

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 6, 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.

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Ukrainian authorities indicated that Ukraine will continue to defend Bakhmut for now. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated at the end of the day on March 6 that he has ordered reinforcements to Bakhmut.[1] This announcement follows Zelensky's March 6 meeting with Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Valerii Zaluzhnyi and Commander of Ukrainian Ground Forces Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi where both commanders recommended the continued defense of Bakhmut and asked Zelensky to strengthen Ukrainian forces in the area.[2] Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykhailo Podolyak similarly stated on March 6 that the Ukrainian defense of Bakhmut thus far has "achieved its goals" and been a "great strategic success." [3] Statements made by Ukrainian officials regarding Bakhmut are likely meant in part to respond to the continued concern expressed by some Americans regarding the costs of Ukraine's continued defense of Bakhmut. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated on March 6 that he would not view a Ukrainian withdrawal from Bakhmut as a "significant strategic setback," possibly intimating that he favors such a withdrawal.[4]

Bakhmut is not intrinsically significant operationally or strategically as ISW has previously observed. Taking Bakhmut is necessary but not sufficient for further Russian advances in Donetsk Oblast, and Russian forces have already taken such heavy losses fighting for the city that their attack will very likely culminate after they have secured it—if not before. The loss of Bakhmut is not, therefore, of major operational or strategic concern to Ukraine, as Secretary Austin and others have observed.

But Ukraine's fight for Bakhmut has become strategically significant because of the current composition of Russian forces arrayed in the area. Some Western reports have recently suggested that Ukraine is expending its own elite manpower and scarce equipment on mainly Wagner Group prison recruits who are mere cannon fodder, noting that such an exchange would be to Ukraine's disadvantage even at high ratios of Russian to Ukrainian losses. That observation is valid in general, although the pool of Russian convict recruits suitable for combat is not limitless and the permanent elimination of tens of thousands of them in Bakhmut means that they will not be available for more important fights.

Russian forces fighting in Bakhmut are now drawn from the elite elements of the Wagner Group and from Russian airborne units as well as from lower-quality troops. Ukrainian intelligence has supported ISW's assessment that Russian forces near Bakhmut have recently changed tactics and committed higher-quality special forces operators and elements of conventional forces to the fight.[5] ISW has previously reported on the increasing presence of Russian Airborne (VDV) forces around Bakhmut since late December into early January, indicating that conventional Russian troops may be supporting or even supplanting Wagner's operations around Bakhmut.[6] The Wagner Group is still likely using prisoners to support operations in Bakhmut, albeit to a much more limited extent than in previous months due to massive losses suffered by those recruits in attritional frontal assaults. But Wagner has now also committed its very best soldiers to the fight, and it is they who are being attrited along with the conscripts.

The Battle of Bakhmut may, in fact, severely degrade the Wagner Group's best forces, depriving Russia of some of its most effective and most difficult-to-replace shock troops. The Wagner attacks already culminated once, causing the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to commit some of its elite airborne troops to the fight. It may well culminate again before taking the city, once more forcing the Russian military to choose between abandoning the effort or throwing more high-quality troops into the battle. The opportunity to damage the Wagner Group's elite elements, along with other elite units if they are committed, in a defensive urban warfare setting where the attrition gradient strongly favors Ukraine is an attractive one.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin apparently fears that his forces are being expended in exactly this way. Prigozhin made a number of statements on March 5 and 6 that suggest that he fears that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is fighting the Battle of Bakhmut to the last Wagner fighter and exposing his forces to destruction. Prigozhin claimed that he wrote a letter to the commander of Russian forces in Ukraine (presumably Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov) with an urgent appeal for the Russian command to allocate ammunition to Wagner but that his representative was denied access to Russian headquarters and could not deliver the appeal.[7] Prigozhin later published a

response to the Zelensky-Zaluzhnyi-Syrskiy meeting on March 6 and claimed that Ukraine has formed a number of offensive groups in Donetsk Oblast to “unblock” Wagner’s blockade of Bakhmut and that he has been “raising the alarm” to call for ammunition and reinforcements for Wagner.[8] Prigozhin claimed that if Wagner does not receive needed ammunition and reinforcements and the blockade of Bakhmut breaks, all is essentially lost and that he will stay with Wagner to the end.[9] Prigozhin’s plea to the Russian General Staff and suggestion that he will stay with Wagner until the bitter end suggests that he is working to position himself as the ultimate martyr for the ideological cause that Bakhmut has come to represent in the Russian milblogger information space. More importantly, it shows that he sees his elite forces to be in grave danger.

The severe degradation or destruction of the elite Wagner fighting force would have positive ramifications beyond the battlefield. Prigozhin has ostentatiously ramped up efforts to disseminate Wagner’s militarism and ideology throughout Russia by advertising Wagner’s role in Bakhmut. The Wagner Group has recently opened several recruitment centers at sports clubs throughout Russia, opened a youth branch, and is visiting schoolchildren to lecture them about Wagner’s structure and show them unfiltered combat footage from Ukraine.[10] Wagner’s success in Bakhmut thus far has given Prigozhin a major advantage in the information space, bolstering his reputation and increasing his popularity in a way that will likely have long-term impacts in the Russian domestic sphere. Prigozhin is one of the most extreme of the Russian pro-war nationalists. He is one of the very few with a serious military force loyal to himself. He has even seemed at times a possible threat to Putin or a possible successor. Which may be why Putin is allowing the Russian MoD to hang him out to dry. Badly damaging Prigozhin’s power and reputation within Russia would be an important accomplishment from the standpoint of the long-term prospects for restoring sanity in Russia. That is an aim in America’s interests as well as in Ukraine’s, and it raises the stakes in the Battle of Bakhmut beyond matters of terrain and battlespace geometry.

