

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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April 19, 5:30 pm ET

Russian and Ukrainian officials announced that the next phase of the Russian invasion of Ukraine began on April 19. Russian forces conducted intensive artillery and air bombardments of many areas along the front line from around Izyum to Mykolaiv but relatively few ground offensive operations. Russian forces continue to receive personnel and equipment reinforcements as well as command-and-control and logistics capabilities even as they conduct air and artillery preparations and some mechanized advances.

The Russians have not fully set conditions for a large-scale offensive operation. The Russians have not had enough time to reconstitute forces withdrawn from the Battle of Kyiv and ready them properly for a new offensive in the east. The Russians appear to be still building logistics and command-and-control capabilities even as they start the next round of major fighting. The tempo of Russian operations continues to suggest that President Vladimir Putin is demanding a hasty offensive to achieve his stated objectives, possibly by “Victory Day” on May 9. The haste and partial preparation of the Russian attack will likely undermine its effectiveness and may compromise its success.

Russian forces appear to be attempting to conduct a wide encirclement of Ukrainian troops along axes from Izyum to the southeast and from Donetsk City to the north even as they push west from Popasna and positions north of Severodonetsk. Russian ground offensives in the last 24 hours occurred around Izyum, Kreminna (north of Severodonetsk), and from Donetsk City toward Avdiivka. Only the advance to and possibly through Kreminna made significant progress. An encirclement on this scale would likely take considerable time to complete against Ukrainian resistance. Even if the Russians did complete such an encirclement and trapped a large concentration of Ukrainian forces inside one or more pockets, the Ukrainian defenders would likely be able to hold out for a considerable period and might well be able to break out.

The Russians may alternatively try to complete several smaller encirclements simultaneously, each trapping fewer Ukrainian forces and therefore taking less time to complete and then reduce. Coordinating such operations is complicated and beyond the planning and execution capacities the Russian army has demonstrated in the conflict thus far.

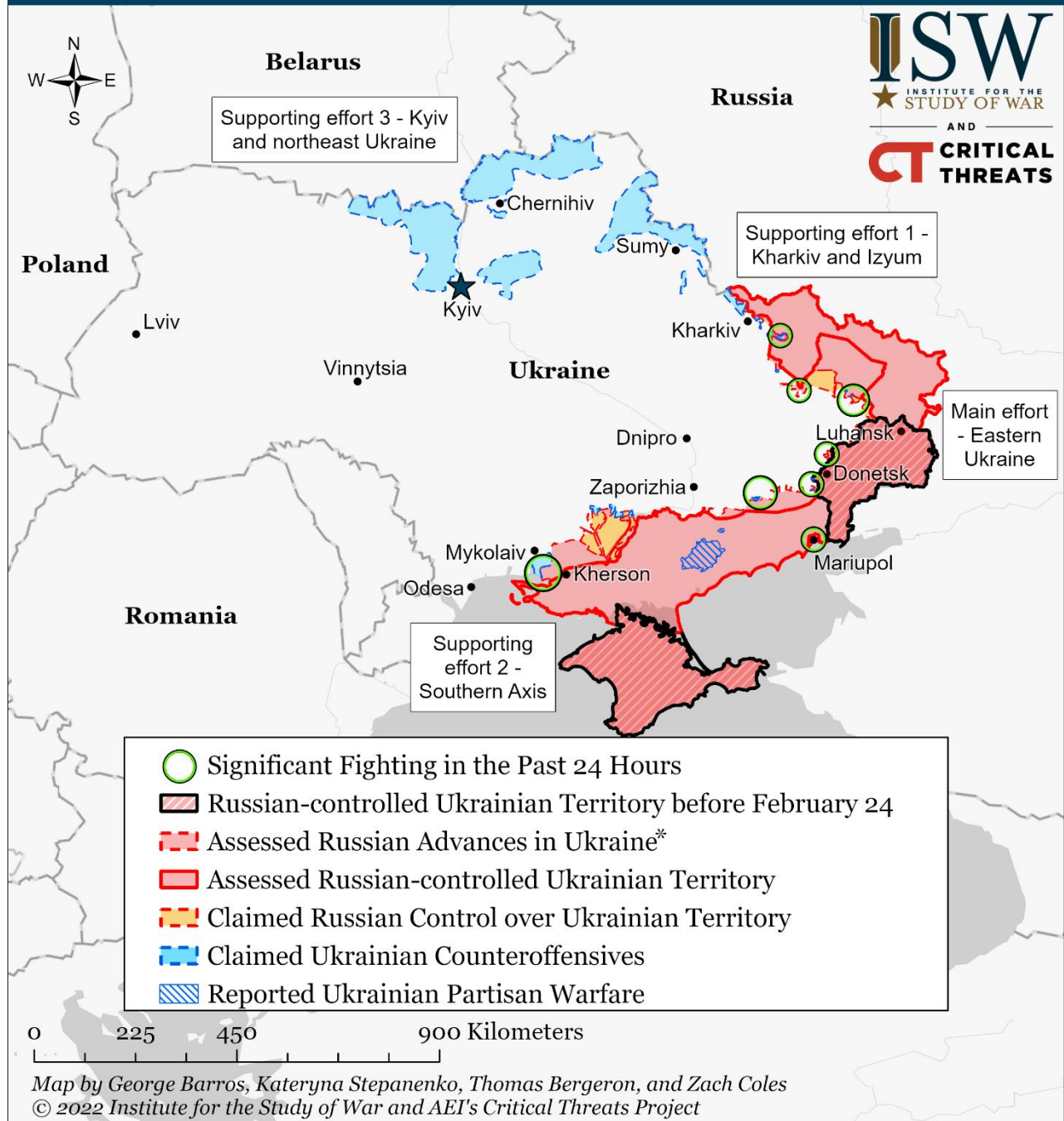
Ukrainian forces continue to defend parts of the Azovstal complex in Mariupol, but Russian officials and media are gathering in and near the city, likely in preparation to declare victory in the coming days whether or not fighting continues.

