

## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 23, 2023

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July 23, 2023, 7:15pm 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 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 12:30pm ET on July 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

**Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed his continuing concern over the potential threats that the Wagner Group and Yevgeny Prigozhin may pose to him through symbolism and posturing during a meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in St. Petersburg, Russia.** Putin made several significant symbolic gestures during his July 23 meeting with Lukashenko, suggesting that Putin sought to project power and confidence in his own supremacy over the Prigozhin-aligned St. Petersburg-based faction. Putin took Lukashenko to visit Kronstadt in St. Petersburg – the historically significant island fortress where Russian soldiers and sailors conducted a famous unsuccessful anti-Bolshevik insurrection in early 1921 that the Soviet government ultimately suppressed.[1] Putin and Lukashenko toured Kronstadt with St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's younger daughter Ksenia Shoigu.[2] Both Beglov and Shoigu are personal enemies of Prigozhin, and Putin's public meeting with Beglov, Shoigu's daughter, and Lukashenko on the historic grounds of the failed Kronstadt rebellion was almost certainly intended to signal Putin's and his loyalist cadre's defeat of Prigozhin's armed rebellion and Prigozhin's St. Petersburg-based supporters.[3] Putin also made an unusual effort to take photographs with crowds of local Russian citizens, including children, while at Kronstadt, likely to present himself as a popular and beloved leader among the Russian people.[4] These symbolic gestures indicate that Putin is concerned about his perceived popularity, the security of his regime, and the array of factions competing for power within the high echelons of Russian governance.

**Lukashenko told Putin that the Wagner Group in Belarus will remain in central Belarus likely subtly reminding Putin of the threat the Wagner military organization still poses to him and underlining Lukashenko's control over that power.** [5] Lukashenko's statements were likely meant to make Putin reflect on the uncomfortable (for Putin) fact that Wagner's new garrison in Belarus puts its forces half as far from Moscow as Wagner's previous base in southern Russia. The Wagner Group's previous base in Krasnodar Krai was about 1,370 km from Moscow, whereas its new base in Belarus is about 720 km along an excellent military highway.

**Putin and Lukashenko also amplified information operations targeting the West.** The leaders amplified their false claims that Ukraine's counteroffensive has failed.[6] Senior Western and Ukrainian leaders--and ISW--continue to assess that it is too early to evaluate Ukraine's counteroffensive since Ukraine still has significant uncommitted prepared forces and retains the

ability to launch decisive operations at times and places of its choosing.[7] Lukashenko and Putin also reiterated an information operation that the Wagner Group poses a threat to Poland.[8] There is no indication that Wagner fighters in Belarus have the heavy weaponry necessary to mount a serious offensive against Ukraine or Poland without significant rearmament, as it was a condition of the Putin-Lukashenko-Prigozhin deal ending the armed rebellion that Wagner surrender such weapons to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). Maxar imagery of the main Wagner base in Tsel, Asipovichy, collected at an oblique angle on July 23 indicates that the vehicles currently parked in and around the vehicle storage area are primarily hundreds of cars, small trucks, and approximately 35 semi-trailers.[9] Wagner forces in Belarus pose no military threat to Poland or Ukraine, for that matter, until and unless they are re-equipped with mechanized equipment. They pose no meaningful threat to NATO even then.



Caption: Wagner Group Field camp in Tsel, Asipovichy, Belarus. Collected on July 23, 2023.

Credit: Satellite image ©2023 Maxar Technologies.



Caption: Wagner Group Field camp in Tsel, Asipovichy, Belarus. Collected on July 23, 2023.

Credit: Satellite image ©2023 Maxar Technologies.

**US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told CNN on July 23 that Ukrainian forces have liberated approximately 50 percent of the territory that Russian forces captured since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022.**<sup>[10]</sup> This figure is largely consistent with ISW’s current assessment of control of terrain. Analysts can employ several methods to calculate control of terrain with varying results depending on the cartographical projection used and other factors. An estimate using ISW’s control of terrain data and the Mercator projection indicates that Ukrainian forces liberated about 53 percent of the land that Russian forces captured since February 2022. Estimates made using different data sources, measurement methods, or projections will generate different numbers. Factors, such as higher confidence about unconfirmed Russian claimed territorial gains, can impact such estimations as well. ISW appreciates and closely studies government officials’ statements about control of terrain geometry to cross-reference, confirm, and where necessary correct assessments.

**Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front line and advanced on July 23.** Geolocated footage published on July 22 shows that Ukrainian forces made some advances in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka), and some Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces also advanced near Pryyutne (14km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).<sup>[11]</sup> Geolocated footage published on July 22 also shows that Ukrainian forces made marginal advances in western Zaporizhia Oblast near Kamianske, and Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted additional ground attacks south of Orikhiv near Robotyne (12km south).<sup>[12]</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported continued Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in both areas of the front.<sup>[13]</sup> Some Russian and Ukrainian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued attacking on Bakhmut’s northern and southern flanks and reportedly made advances near Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut).<sup>[14]</sup>

**Russian forces conducted another series of missile strikes against port infrastructure and the city center in Odesa City overnight on July 22 to 23, severely damaging civilian areas.** The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched 19 missiles, including five Onyx, five Iskander-K, four Kalibr, two Kh-22, and two Iskander-M missiles, and that Ukrainian forces shot down four Kalibr and five Iskander-K missiles.[15] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian strikes hit the Odesa Transfiguration Cathedral, and Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk stated that the city center strikes injured 19 civilians.[16] Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov stated that Russian strikes against Odesa City and Oblast intend to disrupt Ukraine's access to the Black Sea and intimidate international partners working to restore the Black Sea Grain Initiative deal.[17] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Vadym Skibitskyi warned that Russian forces are also evaluating Ukrainian energy infrastructure to identify critical infrastructure objects, presumably to target in future strikes.[18]

