

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine made minor advances on April 28.

Russian forces attacking southwest from Izyum likely seek to bypass Ukrainian defenses on the direct road to Slovyansk. Russian forces continued shelling and minor attacks along the line of contact in eastern Ukraine but did not secure any gains in the past 24 hours. Additional Russian reinforcements continue to deploy to Belgorod to support the Izyum advance. Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol's Azovstal Steel Plant continue to hold out against heavy Russian artillery and aerial bombardment, including the likely use of multi-ton "bunker-buster" bombs against a Ukrainian field hospital.

Ukrainian news outlet Defense Express reported on April 27 that Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov will take personal command of the Russian offensive in the Izyum direction.¹

Citing unspecified Ukrainian military sources, Defense Express stated that Gerasimov is already in-theater and will command the offensive "at the operational and tactical level" and claimed the Russian military failed to create a single command structure under Southern Military District Commander Alexander Dvornikov. ISW cannot independently confirm this report. However, ISW previously assessed that Dvornikov's appointment as overall commander in Ukraine would not solve Russia's command and control challenges and likely strain his span of control.² If confirmed, the appointment of Russia's senior general officer to command tactical operations indicates both the importance of the Izyum drive to Russia's war in Ukraine and the breakdown in the Russian military's normal chain of command.

Key Takeaways

- Russian strategic bombers likely targeted a Ukrainian field hospital in the Azovstal Steel Plant. The remaining Ukrainian defenders are likely running low on supplies.
- Russian attacks southwest of Izyum likely seek to outflank Ukrainian defenses on the direct road to Slovyansk and have made tactical gains in the last 24 hours.
- Russian forces continued tactical ground attacks and shelling along the entire line of contact in eastern Ukraine but did not secure any major advances.
- Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin stated that the DNR will postpone local Victory Day celebrations planned for May 9 until "the complete victory and the expansion of the DNR" to control Donetsk Oblast, though the Kremlin remains likely to attempt to claim some sort of victory on May 9.
- Russian forces conducted several locally successful attacks from Kherson toward Mykolaiv.
- Russian and proxy forces continued to mobilize in Transnistria and set conditions for a false flag attack.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 28, 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.

