

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 20, 2023

Riley Bailey, Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, and Mason Clark

June 20, 2023, 4:15pm 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 12pm ET on June 20 ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in at least two sectors of the front on June 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations on the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts and in western Zaporizhia oblast.[1] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that units of the Eastern Grouping of Forces repelled four Ukrainian assaults near Orikhiv, Zaporizhia Oblast, and in western Donetsk Oblast.[2] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on June 19 that Russian forces have committed significant forces to stop Ukrainian offensives, making Ukrainian advances difficult.[3] Malyar added that ongoing Ukrainian operations have several tasks that are not solely focused on liberating territory and that Ukrainian forces have yet to start the main phase of counteroffensive operations.[4]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to respond to Ukrainian counteroffensive operations with a relatively high degree of rhetorical coherence, suggesting that the MoD has learned from its past mishandling of the information space during previous Ukrainian counteroffensives. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu addressed the MoD Collegium on June 20 and began his speech by addressing ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in western Donetsk and Zaporizhia Oblasts.[5] Shoigu claimed that the counteroffensive began on June 4, consistent with ISW's previous assessment of when the counteroffensive began.[6] Shoigu additionally claimed that Ukrainian troops have launched 263 attacks on Russian positions since June 4 but denied that Ukrainian forces have made gains anywhere in the theater, contrary to publicly available geolocated evidence of Ukrainian advances. The fact that Shoigu addressed the counteroffensive in such a public and relatively even-keeled manner (even while maintaining typical MoD denial of Ukrainian successes) is a notable inflection from the Russian MoD's failure to prepare a unified response to Ukraine's Kharkiv and Kherson Oblast counteroffensives in 2022 and the resulting panic in the Russian information space, indicating the Russian information space has somewhat adapted to and learned from past moments of informational collapse.[7]

Russian forces conducted a missile and drone strike on Ukraine on June 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched 35 Shahed-131/136 drones, seven S-300 missiles, and one Iskander-M missile targeting Kyiv Oblast and civilian infrastructure facilities in Zaporizhia Oblast and that Ukrainian forces shot down 32 Shahed drones.[8] The Ukrainian General

Staff reported that Russian forces launched the Shahed drones from Bryansk Oblast and the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov.[9]

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in at least two sectors of the front on June 20.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to respond to Ukrainian counteroffensive operations with a relatively high degree of rhetorical coherence, suggesting that the MoD has learned from its past mishandling of the information space during previous Ukrainian counteroffensives.**
- **Russian forces conducted a missile and drone strike on Ukraine on June 20.**
- **Russian forces continued a slightly intensified pace of ground attacks near Kreminna.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks near Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued limited ground attacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin continues to lower the requirements for Russian military service in an effort to increase recruitment.**
- **Russia aims to use the annual International Military-Technical Forum “Army-2023” to diversify and expand its defense industrial base (DIB).**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

* 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.