The Kremlin is returning to its previously unsuccessful volunteer recruitment and crypto-mobilization campaigns to avoid ordering another major involuntary reserve call-up. Russian Telegram channels began advertising for recruitment into existing volunteer battalions after ceasing such recruitment calls in September 2022 at the start of involuntary reserve mobilization.[11] Some local Russian officials are also setting up mobile recruitment centers in order to advertise voluntary military contract service — a phenomenon that ISW observed during the previous volunteer recruitment campaign between late May 2022 and September 2022.[12] Russian officials are even advertising contract service in unusual places: A Moscow-based psychiatrist is reportedly calling on suicidal men to enlist.[13] Russian ultranationalist social media networks are also increasingly advertising recruitment for Wagner Group units across almost 30 Russian cities.[14] Ukrainian officials observed instances of Russian occupation officials registering male teenagers born in 2006 from occupied Luhansk Oblast for military service.[15] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that military recruitment centers in occupied Donetsk Oblast received instructions to clarify personal credentials of reserve officers under 65 years of age, and soldiers, sergeants, and warrant officers under the age of 50.[16] Russian officials had extensively conducted similar crypto-mobilization in occupied Ukrainian territories throughout the war, especially over the summer.

Such voluntary recruitment drives may also indicate that the Kremlin is running out of combat-ready reserves to continue its offensive operations past the Battle of Bakhmut and its failed offensives around Vuhledar and in Luhansk Oblast. ISW assessed on February 26 that Russian President Vladimir Putin had turned to voluntary recruitment campaigns in late May 2022, when the Russian military began to run out of reserves as it was conducting a costly offensive on the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk line — over a month before Russian attack culminated in Luhansk Oblast.[17] Putin later abandoned his country-wide and summer-long volunteer recruitment campaign and ordered an involuntary reservist call-up in response to the sweeping Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast in September 2022.[18] The Kremlin may be repeating similar efforts in hopes that such irregular forces will be sufficient to retain Russian initiative on the frontline. Russian veterans and milbloggers, however, observed that Russia will not be able to achieve its objectives of reaching the administrative borders of Donetsk Oblast without the large-scale mobilization of personnel, economy, and industry.[19]

The return of the voluntary recruitment and crypto-mobilization campaigns likely indicates that the Kremlin will not launch another mobilization wave before the summer of 2023 at the earliest because the spring conscription cycle is due to begin on April 1. Western officials previously reported that Putin had been delaying announcing the second mobilization wave since January and was leaning towards conducting “silent mobilization” out of concern for the stability of his regime.[20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) likely again advised Putin to launch another mobilization over the winter as an involuntary call-up at that time would be less likely to overwhelm already struggling Russian military recruitment centers between bi-annual conscription cycles. ISW had observed numerous indicators that Russia was preparing to execute the second mobilization wave since fall 2022, but Putin passed the mobilization window to avoid further antagonizing Russians who did not support previous involuntary call-ups.[21] The Russian MoD will likely be unable to embark on mobilization processes until after Russia completes its spring conscription cycle given that Russian military recruitment centers appear to have the administrative capacity to prepare and generate roughly 130,000 conscripts per bi-annual cycle.[22] That limitation appears to be relatively inflexible and likely explains why the 300,000 reservists called up in the fall seem to have been trained in batches rather than all at once. It likely also

explains why Russian forces are using training areas in Belarus to reconstitute formations damaged in combat. Putin would likely need to delay the spring conscription cycle if he decided to announce mobilization now, likely for longer than the one-month delay in the autumn conscription cycle caused by his September 2022 reserve call-up.[23]

A reportedly captured Russian military manual suggests that Russian forces intend to use the newly created “assault detachment” elements in urban warfare. Ukrainian news outlet *Censor.NET* originally published the alleged manuals that detail the formation and use of the assault detachment on December 12.[24] ISW previously reported on the “assault detachment” on February 27 and assessed that this newly minted formation is likely an effort to compensate for current combat power limitations by breaking maneuver forces into smaller and more agile structures, thereby partially institutionalizing practices previously used to tactical effect by the Wagner Group in urban combat.[25] A Ukrainian reserve officer amplified documents in the manual on March 5 that recommend assault detachment tactics to be applied in an urban context.[26] The document recommends that Russian forces begin their assaults by targeting the defense’s frontline with tanks or explosives to make holes in fences and buildings to ensure safe passage of an assault company and suggests how to seize observation points, confuse the enemy, seize multi-story buildings, and take cover. The documents also makes suggestions for Russian forces operating in an assault platoon to break into small groups and clear multi-story and multi-entrance buildings. The Ukrainian reserve officer noted that while the Russian military attempts to create more flexible military formations, instructions are “blindly applied across the battlefield based on a few successful examples.”[27] ISW previously assessed that the documents indicate that the Russian military attempts to simplify combined arms warfare to compensate for the challenges posed by manpower and equipment losses and inexperienced and untrained mobilized personnel.[28] Assault detachments may suffer significant losses in urban warfare given the extensive use of untrained personnel and attritional tactics.