Key Takeaways

- **The next phase of the Russian offensive in Ukraine’s east has reportedly begun, largely with artillery and air bombardments supporting a few small-scale ground offensives.**
- **Russian officials and media are likely preparing to declare victory in Mariupol in the coming days, possibly before Ukrainian forces in the Azovstal facility have been fully defeated.**
- **The Russians may be attempting a single wide encirclement of Ukrainian forces from Izyum to Donetsk City or a series of smaller encirclements within that arc. It is too soon to assess the intended Russian scheme of maneuver.**

- **Russian operations continue to proceed hastily, as if President Vladimir Putin has set an arbitrary date by which they must succeed. Putin may have decided that he will announce a Russian success and the completion of the operation on Victory Day, May 9. The haste with which Russian forces are moving may compromise the success of their operations.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 19, 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.

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

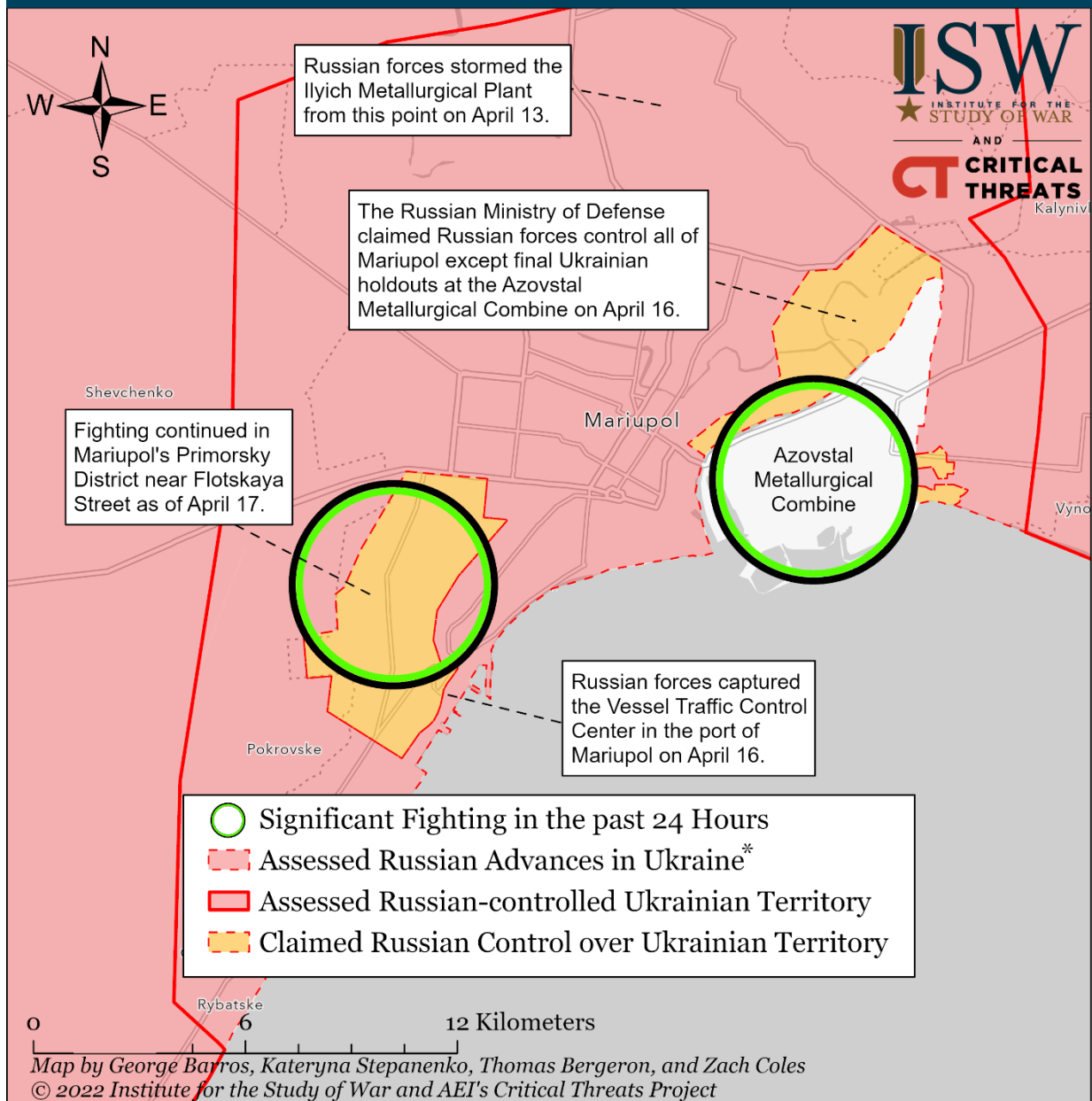
Subordinate Main Effort—Mariupol (Russian objective: Capture Mariupol and reduce the Ukrainian defenders)

