

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 9, 2023

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July 9, 2023, 7pm 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 1:00pm ET on July 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on July 9. Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskiy stated that Ukrainian forces successfully continue to advance in the Bakhmut direction.[1] Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian forces continued to conduct counteroffensive operations in the Berdyansk and Melitopol directions.[2] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted attacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[3] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are attacking Russian positions in small groups and are targeting Russian rear positions, warehouses, and infrastructure.[4] Ukrainian military officials also reiterated that Ukrainian forces are continuing their interdiction campaigns in southern and eastern Ukraine.[5]

The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported that Ukrainian forces are attempting to soften Russian defenses before liberating territory, accepting a slower pace of advance.[6] The WSJ also reported that Ukrainian forces are focusing on dislodging Russian forces from fortifications and minefields, which are over 24km deep in some areas of Russian occupied territory.[7] Lieutenant Colonel Oleksiy Telehin of Ukraine's 108th Territorial Defense Brigade told the *WSJ* that Russian forces are continually able to bring in replacements even if Ukrainian forces destroy entire units.[8] ISW has assessed that Russian forces lack operational reserves. Telehin's statement likely refers to locally available tactical reserves. Another unit commander in the 108th Territorial Defense Brigade stated that the shortage of armored vehicles makes it difficult for Ukrainian forces to advance on well-prepared positions. *WSJ* sources also cited the lack of Ukrainian air superiority as one of the factors slowing down Ukrainian counteroffensives. ISW continues to assess that the current pace of the Ukrainian counteroffensive is reflective of a deliberate effort to conserve Ukrainian combat power and attrit Russian manpower and equipment at the cost of slower territorial advances.[9]

US President Joe Biden stated that Ukraine cannot join NATO until Russia's war in Ukraine is over. Biden told *CNN* on July 9 that it is premature to vote on Ukraine's NATO membership and that the alliance should "lay out a rational path for Ukraine to be able to qualify to be able to get into NATO." [10] Biden's statement follows Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's July 7 statement that Ukraine "deserves NATO membership" and precedes the NATO summit in Vilnius on July 11 and July 12.[11]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discussed Turkey’s decision to allow the release of five Ukrainian commanders involved in the defense of the Azovstal Metallurgical Combine in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan on July 9.[12] Ukraine, Russia, and Turkey previously agreed in September 2022 that Azovstal commanders would remain in Turkey for the duration of the war after Russia freed some Azovstal defenders in an Ankara-brokered prisoner exchange.[13] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky brought five Azovstal commanders home to Ukraine on July 8.[14] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced that Lavrov and Fidan discussed the situation regarding the release of Azovstal defenders in a phone call initiated by the Turkish side but did not provide additional details regarding the discussion.[15] Lavrov reportedly emphasized to Fidan that further deliveries of military aid to Ukraine are “destructive” and “can lead to negative consequences,” likely in an effort to discourage further military support for Ukraine. The Turkish MFA also noted that Fidan and Lavrov discussed the United Nations-brokered grain export deal, while the Russian MFA predictably blamed the West for its “inability to take necessary steps” to implement the agreement.[16] The grain deal expires on July 17, and it is likely that the Kremlin will threaten to not extend the deal to advance its objectives.[17]

The Russian ultranationalist community continued to blame the Kremlin for trusting Turkey to uphold the deal and to keep Azovstal defenders in Turkey. Russian ultranationalists have been consistently criticizing the Kremlin’s decisions to free Azovstal defenders in other prisoner exchanges because the Kremlin had portrayed these Ukrainian fighters as “Nazis” during the Battle of Mariupol.[18] One Russian milblogger observed that the release of Azovstal defenders undermines Russia’s aim to “denazify” Ukraine, while another milblogger implied that Russia should not have trusted Turkey to uphold the deal given that Turkey is Russia’s “historical enemy.”[19] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russia could have avoided this release by not organizing the initial prisoner of war (POW) exchange in 2022, and another Russian milblogger stated that Russia was once again misled because Russian officials irresponsibly prioritized the release of Kremlin-affiliated former Ukrainian MP Viktor Medvedchuk - who is a godfather to one of Putin’s children - from Ukrainian captivity.[20] Another milblogger stated that the news of the Azovstal commanders’ release had upset Russian military personnel on the frontlines and urged people to reevaluate the reasons for Wagner Group’s armed rebellion – implying that the rebellion’s goals of changes within the Russian military command and information space are still needed in Russia.[21] The milblogger added that this incident is one of many incidents since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine that are dividing Russian society.[22]

Former Russian officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin claimed that the Russian Federal Security Service’s (FSB) Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (UZKS) is deliberately censoring him. Girkin reported that his talk about the Wagner Group armed rebellion was canceled at the Listva bookstore in St. Petersburg on July 9 after St. Petersburg law enforcement responded to a claimed bomb threat at the bookstore.[23] Girkin and Listva complained on July 8 that St. Petersburg police warned Listva not to host the event, but Listva claimed it would host the event despite the warning.[24] Russian police routinely cancel events under the premise of bomb threats to censor public figures.[25] Girkin claimed that someone attempted to censor his event and discussed three potential culprits.[26] Girkin sarcastically hypothesized that the government perceives him as a greater threat than Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin and 15,000 Wagner military

personnel. Girkin also noted that Prigozhin may own and fully control the Listva bookstore.[27] Listva has notably promoted Girkin and hosted many prior events with him, and it is unclear why a Prigozhin-owned bookstore would first try to host such an event and then cancel it.[28] Girkin also suggested that UZKS Head Lieutenant General Aleksey Zhalo may have censored his event, either because he had gone crazy or because he is under Prigozhin's influence.[29] Girkin's mention of Zhalo stands out as the only serious theory Girkin offered.

