

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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March 31, 6:00 pm ET

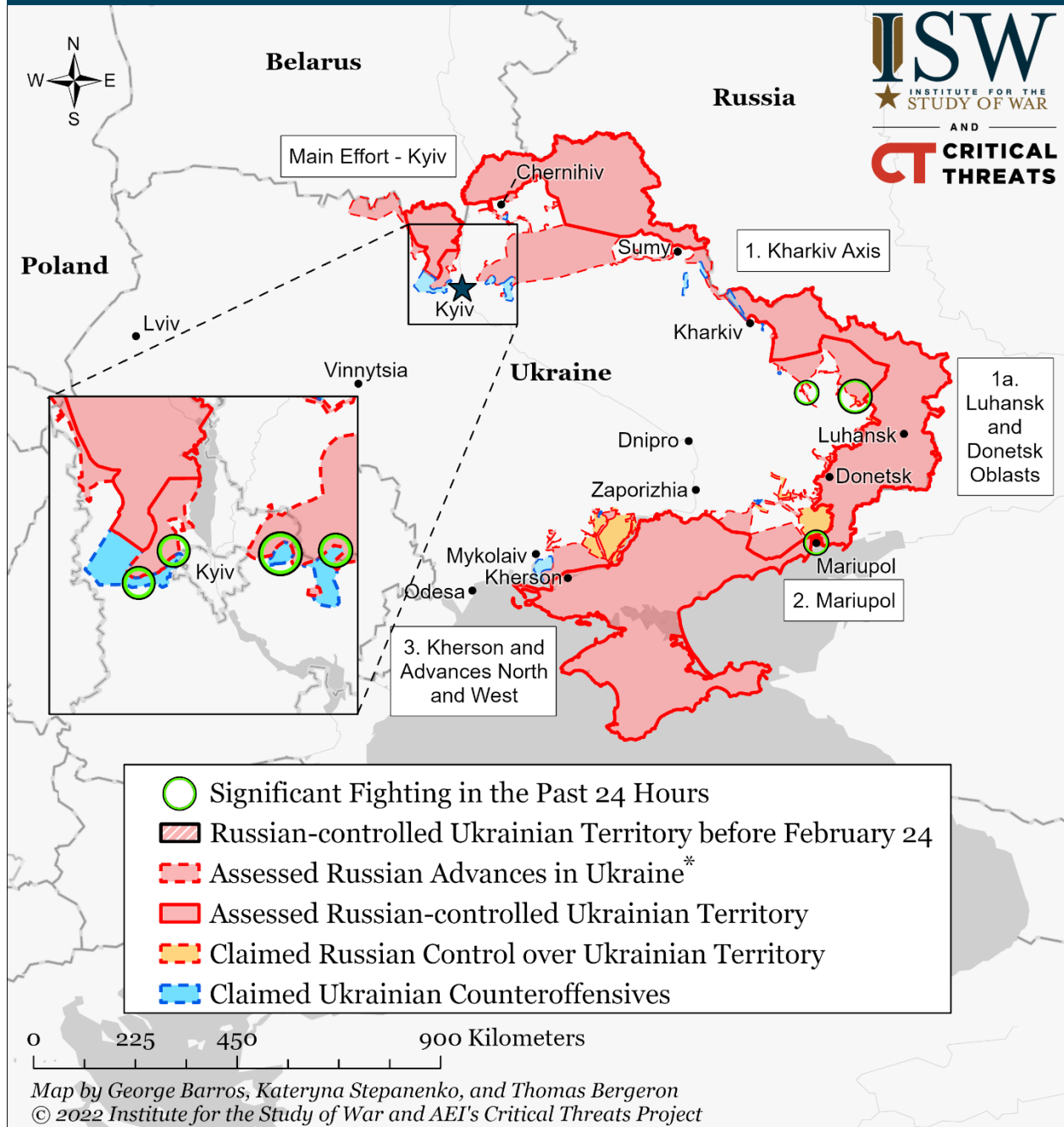
Ukrainian forces conducted several local counterattacks around Kyiv, in northeastern Ukraine, and toward Kherson on March 31, successfully pressuring Russian forces and seeking to disrupt ongoing Russian troop rotations. Ukrainian forces northwest of Kyiv pushed Russian forces north of the E-40 highway and will likely assault Russian-held Bucha and Hostomel in the coming days. Ukrainian forces exploited limited Russian withdrawals east of Brovary to retake territory across Kyiv and Chernihiv Oblasts. Ukrainian forces likely conducted counterattacks toward Sumy in the past 24 hours as well, though ISW cannot independently confirm these reports. Finally, Ukrainian forces conducted limited counterattacks in northern Kherson Oblast. Russian forces only conducted offensive operations in Donbas and against Mariupol in the last 24 hours and did not make any major advances.