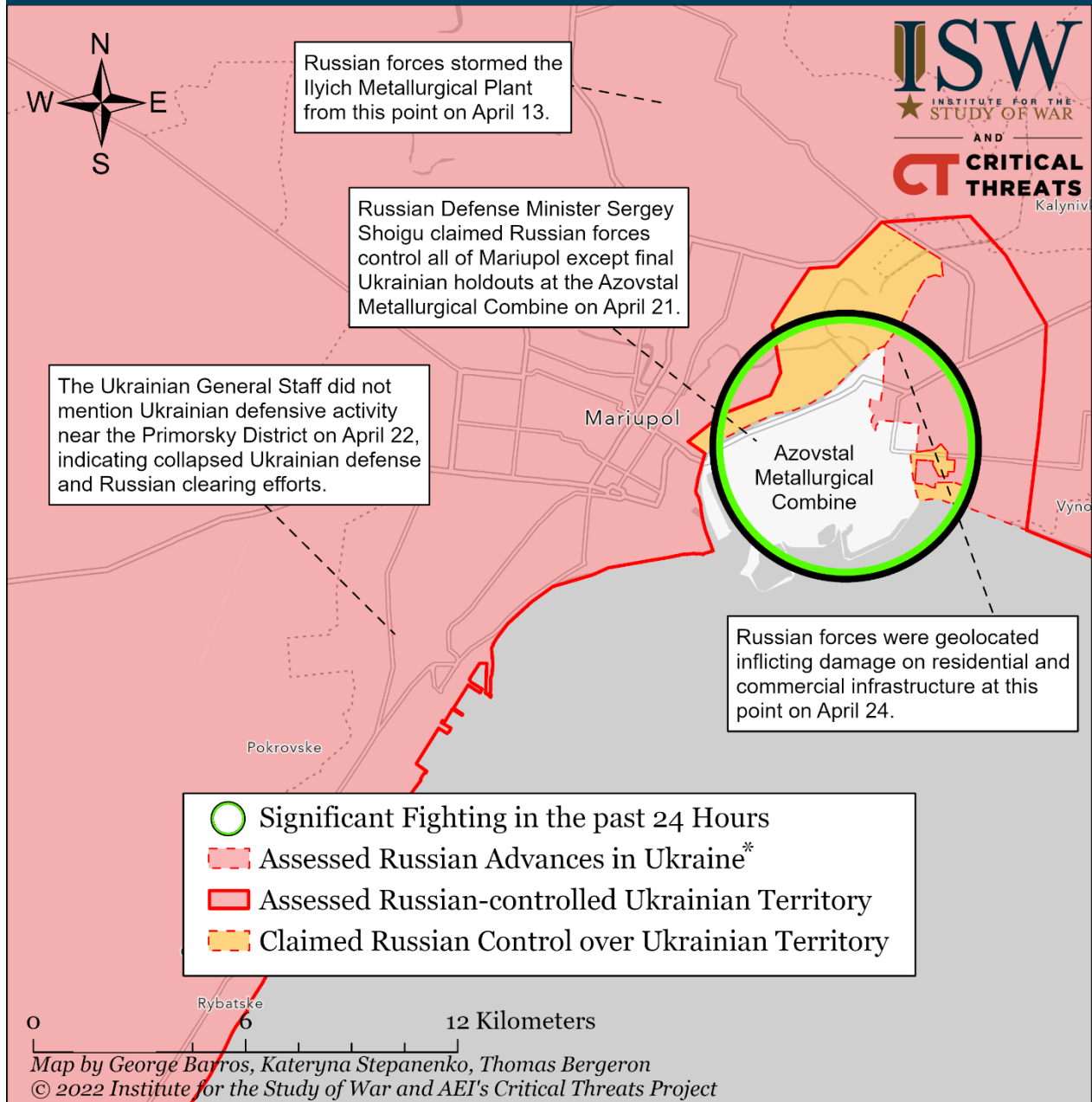
Main effort—Eastern Ukraine

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

Russian forces increased the tempo of artillery and airstrikes against Ukrainian positions in the Azovstal facility on April 28 and directly targeted a Ukrainian field hospital.³ Mariupol’s City Council and the Ukrainian General Staff reported that seven Russian Tu-22 strategic bombers struck the hospital with multi-ton “bunker-buster” bombs.⁴ ISW cannot independently confirm this report, though Russian forces have targeted Ukrainian medical facilities and hospitals throughout the war. Azov Regiment Commander Captain Svyatoslav Palamar appealed to Kyiv “to take decisive action” against Russian forces, and Ukrainian defenders are likely running low on supplies.⁵

Russian forces are expanding occupation measures amid continuing Ukrainian partisan actions. Advisor to the Mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushenko stated that Russian forces are posing as social services employees to collect information on Mariupol residents, and other local government sources reported that Russian forces continued widespread detentions of Ukrainian civilians.⁶ The Ukrainian General Staff claimed Ukrainian Special Operations Forces and organized partisan groups destroyed a railway bridge in Yakymivka (near Melitopol) used to transit supplies from Crimea towards Mariupol on April 28, though ISW cannot independently confirm this claim.⁷

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of April 28, 2022, 3:00 ET



The Kremlin declared victory in Mariupol on April 21 after capturing the city besides Ukrainian holdouts in the encircled Azovstal Metallurgical Combine. Russian forces continued ground assaults on remaining Ukrainian defenders at Azovstal on April 27. Ukrainian forces engaged in small-scale street fights in the Left Bank District outside Azovstal on April 27. Russian war reporters filmed some Russian elements redeploying from Mariupol northward on April 24 and April 25. The Ukrainian General Staff notably did not mention Ukrainian defensive activity near the port of Mariupol or Primorsky District on April 22, indicating Russian clearing efforts. The Kremlin will spin the (still incomplete) capture of Mariupol into a major victory in Ukraine to compensate for stalled or failed Russian offensives elsewhere.

