrative that had been largely dormant since Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin’s armed rebellion.** Khodakovsky stated that Russia will not be able to topple Ukraine militarily in the near term and that Russian forces are unlikely to easily occupy additional Ukrainian cities, echoing comments Prigozhin had made in April 2023.[1] Khodakovsky concluded that Russia will likely have to come to a “truce” and that Russia may enter a phase “of neither peace nor war” with Ukraine.[2] Khodakovsky suggested that Ukraine would be sufficiently weakened in this state of frozen conflict and that Russia would be able to exert more influence over Ukraine in such a situation than it currently can during the “Special Military Operation.”[3] Prigozhin’s April 14 essay suggested that Russia freeze the war in Ukraine to set conditions for a future victory without negotiations.[4] Russian sources have periodically claimed that a Kremlin faction is interested in freezing the war along the current frontlines for similar reasons as well as over concerns about domestic political stability and the economic fallout from the war.[5] Discussion of this narrative has waned with Prigozhin’s relative silence following Wagner’s June 24 rebellion and the arrest of ardent ultranationalist Igor Girkin, who routinely called on the Kremlin to resist the faction that aims to freeze the war.[6] Khodakovsky may be reintroducing the narrative into the Russian information space on behalf of the faction allegedly interested in freezing the war, although Khodakovsky likely has limited influence on the Russian leadership itself. ISW continues to assess that a temporary ceasefire in Ukraine and protraction of the war will only benefit Russia by allowing Russian forces to reconstitute and letting Russia wear down Western support for Ukraine.[7]

**Khodakovsky commands forces defending in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and his comments about freezing the war follow the Ukrainian liberation of Urozhaine on August 16, suggesting that recent Ukrainian advances may be significantly weakening confidence in the Russian defense along the wider front in southern Ukraine.** Khodakovsky has previously highlighted concerns about the Russian defense in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, specifically relating to poor Russian counterbattery capabilities, heavy Russian losses, exhausted Russian forces, and a lack of reserves.[8] Khodakovsky previously called for an operational pause on August 13 so that Russian forces could accumulate resources for a new operation.[9] Khodakovsky’s escalation from calling for an operational pause to suggesting that Russia freeze the conflict is likely associated with his firsthand experience of recent tactically significant Ukrainian advances and the degradation of defending Russian forces in Urozhaine.

**Recent Ukrainian advances near small settlements in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and in western Zaporizhia Oblast are likely tactically significant because of the structure of Russian defensive lines.** Ukrainian Colonel Petro Chernyk stated on August 15 that the three-echeloned Russian defensive line in southern Ukraine is comprised of a first line of minefields stretching several kilometers deep; a second line with artillery, equipment, and personnel concentrations; and a third line of rear positions meant to preserve resources.[10] Recent Ukrainian advances north and northeast of Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv) in western Zaporizhia may allow Ukrainian forces to begin operating in the areas past the densest minefields.[11] If the areas around the second Russian line of defense are less heavily mined, then they would likely be more conducive to more rapid Ukrainian gains. ISW has no ability to assess the density or depth of Russian minefields, however.

**Russian forces have dedicated significant effort, resources, and personnel to hold settlements such as Robotyne and Urozhaine, and recent Ukrainian advances in these areas are therefore likely reflective of a wider degradation of defending Russian forces.** ISW continues to assess that Russian forces lack significant operational reserves, and the intense Russian effort to hold these settlements instead of withdrawing their forces means that Ukrainian forces have likely had to thoroughly degrade Russian units before advancing.[12] ISW recently observed Russian forces conduct lateral redeployments of elements of the 7th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division from Kherson Oblast and possibly from the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area to the Robotyne area, further suggesting that recent Ukrainian advances have significantly degraded the Russian forces that have been defending in western Zaporizhia Oblast without

rotation since the start of the counteroffensive.[13] The lack of Russian operational reserves means that Russian forces will have to reinforce certain areas of the front at the expense of others, likely weakening Russian defensive lines in aggregate and offering Ukrainian forces opportunities for exploitation.[14] Khodakovsky's recent complaint that the Russian command failed to send reinforcements to secure exhausted Russian forces defending Urozhaine may indicate that the Russian command is already making difficult choices about what sectors to prioritize as Ukrainian forces advance.[15] Russian forces increasingly appear likely to have to withdraw to secondary prepared defensive positions without significant support in the case of a Ukrainian breakthrough, and the further degradation of Russian forces creates opportunities for any Ukrainian breakthrough to be potentially operationally significant.[16] Khodakovsky's apparent waning confidence in the Russian defense in southern Ukraine may indicate that he believes that recent advances have made a Ukrainian breakthrough more likely.

**Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on August 17 and advanced near Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.** The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut, Berdyansk (Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area), and Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) directions.[17] Geolocated footage published on August 16 indicates that Ukrainian forces made marginal gains in southern Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[18] Additional geolocated footage published on August 14 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced southwest of Novopokrovka (16km southeast of Orikhiv).[19] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces shot down two Russian Ka-52 attack helicopters on August 17.[20] Ukrainian military sources and geolocated footage posted on August 17 indicate that Ukrainian forces downed a Russian Ka-52 helicopter near Robotyne in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[21] Ukrainian Air Force Commander Mykola Oleshchuk stated that Ukrainian air defense units downed another Russian Ka-52 helicopter in the Bakhmut direction, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of a downed Russian Ka-52 helicopter in this direction.[22] The destruction of two Russian Ka-52 helicopters in the same day could indicate that protracted Russian aviation operations without rest may be degrading Russia's limited cadre of pilots, although it would be premature to draw firm conclusions from two instances.