**Further speculation about former Russian officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin's arrest and the public posturing of Girkin's affiliates suggests that a limited section of the pro-war community may have been contemplating political action in opposition to the Kremlin.** Angry Patriots Club member and leader of the "Civil Solidarity" movement Georgy Fedorov claimed on July 22 that the Club developed a strategy and specific action plan for a campaign to defend Girkin and will be reaching out to grassroots supporters for help.[19] Fedorov also announced that the Angry Patriots Club will release a political statement sometime next week.[20] A Russian insider source claimed that Girkin planned to start formal legal procedures to create a political party in the spring of 2024.[21] The insider source claimed that Girkin had discussed with Angry Patriots members the possibility of holding a founding party congress in fall 2023 and plans to form regional branches for the Angry Patriots Club.[22] The Angry Patriots Club has opened a St Petersburg regional chapter and published a 17-point political resolution on June 26 that signaled its interest in participating in Russian politics.[23] The Angry Patriots Club's political resolution explicitly states that it will use legal means to compel Russian leadership to "end the policy of appeasement and behind-the-scenes agreement with the West" and declares its "intention to claim political power." [24] The Angry Patriots Club's resolution indicates that this section of the pro-war community may have attempted to set conditions for future political actions opposing figures in the Kremlin whom the Angry Patriots Club believes seek to end the war. Girkin previously claimed that there is a faction within the Kremlin arguing in favor of freezing the front line in Ukraine and negotiating with the West, and the Angry Patriots appeared to be preparing to explicitly challenge this faction through a political project.[25] Factions within the Kremlin are likely aiming to maneuver for more influence against the backdrop of Russia's 2024 presidential elections, and Girkin's alleged plans to explicitly cast himself and his affiliates as political actors ahead of the elections likely threatened some of these factions.

**Angry Patriots members likely view Girkin's arrest as an existential threat to the segment of the ultranationalist community he represents and will likely intensify their campaign to cast Girkin as an opposition figure.** Angry Patriots Club member Yevgeny Mikhailov continued to criticize the Kremlin, calling Girkin's arrest a "gross mistake" and highlighting the double standards that Russian authorities use for prominent Russian officials who have criticized Russian forces' conduct in the war in Ukraine.[26] Mikhailov noted the hypocrisy of arresting a "Russian patriot" who he claimed "led the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics to victory in 2014" while allowing Russian State Duma Deputy Sergei Morozov to go unpunished for saying that officers who sent mobilized personnel into combat without preparation "should be shot themselves." [27] Another Angry Patriots member, Vladimir Grubnik, expressed his loyalty to Girkin claiming that he joined at Girkin's invitation and would leave the organization if Girkin chose to

leave.[28] Grubnik claimed that 95 percent of the people joined the Angry Patriots Club because of Girkin's personality and reputation.[29] The continued support for Girkin despite his arrest suggests that Girkin established a strong personal loyalty among his affiliates reminiscent of other ultranationalist figures, particularly Prigozhin's support among Wagner personnel and affiliated milbloggers.[30]

**The Kremlin may be attempting to censor an isolated segment of the Russian ultranationalist community that is consistently vocally hostile to the Kremlin.** Russian news outlet *Kommersant* reported on July 21 that Russian law enforcement is investigating Angry Patriots Club Chair Pavel Gubarev for extremism because of his Telegram posts.[31] Milbloggers outside of Girkin's relatively isolated Angry Patriots Club have notably not commented on Girkin's arrest, suggesting a fragmentation in the Russian ultranationalist community along factional affiliations and ideological differences on Russia's approach to the war in Ukraine. Continued Russian law enforcement censorship of Angry Patriots members likely indicates that the Kremlin does not intend to censor the wider ultranationalist community at this time and is likely isolating this round of censorship primarily to the Angry Patriots movement and their affiliates.

**The head of one of the largest suppliers of surveillance equipment to Russian special services died on July 22.** Russian law enforcement found "IKS Holding" Head Anton Cherepennikov dead in his office on July 22 and later claimed that Cherepennikov suffocated during a xenon gas therapy session.[32] IKS Holding owns the developer of the YADRO data storage system, which Russian authorities reportedly use in efforts to monitor Russian internet users, and the Citadel Group, which produces operational-search measures that Russian special services use to listen to phone calls and monitor internet activities.[33]

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed his continuing concern over the potential threats that the Wagner Group and Yevgeny Prigozhin may pose to him through symbolism and posturing during a meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in St. Petersburg, Russia.**
- **Lukashenko told Putin that the Wagner Group in Belarus will remain in central Belarus likely subtly reminding Putin of the threat the Wagner military organization still poses to him and underlining Lukashenko's control over that power.**
- **Putin and Lukashenko also amplified information operations targeting the West.**
- **US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told CNN on July 23 that Ukrainian forces have liberated approximately 50 percent of the territory that Russian forces captured since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front line and advanced on July 23.**
- **Russian forces conducted another series of missile strikes against port infrastructure and the city center in Odesa City overnight on July 22 to 23, severely damaging civilian areas.**
- **Further speculation about former Russian officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin's arrest and the public posturing of Girkin's affiliates suggests that a limited section of the pro-war community may have been contemplating political action in opposition to the Kremlin.**

- **Angry Patriots members likely view Girkin’s arrest as an existential threat to the segment of the ultranationalist community he represents and will likely intensify their campaign to cast Girkin as an opposition figure.**
- **The Kremlin may be attempting to censor an isolated segment of the Russian ultranationalist community that is consistently vocally hostile to the Kremlin.**
- **The head of one of the largest suppliers of surveillance equipment to Russian special services died on July 22.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line and reportedly made tactically significant gains.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line and in the Bakhmut area, and reportedly made gains near Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut and Avdiivka-Donetsk City areas but did not advance.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia oblasts border area and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia oblasts border area.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to recruit prisoners to fight in Ukraine.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are bringing foreign citizens to occupied Ukraine to artificially alter demographics.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 23, 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.

