

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 18, 2023

Kateryna Stepanenko, Riley Bailey, George Barros, Angela Howard, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick Kagan

February 18, 7 pm 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.

**Russian forces conducted another missile strike attack targeting Ukrainian infrastructure throughout the country.** The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 18 that Russian forces launched 16 missiles targeting civilian infrastructure in Khmelnytskyi City and Ukrainiinsk in Donetsk Oblast (about 30km west of Donetsk City).[1] Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian air defense systems shot down two Kalibr missiles of four launched earlier in the day but did not release the total number of intercepted missiles towards the end of the day.[2] Ukrainian officials also did not release information about the type of missiles Russian forces used during this attack as of the time of this publication. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces struck critical infrastructure facilities in Khmelnytskyi City and oblast and Kryvyi Rih.[3] Ukrainian nuclear enterprise Energoatom reported that two Russian missiles flew dangerously close to the South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant (NPP).[4]

**Russian news aggregators are advocating for Russia to carry out “retaliatory strikes” that would systematically target electrical infrastructure supporting Ukrainian nuclear power plants (NPPs) to force Ukraine to conduct emergency shutdowns of its NPPs.** Prominent Russian news aggregator *Readovka* told its audience of almost 1.7 million subscribers that Russian forces need to prioritize the “decommissioning” of the NPPs’ external electrical infrastructure in hopes that doing so would lead to the emergency shutdown of NPPs in Ukraine.[5] *Readovka* did not advocate for Russian forces to directly strike nuclear power plants or attempt to cause radiological events, but rather to target separate substations that would cut off electrical supply essential to the safe operation of the plants thereby forcing Ukrainian officials to shut the plants down in ways that would make it very difficult to restart them. *Readovka* stated that the destruction of such targets for the three Ukrainian NPPs outside of Russian-occupied areas “will cause damage many times greater than the last few massive missile strikes.”[6] *Readovka* claimed with low confidence that the February 18 missile strike on Khmelnytskyi City may have targeted one such substation that supports the Khmelnytskyi NPP, though Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces hit a military facility and civilian infrastructure.[7] *Readovka* had previously advocated for such strikes noting that Russia’s massive missile strikes have not generated the desired effect of prompting the Ukrainian government’s capitulation.[8] ISW has no other evidence that Russia is pursuing or considering such a course of action but observes that the Russian militarization of the Zaporizhzhia NPP, the use of Zaporizhzhia NPP grounds to fire at Ukrainian positions, and the reported Russian strikes on Zaporizhzhia NPP transmission lines all suggest that it is not beyond the realm of the conceivable that the Kremlin might pursue actions with the intent of forcing the emergency shutdowns of Ukrainian nuclear reactors.

**The Russian Ministry of Defense’s (MoD) reported dismissal of Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) military spokesman Eduard Basurin as part of the formal reorganization of the DNR militia under the Russian MoD triggered another wave of Russian milblogger criticisms against the Russian defense establishment.** A prominent Russian milblogger broke the news to his over one million subscribers that Russian military officials fired Press Secretary of the DNR’s Military Command Eduard Basurin on February 17.[9] This milblogger reported that the Russian defense establishment seeks to replace all commanders of the DNR and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) militias with professional Russian officers as part of the formal reorganization of the DNR and LNR militias under the Russian MoD. Many Russian milbloggers met the news with discontent, disappointment, and outrage, stating that the DNR and LNR commanders have practical experience fighting Ukraine and are better than the “real” Russian commanders even if DNR and LNR commanders do not have formal military education, know the military’s peacetime functions, have the right bureaucratic experiences, or meet the Russian military’s physical fitness requirements.[10] Some milbloggers stated that a purge of the DNR and LNR officers would degrade Russian fighters’ morale and undercut support for the Russian military establishment.[11] Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin stated that he will meet with DNR commanders in the near future to discuss Basurin’s alleged dismissal and stated that the news must be some kind of fake propaganda because firing DNR and LNR commanders would be unacceptable.[12] Prigozhin will likely exploit this episode in his ongoing informational counteroffensive against the Russian MoD if Basurin’s dismissal is confirmed.[13]

The DNR and LNR’s 1st and 2nd army corps are not and never have been a professional military or even an effective fighting force. These Russian proxies were ineffective at capturing and holding ground during the initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and required reinforcements from the conventional Russian military to capture Debaltseve in 2015.[14] DNR and LNR unit effectiveness has not improve since 2014, and the proxy forces and have continued to be ineffective in the renewed invasion

of Ukraine in 2022. The Russian milblogger community's reaction to the professionalization of the DNR and LNR forces indicates that the ultranationalist community values ideological commitment to the DNR's and LNR's brand of Russian nationalism over military professionalism, competence, and fighting effectiveness.

**The Kremlin continues to fail to deliver on previous financial promises to volunteer forces, a failure that will likely have detrimental ramifications on Russia's ability to generate volunteer forces in the long-term as it seeks to professionalize and expand the army.** Prominent Russian milbloggers claimed that the Russian military is not delivering promised financial compensation to Russian combatants across many units and noted that the problem is particularly affecting elements of the Russian Combat Army Reserve (BARS).[15] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) sought to establish BARS as an active reserve by recruiting volunteer reservists for three-year contract service starting in fall 2021 and offered minor financial compensation of 4,000 to 9,000 rubles (about \$54 to \$122) per month with other benefits, but this initiative failed almost immediately.[16] Milbloggers also noted that the Russian bureaucracy is making it impossible for volunteers who had joined the Russian war effort in spring–summer 2022 to obtain documents proving that they participated in combat — documents necessary to collect their promised payments. One milblogger noted that Russian officials must resolve these concerns soon or there will be “an explosion” of discontent.[17] Another milblogger noted that the Russian General Staff should be punished for the mistreatment of BARS personnel since the active reserve was the Russian General Staff's initiative.[18] The milbloggers also noted that Russian mobilized servicemen who had fought on the Svatove-Kreminna line in late September 2022 are not receiving compensation for their injuries and added that officials in military recruitment centers are understaffed and incapable addressing these issues.[19]

The Kremlin's uninterest in paying volunteer formations may kill any incentive among Russians to sign contracts with the Russian MoD during or after the war because of growing mistrust that promised financial incentives will materialize. ISW previously reported that the Russian MoD likely did not reach its recruiting targets for volunteers over summer 2022 due to pervasive underlying distrust of the Russian military to honor its promises against the backdrop of a bloody war, and that the Russian military will likely further undermine its reputation by failing to pay and recognize volunteers.[20] The widespread distrust and of the Russian MoD may increasingly erode Russians' willingness to enter contract service and increase the Russian military's dependence on forced mobilization and recruitment practices. Integration of select irregular forces such as the Donetsk or Luhansk People's Republic (DNR/LNR) may further alienate irregular volunteer formations, and ISW had been observing ongoing conflicts between irregular formations due to the Russian military command's unequal treatment.[21] ISW had also previously assessed that the Kremlin would deplete Russian state budgets at the federal and s federal subject level if it delivers the promised payments and long-term benefit commitments.[22] The Kremlin's failure to create and properly support BARS formations also indicates that the Kremlin will be unlikely to establish effective volunteer reserves — during wartime or peacetime.