**Russian efforts to ramp up the domestic production of Iranian Shahed-136/-131 drones indicates that Russia aims to develop the long-term capability to conduct large strike series in Ukraine.** *The Washington Post* reported that a drone production facility in the Alabuga Special Economic Zone aims to build 6,000 Iranian Shahed drones domestically by 2025.[23] *The Washington Post* cited leaked documents from a disillusioned Alabuga facility worker that state that Russia aims to develop a drone manufacturing capability that exceeds Iran's production capacity and aims to improve on existing capabilities of the Iranian Shahed-131 and -136 drones. The report noted that Russia is focused on producing and improving the Shahed-136 variant, which has a payload 10 times larger than the Shahed-131. Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Yuri Ihnat stated on August 17 that Russian forces are producing many missiles, helicopters, and aircraft but are unable to sustain this production.[24] Ihnat recently assessed that Russian forces will rely on strike drones because they are cheaper and easier to manufacture than precision missiles.[25] Ihnat stated that Russian forces are largely launching precision missiles that Russia recently produced, which indicates that Russian forces are prioritizing targeting Ukraine with precision missiles over restoring their stockpiles.[26] Russian forces currently use Shahed drones in Ukraine primarily as decoys so that high precision missiles have better chances of hitting their targets. The Russian command may believe that a large number of strike drones will allow Russian forces to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses, although Shahed drones remain Russia's high precision weapon system most vulnerable to Ukrainian air defenses.[27] Shahed drones do not carry sufficient payloads to significantly damage most critical military targets, and Russian forces are likely to continue using the drones to target soft and civilian targets in Ukraine.[28]

**The Washington Post report indicates that Russia is struggling to produce its own variants of the Shahed drones at the pace and quality it desires.** *The Washington Post* cited experts who assessed from the leaked documents that the Alabuga drone production facility has only manufactured the external components for 300 drones and is about one month behind schedule.[29] The leaked documents indicate that the Alabuga facility has struggled to fill specialist positions and that workers, including the one who leaked the documents, struggle with morale issues and that the plant has had to implement incentives such as increased pay and coercive measures such as seizing passports to retain workers. The documents also indicate that the Alabuga facility is struggling to obtain necessary drone components from foreign sources, as Russia only produces four of the 130 necessary internal components, and recent US blanket sanctions have further hindered Russia's ability to acquire some electrical components.

**Russia is likely dissatisfied with the quality of Shahed-131- and -136 drones it sources from Iran but likely seeks to retain Iran as a long-term strategic defense partner.** *The Washington Post's* leaked documents indicate that Iran has consistently held an advantage over Russia with the provision of the Shahed drones on Iranian rather than Russian terms.[30] The documents state that Iran leveraged negotiations to provide the smaller Shahed-131 drone to Russia despite Russia's strong preference for the larger Shahed-136. *The Washington Post* reported that an estimated 25 percent of Iranian-provided drones arrive damaged, many even inoperable. Russia has continued to posture itself as supporting or partnering with Iran in other strategic initiatives, including promoting Iranian weapons at the ongoing Army-2023

development forum, continuing bilateral defense cooperation discussions, and seeking to expel US forces from Syria, however.[31]

**Russian reports about the state of the Chonhar Bridge in occupied Kherson Oblast indicate that Ukrainian strikes disrupted a major Russian ground line of communication (GLOC) to Crimea for 11 days.** Crimean occupation Transport Minister Anatoly Tsurkin claimed on August 16 that traffic resumed on the Chonhar road bridge connecting Crimea with occupied Kherson Oblast after a Ukrainian strike on August 6 damaged the bridge and forced authorities to reroute civilian and likely military traffic.[32] The road bridge is part of a critical Russian GLOC, and the resumption of traffic on the bridge 11 days following the strike indicates that the Ukrainian interdiction campaign against Russian deep rear areas in southern Ukraine is able to temporarily disrupt Russian logistics supporting the Russian defense of critical sectors of the front during the Ukrainian counteroffensive.[33] The status of rail activity on the Chonhar railway bridge is unknown at this time, as is the status of the damaged road bridge across the Henichesk Strait.

**Russian authorities are likely targeting individuals associated with the “Golos” Movement for Defense of Voters’ Rights, including its Co-Chairperson Grigory Melkonyants, to suppress meaningful electoral opposition in preparation for the 2024 presidential election.** Russian opposition news outlets reported that Russian authorities searched the premises of 14 associates of Melkonyants in eight oblasts in connection with the case against Melkonyants.[34] Russian authorities also reportedly arrested “Golos” Movement Coordinator Vladimir Yegorov on charges of disobeying the police and searched Yegorov’s home in connection to the case against Melkonyants.[35] “Golos” Movement Co-Chairperson Stanislav Andreychuk stated that the case against Melkonyants is connected to the upcoming regional elections in Russia and claimed that Russian authorities have made it difficult for “Golos” to cover Russian elections over the past year.[36] The “Golos” Movement had remained the main independent election observation organization in Russia until recently.[37]

**Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officers reportedly detained the lawyer of arrested former FSB officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin on August 17.** Russian sources claimed that FSB officers detained Girkin’s lawyer, Alexander Molokhov, in Yalta on suspicion of extortion after he was invited to the city by a developer in an arbitration case and offered money.[38] Russian sources claimed that the FSB officers held Molokhov for 10 hours before releasing him but did not initiate a criminal case.[39]

**An imprisoned former Russian Federal Protection Service (FSO) general with alleged knowledge of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s private Black Sea residence died suspiciously on August 16.** Gennady Lopyrev, a former lieutenant general in the Russian Federal Protection Service (FSO), who was serving a sentence for bribery in a penal colony in Ryazan Oblast, Russia, died on August 16.[40] The chairman of the Public Monitoring Commission of Ryazan Oblast, Viktor Boborykin, did not provide the cause of Lopyrev’s death, but a Russian insider source claimed that Lopyrev was “unexpectedly” diagnosed with leukemia on August 14 after suddenly complaining of shortness of breath despite normal health indicators.[41] The insider source claimed Lopyrev was “the keeper of secrets” related to the construction of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s Black Sea residence in Gelendzhik, often referred to as “Putin’s Palace.”[42]

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **“Vostok” Battalion commander Alexander Khodakovsky suggested that Russia freeze the war in Ukraine along the current frontlines, reintroducing a narrative that had been largely dormant since Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin’s armed rebellion.**
- **Khodakovsky commands forces defending in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and his comments about freezing the war follow the Ukrainian liberation of Urozhaine on August 16, suggesting that recent Ukrainian advances may be significantly weakening confidence in the Russian defense along the wider front in southern Ukraine.**
- **Recent Ukrainian advances near small settlements in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and in western Zaporizhia Oblast are likely tactically significant because of the structure of Russian defensive lines.**
- **Russian forces have dedicated significant effort, resources, and personnel to hold settlements such as Robotyne and Urozhaine, and recent Ukrainian advances in these areas are therefore likely reflective of a wider degradation of defending Russian forces.**
- **Russian efforts to ramp up the domestic production of Iranian Shahed-136/-131 drones indicates that Russia aims to develop the long-term capability to conduct large strike series in Ukraine.**

