

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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February 22, 2024, 8:15pm 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 see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

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.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:00pm ET on February 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Click [here](#) to read ISW's latest warning update on the possibility of Transnistria, a pro-Russian breakaway region of Moldova, calling for Russian annexation or taking other action to support Russian hybrid operations against Moldova.

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev said that Russia would likely have to seize Kyiv sooner or later while identifying Russia's possible further territorial objectives in Ukraine. Medvedev responded in an interview published on February 22 to a question asking if there will "still be any part of Ukraine left that [Russia] will consider as a legitimate state, whose borders [Russia] will be ready to recognize."^[1] Medvedev stated that Russia must "ensure its interests" by achieving the goals of the "special military operation" as laid out by Russian President Vladimir Putin – referring to Russian demands for Ukraine's "demilitarization," "denazification," and neutrality. Medvedev reiterated Russia's intention of changing the in Ukraine, stating that the Ukrainian government "must fall, it must be destroyed, it must not remain in this world." Medvedev claimed that Russia must create a "protective cordon" in order to protect against "encroachments on [Russia's] lands," including shelling and active offensive operations. Medvedev stated that he does not know where Russia should "stop" but that Russia "probably" must seize and occupy Kyiv "if not now then after some time." Medvedev claimed that Kyiv is historically a "Russian" city from where "international" threats to Russia's existence currently originate. Medvedev also labeled Odesa a historical "Russian" city. Putin similarly emphasized on January 31 the idea of a "demilitarized" or "sanitary" zone in Ukraine.^[2] ISW previously assessed that Putin's statements about creating a "protective" zone in which Russia's claimed and actual territories are out of Ukrainian firing range actually mean that Russia cannot accept the existence of any independent Ukraine with the ability to defend itself.^[3] Medvedev, however, also claimed that "if ... something remains of Ukraine," then it "probably" has a low chance of survival and reiterated his previous comments about a possible Ukrainian rump state in Lviv Oblast while alluding to the fact that this area was Polish territory earlier in history.^[4] Medvedev's comments continue to indicate that the Kremlin has returned to its domestic narrative that Russia is fighting the war to "liberate its historic lands."^[5]

Medvedev's mention of Russia's possible intentions to occupy Odesa may be worth noting in light of recent developments in the pro-Russian breakaway republic of Transnistria in Moldova, the southern tip of which is about 50 kilometers from the city. Transnistrian authorities recently announced that the Transnistrian Congress of Deputies is planning to meet on February 28.^[6] ISW forecasts that deputies may initiate a new referendum seeking annexation by Russia or propose or demand action on a 2006 referendum that called for Transnistria's annexation by Russia.^[7] ISW has not observed clear indications of Russian military preparations to intervene in Transnistria or Moldova more generally, and Russian military intervention would be challenging for Moscow since Moldova and Transnistria are landlocked and accessible only through Romanian or Ukrainian territory.^[8]

Medvedev also described Russian plans to repress Ukrainian citizens in occupied Ukraine. Medvedev claimed that Ukrainian citizens in occupied Ukraine who "harm" (*vredyat*) Russia in must be "exposed and punished, sent to Siberia ... for re-education in forced labor camps."^[9] Stalin-era show trials and repressions starting in the 1920s and 1930s similarly targeted saboteurs (*vrediteli*), particularly in the agricultural sphere.^[10] Medvedev's usage of Stalin-era purge rhetoric is significant. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation governor Yevgeny Balitsky also openly discussed – and attempted to defend – the illegal Russian occupation policies, including the forced deportation of Ukrainian citizens who oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine and possibly even alluded to Russian occupation forces' summary executions of Ukrainian citizens.^[11]

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) leaders and Republic of Tatarstan Head Rustam Minnikhanov on February 21 and 22. Putin attended the “Games of the Future” in Kazan alongside Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Kazakhstan’s President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kyrgyzstan’s President Sadyr Japarov, Uzbekistan’s President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and Tajikistan’s President Emomali Rahmon.[12] Putin also met with Minnikhanov and former head of Tatarstan Mintimer Shamaev to discuss the construction of a new unspecified research and development center in Sibur, Tatarstan.[13] CTP-ISW previously reported that Minnikhanov visited Iran, likely to discuss Russo-Iranian defense industrial and military cooperation.[14] Minnikhanov’s visit was particularly noteworthy given his trip to the Esfahan Province, where several prominent Iranian defense industrial and military sites are located and considering that Iran is helping to construct a military drone manufacturing facility in the “Alabuga” Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Tatarstan. Minnikhanov also has previous ties to authorities in Gagauzia, a pro-Russia autonomous region of Moldova (although separate from Transnistria), which is notable given ISW’s February 22 warning forecast about a possible Russian hybrid operation against Moldova.[15]

Ukrainian forces conducted another successful strike against a Russian training ground in occupied Kherson Oblast on February 21 and likely inflicted significant casualties. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk reported on February 22 that a Ukrainian strike killed nearly 60 Russian servicemen at a Russian training ground in occupied Podo-Kalynivka, Kherson Oblast.[16] Humenyuk stated that the targeted Russian assault groups were training to conduct operations near Krynyky.[17] Footage published on February 21 shows the strike, which reportedly killed members of the Russian 328th Airborne Assault (VDV) Regiment (104th VDV Division), 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), and 81st Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment (likely a reconstituted Soviet-era unit).[18] Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian command for conducting training exercises within the range of Ukrainian drones and HIMARS systems and advocated for updated training policies that account for the threat of Ukrainian strike systems and better protect Russian servicemen.[19] Some Russian milbloggers noted that this strike follows the February 20 Ukrainian HIMARS strikes against a Russian training ground near Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast, which reportedly killed “dozens” of Russian military personnel.[20]

Ukraine’s European and Western allies continue to ramp up their support for Ukraine. The Danish Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced a new military aid package for Ukraine on February 22 valued at 1.7 billion Danish kroner (\$228 million). This package includes 15,000 155mm shells jointly produced with the Czech Republic, air defense materiel and ammunition, mine clearance equipment, drones, radar, and communication equipment.[21] Denmark also signed a 10-year bilateral security agreement with Ukraine.[22] UK Defense Minister Grant Shapps announced that the UK is sending 200 Brimstone anti-tank missiles to Ukraine.[23] New Zealand also announced a new aid package for Ukraine valued at 25.9 million NZD (\$15.4 million), including humanitarian aid and funding for other international funds that support Ukraine’s weapons acquisition, recovery, and reconstruction.[24] The German Bundestag approved additional military support to Ukraine, including unspecified long-range weapons systems and ammunition, but rejected a bill that called for Germany to provide Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine.[25]