Russian forces continued to prioritize the capture of the Azovstal steel plant from the north but did not make any significant advances as of April 19. Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin announced that the capture of Azovstal is the DNR’s main priority, and People’s Militia Spokesperson Eduard Basurin said that an assault with Russian forces began on April 19.¹ The advisor to the Ukrainian mayor of Mariupol, Petro Andryushenko, said that Russian forces gathered heavy weaponry and tanks in the city’s Left Bank District near the plant but continued to shell residential streets in the neighborhood.² Russian forces conducted an airstrike on the northern end of the plant on April 18.³ Russian social media accounts published photos of Russian forces entering a warehouse near Azovstal, but ISW cannot confirm the authenticity or location of the images.⁴

Russia’s Defense Ministry made another demand for Ukrainian Azov Regiment fighters to surrender, which Mariupol’s defenders refused. Ukrainian forces maintained their positions at the plant and continued limited street fighting in central Mariupol.⁵

The Kremlin is likely attempting to accelerate the capture of Mariupol for the domestic Russian information space judging from the large presence of Kremlin-sponsored journalists in the area.⁶ The Russians may announce success even if Ukrainian forces retain their hold on portions of Azovstal, or they may wait until Russian or proxy forces have secured the entire facility.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of April 19, 2022, 3:00 ET



