

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 20, 2023

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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 maps that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Russian forces made marginal gains in and around Bakhmut amid a reported increase in the tempo of Russian operations around Avdiivka. Russian forces likely made additional gains in southwestern and northern Bakhmut as well as northwest of Bakhmut between Bohdanivka and Khromove as of March 20.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 19 that Russian troops attacked toward Berdychi (10km northwest of Avdiivka), which indicates that Russian forces likely advanced west of Krasnohorivka (9km north of Avdiivka) and captured Stepove (just west of Krasnohorivka).[2] Russian forces are likely increasing the tempo of operations north of Avdiivka in an effort to set conditions for the encirclement of the settlement and are reportedly employing a greater number of aviation units in the area to support these operations.[3] Avdiivka Mayor Vitaly Barabash told *AFP News* on March 20 that Russian forces are increasingly using Kh-59, Kh-101, Kh-555, and S-300 missiles in the Avdiivka area.[4] A Ukrainian military spokesperson stated on March 20 that Russian forces have lost about three unspecified companies (likely referring to infantry) in assaults on Avdiivka since March 19.[5] ISW previously reported that this increased tempo of Russian operations in the Avdiivka area has reportedly led to major losses and is likely a misguided effort to pull Ukrainian forces away from other areas of the front.[6] ISW has not observed Russian forces arraying substantial combat power along the outskirts of Donetsk City, and it is unlikely that Russian forces will be able to sustain this temporary increased tempo. ISW assesses that the overall Russian spring offensive is likely approaching culmination, and Russian forces may be intensifying efforts to make even marginal gains before they lose the initiative in Ukraine.[7] It remains possible that Russian advances could prompt Ukraine to withdraw from Bakhmut and/or Avdiivka although neither appears likely at this time.

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on March 20 and offered a more reserved vision for Russian-Chinese relations than what Putin was likely seeking. Xi and Putin touted the strength of Chinese-Russian relations in their meeting on March 20, but offered differing interpretations of the scale of future relations in articles they published on March 19.[8] Putin published an article in Chinese state media in which he argued that Russia and China are building a partnership for the formation of a multipolar world order in the face of the collective West's seeking of domination and the United States pursuing a policy of dual containment against China and Russia.[9] Xi offered a less aggressive overarching goal for Russian-Chinese relations in his article published in Russian state media outlet *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, in which he noted that Russia and China are generally pursuing a multipolar world order but not specifically against an adversarial West.[10] Xi instead focused heavily on presenting China as a viable third-party mediator to the war in Ukraine whose plan for negotiations "reflects the unity of views of the world community on overcoming the Ukrainian crisis." [11] Putin wrote that Russia welcomes China's willingness to "play a constructive role in crisis management" regarding the war in Ukraine, but Putin likely was hoping for Xi to adopt a similarly aggressive rhetorical line against the West.[12]

Xi's refusal to explicitly align China with Russia in Putin's envisioned geopolitical conflict with the West is a notable departure from China's declared "no limits partnership" with Russia preceding the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[13] Xi's rhetoric suggests that he is not inclined to fully give Russia the economic and political support that Russia needs to reverse setbacks in Ukraine. Putin and Xi offered somewhat similar visions for increased Chinese-Russian economic partnership, and it is likely that the two will sign bilateral trade and economic agreements during Xi's visit, some of which will likely aim to facilitate schemes for sanctions evasion.[14] Xi will also likely offer a more concrete proposal for a negotiated settlement to the war in Ukraine, although it remains unclear what his proposal will entail and how receptive the Kremlin will be to it. The prospects of China supplying Russia with military equipment also remain unclear.

Putin is likely increasing his attempts to rhetorically rally the rest of the world against the West, although it remains unlikely that he will achieve decisive effects through this effort. Putin attended the International Parliamentary Conference "Russia-Africa in a Multipolar World" on March 20 and stated that Russia and states in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America uphold the norms of social principles, morality, and traditions and oppose neo-colonial ideology.[15] Putin's depiction of an envisioned Chinese-Russian axis against the West and his comments at the conference likely amount to an intensified proposal to non-aligned countries to form a defined anti-Western bloc. Putin likely hoped that Xi would offer a similar vision to augment this proposal, and Xi's refusal to do so likely weakens the impacts

of Putin's efforts. The attractiveness of a potential anti-Western Chinese-Russian-based geopolitical bloc lies more with China's economic and political power than with Russia's declining economic strength and its military power badly degraded by fighting in Ukraine. Russia's ongoing diplomatic efforts to generate support for its war in Ukraine continue to produce few tangible results, and an intensified effort to rally the rest of the world against the West will not likely be more effective.