The FSB's possible soft censorship of Girkin may be part of a longstanding feud between Girkin and Zhalo. Zhalo previously orchestrated FSB crackdowns on Russian ultranationalist groups and charged their leaders with terrorism and fraud.[30] Girkin, who led an ultranationalist movement, publicly criticized Zhalo and the FSB in 2018 for further arrests of individuals in the ultranationalist pro-separatist movement and for failing to combat the Ukrainian Azov Regiment's recruitment measures.[31] Girkin claimed in 2018 that he personally knew Zhalo, criticized Zhalo as a "thief" and a "hypocrite," and claimed that Zhalo is one of multiple Russian officials who stand against him.[32]

Central African Republic (CAR) Presidential Spokesperson Albert Yaloke Mokpem stated on July 8 that Wagner Group personnel leaving CAR are conducting rotations and are not withdrawing.[33] *Reuters* reported that a CAR military source claimed that several hundred Wagner forces recently left CAR, and ISW observed footage published on July 6 purportedly showing 600 Wagner personnel departing from an airport in Bangui, CAR.[34] ISW previously assessed that some Wagner personnel in CAR may be leaving after refusing to sign contracts with the Russian MoD given similar reports of Wagner personnel departing Syria.[35] Wagner personnel may be attempting to remain in CAR to maintain control over Wagner-owned natural resource extraction operations in CAR.[36]

Unknown persons leaked an image of what appears to be the Wagner Group's founding charter on July 9, possibly to present the Wagner Group as a professional organization. The document, dated May 1, 2014, commits Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin and Wagner Group commander Dmitry Utkin to follow a set of rules for their new private military company's participation for combat in eastern Ukraine.[37] Prigozhin's duties as "director" include the responsibility to provide weapons and funding; provide guarantees for the killed and wounded; provide permanent work; protect personnel against criminal charges for mercenaryism (article 359 of Russia's Criminal Code); resolve all issues "collegially"; participate in person; and not go against the Russian nation.[38] Utkin's responsibilities as "commander" were to select and train personnel; get rid of deserters; prohibit alcohol and drugs; resolve issues "collegially"; implement lessons learned and complete tasks to the end; not go against "VVP" (Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin); and not lie or deceive and always tell the truth as it is.[39] It is unclear who leaked this document or why. Russian law enforcement, which raided Prigozhin's home, and pro-Prigozhin actors likely had access to the document.[40] The leak may be part of an effort to rehabilitate Wagner's image following Prigozhin's June 24 rebellion. The document reiterates that Wagner's founding principles are to fight Russia's war in Ukraine in loyal service to Russian President Vladimir Putin and "the Russian nation."

Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to not rapidly dispose of the Wagner Group and prosecute rebellion participants is placing himself and his subordinates in an awkward position. It remains unclear who benefits from the leak of Wagner's alleged founding document as the document makes the Wagner Group look

professional and appealing in comparison with the regular Russian military. Wagner is still reportedly recruiting within Russia while the Russian MoD is reportedly conducting a competing effort to recruit Wagner fighters to sign contracts with the MoD.[41] Putin's decision to not dispose of the Wagner Group – previously Russia's most combat capable force – is making it difficult for Putin and other Russian power players to know how to interact with the Wagner Group and its leaders and fighters.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on July 9.**
- **The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported that Ukrainian forces are attempting to soften Russian defenses before liberating territory, accepting a slower pace of advance.**
- **US President Joe Biden stated that Ukraine cannot join NATO until Russia's war in Ukraine is over.**
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discussed Turkey's decision to allow the release of five Ukrainian commanders involved in the defense of the Azovstal Metallurgical Combine in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan on July 9.**
- **The Russian ultranationalist community continued to blame the Kremlin for trusting Turkey to uphold the deal and to keep Azovstal defenders in Turkey.**
- **Former Russian officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin claimed that the Russian Federal Security Service's (FSB) Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (UZKS) is deliberately censoring him.**
- **Central African Republic (CAR) Presidential Spokesperson Albert Yaloke Mokpem stated on July 8 that Wagner Group personnel leaving CAR are conducting rotations and are not withdrawing.**
- **Unknown persons leaked an image of what appears to be the Wagner Group's founding charter on July 9, possibly to present the Wagner Group as a professional organization.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to not rapidly dispose of the Wagner Group and prosecute rebellion participants is placing himself and his subordinates in an awkward position.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks north of Svatove and south of Kreminna.**
- **Ukrainian and Russian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Bakhmut area.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks on the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, and Russian forces advanced as of July 9.**

- **Ukrainian forces continued to advance in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia oblasts administrative border area, and continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian forces reportedly continued to reestablish previously flooded positions on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast.**
- **Russian sources accused Ukrainian forces of targeting the Kerch Strait Bridge.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is reportedly accepting Wagner Group mercenaries for contract service with the Russian MoD in Molkino, Krasnodar Krai.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 9, 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.

