

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 20, 2023

Riley Bailey, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, George Barros, Christina Harward,  
and Frederick W. Kagan  
July 20, 2023, 7:50pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

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**Note:** The data cutoff for this product was 12:30pm ET on July 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

**Russian forces launched a third night of missile and drone strikes against port and grain infrastructure in southern Ukraine on July 20 following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative on July 17.** The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched seven Onyx cruise missiles, four Kh-22 anti-ship missiles, three Kalibr sea-based cruise missiles, five Iskander ballistic missiles, and 19 Iranian-made Shahed drones.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian air defenses destroyed 18 targets, including two Kalibrs, three Iskanders, and 13 Shaheds.[2] Spokesperson of the Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces targeted port infrastructure in Mykolaiv and Odesa oblasts and noted that the strikes mainly affected warehouses and logistics facilities.[3] Humenyuk noted that Russian "blackmail and sabotage" of Ukrainian ports started shortly after Russian began its rhetoric about its conditions for the expansion of the grain deal.[4] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces struck Ukrainian manufacturing and storage facilities in Odesa City and Chornomorske in Odesa Oblast, and fuel infrastructure facilities and ammo depots in Mykolaiv City.[5] Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces destroyed the Odesa Seaport Administration building in the center of Odesa City and noted that residential buildings were damaged by the blast wave.[6] Ukrainian sources reported that Russian missile strikes also damaged a Chinese consulate building in Odesa City.[7]

**Ukrainian military officials outlined the challenge of defending against Onyx missiles and Russia's shortage of Kh-22 missiles.** Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat stated that Onyx missiles fly at a speed of more than 3,000 kilometers per hour at a high altitude and then quickly change altitude to 10–15 meters above the surface when striking a target, making it difficult to detect and destroy.[8] Ihnat noted on July 19 that Russian forces are using Onyx cruise missiles that are designed to destroy targets located directly on the coastline along the sea.[9] Ihnat also stated on July 20 that Russia does not have the same ability to manufacture Kh-22 missiles that it does to produce other types of high-precision long-range missiles.[10] Ihnat noted that Russia had approximately 250 Kh-22 missiles at the beginning of the war in February of 2022 and has already used approximately 150 missiles against Ukraine.[11]

**The Russian military announced that it may consider civilian ships in the Black Sea en route to Ukrainian ports legitimate military targets.** The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on July 19 that as of midnight Moscow time on July 20 Russian forces will consider all ships en route to Ukrainian ports as potential carriers of military cargo and will consider the flag countries of such vessels as "involved in the Ukrainian conflict on the side of the Kyiv regime." [12] The Russian MoD declared a number of sea areas in the northern and southern parts of the Black Sea "temporarily dangerous for navigation" and claimed that it issued relevant warnings to sailors in the Black Sea about the withdrawal of safety guarantees.[13] The Russian MoD specified that these naval measures are connected to the termination of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the curtailment of the maritime humanitarian corridor in the Black Sea.[14] The announcement prompted the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to announce on July 20 that as of midnight Kyiv time Ukrainian forces may treat all ships in the Black Sea heading to ports in Russia and occupied Ukrainian territories as military cargo vessels.[15] The Ukrainian MoD similarly stated that Ukrainian officials released relevant navigation information to seafarers.[16] US National Security Council Spokesperson Adam Hodge stated on July 20 that US intelligence indicates that Russian forces have laid additional sea mines in the approaches to Ukrainian ports.[17] Hodge added that the White House believes that Russia is engaging in a coordinated effort to justify possible attacks against civilian ships in the Black Sea and blame Ukrainian forces for the attacks.[18]

**The Russian military's intensifying strikes against Ukrainian port and grain infrastructure and threats of maritime escalation are likely a part of a Kremlin effort to leverage Russia's exit from the Black Sea Grain Initiative and exact extensive concessions from the West.** Russian President Vladimir Putin stated on July 19 that Russia is ready to return to the grain deal immediately if all previously agreed-upon conditions for Russia's participation in the initiative are fulfilled and the parties restore the deal's "original humanitarian essence." [19] Putin accused Western

countries of exploiting the grain deal so that European enterprises could profit at the expense of Russian businesses.[20] Putin claimed that elements of the grain deal led to a 30 to 40 percent discount on Russian grain on global markets, which caused Russian farmers to lose \$1.2 billion and Russian fertilizer producers to suffer \$1.6 billion in losses.[21] Putin stated that returning to the deal in its current form is pointless and called for the lifting of sanctions on Russian grain and fertilizer deliveries and the removal of obstacles for Russian banks servicing food supplies to the global market, including their connection to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) banking system.[22] Putin also called for the resumption of deliveries of components and spare parts for Russian agricultural machinery and fertilizer production, the resolution of issues with Russia ship chartering and insurance of Russian food exports, the renewal of operations for the Togliatti-Odesa ammonia pipeline, and the removal of blocks on Russian agricultural assets.[23]

**The Kremlin likely views the Black Sea Grain Initiative as one of its few remaining avenues of leverage against the West and has withdrawn from the deal to secure these concessions.** The Kremlin now appears to be attempting to create a sense of urgency around its return to the Black Sea Grain Initiative by conducting intensifying strikes against Ukrainian port and grain infrastructure and threatening to strike civilian ships in the Black Sea. Ukraine harvests most of its grain between July and August, and Russia's strikes on Ukrainian port and agricultural infrastructure can further complicate Ukraine's ability to free up space for newly harvested grains.[24] Prolonged disruptions to grain logistics in Ukraine will likely have increasingly cascading effects on grain supplies, adding to the sense of urgency that the Kremlin hopes to create.

The Kremlin routinely engages in escalatory rhetoric surrounding the West's support for Ukraine in an effort to shape Western behavior, although Russia appears notably to be conducting these shaping efforts concerning the grain deal with kinetic operations instead of rhetoric. It is unclear to what extent Russian forces intend to strike civilian ships in the Black Sea, although the Kremlin likely believes the announcement will have a chilling effect on maritime activity in the Black Sea and create conditions reminiscent of the complete blockade of Ukrainian ports at the start of the full-scale invasion.[25] This attempt to achieve economic concessions from the West may undermine the Kremlin's international outreach efforts by threatening the food supplies of several countries that are the intended targets of the Kremlin's outreach.[26] Russian strikes against Ukrainian port and grain infrastructure and naval posturing also continue to illustrate that the Kremlin is willing to use naval and precision strike assets to prioritize immediate economic concerns instead of operations in Ukraine that pursue the Kremlin's overall campaign objectives.