Wagner Group Financier Yevgeny Prigozhin appears to maintain powerful political leverage and regional connections within Russia despite some officials' attempts to distance themselves from the Wagner Group. Prigozhin claimed on March 20 that Krasnodar Krai Governor Veniamin Kondratyev personally invited a Wagner representative to Krasnodar Krai, overruled local refusals to bury Wagner mercenaries, and informed the representative that the Wagner Group will face no further obstacles burying its dead.[16] Prigozhin on March 18 claimed that authorities in Goryachiy Klyuch, Krasnodar Krai, reneged on an agreement to bury Wagner personnel.[17] A Goryachiy Klyuch official initially told a Wagner representative that Kondratyev stripped him of authority to cooperate with Wagner, which ISW assessed as an indicator of weakening connections between Prigozhin and regional officials.[18] Prigozhin's ability to reach out to Kondratyev directly and resolve the situation suggests that his leverage in the krai remains strong. Goryachiy Klyuch officials' initial refusal to bury Wagner mercenaries and ongoing clashes between Prigozhin and St. Petersburg officials over Wagner burials indicate that some authorities do seek to distance themselves from Wagner PMC, however. [19]

Russian authorities are likely unsure of how to redefine Wagner's new role following Prigozhin's overextension of Wagner resources and support. The destruction of Wagner forces near Bakhmut is likely forcing Prigozhin and Russian officials to reconsider the role of Wagner while Prigozhin works to rebuild his forces. Several news sources reported on March 20 that Russian political party "A Just Russia – for Truth" leader Sergey Mironov publicly advocated for the legalization of private military companies – such as the Wagner Group – and proposed that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) take control of their oversight, which would likely be a major limitation on Prigozhin's current freedoms as Wagner's financier.[20] A Wagner-affiliated milblogger on March 19 accused the Russian MoD of sabotaging Wagner efforts to replenish its ranks in Ukraine with Wagner fighters from further abroad by canceling military transport flights.[21] If true, this report would suggest that the Russian MoD is attempting to prevent Wagner from regaining political leverage and rebuilding its military capabilities in Ukraine while maintaining Wagner's role abroad. Prigozhin himself appears to be taking every opportunity to increase his media relevance and maintain the Wagner Group's prominence in the process. Prigozhin has publicized an array of statements picking fights with local officials, amplifying disputes over Wagner burials, commenting on the expansion of Russian censorship laws, commemorating the alleged one-year anniversary of Wagner involvement in Ukraine, and more since March 18 alone.[22]

The Russian information space continues to respond to the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s issuance of arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova with ire and anxiety. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on March 20 that the Kremlin is "calm" about Putin's arrest warrant and called its issuance "outrageous and unacceptable." [23] The Russian Investigative Committee, however, opened a criminal case against ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan and several ICC judges on March 20, indicating that Russian leadership feels the need to posture proactively in its response to the ICC despite promises that the arrest warrants are meaningless in the eyes of the Russian government.[24] Russian Security Council Deputy Head Dmitry Medvedev relatedly threatened a missile strike against the ICC and suggested that "it is quite possible to imagine the point of application of a hypersonic missile carrier from the North Sea from a Russian ship to the Hague courthouse." [25] Medvedev has notably made continuous inflammatory and escalated threats against the collective West, and his threats should not be taken as more than aggressive informational posturing on the part of the Kremlin.[26] The range of ostensibly diverging Russian responses to the ICC arrest warrants suggests that this event will likely remain a point of neuralgia in the Russian information space and will likely lead to continued legislative and informational responses.

Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated on March 20 that the frequency of large Russian missile attacks has decreased. Yusov stated that Russia does not have many Kalibr, Iskander, and Kinzhal missiles left, but still has many S-300 surface-to-air missiles.[27] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces continue to deplete their missile arsenal and may constrain how often and at what scale to conduct missile strikes but will likely continue to threaten Ukrainian critical infrastructure and civilians.[28]

Russia requested that the UN Security Council discuss Israeli airstrikes in Syria possibly in retaliation for Israel's approval of export licenses for anti-drone jamming systems for Ukraine. Israeli news outlet *The Times of Israel* reported on March 18 that Russia's UN representative told the UN Security Council that Israel's airstrikes in Syria must stop.[29] An Israeli official claimed that Israel had not expected Russia to call for the discussion and feared that Russia would promote a resolution against Israel. Russia's comments about Israeli airstrikes in Syria occurred after Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen notified Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky about the approval of the export licenses on Cohen's visit to Ukraine on March 15.[30]

