

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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July 4, 7:00 pm ET

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.

Russian President Vladimir Putin celebrated the Russian seizure of Lysychansk and the Luhansk Oblast border and appeared to direct the Russian military to conduct an operational pause. Putin met with Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu on July 4 to discuss recent Russian gains in Luhansk Oblast and presented Colonel General Alexander Lapin and Major General Esedulla Abachev with the “Hero of Russia” award for their leadership during the Lysychansk operation.¹ Putin and Shoigu presented the capture of Lysychansk and Luhansk Oblast as a major victory for Russian forces in Ukraine. Putin also stated that the Russian units that participated in the battle for Lysychansk should rest to increase their combat capabilities.² Putin’s public comment was likely meant to signal his concern for the welfare of his troops in the face of periodic complaints in Russia about the treatment of Russian soldiers. His comment was also likely accurate—Russian troops that fought through Severodonetsk and Lysychansk very likely do need a significant period in which to rest and refit before resuming large-scale offensive operations. It is not clear, however, that the Russian military will accept the risks of a long enough operational pause to allow these likely exhausted forces to regain their strength.

Former Russian military commander Igor Girkin, an ardent Russian nationalist who commanded militants during the 2014 war in Donbas, posted a scathing critique of the Kremlin’s handling of the war on his Telegram channel and questioned the significance of the seizure of Lysychansk. He suggested that Russian forces had paid too high a price for a limited gain. In a series of Telegram posts published prior to Putin’s meeting with Shoigu on July 4, Girkin complained that Russian forces have failed to meet the announced goals of the “second stage of the special operation” (the operations in eastern Ukraine following Russia’s retreat from Kyiv) to his nearly 400,000 subscribers.³ Girkin noted that the Ukrainian defense of Lysychansk was deliberately designed to inflict maximum damage on Russian troops and burn through Russian manpower and equipment. He strongly suggested that accepting battle on the Ukrainians’ terms was a significant misstep by the Russian leadership.⁴ Girkin stated (before Putin’s remarks were made public) that Russian troops need time to rest and replenish in order to recover their offensive potential and noted that the lack of individual soldier replacements and unit rotations is severely degrading morale. He warned, however, that taking time to reconstitute offensive capability would allow Ukrainian troops to seize the initiative and further threaten Russian gains.⁵ Girkin additionally claimed that Russian forces have limited prospects of advancing elsewhere in Ukraine due to Ukrainian personnel and equipment superiority.⁶

Girkin’s critique is a noteworthy example of the way Russian milbloggers and military enthusiasts have become disillusioned with the Kremlin’s handling and execution of operations in Ukraine, particularly after the dramatic failed river crossing attempt at Bilohorivka in early May.⁷ Girkin’s statements directly undermine the Kremlin’s efforts to frame Lysychansk as a significant victory or turning point and show that the disillusionment amongst ultra-nationalist elements in the Russian information space continues to run deep. Girkin’s assessment of Russian military failures notably aligns with much of ISW’s (and other Western agencies’ and experts’) analysis, suggesting that he and some other milbloggers continue to make and publish assessments of the situation and forecasts independent of the Kremlin line. Girkin likely hopes to use his status as a prominent former participant in the war in Donbas in 2014 to persuade Putin to take certain measures to secure Russian success in a war that Girkin still thinks is justified and