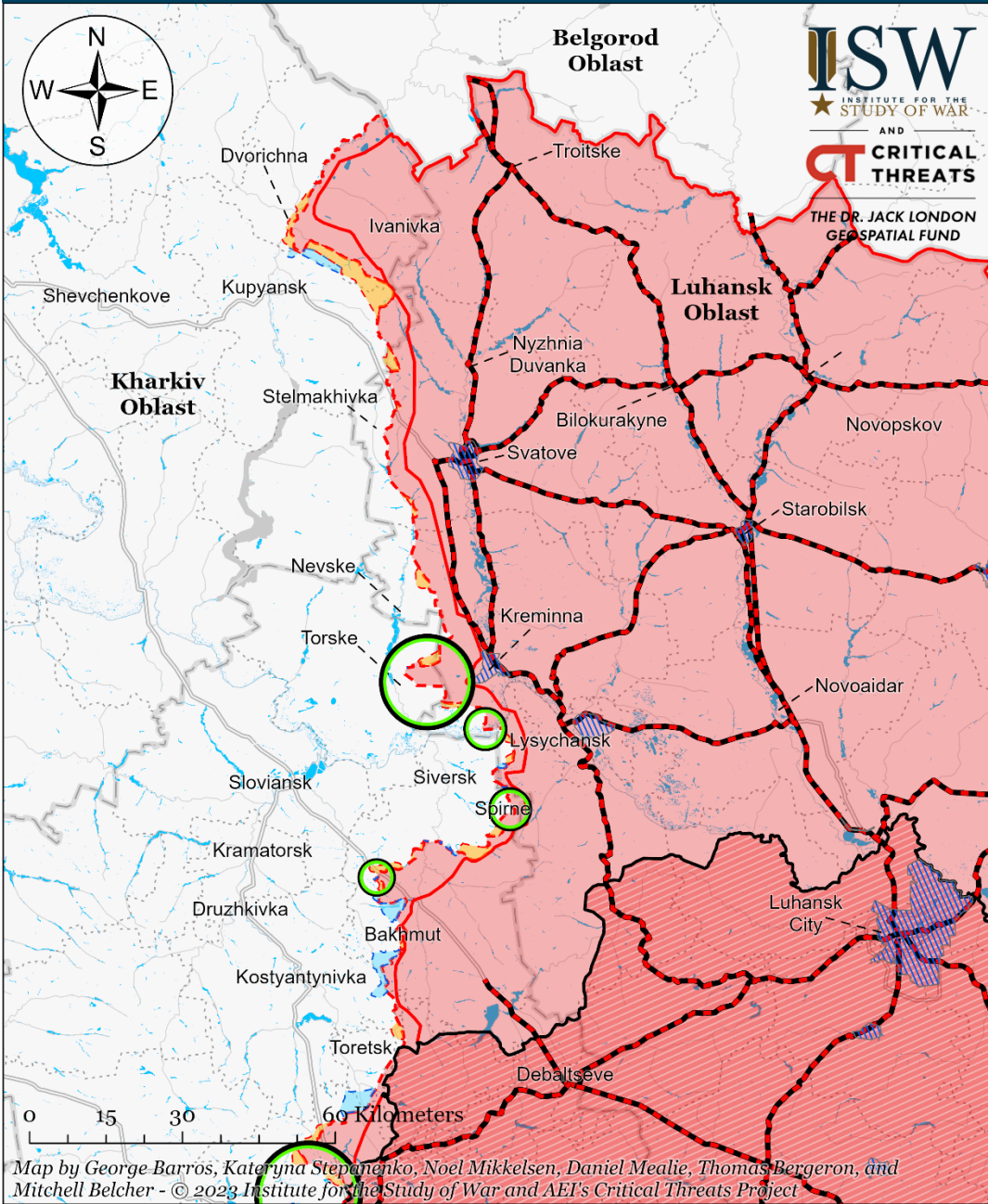
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety 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 a slightly intensified tempo of ground attacks near Kreminna on June 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations west of Kreminna near Yampolivka (17km west), Torske (15km west), and western Dibrova (7m southwest), and south of Kreminna near Hryhorivka (10km south) and Spirne (25km south).[10] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that Russian forces conducted over 21 ground attacks in the Kupyansk and Lyman directions in the past day and noted that Russian forces are actively using “Storm-Z” assault units comprised of former prisoners to conduct highly attritional assaults on Ukrainian positions in these directions.[11] The recent commitment of “Storm-Z” units to the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast frontline likely explains the increased number of attacks reported near Kreminna over the previous few days, as it appears that Russian forces have committed a relatively large quantity of low-quality forces to frontal infantry assaults. Several Russian milbloggers additionally claimed that elements of the 76th and 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Divisions are operating near Kreminna.[12] It is unclear whether elements of the 76th and 98th VDV Divisions have formed “Storm-Z” formations staffed with prisoners or whether the “Storm-Z” formations are fighting alongside VDV elements but operating under a different command and control structure.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of June 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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