Key Takeaways

- **Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow and offered a more reserved vision for Russian-Chinese relations than Putin likely desires.**
- **Putin is likely increasing his attempts to rally the rest of the world against the West, although it remains unlikely that he will achieve decisive effects in this effort.**
- **Wagner Group Financier Yevgeny Prigozhin appears to maintain powerful political leverage and regional connections despite some officials' attempts to distance themselves. Russian authorities are likely unsure of how to redefine Wagner's new role following Prigozhin's overextension of Wagner resources and support.**
- **The Russian information space continues to respond to the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s issuance of arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova with ire and anxiety.**
- **Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated that the frequency of large Russian missile attacks has decreased.**
- **Russia requested that the UN Security Council discuss Israeli airstrikes in Syria possibly in retaliation for Israel's approval of export licenses for anti-drone jamming systems for Ukraine.**
- **Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian and Russian forces conducted offensive operations northeast of Kupyansk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations near Svatove and Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces continued making advances in and around Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline and made marginal gains near Avdiivka.**
- **Russian sources claim that Russian forces are building up defensive fortifications and repelled Ukrainian reconnaissance-in-force operations in Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian sources accused unknown actors of planting a bomb that exploded near a gas pipeline in occupied Simferopol, Crimea.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged Russian difficulties obtaining components for high-tech industrial production.**
- **Ukrainian partisans killed Russian-appointed head of the Kherson Oblast pre-detention center Serhii Moskalenko with an improvised explosive device on March 17.**

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



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiehm, 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 those 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 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

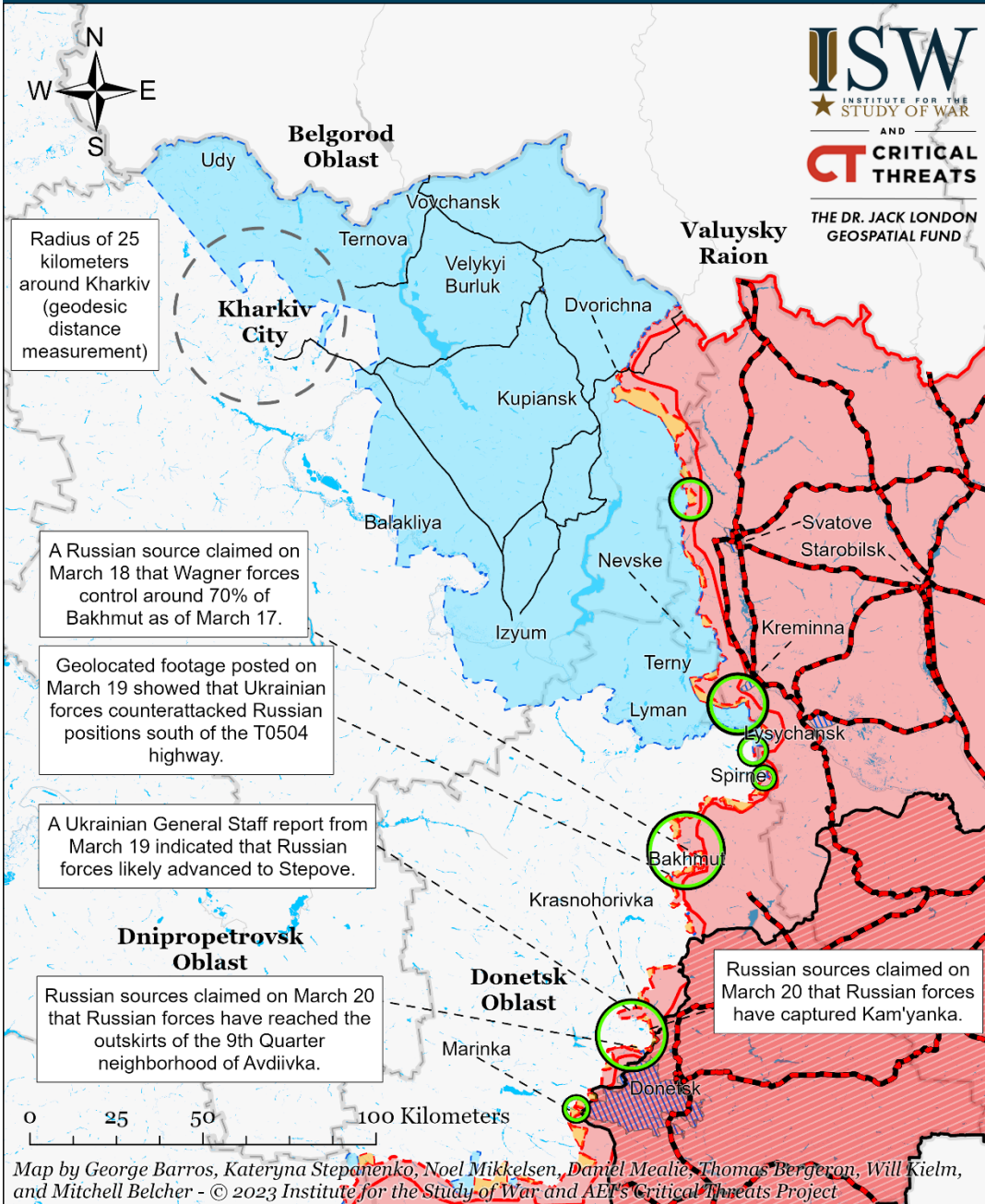
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1— Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian and Russian forces conducted offensive operations northeast of Kupyansk on March 19 and 20. Russian Western Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Sergey Zybinsky claimed on March 20 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian assault near Hryanykivka (14km northeast of Kupyansk) and that unspecified artillery elements operating in the area of responsibility of the 6th Combined Arms Army (Western Military District) destroyed three Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups near Hryanykivka, Vilshana (12km northeast of Kupyansk), and Pershotravneve (20km east of Kupyansk).[31] Zybinsky claimed that Russian forces destroyed another two Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups near Hryanykivka and Orlianka (22km east of Kupyansk) on March 19.[32] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Hryanykivka on March 18 and 19 and that Ukrainian forces withdrew forces to the west (right) side of the Oskil River, although ISW has not seen visual confirmation of these claims.[33]