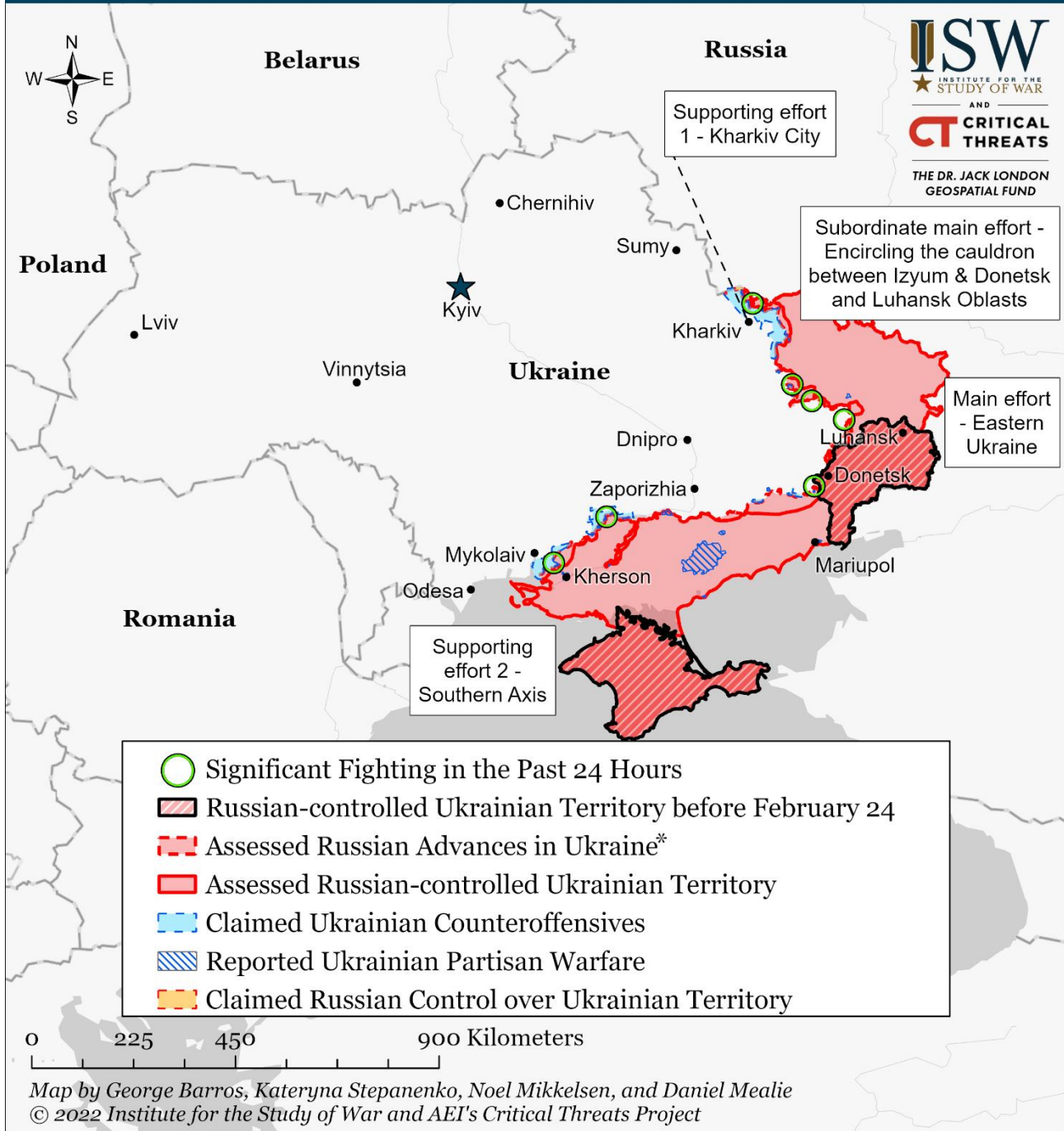
necessary—specifically mobilizing the Russian population for war on a much larger scale.⁸ Girkin, along with other members of the Russian nationalist milblogger space, will likely continue to offer critiques of the Kremlin’s line on operations in Ukraine to advocate for general mobilization and more competent Russian military leadership.

Ukrainian forces are increasingly targeting Russian military infrastructure with indirect fire and US-provided HIMARS systems deep in occupied territory. Ukrainian forces reportedly struck Russian ammunition depots in Dibrivne, Kharkiv Oblast, (close to the frontline) on July 4 and Snizhne, Donetsk Oblast, (approximately 75 km from the frontlines) overnight on July 3-4 following a strike on one of four Russian ammunition depots in Melitopol on July 3.⁹ The Ukrainian General Staff also published a video on July 4 of a Ukrainian HIMARS (high mobility artillery rocket system) operating in an unspecified area of Zaporizhia Oblast.¹⁰ The increased ability of Ukrainian forces to target critical Russian military facilities with Western-provided HIMARS demonstrates how Western military aid provides Ukraine with new and necessary military capabilities.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian leadership may be setting conditions for an operational pause following the seizure of Lysychansk and the Luhansk Oblast boundary.**
- **Russian forces are consolidating territorial and administrative control over Severodonetsk and Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations to the east of Bakhmut to prepare for advances on Bakhmut and Siversk.**
- **Russian forces continued limited and unsuccessful assaults north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Ukrainian partisan activity is targeting Russian railway lines around Melitopol and Tokmak.**
- **Russian leadership may be setting conditions for the conscription of Ukrainian citizens living in occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 4, 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.