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

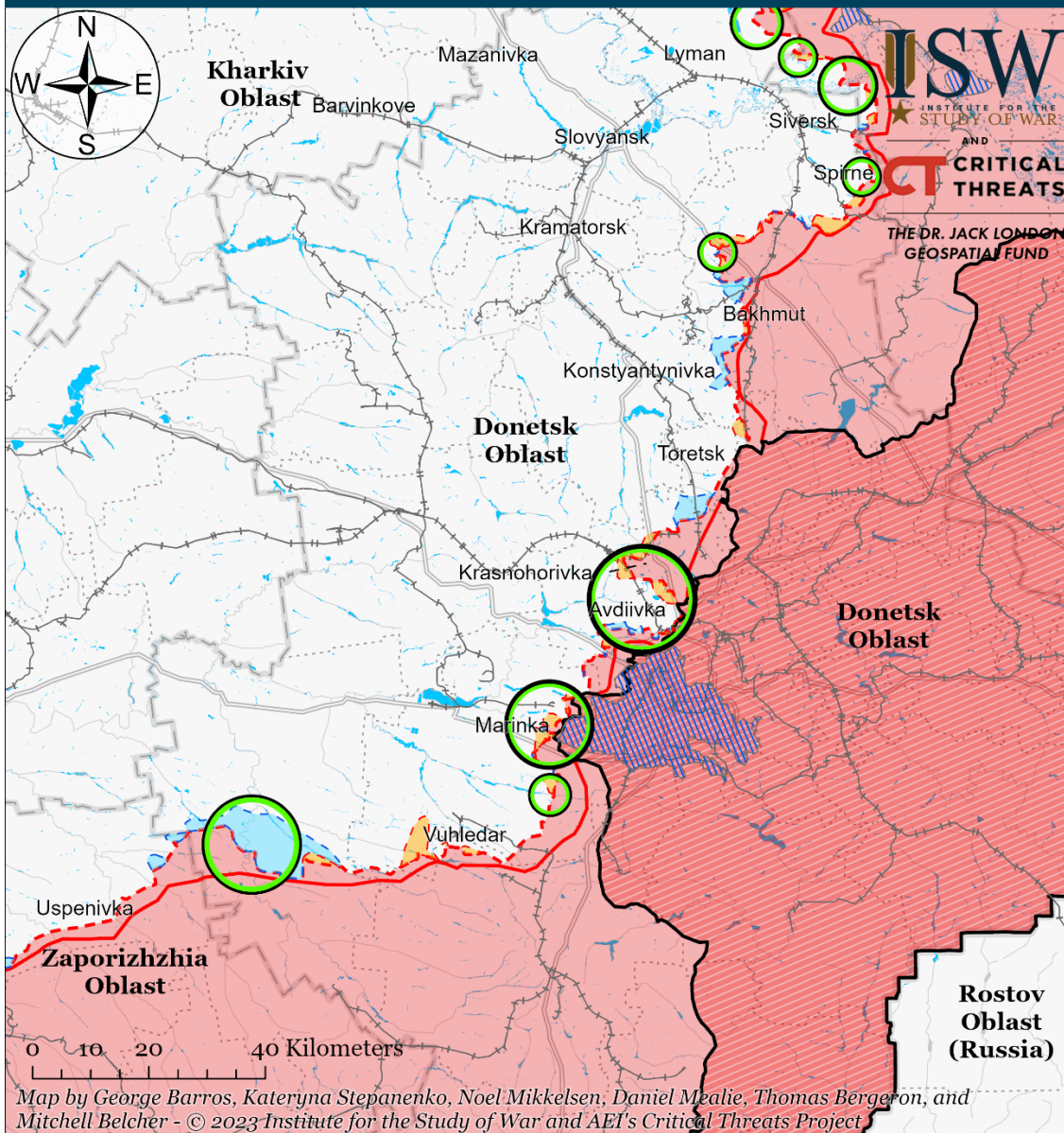
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Click [here](#) to read ISW’s retrospective analysis on the Battle for Bakhmut.

Russian and Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks near Bakhmut on June 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut).[13] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that there were three combat clashes in Bakhmut.[14] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces employed a TOS-1A thermobaric artillery system against Ukrainian positions in Berkhivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut).[15] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted limited attacks around Bakhmut, including localized attacks near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), Berkhivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), Rozdolivka (19km northeast of Bakhmut), Vasyukivka (16km north of Bakhmut), and Yahidne (3km northwest of Bakhmut).[16] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced to within 1.5km of Klishchiivka and approached a section of the E40 Bakhmut-Slovyansk highway.[17]

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on June 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Avdiivka, Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City), Krasnohorivka (directly west of Donetsk City), and Pobieda (5km southwest of Donetsk City).[18] Russian sources claimed that elements of the 33rd and 255th Motorized Rifle Regiments of the 20th Motor Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) made gains near the “Zverients” fortified area near Novomykhailivka (just southwest of Donetsk City).[19]