***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 Svatove-Kremlinna line on July 23 and reportedly made tactically significant gains southwest of Svatove. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Nadiya, Luhansk Oblast (15km west of Svatove) and Torske (16km west of Kremlinna), and Hryhorivka (11km south of Kremlinna) in Donetsk Oblast.[34] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful assaults in the Serebryanske forest area south of Kremlinna and near Nevske (18km northwest of Kremlinna) and Makiivka (23km northwest of Kremlinna).[35] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces crossed the Zherebets River west of Karmazynivka (12km southwest of Svatove) and made further advances on the west (right) bank of the river towards Novoyehorivka (15km southwest of Svatove).[36] One milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced up to four kilometers in depth west of Karmazynivka, although ISW has not seen visual confirmation of any recent Russian advances in the area.[37] Another milblogger claimed that elements of the 21st Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) were responsible for the recent Russian advances and that elements of the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) and 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) are also participating in the offensive operations in the area.[38]

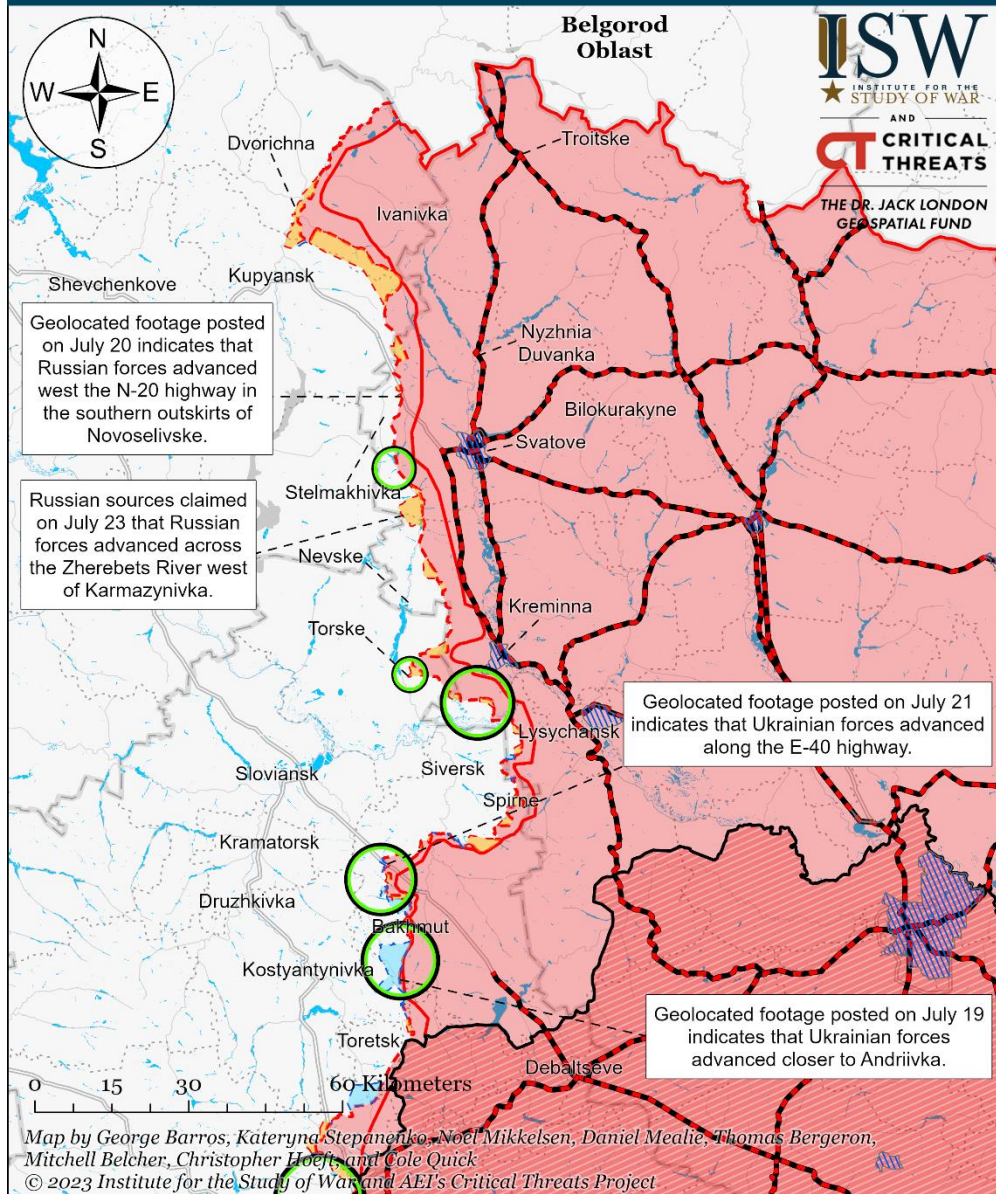
Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted ground attacks along the Svatove-Kremlinna line but did not make any gains on July 23. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian elements of the Central Grouping of Forces repelled six Ukrainian assaults near Novovodyane (16km southwest of Svatove) and Karmazynivka, four Ukrainian assaults in the Kremlinna area, and Ukrainian assaults south of Kremlinna near Bilohorivka, Donetsk Oblast (30km south of Kremlinna).[39] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces also conducted unsuccessful offensives near the Serebryanske forest area, Nevske, Torske, and Dibrova (5km southwest of Kremlinna).[40]

Russian sources may be exaggerating Russian gains and Ukrainian offensive activity along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kremlinna line to portray ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive operations as a



failure. ISW has observed recent Russian claims of Russian advances northeast of Kupyansk, southwest of Svatove, and west of Kreminna, although corroborating visual confirmation has not accompanied these claims.[41] Russian sources previously amplified older footage on July 8 to claim that Russian forces advanced near Torske, but ISW has not observed any current visual confirmation of these claims.[42] The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) reported on July 23 that Russian forces are intentionally trying to portray marginal gains in Luhansk and Kharkiv oblasts as significant tactical advances.[43] The Russian MoD and a few select milbloggers have claimed widespread Ukrainian counteroffensive activity along the Kreminna-Svatove line in recent weeks. A notable Ukrainian counteroffensive effort in Luhansk Oblast would likely generate substantial discussion amongst Russian milbloggers, however, which ISW has not observed.[44] Significant Russian gains in this region would also generate geolocated footage and other confirmation, which ISW has also not observed.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: A Russian source claimed on July 21 that Russian forces made marginal advances in the Serebryanske forest area. 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.

