

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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April 14, 7:15pm ET

The Russian missile cruiser *Moskva*, flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, sunk on April 14 after a likely Ukrainian anti-ship missile strike on April 13. Ukrainian forces claimed to strike the *Moskva* with two Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles on April 13.ⁱ The Kremlin denied this claim and stated the *Moskva* suffered damage from an accidental fire and ammunition explosion.ⁱⁱ Initial Ukrainian claims to have sunk the warship on April 13 were likely false, but the Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed the *Moskva* sank in a storm while being towed to Crimea after the crew evacuated.ⁱⁱⁱ ISW cannot independently confirm that a Ukrainian strike sunk the *Moskva*, though Ukrainian forces likely have the capability to have done so.

The loss of the *Moskva*—regardless if from a Ukrainian strike or an accident—is a major propaganda victory for Ukraine. The sinking of the *Moskva*, which was involved in the infamous “Snake Island” incident in the early days of the Russian invasion, is a boon to Ukrainian morale as a symbol of Ukrainian capabilities to strike back at the Russian navy. The Kremlin will conversely struggle to explain away the loss of one of the most important vessels in the Russian fleet. The Kremlin’s current story of losing the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet due to an accidental fire and ammunition explosion will, at minimum, likely hurt Russian morale and cannot be hidden from the Russian domestic audience. Both explanations for the sinking of the *Moskva* indicate possible Russian deficiencies—either poor air defenses or incredibly lax safety procedures and damage control on the Black Sea Fleet’s flagship.

The loss of the *Moskva* will reduce Russia’s ability to conduct cruise missile strikes but is unlikely to deal a decisive blow to Russian operations on the whole. The *Moskva*’s main role was likely conducting precision strikes with Kalibr cruise missiles on targets in Ukrainian rear areas, including logistics centers and airfields. These Russian strikes have been effective but limited in number compared to airstrikes and ground-launched cruise missiles throughout the invasion, and the loss of the *Moskva* is unlikely to be a decisive blow. Ukraine’s possibly demonstrated ability to target Russian warships in the Black Sea may change Russian operating patterns, however, forcing them to either deploy additional air and point-defense assets to the Black Sea battleground or withdraw vessels from positions near the Ukrainian coast.

Key Takeaways

- **The flagship of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet sunk on April 14 following a likely Ukrainian cruise missile strike on April 13. The loss of the *Moskva* is a significant propaganda victory for Ukraine but will likely have only limited effects on Russian operations.**
- **Ukrainian officials admitted Russian forces captured “some” personnel from Ukraine’s 36th Marine Brigade in Mariupol despite initial denials, though Ukrainian defenders predominantly continued to hold out against Russian assaults.**
- **Russian forces may have committed damaged units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine to combat operations in eastern Ukraine for the first time on April 14. Continued daily Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine are failing to take any territory.**
- **Ukrainian partisans have likely been active in the Melitopol region since at least mid-March.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 14, 2022, 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 forces continued to redeploy from Belarus to Russia for further deployment to eastern Ukraine.**

The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian conscription measures in Donbas have been largely unsuccessful, reporting Russia sought to mobilize 60-70,000 personnel by an unspecified date and has only recruited 20% of its goal.^{iv} ISW cannot independently confirm these reports, though they are consistent with the demoralization observed among Russian and proxy personnel. The Ukrainian General Staff additionally reported that unspecified elements of Russia’s Northern Fleet and 8th Combined Arms Army are preparing to deploy to Ukraine, though the Russian military likely has little effective combat power remaining to send to Ukraine.^v

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.

ISW has updated its assessment of the four primary efforts Russian forces are engaged in at this time:

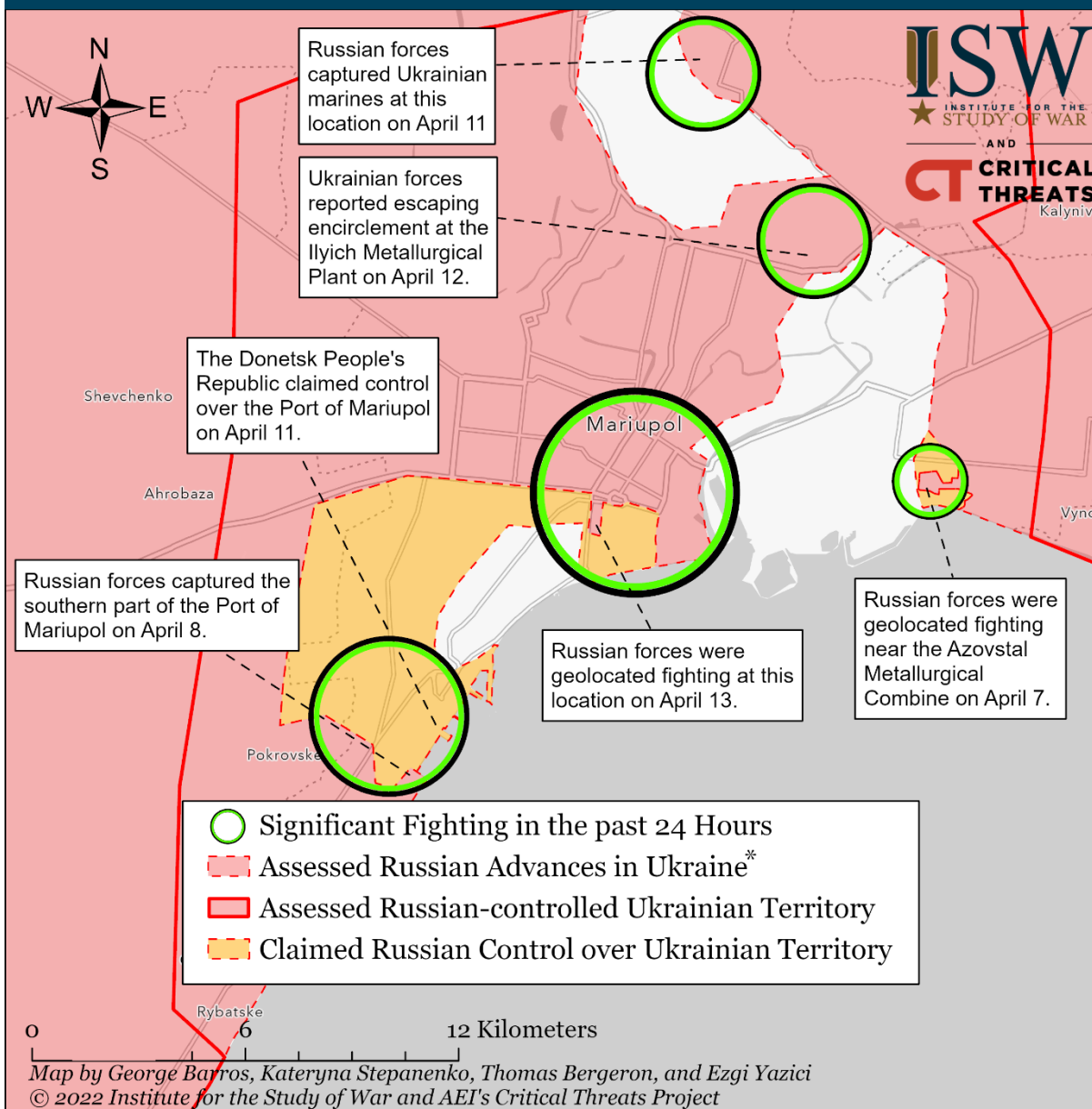
- Main effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate supporting efforts);
- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv and Izyum;
- Supporting effort 2—Southern axis;
- Supporting effort 3—Sumy and northeastern Ukraine.

Main effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate main effort—Mariupol (Russian objective: Capture Mariupol and reduce the Ukrainian defenders)

Russian forces continued assaults against Ukrainian defenses in southwestern and eastern Mariupol on April 13, though ISW cannot confirm any territorial changes. Ukrainian officials admitted on April 14 that Russian forces captured “some” personnel from Ukraine’s 36th Marine Brigade during their breakout from the Ilyich plant to link up with Ukrainian forces in the Azovstal plant in eastern Mariupol on April 13.^{vi} Petro Andryushenko, advisor to Mariupol’s mayor, provided a detailed report on April 14 on areas of active fighting in Mariupol, which we used to refine our control of terrain assessment in the accompanying maps.^{vii} Andryushenko said Russian forces are concentrated on capturing the Mariupol port in the southwest with heavy air and artillery support, contradicting Russian claims to have previously captured the port.^{viii} Andryushenko further stated that Russian forces are strictly controlling entry and exit in Mariupol and are “filtering” Ukrainian civilians—a term used by Russian forces elsewhere in Ukraine to describe searches, interrogations, and possible targeted killings of Ukrainian civilians.^{ix}