**The Kremlin may be destroying Ukrainian port and grain infrastructure before renegotiating the Black Sea grain deal to set conditions for the export of stolen Ukrainian grain from Russian-occupied territories that could disproportionately benefit the Russian economy.** Ukrainian Minister for Agrarian Policy Mykola Solskyi stated that it would take Ukraine no less than one year to restore the Chornomorsk port in Odesa Oblast, which was used for export of grain.[27] The destruction of Ukrainian port infrastructure in government-controlled Odesa and Mykolaiv oblasts may restrict Ukraine's ability to export grain by sea even if the grain deal is renegotiated, while allowing Russia to offer grain from occupied Ukraine or Russia to fulfil the deal in the meantime.

**Russia is also likely attempting to intensify divisions between Ukrainian and Central European governments as Ukraine and the West search for a way to re-route the grain exports.** Senior European officials stated that the European Union (EU) is seeking to transport more Ukrainian grain via road and rail to help make up for Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea grain deal.[28] Five Central European countries — Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Bulgaria — called on the EU to extend the ban on grain imports from Ukraine until at least the end of the year on July 19.[29] Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki also announced on July 19 that Poland will retain its ban on Ukrainian grain exports on September 15 even if the EU does not agree to the extension.[30] Polish Agriculture Minister Robert Telus stated on July 18 that Poland is willing to facilitate Ukrainian grain transit through Poland but said that the EU will need to help to establish necessary infrastructure.[31] Telus added that Poland had only begun its harvest and noted that it cannot facilitate the extra transit immediately. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal condemned Poland's decision to extend the ban as an “unfriendly and populist move that will severely impact global food security and Ukraine's economy.”[32] Exports through Poland and other EU countries bordering Ukraine had previously sparked resistance from local farmers after the EU lifted tariffs and quotas on food exports from Ukraine in June 2022 as Russia blocked Ukraine from transporting grain and other goods by sea.[33] Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary announced in April 2023 bans on grain and other food exports from Ukraine to protect their agricultural sectors.[34] The European Commission later announced restrictions on the imports of Ukrainian wheat, maize, rapeseed, and sunflower seeds in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Bulgaria until June 5 as a result of farmers' concerns in Central European countries.[35] The Kremlin may be attempting to disrupt Ukraine's future prospects for maritime exports in an effort to sour Ukrainian relations with its Western neighbors.[36]

**Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front and reportedly advanced on July 20.** A Ukrainian commander operating in the Bakhmut area reported on July 19 that Ukrainian forces advanced 1.8km likely on the southern flank of Bakhmut, and Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces also advanced on Bakhmut's northern flank on July 20.[37] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Ukrainian forces cannot rapidly advance near Bakhmut due to heavy Russian force concentrations in the area.[38] The Russian military command concentrated a high density of forces in the Bakhmut area to defend against Ukrainian attacks in the area, likely an intended effect of those attacks, though Syrskyi and other Ukrainian officials have repeatedly restated their intent to retake Bakhmut.[39] Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian forces continued advancing in the Berdyansk (Donetsk-Zaporizhia oblasts border area) and Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) directions and are continuing to advance by roughly 100 meters per day south and southeast of Orikhiv.[40] Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykhailo Podolyak reiterated that the Ukrainian counteroffensive will be slow and difficult but will prevent Russian forces from retaking the battlefield initiative.[41] *The Washington Post* reported that Ukrainian forces have begun using Western-provided cluster munitions in southeastern Ukraine and assessed that Ukrainian forces will likely use them near Bakhmut soon.[42] *The Washington Post*, citing an anonymous Ukrainian military official, reported that Ukrainian forces are using the cluster munitions to “break up [Russian] trenches slowing down Ukrainian forces.”

**The United States and European Union (EU) reiterated their long-term security commitments to Ukraine via security assistance packages and proposals on July 19 and 20.** The Pentagon announced on July 19 a new \$1.3 billion security package for Ukraine that includes four National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), 152mm artillery rounds, mine-clearing equipment, and other munitions and vehicles.[43] The US package also includes electronic warfare, communications, and other security equipment. EU Foreign Affairs Representative Josep Borrell proposed a plan to EU ministers on July 20 to provide Ukraine with security assistance worth up to 20 billion euros (\$22.4 billion), including weapons, ammunition, and other military aid, over the next four years.[44]

**Wagner Group personnel are training Belarusian special forces on modern tactics at the Brest Training Ground in Brest, Belarus.** The Belarusian Ministry of Defense and Wagner-linked sources reported on July 20 that Wagner forces began training unspecified Belarusian special forces elements at the Brest Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, and that the training will last until July 24.[45] The Wagner trainers are teaching Belarusian forces modern combined arms techniques and tactics, including using drones for tactical reconnaissance, tactical maneuvers, movement under fire, camouflage, and command and control.[46] Wagner-linked sources praised the Belarusian military and Belarusian trainees for their adeptness, agility, and flexibility in training while complaining that the Russian Ministry of Defense did not appreciate the Wagner Group due to Russian command staff's "rigidity of thinking and bureaucratic barriers." [47] A Wagner-linked source specifically praised Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's "old school" style and how Lukashenko managed to preserve the Soviet military's "best traditions." [48]

**The Wagner Group may open another base in Belarus in Gomel Oblast near Belarus' international border with Ukraine.** The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on July 20 that construction for another Wagner Group base in Belarus began near Naroulia Raion and that Wagner personnel surveyed land near Dyatlik, Naroulia Raion, Gomel Oblast, approximately 2km from Belarus' border with Ukraine on July 19.[49] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of construction in this area as of this publication.