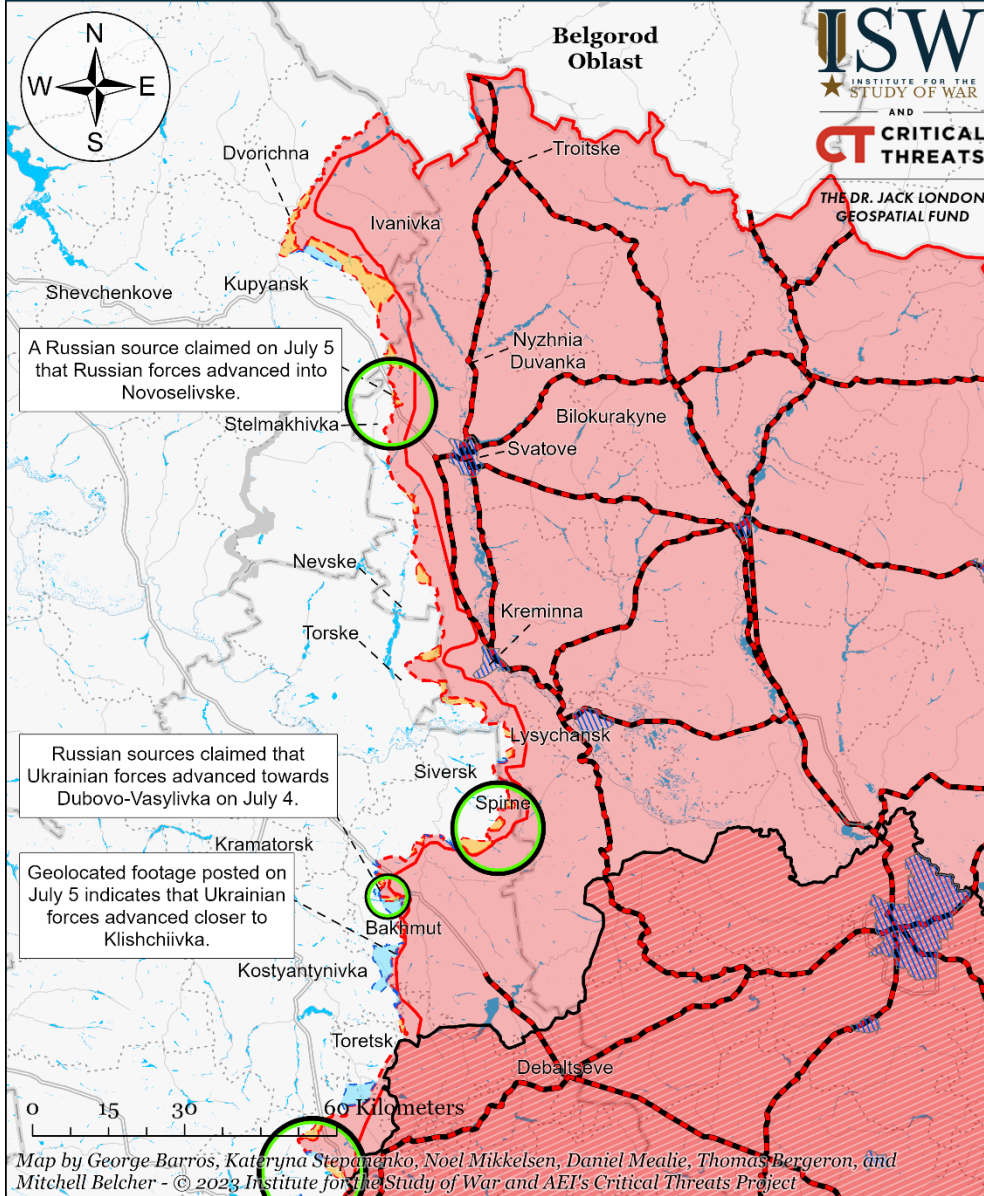
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety 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 conducted limited ground attacks north of Svatove and south of Kreminna on July 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Berestove (20km northeast of Svatove), Novoselivske (13km northwest of Svatove), Stelmakhivka (15km northwest of Svatove), Spirne (25km south of Kreminna), and Vesele (30km south of Kreminna).[42] Footage posted on July 9 purportedly shows Ukrainian forces repelling a small platoon-sized Russian assault with tank and infantry fighting vehicle support near Bilohorivka.[43] Footage posted on July 9 purportedly shows artillery elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army (Western Military District) operating near Kotlyarivka (27km northwest of Svatove), units of the 120th Guards Artillery Brigade (41st Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) operating near Kreminna, and units of the 3rd Guards Spetsnaz Brigade operating in the Lyman direction.[44] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks in the Svatove direction and near Novovodyane (25km northwest of Kreminna), Nevske (19km northwest of Kreminna), Torske (16km west of Kreminna), and Bilohorivka (33km south of Kreminna).[45]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 9, 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: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 7 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than one kilometer in different areas on the southern flank of Bakhmut. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