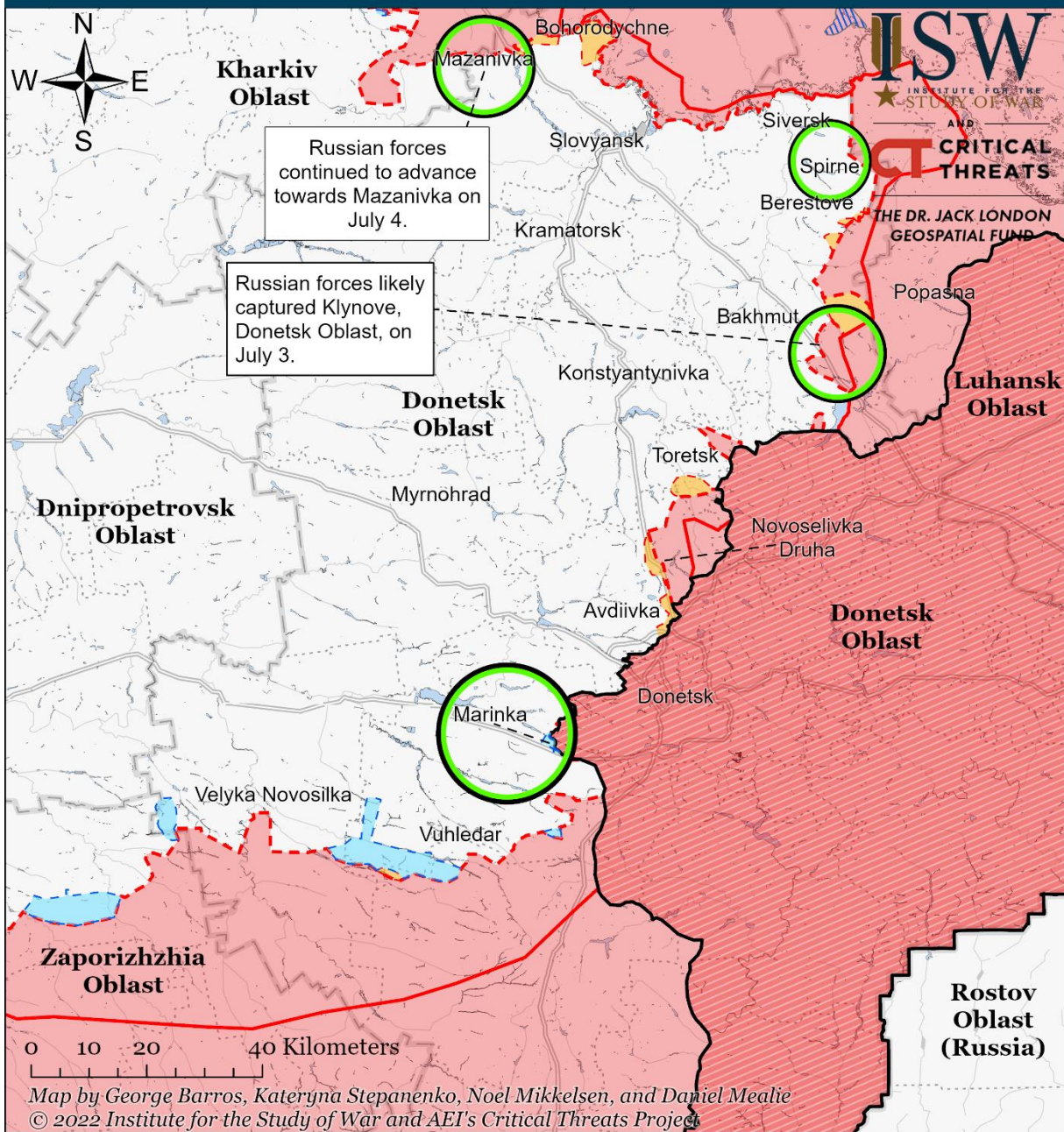
- Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and three supporting efforts)
- Subordinate Main Effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts
- Supporting Effort 1—Kharkiv City
- Supporting Effort 2—Southern Axis
- Mobilization and force generation efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces took measures to consolidate control of captured territory around Severodonetsk and Lysychansk on July 4.¹¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that Russian forces completed the capture of Luhansk Oblast with the capture of Lysychansk.¹² The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops are fortifying their positions around Lysychansk and Bilohorivka.¹³ Severodonetsk Mayor Oleksandr Stryuk also noted that Russian forces are trying to establish an administrative presence in Severodonetsk and have established a commandant’s office to replace the local government.¹⁴ Russian forces will likely begin to institute administrative occupational control over Severodonetsk and Lysychansk.