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Svatove on March 19 and 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Novoselivske (15km northwest of Svatove) on March 19 and 20.[34] Geolocated footage published on March 20 indicates that Russian forces likely made marginal gains north of Novoselivske close to the N-26 highway.[35] Zybinsky claimed that elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army (Western Military District) disrupted Ukrainian force rotations at forward positions near Kotlyarivka (27km northwest of Svatove) and Stelmakhivka (16km west of Svatove) on March 20.[36]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kreminna area on March 19 and 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Kreminna and within 25km south of Kreminna near Dibrova, Bilohorivka, Verkhokamianske, and Spirne.[37] Geolocated footage published on March 20 indicates that Russian forces likely advanced to the outskirts of Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna).[38] Geolocated footage published on March 19 indicates that Russian forces likely made marginal gains southwest of Ploshchanka (17km northwest of Kreminna).[39] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced west of Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna) and conducted unsuccessful assaults in the direction of Makiivka, Yampolivka (17km west of Kreminna), and Terny (17km west of Kreminna) on March 19 and 20.[40]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of March 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
Key Ukrainian Roads	Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Russian Ground Lines of Communication	Assessed Russian-controlled 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.

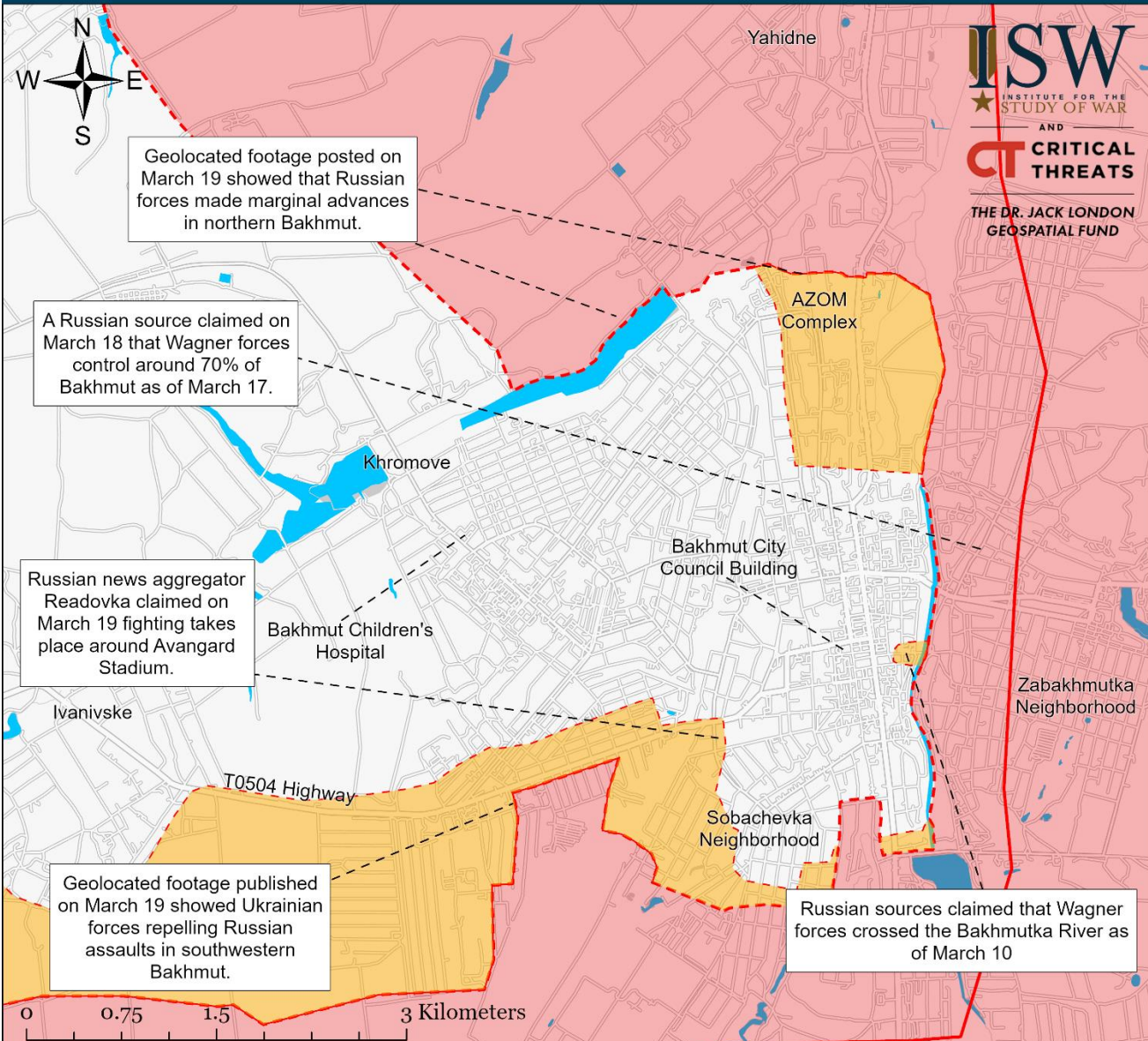
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued making advances in and around Bakhmut on March 19 and 20. Geolocated footage posted on March 19 shows that Russian forces have advanced in southwestern Bakhmut just south of Korsunskoho Street, about 7km northwest of Bakhmut between Bohdanivka and Khromove, and in northern Bakhmut near the AZOM complex.[41] Geolocated footage posted on March 20 also indicates that Wagner forces have made advances near the Mariupolske Cemetary in southwestern Bakhmut.[42] Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed on March 20 that Wagner controls 70 percent of Bakhmut.[43] A Russian milblogger claimed on March 19 that Wagner Group forces are fighting at five points along the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway and advancing towards the road itself.[44] Russian milbloggers additionally claimed that Wagner made gains northwest of Bakhmut near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (10km northwest of Bakhmut) and towards Novomarkove (14km northwest of Bakhmut) between March 19 and 20.[45] Several Russian sources reported that Wagner has also advanced in central and southwestern Bakhmut and is fighting in the Avangard Stadium, 800m from the Bakhmut City Administration building.[46] Russian sources notably appear to be concerned about the prospect of Ukrainian counterattacks in Bakhmut, and several claimed that Ukrainian forces are amassing west of Bakhmut near Kostyantynivka and Chasiv Yar.[47] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 19 and 20 that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northwest of Bakhmut near Orikhovo-Vasylivka, Bohdanivka (6km northwest), and Hrykorivka (10km northwest); and west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west).[48]