Russian opposition outlet *Proekt* reported on February 22 that the Russian government has subjected at least 116,000 Russians to criminal and administrative charges since the start of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s fourth term in office in 2018.[26] *Proekt* reported that Russian authorities pursued criminal charges against 11,442 people for politically motivated charges, including extremism, justifying terrorism, discrediting the Russian military, and spreading “fake” information about Russia’s war in Ukraine in 2018-2023.[27] *Proekt* noted that Russian authorities brought administrative charges against an additional 105,000 people for charges related to speech, conscience, and assembly, including at protests.[28] *Proekt* reported that Russian authorities initiated 5,829 cases for crimes against the state in this time period, including espionage, disclosure of state secrets, cooperation with foreign organizations, and for refusing to participate in the war in Ukraine.[29] *Proekt*’s partner organization *Agenstvo Novosti* noted that Russian authorities have tried 329 people for disclosing state secrets since 2018, more than the Soviet Union did during the entirety of the Cold War.[30] *Proekt* reported that Russian authorities have tried over 13,000 people under criminal statutes introduced due to the war in Ukraine, including spreading fake information and discrediting the Russian military, including roughly 4,500 military personnel punished for new articles related to conduct in the military or on the battlefield.[31] *Proekt* reported that Russian authorities have pursued over 600,000 cases for insubordination against, insulting, and violence against Russian government officials and over 159,000 cases for violating pandemic restrictions in this timeframe.[32] While it is likely that some and even many of these cases are legitimate, the Kremlin has increasingly weaponized the Russian criminal justice system to crack down on domestic dissent against the war and Putin’s autocratic rule to consolidate control over domestic Russian society.[33] *Proekt* noted that the number of political repression-related cases initiated has sharply increased since 2022 and that many of the cases are dubious, either due to officials’ obfuscation of the criminal case itself or because they are prosecutions of a fake or overblown crime to cover up another misdeed.[34]

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on February 22 that the Kremlin does not regard Russian military correspondents (*voyenkory*) and milbloggers as participants of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, shortly after the suicide of a prominent Russian milblogger on February 21. Peskov stated that it

would be wrong to linearly equate *voyenkory* to Russian servicemen fighting in Ukraine because they do not bear arms.[35] Peskov implied that Russian President Vladimir Putin holds a similar opinion and noted that Russian military correspondents' contributions to the war effort should be acknowledged in their own distinct category, despite the fact that many Russian milbloggers do in fact bear arms and engage in combat operations, among other tasks that military personnel perform.[36] Peskov's statement follows the Russian information space's widespread discussion of the suicide of Russian serviceman and independent milblogger Andrei Morozov (alias Boytsovskiy Kot Murz).[37] Morozov served in the Russian 4th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic's [LNR] Army Corps) while simultaneously maintaining a Telegram channel with over 100,000 followers — where he avidly criticized the Russian military command and senior Russian political figures — and coordinating aid provisions to Russian frontline forces. Morozov blamed the Russian military command and propagandists for triggering his decision to commit suicide after an abusive Russian military commander ordered him to delete his reports about high Russian personnel losses around Avdiivka. The timing of Peskov's remarks is notable and may reflect a broader Kremlin campaign to consolidate a monopoly over the Russian military correspondent and milblogger community. The Kremlin has been increasingly collaborating with *voyenkory* who work as frontline correspondents, and ISW observed an increase in reports about persecutions against milbloggers who perform humanitarian or combat operations in addition to maintaining Telegram channels.[38] Russian officials have previously threatened to restrict certain milbloggers from reporting on the frontlines unless they possess Kremlin-issued “press” vests, and the Kremlin may be attempting to eliminate the independent class of milbloggers and replace them with Kremlin-affiliated *voyenkory*. [39]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev said that Russia would likely have to seize Kyiv sooner or later while identifying Russia's possible further territorial objectives in Ukraine.**
- **Medvedev's mention of Russia's possible intentions to occupy Odesa may be worth noting in light of recent developments in the pro-Russian breakaway republic of Transnistria in Moldova, the southern tip of which is about 50 kilometers from the city.**
- **Medvedev also described Russian plans to repress Ukrainian citizens in occupied Ukraine.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) leaders and Republic of Tatarstan Head Rustam Minnikhanov on February 21 and 22.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted another successful strike against a Russian training ground in occupied Kherson Oblast on February 21 and likely inflicted significant casualties.**
- **Ukraine's European and Western allies continue to ramp up their support for Ukraine.**
- **Russian opposition outlet *Proekt* reported on February 22 that the Russian government has subjected at least 116,000 Russians to criminal and administrative charges since the start of Russian President Vladimir Putin's fourth term in office in 2018.**
- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on February 22 that the Kremlin does not regard Russian military correspondents (*voyenkory*) and milbloggers as participants of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, shortly after the suicide of a prominent Russian milblogger on February 21.**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Bakhmut and Avdiivka.**
- **A Russian insider source claimed that Russian officials have postponed creating Rosgvardia's 1st Volunteer Corps from remaining Wagner Group detachments because of an ongoing rotation of former Wagner personnel in Africa.**
- **Russia continues to export its state policies on systemic religious persecution to occupied Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Shaylei Dauphinais, Tom Thacker, and Kaitlyn Thomas.