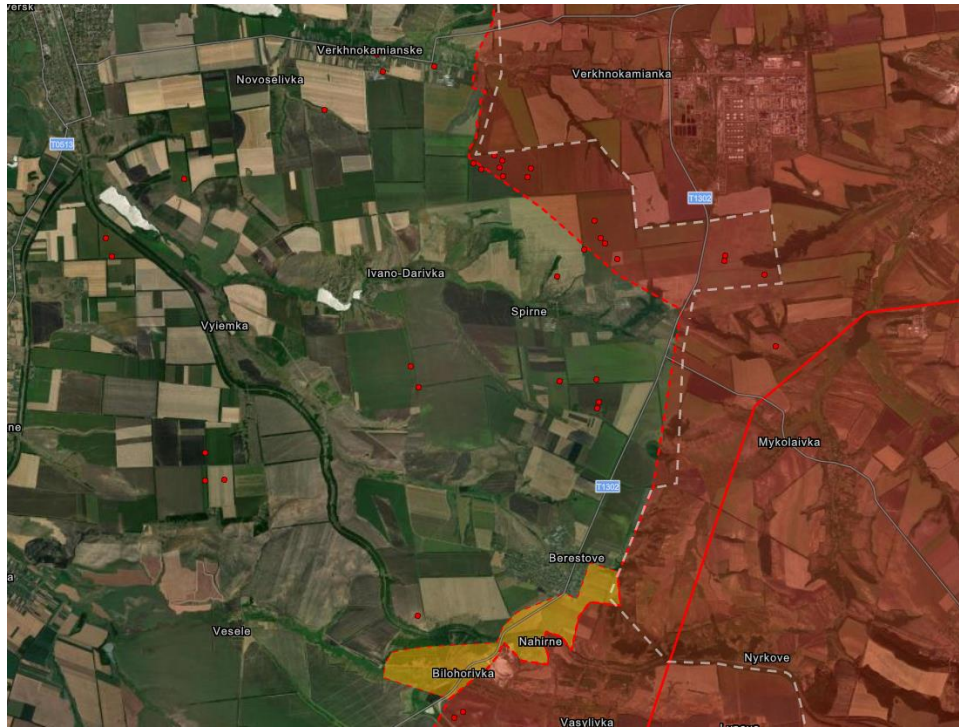
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- 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.

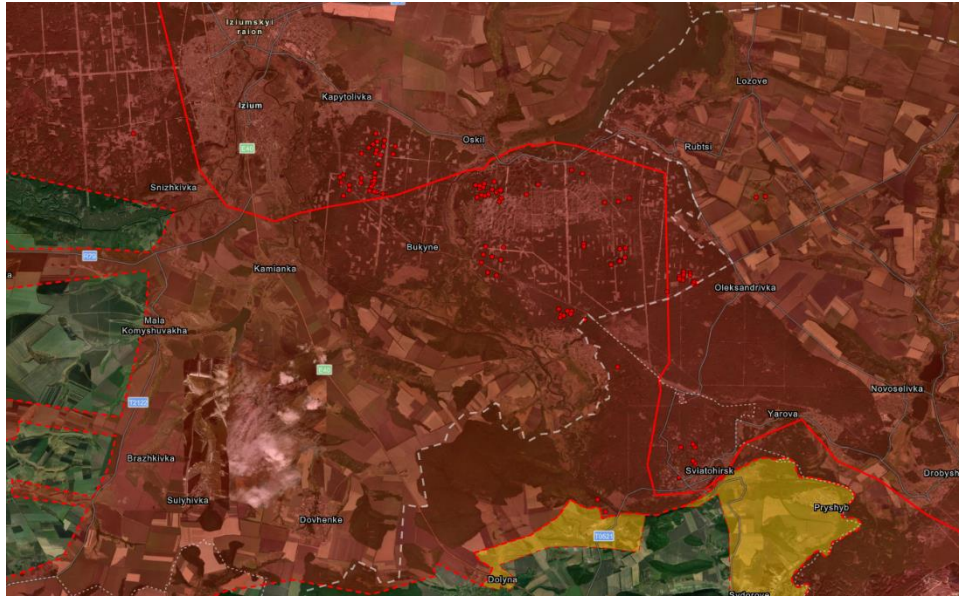
Russian forces continued offensive operations to the east of Bakhmut on July 4 to prepare for subsequent offensive operations toward Bakhmut and Siversk.¹⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted a reconnaissance in force on the outskirts of Berestove and undertook offensive operations around the Vuhledar Power Plant, Vasylivka, Spirne, Klynove, and Mayorsk.¹⁶ Russian forces will likely continue efforts to move west of the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway to eventually drive on Bakhmut and Siversk, although their ability to do so successfully following losses sustained during attempts to take Lysychansk is questionable.¹⁷ NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS) remotely sensed data showed fires near Spirne, Klynove, and the Vuhledar Power Plant on July 4, consistent with the Ukrainian General Staff's reports.



[Source: NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System, July 4]

Russian forces conducted limited ground assaults southwest of Donetsk City to improve their tactical position in the Donetsk City-Avdiiivka area on July 4.¹⁸ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted assaults in the direction of Pobeda and Mariinka, just southwest of Donetsk City. Russian forces have reportedly occupied the dominant heights surrounding Novoselivka Druha (10km northeast of Avdiivka) and are using this position to exert fire control over Avdiivka.¹⁹

Russian forces continued offensive operations northwest of Slovyansk near the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border and made incremental gains on July 4.²⁰ The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces had "partial success" in Mazanivka, about 20 km northwest of Slovyansk, and fought in Bohorodychne and Dolyna.²¹ Russian forces also reportedly redeployed a battalion tactical group (BTG) from Izyum to Snizhkiivka- just south of Izyum in the direction of Barvinkove, which may suggest that Russian forces are preparing for renewed offensives southeast of Izyum towards Barvinkove. NASA FIRMS data for July 4 showed large concentrations of heat anomalies in the wooded areas to the southeast of Izyum indicating probable locations for Russian indirect fire and Ukrainian counterbattery fires.