**Approximately 400 Wagner convict fighters are reportedly awaiting their criminal pardon paperwork to clear in Anapa, occupied Crimea.** Independent Russian investigative outlet *Vazhnye Istori* reported on July 19 that about 400 Wagner convict fighters are waiting in hotels in Anapa until the Russian government approves their pardons.[50] The report states that the Wagner Group suspended its effort to recruit Russian convicts (codenamed "Project K") and that Wagner seeks to release these convicts no later than July 29.[51] The report states that the former convicts will have the option to extend their contracts with Wagner to serve in Belarus or Africa.[52]

**The Wagner Group reportedly suffered an 80 percent casualty rate and a 28 percent killed-in-action rate in Ukraine.** A Wagner-linked source reportedly quoted a senior Wagner commander with the callsign "Marx," who stated that 78,000 Wagner fighters fought in Ukraine (49,000 of whom were convicts), and that that Wagner had suffered 22,000 killed-in-action and 40,000 wounded-in-action as of Wagner's capture of Bakhmut on May 20.[53] These figures — if accurate — indicate that the Wagner Group was likely combat ineffective after fighting in Bakhmut and that the force suffered a 79.5 percent overall casualty rate and a 28.2 percent death rate. Marx reportedly stated that 25,000 Wagner fighters are currently alive and that 10,000 of them are in Belarus and the remaining 15,000 are resting, presumably in Russia.[54]

## Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces launched a third night of missile and drone strikes against port and grain infrastructure in southern Ukraine on July 20 following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative on July 17.
- The Russian military announced that it may consider civilian ships in the Black Sea en route to Ukrainian ports legitimate military targets.
- The Russian military's intensifying strikes against Ukrainian port and grain infrastructure and threats of maritime escalation are likely a part of a Kremlin effort to leverage Russia's exit from the Black Sea Grain Initiative and exact extensive concessions from the West.
- The Kremlin likely views the Black Sea Grain Initiative as one of its few remaining avenues of leverage against the West and has withdrawn from the deal to secure these concessions.
- Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front and reportedly advanced on July 20.
- The United States and European Union (EU) reiterated their long-term security commitments to Ukraine via security assistance packages and proposals on July 19 and 20.
- Wagner Group personnel are training Belarusian special forces on modern tactics at the Brest Training Ground in Brest, Belarus.
- The Wagner Group may open another base in Belarus in Gomel Oblast near Belarus' international border with Ukraine.
- The Wagner Group reportedly suffered an 80 percent casualty rate and a 28 percent killed-in-action rate in Ukraine.
- Russian forces continued limited ground attacks on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, around Bakhmut and along the Avdiivka–Donetsk City line and advanced on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line as of July 20.
- Ukrainian forces continued limited offensive operations east of Kupyansk, near Kreminna, near Bakhmut, and along the Avdiivka–Donetsk City line and made gains near Bakhmut on July 20.
- Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations near Vuhledar, on the administrative border between western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts, and south of Orikhiv and made limited territorial gains in western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts and western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 20.
- Russian forces continued to unsuccessfully counterattack Ukrainian positions on the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast administrative border on July 20.
- The Russian State Duma approved amendments increasing penalties for draft dodging and for officials and legal entities that fail to assist Russian force generation efforts on July 20.
- Russian authorities continue persecution of non-Russian Orthodox churches in occupied Ukraine.

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 20, 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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\* 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 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**

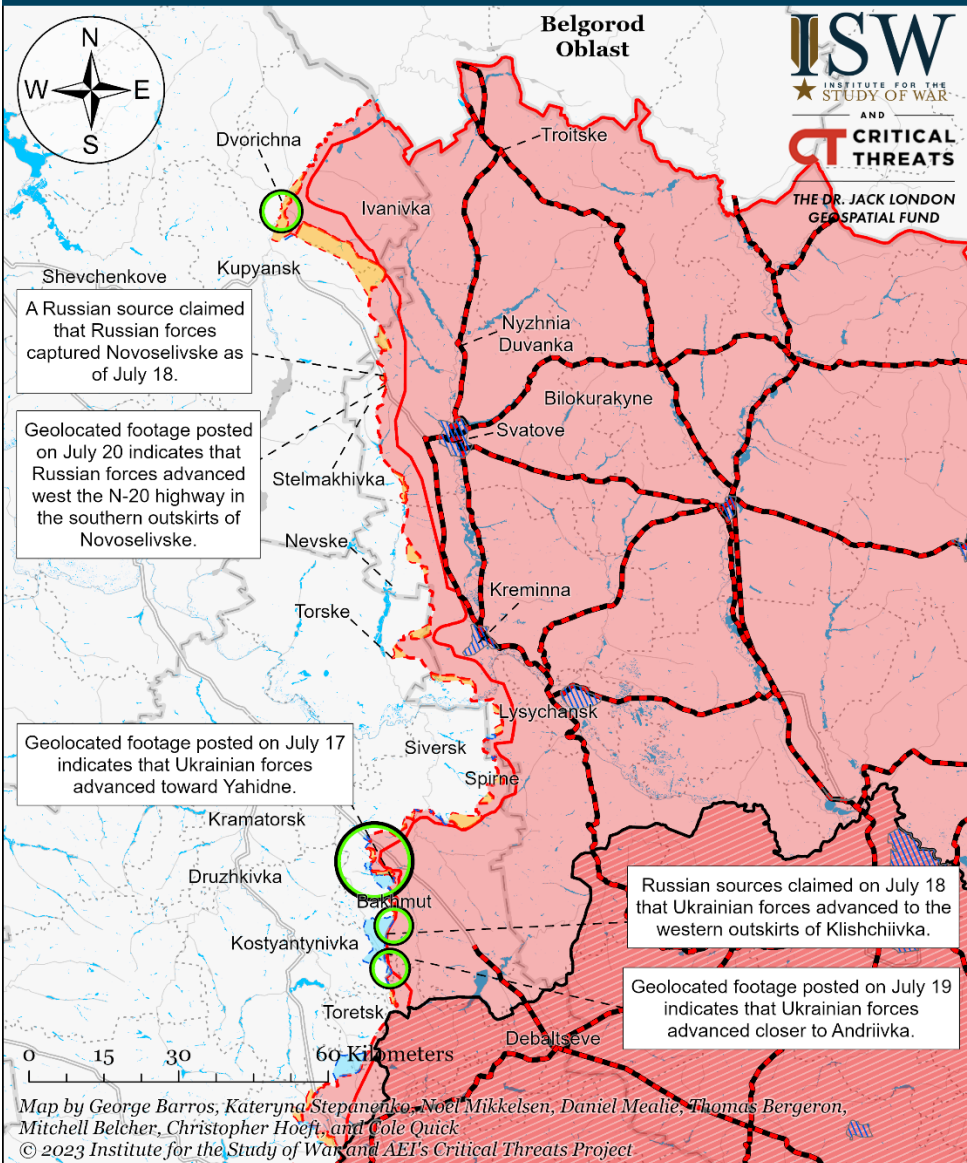
#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces continued limited ground attacks on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and advanced as of July 20. Geolocated footage published on July 20 shows that Russian forces advanced across the N26 Kupyansk-Svatove highway south of Novoselivske (15km northwest of Svatove).[55] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces made marginal advances in the Serebryanske forest area (11km south of Kreminna).[56] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks southwest of Masyutivka (13km northeast of Kupyansk).[57] Ukrainian National Guard Main Directorate's Application Planning Department Deputy Director Colonel Mykola Urshalovych acknowledged that Russian forces recently attempted a limited offensive effort on the Kupyansk-Lyman line but said that Ukrainian forces repelled the Russian assaults.[58]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued limited offensive operations east of Kupyansk and near Kreminna without advancing on July 20. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group near Ivanivka (20km east of Kupyansk) and ground attacks near Bilohorivka (12km southwest of Kreminna) and Vesele (31km south of Kreminna).[59]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 20, 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 Russian Ministry of Defense claimed on July 19 that Russian forces advanced more than one kilometer in depth and up to two kilometers along the front in Luhansk Oblast. A Russian source claimed on July 18 that Russian forces advanced two kilometers west of Lyman Pershyi. 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. 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)**