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

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

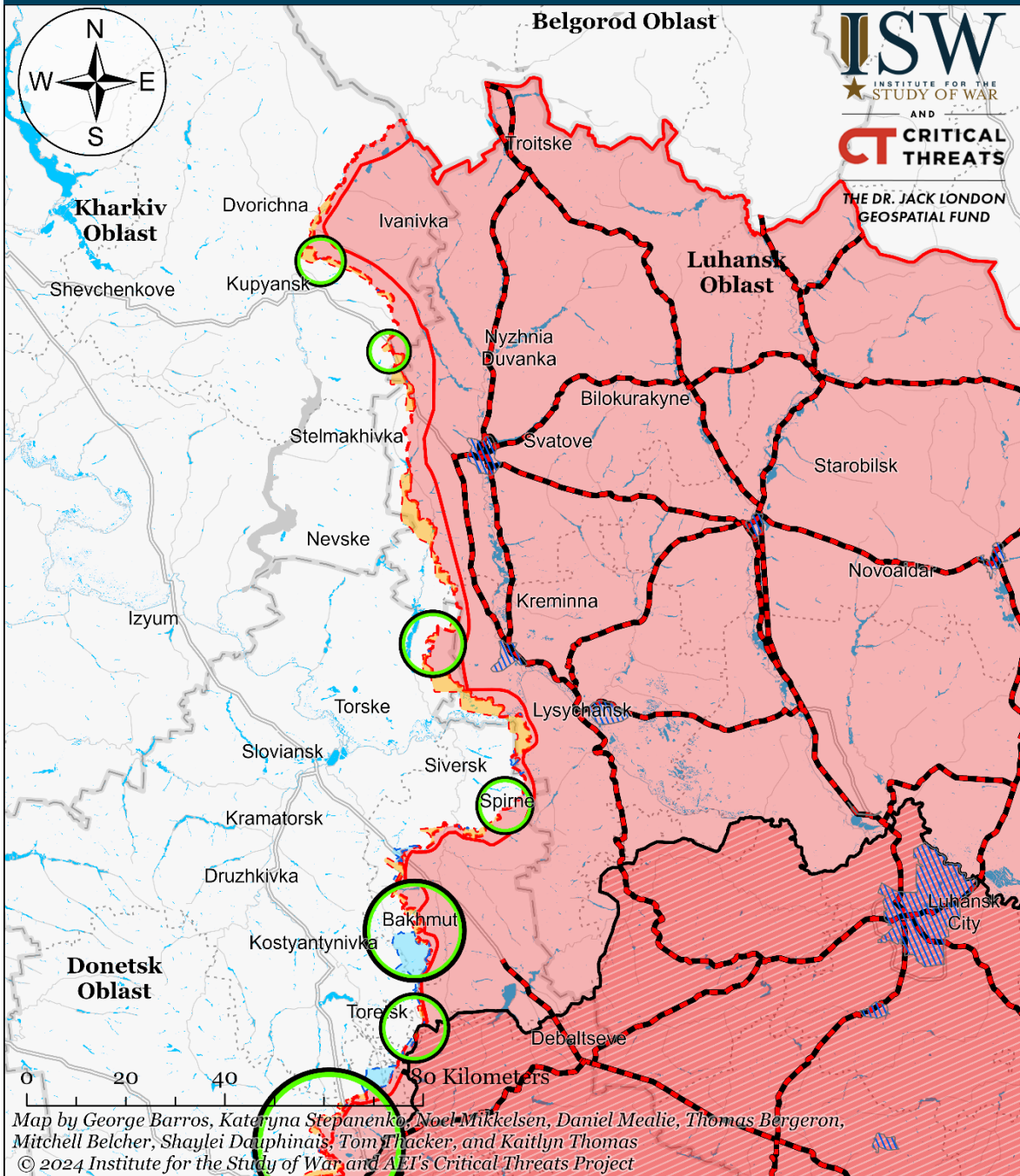
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

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)

Positional engagements continued along the Kupaynsk-Svatove-Kreminna line on February 22, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Positional engagements continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Tabaivka, Berestove, and Krokhmalne; west of Kreminna near Terny and Yampolivka; and south of Kreminna in Bilohorivka.[40] Elements of the Russian 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Bilohorivka.[41]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of February 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



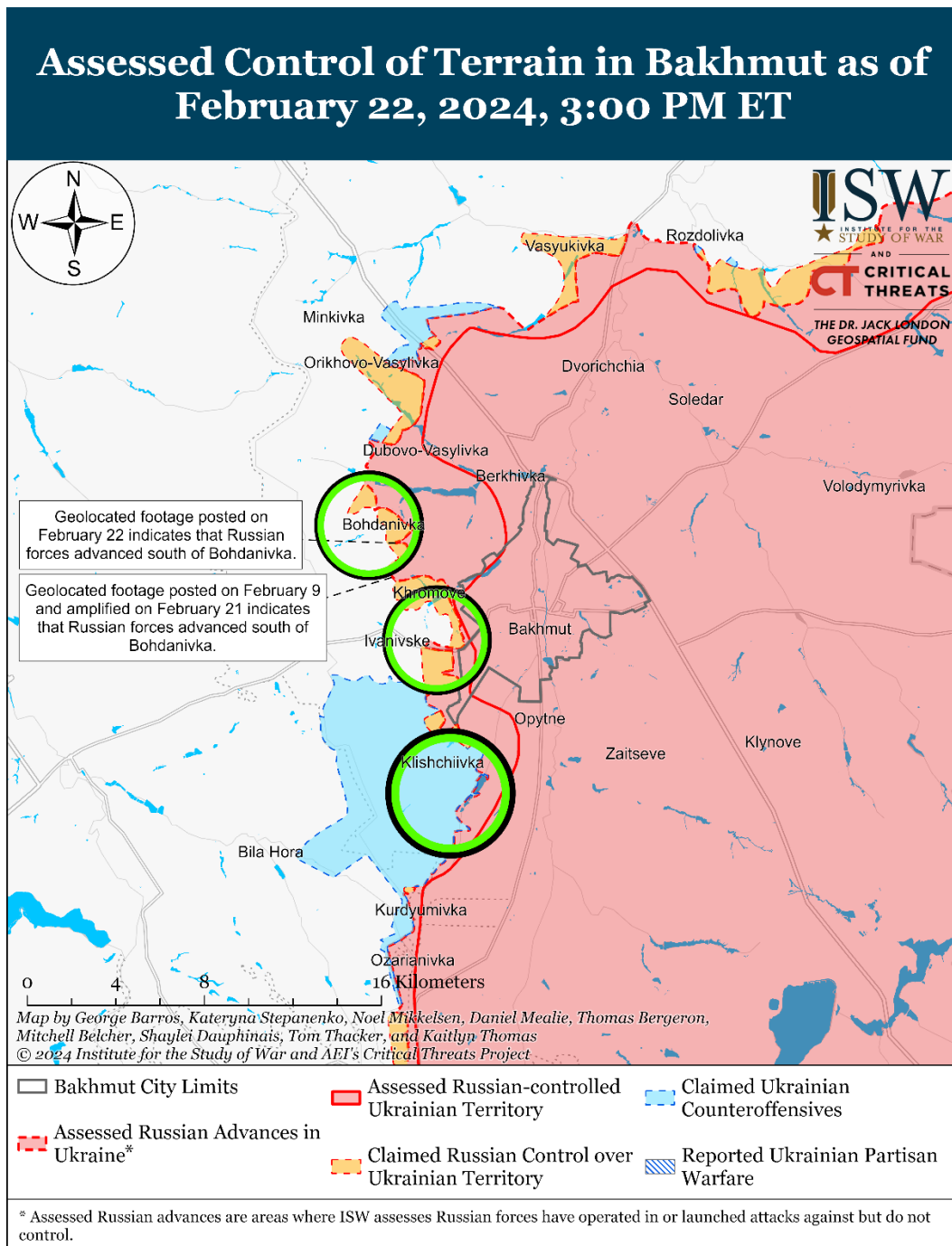
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Shaylei Dauphinais, Tom Thacker, and Kaitlyn Thomas
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed 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.