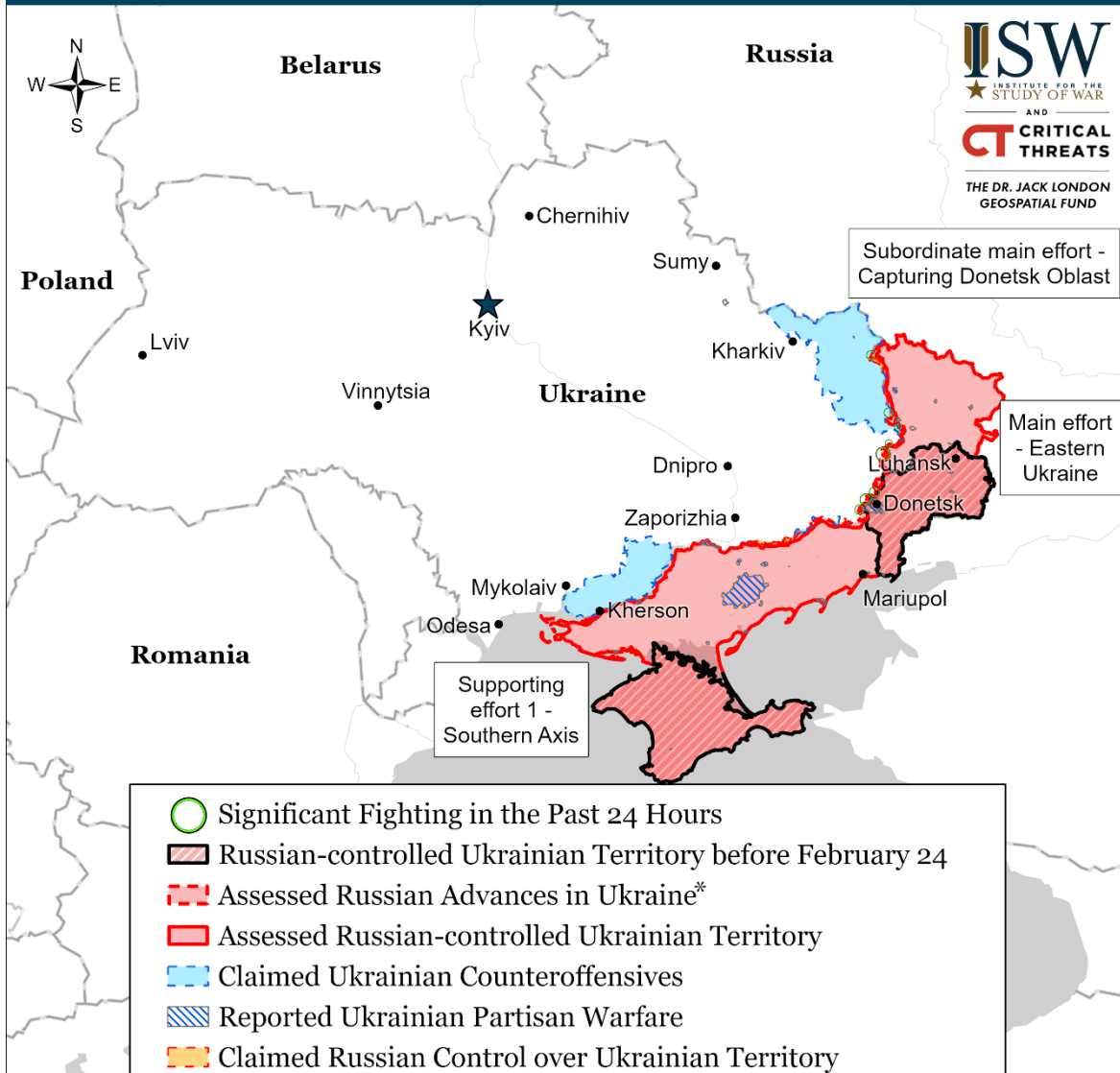
Russian forces utilized a new type of guided aerial bomb against Ukrainian targets amid continued precision missile shortages. Ukrainian news outlet *Defense Express* reported on March 4 that Russian forces used the UPAB-1500V guided aerial bomb against an unspecified target in Chernihiv Oblast within the past few weeks. *Defense Express* noted that Russian bomber aircraft can release the bombs up to 40km from the intended target and that the aircraft can maintain a low altitude of 14km, both of which would lessen the risk of Ukrainian air defenses taking out the Russian bombers.[29] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Yuriy Ignat stated that a Russian Su-34 may have been trying to launch a UPAB-1500V when Ukrainian forces shot the jet down.[30] Ignat stated on March 6 that Russian forces will undertake every possible measure to procure more weapons and warned not to underestimate Russia’s ability to procure artillery shells, drones, and missiles for use in Ukraine.[31]

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian authorities indicated that Ukraine will continue to defend Bakhmut for now.**
- **Bakhmut is not intrinsically significant operationally or strategically as ISW has previously observed. But Ukraine’s fight for Bakhmut has become strategically significant because of the current composition of Russian forces arrayed in the area. The Battle of Bakhmut may, in fact, severely degrade the Wagner Group’s best forces, depriving Russia of some of its most effective and most difficult-to-replace shock troops.**
- **Wagner Group head Yevgeny Prigozhin apparently fears that his forces are being expended in exactly this way. The severe degradation or destruction of the elite Wagner fighting force would have positive ramifications beyond the battlefield.**
- **The Kremlin is returning to its previously unsuccessful volunteer recruitment and crypto-mobilization campaigns to avoid calling the second mobilization wave. The return of the voluntary recruitment and crypto-mobilization campaigns likely indicates that the Kremlin will not launch another mobilization wave at least before the summer 2023 due to spring conscription cycle on April 1.**
- **A reportedly captured Russian military manual suggests that Russian forces intend to use the newly created “assault detachment” elements in urban warfare.**
- **Russian forces utilized a new type of guided aerial bomb against Ukrainian targets amid continued precision missile shortages.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks northwest of Svatove and near Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces secured territorial gains in Bakhmut but have not yet encircled the city or forced Ukrainian forces to withdraw.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks near Avdiivka and west of Donetsk City.**
- **Russian forces continue struggling to maintain fire control over the Dnipro River Delta in Kherson Oblast.**
- **Russian military command is failing to properly equip its forces despite forces increasingly conducting close combat in Ukraine.**