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

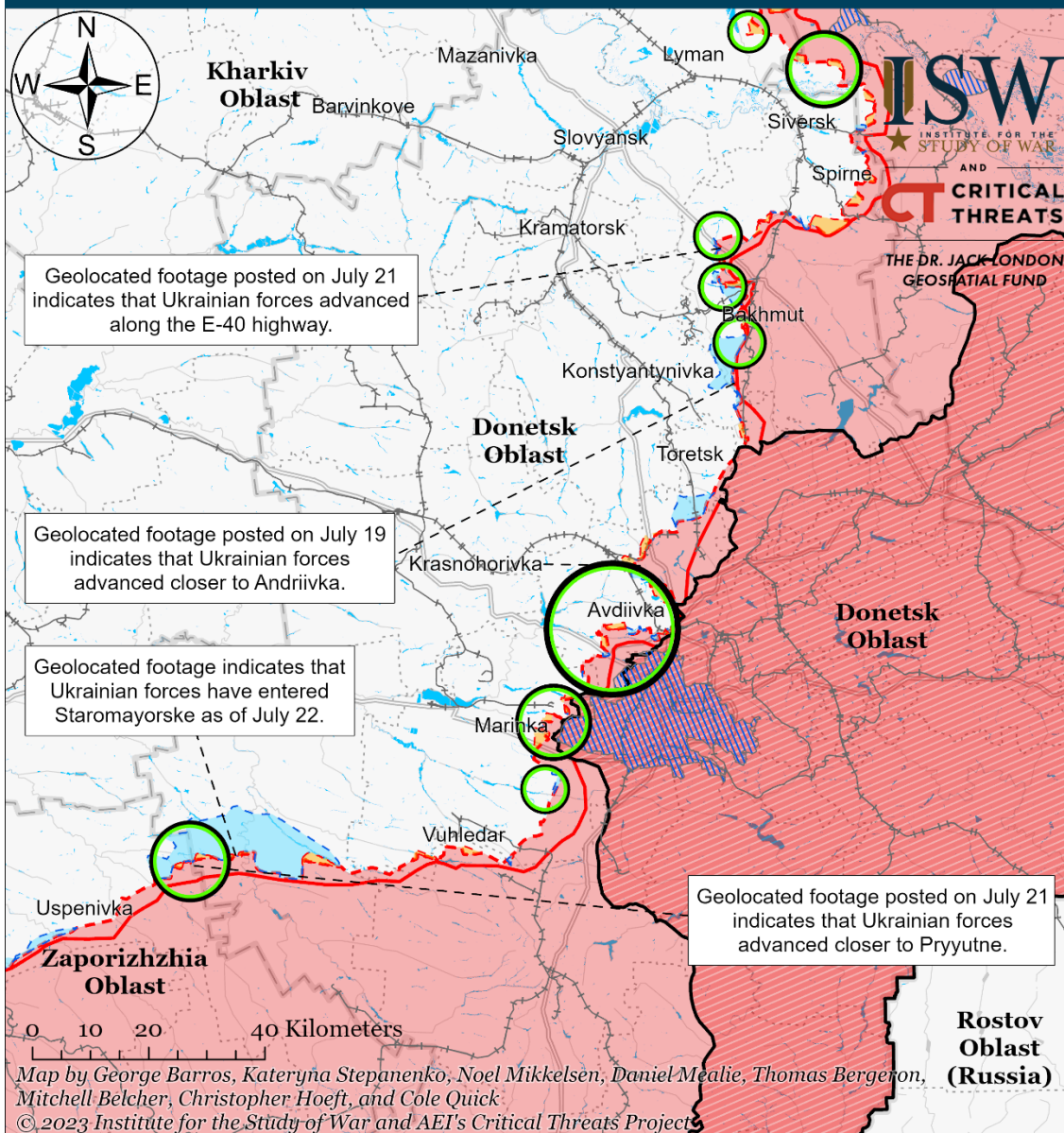
Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Bakhmut area and reportedly made gains near Bakhmut City on July 23. A Ukrainian source reported that Ukrainian forces advanced northwest of Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut), and a Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces to the city limits of the settlement.[45] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian elements of the Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and Mayorske (20km south of Bakhmut).[46] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are conducting ongoing offensive actions near Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).[47]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut area on July 23 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut), Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut), and Klishchiivka.[48] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian counterattack near Hryhorivka (9km northwest of Bakhmut) and that Russian forces conducted assaults near Kurdyumivka.[49]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued limited ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front without advancing on July 23. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian elements of the Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Vodyane (8km southwest of Avdiivka) and Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka).[50]

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front on July 23 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Avdiivka, Nevelske (13km southwest of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka (22km southwest of Avdiivka), Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka), and Novomykhailivka (36km southwest of Avdiivka).[51] A Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces made unspecified gains north of Novomykhailivka and conducted an unsuccessful assault near Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka).[52]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

