

## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 18, 2023

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July 18, 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.

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 cutoff for this product was 2:30pm ET on July 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**The July 17 Kerch Strait Bridge attack is likely having immediate ramifications on Russian military logistics in southern Ukraine.** Footage and imagery published on July 17 and 18 show extensive traffic jams and accidents reportedly on the E58 Mariupol-Melitopol-Kherson City highway – Russia's current main logistics line connecting Russia to southern Ukraine – at various points between Mariupol and Berdyansk, and in Kherson Oblast.[1] Russian occupation authorities claimed to have reduced traffic at Crimea-Kherson Oblast checkpoints near Chonhar and Armiansk following significant traffic jams in the morning.[2] Russian occupation authorities also advertised alternate routes and rest stops along them for tourists to drive from occupied Crimea through occupied Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts – rear areas in a war zone – to return to Russia.[3] Russian authorities also announced additional measures to mitigate resulting traffic jams and logistics issues, including a temporary road bridge next to the Kerch Strait Bridge, the reconstruction of a 60-kilometer stretch of road between Crimea and Kherson Oblast through Armiansk, and lowering security measures at the Kerch Strait Bridge checkpoints.[4] Russian authorities reopened one span of the Kerch Strait Bridge to one-way road traffic towards Russia on July 18, and plan to reopen the same span to two-lane traffic on September 15 and the whole bridge to road traffic in November.[5] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on July 18 that the Russian government is still developing measures to increase the security of the Kerch Strait Bridge, and Russian milbloggers continued to criticize the claimed Russian security failure to adequately protect the bridge.[6]

**Russian forces conducted a strike campaign ostensibly against Ukrainian military objects in southern Ukraine in explicit retaliation for the Kerch Strait Bridge attack.** The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian retaliatory strikes hit port infrastructure in Odesa City and to have destroyed Ukrainian fuel storage facilities holding a combined 70 thousand tons of fuel near Odesa and Mykolaiv cities.[7] Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian air defenses shot

down all six Russian Kaliber missiles and 31 of 36 Shahed 131/136 drones targeting these areas, but that falling missile fragments damaged port infrastructure and a residential area in Odesa.[8] Russian milbloggers heavily criticized the Russian MoD for only targeting Ukrainian military assets in retaliation for Ukrainian military "provocations" rather than targeting these assets as part of the war effort.[9] These complaints are consistent with prior milblogger criticisms to the same effect following other major military events, including the October 2022 Kerch Strait Bridge attack.[10] The Russian MoD also accused Ukrainian forces of targeting occupied Crimea with 28 drones overnight on July 17 to 18 and claimed that Russian air defenses and electronic warfare systems downed all 28 drones.[11]

**The dismissal of former Russian 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Commander Major General Ivan Popov and the issues he cited continue to have effects on Russian military operations in southern Ukraine and the discourse around these operations.** A prominent, Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger accused Ukrainian forces of attempting to exhaust Russian forces defending in southern Ukraine and noted that the Russian military command has not solved the force rotation issues Popov outlined before his dismissal.[12] Another prominent milblogger supported Popov, noting that the issues Popov outlined seem more important issues for the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to address than transferring Popov to Syria or other information mitigation measures.[13] Some Russian milbloggers amplified reports of several Russian assault groups with forces of up to a platoon simultaneously surrendering to Ukrainian forces in the Zaporizhia direction.[14] Persistent issues with Russian logistics and operations in southern Ukraine may have contributed to these forces' inability or unwillingness to fight and reported resulting surrender.

**Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive actions on at least three sectors of the frontline against the backdrop of increased Russian offensive operations and claimed tactical gains along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border on July 18.** Russian and Ukrainian sources noted that Russian forces have recently increased offensive operations in the Kupyansk area (between northeastern Kharkiv Oblast and northwestern Luhansk Oblast).[15] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 2km along the front and up to 1.5km in depth in an unspecified area in the Kupyansk direction.[16] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar and Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported that Russian forces continue to transfer reinforcements to the Bakhmut direction and are concentrating their main forces in the Kupyansk direction due to Ukrainian advances in the Bakhmut area, supporting ISW's assessment that Russian forces aim to draw Ukrainian reserves to the Kupyansk area and away from critical areas of the theater where Ukrainian forces are conducting counteroffensive operations.[17] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces will not likely make tactically significant advances or an operationally significant breakthrough between northeastern Kharkiv Oblast and Luhansk Oblast in part due to the poor quality of Russian forces deployed in this area. Russian and Ukrainian sources noted that elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army (Western Military District) and convicted "Storm-Z" units are operating in the Kupyansk area.[18] ISW has previously

assessed that the elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army are heavily degraded and that “Storm-Z” units suffer from poor morale and discipline.[19]