**The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) promoted the Western and Eastern Military District (WMD/EMD) commanders after confirming their appointments as district commanders.** Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted WMD Commander Yevgeny Nikiforov and EMD Commander Rustam Muradov to Colonel General after the Russian MoD formally named the two as military district commanders.[23] Nikiforov and Muradov have likely held these positions for at least several months without the rank of Colonel-General that is typical for military district commanders.[24] The Kremlin likely ordered the Russian MoD to formally confirm Russia's four military district commanders in part to present the Russian military as an organized institution with a clear chain of command following months of confusion about what commanders were in charge of the war in Ukraine.

**Chechen Republic leader Ramzan Kadyrov appears to have rejected overtures from Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin to join a renewed informational campaign against the Russian MoD, suggesting that this campaign may fail to restore Prigozhin's waning influence.** Kadyrov likely responded to the Russian MoD's confirmation of the four military district commanders on February 17, stating that Chechen formations will follow the orders of any commander appointed by Russian President Vladimir Putin and that Chechen combat officers have an excellent well-coordinated relationship with the MoD.[25] Kadyrov's endorsement of the Russian MoD follows Prigozhin's attempt to court Kadyrov's support through a publicized visit to a wounded Akhmat Special Forces commander on February 16.[26] Prigozhin appears to be intensifying his informational campaign against the MoD, stating on February 18 that the Wagner Group is not subordinate to the MoD and “has nothing to do with the Russian Army.”[27] Prigozhin's and Kadyrov's divergent attitudes towards the MoD are notable as Prigozhin used Kadyrov's criticism of Russian military officials in October 2022 to undermine the MoD and establish the Wagner Group as Russia's elite force in Ukraine.[28] Kadyrov likely refused to join Prigozhin's renewed informational attack against the MoD because his formal ties to the Kremlin and position in the Russian government are more beneficial than any political relationship with Prigozhin could be. Prigozhin is likely trying to enlist ultranationalist figures within the Kremlin and select Russian milbloggers to support his quest for authority in Russia but will likely find that those with ties to the Kremlin may turn away from him to retain their patronage.[29]

**Ukrainian officials continue to question the Russian military's ability to conduct a large-scale offensive throughout Donetsk Oblast.** Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Defense Forces in the Tavriisk operational direction Oleksiy Dmytrashkivskyi stated on February 18 that Russian forces likely do not have the potential to conduct large-scale assaults throughout Donetsk Oblast and are beginning to lose momentum along this sector of the front.[30] Dmytrashkivskyi also stated that Russian forces are committing motorized rifle detachments to offensive operations throughout Donetsk Oblast with insufficient equipment and without armored vehicle support.[31] ISW has previously assessed that the Russian military's costly campaign in Ukraine has likely significantly depleted the necessary Russian equipment and manpower reserves for large-scale offensives in Ukraine.[32] The Russia military's likely degraded ability to conduct mechanized maneuver warfare tactics may be denying the Russian military any tactical advances throughout Ukraine outside of marginal gains in the Bakhmut area.[33] ISW has observed that there are likely some Russian conventional units uncommitted in the current fighting that may constitute a reserve to support the ongoing offensive, although likely not on a large scale or in a way that would likely generate significant Russian momentum. ISW will explore this topic in more detail in its special edition on February 19.

**United States Vice President Kamala Harris announced on February 18 that the US had determined that Russia had committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine.**[34] Harris stated during the Munich Security Conference that Russian forces “have pursued a widespread and systematic attack against a civilian population” by committing murder, torture, rape, and deportation. Harris noted that Russian forces forcibly deported hundreds of thousands of people from Ukraine to Russia, including children. Harris noted that after the review of evidence there is “no doubt” that Russia committed crimes against humanity. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken added that the US reserves the determination of crimes against humanity for the “most egregious crimes.”[35]

### **Key Takeaways**

- **United States Vice President Kamala Harris announced on February 18 that the US had determined that Russia had committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces conducted another missile strike attack targeting Ukrainian infrastructure.**
- **Russian news aggregators are advocating for Russia to carry out “retaliatory strikes” that would systematically target electrical infrastructure supporting Ukrainian nuclear power plants (NPPs) to force Ukraine to conduct emergency shutdowns of its NPPs.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense’s (MoD) reported dismissal of Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) military spokesman Eduard Basurin as part of the formal reorganization of the DNR militia under the Russian MoD triggered another wave of Russian milblogger criticisms against the Russian defense establishment.**
- **The Kremlin continues to fail to honor its commitments to financially incentivized volunteer forces, which will likely have detrimental ramifications on Russia’s ability to generate volunteer forces in the long-term.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) promoted the Western and Eastern Military District (WMD/EMD) commanders after confirming their appointments to the roles as part of an ongoing effort to present the Russian military as a well-organized fighting force.**
- **Chechen Republic head Ramzan Kadyrov appears to have rebuffed overtures from Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin to join a renewed informational campaign against the Russian MoD.**
- **Ukrainian officials continue to question the Russian military’s ability to conduct a large-scale offensive throughout Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations northwest of Svatove and in the Kreminna area.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut, along the western outskirts of Donetsk City, and in western Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces are continuing to reinforce defensive positions in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian authorities continue to exaggerate the extent of a Ukrainian threat to Russia’s border regions, attempting to convince the public of the “existential necessity” of the war in Ukraine.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