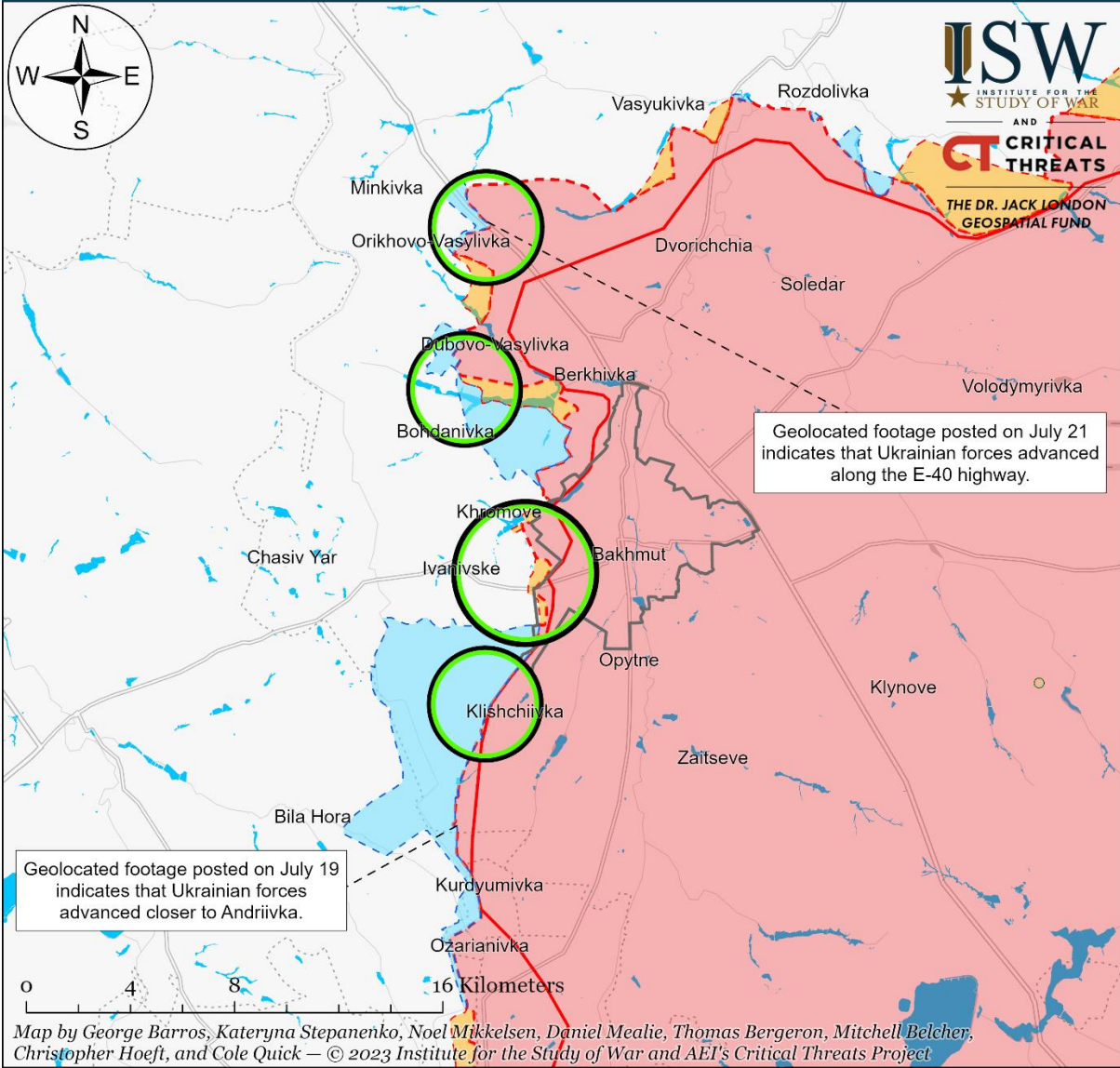


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Ukrainian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

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

Note: Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated on July 21 that Ukrainian forces are making measured and stable progress, capturing hundreds of meters daily in the Bakhmut direction.

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of July 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Christopher Hoefl, 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 Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated on July 21 that Ukrainian forces are making measured and stable progress, capturing hundreds of meters daily in the Bakhmut direction. Commander of the Ukrainian Ground Forces Colonel General Okeksandr Syrsky stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces advances 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 Klishchivka, 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.

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

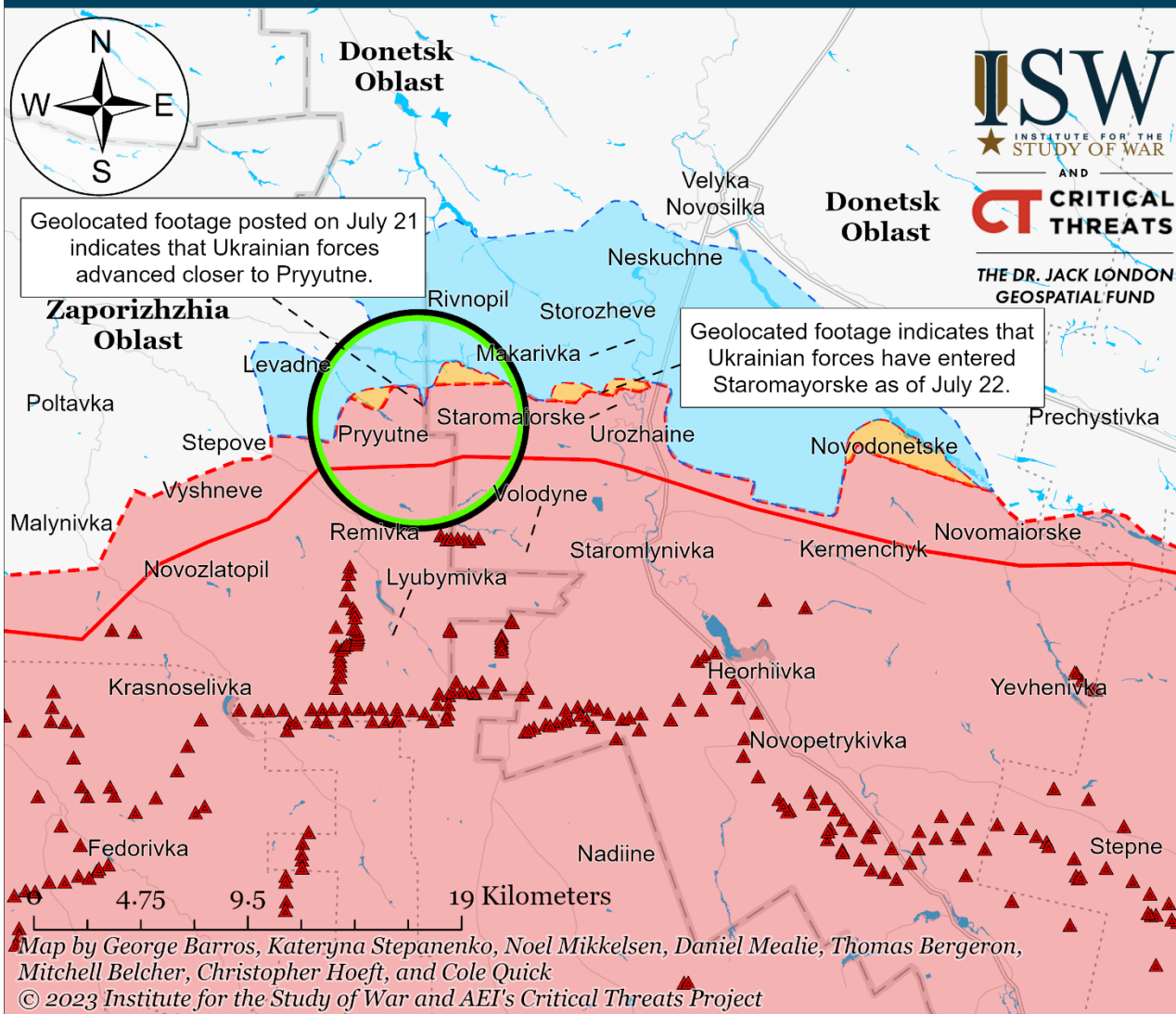
Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations along the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area and advanced as of July 23. Geolocated footage published on July 22 shows that Ukrainian forces have entered northern Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka), though the extent of current Ukrainian positions in or near the settlement is unclear.[53] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced north of Staromayorske and on the northern outskirts of Pryyutne (14km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[54] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces repelled small Ukrainian assault groups near Staromayorske and Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[55]