- Ukrainian officials reported on alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 6, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

* 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
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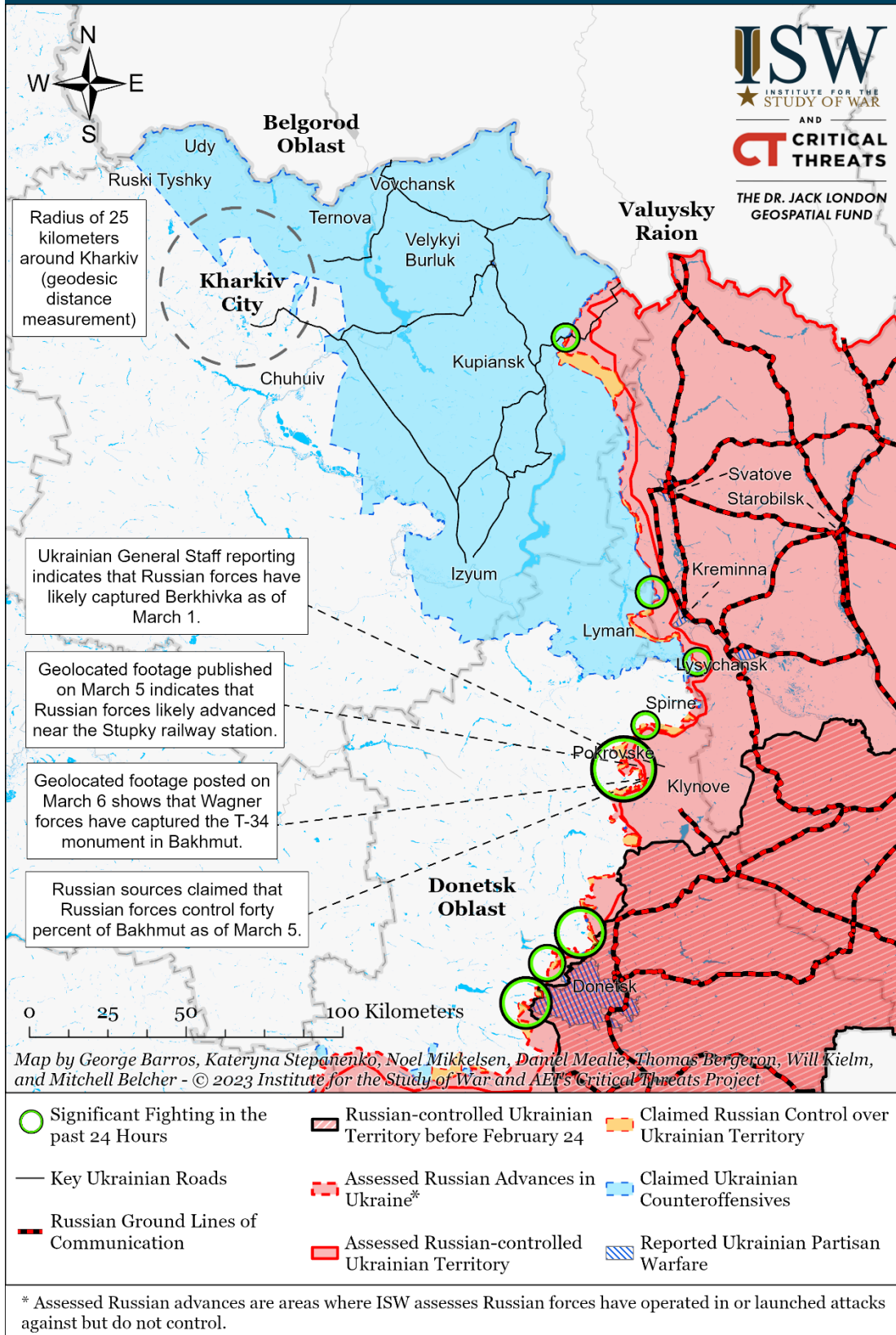
Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

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 forces conducted limited ground attacks northwest of Svatove on March 5 and 6. Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai stated on March 5 that Russian forces tried and failed to break through Ukrainian defenses near Svatove.[32] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Hryanykivka (54km northwest of Svatove).[33] Russian sources posted footage on March 4 claiming to show the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) operating along the Svatove-Kreminna line.[34]

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Kreminna on March 5 and 6. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Nevske (17km north of Kreminna), Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna), and the Serebrianska forest area (10km south of Kreminna).[35] A Russian milblogger claimed on March 5 that Russian forces conducted ground attacks against Terny (17km west of Kreminna) and Torske (14km west of Kreminna).[36] The milblogger claimed on March 6 that Russian forces attempted to advance near Bilohorivka, towards Nevske, and from Shypylivka (8km southeast of Kreminna) toward the Serebrianska forest area.[37] A Russian BARS-13 (Russian Combat Reserve of the Country) commander claimed on March 6 that the front line stabilized near Kreminna and that there are contested (grey) zones along the frontline.[38]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of March 6, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