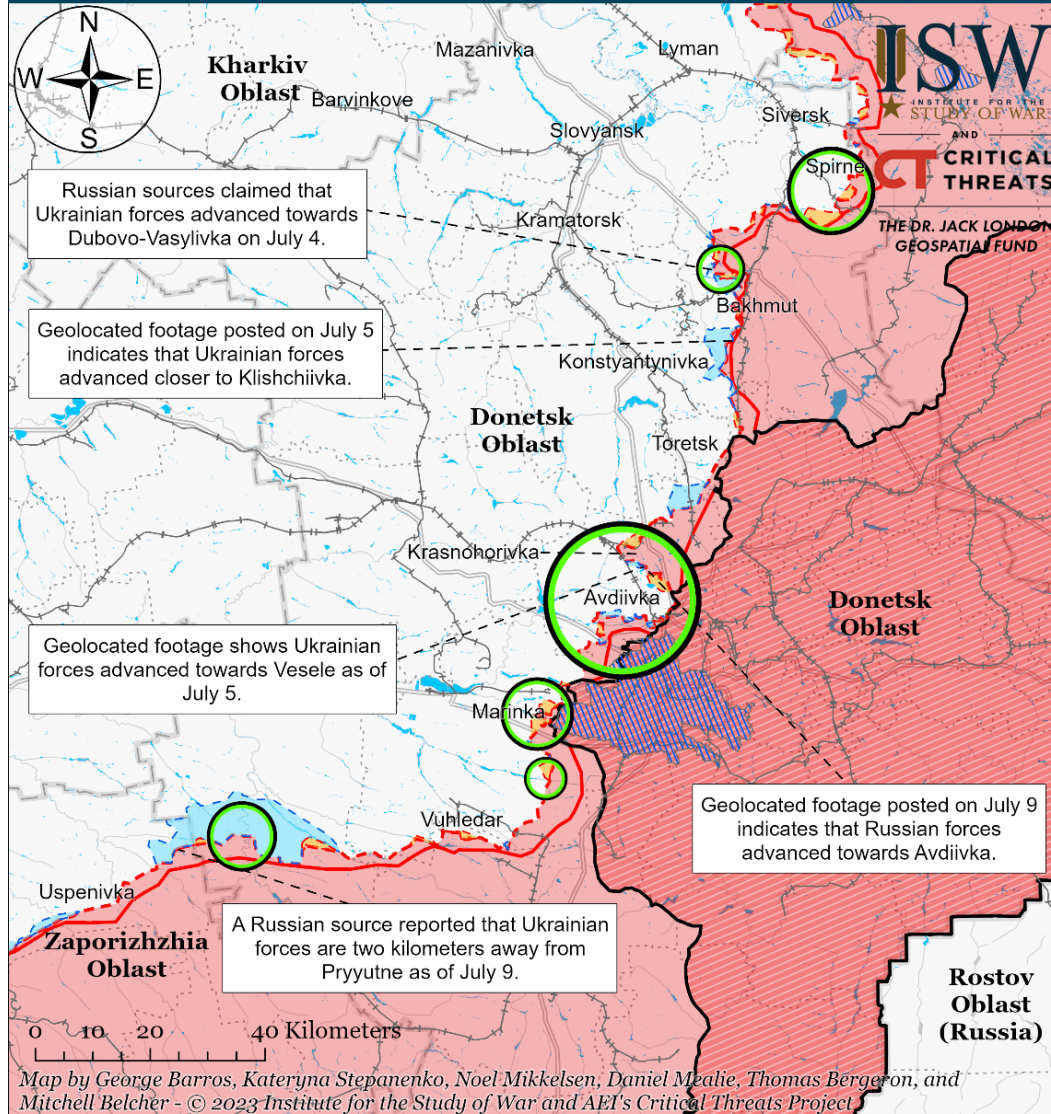
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Bakhmut area on July 9. Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Ukrainian forces have been successful and continue to advance in the Bakhmut direction.[46] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces made some advances west of Andriivka (8km south of Bakhmut) but that they failed to capture a dominant height approaching Andriivka.[47] The milblogger also claimed that Ukrainian counterattacks near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) were unsuccessful. Other Russian milbloggers claimed that the situation for Ukrainian forces near Klishchiivka is improving and restated that Russian control of this settlement is vital to the broader Russian defense of Bakhmut.[48] One milblogger complained that the Russian 72nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd Army Corps) is inadequately defending in the Klishchiivka area and left holes in its defensive lines that elements of the Russian 106th Airborne (VDV) Division must fill.[49] Elements of the 72nd Motorized Rifle Brigade previously failed to hold their positions against Ukrainian counterattacks in the Bakhmut area in May 2023, demonstrating pervasive issues with the Russian force generation effort and drawing extensive ire in the Russian information space.[50] A Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian 98th VDV Division is defending against Ukrainian ground attacks near Berkhivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut).[51]