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline on March 19 and 20 and made marginal gains in the Avdiivka area as of March 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 19 that Russian troops attacked toward Berdychi (10km northwest of Avdiivka), which indicates that Russian forces likely advanced west of Krasnohorivka (9km north of Avdiivka) and captured Stepove (just west of Krasnohorivka) in order to launch attacks on Berdychi.[49] Geolocated footage posted on March 18 shows that Russian forces have advanced north of Avdiivka between Krasnohorivka and Kamianka.[50] Geolocated footage posted on March 19 additionally indicates that Russian forces have advanced near Vodyane, about 6km southwest of Avdiivka.[51] Russian milbloggers widely claimed that Russian forces are trying to bypass Avdiivka from the north along the Krasnohorivka-Stepove line and that Russian forces captured Kamianka (4km northeast of Avdiivka) on March 20.[52] Several Russian milbloggers additionally claimed that Russian forces have entered the southwestern outskirts of Avdiivka itself and are fighting near the Palace of Technology and Sports and in the 9th Quarter neighborhood, although a prominent milblogger emphasized that reports of fighting in Avdiivka are premature.[53] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations on March 19 and 20 near Avdiivka itself; in the Avdiivka area near Kamianka, Severne (5km west of Avdiivka), and Berdychi; on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Vodyane and Pervomaiske; and on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Marinka.[54] A milblogger posted footage of elements of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) reportedly fighting near Marinka.[55]

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in western Donetsk City on March 19 or 20. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, namely naval infantry elements, once again tried to move on Ukrainian positions in southeastern Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City) from the dacha area near Mykilske.[56] The Russian Eastern Group of Forces spokesperson claimed on March 19 that Russian motorized rifle elements destroyed a Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group near Novodariivka (eastern Zaporizhia Oblast, about 45km west of Vuhledar).[57]