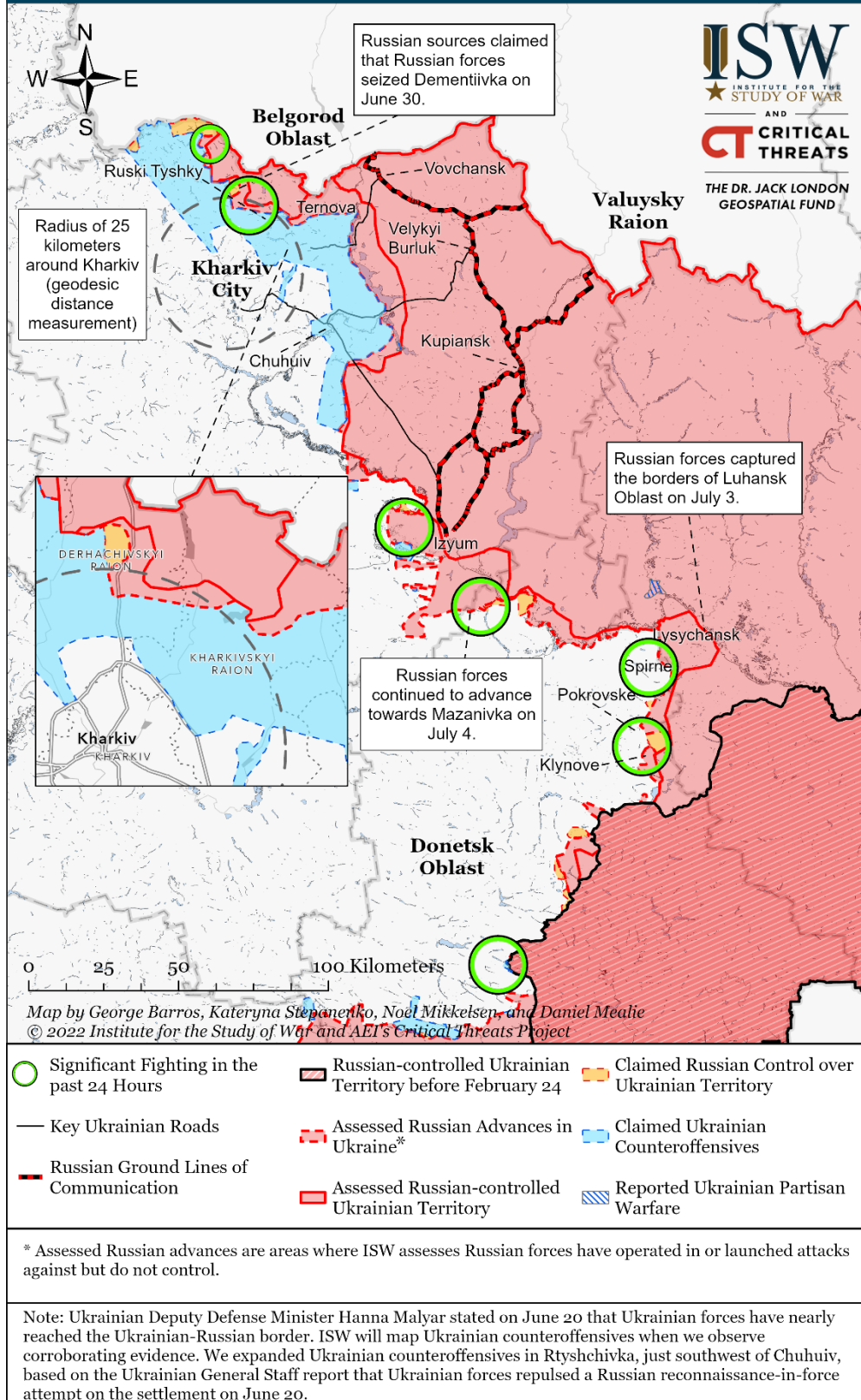


[Source: NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System, July 4]

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum and prevent Ukrainian forces from reaching the Russian border)