Russian forces continued limited ground attacks in the Bakhmut area on July 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian ground attack near Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut).[52] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted failed ground attacks from their positions in Berkhivka.[53] Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces had unspecified tactical successes north of Bakhmut, however.[54]

Russian and Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks on the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, and Russian forces advanced as of July 9. Geolocated footage indicates that Russian forces made marginal advances southwest of Vesele (4km northeast of Avdiivka) as of July 9.[55] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Avdiivka, Novokalynove (11km northwest of Avdiivka), Stepove (3km northwest of Avdiivka), Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), Nevelske (13km southwest of Avdiivka), Marinka (immediately southwest of Donetsk City), and Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).[56] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also conducted unsuccessful ground attacks southwest of Avdiivka.[57] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian counterattacks near Opytne (3km southwest of Avdiivka), Pervomaiske, and Sieverne (5km west of Avdiivka).[58]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

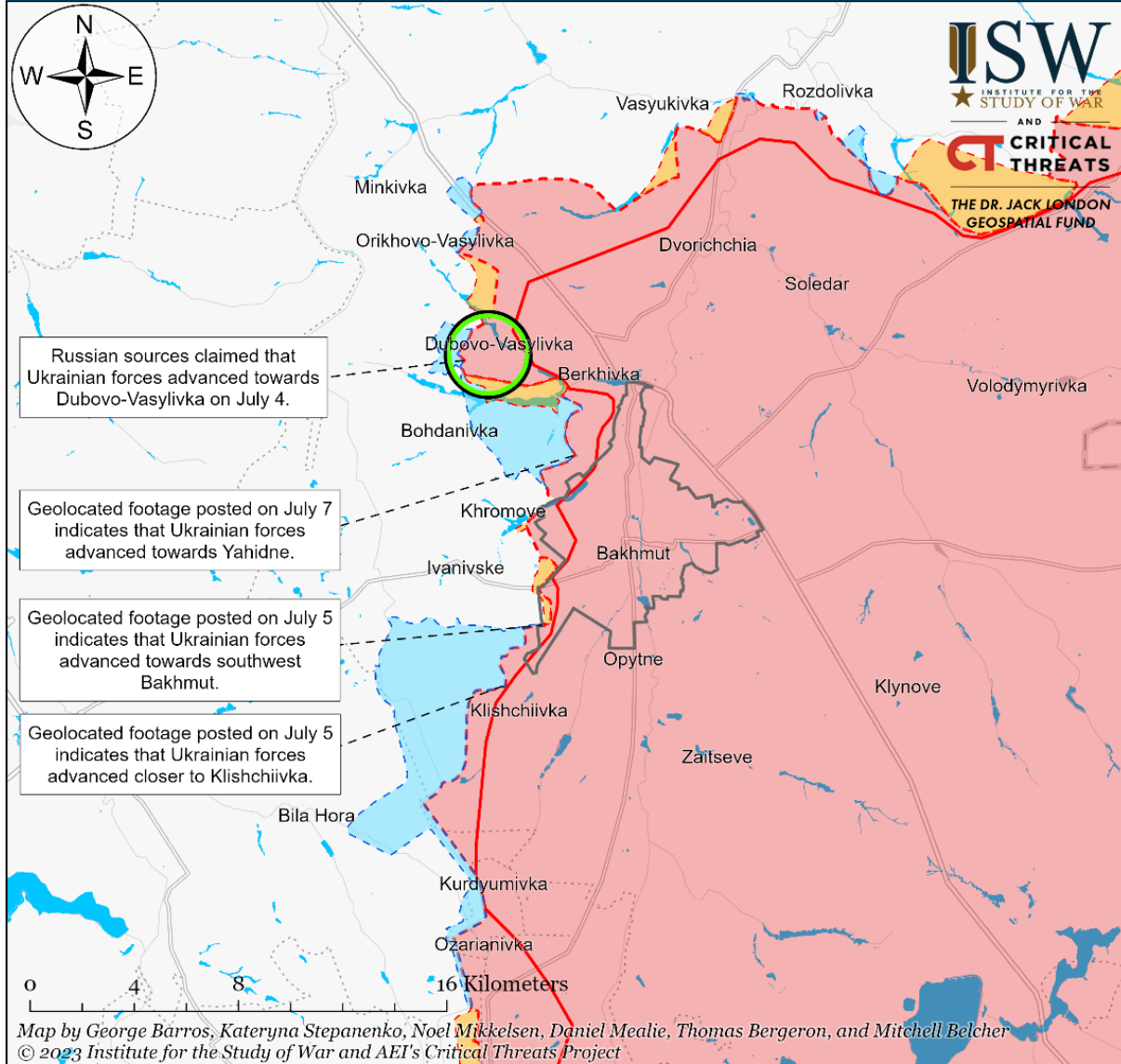


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads
- 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 Chief of the Main Operational Department of the General Staff Oleksii Hromov reported on July 5 that Ukrainian forces advanced up to 7.5 kilometers deep in the Melitopol and Berdyansk directions. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of July 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 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 7 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than one kilometer in different areas on the southern flank of Bakhmut. 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)