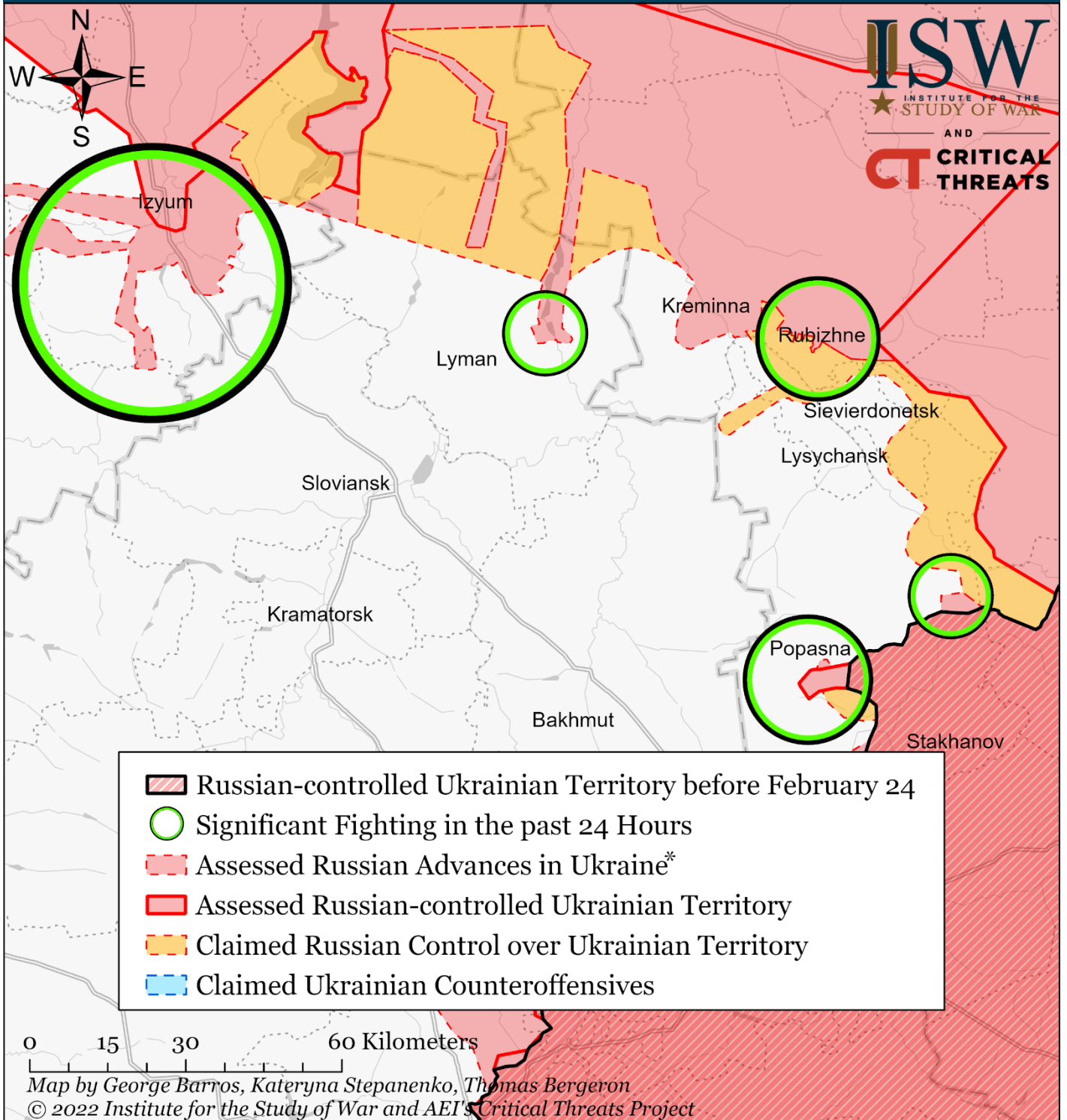
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Subordinate Main Effort—Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued tactical ground attacks and shelling along the entire line of contact in eastern Ukraine on April 28 but did not secure any major advances.⁸ The concentrated use of artillery by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine in April is one of the few major changes Russia has made to its operations compared to the early weeks of the war. Russian forces conducted a (failed) attack on Rubizhne on April 28 but largely shelled Ukrainian positions in the Severodonetsk region without conducting ground attacks.⁹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces concentrated on improving their tactical positions and preparing for offensive operations towards Lyman, 55 km west of Rubizhne.¹⁰ Russian forces conducted several assaults west of Donetsk, attempting to advance on Solodke, Novomykhailivka, and Marinka; and Russian forces attempted to advance north of Mariupol in the area of Neskuchne and Vremivka.¹¹ ISW cannot confirm any territorial changes in these areas, however.