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

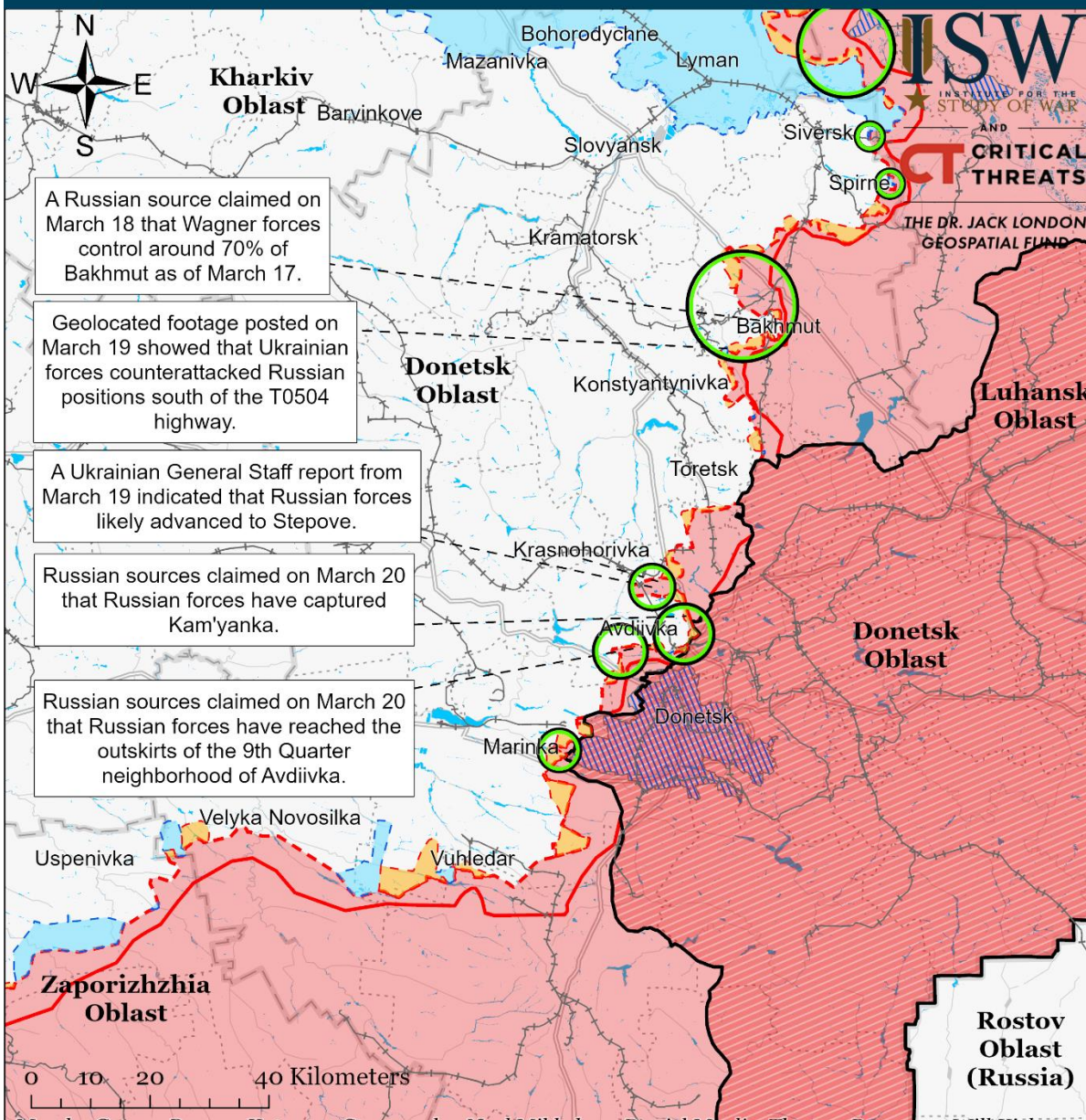


Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Meahie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-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.

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



A Russian source claimed on March 18 that Wagner forces control around 70% of Bakhmut as of March 17.

Geolocated footage posted on March 19 showed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked Russian positions south of the T0504 highway.

A Ukrainian General Staff report from March 19 indicated that Russian forces likely advanced to Stepove.

Russian sources claimed on March 20 that Russian forces have captured Kam'yanka.

Russian sources claimed on March 20 that Russian forces have reached the outskirts of the 9th Quarter neighborhood of Avdiivka.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, 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-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- 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.

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

Russian sources claim that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian reconnaissance-in-force operations in Zaporizhia Oblast. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian reconnaissance-in-force operations near Charivne (20km west of Orikhiv), Novodanylivka (5km south of Orikhiv), Robotyne (15km south of Orikhiv), and Mala Tokmachka (10km southwest of Orikhiv) on March 19.[58] Milbloggers published footage on March 19 purportedly showing elements of the 291st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) repelling Ukrainian forces near Robotyne and Orikhiv.[59] It is unclear if this footage is from an earlier assault, possibly on March 15, however.[60] ISW previously reported that Ukrainian forces' reconnaissance near Novodanylivka generated an unusually large response from Russian milbloggers despite the frequent occurrence of such actions on other areas of the frontline.[61]