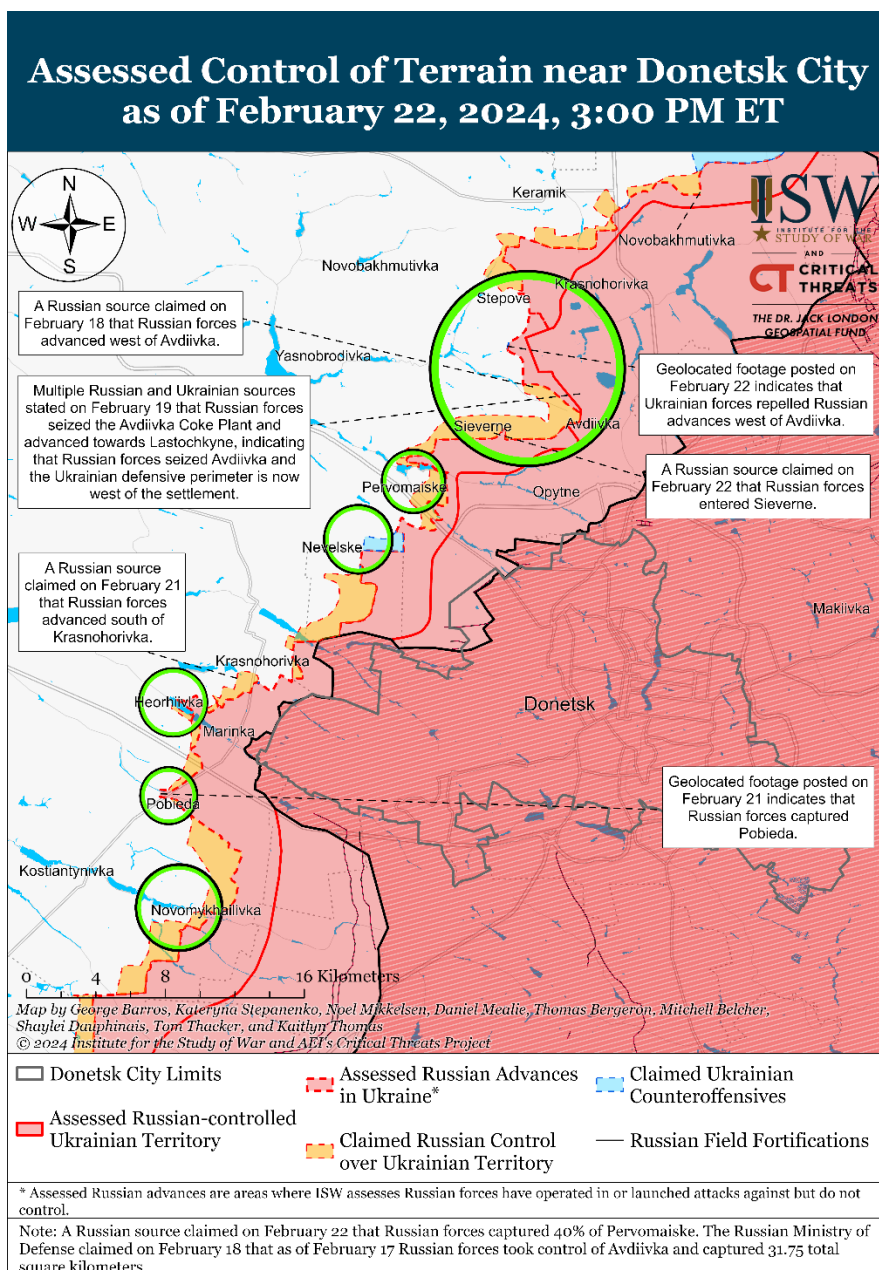
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces recently marginally advanced northwest of Bakhmut amid continued positional fighting in the area on February 22. Geolocated footage published on February 9 and 21 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced southeast and south of Bohdanivka (northwest of Bakhmut), respectively.[42] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 11th Separate Guards Air Assault (VDV) Brigade and 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) broke through Ukrainian defenses on the northern and northeastern outskirts of Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut) and are now fighting in the village itself and on its eastern outskirts, though ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[43] Positional fighting continued northeast of Bakhmut near Vyimka; northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka; and south of Bakhmut near Mayorske, Niu York, Toretsk, and Pivdenne.[44] Elements of the Russian 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps [AC], Northern Fleet) are reportedly operating near Bohdanivka, and elements of the Chechen “Sever-Akhmat” detachment (78th Motorized Rifle Regiment, 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD) are operating near Klishchiivka.[45]