DNR Head Denis Pushilin stated on April 28 that the DNR will postpone local Victory Day celebrations planned for May 9 until “the complete victory and the expansion of the ‘DNR’ to the constitutional borders,” meaning the entirety of Donetsk Oblast.¹² Russian and proxy forces will likely continue steady offensive operations throughout May and possibly longer, though the Kremlin remains likely to attempt to claim some sort of victory on May 9.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of April 28, 2022, 3:00 ET



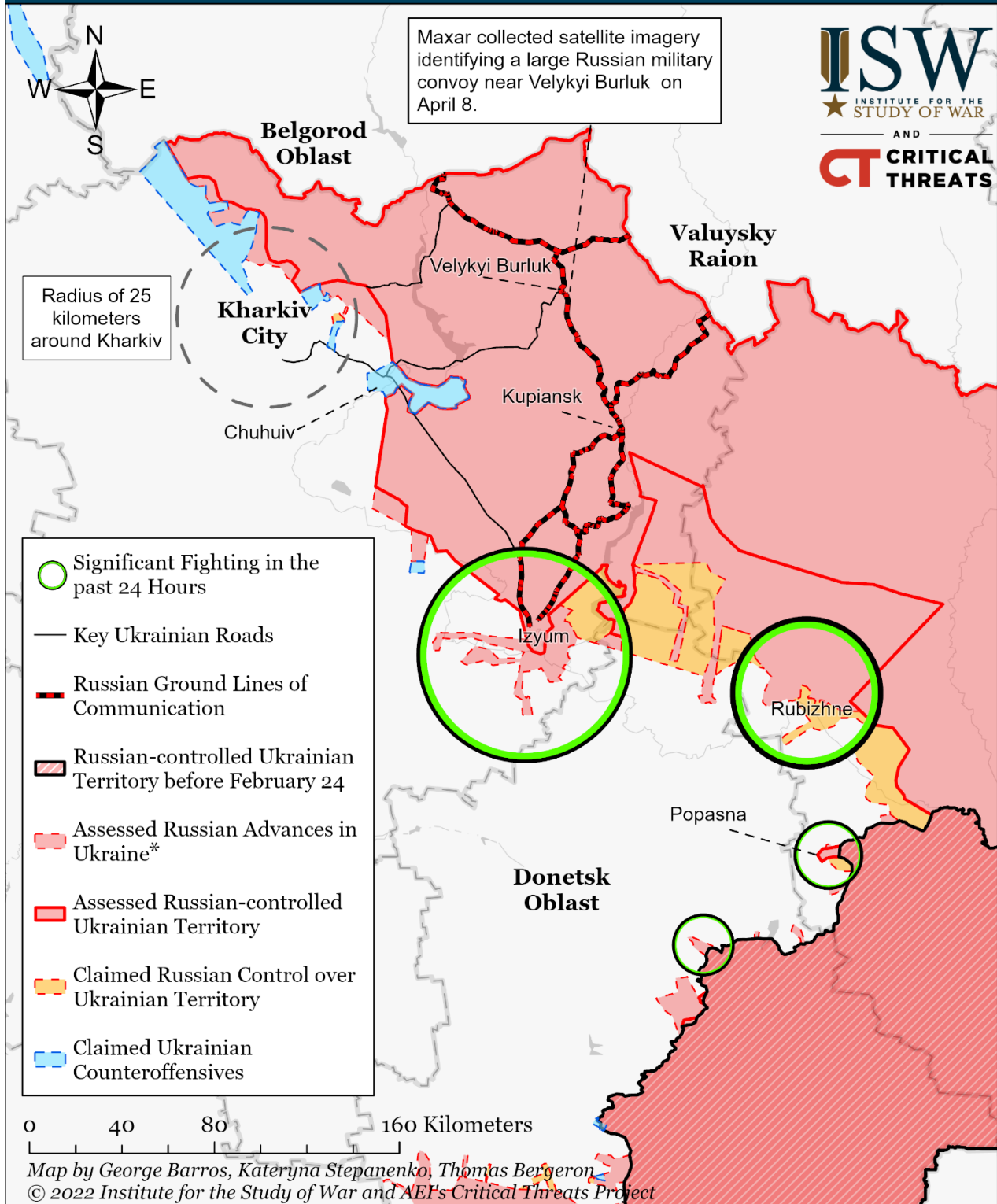
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Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum: (Russian objective: Advance southeast to support Russian operations in Luhansk Oblast; defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to the Izyum axis)