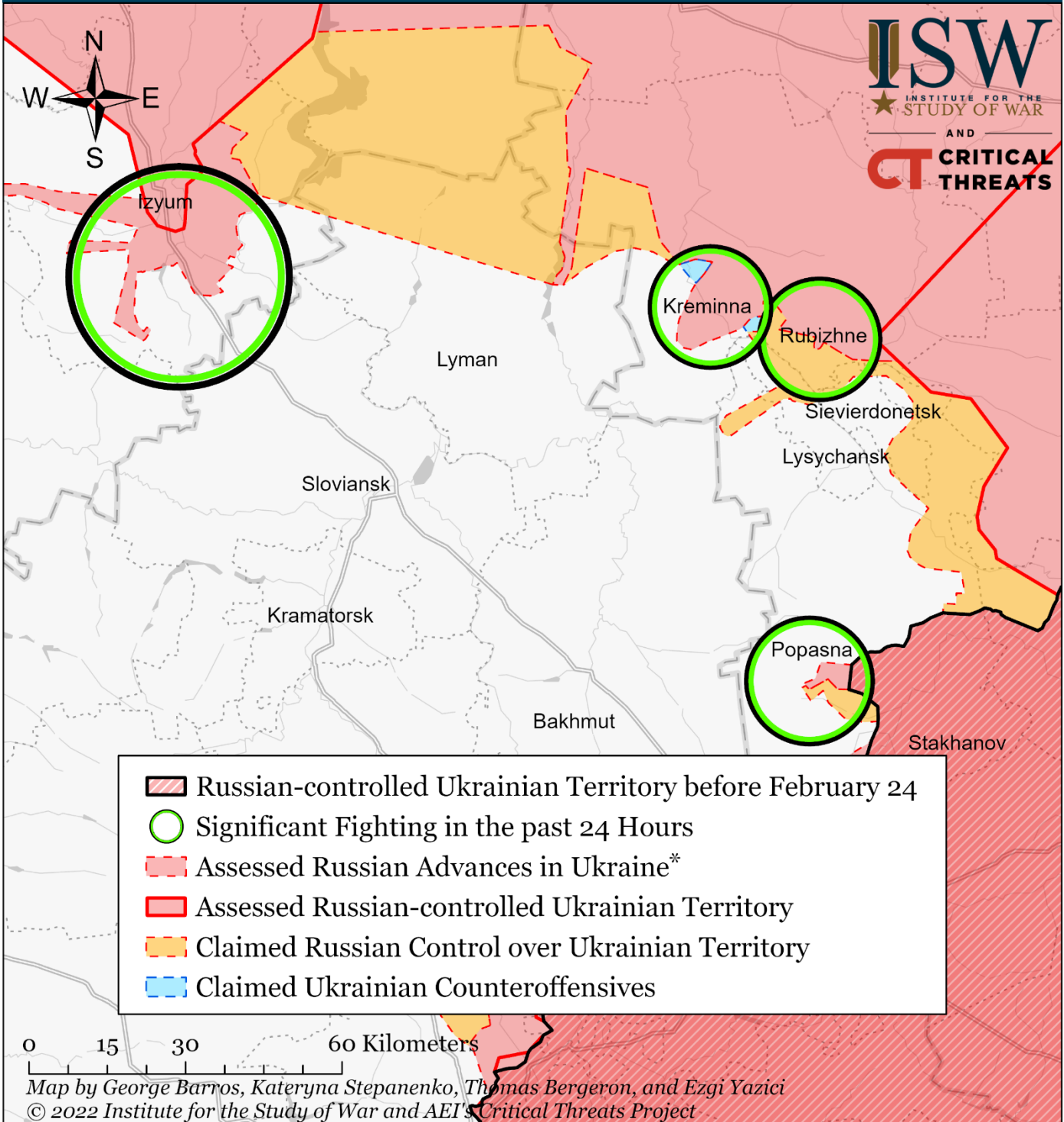
Russian forces continue their grinding advance into Mariupol, which they have encircled and are bombarding. Russian forces began penetrating Mariupol's city center on March 24. Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade reported escaping encirclement at the Ilyich Metallurgical Plant and reuniting with the Ukrainian Azov Regiment on April 12, prompting Russian reports of mass Ukrainian surrender. Russian forces advanced toward the Port of Mariupol from southern and northern directions on April 15 and April 16, likely to encircle the remaining Ukrainian forces. Russia's Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces control all of Mariupol except the Azovstal Metallurgical Combine on April 16. Mariupol's remaining defenders refused a Russian ultimatum to surrender by 1300 local time on April 17. Mariupol's Ukrainian defenders will likely fight to the last man at the Azovstal Metallurgical Combine in the coming hours and possibly days.