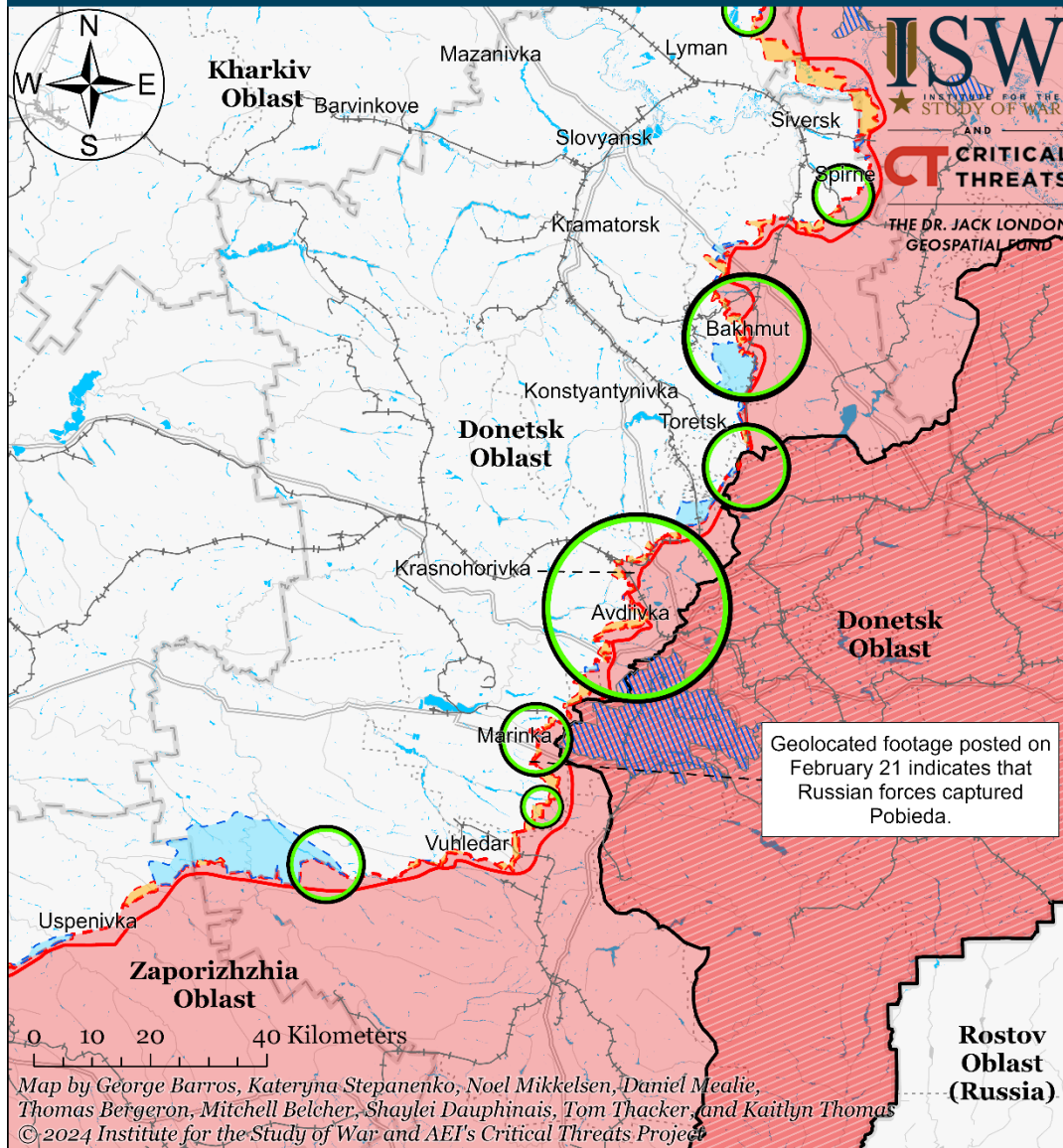
Russian forces advanced west of Avdiivka, and Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Sieverne to the southwest on February 22. Geolocated footage published on February 22 shows that Russian forces advanced in a field west of the Avdiivka Coke Plant in northern Avdiivka.[46] Russian milbloggers claimed that the Russian 1st “Slavic” Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People’s Republic’s [DNR] AC) captured Sieverne and that other Russian forces captured roughly 40 percent of Pervomaiske (southwest of Avdiivka), though ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[47] Positional fighting continued northwest and west of Avdiivka near Stepove, Berdychi, Orlivka, Lastochkyne; and southwest of Avdiivka near Sieverne, Pervomaiske, and Nevelske.[48] Elements of the Russian 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) continue to operate in Avdiivka, and elements of the Russian 110th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC) are operating near Nevelske.[49]

A Ukrainian military analyst stated that Russian forces lost roughly a division’s worth of tanks and roughly two divisions’ worth of armored vehicles in the Russian campaign for Avdiivka. Ukrainian military analyst Colonel Petro Chernyk reported on February 22 that Russian forces lost 364 tanks and 748 armored vehicles, which Chernyk stated amounts to just over one division’s worth of tanks and nearly two divisions’ worth of armored vehicles, respectively.[50] Chernyk stated that Russian forces have not suffered equipment losses at this scale since the Second World War and noted that Soviet forces only lost a maximum of 180 tanks in the entire nine-year war in Afghanistan.[51] Chernyk warned that Russian forces will use infantry to compensate for extreme vehicle losses, which is consistent with ISW’s observations about Russian attritional infantry-led “meat assaults” observed near Avdiivka and elsewhere in the theater.[52]



Positional fighting continued west and southwest of Donetsk City on February 22, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces marginally advanced towards Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City) from the south.[53] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officially announced the Russian capture of Pobieda (southwest of Donetsk City) on February 22 after Russian forces seized the settlement no later than February 21.[54] Positional fighting continued west of Donetsk City and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda and Novomykhailivka.[55]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