Ukrainian forces repelled continued Russian assaults west of Izyum toward Velyka Komushevkha and southwest on the road to Barvinkove. Russian forces launched assaults on Velyka Komushevkha (likely seeking to capture the south before pivoting south) and Nova Dmytrivka (on the direct road to Barvinkove).¹³ Russian forces have made little progress in attacks directly southeast toward Slovyansk and will likely seek to bypass Ukrainian defenses by attacking further west. Ukrainian forces conducted a limited counterattack directly northwest of Kharkiv city on April 28, recapturing the town of Kutuzivka.¹⁴

Russian reinforcements and tactical missile systems continued to regroup in Belgorod on April 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that up to five Iskander-M ballistic missile formations are active in Belgorod Oblast, damaged Russian airborne units on the Izyum front are rotating back to Belgorod for refit, and elements of the 29th Combined Arms Army deployed to an unspecified location in Kharkiv Oblast.¹⁵

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of April 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



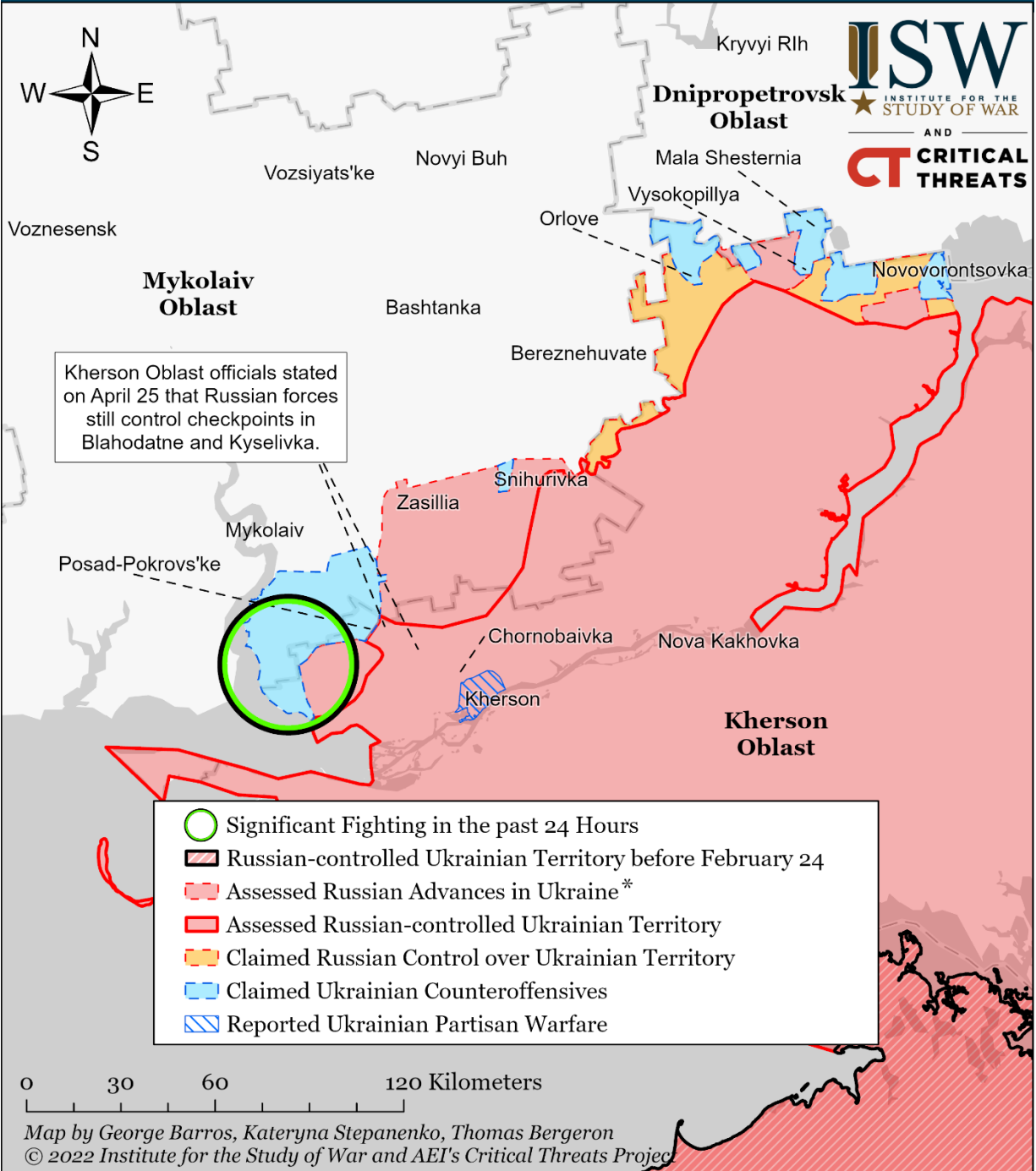
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Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces conducted several locally successful attacks from Kherson toward Mykolaiv on April 28.¹⁶ Russian forces captured the outskirts of Tavriyske and conducted assaults on the nearby settlements of Nova Zorya and Oleksandrivka, on the route to Mykolaiv.¹⁷ Russian forces likely intend to capture the western border of Kherson Oblast and threaten Mykolaiv but are unlikely to be able to renew assaults on the city itself in the near future. Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks north towards Kryvyi Rih in the past 24 hours.¹⁸