**Russia continues legislative manipulations to repress domestic dissent through introducing fear of criminal liability.** Russian State Duma Deputy Vasily Piskarev stated on July 18 that he and several other deputies submitted a bill for consideration to the Duma on “liability for propaganda and justification of the ideology of extremism” that will introduce a 300 thousand ruble (roughly \$3,297) fine and up to five years in prison for violation of the amendment.[20] ISW has previously reported on similar laws and amendments that are meant to set high penalties and criminal liability for anything that Russian authorities assert is “extremist” or “terroristic” behavior in order to encourage self-censorship and facilitate crackdowns against any dissenting parties.[21] Some facets of the Russian information space expressed concern that Russian authorities could use the law to crack down against any expressed viewpoints that contradict those of the Russian state, including support for Russian opposition parties or figures.[22]

**The *Telegraph* concluded that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Belarusian authorities are actively involved in the forced deportation of Ukrainian children.** The *Telegraph* quoted the head of the Belarusian opposition group National Anti-Crisis Management, Pavel Latushka, who alleged that Lukashenko is personally responsible for the forced displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus and that he gave direct instructions on how to carry out and finance the displacement.[23] The *Telegraph* found that Belarusian authorities actively worked with Russian authorities to transport some Ukrainian children to Belarus and others to far eastern regions of Russia. The *Telegraph* reported that Belarusian and Russian authorities collaborated to forcibly transport at least 2,150 Ukrainian children to Belarus since September 2022 and that the number of Ukrainian children in Belarus will likely reach 3,000 by fall of 2023.[24] The European Parliament Foreign Affairs Council had previously called for an arrest warrant against Lukashenko in early June for actions relating to Ukrainian children and for facilitating other crimes committed in Ukraine.[25] ISW has long assessed that Belarus is involved in the deportation of Ukrainian children to Belarus and the Russian Federation.[26]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **The July 17 Kerch Strait Bridge attack is likely having immediate ramifications on Russian military logistics in southern Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces conducted a strike campaign ostensibly against Ukrainian military objects in southern Ukraine in explicit retaliation for the Kerch Strait Bridge attack.**
- **The dismissal of former Russian 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Commander Major General Ivan Popov and the issues he cited continue to have effects on Russian military operations in southern Ukraine and the discourse around these operations.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive actions on at least three sectors of the frontline against the backdrop of increased Russian**

**offensive operations and claimed tactical gains along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border on July 18.**

- **Russia continues legislative manipulations to repress domestic dissent through introducing fear of criminal liability.**
- **The Telegraph concluded that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Belarusian authorities are actively involved in the forced deportation of Ukrainian children.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove line, southwest of Kreminna, and in the Bakhmut and Avdiivka-Donetsk City areas and made limited territorial gains in all sectors.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations around Bakhmut and advanced north of Bakhmut.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia area and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and reportedly made limited advances.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia oblast area and recently made limited advances in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Some Russian sources suggested that recent measures supporting the development of the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) allow it to posture as an alternative Russian military formation.**
- **Russia continues to formalize methods of social programming targeted at youth in occupied areas of Ukraine.**