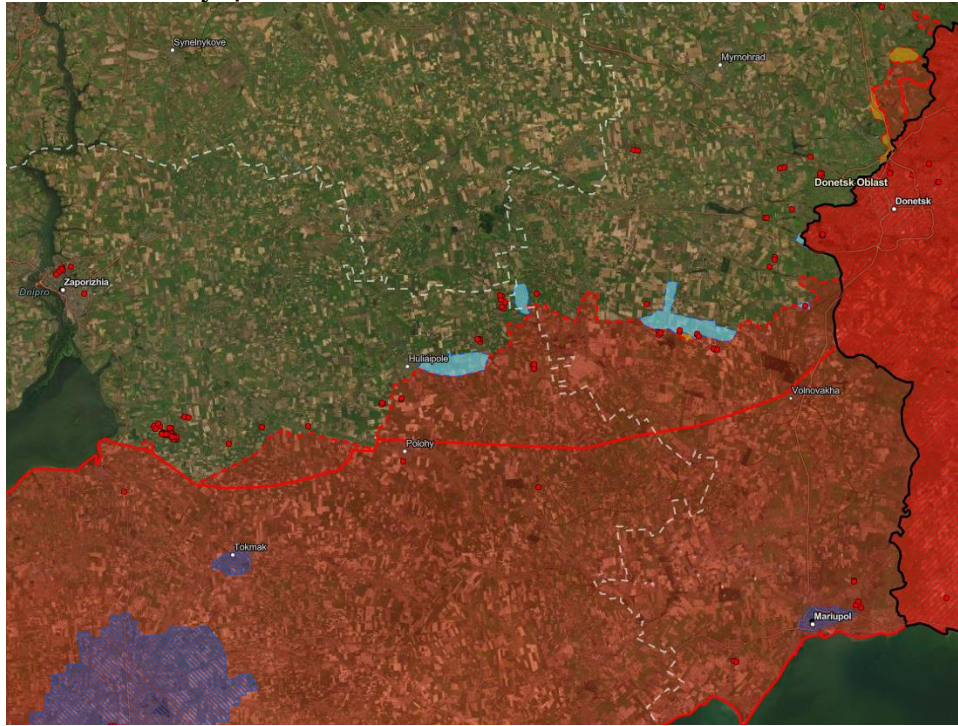
Russian forces did not make any territorial gains on the Kharkiv City Axis on July 4. Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults on Prudyanka along the T2117 highway and Sosnivka, less than 10 km from the Russian border.²² Russian forces continued air, artillery, and rocket strikes on Ukrainian military infrastructure and settlements north, northeast, and east of Kharkiv City.²³ Russian Telegram channel Rybar claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted spoiling attacks, likely small reconnaissance in force operations, on Russian positions near Kozacha Lopan, east of Udy.²⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian ground forces with aviation support on the Kharkiv City Axis are focusing on restraining any Ukrainian offensive operations.²⁵ The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that Russian forces destroyed the temporary deployment points of the Ukrainian 92nd Mechanized and 40th Artillery Brigades in Kharkiv City.²⁶

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of July 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

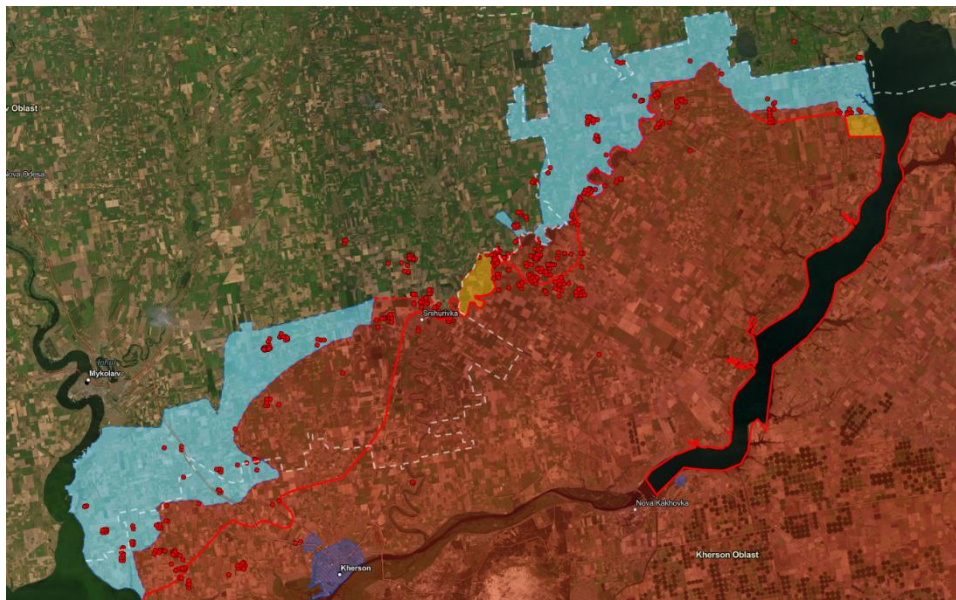


Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Defend Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces focused on regaining lost positions in northeastern Kherson Oblast on July 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian attacks on Ivanivka, Potemkyne, and Myrne.²⁷ Russian forces reportedly deployed 17 railway wagons with ammunition from Crimea to northern Kherson Oblast, likely to resupply Russian artillery units.²⁸ NASA’s FIRMS data showed abnormally high numbers of fires along the Mykolaiv-Kherson Oblast frontline on July 4, indicating intense indirect fire attacks. Russian and Ukrainian forces continued shelling across the line of contact along the entire Southern Axis on July 4.²⁹