* 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)

Russian forces intensified offensive operations in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts on April 19.⁷ Russian artillery fire continued to target Popasna, Rubizhe, Lysychansk, and Severodonetsk and shell various settlements in Donetsk Oblast over the last 24 hours.⁸ The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense stated that Russian troops are consolidating in the vicinity of Avdiivka and Mariinka.⁹ Ukrainian forces reportedly repelled attempted Russian advances into Avdiivka, Popasna, and Rubizhne on the night of April 18.¹⁰ Pro-Russian sources additionally claimed that Russian troops entered Torske in order to encircle Ukrainian positions in Lysychansk, Severodonetsk, and Rubizhne, but ISW cannot independently verify this claim.¹¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of April 18, 2022, 3:00 ET

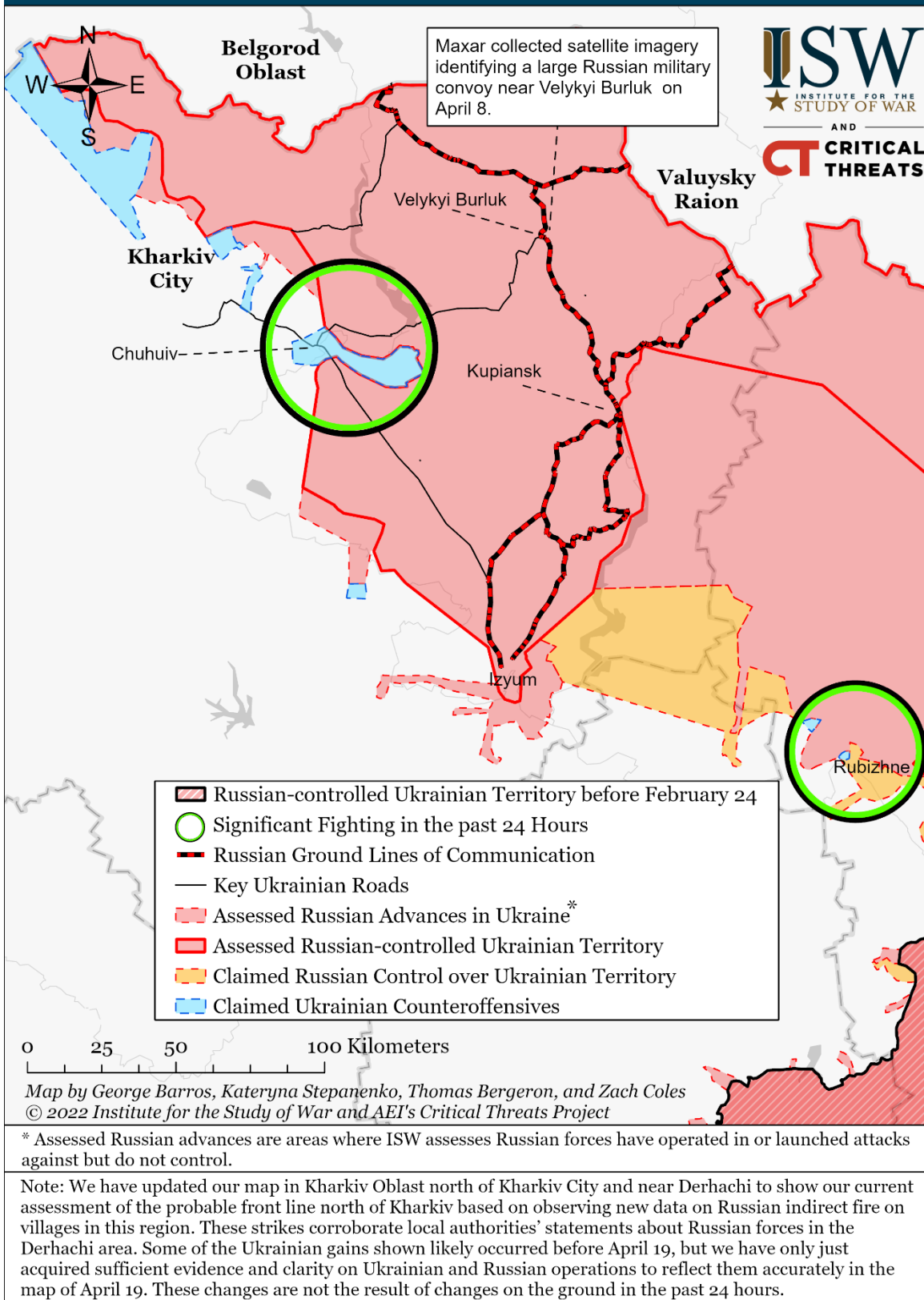


* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum: (Russian objective: Advance southeast to support Russian operations in Luhansk Oblast; defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to the Izyum axis)

Russian forces continued to shell settlements in Kharkiv Oblast and maintain a partial blockade of Kharkiv city on April 19.¹² The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian troops mounted an unsuccessful offensive to the south of Izyum and are generally conducting offensive operations along the east bank of the Siverskyi Donets River.¹³ Vyacheslav Zadorenko, the mayor of Derhachi—which is about 10 miles northwest of Kharkiv City, stated that Russian forces are likely blocking approximately six settlements around Derhachi as of April 10.¹⁴

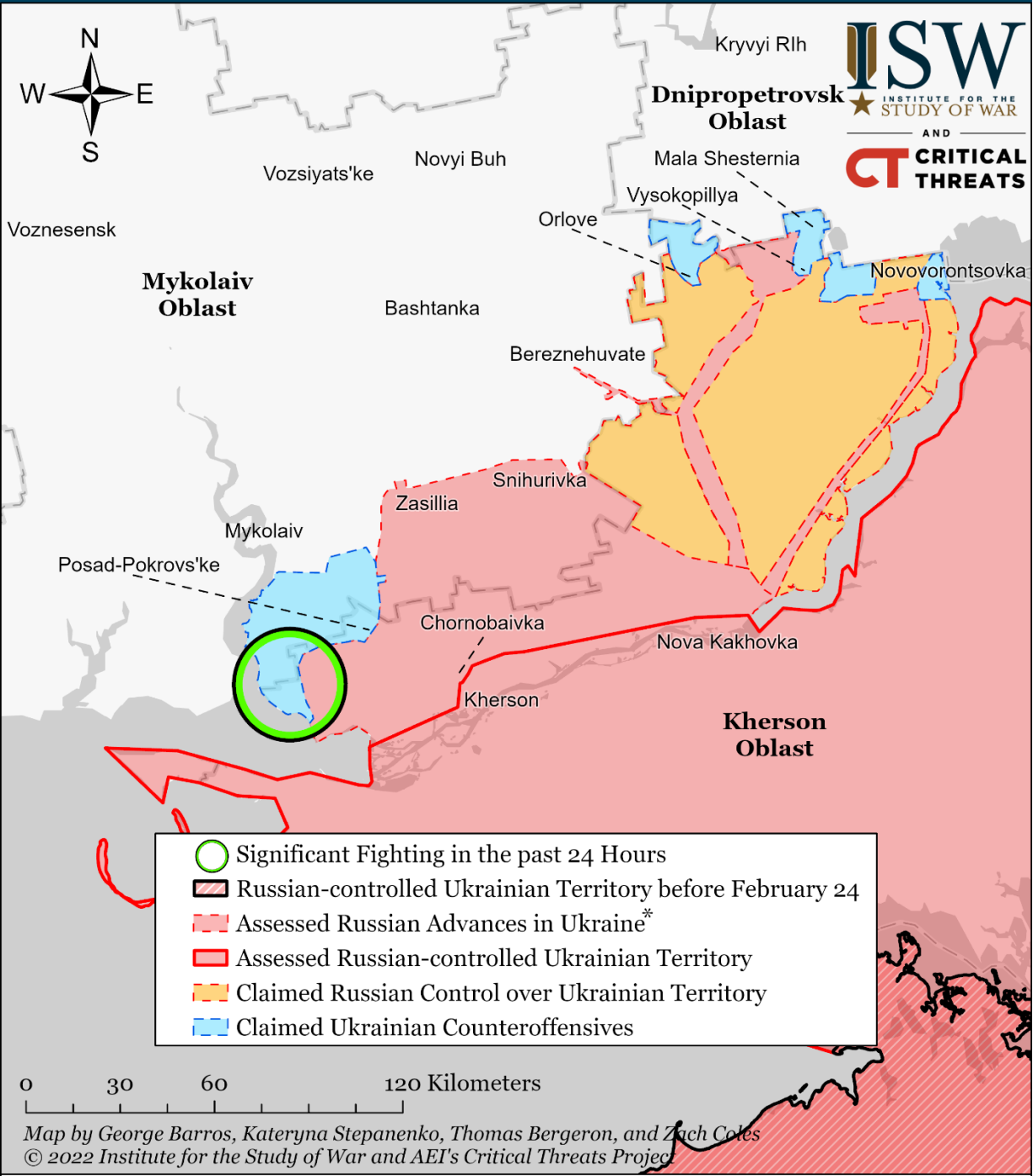
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of April 19, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