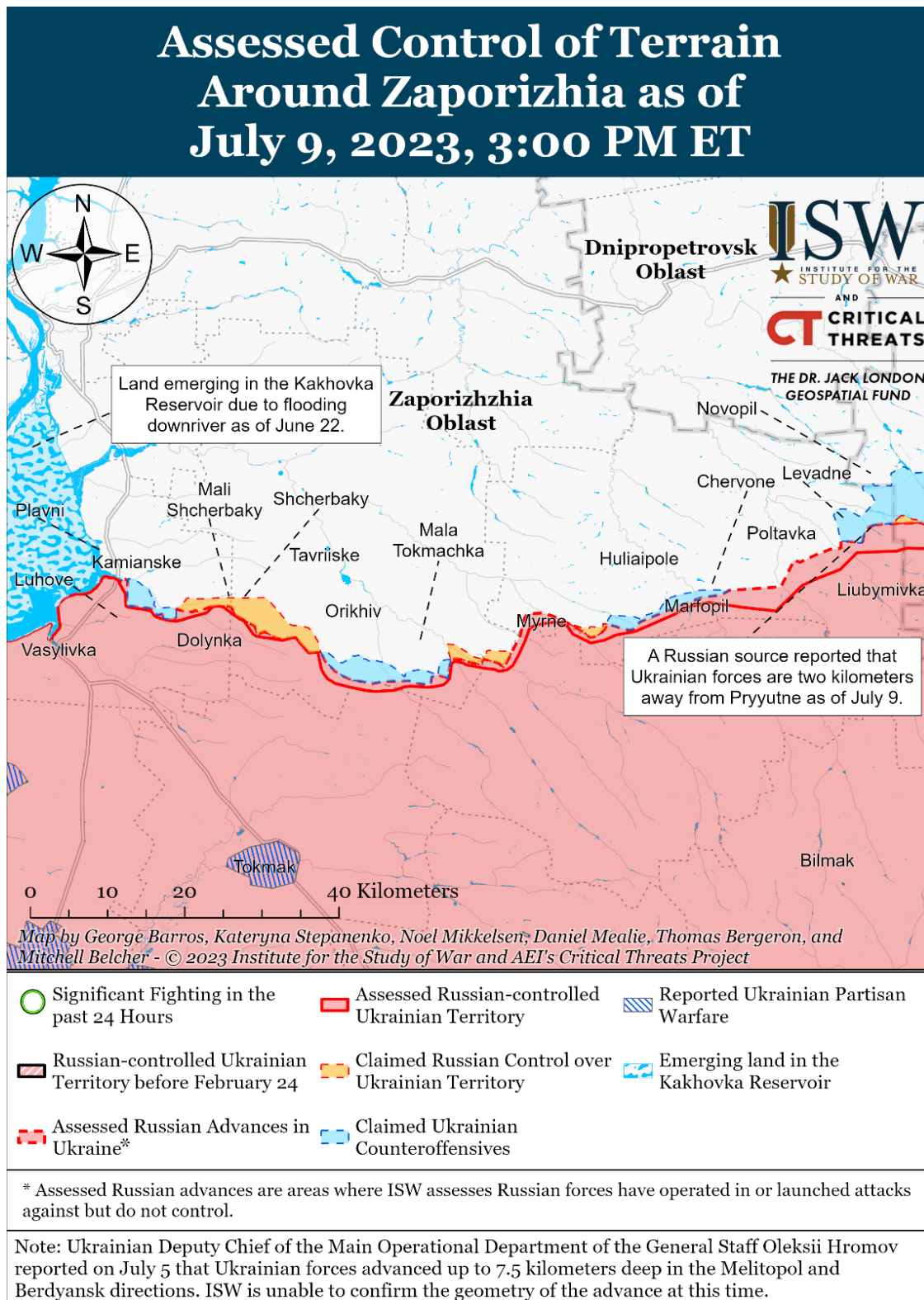
Ukrainian forces continued to advance in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia oblasts administrative border area on July 9. Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations and counter-battery measures in the Berdyansk direction.[59] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced towards Pryyutne (17km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) from the north and are currently about 2km away from the settlement.[60] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully counterattacked from the direction of Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) towards Blahodatne (5km south of Velyka Novosilka).[61] The Ukrainian General Staff similarly reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Blahodatne.[62]