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

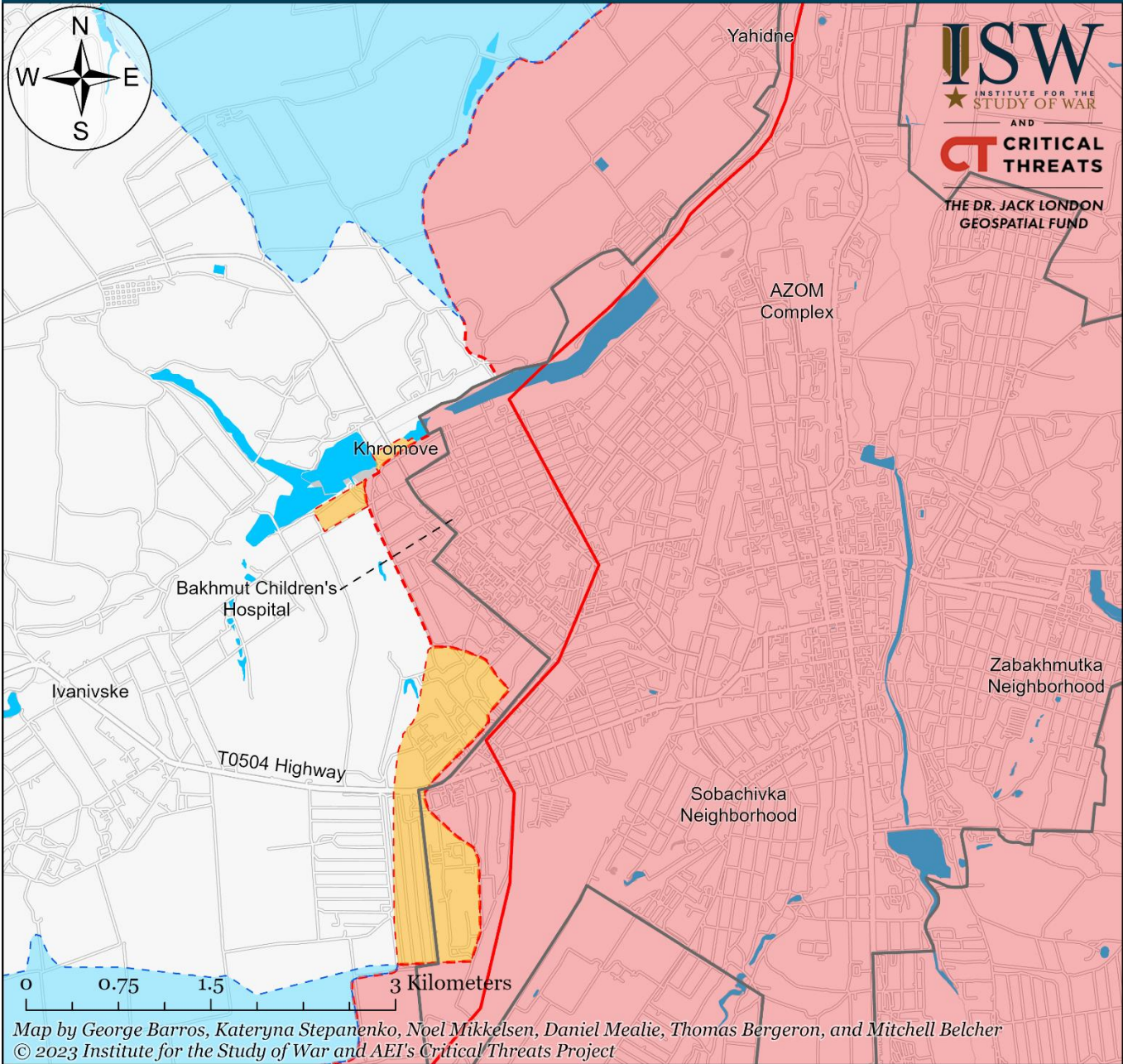


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads
- 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: Avdiivka City Military Administration Head Vitaliy Barabash reported on June 18 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than a kilometer north of Avdiivka on the Donetsk City frontline over the past two weeks.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of June 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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- Bakhmut City Limits
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