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

- 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**

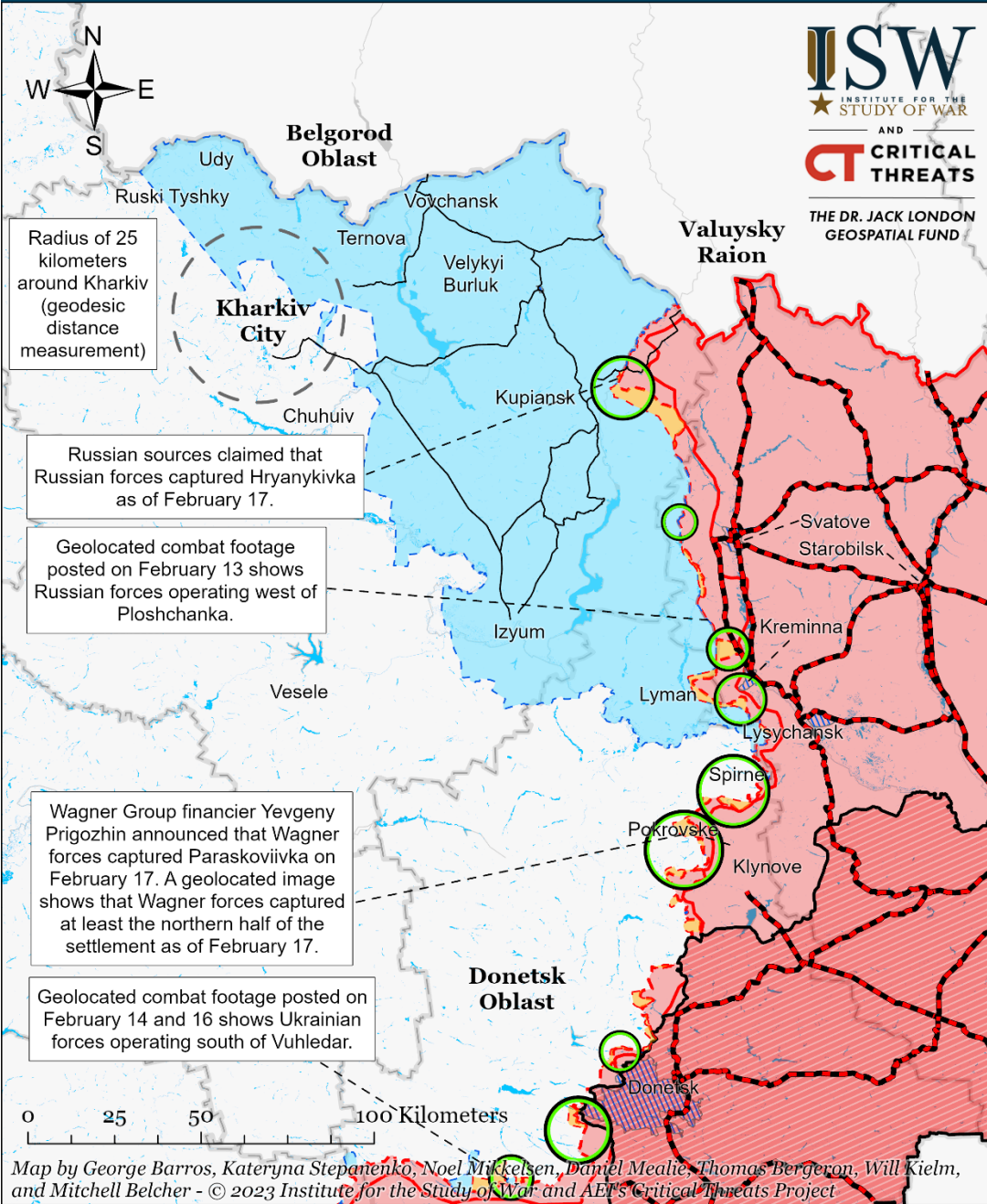
#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1- Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces continued ground assaults on the Kupyansk-Svatove line on February 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Hryanykivka (55km northwest of Svatove) and Synkivka (45km northwest of Svatove) in Kharkiv Oblast, and Stelmakhivka (15km northwest of Svatove) in Luhansk Oblast.[36] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian units from the western group of forces seized Hryanykivka.[37] A Russian milblogger expressed doubt that Russian forces could take Kupyansk (46km northwest of Svatove) despite Russian claimed capture of Hryanykivka.[38] ISW has no independent verification that Russian forces seized Hryanykivka.

Russian forces continued ground assaults near Kreminna and Lyman on February 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Kreminna itself and Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna).[39] Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai stated that Russian forces continue to prioritize the Kreminna direction, supporting ISW's previous assessments.[40] Haidai stated that Russian forces have not made advances near Kreminna, but have intensified artillery fire in the area.[41] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to attack Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna) and Zarichne (17km west of Kreminna).[42] A milblogger claimed that infantry elements of the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division (20th Guards Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) conducted offensive battles near Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna).[43] A milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to advance toward Russian positions near the Balka Zuravka gully, near Yampolivka (17km west of Kreminna).[44] Another milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to regain lost positions near Ploshchanka (15km northwest of Kreminna) on February 17.[45]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of February 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- 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)**