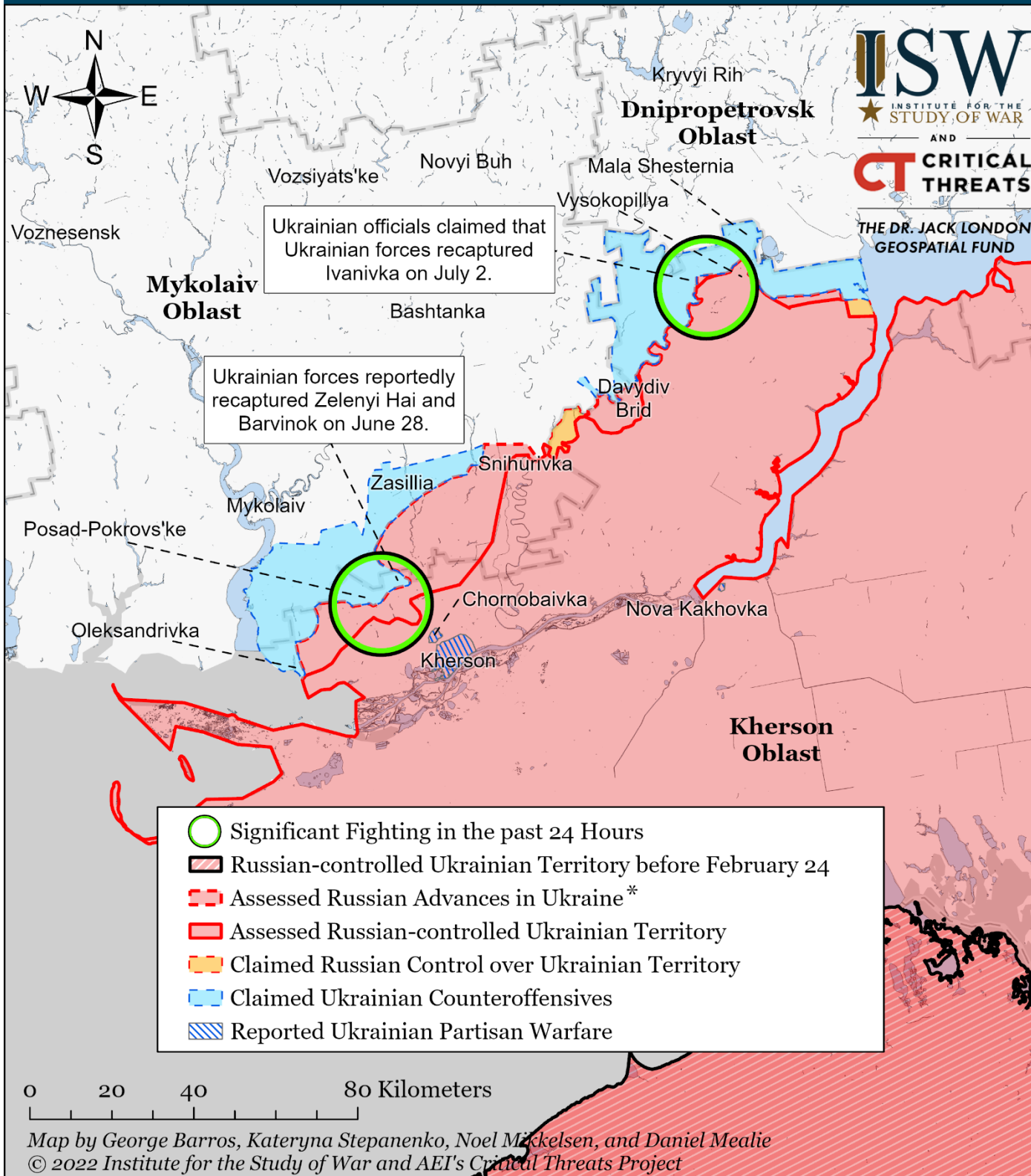
[Source: NASA’s Fire Information for Resource Management System, July 4]



[Source: NASA’s Fire Information for Resource Management System, July 4]

A Ukrainian partisan campaign may be targeting Russian rail lines near Melitopol in Zaporizhia Oblast. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Ukrainian partisans blew up a railway bridge near occupied Lyubimivka between Melitopol and Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast on July 3, likely obstructing Russian resupply efforts from Crimea to the Zaporizhia Oblast front line.³⁰ Ukrainian partisans derailed a separate Russian armored train carrying ammunition near Melitopol on July 2.³¹ Ukrainian partisans had previously targeted Russian armored trains and locomotives in Melitopol in late April and mid-May.³² This pattern of reported activity may indicate a coordinated partisan campaign targeting Russian rail lines.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 4, 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.