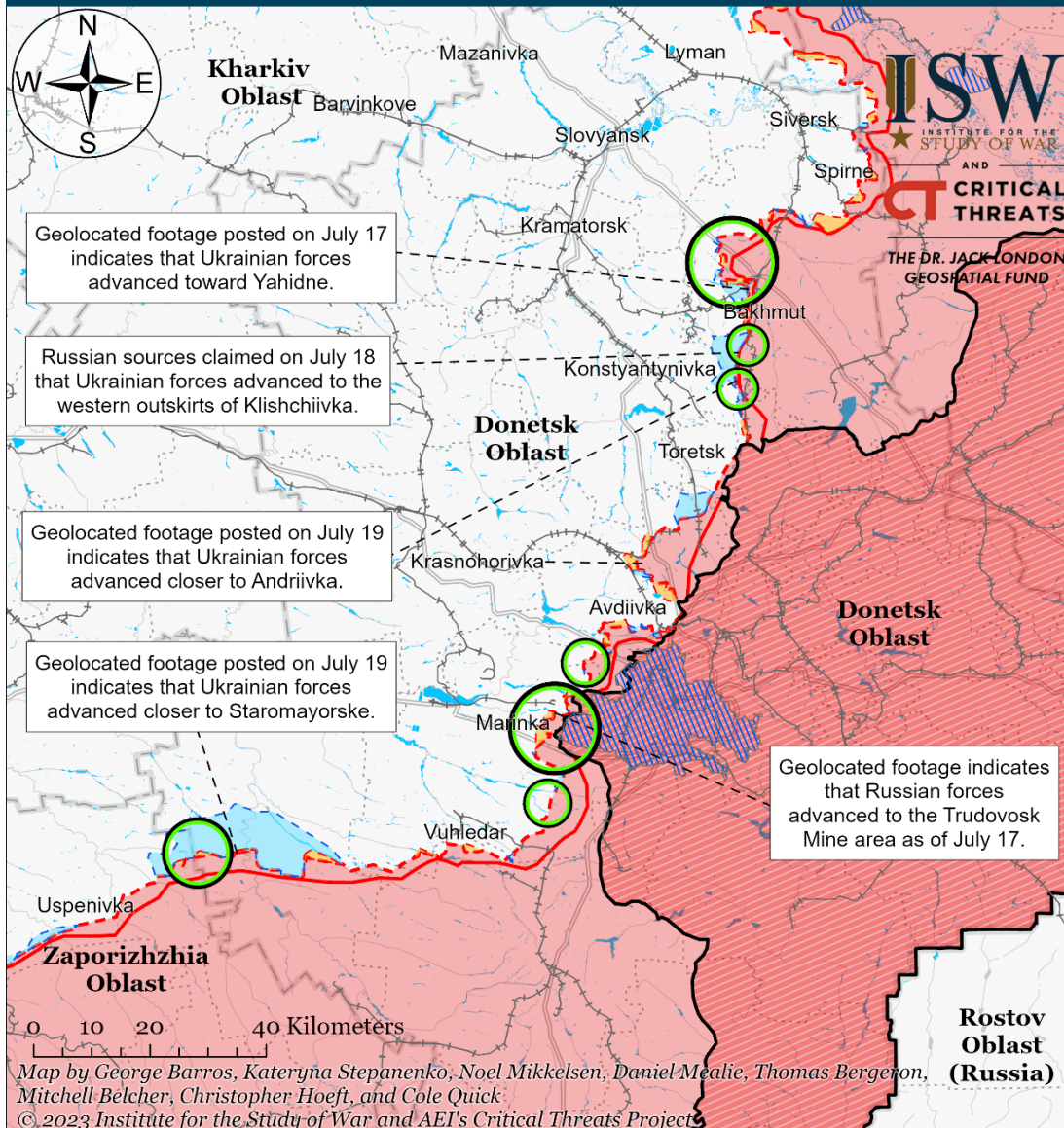
Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on Bakhmut’s northern and southern flanks and made limited gains on July 20. Geolocated footage indicates that Ukrainian forces have advanced in the forest area of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[60] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive actions north and south of Bakhmut.[61] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces near Bilohorivka (22km northeast of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka, and Vesele (20km northeast of Bakhmut).[62] Commander of the Ukrainian 3rd Separate Assault Brigade Andriy Biletskyi reported that Ukrainian forces successfully attacked elements of the Russian 72nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd Army Corps) and “Storm-Z” detachments and advanced 1,800m in the Bakhmut direction.[63] Other Russian milbloggers claimed that small Ukrainian assault groups with light armored support tried to advance near Dubovo-Vasylivka (7km northwest of Bakhmut) and that Ukrainian forces advanced towards Yahidne (immediately northwest of Bakhmut) and near the E40 (Bakhmut to Slovyansk) highway in Orikhovo-Vasylivka (12km northwest of Bakhmut).[64] A Russian milblogger claimed that heavy fighting continues near Klishchiivka where Ukrainian forces are conducting ground assaults.[65] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces hold heights near Klishchiivka, whereas another milblogger claimed that Russian forces, including Airborne (VDV) units, pushed Ukrainian forces off the heights.[66] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces tried to advance in the direction of Andriivka (11km southwest of Bakhmut) and near Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).[67]

Russian forces attacked Ukrainian forces around Bakhmut and along the Avdiivka–Donetsk City line but made no confirmed advances on July 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked Ukrainian forces near Bohdanivka (5km northwest of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka, Nevelske (14km southwest of Avdiivka), Marinka, Krasnohorivka, and Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).[68] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked Ukrainian forces near Krasnohorivka.[69]

Ukrainian forces reportedly continued limited offensive operations along the Avdiivka–Donetsk City line but did not advance on July 20. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces near Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka (23km southwest of Avdiivka), and Marinka (29km southwest of Avdiivka).[70]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