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



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

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

### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

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

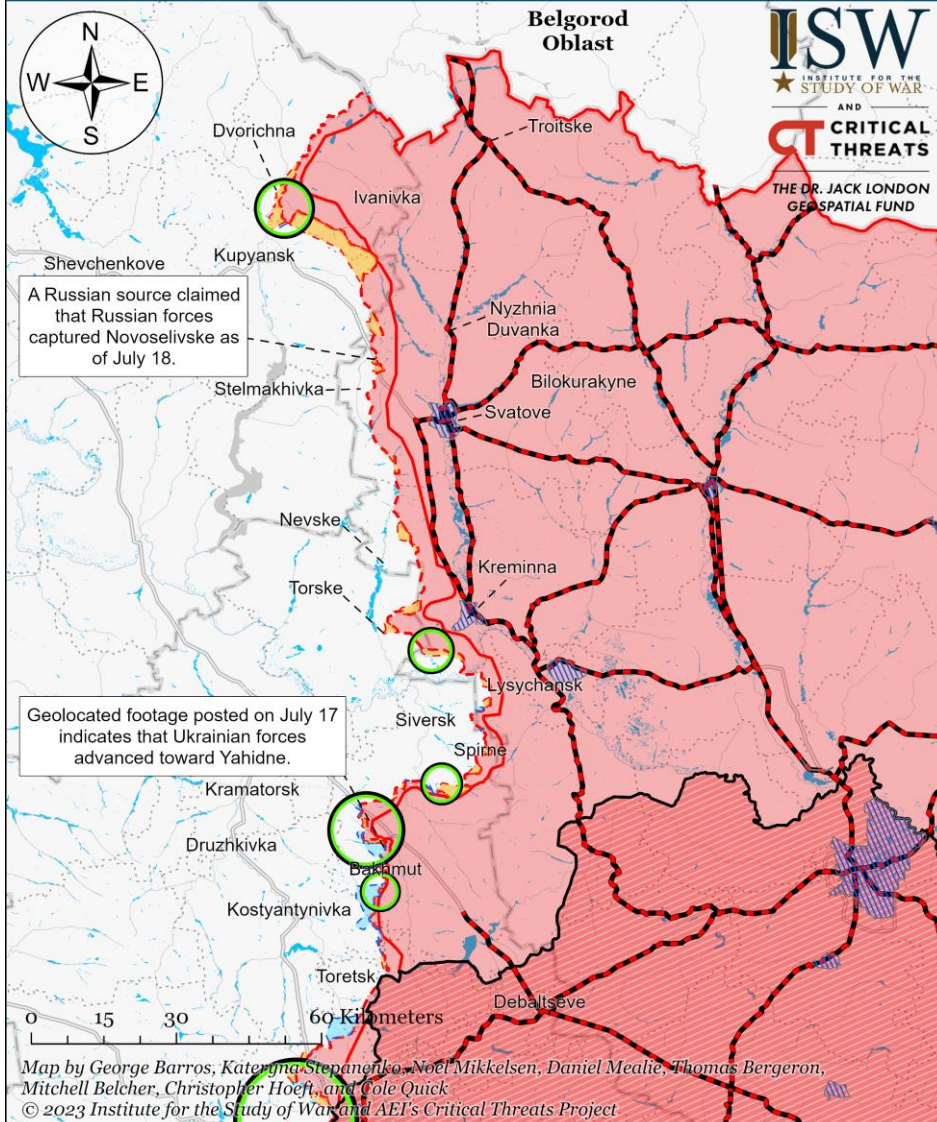
Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove line and made tactical gains in this area on July 18. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 2km along the front and up to 1.5km in depth in an unspecified area in the Kupyansk direction.[27] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, including “Storm-Z” assault detachments, took control of the remainder of Novoselivske (16km northwest of Svatove).[28] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces from the 6th Combined Arms Army (Western Military District) advanced 3km west of Lyman Pershyi (11km northwest of Kupyansk) in the Kupyansk direction, and the Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked west of Lyman Pershyi.[29] Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted ground attacks and gained territory in Synkivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk), Kuzemivka (16km northwest of Svatove), and Karmazynivka (12km southwest of Svatove).[30] Other Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, including convict-formed “Storm-Z” detachments, captured Novoselivske (16km northwest of Svatove).[31] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are transferring reserves to the area to counterattack and defend against Russian advances.[32] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty reported that Russia has concentrated over 100,000 personnel along the entire Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border.[33]

Russian forces continued limited ground attacks southwest of Kreminna and made limited gains on July 18. Geolocated footage published on July 18 shows Russian forces

have made marginal advances northwest of Dibrova (about 8km southwest of Kreminna).[34] Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Artem Lysohor reported that Russian forces attacked Ukrainian forces near Dibrova, and the Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations west of Dibrova.[35] The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) reported that Russian forces attempted to push west through the forests west of Kreminna.[36] Russian Central Grouping of Forces (Central Military District) Spokesperson Alexander Savchuk claimed that Russian forces counterattacked Ukrainian forces near the Serebryanske forest area southwest of Kreminna.[37] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces from the Center Group of Forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Dibrova.[38] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces engaged with Ukrainian forces near Torske (15km west of Kreminna).[39]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- 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: The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed on July 18 that Russian forces advanced 1.5 kilometers deep along a two kilometer frontline in the direction of Kupyansk. A Russian source claimed on July 18 that Russian forces advanced three kilometers west of Lyman Pershyi over the last few days. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces occupied almost all the dominant heights around Bakhmut. Malyar also reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces have recaptured a total of seven square kilometers within the past week and 31 square kilometers total since the start of the counteroffensive in the Bakhmut direction. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.