Russian forces continued fighting outside Oleksandrivka on April 19 without any significant territorial changes.¹⁵ Zaporizhia Oblast Head Oleksandr Staruckh reported that Russian units are concentrating in Polohy, central Zaporizhia Oblast.¹⁶ Russian forces may intend to stop Ukrainian counteroffensives in this area or could be planning a more ambitious advance to reach the N15 highway running east from Zaporizhia City.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 19, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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Note: Ukrainian authorities claimed on April 14 that the Ukrainian 80th Airmobile Brigade (which previously operated near Mykolaiv) liberated unspecified villages in southern Ukraine, but did not name those villages for operational security reasons. We will update our maps to reflect this data once we can confirm this claimed counterattack.

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

There was no significant change in this area in the past 24 hours.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces will likely continue attacking southeast from Izyum, west from Kreminna and Popasna, and north from Donetsk City via Avdiivka.
- Russian troops and aircraft will continue to pound the Azovstal facility, and Russian officials may declare victory in Mariupol even before the facility is fully cleared.
- Russian forces will likely increase the scale of ground offensive operations in the coming days, but it is too soon to tell how fast they will do so or how large those offensives will be. It is also too soon to assess how the Russians will likely weight their efforts in the arc from Izyum to Donetsk City.



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¹ <https://t.me/readovkanews/31316>; https://riafan.ru/23114128mopushilin_nazval_glavnoi_zadachei_nm_dnr_osvobozhdenie_azovstali_v_kratchaishie_sroki

² <https://t.me/andriyshTime/329>; https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-04-19-22/h_c85bc985b25029c10d3b1426068d80ac; <https://hromadske dot ua/posts/u-mariupoli-okupanti-obstrilyuyut-azovstal-ta-zhitlovij-sektor-u-yakih-vchora-pustili-civilnih-radnik-mera>

³ <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1516431666318913538>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1516129910917672967>;
<https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1516112466077487105>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1516429756887150600>;
<https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1516394856976900099>

⁶ https://t.me/nm_dnr/7665; <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1516450745654169602>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/298021502510935>

⁸ <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/1758>;
https://t.me/pavlokyrylenko_donoda/3068; https://t.me/pavlokyrylenko_donoda/3068; <https://t.me/guberniaband/3283>

⁹ <https://armyinform dot com.ua/2022/04/19/okupanty-ne-prypynyayut-sprob-vstanovyty-povnyj-kontrol-nad-mistom-mariupol-ta-zoseredzheni-na-zahoplenni-popasnoyi-rubizhnogo-ta-syevyverodoneczka/>

¹⁰ https://t.me/pavlokyrylenko_donoda/3068; <https://t.me/stranaua/37373>

¹¹ <https://t.me/stranaua/37442>

¹² <https://t.me/stranaua/37450>; <https://t.me/synegubov/2923>;
<https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1516110445773570058>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/298021502510935>

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/298410722472013>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/298021502510935>

¹⁴ <https://ru.interfax.com.ua/news/general/820747.html>; https://24tv.ua/okupanti-obstrilyali-selishhe-slatine-harkivshhini-5-lyudey-zaginulo_n1945900

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/298410722472013>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/298021502510935>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/298021502510935>; <https://t.me/stranaua/37454>;
<https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1516154323377561602/photo/1>; <https://t.me/stranaua/37341>