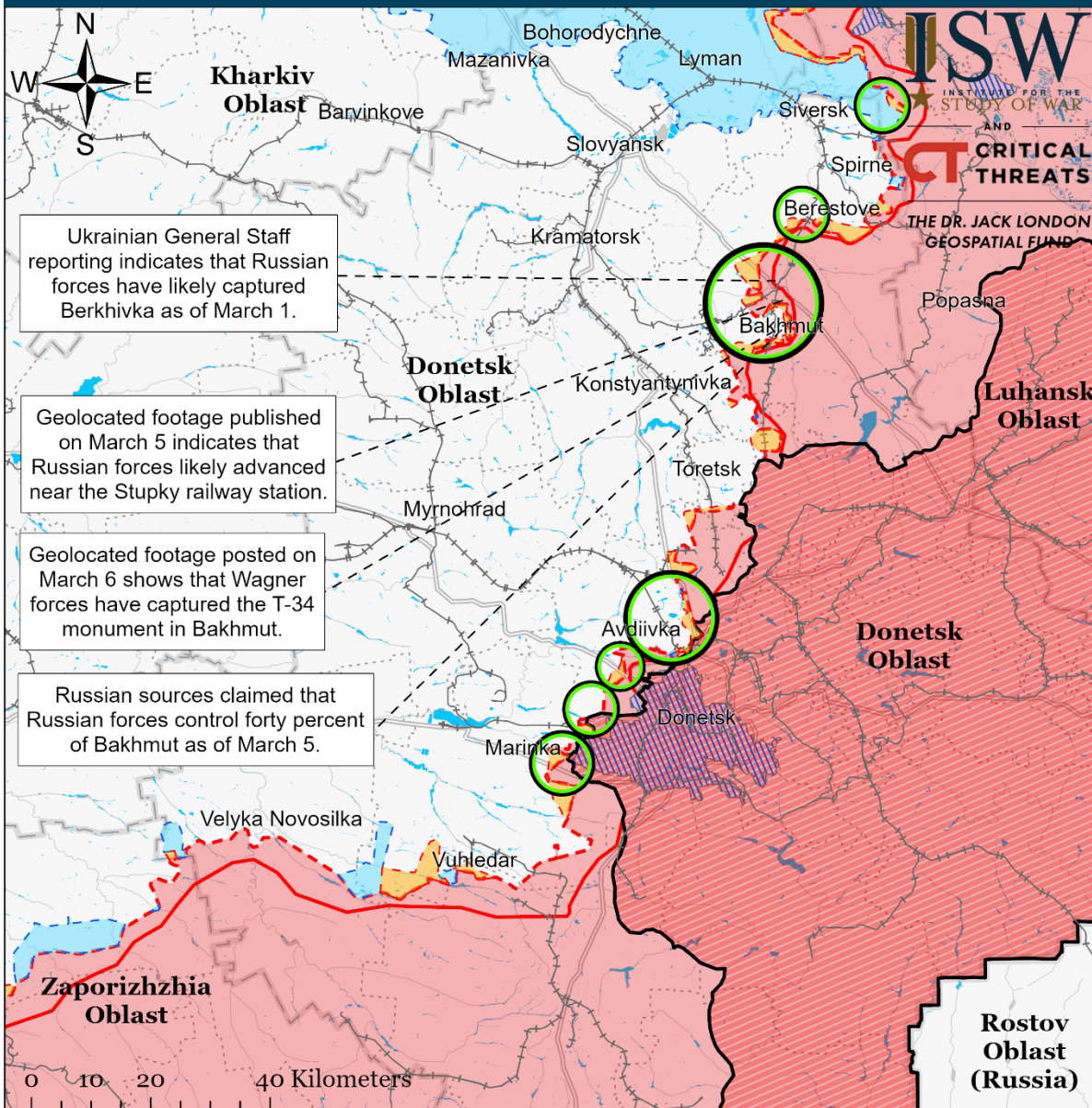
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued ground attacks in and around Bakhmut on March 6 and secured gains but still have not succeeded in encircling the city. Geolocated footage posted on March 6 shows Wagner Group infantry hanging a Wagner flag and posing in front of the T-34 tank monument in eastern Bakhmut, confirming the Wagner has advanced westward along Maksyma Horkoho street towards Bakhmut’s city center.[39] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported on March 6 that Russian forces are storming Bakhmut despite continued losses and reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northwest of Bakhmut near Zalizianske (7km northwest), Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest), and Orikhovo-Vasylivka (10km northwest); and west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west).[40] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have cleared the Miasokombinat suburb of northeastern Bakhmut and are advancing in urban areas of eastern Bakhmut.[41] Several Russian milbloggers amplified the assertion that Russian forces control 40 percent of Bakhmut and that while Russian forces have fire control of all roads into Bakhmut, they still lack physical control of critical supply routes into the city.[42] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continue withdrawing from within Bakhmut to secondary lines of defense.[43] A Russian milblogger notably claimed that Ukrainian troops mounted a counterattack along the Bohdanivka-Ivanivske line and near the T0504 Kostiantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut route west of Bakhmut on March 6.[44]