- Russian reports about the state of the Chonhar Bridge in occupied Kherson Oblast indicate that Ukrainian strikes disrupted a major Russian ground line of communication (GLOC) to Crimea for 11 days.
- Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, and in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area on August 17 and advanced in certain areas.
- Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on August 17 and advanced near Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of August 17, 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 western 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**

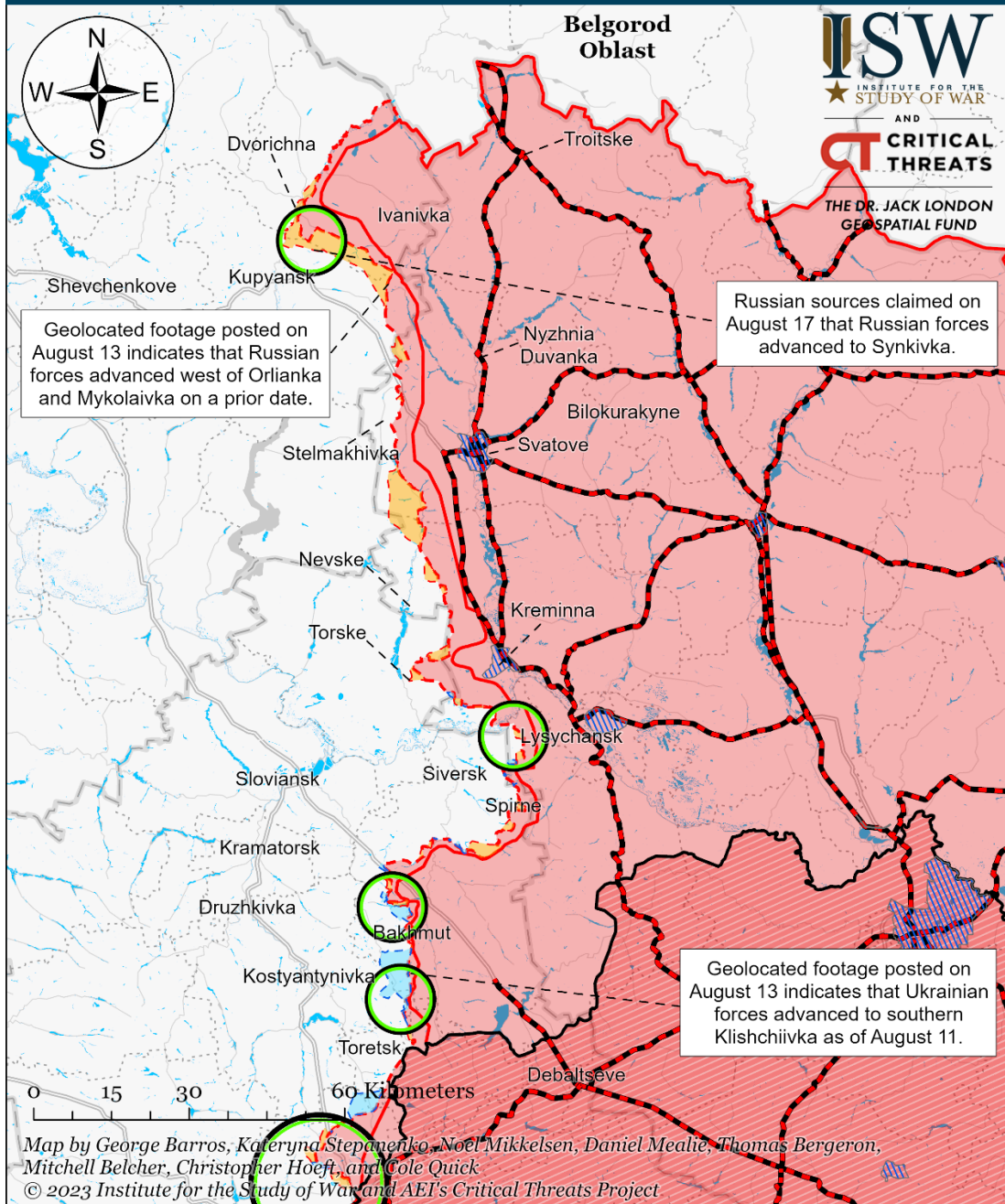
#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and reportedly advanced on August 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Synkivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk) and Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).[43] Russian Western Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Yaroslav Yakimkin claimed that Russian elements of the 6th Combined Arms Army (Western Military District) captured Ukrainian positions near Vilshana (15km northeast of Kupyansk).[44] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces advanced towards Vilshana on August 16, and a Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces captured Ukrainian positions southwest of Vilshana on August 17.[45] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced towards Synkivka, and one prominent milblogger claimed that Russian forces have partially encircled the settlement.[46] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Zahoryivka (16km east of Kupyansk), Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk), and Synkivka.[47]

Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations near Kupyansk but did not advance on August 17. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Yakimkin claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Vilshana and Synkivka.[48] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces hold the southern outskirts of Synkivka and that the rest of the settlement is a contested "gray zone." [49] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty suggested on August 10 that Russian efforts to draw additional Ukrainian forces to the Kupyansk area may have been successful in the short term, although a Russian milblogger suggested on August 17 that the Russian effort has not had further success within the past week.[50]

Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line but did not advance on August 17. The Russian MoD and Russian Central Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Alexander Savchuk claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Novoselivske (14km northwest of Svatove), Kuzmyne (4km southwest of Kreminna), and the Serebryanske forest area (10km southwest of Kreminna).[51] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to break through Russian defenses along the Raihorodka-Karmazynivka line (up to 13km southwest of Svatove) and that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Torske (15km west of Kreminna) and the Serebryanske forest area on August 16.[52]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of August 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