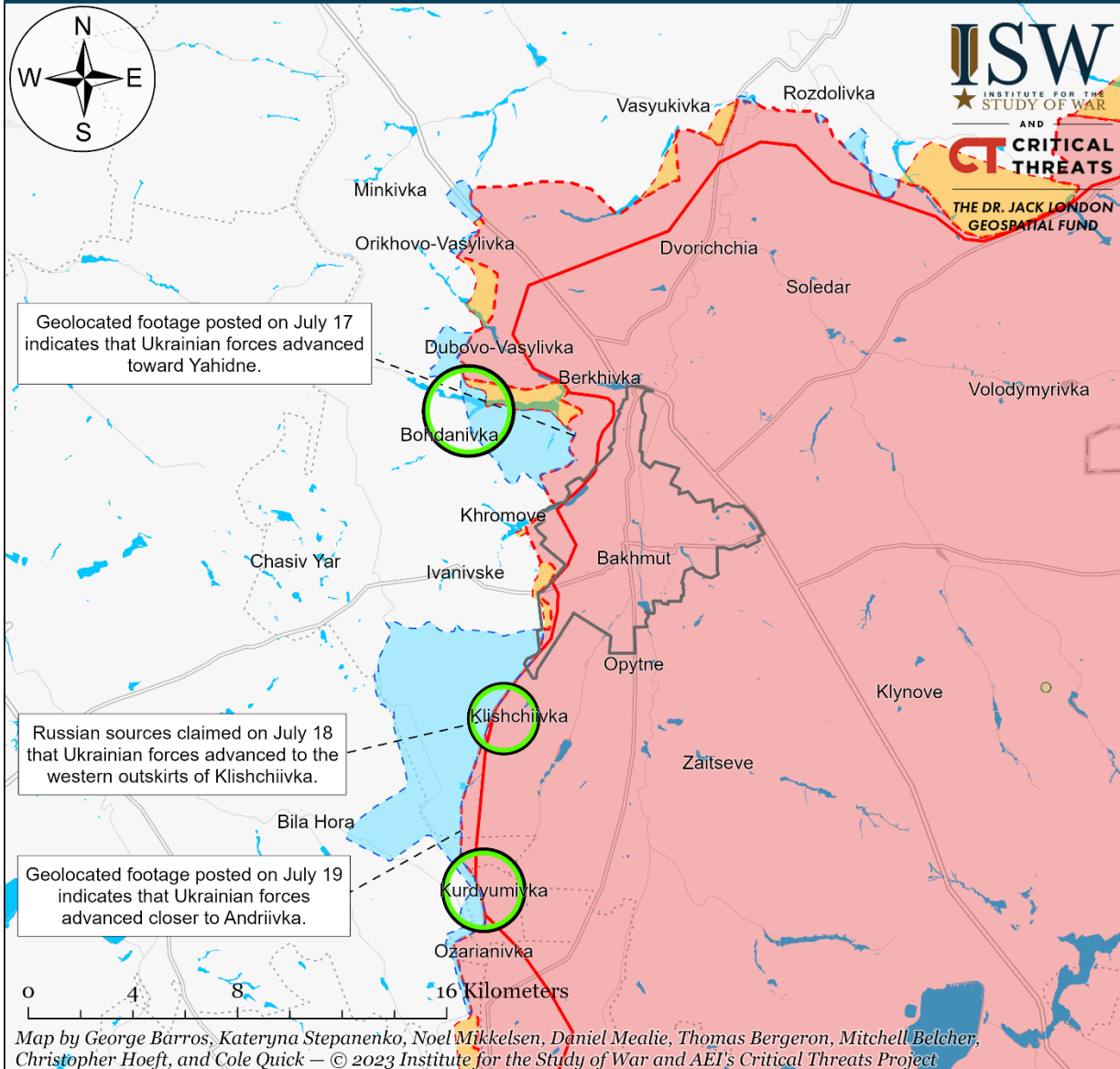


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads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

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.

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of July 20, 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
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- 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: Commander of the Ukrainian Ground Forces Colonel General Oleksandr Syrsky stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces advance approximately 0.5 kilometers to 1 kilometer daily in the Bakhmut direction. A Russian source claimed on July 20 that Ukrainian forces captured positions on the heights near Klishchiivka, but Russian forces still control the settlement. The Russian source also claimed on July 20 that Ukrainian forces captured positions near the M-03 highway near Orikhovo-Vasylivka and advanced toward Yahidne. 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 reportedly attacked Russian positions near Vuhledar in western Donetsk Oblast but did not make confirmed territorial gains on July 20. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked positions of elements of the Russian 36th Guards Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (29th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District [EMD]) and the 155th Separate Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) near Mykilske (4km southeast of Vuhledar).[71] Russian sources indicated that a company-sized Ukrainian force with tank and armored vehicle support attacked Russian positions in the area.[72] ISW has previously observed elements of the 36th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade operating in the Mykilske area, and a Ukrainian military observer noted that this brigade is the 29th Combined Arms Army's only maneuver brigade.[73] The military observer suggested that the only reserve that the Russian military maintains in southern Ukraine consists of elements of the 29th Combined Arms Army.

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations on the administrative border between western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts and made limited advances on July 20. Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on the administrative border area and made unspecified gains.[74] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked in the direction of Urozhaine (10km south of Velyka Novosilka) and advanced near Novodonetske (13km southeast of Velyka Novosilka).[75] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the Russian Eastern Group of Forces repelled two Ukrainian attacks near Staromayorske (10km south of Velyka Novosilka), and that the grouping eliminated a Ukrainian reconnaissance group west of Makarivka (7km south of Velyka Novosilka).[76]