Ukraine's Operation Command "South" reported on April 28 that Russian forces are continuing to prepare to create a Kherson People's Republic and intimidate the local population, though the Deputy Chairman of Russia's local collaborationist government claimed there are no plans to hold a referendum in Kherson on April 28.¹⁹ Russian authorities do likely intend to create some form of proxy republic in Kherson but may seek to mitigate protests and resistance from residents.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

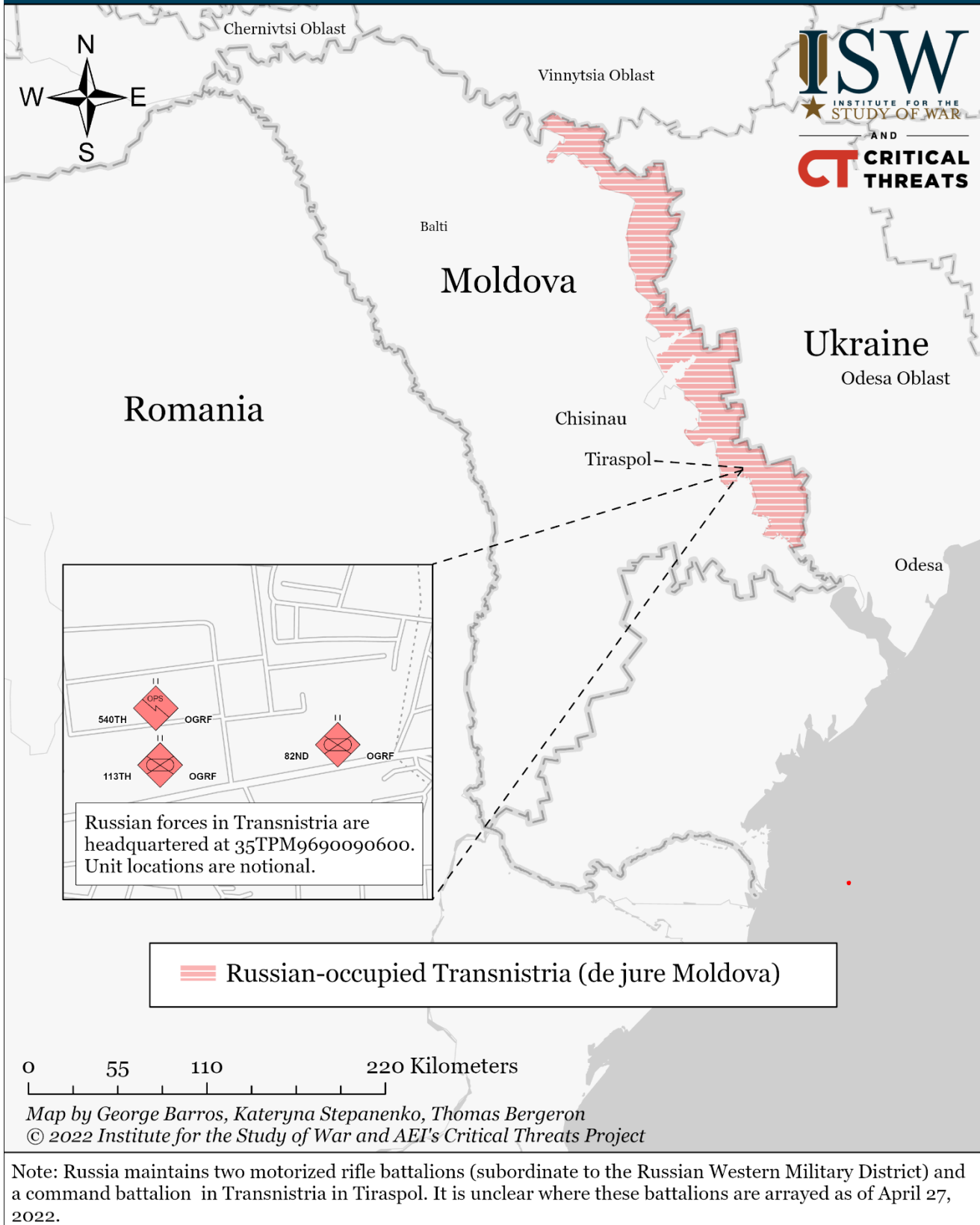


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Note: Ukrainian forces claimed to have recaptured five unspecified settlements in Mykolaiv Oblast on April 24 and eight unspecified settlements in Kherson Oblast on April 23. We expanded Ukrainian counteroffensives to Shyroke, Novopetrivka, and Lyubino in Mykolaiv Oblast based on official reports made on April 27. ISW will update our maps once open sources name the rest of the liberated settlements.

Russian and proxy forces continued to mobilize in Transnistria. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Transnistria is preparing to fully staff its military units and increase their readiness.²⁰ Ukraine's Operational Command "South" reported on April 27-28 that Russia is "systematically" conducting provocations in Transnistria and creating the false threat of an attack from Ukraine.²¹ Transnistrian President Vadim Krasnoselsky ordered Transnistria's Ministry of Internal Affairs to "be ready for any scenario" on April 28, but (likely falsely) denied Moldovan government reports that Transnistrian authorities are preventing men of fighting age from leaving the region.²²

Moldova Situational Map as of April 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

Ukraine's Border Guard Service reported Russian forces fired at border checkpoints in Chernihiv and Sumy Oblasts on April 27-28 but did not inflict any casualties.²³ The Ukrainian General Staff continued to report that Russian forces are highly unlikely to attempt a new offensive in northeastern Ukraine but are reinforcing the Russian border and are trying to fix Ukrainian reserves in place to prevent their redeployment to eastern Ukraine.²⁴