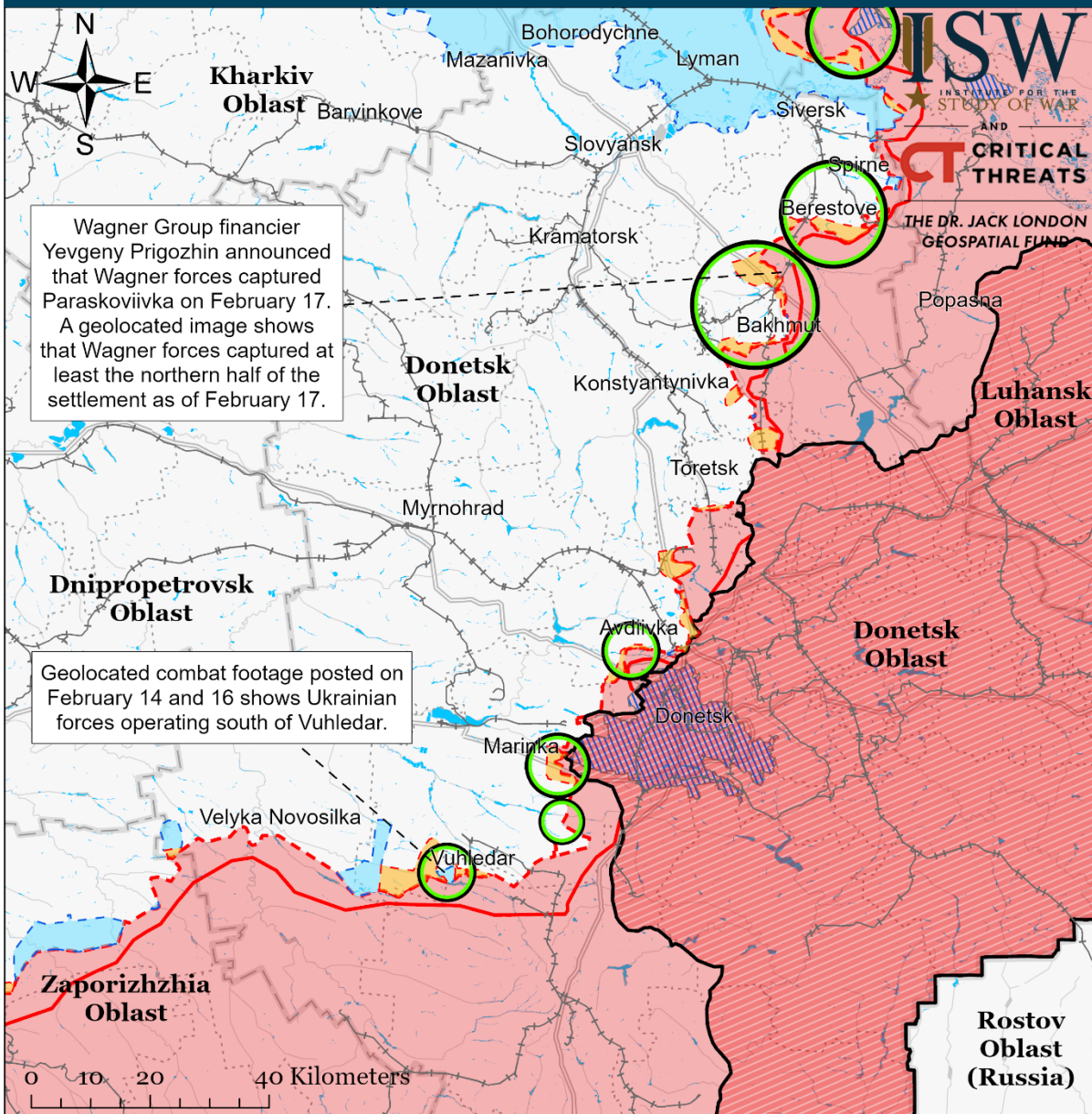
Russian forces secured marginal advances amidst continued offensive operations around Bakhmut. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut itself; within 23km north of Bakhmut near Vyimka, Fedorivka, Dubovo-Vasylivka, Rozdolivka, Paraskoviivka, and Berkhivka; and within 12km west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske and Chasiv Yar.[46] Geolocated footage published on February 18 indicates that Russian forces likely secured marginal advances northwest of Bilohorivka (21km northeast of Bakhmut) and near Rozdolivka (18km north of Bakhmut).[47] Geolocated footage published on February 17 shows Russian forces closer to Zaliznianske (11km north of Bakhmut) and a section of the E40 highway north of Bakhmut.[48] Wagner financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed on February 17 that Wagner Group fighters completely captured Paraskoviivka (7km north of Bakhmut) and posted a picture of Wagner Group fighters in the settlement that was later geolocated, indicating that Wagner Group fighters likely captured at least northern Paraskoviivka.[49] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces withdrew from Paraskoviivka and that Russian forces conducted assaults on Berkhivka (5km north of Bakhmut), where fighting is reportedly ongoing on the eastern outskirts of the settlement.[50] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces are currently clearing Paraskoviivka and surrounding areas and that the capture of the settlement will allow Russian forces to launch further assaults on Ukrainian positions in northern Bakhmut and its suburbs.[51] Geolocated footage published on February 18 indicates that Russian forces likely secured marginal advances in the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut.[52] Geolocated footage published on February 17 indicates that Russian forces have advanced closer to the T0504 highway northeast of Klishchiivka (6km southwest of Bakhmut).[53] A Russian milblogger claimed on February 18 that Russian forces advanced close to the southern and southeastern outskirts of Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut) on February 17.[54]

Russian sources continue to falsely assert that the encirclement of Bakhmut is imminent and that Russian forces are interdicting most Ukrainian logistics in the area. Advisor to the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) head Yan Gagin claimed on February 18 that Russian forces have cut off supplies to the Ukrainian grouping in Bakhmut and that Russian forces have started the operational encirclement of the city.[55] A Wagner Group-affiliated milblogger directly refuted Gagin’s claim and stated that discussions of operational encirclement are premature as Ukrainian forces continue to reinforce their positions in the Bakhmut area.[56] Russian sources claimed that the reported capture of Paraskoviivka allows Russian forces to threaten Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) from the north into Bakhmut, with one Russian source claiming that the capture of the settlement indicates that the operational encirclement of Bakhmut is near.[57] A Russian milblogger reiterated longstanding Russian claims that Russian forces can interdict all Ukrainian GLOCs into Bakhmut and claimed that Russian artillery units can now also interdict the T0516 highway between Toretsk (23km southwest of Bakhmut) and Kostyantynivka, which Ukrainian forces reportedly use to transfer personnel and equipment to the grouping in Bakhmut.[58] The Ukrainian military’s continued ability to send significant amounts of personnel and equipment to Bakhmut and the surrounding areas casts doubt on these Russian claims.

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on February 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults within 36km southwest of Avdiivka near Vodyane, Marinka, Pobieda, and Novomykhailivka.[59] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in the northern outskirts of Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka) and that Russian forces aim to encircle the settlement instead of continuing frontal assaults on Ukrainian positions in the western part of the settlement.[60] Geolocated footage published on February 18 shows elements of DNR 1st Army Corps 3rd Brigade, now the 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Southern Military District, shelling Ukrainian positions near Novobakhmutivka (13km northeast of Avdiivka).[61]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast on February 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Avdiivka).[62] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces are attempting to conduct offensive operations from positions west of Mykilske (27km southwest of Vuhledar) and that positional battles are ongoing around Vuhledar.[63] Odesa Oblast head Serhiy Bratchuk amplified footage on February 17 showing Chechen Akhmat Special Forces reportedly deploying to positions in the direction of Vuhledar.[64]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 18, 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 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.