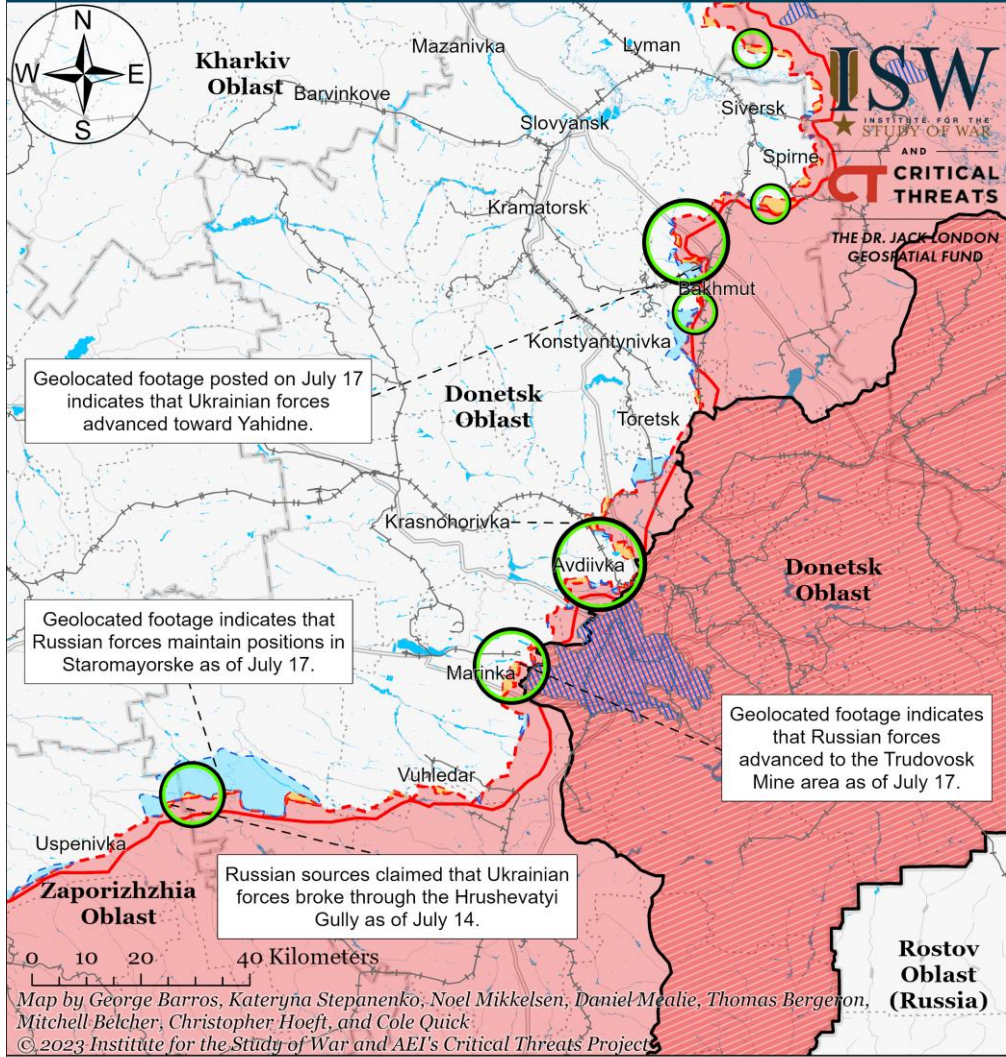
## **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations around Bakhmut and advanced north of Bakhmut as of July 18. Geolocated footage posted on July 17 shows that Ukrainian forces advanced west of Yahidne (3km northwest of Bakhmut).[40] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that Ukrainian forces have occupied almost all the dominant heights around Bakhmut.[41] A Russian milblogger also claimed that Ukrainian units unsuccessfully attempted to break through Russian defensive lines in the direction of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[42]

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Bakhmut area and made limited territorial gains south of Bakhmut on July 18. Geolocated footage posted on July 18 shows that Russian forces advanced near Ozaryanivka (14km southwest of Bakhmut).[43] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Bohdanivka (5km southwest of Bakhmut), Minkivka (13km northwest of Bakhmut), Ivanivske (5km west of Bakhmut), and southwest of Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut).[44] Malyar stated that Russian forces are panicked at Ukraine’s recent advances in the Bakhmut area and that Russian actions in different directions, particularly the Kupyansk direction, are intended to distract and draw Ukrainian forces away from where they are making advances.[45] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Russian forces are transferring reserves to Bakhmut to stop Ukrainian advances despite the fact that Russia is concentrating its main forces in the Kupyansk direction.[46] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian counterattacks made no advances near Ozaryanivka and in the direction of Ivanivske, Hyrhorivka (8km northwest of Bakhmut), Orikhovo-Vasylivka, and Vesele (20km northeast of Bakhmut).[47]

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area and made limited territorial gains on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City on July 18. Geolocated footage published on July 18 shows that Russian forces advanced west in Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[48] Additional geolocated footage published on July 18 shows that Russian forces took control of some ground near the Trudovska Mine east of Marinka and advanced south of Krasnohorivka (on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[49] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that a Russian armored group broke through Ukrainian defensive lines near the Trudovske Mine area, captured the mine area, and advanced one kilometer towards Krasnohorivka.[50] One milblogger claimed that the loss of the mine severely impacts Ukrainian positions in the Marinka area.[51] The Trudovske Mine area is approximately 2 kilometers away from the control of terrain lines that have existed since Russia’s 2014 annexation of the Donbas. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Avdiivka, Marinka, and Krasnohorivka.[52]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