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

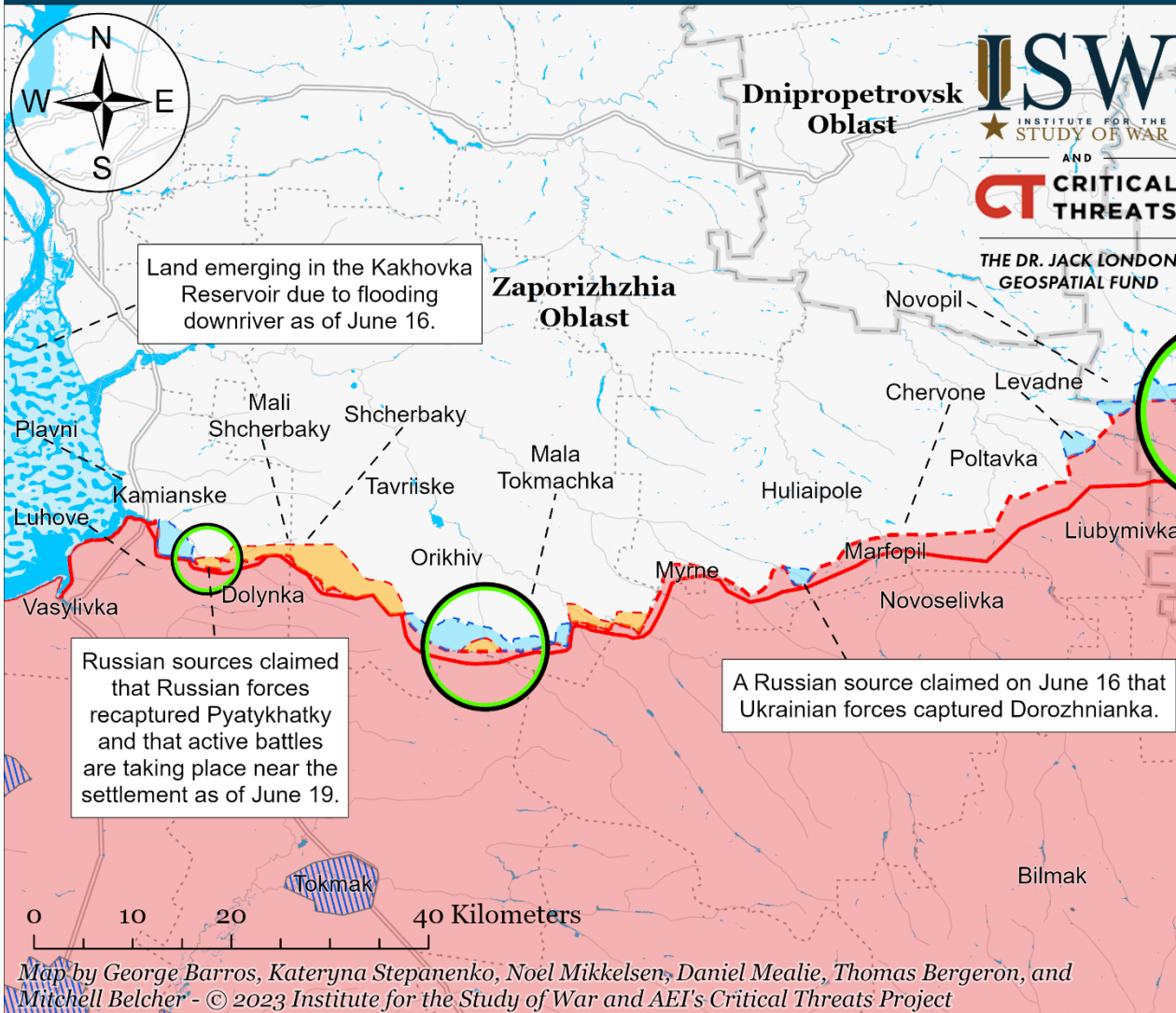
Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts on June 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive actions along the Novodarivka-Priyutne line (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka to 17km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and Rivnopil-Makarivka line (11km southwest of Velyka Novosilka to 7km south of Velyka Novosilka).[20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian units of the Eastern Grouping of Forces repelled three Ukrainian assaults in the Velyka Novosilka area on June 19.[21] A prominent milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced up to 200m into Russian defensive positions southeast of Velyka Novosilka on June 19.[22]