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of April 14, 2022, 3:00 ET



Russian forces continue their grinding advance into Mariupol, which they have encircled and are bombarding. Fighting is proceeding block-by-block and slowly. Russian forces began penetrating Mariupol's city center on March 24. Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade reported escaping encirclement at the Ilyich Metallurgical Plant and reuniting with the Ukrainian Azov Regiment on April 12. Russian Defense Ministry claimed that 1,026 Ukrainian servicemen surrendered at the the Ilyich Metallurgical Plant on April 13, but Ukrainian forces deny reports of mass surrender. The Azov Regiment continued to challenge Russian forces in central Mariupol by destroying some Russian military equipment on April 13.

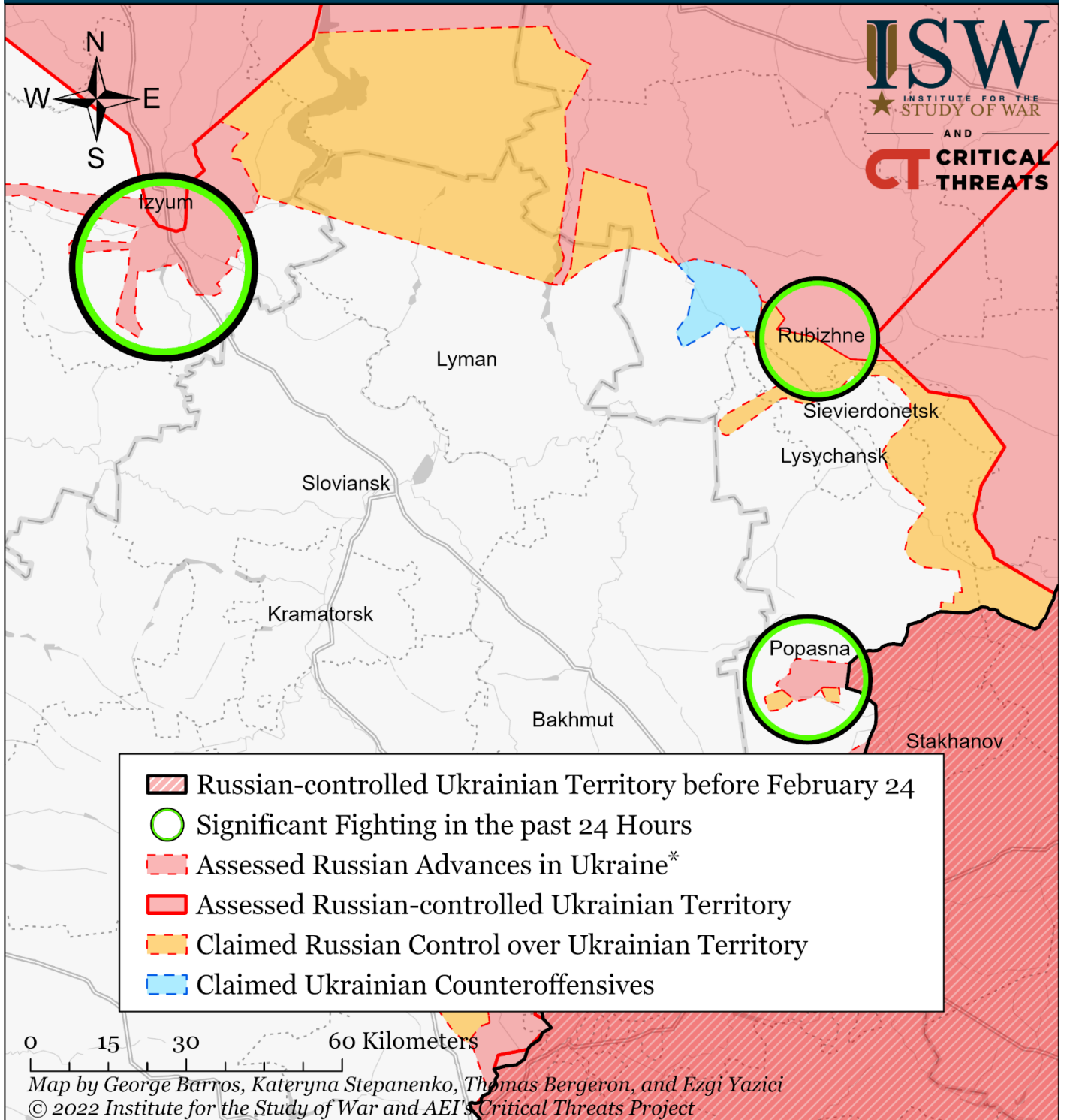
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Subordinate main effort—Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on April 14 that elements of Russia’s 2nd Combined Arms Army—which was previously withdrawn from the Chernihiv axis—are deploying around Severodonetsk.^x If confirmed, this is the first Russian unit withdrawn from fighting in northeastern Ukraine to be recommitted to eastern Ukraine. These units likely remain degraded, and Russian forces will face challenges integrating units from several military districts into a cohesive fighting force.^{xi}