Russian forces continued limited offensive operations along the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area and did not advance on July 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attempts to retake lost positions near Pryyutne and south of Novodarivka (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[56] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted a failed counterattack towards Blahodatne (4km south of Velyka Novosilka) from the south.[57]

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced on July 23. Geolocated footage shows that Ukrainian forces made marginal advances south of Kamianske (30km southwest of Orikhiv) as of July 22.[58] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valery Shershen reported that Ukrainian forces advanced over two kilometers into Russian defensive positions and across the front line in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction between July 21 and 22.[59] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled two Ukrainian ground attacks near Robotyne (12km south of Orikhiv).[60] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted waves of mechanized attacks towards Robotyne overnight from July 22 to 23 and on July 23 but that Russian forces repelled all the attacks.[61]

Ukrainian and Russian forces continue to skirmish in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast and on the Dnipro River delta islands. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces still maintain a presence in east bank Kherson Oblast near Oleshky and that Ukrainian special forces are probing Russian defenses near Hola Prystan (10km south of Kherson City) and Krynky (31km northeast of Kherson City).[62] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk reported that Russian Airborne (VDV) units and other special units are deployed along the Dnipro River and attempt sabotage activities along the river and near the delta islands.[63] Humenyuk stated that the Russian military command transfers degraded units from various parts of the front to Kherson Oblast to recover and that Russian forces recently established training grounds on Dzharylhach Island (in the Black Sea 70km southeast of Kherson City) for this effort.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of July 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

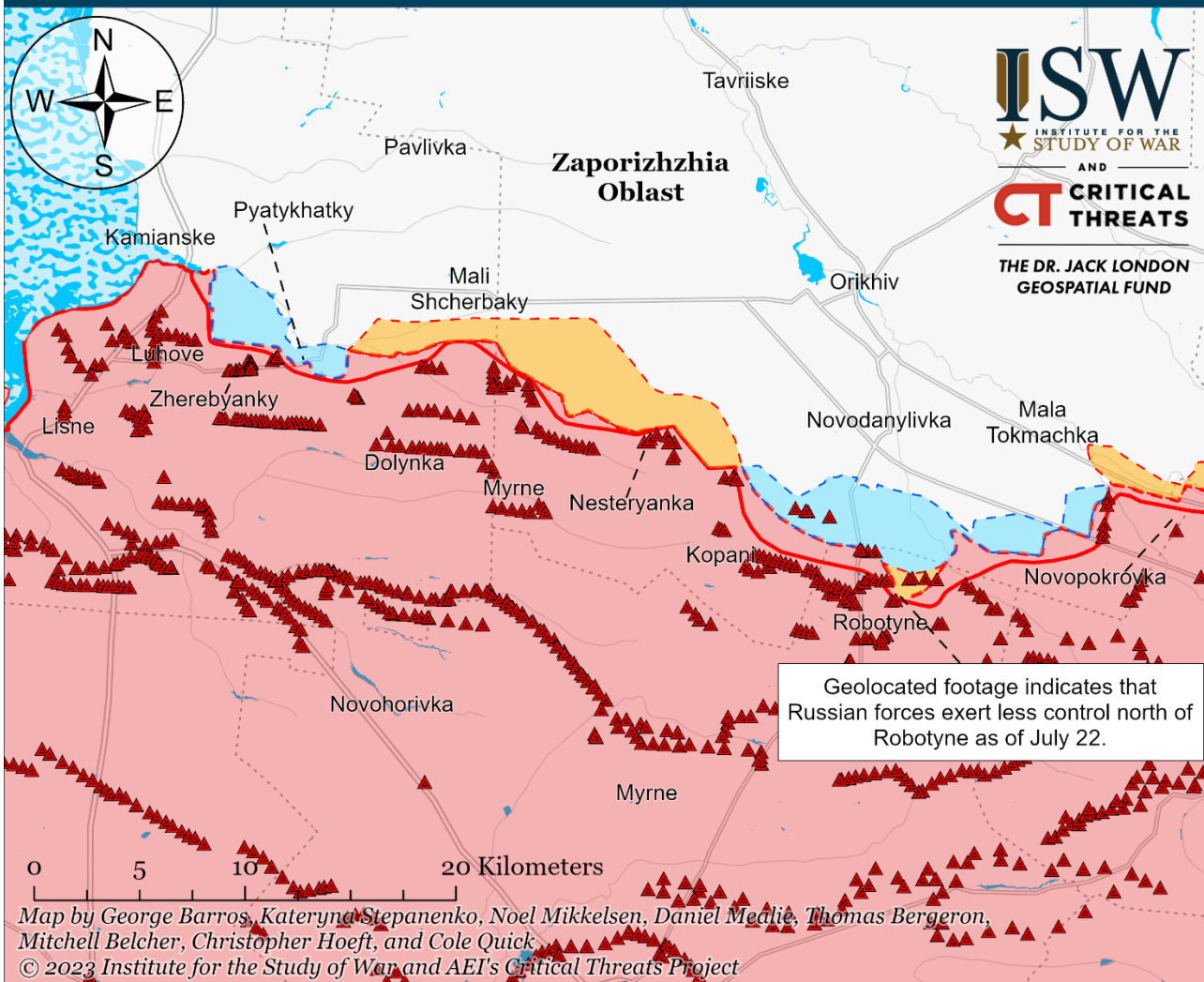


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- ▲ Russian Field Fortifications
- Assessed Russian Advances 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 22 that Ukrainian forces advanced by more than two kilometers in the Melitopol direction.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of July 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