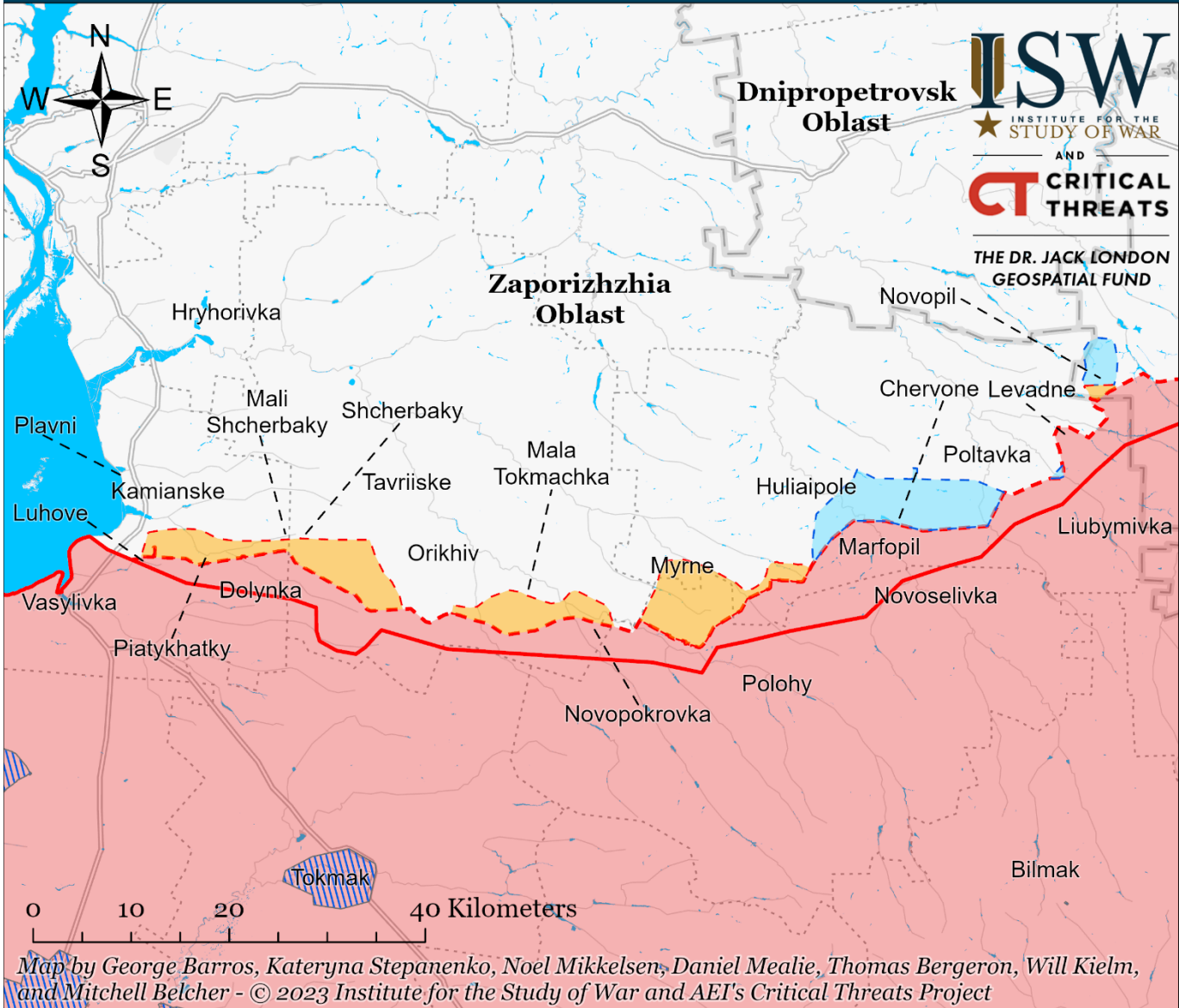
**Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Russian forces are continuing to reinforce defensive positions in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast. Ukrainian Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov published footage showing 43 buses with Wagner Group personnel moving via Melitopol in the Zaporizhia direction.[65] Geolocated footage also showed servicemen with Wagner uniforms and symbology at a bus stop in Melitopol.[66] The Ukrainian General Staff previously reported on February 11 that Wagner recruited 1,200 convicts in occupied Crimea, but the relationship between the two reports is unclear at this time.[67] Fedorov also reported that Russian forces have also deployed mobilized men from Vladivostok to Melitopol and are studying underground tunnels in Melitopol, possibly for fortification purposes.[68] Fedorov added that Russians are using sea shipping containers to build fortifications near Novomykhailivka (about 70 northeast of Melitopol).[69]

Ukrainian forces are continuing to repel Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups in the Dnipro River delta. The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported on February 18 that Ukrainian forces destroyed a Russian sabotage and reconnaissance group that attempted to land on an unspecified island in the delta using a civilian boat.[70] Ukrainian forces also reportedly conducted 70 fire missions striking Russian positions and equipment on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River.[71] Geolocated footage showed Ukrainian forces striking Russian positions in Nova Kakhovka and Pishchanivka.[72] Russian forces continued to shell settlements on the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River and Ochakiv in Mykolaiv Oblast.[73]

Geolocated footage shows that Russian occupation officials installed air defense systems on top of a building in Sevastopol.[74]

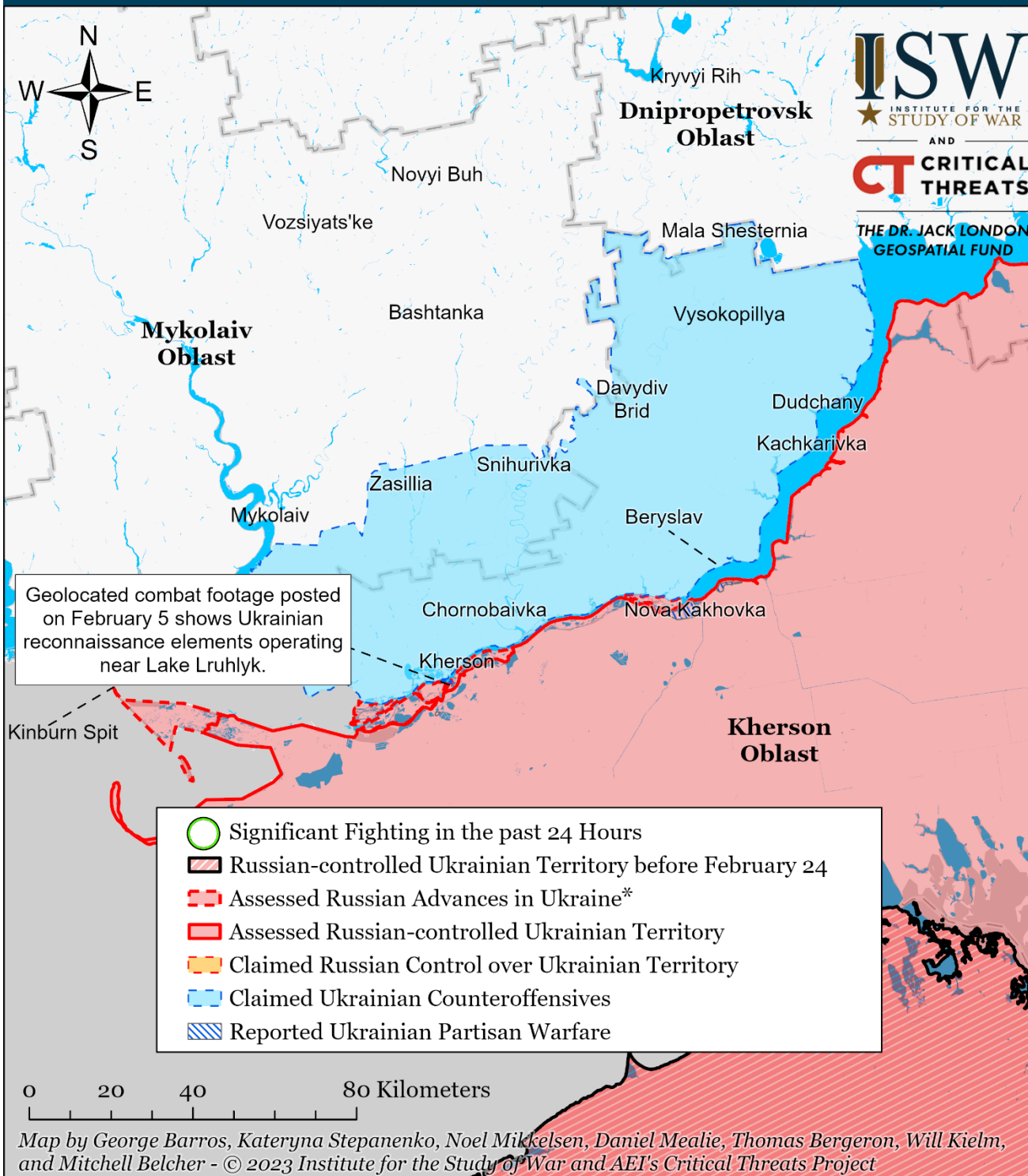
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of February 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- 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
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*