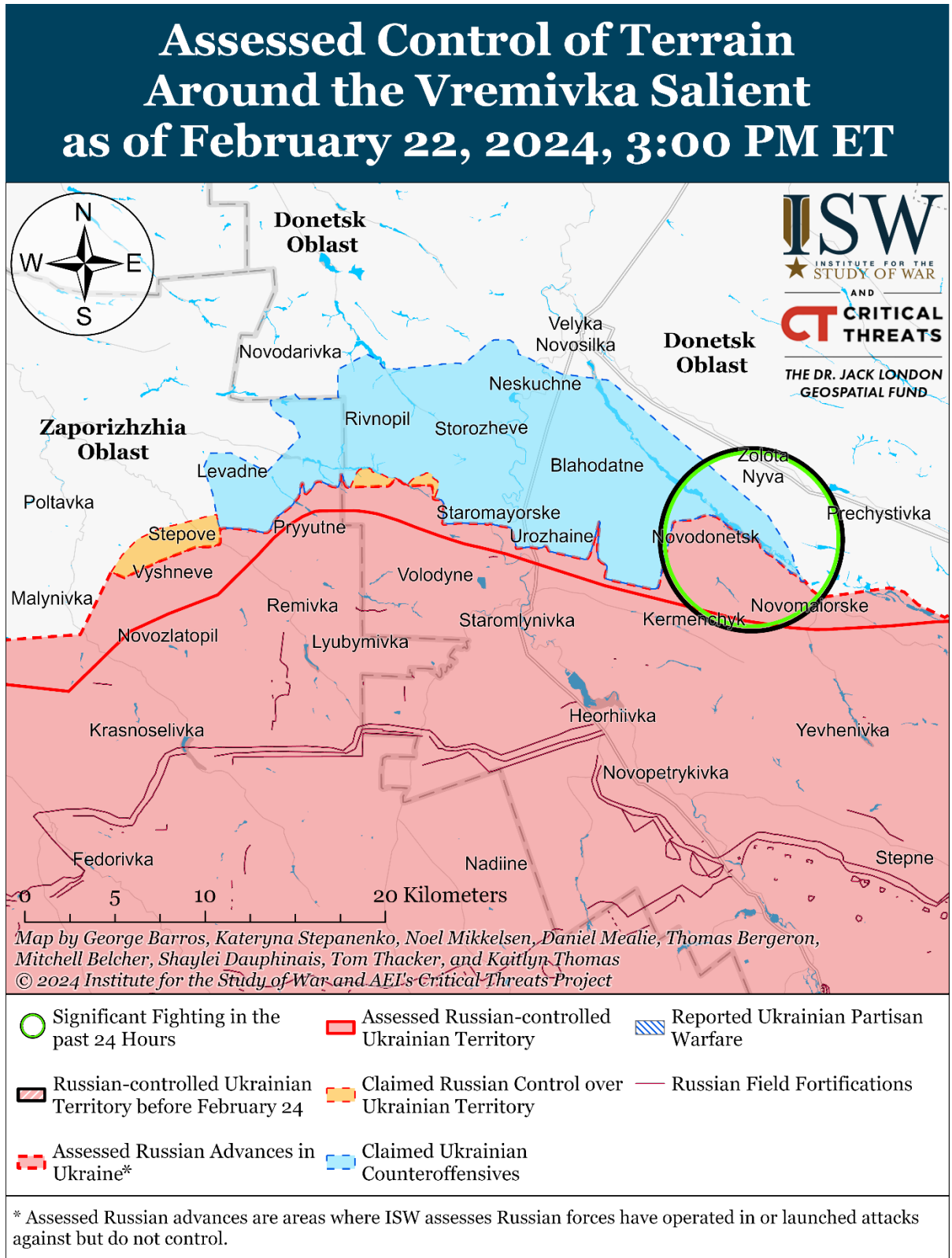


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads
- 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.

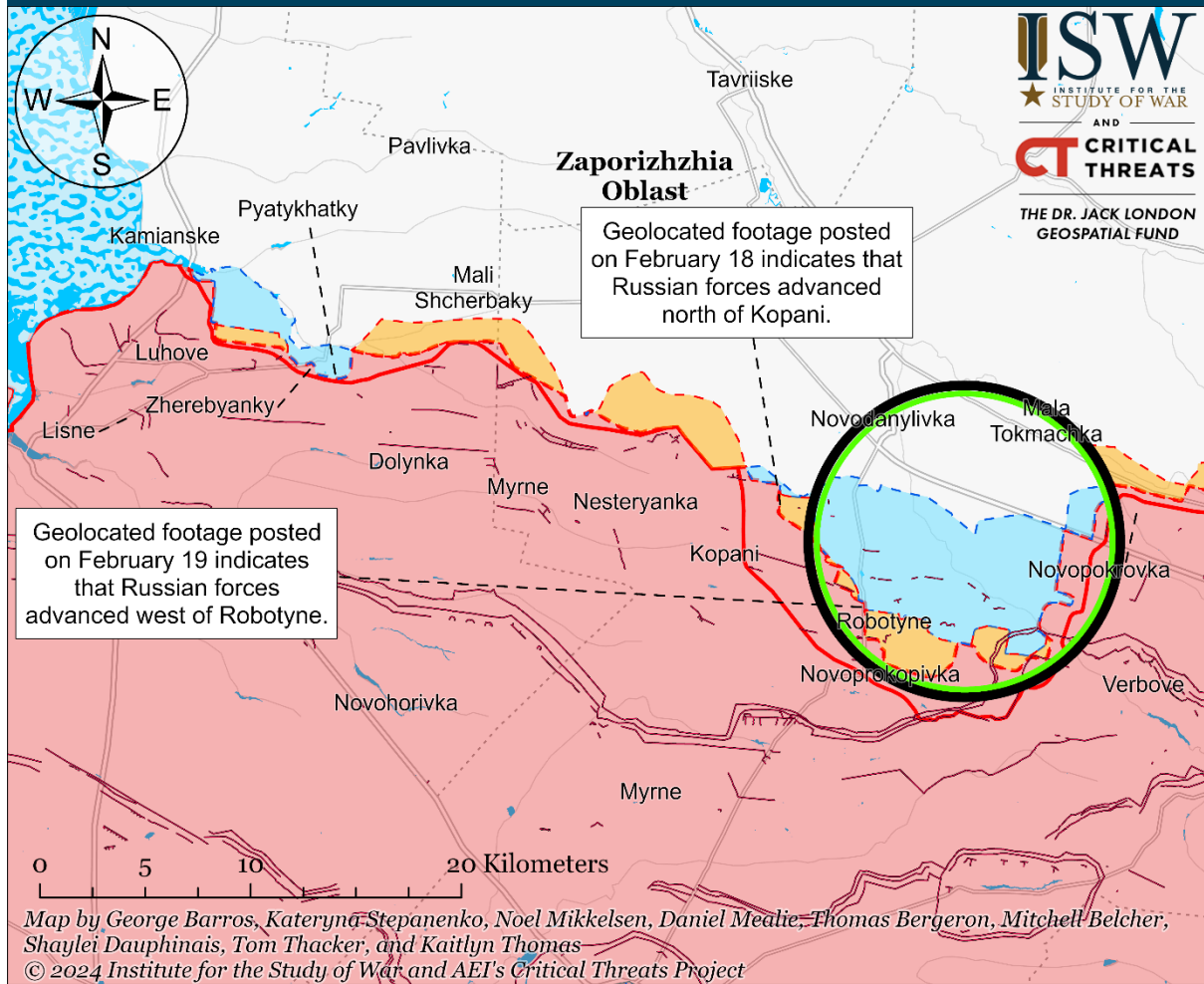
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Positional engagements continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on February 22. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Novodonetske (southeast of Velyka Novosilka) and Pryyutne (southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[56] Positional fighting continues south of Zolota Nyva (southeast of Velyka Novosilka) and near Novozlatopil (southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[57] Elements of the Russian 30th Artillery Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) are reportedly operating near Urozhaine (south of Velyka Novosilka).[58]



Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on February 22. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced one kilometer near Robotyne and that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from several positions near Verbove (east of Robotyne).[59] Another prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced more than two kilometers near Robotyne on February 21.[60] Fighting continued east and on the southern outskirts of Robotyne and west of Verbove.[61] Elements of the Russian 136th Artillery Regiment (likely a reconstituted Soviet-era unit) are reportedly operating near Robotyne.[62]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of February 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