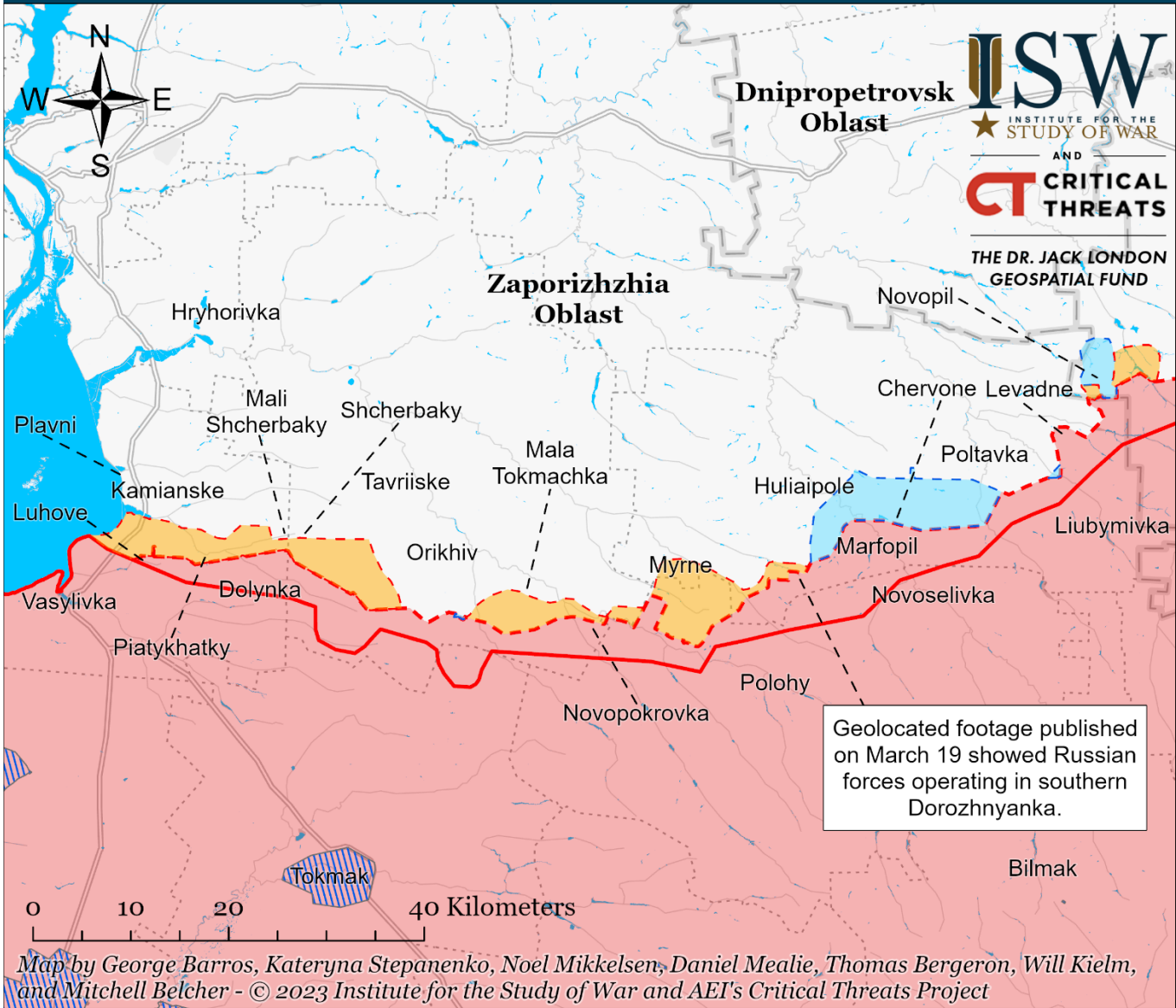
Russian sources claim that Russian forces attempt to use civilians to build defensive fortifications in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast and Crimea. Independent Russian news outlet *Verstka* reported on March 18 that Russian occupation authorities are recruiting civilians to build defenses and dig trenches in occupied Crimea and offering up to 7,000 rubles (about \$90) per day, meals, and accommodations.[62] A Russian milblogger claimed on March 19 that civilian specialists have undertaken projects to strengthen defensive lines in Zaporizhia Oblast.[63] Russian occupation authorities' efforts to use civilians to build fortifications could indicate that Russian forces are concerned about their ability to hold occupied territory but need to use military personnel in more immediate capacities.

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on March 20 that explosions in occupied Dzhankoy, Crimea, destroyed a shipment of Kalibr cruise missiles being transported by train.[64] Russian sources reported explosions and a drone sighting in Dzhankoy prior to the GUR's statement confirming the explosion.[65]

Russian news aggregators claimed that unknown actors planted a bomb next to a gas pipeline in occupied Simferopol, Crimea causing an explosion and fire on March 19.[66] Russian news aggregators claimed that the explosion did not disrupt the gas supply or damage the pipeline infrastructure.[67]

Russian forces conducted routine shelling in Zaporizhia, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, and Mykolaiv oblasts on March 19 and 20.[68]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of March 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
- ▭ 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.