Russian forces continued unsuccessful daily attacks against Rubizhne, Popasna, and Marinka and did not make any territorial advances on April 14.^{xii} The DNR claimed its forces drove back Ukrainian forces around Marinka on April 14, but ISW cannot independently confirm this claim.^{xiii} The UK Ministry of Defense reported on April 14 that Russian forces in eastern Ukraine are employing “massive rocket and artillery strikes,” consistent with reports on the ground of continued Russian shelling along the line of contact.^{xiv}

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of April 14, 2022, 3:00 ET

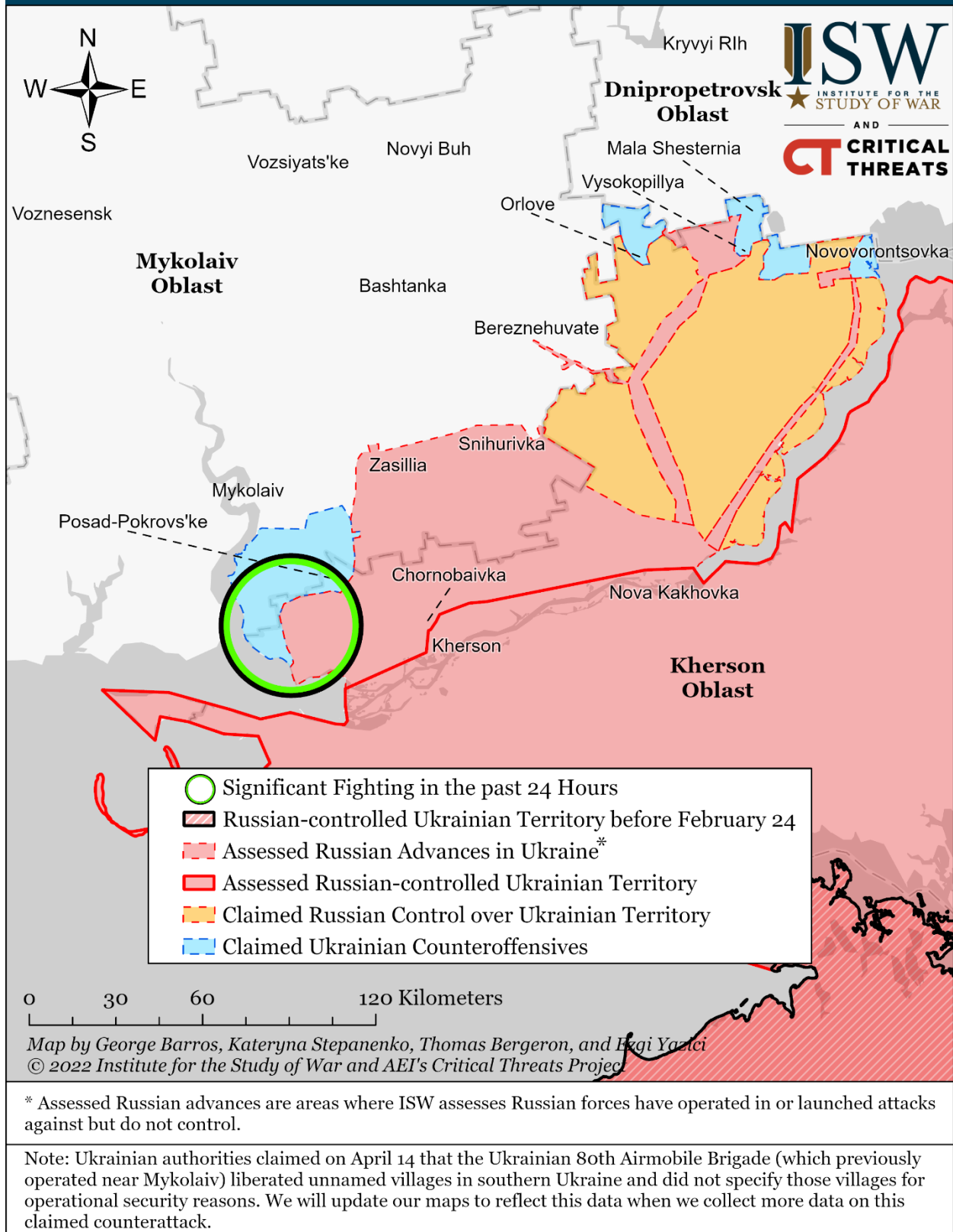


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Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum: (Russian objective: Advance southeast to support Russian operations in Luhansk Oblast, and fix Ukrainian forces around Kharkiv in place)

Local social media reports confirmed Ukrainian claims that Ukrainian Special Forces destroyed a bridge near Izyum while a Russian military convoy was crossing it on April 13.^{xv} Ukrainian Special Forces are likely successfully interdicting Russian operations to reinforce the Izyum axis. Russian forces launched limited attacks around Izyum in the last 24 hours but did not make any territorial advances.^{xvi} The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces concentrated on reconnoitering Ukrainian positions and resupplying forward positions.^{xvii} Russian forces reportedly deployed an information and psychological operations unit to Belgorod, Russia, to support unspecified efforts to demoralize Ukrainian forces and civilians in Kharkiv Oblast.^{xviii}

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 14, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Supporting Effort #2—Southern axis: (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Fighting continued west of Kherson city on April 14, though ISW cannot confirm any specific Ukrainian or Russian attacks. Russian forces conducted minor attacks against Ukrainian positions in Oleksandrivka, 30 km west of Kherson city, on April 14.^{xix} Ukraine's Airborne Forces command claimed on April 14th that the 80th Airmobile Brigade (previously operating in Mykolayiv) liberated unspecified villages in southern Ukraine but declined to name them for operational security reasons.^{xx} ISW cannot independently confirm any Ukrainian counterattacks in the last 24 hours.