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

Russian leaders may be preparing to mobilize Ukrainian citizens in occupied areas. The Representative of the Ukrainian President in Crimea stated on July 3 that the Russian administration in Crimea issued a decree creating a “conscription commission for the mobilization of citizens in the Republic of Crimea,” which would allow Russian authorities to forcibly mobilize residents of Crimea to fight against Ukraine.³³ While the status of Crimea under Russian Federation law (but not under Ukrainian or international law) is distinct from the areas of eastern and southern Ukraine that have been occupied since February 24, this decree may set an internal Russian precedent for Russian authorities to begin forced mobilization campaigns throughout occupied parts of Ukraine to support force generation efforts in the coming months.

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of occupied areas; set conditions for potential annexation into the Russian Federation or some other future political arrangement of Moscow’s choosing)

Russian authorities continued to set conditions for various annexation scenarios on July 4. Director of Ukraine’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Kyrylo Budanov stated that Russia is preparing several annexation scenarios before September 11, the suggested date for the annexation of Ukrainian territory into the Russian Federation.³⁴ Budanov claimed that Russia may be preparing to join Ukrainian territories to Russia, create one large “People’s Republic,” or annex individual territories to Russia. The suggestion of a singular, large “People’s Republic” is novel and has not yet been discussed by Ukrainian or Russian authorities. A single “People’s Republic” likely indicates that the Kremlin continues to hold territorial aspirations beyond the Donbas.



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¹ https://t.me/mod_russia/17385; https://t.me/riz_the_kraken/51078; <https://tass.ru/politika/15116687>; <https://ria.ru/20220704/geroi-1800093356.html>

² <https://tass.ru/politika/15116687>; <https://ria.ru/20220704/geroi-1800093356.html>

³ <https://t.me/strelkovii/2864>; <https://t.me/strelkovii/2863>

⁴ <https://t.me/strelkovii/2864>

⁵ <https://t.me/strelkovii/2864>

⁶ <https://t.me/strelkovii/2864>

⁷ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-16>;
<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-14>

⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/07/russia-ukraine-victory-day-mobilization/>

⁹ <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1543925116618346500>;
<https://twitter.com/Osinttechnical/status/1543735226978996224>; <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1543734894425247746>;
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https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/229; https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/228

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/GeneralStaffUA/status/1543952771631747073>

¹¹ <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/4022>; <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/4019>;

¹² https://t.me/mod_russia/17386

¹³

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0387nadvbW8LgDAtauW9ZS5NuTVpC21pr4pdNxxw437brMXCZifA5BEFdm43mni9GJrl>

¹⁴ <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/4025>

¹⁵

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<https://t.me/strelkovii/2863>

¹⁶

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0387nadvbW8LgDAtauW9ZS5NuTVpC21pr4pdNxxw437brMXCZifA5BEFdm43mni9GJrl>;

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¹⁷ <https://t.me/strelkovii/2863>

¹⁸

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¹⁹ <https://t.me/milchronicles/867>

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²¹

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²²

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<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0387nadvbW8LgDAtauW9ZS5NuTVpC21pr4pdNxw437brMXCZifA5BEFdm43mni9GJrl>; <https://t.me/synegubov/3547>; <https://t.me/rybar/34877>

²⁴ <https://t.me/rybar/34876>

²⁵

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0387nadvbW8LgDAtauW9ZS5NuTVpC21pr4pdNxw437brMXCZifA5BEFdm43mni9GJrl>

²⁶ https://t.me/mod_russia/17381

²⁷

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0387nadvbW8LgDAtauW9ZS5NuTVpC21pr4pdNxw437brMXCZifA5BEFdm43mni9GJrl>

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²⁹ <https://t.me/mykolaivskaODA/1681>; <https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/1250>; https://t.me/mykola_lukashuk/682;

<https://t.me/rybar/34877>; https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/9973; https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/9989;

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³⁰ <https://sprotyv.mod.gov.ua/2022/07/03/poblyzu-melitopolya-pidirvaly-zaliznychnyj-mist/>

³¹ <https://sprotyv.mod.gov.ua/2022/07/03/partyzany-pid-melitopolem-vidpravyly-pid-ukis-rosijskyj-bronepoyizd/>;

<https://t.me/riamelitopol/60204>; <https://www.facebook.com/100001701408811/videos/2172478259628933/RIA>;

<https://t.me/riamelitopol/60204>

³² <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-19> ;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Operations%20Assessments%20April%2028.pdf>

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/ppu.gov.ua/posts/404441455063219>

³⁴ <https://www.rbc dot ua/ukr/news/kirill-budanov-voyna-zakonchitsya-sleduyushchem-1656837517.html>