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

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged Russian difficulties obtaining components for high-tech industrial production – likely referring to electronics and microchips – in his address to the Collegium of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) on March 20. Putin argued that Russian industry will use import substitution to boost Russian domestic production, presenting the situation as a positive turn.[69] Russian defense-industrial base (DIB) production appears to continue to struggle, however.[70] Many Russians seek to address general shortages and outmaneuver Western sanctions through covert imports. A Russian milblogger claimed on March 18 that volunteers provisioning Russian forces import goods from Laos.[71] An aircraft tracker and image analyst on Twitter stated on March 19 that an Iranian cargo airline that consistently flies cargo sorties to Moscow sent another flight from Tehran to Moscow.[72] ISW has previously reported on similar Russian attempts to import foreign military and dual-use goods to fill shortages or reduce strain on the Russian DIB.[73]

Russian authorities continue to crack down on limited domestic resistance to mobilization or to the war in Ukraine. A Russian opposition news source reported on March 17 that Russian federal state censoring agency Roskomnadzor blocked a website that aided Russians in evading mobilization.[74] Several Russian sources reported on March 18 and 20 that Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) detained two Saratov Oblast residents for committing an arson attack against the relay boxes at the Zorinsky-Trofimovsky-2 rail station in Saratov Oblast.[75] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed the men set fire to the relay boxes for a bounty from an unspecified actor.[76] A Russian activist group claimed on March 18 that unknown actors committed an arson attack against a relay box in Grelovo Raion in Saint Petersburg but failed to damage the inside controls.[77]

Russian mobilized soldiers fighting in Donetsk Oblast and their families continue to appeal to Russian authorities, complain to their loved ones, and resist forward deployments due to poor conditions on the front lines. An independent Russian media outlet amplified footage on March 18 of mobilized soldiers from Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast appealing to Russian President Vladimir Putin to do something about their extremely high casualty rate.[78] The soldiers claimed that they suffered a 70 percent casualty rate after their commanders ordered them to storm Avdiivka and that the commanders will send them to storm Avdiivka again all the same.[79] *Radio Liberty's* Siberian branch, *Siber Realii*, on March 17 cited the friend of a mobilized soldier from Siberia claiming that the soldier's battalion lost 298 of its 300 soldiers after conducting an assault on Avdiivka.[80] *Siber Realii* reported that a mobilized soldier from Volchikha, Altai Krai told his family on March 13 that he refused to fight further in Avdiivka after being thrown unprepared against Ukrainian defenses.[81]

Russian authorities continue to conduct large-scale recruitment campaigns for contract soldiers.[82] Russian military registration and enlistment offices continue to summon men to “verify information,” likely attempting to pressure men into signing contracts and setting conditions for covert mobilization.[83]

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Ukrainian partisans killed a Russian collaborator in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack on March 17. Ukrainian sources and geolocated imagery confirmed on March 20 that Ukrainian partisans assassinated Russian-appointed head of the Kherson Oblast pre-detention center Serhii Moskalenko on March 17.[84] The Russian Investigative Committee claimed on March 19 that an unknown person planted an explosive device in the car of the Russian occupation law enforcement officer in occupied Yuvileine, Kherson Oblast, while he, his wife, and daughter were in the car.[85]

Russian officials and occupation authorities continue to deport children and other vulnerable people to Russia under the guise of rehabilitation and safety efforts. Advisor to the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) head Rodion Miroshnik claimed on March 20 that 10 Ukrainian children and their mothers or grandmothers arrived at a sanatorium in Moscow Oblast, where they will remain for three weeks.[86] Miroshnik emphasized that the project “Helping Ours” helps facilitate the travel and ensures that children and their mothers safely arrive in Russia and receive care from Russian doctors at the facility.[87] Miroshnik claimed that volunteers of the LNR and Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) have planned at least two upcoming trips for Donbas children and their mothers to Russia in an unspecified timeframe.[88] Miroshnik stated that crowd-funding efforts fund the trips to Russia.[89] Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko stated that Russian occupation officials sent a large group of children from Mariupol to St. Petersburg on March 20, reportedly for vacation.[90] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on March 20 that Russian occupation forces threatened families in occupied Tokmak that Russian forces would take away their children if they did not receive Russian passports.[91]

Russian officials are continuing efforts to intensify law enforcement measures in occupied territories. Russian President Vladimir Putin asked in a speech to Russian Ministry of International Affairs (MVD) personnel that MVD employees recruit

personnel for territorial units in occupied Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts.[92] Putin also called on the Russian MVD to supply the new units with special hardware and information equipment.[93] Putin also stated that Russian MVD employees are intensifying measures to counter crime on the Russia-Ukraine border even more vigorously.[94]

Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. Unspecified elements of the Vitebsk-based Belarusian 103rd Air Assault Brigade began conducting tactical exercises in an unspecified location on March 20.[95]

Mobilized Russian soldiers continue training in Belarus. A local Saratov Oblast news outlet reported on March 19 that Russian volunteers collected foodstuff to transport to fighters of the Russian “94th Regiment” that is currently undergoing combat training in Belarus.[96] The “94th Regiment” is likely a new unit made of mobilized servicemen, as there is no known 94th Regiment in the Russian military.

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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