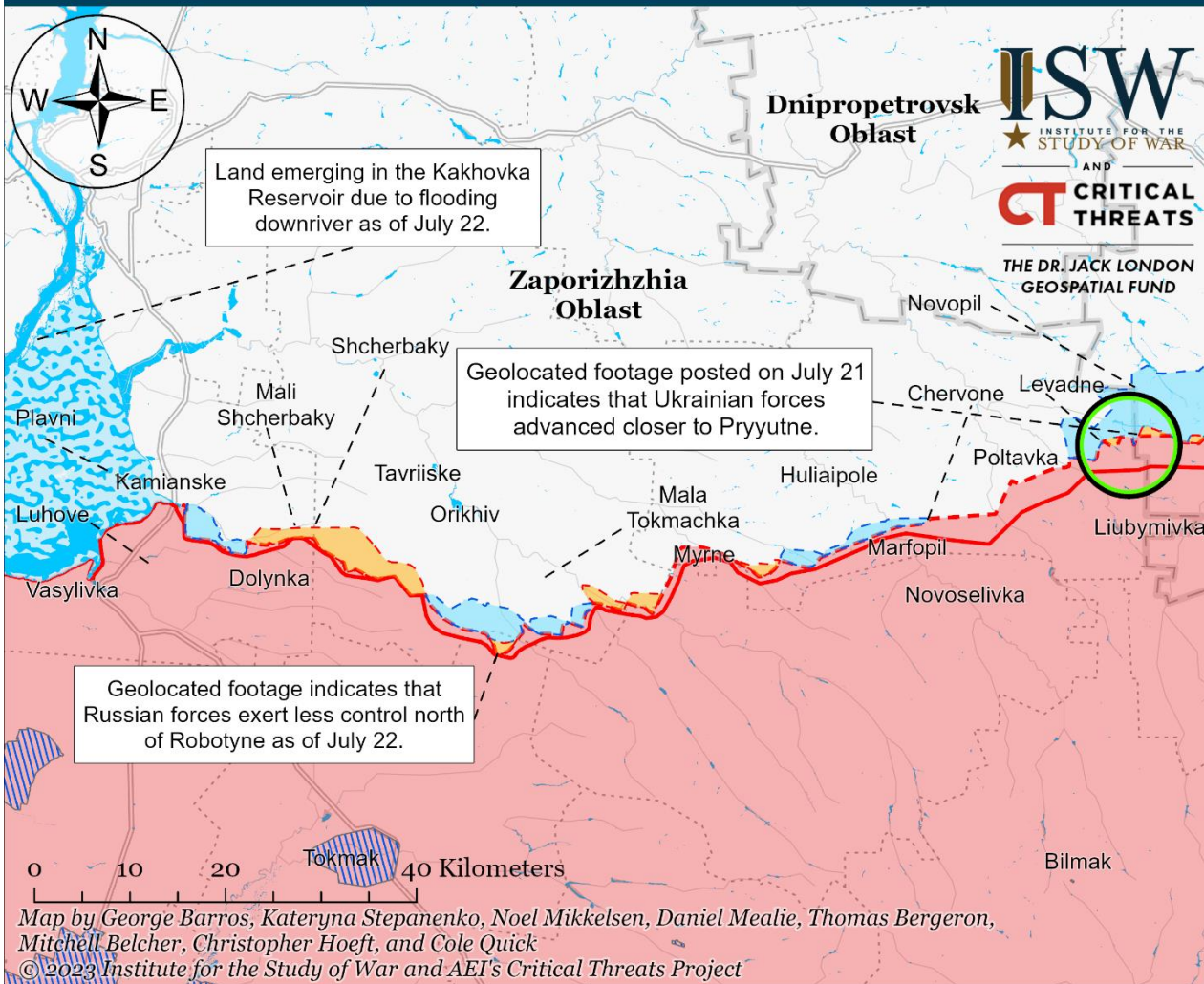
- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours                 | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory  | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare     |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory | Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir |
| Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*                     | Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives              | 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 Tavriivsk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen stated on July 22 that Ukrainian forces advanced by more than two kilometers in the Melitopol direction. 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.