Ukrainian forces continued to conduct counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 9. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that the Russian “Vostok” volunteer battalion and Russian artillery, missile, and air strikes repelled Ukrainian attacks near Robotyne (15km south of Orikhiv), Novodanylivka (6km southeast of Orikhiv), and Mala Tokmachka (9km southeast of Orikhiv).[63] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces continued attacks towards Robotyne but were not successful.[64] Another Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that a Ukrainian assault group broke through Russian defenses on the seam between unspecified Russian regiments northeast of Robotyne and that fighting is ongoing for control over positions of the 7th company of the 71st Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District [SMD]).[65] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces withdrew personnel from Pyatykhatky (25km southwest of Orikhiv) but noted that Ukrainian forces retain positions between Zherybyanky (27km southwest of Orikhiv) and Pyatykhatky.[66] ISW has not observed visual evidence confirming Russian claims at the time of this publication. A Russian source indicated that elements of the Russian BARS-1 (Russian Combat Army Reserve) volunteer detachment are operating as part of the 70th Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, SMD) alongside drone operators from the “Tsarskiye Volky” (Tsar’s Wolves) detachment in the Zaporizhia direction.[67] A Russian source also noted that elements of the Russian “Osman” Spetsnaz unit are fighting in the Zaporizhia direction.[68]

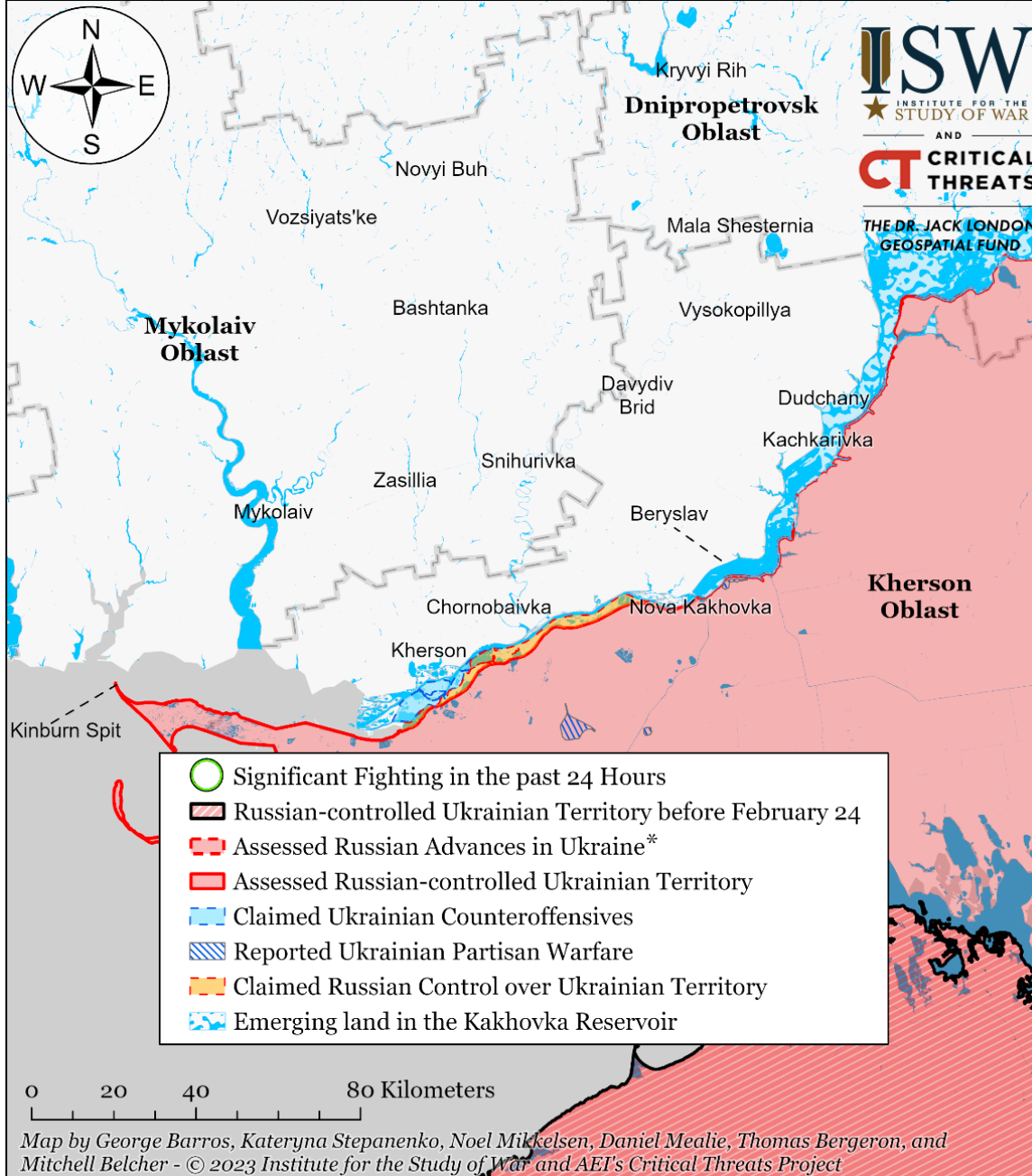
Russian forces reportedly continued to reestablish positions on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River that were previously flooded after the destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP) dam.[69] Head of the Ukrainian Joint Coordination Press Center of the Southern Forces Captain Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces are partially successful in restoring some positions but continue to encounter mines that dispersed throughout Russian positions during the flood.[70] Humenyuk noted that many Russian servicemen are reluctant to return to their abandoned positions due to mining but that the Russian military command forces them to do so. Russian milbloggers previously claimed that Russian forces suffered significant casualties along the coast after being caught in minefields as they attempted to suppress Ukrainian positions near the Antonivsky Bridge.[71]