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline on March 5 and 6. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops conducted unsuccessful offensive actions towards Avdiivka itself; around Avdiivka near Krasnohorivka (9km north of Avdiivka), Kamianka (5km northeast of Avdiivka), and Severne (5km west of Avdiivka); on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Vodyane, Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Krasnohorivka (the Krasnohorivka just northwest of Donetsk City and not the Krasnohorivka north of Avdiivka); and on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Marinka and Pobieda.[45] Spokesperson for the Joint Press Center for Ukrainian Ukrainian Tavriisk Defense Group spokesperson Colonel Oleksiy Dmytrashkivskiy stated on March 5 that Russian forces are concentrating near Krasnohorivka and Vodyane on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City and that offensive efforts in this area are led by elements of the 114th Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) and 136th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade (58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District).[46] Dmytrashkivskiy also noted that Russian forces have reconstituted the 200th Separate Motor Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Northern Fleet) following catastrophic losses in Kharkiv Oblast and redeployed the brigade to the Donetsk area.[47] The presence of likely heavily degraded and poorly reconstituted elements of three separate military districts suggests that Russian forces will be unable to pursue successful offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast in the near future. Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian troops advanced within Marinka and had success along the Pobieda-Novomykhailivka line southwest of Donetsk City between March 5 and 6.[48] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on March 5 or 6. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations in the western Donetsk direction on both March 5 and 6 but did not specify where these offensive actions occurred.[49] Russian milbloggers continued to amplify footage that reportedly shows elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade conducting positional battles in the dacha area on the outskirts of Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City).[50] Milbloggers warned that Ukrainian troops are preparing for counteroffensives near Vuhledar.[51] Russian force capacity and consistent failures to take ground in western Donetsk Oblast has become a clear point of neuralgia for the Russian military command, as ISW previously assessed.[52] Anxiety emanating from the Russian milblogger community regarding Ukrainian counteroffensive capabilities in this sector of the front is likely emblematic of greater breakdowns in the Russian information space following persistent losses in the Vuhledar area.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 6, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Ukrainian General Staff reporting indicates that Russian forces have likely captured Berkhivka as of March 1.

Geolocated footage published on March 5 indicates that Russian forces likely advanced near the Stupky railway station.

Geolocated footage posted on March 6 shows that Wagner forces have captured the T-34 monument in Bakhmut.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces control forty percent of Bakhmut as of March 5.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiehl, 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
- 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.

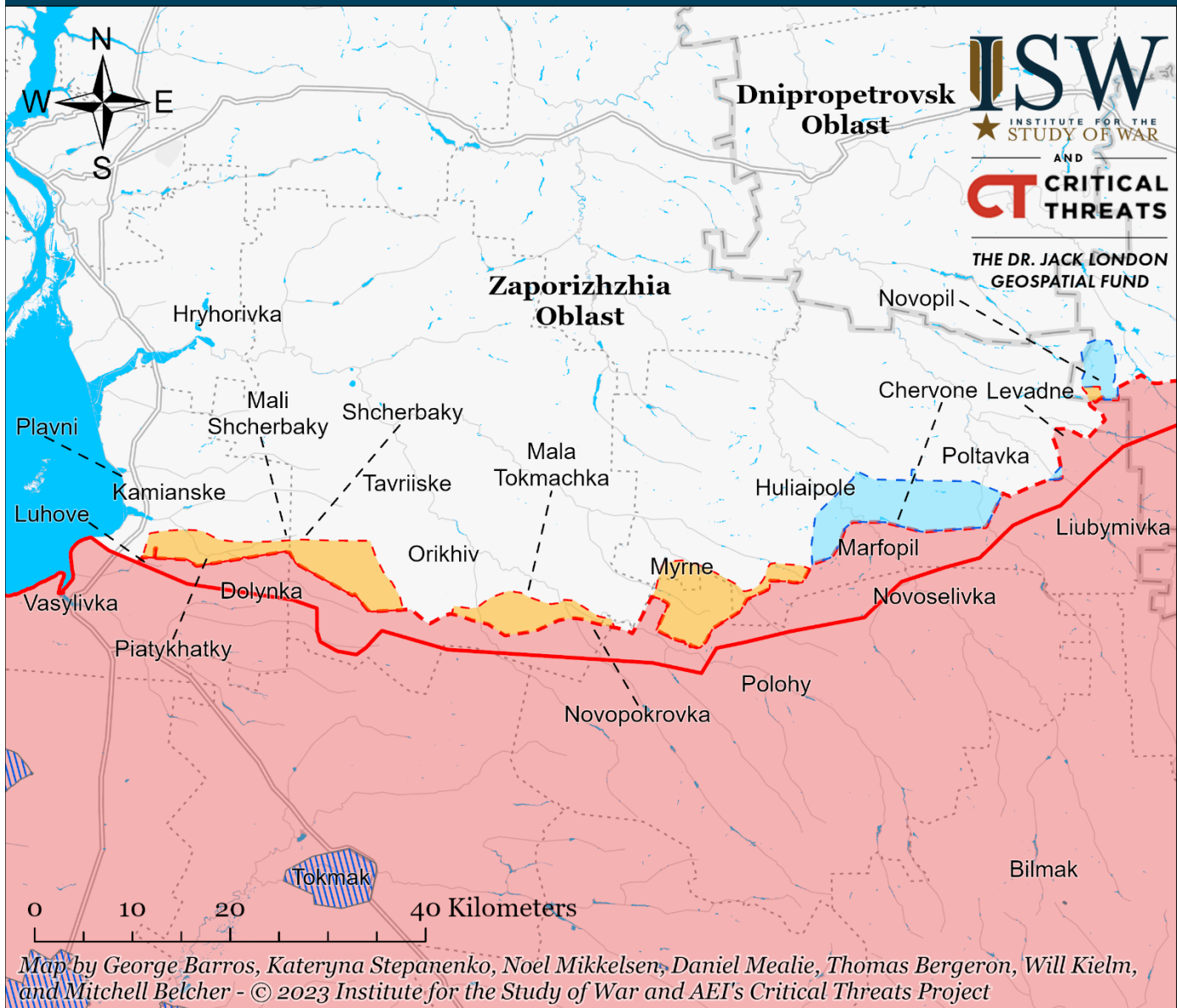
Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces continue struggling to maintain fire control over the Dnipro River Delta in Kherson Oblast. Geolocated footage from a Russian milblogger on March 6 shows Russian forces striking a Ukrainian reconnaissance group's position on Velykyi Potemkyne Island near Bilohrudove (11km southwest of Kherson City).[53] The milblogger posted footage of two other engagements on February 27 and claimed that Russian forces forced Ukrainian forces to retreat from their positions after half an hour of artillery fire.[54] ISW is unable to confirm the milblogger's claims of short engagements; the extent and duration of Ukrainian positions on the islands in the Dnipro River Delta remain unclear.