Ukrainian forces continued limited ground attacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast on June 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive actions along the Novodanylivka-Robotyne line (6km south of Orikhiv to 15km south of Orikhiv).[23] The Russian MoD and Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled all Ukrainian assaults in the Orikhiv direction.[24] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recaptured previously lost positions near Robotyne and pushed Ukrainian forces further away from the settlement on June 19.[25] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recaptured Pyatykhatky (24km southwest of Orikhiv) on June 19 after elements of the 429th Motorized Rifle Regiment (19th Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) recaptured positions west of the settlement, partially encircling the Ukrainian grouping in the settlement and forcing Ukrainian forces to retreat.[26] Russian sources claimed that a small Ukrainian grouping maintained positions on the outskirts of Pyatykhatky and that Ukrainian forces continued assaults on the flanks around the settlement on June 19.[27] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 19th Motorized Rifle Division, the “Sudoplatov” volunteer battalion, and unspecified Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) continued counterattacks near Pyatykhatky after recapturing the settlement.[28] Another prominent milblogger claimed that neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces control Pyatykhatky and that fighting was ongoing in the settlement as of the morning of June 20.[29] Russian milbloggers claimed on June 20 that Ukrainian forces are continuing assaults near Pyatkhatky.[30] Footage published on June 19 indicates that Russian forces conducted a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack on a Ukrainian position in an unspecified location in Zaporizhia Oblast with an infantry fighting vehicle loaded with explosives.[31] These VBIED attacks are likely incredibly imprecise (as they reportedly cannot be steered, driving straight forward until detonated by remote control unlike more advanced VBIEDs used by some actors in other conflicts) and are meant to disrupt Ukrainian operations more than cause actual damage to Ukrainian forces.

Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Kyrylo Budanov reported on June 20 that Russian forces mined additional areas at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), including the facility’s cooling pond.[32] Russian forces may be mining additional areas at the ZNPP to dissuade potential Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in the area.

Ukrainian forces continue to target rear Russian positions in southern Ukraine and Crimea. Satellite imagery published on June 19 indicates that Ukrainian forces conducted a missile strike on Russian positions in Rykove, Kherson Oblast (48km southwest of Melitopol).[33] Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko stated on June 20 that Ukrainian forces struck Russian positions near Urzuf, Donetsk Oblast (37km southwest of Mariupol).[34] Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov claimed on June 20 that Russian electronic warfare (EW) units downed a Ukrainian drone in northern Crimea.[35]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of June 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