Russian sources accused Ukrainian forces of targeting the Kerch Strait Bridge on July 9. Crimean Occupation Head Sergei Aksyonov claimed that Russian air defense systems shot down a cruise missile in the Kerch area, and Crimean Occupation Ministry of Transport reportedly temporarily stopped traffic over the bridge resulting in a 3.5km to 6km traffic jam.[72] Russian milbloggers shared footage of Russian air defense systems activating but it is unclear what

weapon these systems shot down.[73] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger doubted Aksyonov's claim about Russian forces shooting down a cruise missile, noting that Ukrainian aircraft would need to launch a missile from a dangerously close position near the frontline.[74]



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 9, 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 Ministry of Defense (MoD) is reportedly accepting Wagner Group mercenaries for contract service with the Russian MoD in Molmino, Krasnodar Krai. Independent Russian media outlet *SOTA* reported on July 9 that the MoD introduced new requirements for Wagner fighters who join the regular Russian military and shared a screenshot with a list of the numerous documents which Wagner fighters must submit to the Russian MoD to sign a contract.[75] Wagner fighters reportedly must provide documents about fighters' psychological and physical health and financial documents to ensure the Wagner fighters are not in debt.[76] *SOTA* reported that the Russian MoD is currently in processing Wagner fighters at an unspecified facility in Molmino in Krasnodar Krai.[77] It remains unclear how many Wagner fighters are opting to sign contracts with the Russian MoD as opposed to remaining with the Prigozhin-led Wagner elements that will reportedly relocate to Belarus within the next few months.

Russian Telegram channels are promoting recruitment for a Russian Orthodox "Archangel Michael" volunteer battalion.[78] A prominent Russian milblogger amplified a recruitment advertisement on July 9 for the Orthodox "Archangel Michael" volunteer battalion, which offers its fighters a monthly salary of 215,000 rubles (about \$2,356) - an increase from its previous offered pay of 195,000 rubles (about \$2,137) earlier in July.[79] The advertisement states that the battalion will accept any volunteer regardless of military specialty.[80] The battalion has been operating in Ukraine since at least May 2022. Russian sources reported that the "Archangel Michael" battalion was active near Bilohorivka, Luhansk Oblast, in May 2022, and near Avdiivka, Donetsk Oblast, in September 2022.[81]

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 continue forced passportization in occupied territories. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian officials issued resident permits for three months to all hospital employees who did not receive a Russian passport Starobilsk, Luhansk Oblast.[82] The General Staff reported that Russian occupation officials are forcing hospital employees to obtain Russian passports within three months or risk property confiscation and deportation from occupied territories to an unspecified area. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian occupation authorities are offering maternity capital if parents apply for Russian passports for children up to 14 years old.[83] The Ukrainian Resistance Center also reported that Russian authorities kidnap and torture civilians who refuse Russian passports and noted that Russian forces tortured civilians for refusing Russian passports in Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast.[84] ISW has previously reported on continued Russian forced passportization in occupied Ukraine.[85]

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.

Nothing significant to report.

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

[1] <https://t.me/osirskiy/179>

[2] <https://t.me/otarnavskiy/156>; <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/07/09/na-tavrijskomu-napryamku-syly-oborony-prosuvayutsya-vpered-valerij-shershen/>;

[3] https://t.me/mod_russia/28210; <https://t.me/wargonzo/13714>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/13725>; <https://t.me/rybar/49490>; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/48939>

[4] <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/49065>

[5] <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/07/09/cherez-sylnyj-shtorm-u-chornomu-mori-vsi-raketonosiyi-xf-zavedeno-do-punktiv-bazuvannya-nataliya-gumenyuk/>; <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/07/09/na-tavrijskomu-napryamku-syly-oborony-prosuvayutsya-vpered-valerij-shershen/>; <https://t.me/otarnavskiy/156>; <https://t.me/otarnavskiy/156>

[6] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-war-counteroffensive-frontlines-rus...>

[7] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-war-counteroffensive-frontlines-rus...>

[8] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-war-counteroffensive-frontlines-rus...>

[9] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-4-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-assessment-j...>

[10] <https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/09/politics/joe-biden-ukraine-nato-russia-cnntv/index.html>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/09/us/politics/biden-ukraine-nato.html>

[11] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-assessment-j...>

[12] <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2023/07/09/984441-lavrov-obsudil-glavoi-mid-turtsii-vozvrashchenie-komandirov-azova>; https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1895959/

[13] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/8/ukraines-zelenskyy-returns-azov-commanders-released-to-turkey>

[14] <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1677669425367900160>

[15] https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1895959/

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