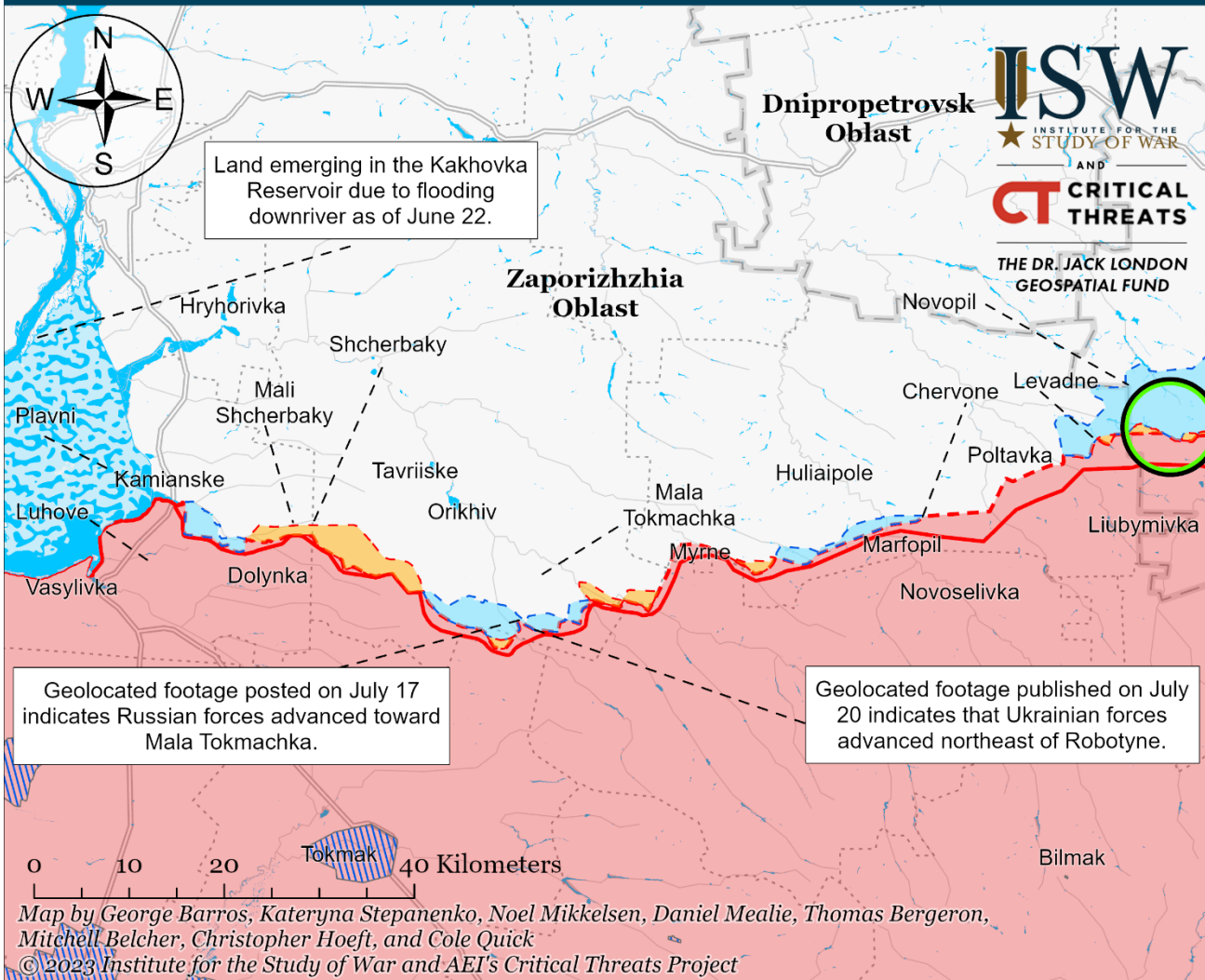
Russian forces continued to unsuccessfully counterattack Ukrainian positions on the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast administrative border on July 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully counterattacked to regain positions north of Pryyutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[77] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful counterattacks in the direction of Novodarivka (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) to regain lost positions near Rivnopil (11km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[78] Russian sources indicated that elements of the 247th Guards Air Assault (VDV) Regiment (7th Guards Mountain Air Assault Division) and the "Sokol" special forces unit of the Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) Internal Affairs Ministry are operating near Urozhaine and Staromayorske, respectively.[79]

Ukrainian forces made limited territorial gains in western Zaporizhia Oblast and continued counteroffensive operations south of Orikhiv on July 20. Geolocated footage published on July 20 shows that Ukrainian forces made marginal advances northeast of Robotyne (15km south of Orikhiv) and were clearing mines.[80] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces advanced in the directions of Mala Tokmachka-Verbove (9 and 22km southeast of Orikhiv respectively) and in the directions of Novodanylivka- Robotyne (5 and 15km south of Orikhiv respectively).[81] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces liberated new positions northeast of Robotyne and west of Novopokrovka (16km southeast of Orikhiv).[82] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces are successfully defending around Robotyne and that fighting is ongoing near Novopokrovka.[83] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces stopped two Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups near Charivne (18km east of Orikhiv) and Myrne (24km east of Orikhiv).[84] The Russian MoD also recognized the Russian 6th Motorized Company of the 1429th Motorized Rifle Regiment (58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) with unspecified state awards for defending a Russian position northeast of Robotyne.[85]

Russian officials and sources accused Ukrainian forces of launching drone strikes against occupied Crimea on July 20. A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that a Ukrainian drone damaged some administrative and civilian infrastructure in Rozdolne, along the T0107 highway in northwestern Crimea.[86] The milblogger also claimed that Russian air defense and electronic warfare systems intercepted three Ukrainian drones in the area of Hvardiiske (15km north of Simferopol). Another Russian milblogger specified that Russian forces shot down the drones near the Hvardiiske military airfield.[87] Crimean Occupation Head Sergei Aksyonov also accused Ukrainian forces of drone attacks in northwestern Crimea.[88]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of July 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