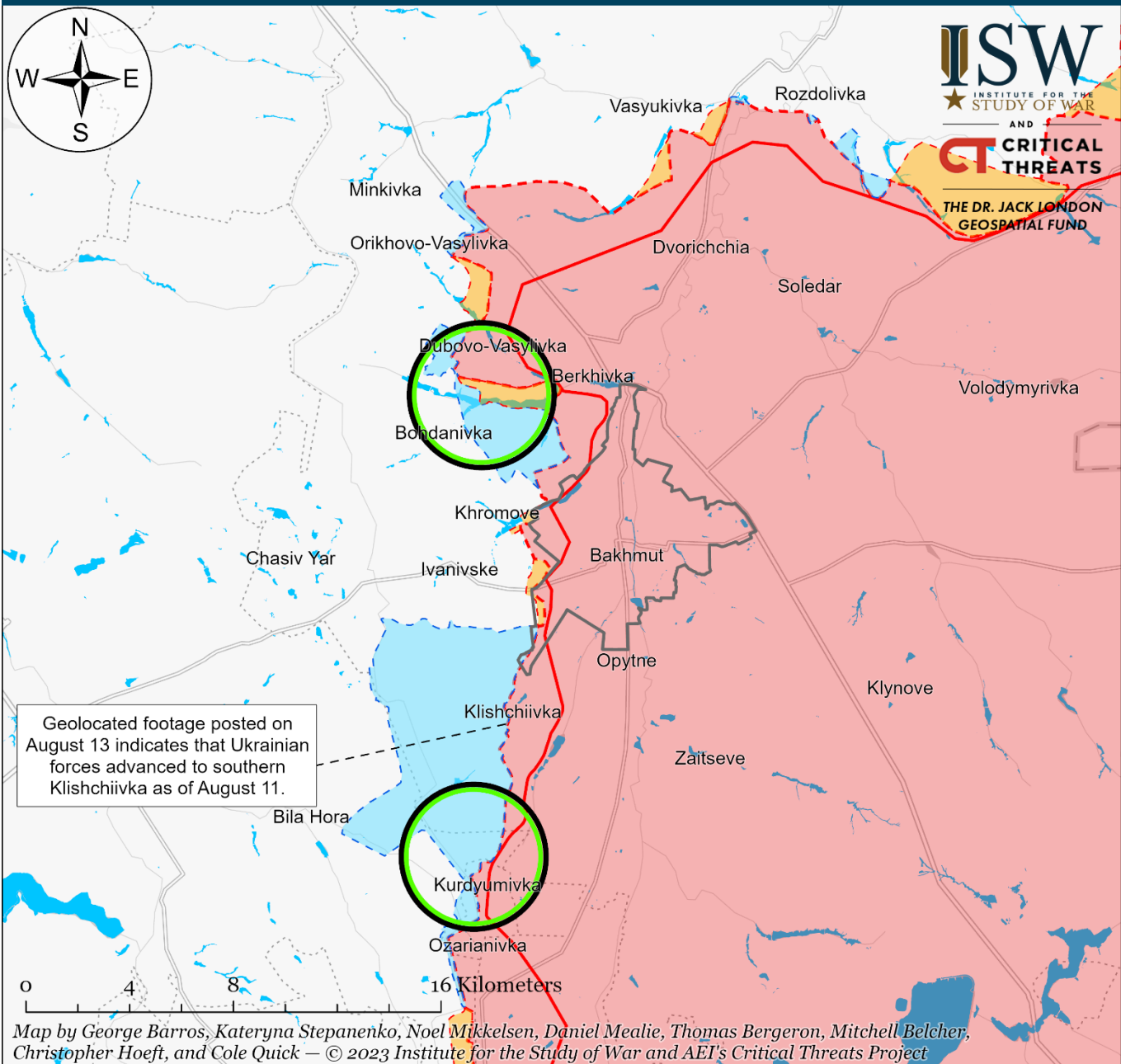
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Bakhmut direction on August 17 and advanced on Bakhmut’s southern flank. Geolocated footage published on August 16 indicates that Ukrainian forces made marginal gains in the southern part of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[53] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations south of Bakhmut and have entrenched themselves in new positions.[54] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Klishchiivka, Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), and Berkhivka (4km north of Bakhmut).[55] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Zaliznyanske (12km northwest of Bakhmut).[56] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces made marginal gains in an unspecified location in the Bakhmut direction.[57] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to break through Russian defense near the E-40 (Bakhmut-Slovyansk) highway and Berkhivka on August 16.[58] One milblogger amplified footage purporting to show elements of the Russian 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Northern Fleet) striking a Ukrainian armored vehicle during assaults near the E-40 on August 16.[59] Russian milbloggers offered diverging descriptions of the tempo of Ukrainian operations in the Bakhmut direction on August 17, with one claiming that Ukrainian forces are intensifying offensive operations while another claimed a decrease in Ukrainian offensive actions in the area.[60]

Russian forces continued limited unsuccessful counterattacks in the Bakhmut direction on August 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive actions near Bohdanivka (7km northwest of Bakhmut) and Bila Hora (14km southwest of Bakhmut).[61] The Russian MoD published footage on August 16 showing that elements of the 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division continue to operate near Bakhmut.[62]

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of August 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Christopher Hoeft, and Cole Quick – © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI'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