Russian milbloggers are growing increasingly concerned that Ukrainian forces may conduct a counteroffensive push in southern Ukraine. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov claimed on March 6 that Ukrainian forces have massed 12,000 troops for an offensive push towards the Sea of Azov coastline in late March or early April.[55] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces transported new weapons and military equipment to western Donetsk Oblast for a future offensive against Melitopol.[56] Another milblogger speculated that Ukrainian forces may instead target Mariupol.[57]

Ongoing efforts to stabilize the situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) have stalled amid deteriorating conditions at the plant. Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko stated on March 5 that ZNPP negotiations have reached an impasse and that Ukraine's efforts to regain control of the ZNPP have failed.[58] Halushchenko noted that Russian authorities are operating the ZNPP in a way that damages the equipment and facilities. The Ukrainian Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian authorities struggle with a "catastrophic" shortage of personnel to operate the ZNPP and employ personnel without proper training or credentials.[59] Ukrainian nuclear energy operator Energoatom reported on March 6 that Russian authorities made plans to loot the ZNPP of specialized equipment in case Russian forces withdraw from the plant.[60] International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi stated that unspecified "military action" near the ZNPP has increased in recent weeks and reiterated calls to establish a safety and security zone at the plant.[61]

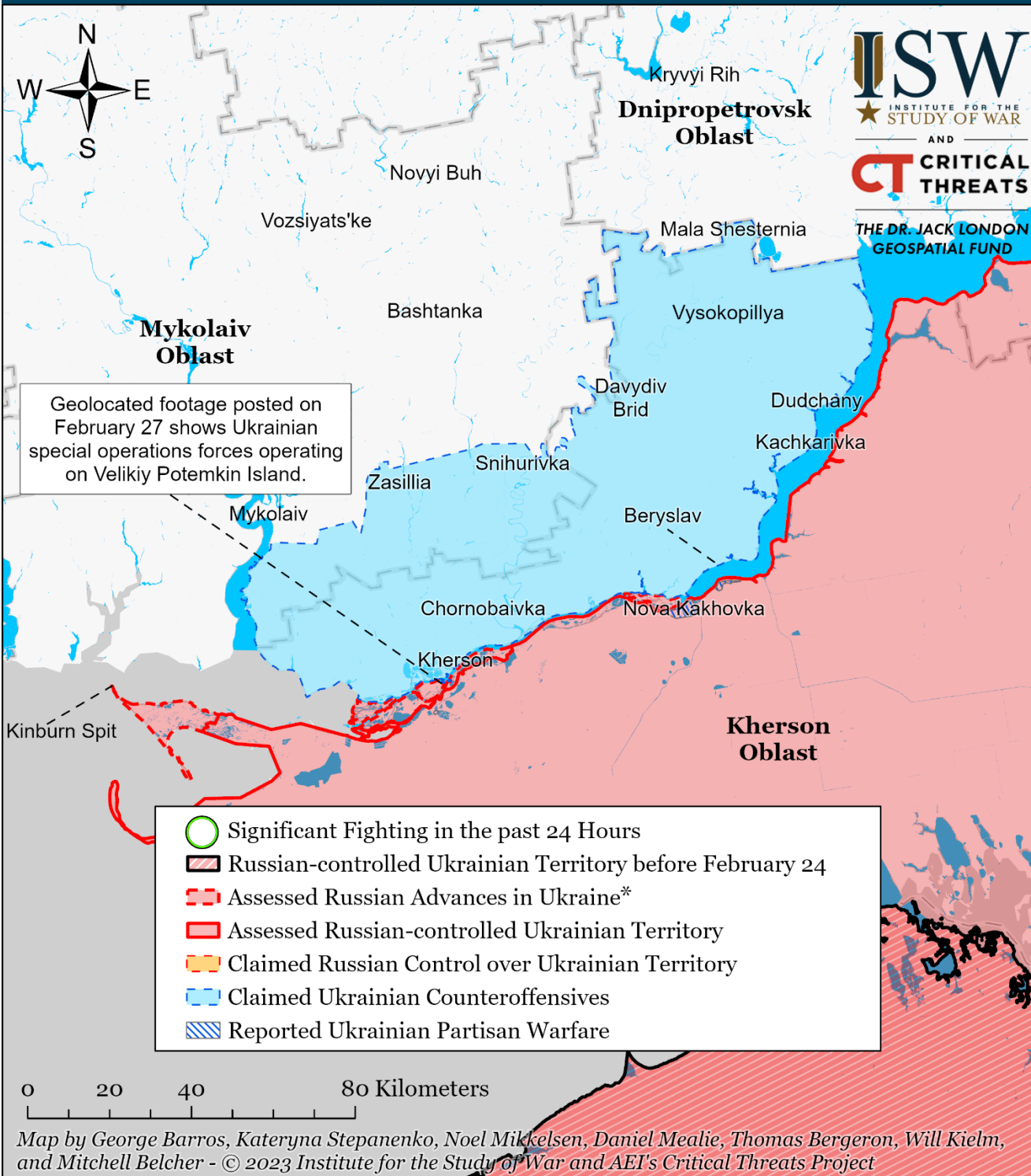
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of March 6, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- 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 6, 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 military command is failing to properly equip its forces despite close combat engagements in Ukraine. The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) that Russian military command is ordering mobilized reservists to assault Ukrainian concrete positions with only firearms and shovels.[62] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian officers on the Donetsk, Marinka, Kupyansk, Zaporizhia, and Kreminna frontlines lack jeeps and pickup trucks for daily reconnaissance, sabotage, and logistics efforts.[63] The milblogger noted that the Russian reliance on trucks is impractical as these vehicles have high fuel consumption and noted instances of breakdown of automotive equipment as a result of low-quality fuel and lubricants.[64] Another milblogger complained that Russian forces lack modern optical systems because the Russian MoD took over four months to sign a contract with a company for the production of optical systems.[65] The milblogger added that the Russian MoD also did not make the promised downpayment for these optical systems. Another milblogger observed that Russian medics refuse to treat injured Russian servicemen, forcing Russian forces to drag injured personnel kilometers away from the frontlines.[66] Mobilized personnel from Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, and Kaliningrad oblasts complained about receiving outdated weaponry from the 1940s.[67]