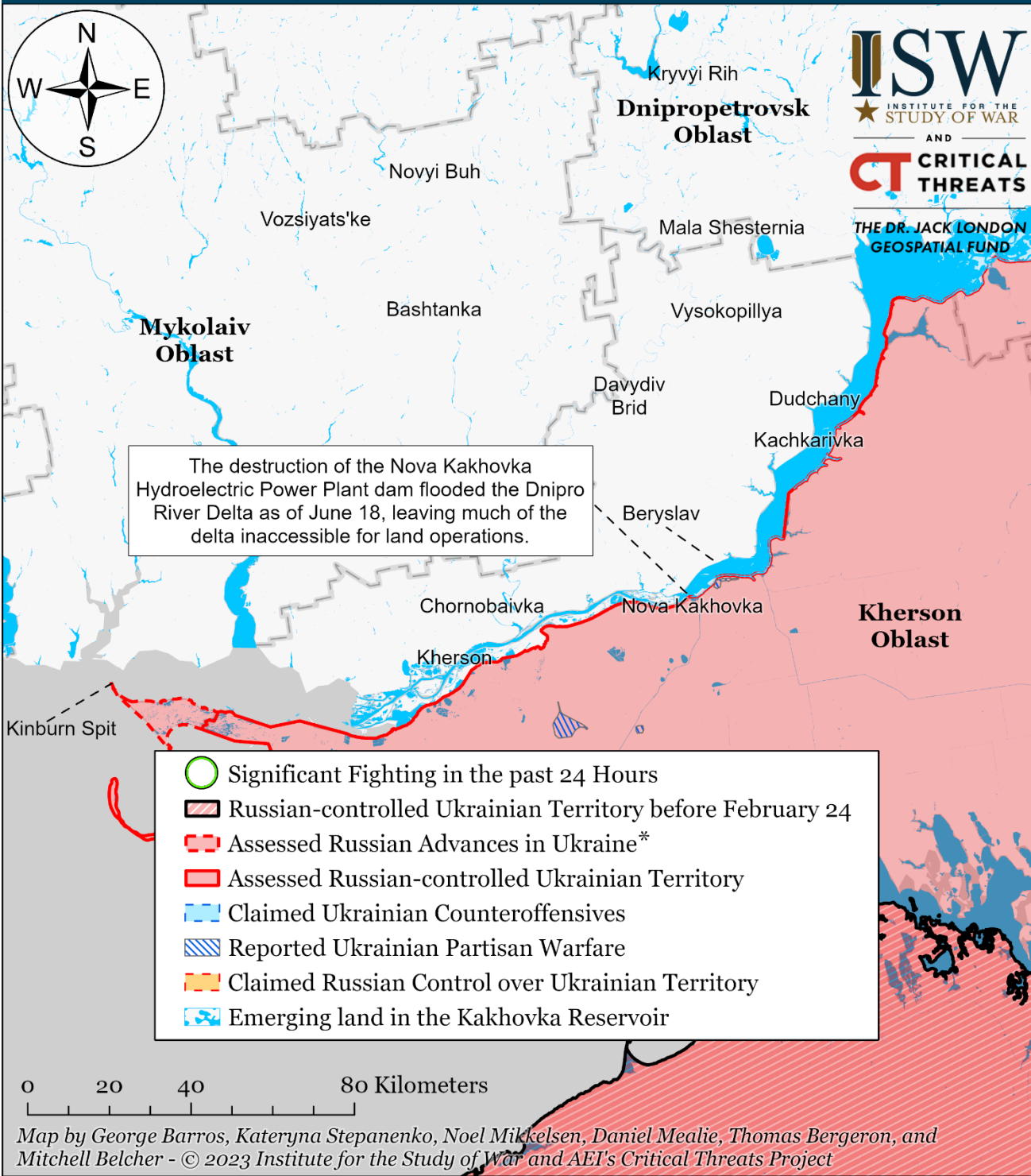


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian 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: Multiple Russian sources claimed that Russian forces recaptured Pyatykhatky and that active battles are taking place near the settlement as of June 19. Geolocated footage published on June 19 and 20 shows Ukrainian forces in Pyatykhatky and Russian forces assaulting the settlement, respectively, however ISW cannot assess the exact areas of advances at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of June 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.

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

The Kremlin continues to lower eligibility requirements for Russian military service in an effort to increase its recruitment pool. Kremlin newswire *TASS* reported on June 20 that the Russian State Duma adopted the third and final reading of a law that would allow citizens with a criminal record and citizens deemed “partially fit” for military service to sign contracts with the Russian military during periods of wartime, mobilization or martial law.[36] Head of the independent Russian human rights organization “Rus Sidyashchaya” (Russia Behind Bars) Olga Romanova claimed that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has already recruited about 15,000 prisoners to serve in the Russian military since February 1, 2023.[37] ISW has previously reported on the Russian MoD’s efforts to recruit prisoners and individuals with criminal records in order to compensate for shortcomings with Russian force generation efforts.[38]

Russia likely aims to use the annual International Military-Technical Forum “Army-2023” to diversify and expand its defense industrial base (DIB). Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that the Army-2023 Forum will focus on the diversification and development of the DIB as well as the IT and AI sectors and will showcase military and dual-use products.[39] Shoigu also claimed 41 countries are interested in attending the Army-2023 Forum from August 14 to 20. The Russian MoD may attempt to use the Army-2023 Forum to purchase technology or dual-use products in an effort to evade sanctions. ISW has previously reported on Russian efforts to acquire dual-use technology to use in the war in Ukraine.[40]

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 officials and occupation authorities continue to establish patronage programs between Russian regions and occupied territories in order to integrate occupied territories into Russia. Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin met with Republic of Sakha Head Aisen Nikolaev on June 20 to discuss various public infrastructure projects that the Republic of Sakha is funding.[41] Pushilin also claimed that doctors from the Sakha Republic will work on an ongoing basis in a hospital in Khrestivka in occupied Donetsk Oblast starting on June 30. ISW has previously reported on the Republic of Sakha’s involvement in patronage programs with occupied regions of Ukraine.[42]

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.