\* 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 Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 18, 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.

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

Russian authorities appear to have made an example out of two mobilized soldiers in the 1444th regiment from Samara Oblast whose video complaints about a lack of proper documentation, payments, and instructions went viral. A Russian opposition source published a video on February 17 showing the mobilized soldiers publicly apologizing for their complaint to an assembled crowd of Russian forces. Russian military police escort the soldiers and guide them into the back of a vehicle for apparent redeployment.[75] ISW reported on February 16 that the Samara Oblast military prosecutor's office arrested two mobilized personnel from the 1444th regiment.[76] Russian authorities likely hope the publicized apology and arrest of these units will discourage other soldiers from joining the series of video complaints from mobilized units. Russian mobilized units continue to film video complaints, however. A Ukrainian source on February 18 amplified a video appeal from mobilized soldiers from Omsk to Omsk Oblast Governor Alexander Burkov.[77] The soldiers criticized their forward deployment, lack of coherent orders, fragmented deployment out of their original unit, and use as infantrymen despite training as artillerymen.[78]

Russian authorities continue to exaggerate the extent of a Ukrainian threat to Russia's border regions, attempting to convince the public of the "existential necessity" of the war in Ukraine. A Russian opposition news source reported on February 17 that the Russian State Duma will consider a bill that proposes to extend benefits to children as from occupied areas of Ukraine as well as from regions of Krasnodar Krai, Belgorod Oblast, Bryansk Oblast, Voronezh Oblast, Kursk Oblast, and Rostov Oblast that were "systemically" subjected to Ukrainian shelling.[79] Ukrainian forces do not hold positions that are within tube artillery firing range of Rostov Oblast's western most administrative borders.[80] The implausibility of Ukrainian forces conducting routine shelling of many of Russia's border regions severely undermines the legitimacy of Russian claims of Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory generally.

*Meduza* amplified reporting from Russian opposition outlet *Faridaily* on February 18 that the Kremlin has prepared a test version of an information database on Russian civilians eligible for military service.[81] The database, in theory, will allow Russian officials to prevent men from fleeing mobilization and to prevent the unlawful mobilization or conscription of Russian men. The database reportedly will begin official operations in April 2024 but may go into use as early as spring 2023.[82]

French retail firm Auchan categorically denied on February 18 the facts and interpretation of facts of the *Le Monde*, *The Insider*, and *Bellingcat* report published February 17 that stated that the Russian military likely relied on a Russian subsidiary of Auchan for the basic provisioning of Russian forces in Ukraine.[83] Auchan added that Auchan subsidiaries remain open to provide food to the Russian populace and provide no voluntary and active help or charity support to non-civilian consumers.[84]

The International Institute for Strategic Studies on February 17 amplified an article from *Military Balance+* on February 9 that stated that Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev visited a Rainbow Manufacturing Design Bureau facility in Dubna, Russia.[85] *Military Balance+* stated that Medvedev used the visit to claim that Russia would see an increase in weapon deliveries, to highlight the construction of additional production facilities, and to view a never-before-seen missile allegedly in the final stages of development: Izdeliye 720 (apparently modeled after the Kh-69 land-attack cruise missile).[86]

Russian authorities continue to prosecute residents for alleged sabotage attacks and resistance. The Siberian branch of *Radio Liberty* reported on February 17 that police in Kansk, Krasnoyarsk Krai tortured a teacher arrested for defacing a military service advertisement in hopes of forcing him to confess to a September 24 arson attack on a military registration and enlistment office in Kansk.[87] *Astra Press* reported on February 17 that Moscow authorities detained a refugee from Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine for allegedly burning down a relay cabinet that regulates train traffic lights on the Podolsk-Hryvnia rail line.[88] A Russian human rights project stated on February 17 that the regional court of Makhachkala, Dagestan fined a local resident 150,000 rubles (about \$2,027) — minus 50,000 rubles (about \$676) as credit for time the man spent in jail during investigations — for protesting mobilization in September 2022.[89]

## **Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)**

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 18 that Russian forces shell civilian areas under Russian control to discredit Ukrainian forces among residents of occupied areas.[90]

Russian Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov appeared to praise Russian efforts to use Ukrainian children as a means of Russifying occupied areas. Kadyrov lauded Chechen Kuchaloi Raion Ministry of Internal Affairs Head Rustam Aguyev for taking the daughter of a Ukrainian family in Donetsk Oblast under his “patronage.”[91] ISW has previously reported that Russian forced adoption programs, evacuation schemes, and children’s “vacation” programs may amount to a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and constitute a wider ethnic cleansing effort.[92]

Advisor to the Kherson Oblast Administration Serhiy Khlan stated on February 17 that Russian forces are gradually expanding the zone of forced evacuation for residents of Kherson Oblast on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River from 15km to 30km.[93]

**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.)**

Nothing significant to report.

**Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.**

---

[1] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid032FQ4TMNPDmT9iL9r68Qbtg3dqZZpM3Nt7cM3yaer6NYFUA4mPZwLNEPSPLPFFVEel>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0xRbN1imBJ5VioVJzQf7oJsNxjyWxzNzeu675gdvignu92hoFTXKXNmjsqT3YxBNYI>; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02j8nci4whRwpjz9vqjBLYVUjTbMSYfL2E82UUiPWLNenkBazxRAVGmKRnqWmaJZhNl>; <https://www.facebook.com/OperationalCommandSouth/videos/904273104123479/>; <https://t.me/operativnoZSU/79143>; [https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1626867125213184001?cxt=HHwWgoC-8fzB5ZMtAAAA](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1626867125213184001?cxt=HHwWgoC-8fzB5ZMtAAAA)

[3] <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonoV/22403>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/52920>; <https://t.me/rybar/43725>; <https://t.me/kommunist/15940>; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/78372](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/78372); <https://t.me/readovkanews/52918>; <https://t.me/readovkane ws/52917>; <https://t.me/rybar/43724>; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/45333>; <https://t.me/milinfoLive/97112>

[4] <https://t.me/babel/28505>; [https://t.me/Bratchuk\\_Sergey/30289](https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/30289); [https://t.me/energoatom\\_ua/11983](https://t.me/energoatom_ua/11983); <https://meduza dot io/news/2023/02/18/ugroza-udara-po-reaktoru-snova-byla-vysokoy-energoatom-zayavil-chto-nad-yuzhno-ukrainskoy-aes-proleteli-dve-krylatye-rakety>; <https://twitter.com/VVoytsitska/status/1626893263524270082>

[5] <https://t.me/readovkanews/52935>

[6] <https://t.me/readovkanews/52935>

[7] <https://www.ukrinform dot net/rubric-ato/3671836-russian-missile-hits-military-facility-in-khmelnyskyi.html>

[8] <https://t.me/readovkaru/2245>

[9] [https://t.me/Sladkov\\_plus/7215](https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/7215)

[10] <https://t.me/wargonzo/10939>; [https://t.me/Sladkov\\_plus/7215](https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/7215); <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/19386>; <https://t.me/sashakots/38558>; <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/19386>; <https://t.me/moscowcalling/19880>; [https://t.me/Sladkov\\_plus/7216](https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/7216)

[11] <https://t.me/sashakots/38558>



- [12] [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/469](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/469)
- [13] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-17-2023>
- [14] [https://web.archive.org/web/20151026225900/https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/201503\\_BP\\_Russian\\_Forces\\_in\\_Ukraine\\_FINAL.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20151026225900/https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/201503_BP_Russian_Forces_in_Ukraine_FINAL.pdf)
- [15] [https://t.me/notes\\_veterans/8049](https://t.me/notes_veterans/8049); [https://t.me/dobrovolsky\\_live/314](https://t.me/dobrovolsky_live/314); <https://t.me/strelkovii/3996>
- [16] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/explainer-russian-conscription-reserve-and-mobilization>; <http://bars2021.tilda.ws/info>
- [17] [https://t.me/notes\\_veterans/8049](https://t.me/notes_veterans/8049)
- [18] [https://t.me/dobrovolsky\\_live/314](https://t.me/dobrovolsky_live/314)
- [19] [https://t.me/dobrovolsky\\_live/314](https://t.me/dobrovolsky_live/314)
- [20] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-13>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-12-0>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-18>
- [21] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-18>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-21>
- [22] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-volunteer-units-and-battalions>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-13>
- [23] <https://t.me/readovkanews/52891>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/52893>; <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/17/02/2023/63efc1699a7947105dd12034>
- [24] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122622>; <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignOct7>
- [25] [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/3361](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/3361)
- [26] [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/462](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/462)
- [27] [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/465](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/465)
- [28] <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignOct1>; <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignOct4>; <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignOct5>;
- [29] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-17-2023>
- [30] <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/02/18/vorog-ne-maye-potenczialu-dlya-provedennya-velykyh-shturmovyhdij/>
- [31] <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/02/18/vorog-ne-maye-potenczialu-dlya-provedennya-velykyh-shturmovyhdij/>
- [32] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021523>
- [33] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021123>
- [34] <https://apnews.com/article/us-russia-ukraine-crimes-against-humanity-harris-cee87f06cbf3fcdf37eobb398360c8ee>
- [35] <https://apnews.com/article/us-russia-ukraine-crimes-against-humanity-harris-cee87f06cbf3fcdf37eobb398360c8ee>
- [36] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02j8nci4whRwpjz9vqjBLYVUjTbMSYfL2E82UUiPWLNcnkBazzRAVGmKRnqWmaJZhNl>

[37] [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/24247](https://t.me/mod_russia/24247)

[38] <https://t.me/wargonzo/10930>

[39] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2j8nci4whRwpjz9vqjBLYVUjTbMSYfL2E82UUiPWLNcnkBazxRAVGmKRnqWmaJZhNl>

[40] <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/8726>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-8-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-28-2023>

[41] <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/8726>

[42] <https://t.me/wargonzo/10930>

[43] [https://t.me/notes\\_veterans/8056](https://t.me/notes_veterans/8056)

[44] <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10786>

[45] <https://t.me/rybar/43718>

[46] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2j8nci4whRwpjz9vqjBLYVUjTbMSYfL2E82UUiPWLNcnkBazxRAVGmKRnqWmaJZhNl>

[47] <https://twitter.com/neonhandrail/status/1626852293734973440> ;  
[https://twitter.com/auditor\\_ia/status/1626923937295699971](https://twitter.com/auditor_ia/status/1626923937295699971) ;  
<https://twitter.com/PaulJawin/status/1626846708377198593> ;  
[https://twitter.com/auditor\\_ia/status/1626923937295699971](https://twitter.com/auditor_ia/status/1626923937295699971) ;  
<https://t.me/ogshb8/54> ; <https://twitter.com/blinzka/status/1626969859257995264> ;  
<https://twitter.com/PaulJawin/status/1626958409982435330> ;  
<https://twitter.com/blinzka/status/1626981874810716163>

[48] <https://twitter.com/PaulJawin/status/1626832115621933058> ;  
[https://twitter.com/auditor\\_ia/status/1626923955402539011](https://twitter.com/auditor_ia/status/1626923955402539011) ;  
<https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1626676810028048396> ;  
<https://t.me/sssternenko/13427>

[49] [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/463](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/463) ; [https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1626702582612647938?cxt=HHwWhICz\\_arYmpMtAAAA](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1626702582612647938?cxt=HHwWhICz_arYmpMtAAAA); [https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1626641494089007104?s=20](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1626641494089007104?s=20); [https://t.me/Prigozhi\\_n\\_hat/2671](https://t.me/Prigozhi_n_hat/2671); <https://twitter.com/foosint/status/1626692654439321616>

[50] <https://t.me/wargonzo/10930> ; <https://t.me/brussinf/5663>

[51] <https://t.me/milchronicles/1572> ; <https://t.me/brussinf/5663> ; <https://t.me/rybar/43713> ; <https://t.me/readovkane ws/52941>

[52] [https://twitter.com/SerDer\\_Daniels/status/1626956789873840128](https://twitter.com/SerDer_Daniels/status/1626956789873840128) ;  
<https://twitter.com/klinger66/status/1626961334645432320>