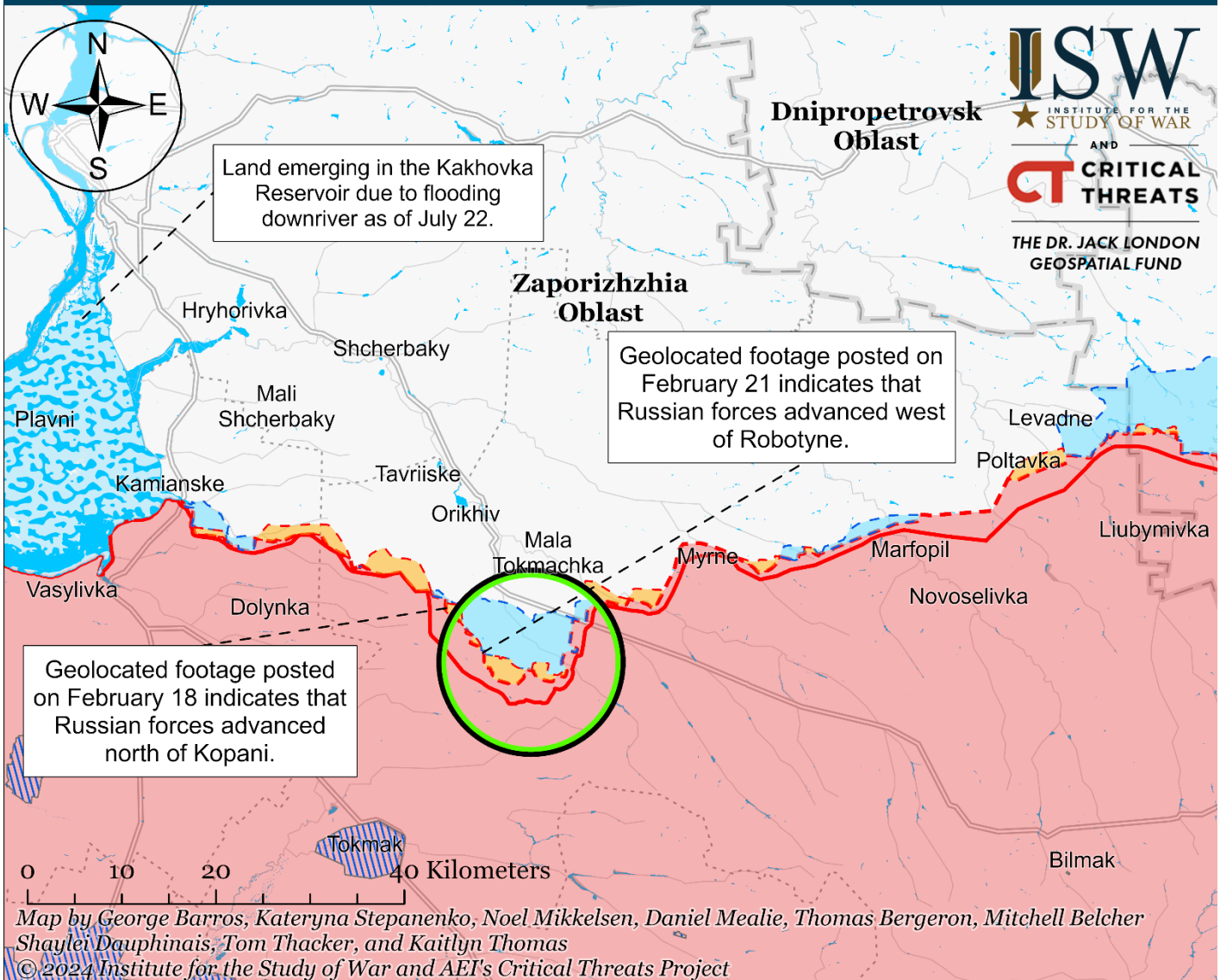
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Shaylei Dauphinais, Tom Thacker, and Kaitlyn Thomas
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| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory | 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: Russian sources claimed on February 20 that Russian forces penetrated between 700 meters and 1.5 kilometers deep into Ukrainian defenses and advanced up to two kilometers along the Robotyne-Verbove front. A Russian source claimed on February 19 that Russian forces advanced in an area 1.42 kilometers wide and 1.15 kilometers deep west of Verbove. Multiple Russian sourced claimed on February 19 that Russian forces advanced 500 meters near Robotyne.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of February 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