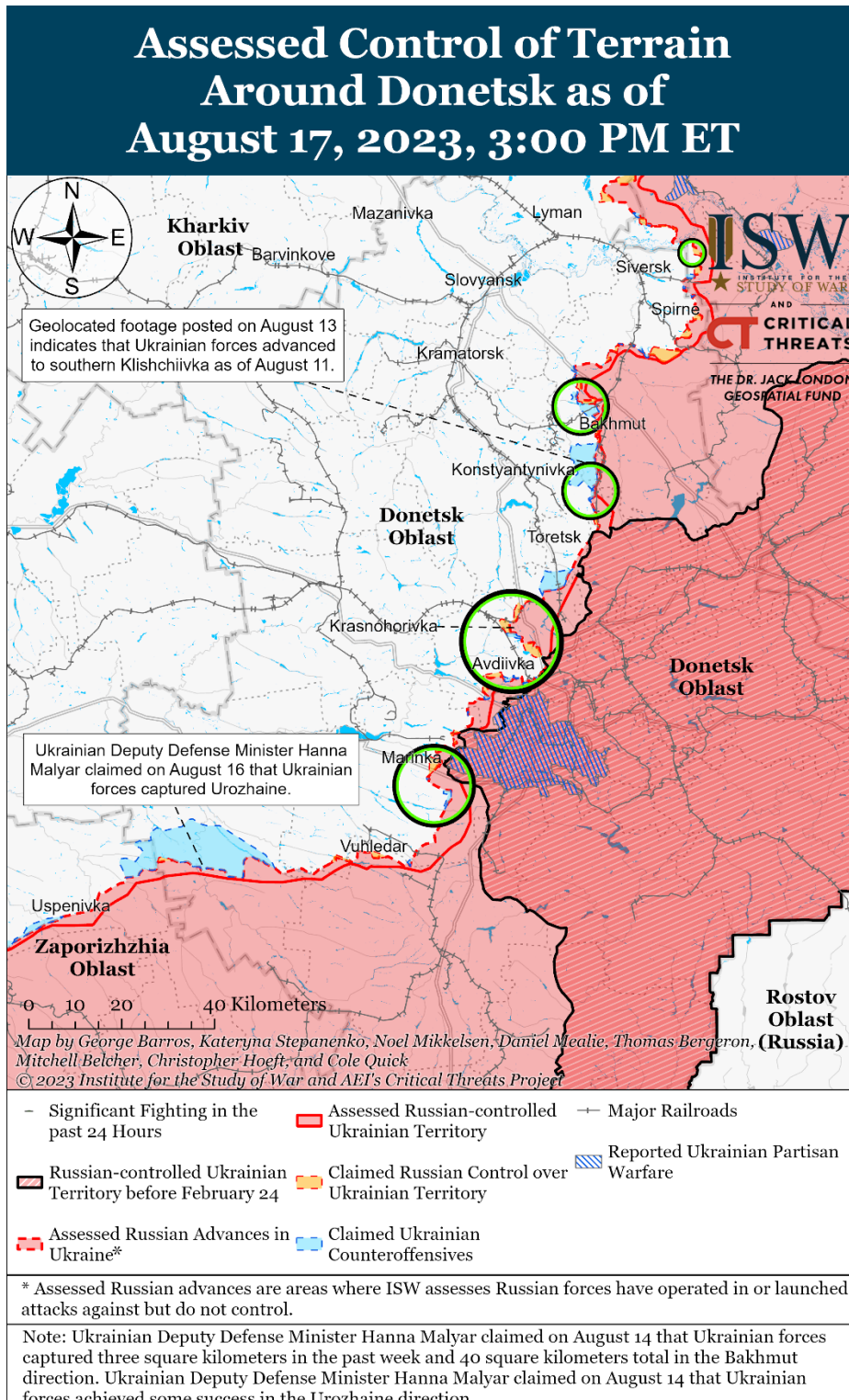
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 14 that Ukrainian forces captured three square kilometers in the past week and 40 square kilometers total in the Bakhmut direction.



The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Staromykhailivka (19km southwest of Avdiivka) and Krasnohorivka (22km southwest of Avdiivka) along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front on August 17.[63]

Russian forces continued limited offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front on August 17 but did not advance. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive actions near Avdiivka, Keramik (14km northwest of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka, and Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka).[64] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted assaults in Marinka itself, near Krasnohorivka, and on the southern approaches towards Avdiivka but did not advance.[65]