Ukrainian forces may have destroyed a Russian supply depot in Kherson on April 13. Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Oleksiy Arestovych stated Ukrainian forces destroyed ammunition depots of Russia's 22nd Army Corps at an unspecified location in Kherson on April 13, and social media users reported heavy Ukrainian shelling of the Choronbaivka airfield.^{xxi}

Ukrainian partisans have likely been active in the Melitopol region since at least mid-March. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that "unknown patriots" killed 70 Russian personnel in Melitopol on April 12, while the Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Ukrainian partisans killed 70 personnel in the area from March 20 to April 12—a more likely report.^{xxii} ISW has previously assessed that growing Ukrainian partisan activities are likely tying down Russian forces in the region but we have not previously seen reports of specific Ukrainian partisan actions.

Supporting Effort #3—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine: (Russian objective: Withdraw combat power in good order for redeployment to eastern Ukraine)

Russian forces continued to redeploy from Belarus to Russia for further deployment to eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported several Central Military District units are redeploying from Bryansk and Kursk Oblasts (near Chernihiv and Sumy) to Belgorod and Voronezh Oblasts (along the Kharkiv axis) but have not been recommitted to combat operations as of April 14.^{xxiii} Elements of the 36th Combined Arms Army of the Eastern Military District are also likely redeploying from Gomel Oblast, Belarus, to western Russian Oblasts.^{xxiv} Commercial satellite imagery taken on April 12 confirmed that Russian aircraft have predominantly departed Belarusian airfields for likely redeployment to the Izyum axis or eastern Ukraine, though ISW cannot confirm their final destination.^{xxv}

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces will likely continue ongoing offensive operations in the Donbas region, feeding reinforcements into the fight as they become available rather than gathering reinforcements and replacements for a more coordinated and coherent offensive.
- Ukrainian defenders of Mariupol will not be able to hold out indefinitely, but it remains unclear how quickly Russia will be able to secure the city.



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- ⁱⁱ <https://twitter.com/KaptainLOMA/status/1514551733434916866>; https://t.me/tass_agency/127209;
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