[53] <https://twitter.com/neonhandrail/status/1626717419669688320> ;  
[https://twitter.com/seneca\\_93/status/1626659695506165761](https://twitter.com/seneca_93/status/1626659695506165761) ; [https://twitter.com/seneca\\_93/status/1626659695506165761](https://twitter.com/seneca_93/status/1626659695506165761); [https://twitter.com/auditor\\_ia/status/1626923958288130049](https://twitter.com/auditor_ia/status/1626923958288130049)

[54] <https://t.me/rybar/43718>

[55] [https://t.me/tass\\_agency/181271](https://t.me/tass_agency/181271);

[56] [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/17273](https://t.me/grey_zone/17273)

- [57] <https://t.me/readovkanews/52914> ; <https://t.me/rybar/43713> ; <https://t.me/brussinf/5663>
- [58] <https://t.me/milchronicles/1572>
- [59] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02j8nci4whRwpjz9vqjBLYVUjTbMSYfL2E82UUiPWLNcnkBazxRAVGmKRnqWmaJZhNl>
- [60] <https://t.me/wargonzo/10930>
- [61] <https://t.me/vorposte/35485> ; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/78376](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/78376) <https://twitter.com/foosint/status/1626924246969602049>
- [62] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02j8nci4whRwpjz9vqjBLYVUjTbMSYfL2E82UUiPWLNcnkBazxRAVGmKRnqWmaJZhNl>
- [63] <https://t.me/wargonzo/10930> ; <https://t.me/readovkanews/52908>
- [64] [https://t.me/Bratchuk\\_Sergey/30249](https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/30249)
- [65] [https://t.me/ivan\\_fedorov\\_melitopol/1365](https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/1365)
- [66] [https://twitter.com/hochu\\_dodomu/status/1626881454658420736](https://twitter.com/hochu_dodomu/status/1626881454658420736) ;  
<https://twitter.com/kargolow/status/1626895231760171008> ;  
<https://twitter.com/WarNewsPL1/status/1626885237669076993> ;  
<https://twitter.com/kargolow/status/1626894695342153728>
- [67] [https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0zcw3oGRVcYAwwuUMcnLTvjBC75TSyyCdq7beecgaHV8hrZUNEFzrkaBMTAburgcNl?locale=uk\\_UA](https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0zcw3oGRVcYAwwuUMcnLTvjBC75TSyyCdq7beecgaHV8hrZUNEFzrkaBMTAburgcNl?locale=uk_UA)
- [68] [https://t.me/ivan\\_fedorov\\_melitopol/1367](https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/1367)
- [69] [https://t.me/ivan\\_fedorov\\_melitopol/1367](https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/1367)
- [70] <https://www.facebook.com/OperationalCommandSouth/videos/904273104123479/>
- [71] <https://www.facebook.com/OperationalCommandSouth/videos/904273104123479/> ; <https://t.me/readovkanews/52912> ; [https://t.me/Bratchuk\\_Sergey/30301](https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/30301)
- [72] <https://t.me/DeepStateUA/15631> ;  
[https://twitter.com/auditor\\_ya/status/1626923987442847755](https://twitter.com/auditor_ya/status/1626923987442847755) ;  
<https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1626698009613312000> ; <https://twitter.com/worldonalert/status/1626577925033299968> ;  
[https://twitter.com/auditor\\_ya/status/1626923984133521410](https://twitter.com/auditor_ya/status/1626923984133521410)
- [73] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid032FQ4TMNPDmT9iL9r68Qbtg3dqZZpM3Nt7cM3yaer6NYFUA4mPZwLNEPSLPPFVEel> ; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02j8nci4whRwpjz9vqjBLYVUjTbMSYfL2E82UUiPWLNcnkBazxRAVGmKRnqWmaJZhNl> ; <https://t.me/rybar/43721> ; <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=639978071466601> ; <https://t.me/mykolaivskaODA/4350>
- [74] <https://twitter.com/kargolow/status/1626899297814953986> ;  
<https://twitter.com/markito0171/status/1626891787993325568>
- [75] <https://t.me/mozhemobyasnit/14668> ; <https://notes.citeam.org/mobilization-feb-16-17>
- [76] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-16-2023>
- [77] <https://t.me/operativnoZSU/79203> ; <https://t.me/CITeam/3134>
- [78] <https://t.me/operativnoZSU/79203> ; <https://t.me/CITeam/3134>

- [79] [https://t.me/news\\_sirena/11227](https://t.me/news_sirena/11227); <https://notes.citeam.org/mobilization-feb-16-17>
- [80] <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/36a7f6a6f5a9448496de641cf64bd375>
- [81] <https://meduza dot io/news/2023/02/18/frantsuzskaya-set-ashan-otritsaet-cto-snabzhala-armiyu-rf-v-ukraine-ranee-zhurnalisty-zayavili-cto-kompaniya-peredala-noski-sigarety-i-topory-dlya-voennyh>
- [82] <https://meduza dot io/news/2023/02/18/frantsuzskaya-set-ashan-otritsaet-cto-snabzhala-armiyu-rf-v-ukraine-ranee-zhurnalisty-zayavili-cto-kompaniya-peredala-noski-sigarety-i-topory-dlya-voennyh>
- [83] <https://www.auchan-retail dot com/fr/position-dauchan-retail/>
- [84] [https://www.auchan-retail dot com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2023\\_02\\_17\\_Position-Auchan-Retail-FR.pdf](https://www.auchan-retail dot com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2023_02_17_Position-Auchan-Retail-FR.pdf)
- [85] <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2023/02/russian-cruise-missile-champions-new-build-and-new-buildings>
- [86] <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2023/02/russian-cruise-missile-champions-new-build-and-new-buildings>
- [87] <https://t.me/sibrealii/15649>; <https://notes.citeam.org/mobilization-feb-16-17>; <https://t.me/Taygainfo/39244>
- [88] <https://t.me/astrapress/21178>; <https://notes.citeam.org/mobilization-feb-16-17>
- [89] <https://notes.citeam.org/mobilization-feb-16-17>; <https://ovd dot news/express-news/2023/02/17/uchastnika-protestov-protiv-mobilizacii-v-mahachkale-prigovorili-k-150>
- [90] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid032FQ4TMNPDmT9iL9r68Qbtg3dqZZpM3Nt7cM3yaer6NYFUA4mPZwLNEPSLPPFVEel>
- [91] [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/3360](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/3360)
- [92] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-16>
- [93] <https://www.facebook.com/sergey.khlan/posts/pfbid0BcB5w4Cc5ktWZfjybyq1q9kzv9S1ig9KjKWvhD3oxjFujyUF9Ui5g3Puoo3CLnXgRl>