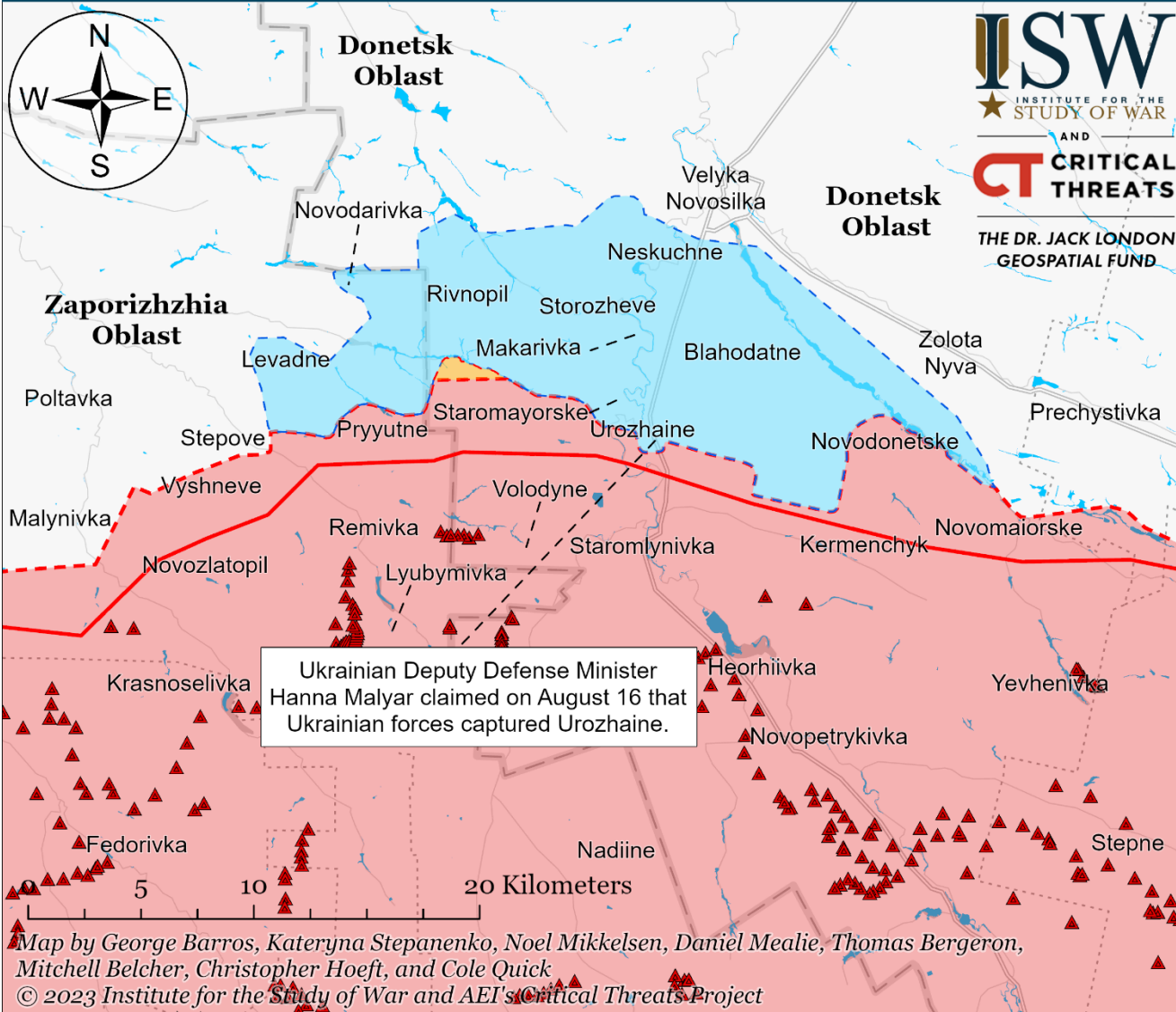


**Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on August 17 but did not advance. The Ukrainian General Staff claimed that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Berdyansk (Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area) direction.[66] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that multiple small Ukrainian assault groups with a total of 25 personnel continued attacking near Zavitne Bazhannya (12km south of Velyka Novosilka).[67] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked in Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) but did not specify an outcome.[68] Other milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 37th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) repelled a Ukrainian armored assault south of Urozhaine.[69]

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on August 17 and did not make any claimed or confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Urozhaine.[70] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian and Russian forces skirmished near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and Urozhaine.[71] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) posted footage claiming to show elements of the Russian 165th Guards Artillery Brigade (35th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) striking Ukrainian positions in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.[72]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of August 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



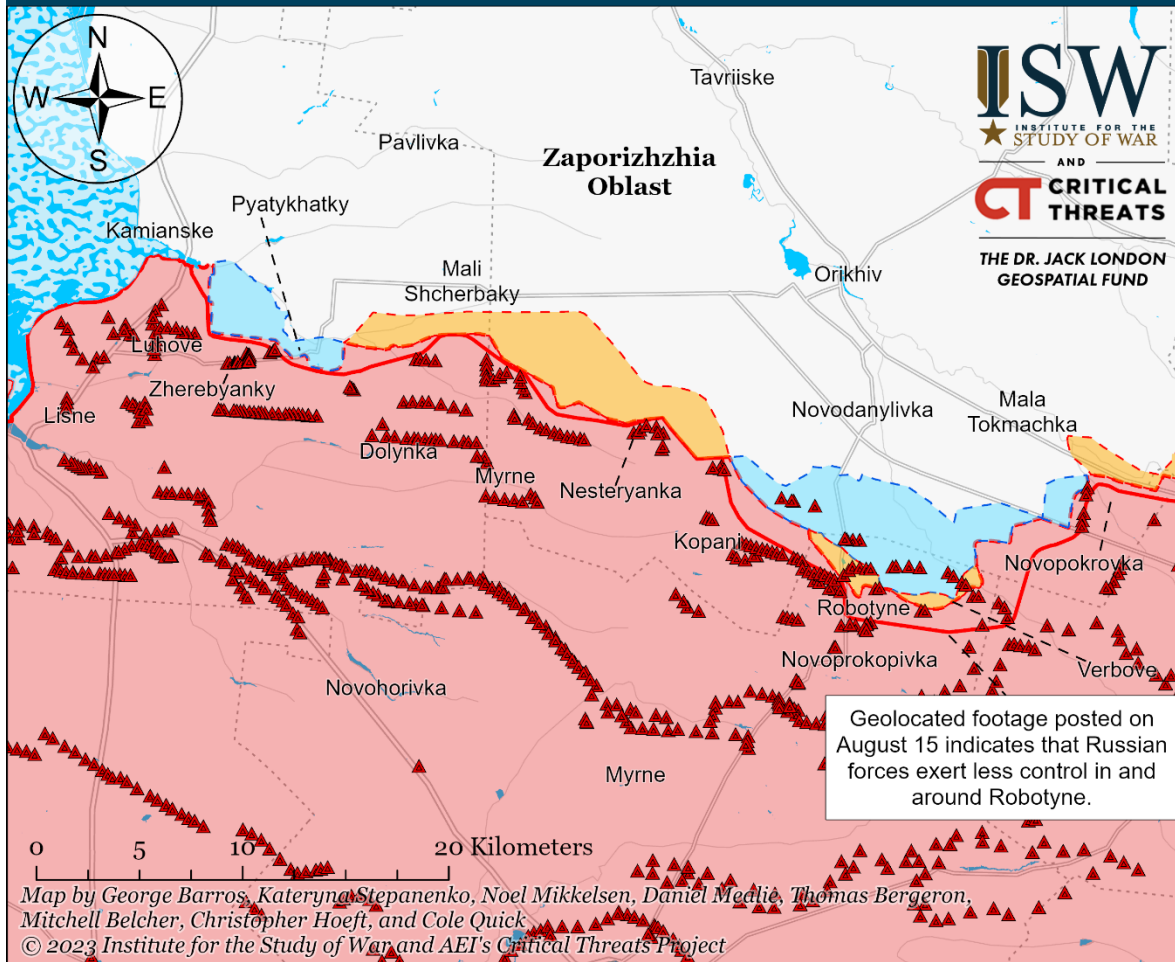
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- ▲ Russian Field Fortifications
- Assessed Russian Advances 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.

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 14 that Ukrainian forces achieved some success in the Urozhaine direction.

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast and advanced as of August 17. Geolocated footage published on August 14 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced southwest of Novopokrovka (16km southeast of Orikhiv).[73] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhzhia Oblast) direction.[74] One Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces made unspecified “progress” near Robotyne, and another Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces control half of Robotyne.[75] Most other Russian sources, including the Russian MoD, claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks on the northern outskirts of Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv) and near Verbove (18km southwest of Orikhiv), however.[76] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian reconnaissance-in-force near Dorozhnyanka (6km south of Hulyaipole).[77]

## Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of August 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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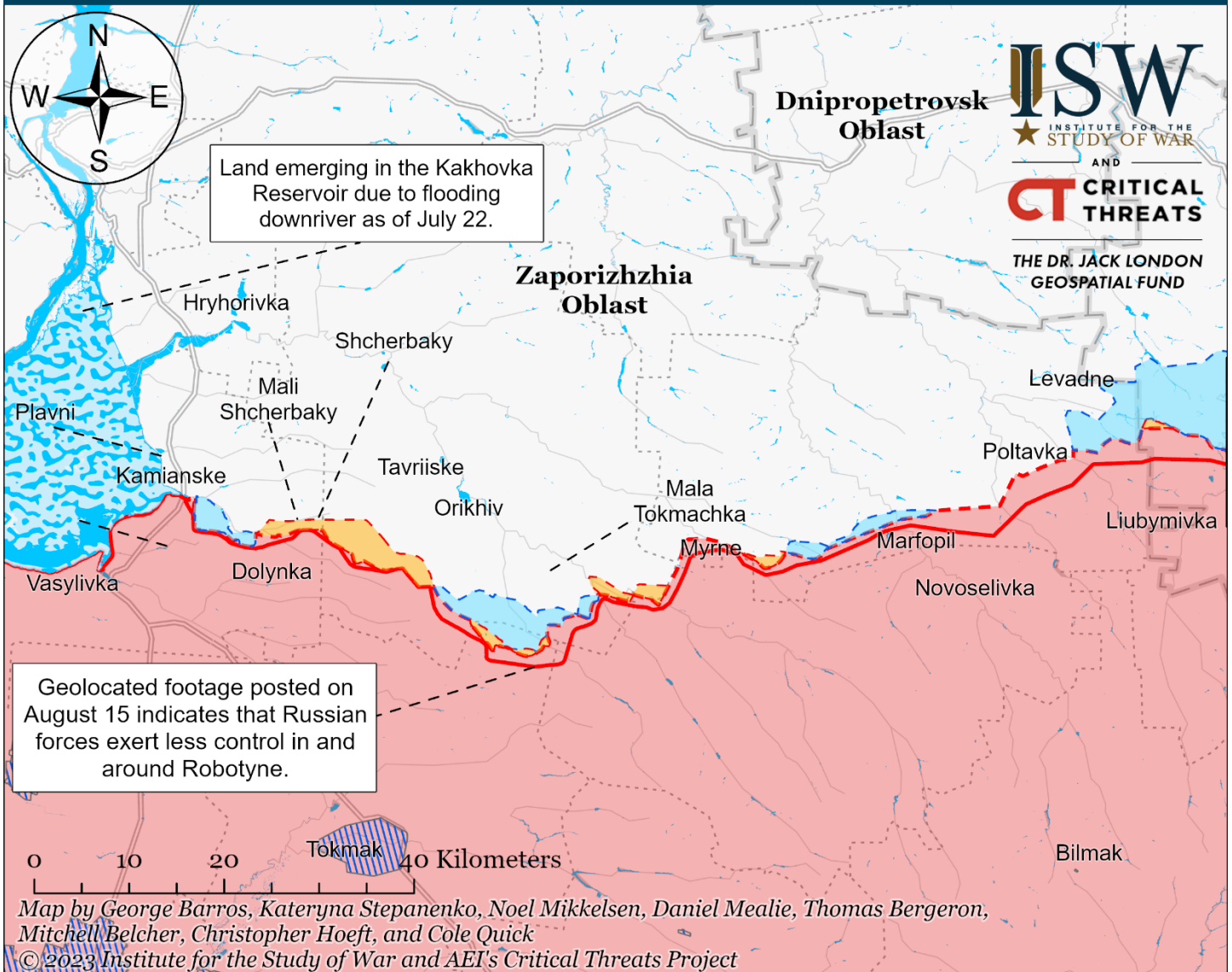
Geolocated footage posted on August 15 indicates that Russian forces exert less control in and around Robotyne.

- 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
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Field Fortifications

\* 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 August 17 that Ukrainian forces captured half of Robotyne.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of August 17, 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
-  Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
-  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.

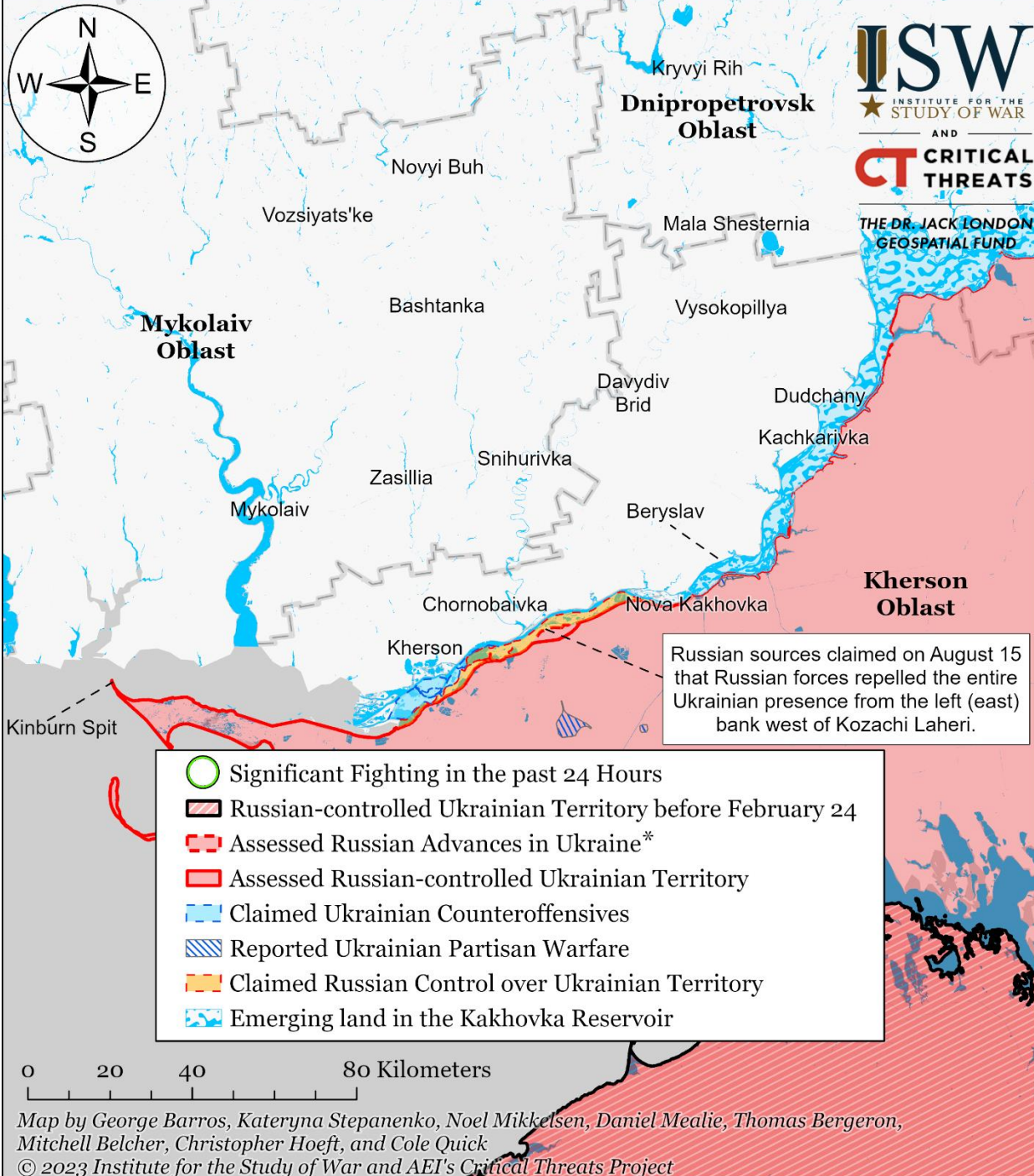
Note: A Russian source claimed on August 17 that Ukrainian forces captured half of Robotyne.