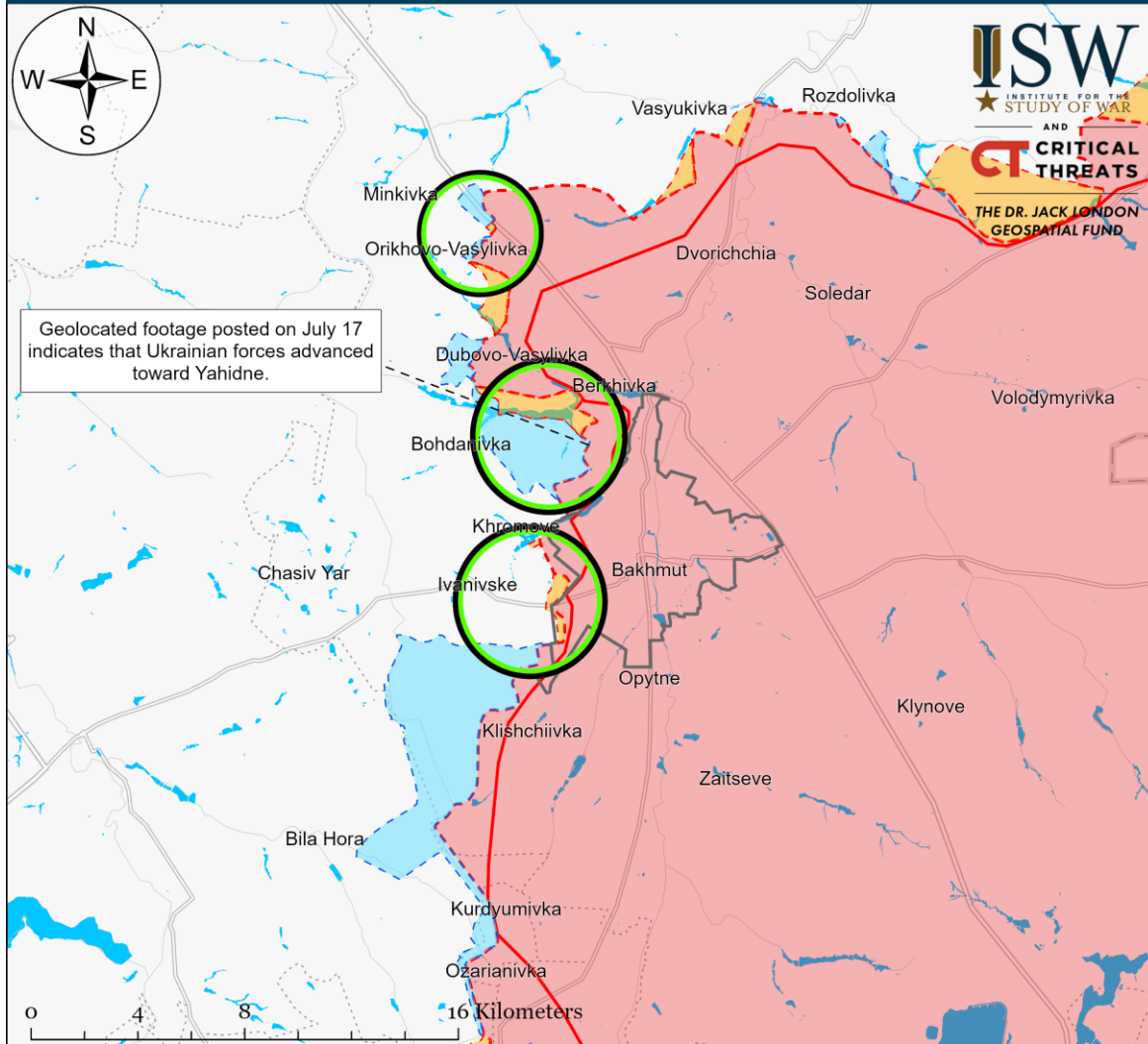


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- ▬ Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads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

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces occupied almost all the dominant heights around Bakhmut. Malyar also reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces have recaptured a total of seven square kilometers within the past week and 31 square kilometers total since the start of the counteroffensive in the Bakhmut direction. The Ukrainian General staff reported on July 14 that Ukrainian forces achieved partial success in the direction of Andriivka. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of July 18, 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 reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces occupied almost all the dominant heights around Bakhmut. Malyar also reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces have recaptured a total of seven square kilometers within the past week and 31 square kilometers total since the start of the counteroffensive in the Bakhmut direction. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

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

Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia area and reportedly made gains in the area on July 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces conducted successful operations in the Velyka Novosilka-Urozhaine direction (up to 9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[53] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are advancing in the Staromayorske area (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and that they conducted attacks north of Pryyutne (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[54] Russian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Oleg Chekhov claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks in the Staromayorske direction, while a Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks in the same direction.[55] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Volodymyrivka (12km southeast of Vuhledar) and Urozhaine.[56]

Russian forces also conducted limited ground attacks in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia oblast area and did not make any confirmed or claimed gains on July 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Rivnopil (8km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and Novodarivka (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[57]

Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and reportedly made limited advances on July 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces conducted successful operations in the Mala Tokmachka-Novopokrovka direction (9-13km southeast of Orikhiv).[58] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks north of Robotyne (12km south of Orikhiv) and that Ukrainian forces hold positions near Orikhiv that Ukrainian forces previously captured from the 7th Company of the 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District).[59] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Novodanylivka (6km south of Orikhiv), Mali Shcherbaky (17km southwest of Orikhiv), and Stepove (22km southwest of Orikhiv).[60] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are attempting to exploit the lack of rotations among Russian servicemen that former Commander of the 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Major General Ivan Popov complained of by attacking near Robotyne.[61] Ukrainian forces have continually conducted attacks near Robotyne since before rumors of Popov's dismissal, however.[62] The milblogger is likely trying to set conditions to excuse potential Russian failures in repelling Ukrainian attacks in the area. Milbloggers previously attempted to use the Wagner rebellion to explain Russian failures on the frontline.[63]

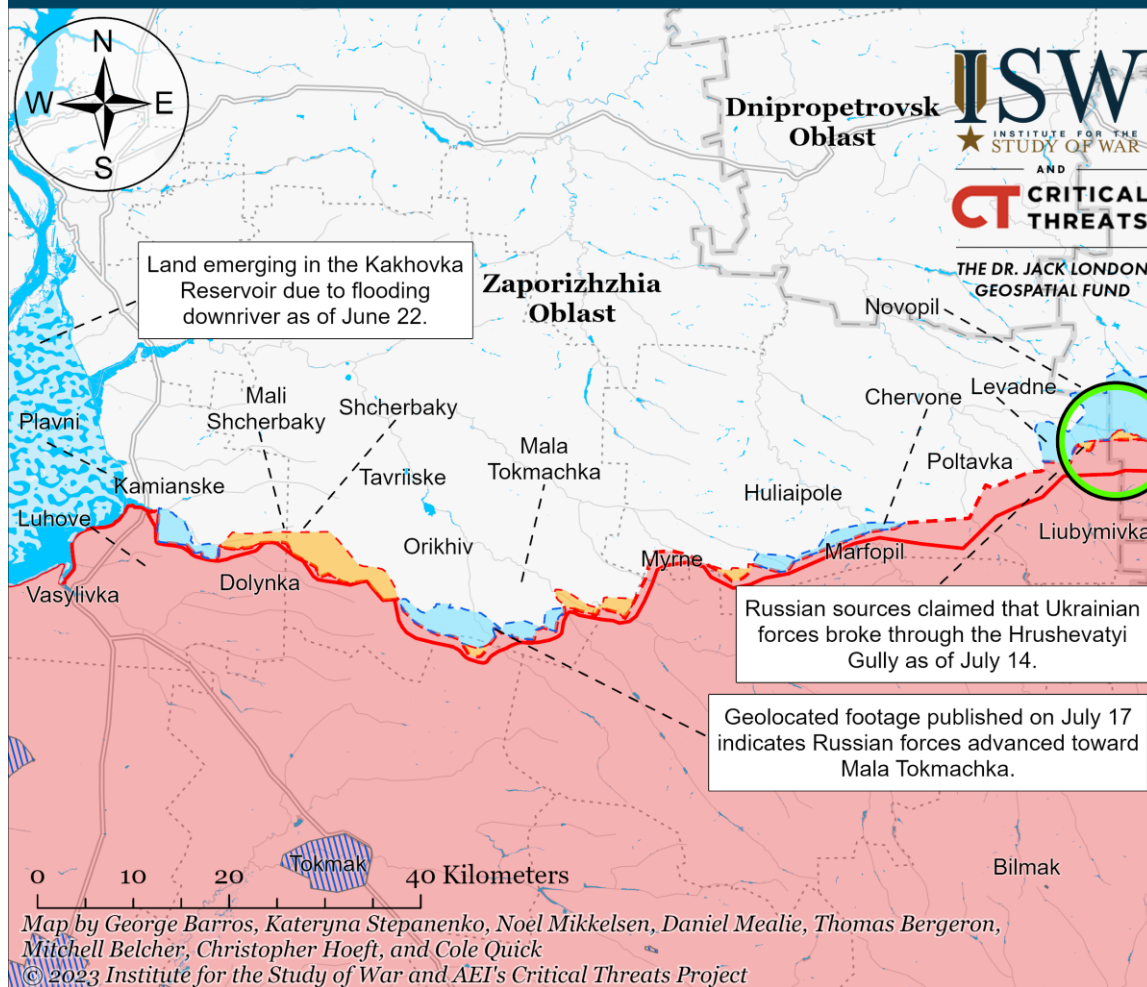
Russian forces recently made limited advances in western Zaporizhia Oblast. Geolocated footage published on July 17 shows that Russian forces made limited gains northeast of Robotyne.[64]