The Belarusian General Staff confirmed that Belarus has amended the language of its constitution to renounce its neutrality and non-nuclear status. Deputy Head of the Faculty of the Belarusian General Staff Colonel Andrey Bogodel stated on June 20 that in order to respond to “external challenges and threats,” Belarus has made requisite changes to its constitution renouncing its neutrality and removing the wording on its non-nuclear status.[43] ISW previously reported on Russian efforts to further consolidate the political subjugation of Belarus through constitutional reform in 2020 and

early 2021, and the official constitutional renunciation of neutrality and non-nuclear further advances these Russian efforts.[44]

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://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02cKy8TXXwLwhLaeiL4qCqugUwNjdyZr44T1GLHJ1PPdQRGgqX7DxyxQDrzDYq6USl>

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[3] <https://t.me/annamaliar/861>

[4] <https://t.me/annamaliar/861>

[5] <https://telegra dot ph/Vstupitelnoe-slovo-Ministra-oborony-Rossijskoj-Federacii-general-a-armii-Sergeya-SHojgu-na-zasedanii-Kollegii-Minoborony-Rossii-06-20>; https://t.me/mod_russia/27614 ; https://t.me/mod_russia/27615

[6] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-8-2023>

[7] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar060823>; <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignSept10>, <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignSept2>; <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignSept9>

[8] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02ggjE8CmQ81Mnys3GANmhoSiFi5ds653prVDQXzE5Z2YltBQcKZpQRUdQ5H6eojwzl>;
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[9] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02D9o1yyPWSmCArVxBeH5b6YQ25UQ5aA5J54AZL3mdkeJL5R7sKDxrjmEooETg9Y1nl>

[10] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02ggjE8CmQ81Mnys3GANmhoSiFi5ds653prVDQXzE5Z2YltBQcKZpQRUdQ5H6eojwzl>;
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[11] https://suspilne dot media/511017-kontrnastup-jde-za-planom-ukraina-vikonala-dvi-iz-semi-umov-dla-vstupu-do-evrosouzu-482-den-vijni-onlajn/?anchor=live_1687257524&utm_source=copylink&utm_medium=ps

[12] https://t.me/boris_rozhin/89628; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/48592>;
https://t.me/rusich_army/9471

[13] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02ggjE8CmQ81Mnys3GANmhoSiFi5ds653prVDQXzE5Z2YltBQcKZpQRUdQ5H6eojwzl> ;
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[14] https://suspilne_dot_media/511017-kontrnastup-jde-za-planom-ukraina-vikonala-dvi-iz-semi-umov-dla-vstupu-do-evrosouzu-482-den-vijni-onlajn/

[15] https://t.me/mod_russia/27612

[16] <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/48592>

[17] <https://t.me/wargonzo/13361>

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[19] https://t.me/nm_dnr/10503 ; <https://t.me/rybar/48716> ; <https://t.me/rybar/48730> ;
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[20] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02cKy8TXXwLwhLaeiL4qCqugUwNjdyZr44T1GLHJ1PPdQRGgqX7DxyxQDrzDYq6USl>;

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[22] <https://t.me/rybar/48718>

[23] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02cKy8TXXwLwhLaeiL4qCqugUwNjdyZr44T1GLHJ1PPdQRGgqX7DxyxQDrzDYq6USl>

[24] https://t.me/mod_russia/27617 ; <https://t.me/epoddubny/16462> ;
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[25] https://t.me/negumanitarnaya_pomosch_Z/8193 ; <https://t.me/rybar/48716> ;
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[26] <https://t.me/rybar/48716> ; <https://t.me/rybar/48718> ;
https://t.me/negumanitarnaya_pomosch_Z/8193 ; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/47621> ;
https://t.me/boris_rozhin/89649 ;

[27] <https://t.me/RVvoenkori/47621> ; <https://t.me/readovkanews/61136> ;

[28] <https://t.me/RVvoenkori/47621>

[29] <https://t.me/voenkoriKotenok/48592> ; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/89649

[30] <https://t.me/batalyon15/2060> ; https://t.me/rusich_army/9483

[31] <https://twitter.com/HKaaman/status/1670885273499041793>

[32] https://t.me/energoatom_ua/13642

[33] <https://twitter.com/bradyafr/status/1670878953819578373>

[34] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/10906>

[35] <https://t.me/Aksenov82/2711>

[36] <https://t.me/readovkanews/61154>; <https://tassdotru/armiya-i-opk/18067877>

[37] <https://verstka.media/novye-gvardejcy-shojgu>; <https://t.me/idelrealii/28239> ;
<https://www.severreal.org/a/ubiytsa-nasilnik-vor-retsdivist/32465267.html>;

[38] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-11-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-27-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-1-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-25-2023>

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[41] <https://t.me/pushilindenis/3533>

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