Russian sources claimed on August 16 that Russian and Ukrainian forces continued mutual shelling across the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast. A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces continued mutual shelling near the Antonivsky Bridge from both banks of the Dnipro River.[78] The milblogger also claimed that Russian forces destroyed five Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups attempting to cross the Dnipro River near Korsunka (43km northeast of Kherson City).[79]

Ukrainian forces conducted a strike on a rear-area Russian training ground in southern Ukraine on August 16. Geolocated footage published on August 16 shows a Ukrainian strike on a Russian training ground west of Primorske (61km southwest of Kherson City).[80] Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian military for having a training ground within range of Ukrainian HIMARS systems, especially after the Ukrainian strike on a Russian training ground on Dzharylhach Island (in the Black Sea 70km southeast of Kherson City) on August 1.[81]

Russian forces conducted a strike on a rear-area Ukrainian railway station in southern Ukraine on August 17. Geolocated footage published by the Russian MoD on August 17 shows a Russian strike on a Ukrainian train carrying ammunition at the Mezhova railway station (46km northeast of Velyka Novosilka) in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[82]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of August 17, 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: The Ukrainian counteroffensive layer displays areas previously assigned to the Russian control, Russian advances, or Russian claims layers where ISW now assesses that Ukrainian forces have established a presence beyond a short-term raid. Inclusion of an area on this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the area is part of any upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive operation.

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

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to use the Army-2023 forum to paint itself as an effective defense partner to other states and a reliable operator of the Russian defense industrial base (DIB). The Russian MoD claimed that it signed contracts worth 400 billion rubles (\$4.24 billion) to produce 2,500 new types of weapons and 1.8 million units of weapons in total, including howitzers, radar systems, demining robots, anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles, communications systems, and command and staff vehicles.[83] Russian Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Alexander Fomin conducted bilateral meetings with representatives of Syria, Burundi, Venezuela, Guinea, Bolivia, Oman, and Uganda on various issues of defense and security cooperation.[84]

A senior Russian official confirmed that Russian universities will begin training drone operators, likely in line with a Kremlin effort to increase drone production and the likely usage of drones in Ukraine. Russian Education Minister Sergey Kravtsov stated on August 17 that Russian universities will begin training operators of drones with takeoff weights below 30 kilograms.[85] Russian Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Vasily Osmakov claimed on August 17 that Russia will need at least one million drone operators by 2030.[86] Russian President Vladimir Putin directed the Russian government in April 2023 to further develop the Russian drone industry for likely use in Ukraine, which likely includes increasing the number of available drone operators.[87]

## **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)**

Russian officials continue to deport children from occupied Ukraine to Russia and are focusing passportization efforts on Ukrainian teenagers, likely in part to justify and simplify future deportation measures. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities sent 50 high school students from occupied Ukraine to Yaroslavl Oblast to encourage them to enroll at the Demidov Yaroslavl State University.[88] The Center also reported that Russian authorities sent 200 children from Dovzhansk, Luhansk Oblast, 150 children from Kakhovka and Henichesk Raions in Kherson Oblast, and 50 children from Zaporizhia Oblast to camps in Krasnodar Krai for “patriotic training” with local Russian teachers.[89] The Kherson Oblast occupation administration stated that the Russian Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources sponsored a group of children from Kherson Oblast to visit Kaluga Oblast and that the Kalanchak occupation administration sent two groups of children from Kherson Oblast to the Lesnaya Skazka Sanatorium in Saransk, Republic of Mordovia, where they underwent medical examinations.[90] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities are requiring that all Ukrainian children aged 14–18 in occupied Luhansk Oblast have Russian passports by October 1.[91] The Center reported that Russian authorities will send commissions, reportedly including members of Russian youth movements, to search for teenagers without Russian passports and that Russian authorities are using a mix of incentives and threats in the effort.[92]

Russian authorities are incorporating military training into the education system in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, likely to support future Russian force generation efforts in the occupied territories. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities announced that Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) personnel will oversee military training classes scheduled to begin in schools in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast on September 1.[93] The classes will reportedly include “patriotic education,” weapons handling, and other military training.[94]

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on August 16 that allows Russian citizens residing in occupied areas of Ukraine to enter the Russian civil service in an effort to incorporate the occupied regions into the larger Russian bureaucracy.[95] The law will allow workers to keep their pensions and be credited for their prior years of service working in occupation administrations in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.[96]

## **Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus).**

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met with Chinese Defense Minister Colonel General Li Shangfu in Minsk on August 17. Lukashenko expressed gratitude for China’s support in military-technical and military cooperation.[97] Li stated that his visit to Belarus aims to ensure the implementation of important agreements and further strengthening bilateral military cooperation.

The Belarusian military deployed Mi-35 helicopters for the first time on August 17. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced that Belarusian pilots began flying Mi-35s for the first time.[98] Belarus signed a contract with Russia in 2020 to acquire Mi-35s.[99]



**ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarussian military activity in Belarus, as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to increase their control over Belarus and other Russian actions 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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