Ukrainian forces continue their interdiction campaign in southern Ukraine. Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov reported explosions in Melitopol and Mykhailivka (47km northwest of Melitopol).[65] Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov claimed that Russian air defenses intercepted a missile over Melitopol and Molochansk (42km northeast of Melitopol).[66]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continue to operate on the east (left) bank Kherson Oblast and that Ukrainian forces made limited gains the area. A Russian milblogger claimed on July 17 that Ukrainian forces made limited gains near the Antonivsky Bridge and that heavy fighting is ongoing in the area.[67] A Russian milblogger claimed on July 18 that Russian forces repelled small Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups attempting to cross the Dnipro River in the Antonivsky Bridge and Hola Prystan areas.[68]



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



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Christopher Hoeft, and Cole Quick  
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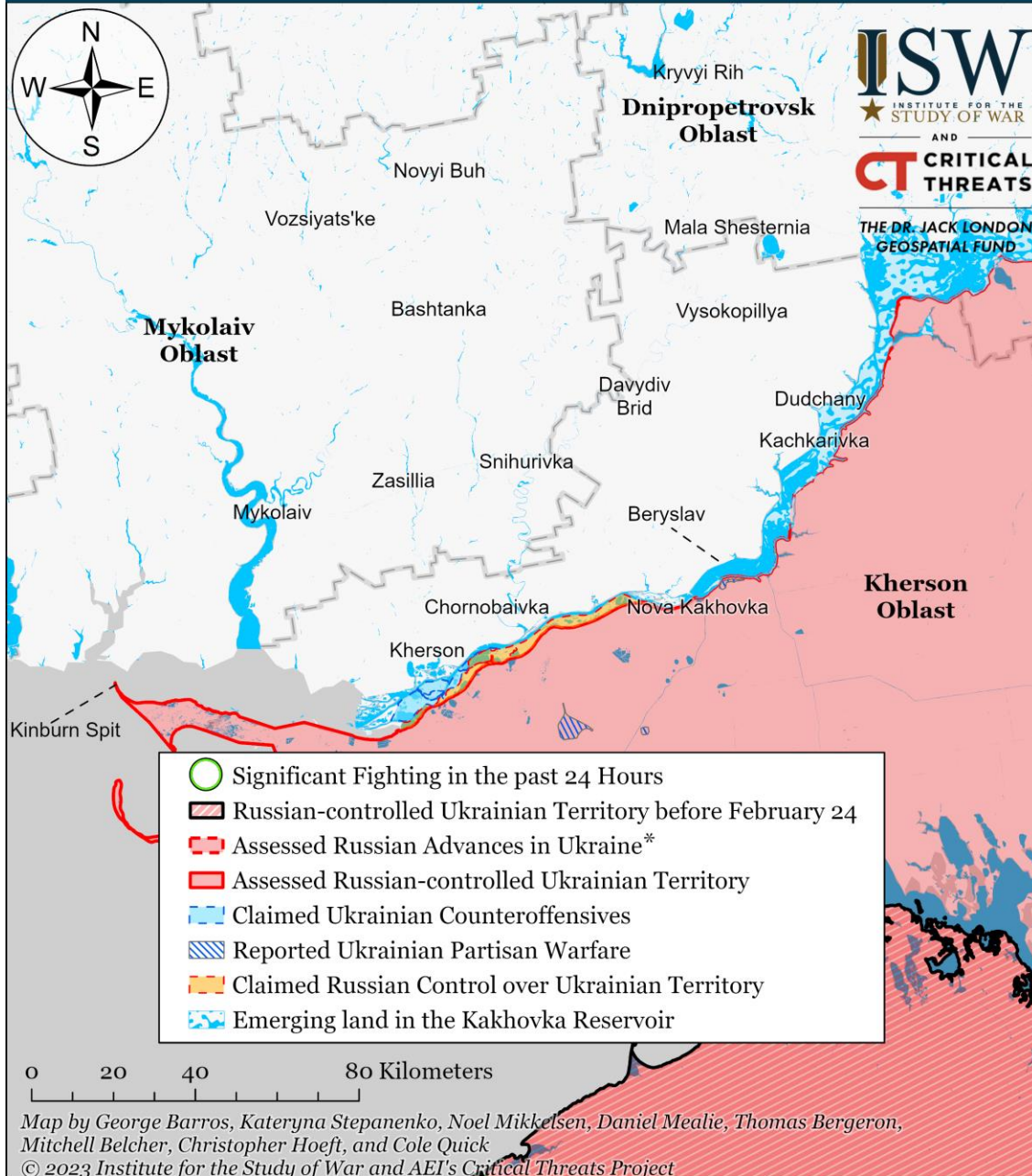
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

\* 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 reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces recaptured 10.9 square kilometers within the last week and 179.5 square kilometers since the start of the counteroffensive in the southern direction. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than one kilometer in the Berdyansk direction in the past 24 hours. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 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.