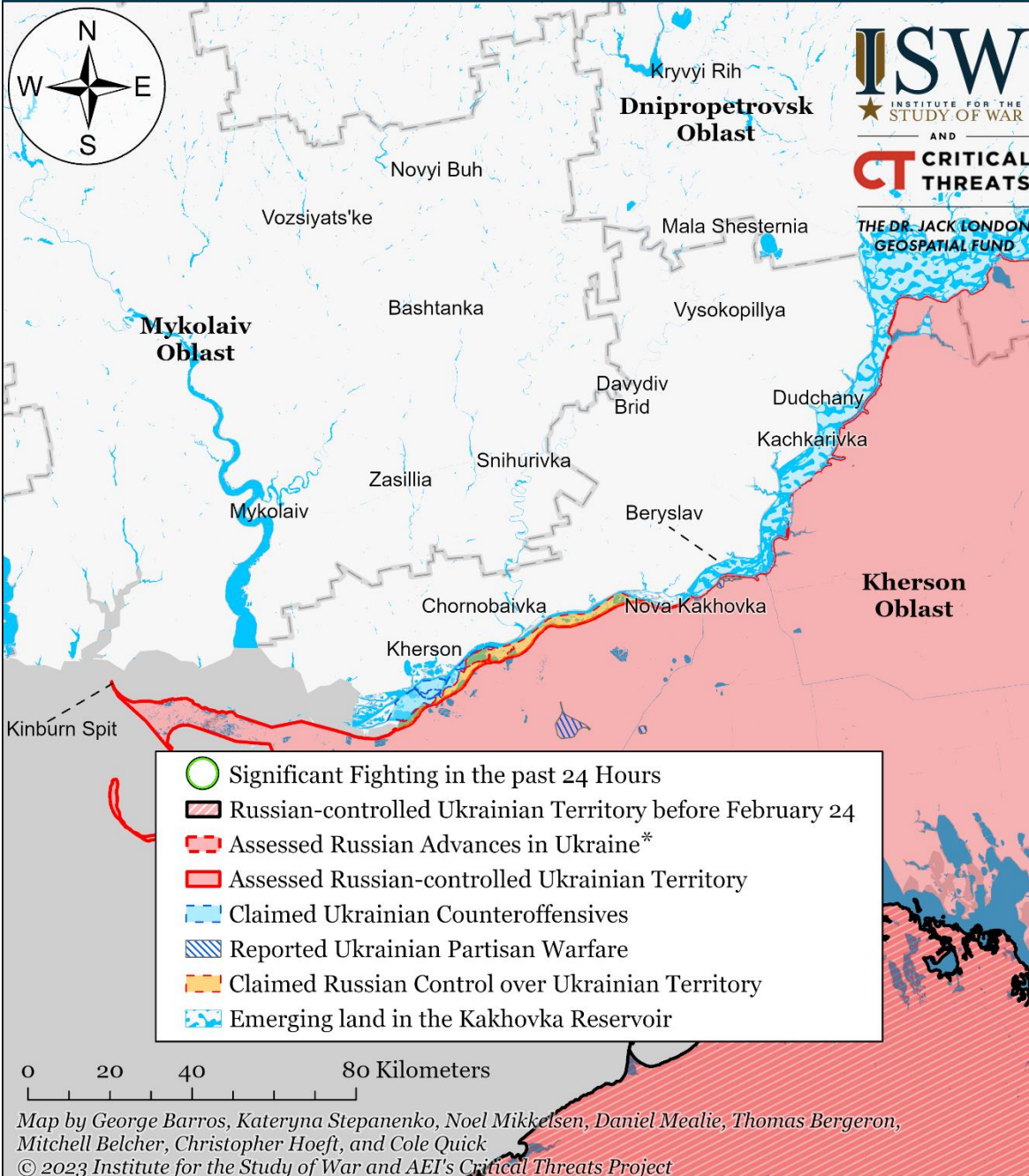
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of July 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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	

Note: Ukrainian Tavriivsk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen stated on July 22 that Ukrainian forces advanced by more than two kilometers in the Melitopol direction. 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.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 23, 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.

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

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

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to recruit prisoners to fight in Ukraine. Russian opposition news outlet *Mobilization News* reported on July 23 that the Russian MoD conducted a survey of prisoners asking about their veteran status, possession of a driver's license, and civilian profession at the IK-4 prison colony in Tomsk Oblast and in prisons in Leningrad Oblast.[64] *Mobilization News* also reported that the Russian MoD took 54 prisoners from IK-2 prison colony in Rostov Oblast to serve in Storm-Z detachments.[65]

## **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 occupation authorities are reportedly bringing foreign citizens to occupied Ukraine to artificially alter demographics. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on July 23 that Russian authorities are bringing Belarusian citizens and "citizens of other countries," likely in reference to recent reports of Uzbek citizens arriving in occupied Mariupol for construction work, to occupied areas.[66] The Ukrainian Resistance Center stated that Russian authorities are bringing in law enforcement officers, officials, and blue-collar workers and their families, leading to housing shortages.[67] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities continue to move Ukrainian citizens to Russia as Russians and other foreigners move into occupied Ukraine.[68]

Russian forces continue to purposefully endanger Ukrainian civilians to protect Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs). Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk stated on July 22 that Russian occupation authorities are diverting civilian vehicles along routes that Russian forces use to deliver military equipment, weapons, and ammunition to Russian forces in occupied Ukraine to prevent Ukrainian forces from striking Russian columns.[69] Such actions would violate Article 51 of the Geneva Convention IV which states that, "the presence or movements of the civilian population or individual civilians shall not be used to render certain points or areas immune from military operations, in particular in attempts to shield military objectives from attacks or to shield, favor or impede military operations." [70]

## **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).**

Another convoy of Wagner trucks reportedly departed Russia and entered Belarus. Independent Belarusian monitoring organization The Hajun Project reported on July 23 that a Wagner Group convoy of at least 10 transportation vehicles (trucks, vans, and minibusses) crossed the Russia-Belarus border from Smolensk Oblast and headed in the direction of the Wagner field camp in Tsel, Asipovichy, Mogilev Oblast.[71] There is no evidence that Wagner Group forces in Belarus have the heavy equipment necessary to threaten Ukraine (or Poland) as of this writing.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko empowered the All-Belarusian National Assembly (BNA) with legal authorities to approve Belarus' military doctrine, introduce martial law, and deploy Belarusian forces abroad on July 17.[72] This is not an indicator that Belarusian forces will deploy to Ukraine or that the Kremlin secured more control over Belarusian forces. The BNA is a congress of Lukashenko loyalists that meets every five years and that previously had no governing power under Belarusian law until Lukashenko passed constitutional amendments in 2022 expanding the BNA's

powers.[73] ISW previously assessed that Lukashenko likely seeks to develop the BNA into a dual power structure that he can use to control Belarus' government if he leaves the presidency.[74] Lukashenko may face a crisis during Belarus' planned 2025 presidential election given that Lukashenko reportedly stated that he would not seek another presidential term in 2020.[75] Lukashenko may also seek to use the BNA's expanded powers to balance against the Kremlin's longstanding and alarmingly effective effort to operationally subordinate Belarus' military to the Russian Western Military District.[76] Lukashenko customarily frames his efforts to maintain or reestablish his independence from Moscow as measures aimed at helping defend the Russia-Belarus Union State against the West.

**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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