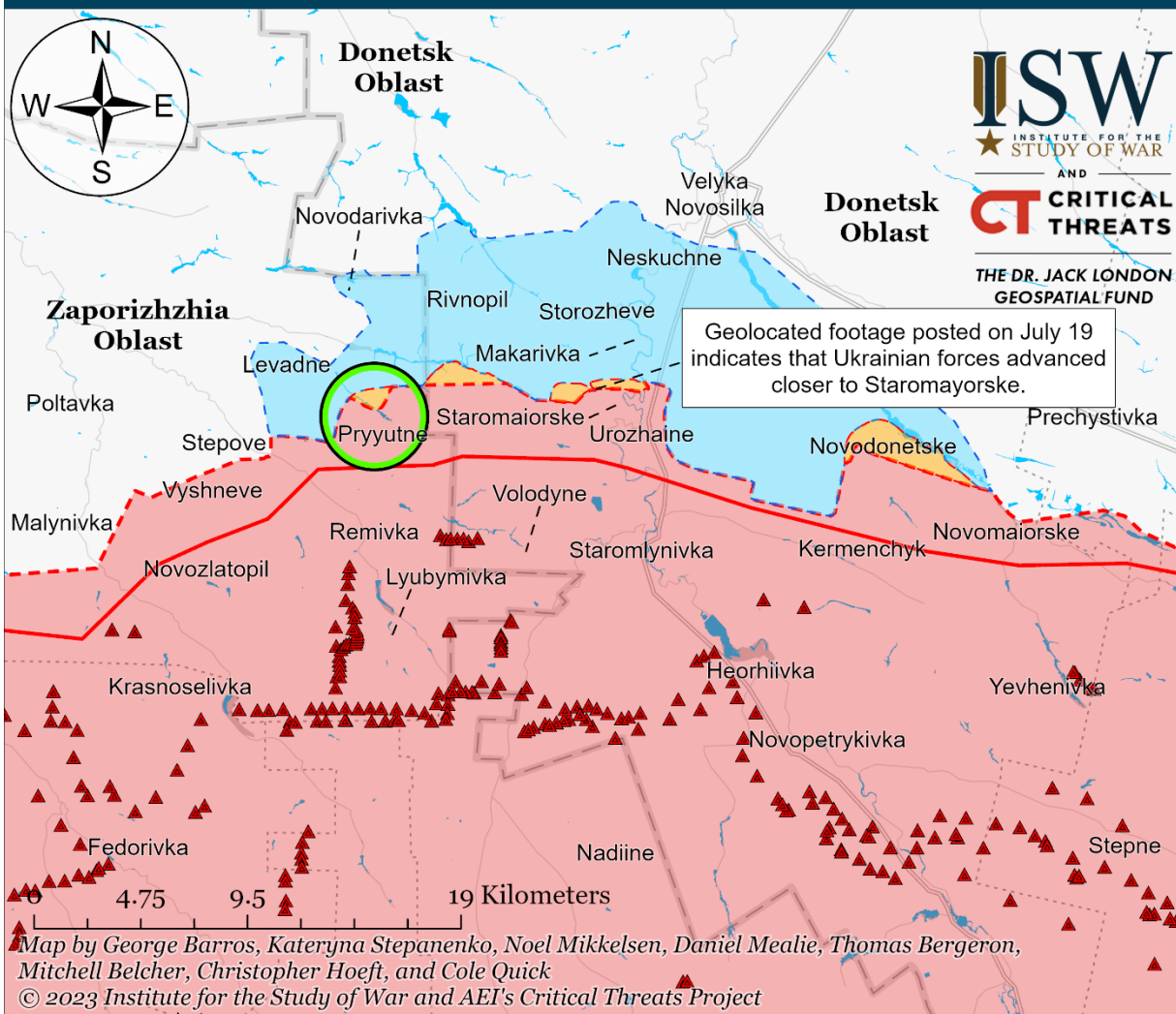


-  Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
-  Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
-  Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
-  Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
-  Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
-  Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
-  Assessed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

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

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Director of the Department of Application Planning of the Main Directorate of the Ukrainian National Guard Colonel Mykola Urshalovych stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces advance a “few hundred” meters every day. Ukrainian Tavriivsk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen stated on July 19 that Ukrainian forces advanced by more than one kilometer in the Melitopol direction. 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. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of July 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

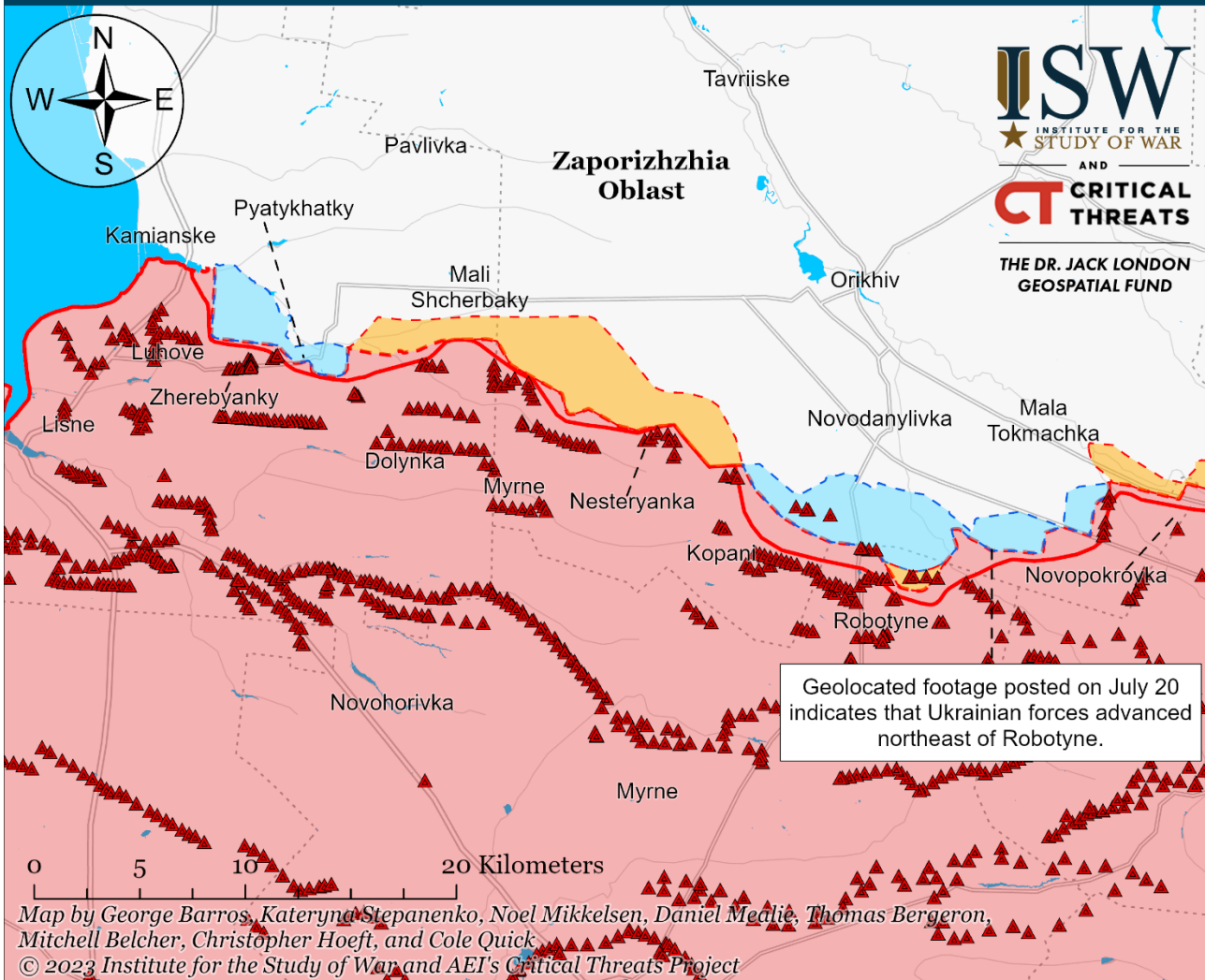


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Russian Field Fortifications
- Assessed Russian Advances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

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

Note: Ukrainian Tavriivsk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen stated on July 19 that Ukrainian forces advanced by more than one kilometer in the Melitopol direction. 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 Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of July 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Geolocated footage posted on July 20 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced northeast of Robotyne.