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)**

Some Russian sources suggested that recent measures supporting the development of the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) allow it to posture as an alternative Russian military formation. Russian newspaper *Vedomosti* reported that Rosgvardia “can count on an influx of” Wagner Group fighters do not want to sign contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), though it is unclear whether these fighters would choose Rosgvardia over retirement.[69] ISW has not yet observed reports of former Wagner fighters signing contracts with Rosgvardia. *Vedomosti* noted that the influx of former Wagner personnel, heavy weapons allocations, and the recent transfer of “Grom” special forces from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) to Rosgvardia strengthens Rosgvardia as an “alternate source of military power.”[70] *Vedomosti* claimed that some Grom officers are upset at the transfer, however.

Wagner Group forces reportedly conducted a limited force rotation in the Central African Republic (CAR). A Belarusian insider source claimed that Wagner forces in CAR conducted a partial rotation, and that some of the fighters had been deployed to CAR without leave for over two years.[71] Russian milbloggers claimed that there are additional reports of hundreds of Wagner personnel arriving in CAR.[72]

The Kremlin continues efforts to invigorate the Russian defense industrial base. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin claimed that Russian tank producer Uralvagonzavod delivered another batch of Russian T-90M Proryv and T-72B2M tanks to the Russian MoD on July 18.[73] Mishustin also claimed that Uralvagonzavod has tripled its production output within the last year.

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

Russia continues to formalize methods of social programming targeted at youth in occupied areas of Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the Russian Federal Agency on Youth Affairs (Rosmolodezh) to take additional measures to “intensify work” with the youth of occupied Donetsk, Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Luhansk oblasts to “harmonize interethnic relations” and strengthen an “all-Russian civic identity.”[74] The mention of “interethnic relations” is likely in reference to the fact that Russian occupation authorities are increasingly facilitating the relocation of Russian ethnic minority communities to occupied areas of Ukraine, as ISW has previously reported.[75] Russian occupation officials continue to target Ukrainian youth in occupied areas to consolidate administrative agendas and strengthen social control of occupied areas.

Russian occupation authorities continue forcible passportization of occupied areas of Ukraine. The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) reported on July 17 that MVD employees are working in occupied Kherson Oblast to issue Russian passports to

residents, particularly in the area that is within a 15km radius of the east (left) bank of Kherson.[76] The MVD claimed that between May 30 and July 16 of this year, 4,527 residents of Kakhovka received Russian passports and that for each applicant MVD employees collected fingerprints.[77] Russian occupation officials are likely using the practice of forced passportization to collect personal and biometric data on residents of occupied areas in order to consolidate administrative control of occupied areas.[78]

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

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

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a law on July 17 on the creation of a people's militia (народное ополчение) in Belarus.[79] The law will create the legal basis for the "voluntary participation" of Belarusian citizens to assist territorial internal affairs bodies in protecting areas under martial law (largely border areas).[80] The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) clarified that the recruitment for the people's militias will be carried out on a volunteer basis among those who are not liable for military service or have not been mobilized, and the operations of the people's militias will be funded by local territorial budgets.[81] One Russian milblogger erroneously suggested that this law essentially "legalizes" Wagner in Belarus as a private military company (PMC) because it militarizes eligible citizens who have not been conscripted or mobilized, which hypothetically could include Wagner fighters as they continue to arrive to and establish a permanent presence in Belarus.[82] However, the law is more likely meant to formalize certain territorial formations as "people's militias" (which are distinct from PMCs) that will likely train under the Wagner Group. ISW has previously reported that Wagner fighters trained analogous people's militias in Kursk and Belgorod oblasts, and Wagner instructors have already begun training some Belarusian territorial defense troops.[83] It is likely that Lukashenko is creating official people's militias to train under Wagner, but the law itself does not legalize Wagner as a PMC in Belarus, as suggested by the milblogger.

The Wagner Group continues to prepare to establish a permanent presence on the territory of Belarus. Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate Spokesperson Andrii Yusov stated on July 17 that about 500 to 700 Wagner fighters have redeployed to Belarus and suggested that a portion of the fighters will train with Belarusian armed forces, while some will be deliberately involved in anti-NATO posturing.[84] Independent Belarusian monitoring group "The Hajun Project" reported that Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's official business jet landed at the Belarusian Machulischy airfield from St. Petersburg in the morning of July 18.[85] Several opposition and pro-Wagner Russian sources reported that another Wagner convoy arrived in Belarus, including vehicles marked with license plates from the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics (DNR and LNR).[86]

**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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[1] <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1681240476962242561> ;  
<https://t.me/andriyshTime/11686>; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/11689>

[2] [https://t.me/SALDO\\_VGA/1002](https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/1002) ; [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/21535](https://t.me/dva_majors/21535)

[3] <https://t.me/astrapress/32706>; <https://t.me/vrogov/11010> ;  
<https://t.me/vrogov/11024>

[4] <https://t.me/vrogov/11010> ; <https://t.me/vrogov/11024>;  
<https://t.me/rusbrief/137157> ; <https://t.me/rusbrief/137167>  
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