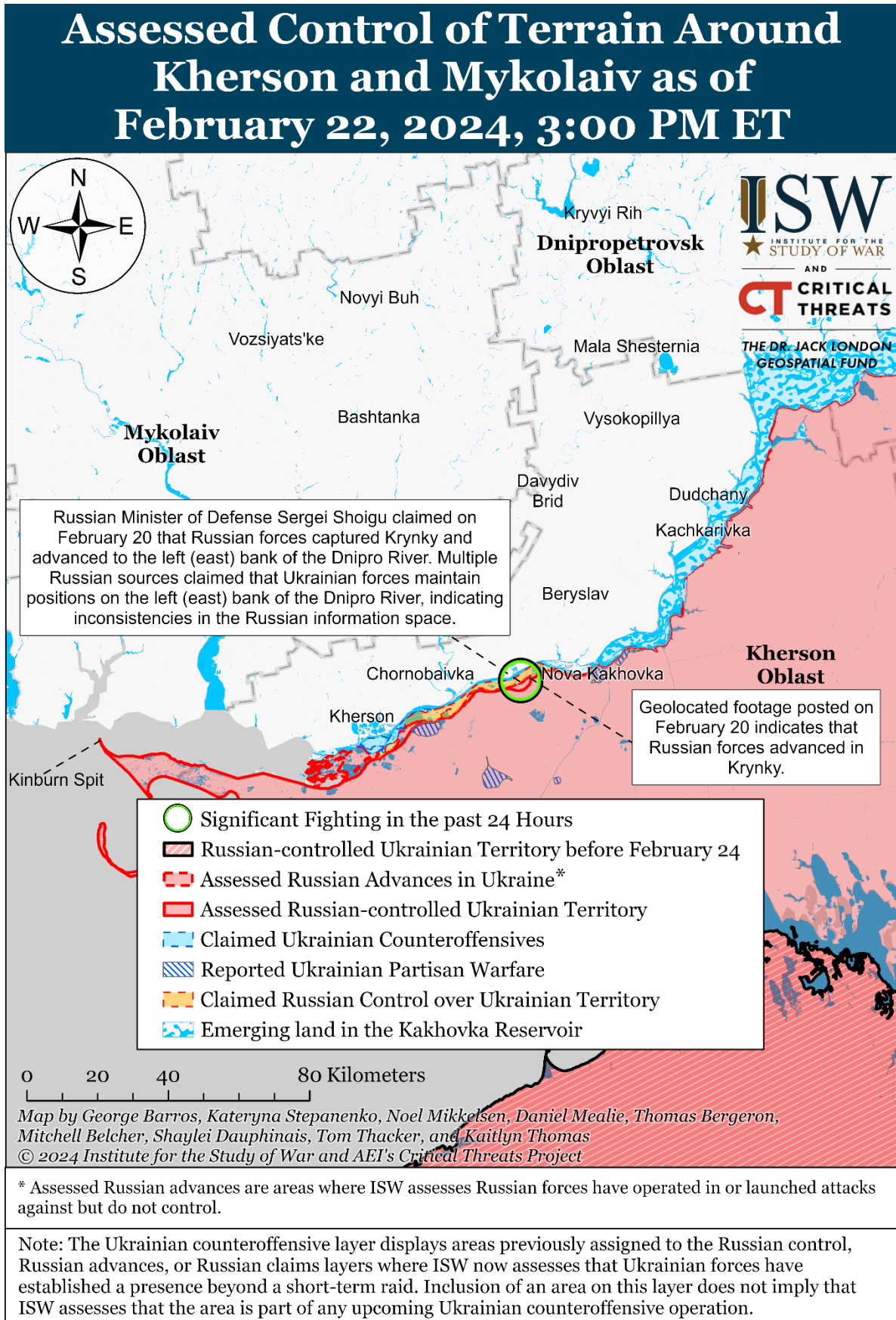


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian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

* 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 February 19 that Russian forces advanced in an area 1.42 kilometers wide and 1.15 kilometers deep west of Verbove. Multiple Russian sourced claimed on February 19 that Russian forces advanced 500 meters near Robotyne.

Positional fighting continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast, particularly near Krynky, on February 22.[63] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces retreated from unspecified positions near Krynky following a Ukrainian assault in the area.[64]



Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign (Russian Objective: Target Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure in the rear and on the frontline)

Russian forces launched another drone and missile strike against Ukraine overnight on February 21 to February 22. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 10 Shahed 136/131 drones from Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai and one Kh-31P anti-radar missile from the Black Sea.[65] Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian force shot down eight Shahed drones over Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, and Kharkiv oblasts.[66] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces launched a missile, possibly a Kh-31 type, against Odesa Oblast on the evening of February 21.[67] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces targeted and struck the Myrhorod military airfield in Poltava Oblast.[68]

Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reported on February 22 that Russian forces have used more than 20 North Korean ballistic missiles in strikes against Ukraine.[69] The SBU reported that it collected evidence of Russian forces using North Korean Hwasong-11 (KN-23/24) ballistic missiles and noted that Russian forces first used these missiles to strike Zaporizhzhia City on December 30, 2023. The SBU added that Russian forces launched North Korea ballistic missiles against an apartment building in Kyiv City in early January 2024 and have also struck residential and civilian infrastructure in Donetsk and Kharkiv oblasts.

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

A Russian insider source claimed that Russian officials have postponed creating Rosgvardia's 1st Volunteer Corps from remaining Wagner Group detachments because of an ongoing rotation of former Wagner personnel in Africa.[70] The source claimed that assault troops — likely referring to Wagner's former 15th, 16th, and 17th assault detachments — in Kazachi Lageri, Rostov Oblast are preparing to rotate in Africa. A Russian milblogger claimed on February 19 that Russian efforts to integrate former Wagner personnel into Rosgvardia have halted.[71]

The Kremlin-affiliated Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) claimed that 68 percent of Russians believe that military professions in Russia have high prestige, based on survey data collected as of February 2024.[72] The FOM claimed that the number of Russians characterizing the Russian military as having high prestige has been consistently increasing from 53 percent in mid-February 2022 to 60 percent in February 2023. The FOM largely conducts surveys for the Russian Presidential Administration and this data may be exaggerated to incentivize military recruitment in Russia.[73]

Russian Technological Adaptations (Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)

Russian design bureau "Stratim" reported that Russian operators will test the "Chaika" drone in Ukraine in March 2024.[74] "Stratim" claimed that the Chaika drone is a tailsitter drone that combines the advantages of fixed wing aircraft and multi-rotor UAVs. "Stratim" claimed that this drone has a range of up to 30km, a speed of at least 100 kilometers per hour, and can carry a payload of four to five kilograms.[75]

Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)

The Danish Ministry of Defense and US Department of Defense announced on February 22 that the Air Force Capability Coalition expects to provide the first F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine in summer 2024.[76]

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)

Russia continues to export its state policies on systemic religious persecution to occupied Ukraine. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) head Denis Pushilin posted footage on February 22 purportedly showing the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Rosgvardia raiding an office of a Jehovah's Witness congregation in occupied Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast.[77] Pushilin claimed that Russian authorities seized more than 5,000 books from the office. Russia banned Jehovah's Witnesses as an "extremist" organization in 2017, and Russian authorities have persecuted Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious minorities in Russia and Ukraine.[78]

Russian authorities continue to illegally deport Ukrainian civilians, including children, to Russia under the guise of rehabilitation programs. The Russian "We Help Ours" organization stated on February 22 that Russian authorities deported a group of 20 Ukrainian children and their mothers from occupied Luhansk Oblast to a sanatorium in Moscow Oblast.[79]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov reiterated Kremlin narratives on February 22 intended to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine and portray the Russian economy as stable and successful despite the pressure of Western sanctions. Putin and Peskov claimed that Russian military personnel are "liberating" historical Russian lands and "minimizing" and "eradicating" danger in Donbas and "Novorossiya." [80] Putin additionally claimed that all of Russia's oblasts — including illegally annexed Ukrainian territories — have good potential for further economic growth. [81]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attempted to blame perceived Western "arrogance and pre-occupation with Russophobia" on February 22 for the lack of peace negotiations to resolve the war in Ukraine, despite official Russian statements that the Kremlin is not interested in good-faith peace negotiations with Ukraine. [82]

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)

Belarus continues strengthening its military-technical cooperation with Russia. Belarusian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin stated that Russia and Belarus have established a legislative framework for creating and operating joint combat training centers and recently proposed to develop a plan for a joint weapons program. [83] Khrenin also stated that the Russian regional grouping of forces and Belarusian forces will conduct their standard biennial exercises again in 2025. [84]

Belarus continues to amplify Kremlin rhetoric that Ukraine poses an existential threat to Russia and Belarus. Khrenin claimed on February 22 that Ukraine has concentrated a "strike force" on the Ukrainian-Belarusian border and that Ukrainian sabotage groups may conduct provocations across the border. [85]

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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