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces attacking southeast from Izyum, west from Kreminna and Popasna, and north from Donetsk City will likely make steady but purely tactical gains against Ukrainian defenders.
- Russian forces will likely attempt to starve out the remaining defenders of the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol and will not allow trapped civilians to evacuate but may conduct costly assaults on the remaining Ukrainian defenders to claim a propaganda victory.
- Russian forces are likely preparing to conduct renewed offensive operations to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in the coming days.
- Russia may continue false-flag attacks in and around Transnistria or move to generate a more serious crisis in Transnistria and Moldova more generally.



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¹ https://defence-ua dot com/army_and_war/gjerasimov_osobisto_komanduvatime_rashistami_pid_izjumom_dvornikova_vidsunuli_na_zadnij_plan-7125.html?; <https://www.pravda.com dot ua/rus/news/2022/04/28/7342691/>; https://censor dot net/ru/news/3337329/nachalnik_genshtaba_armii_rf_gerasimov_pribyl_v_izyum_smi.

² <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-11>.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/304747761838309>;

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=523661212580328>; <https://t.me/mariupolrada/9433>; <https://t.me/polkazov/4448>; <https://t.me/mariupolnow/8324>.

⁵ <https://t.me/polkazov/4447>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VcHVxVQyD0&t=1s>; <https://armyinform dot>

⁶ <https://t.me/mariupolrada/9429>; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/539>.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/304772608502491>;
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⁹ <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2068?single>; <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2075>; <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2068>;
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- ²² <https://t.me/novostipmrcom/38777>; <https://president.gospmr.org/press-sluzhba/novosti/prezident-provel-soveschaniie-s-rukovodyaschim-sostavom-organov-vnutrennih-del.html>; <https://t.me/VadimKrasnoselsky/373>;
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