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- 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: Ukrainian Deputy Director of the Department of Application Planning of the Main Directorate of the Ukrainian National Guard Colonel Mykola Urshalovych stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces advance a “few hundred” meters every day. Ukrainian Tavriivsk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen stated on July 19 that Ukrainian forces advanced by more than one kilometer in the Melitopol direction. 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. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

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

The Russian State Duma approved amendments increasing penalties for draft dodging and for officials and legal entities that fail to assist Russian force generation efforts on July 20.[89] The amendments will increase fines for non-compliance with military summonses from 3,000 rubles (\$33) to up to 50,000 rubles (\$553) and the fine for evading military medical examinations from 3,000 rubles to 25,000 rubles (\$277).[90] The amendments increase fines for the appropriate civilians, officials, and businesses who fail to conduct military transport mobilization duties, notify or provide opportunities for summoned individuals to come to military registration and recruitment office, or provide lists of those eligible for summonses.[91] The amendments will go into effect in October, prompting Russian sources to speculate that the Kremlin intends to launch a second mobilization wave in the fall of 2023.[92] Russia would normally begin its fall 2023 conscription cycle on October 1 and may be setting conditions to ensure that there are no disruptions to the conscription effort. Russian officials could delay the fall conscription cycle as they did in the fall of 2022 following the start of partial mobilization, however.[93] A Russian hybrid force-generation campaign that attempts to simultaneously conduct the regular semi-annual conscription cycle in addition to a reserve mobilization and/or crypto-mobilization through a call-up of reservists will likely stress the Russian military's training capacity without producing significant numbers of trained reservists in a timely fashion.

The State Duma adopted a law on July 20 that will allow Russian security forces, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and some private security companies to stop the operation of drones in Russia. The new law will allow the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia), the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the Federal Penitentiary Service, and the Ministry of Emergency Situations to stop the operation of all air, surface, and underwater drones.[94] The law will also allow employees of private security organizations who have undergone professional anti-terrorism training to stop the operation of drones as well.[95]

The State Duma also adopted an amendment on July 20 focused on creating more stringent operational security measures for the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia). The amendment to the law "On the National Guards Troops of the Russian Federation" prohibits Rosgvardia personnel from posting photos, videos, and other information about themselves, other Rosgvardia personnel, and about Rosgvardia activities.[96] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that law prohibits Rosgvardia from publishing online materials that would reveal their units' locations and criticized the State Duma for waiting so long to address this issue.[97]

The Kremlin-sponsored Working Group on the Special Military Operation reportedly submitted a bill to the State Duma to hold Russian military officials liable for violating measures set by state defense orders. Secretary of the United Russia Party General Council Andrey Turchak, who chairs the working group, stated on July 20 that the bill aims to hold military representatives equally responsible for violating terms of state contracts as other participants in a state defense order.[98] Turchak stated that these military representatives oversee important quality control functions for Russian weapons, ammunition, and equipment and argued that military representatives should bear equal responsibility for failing to meet deadlines.[99] The bill would pressure quality control elements of the Russian military's logistics apparatus to either loosen standards and allow more faulty equipment to reach the front in Ukraine or intensify reviews of military products and limit supplies to the front. Turchak's comments about deadlines suggest that the bill would pressure Russian military officials to engage in the former practice.

The Russian Navy will hold joint naval exercises with the Chinese Navy in the Sea of Japan from July 20 to 23, likely in an effort to portray Russia as an equal defense partner with China and a legitimate Pacific naval power. The Russian Pacific Fleet will send two large anti-submarine ships, two corvettes, and support vessels to conduct antisubmarine and combat exercises alongside two Chinese destroyers, two patrol ships, and supply ships.[100] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that the exercises aim to strengthen naval cooperation between Russian and China and maintain stability in the Asia-Pacific region.[101]

## **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)**

Russian authorities continue persecution of non-Russian Orthodox churches in occupied Ukraine. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities commandeered and are establishing a military facility at a local Evangelical Christian Baptist Church community facility in an unspecified city in southern Ukraine.[102] The Ukrainian Resistance Center noted that this church community previously helped displaced civilians from Mariupol (occupied Donetsk Oblast) during the war.[103] ISW has reported extensively on Russian kidnappings, asset seizures, and legislative measures in preventing the practice of Ukrainian religions in occupied territories.[104]

Russian federal subjects continue to sponsor the relocation of Ukrainian children from occupied Ukraine to Russia. The Kherson Oblast occupation administration amplified a report that the Kaliningrad Oblast government sponsored 160 children from occupied Kherson Oblast to go on a “vacation” in occupied Crimea.[105] The report announced that authorities will send several dozen additional children to a children’s camp in an unspecified location in the coming days, and over one thousand Kherson Oblast children to various Russian facilities during the summer.[106]

Ukrainian sources continue to report on Russian and occupation administration efforts to repopulate occupied territories with Russian citizens. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Mayar stated on July 19 that occupation authorities in Starobilsk, Luhansk Oblast are mass evicting Ukrainian civilians without Russian passports from their houses and apartments for claimed nonpayment of rent and are allocating that housing for Russian civilians.[107] Malyar also stated that the Kherson Oblast occupation administration banned Ukrainian civilians without Russian passports from returning to settlements they fled during flooding from the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP) dam destruction, instead forcing the civilians to move to Russia or occupied Crimea.[108]

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian occupation authorities continue to forcibly issue passports to local populations in occupied Kherson Oblast. The Kherson Oblast Occupation Ministry of Internal Affairs claimed that it has issued over 1.8 million Russian passports since May 2022, including 2,000 passports at a single passportization drive in Hornostaivka.[109] These numbers are highly suspect, however, given that the total prewar population of Kherson Oblast is just over one million.[110] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian occupation police raided civilian homes near Hornostaivka and forced the residents to apply for Russian passports under threat of deportation.[111] Malyar reported that Russian occupation officials are attempting to increase the number of Russian passport holders ahead of the September 2023 regional elections.[112]

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

See topline text.

**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.**

**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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