Russian news outlets are attempting to downplay reports of the Russian military command's improper treatment of mobilized servicemen in Ukraine. A prominent Russian news aggregator published a statement reportedly from an Irkutsk Oblast mobilized serviceman on March 5 who denied viral social media reports that the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) command threw mobilized servicemen from the 1439th Regiment into an assault operation without proper training.[68] The mobilized serviceman claimed that his unit routinely undergoes training and does not have issues with morale.[69]

The Russian MoD's efforts to integrate the DNR forces into the Russian Armed Forces are continuing to fuel tensions between different armed formations. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on March 6 that Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov is actively recruiting DNR fighters into his units in an effort to increase his influence in occupied Donetsk Oblast.[70] The Center noted that the Kremlin is becoming increasingly nervous because Kadyrov appears to be conserving his forces by only performing policing measures without participating in combat, while other Russian armed formations are suffering significant personnel losses.

Russia is likely attempting to rectify long-term mobilization and force-generation effects on Russian demographics and the economy. A Russian news outlet reported that the Russian State Duma Committee of the Financial Market wants to launch "children's deposits" that would allow the state to deposit a certain amount of money to families after the birth of a child.[71] Head of the Duma Committee of the Financial Market Anatoliy Aksakov noted that such provision would "stimulate childbearing" and will "form the financial base of credit institutions." [72] The Russian Central Bank is extending restrictions on foreign currency cash withdrawals until September 9.[73]

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 officials reported on alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine. Footage published on March 6 shows Russian forces reportedly executing a Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW) for saying "*Slava Ukraini*" (Glory to Ukraine).[74] Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets stated that he sent the video to ombudsmen and unspecified international partners and called for holding Russia accountable for each war crime committed in Ukraine.[75] Executing POWs without a prior judgement from a regularly constituted court is a violation of Article III of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.[76] Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska announced on March 5 that Ukrainian authorities are investigating 171 cases of Russian forces sexually assaulting Ukrainians, including 39 cases against male victims and 13 cases against children.[77] Zelenska stated that Russian forces use rape as a weapon against Ukrainian civilians. Ukrainian Deputy Prosecutor General Viktoriya Litvinova reported on March 5 that there are 2,651 criminal cases against Russian forces for crimes against Ukrainian children and that Russian forces have killed 462 and wounded 931 since the start of the war. Litvinova noted that the full scale of Russian crimes against children is unknown.[78]

Ukrainian officials provided more detail on the extent and tactics of Russian schemes to forcibly relocate Ukrainian children to Russia and other crimes against Ukrainian children. Litvinova reported that Russia forcibly relocated about 16,000 Ukrainian children to Russia and Ukrainian authorities were able to recover 307.[79] Ukrainian Presidential Commissioner for Human Rights Daria Herasimchuk stated that Russian occupation authorities use five schemes to forcibly relocate Ukrainian children: killing the parents, separating parents and children during filtration, stripping parental rights, take

children from care institutions, and creating unsuitable conditions for children's lives and offering, sometimes forcing, parents to send children to rehabilitation camps.[80]

Russian occupation authorities continue to construct new housing facilities in occupied Ukraine. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on March 6 that Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu visited occupied Mariupol to inspect ongoing efforts to build housing facilities and other infrastructure in the city.[81] Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin announced on March 6 that Russia will build over 2,800 apartment buildings in newly occupied Ukraine and 47 high rise buildings in Mariupol and Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast and Alchevsk, Luhansk Oblast in 2023.[82]

Russian occupation authorities continue to struggle to provide medical care to both civilians and Russian forces in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky announced on March 6 that mobile hospitals and doctors will begin operating in Zaporizhia Oblast after the Russian Cabinet of Ministers allocated over one billion rubles (about \$13.2 million) to this effort across occupied Ukraine.[83] Russian authorities will likely use these teams to compensate for existing medical infrastructure that Russian forces are using for their own care. Russian authorities may also leverage these mobile teams as medics for Russian forces along critical areas in the front line. Russian milbloggers called on the Russian Human Rights Committee to raise the salaries of doctors in occupied Ukraine and amplified public calls for donations on behalf of the doctors.[84] The milbloggers claimed that doctors from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts only receive salaries of 30–35 thousand rubles (\$397–464) per month, whereas doctors from Russia receive salaries of 60–80 thousand rubles (\$795–1,061).[85]

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.

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.

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