Russian efforts to redeploy damaged units from the Kyiv and Sumy axes to eastern Ukraine are unlikely to enable Russian forces to conduct major gains. Russia continued to withdraw elements of the 35th and 36th Combined Arms Armies and 76 Air Assault Division from their positions northwest of Kyiv into Belarus for refit and likely further redeployment to eastern Ukraine. However, these units are likely heavily damaged and demoralized. Feeding damaged Eastern Military District units directly into operations in eastern Ukraine—predominantly conducted by the Southern Military District—will likely prove ineffective and additionally introduce further command-and-control challenges for the Russian military. Russian forces will likely attempt to retain their current front lines around Kyiv and in northeastern Ukraine and will continue to dig in on these fronts; ISW has not seen any indicators of Russian forces fully relinquishing captured territory. However, Ukrainian counterattacks are likely disrupting Russian efforts to redeploy and refit their forces and will continue in the coming days.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces successfully conducted local counterattacks around Kyiv, towards Sumy, and in Kherson Oblast and will likely take further territory—particularly northwest and east of Kyiv—in the coming days.**
- **Russia is withdrawing elements of its damaged forces around Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy for redeployment to eastern Ukraine, but these units are unlikely to provide a decisive shift in Russian combat power.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian assaults throughout Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, and Russian forces failed to take territory in the past 24 hours.**
- **Russian forces continue to steadily advance in Mariupol.**
- **Russia’s preplanned spring draft will begin on April 1 and does not appear abnormal from Russia’s typical conscription cycle. Newly drafted conscripts will not provide Russia with additional combat power for many months.**
- **The Kremlin is likely accelerating efforts to establish quasi-state entities to govern occupied Ukrainian territory.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 31, 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.

Putin signed a decree on March 31 beginning Russia’s preplanned spring draft, conscripting 134,500 Russians.¹ Russia conducts two prescheduled drafts a year, typically running from April 1 to July 15 and October 1 to December 31.² The number of Russian conscripts called up is relatively consistent, including 127,000 in fall 2021 and 134,000 in Spring 2021.³ New conscripts typically undergo one or two months of basic training followed by three to sixth months of advanced training prior to assignment to specific units, and are precluded by law from deploying to combat with less than four months of training—though the Kremlin could bypass this restriction by announcing a general mobilization.⁴ **Russia’s Spring 2022 draft does not as of yet appear abnormal from Russia’s typical conscription cycle, but ISW will closely monitor any developments throughout the April 1-July 15 call-up period. Newly drafted conscripts will not provide Russia additional combat power for many months.**

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 31 that 200 “mercenaries from the Middle East,” likely Syrian troops, arrived at the Gomel military airfield in Belarus on March 29.⁵ ISW published an assessment of Russia’s mobilization of reinforcements from Syria and elsewhere to Ukraine earlier on March 31.⁶

The Kremlin is likely accelerating efforts to establish quasi-state entities to govern occupied Ukrainian territory. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 30 that Russia is attempting to set up military-civilian administrations and is preparing to create a “Kherson’s Peoples Republic” to administer occupied southern Ukraine. The General Staff later reported on March 31 that Russia’s FSB, the 652nd Group of Information and Psychological Operations, and officers of the 12th Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Federation are currently overseeing the occupation around Kherson, and the Kremlin is “curating” Russian law enforcement personnel and court officials for deployment to Ukraine at an unspecified future date.⁷

We do not report in detail on the deliberate Russian targeting of civilian infrastructure and attacks on unarmed civilians, which are 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 forces are engaged in four primary efforts at this time:

- Main effort—Kyiv (comprised of three subordinate supporting efforts);
- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv;
 - Supporting effort 1a—Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts;
- Supporting effort 2—Mariupol; and
- Supporting effort 3—Kherson and advances northward and westward.

Main effort—Kyiv axis: Russian operations on the Kyiv axis were aimed at encircling the city from the northwest, west, and east. It is unclear if forces on this axis have been given a new mission and, if so, what it might be.

Subordinate main effort along the west bank of the Dnipro

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 31 that elements of Russia’s 35th Combined Arms Army (CAA), 36th CAA, and 76th Air Assault Division withdrew from positions northwest of Kyiv into Belarus to restore combat capabilities and possible redeployment to other axes of advance.⁸ Belarusian social media users additionally observed a large column of Russian Naval Infantry (vehicles marked with a “V”) moving through Gomel, Belarus towards the Russian border on March 30.⁹ These units – particularly the 76th Air Assault Division—have likely suffered extensive damage since February 24 and are highly unlikely to quickly reconstitute their combat power. Russia may seek to redeploy these damaged units to Donbas or into the fighting around Izyum, but they will likely be of limited utility in the short term and face growing morale problems.

Ukrainian counterattacks west of Kyiv since March 29 have reportedly pushed Russian forces north of the critical E-40 highway, the southernmost extent of Russian advances around Kyiv.¹⁰ Local media and social media users reported that Ukrainian forces have recaptured Lisovo, Kapitanivka, Dmytrivka, Kopiliv, and Buzova since March 29. Fighting continued throughout Bucha, Makariv, and Hostomel in the past 24 hours.¹¹ Ukrainian counterattacks will likely continue to steadily roll back Russian-occupied territory northwest of Kyiv in the coming days, but a sustained Ukrainian offensive to drive Russian forces out of artillery range of Kyiv would likely require a greater concentration of forces.

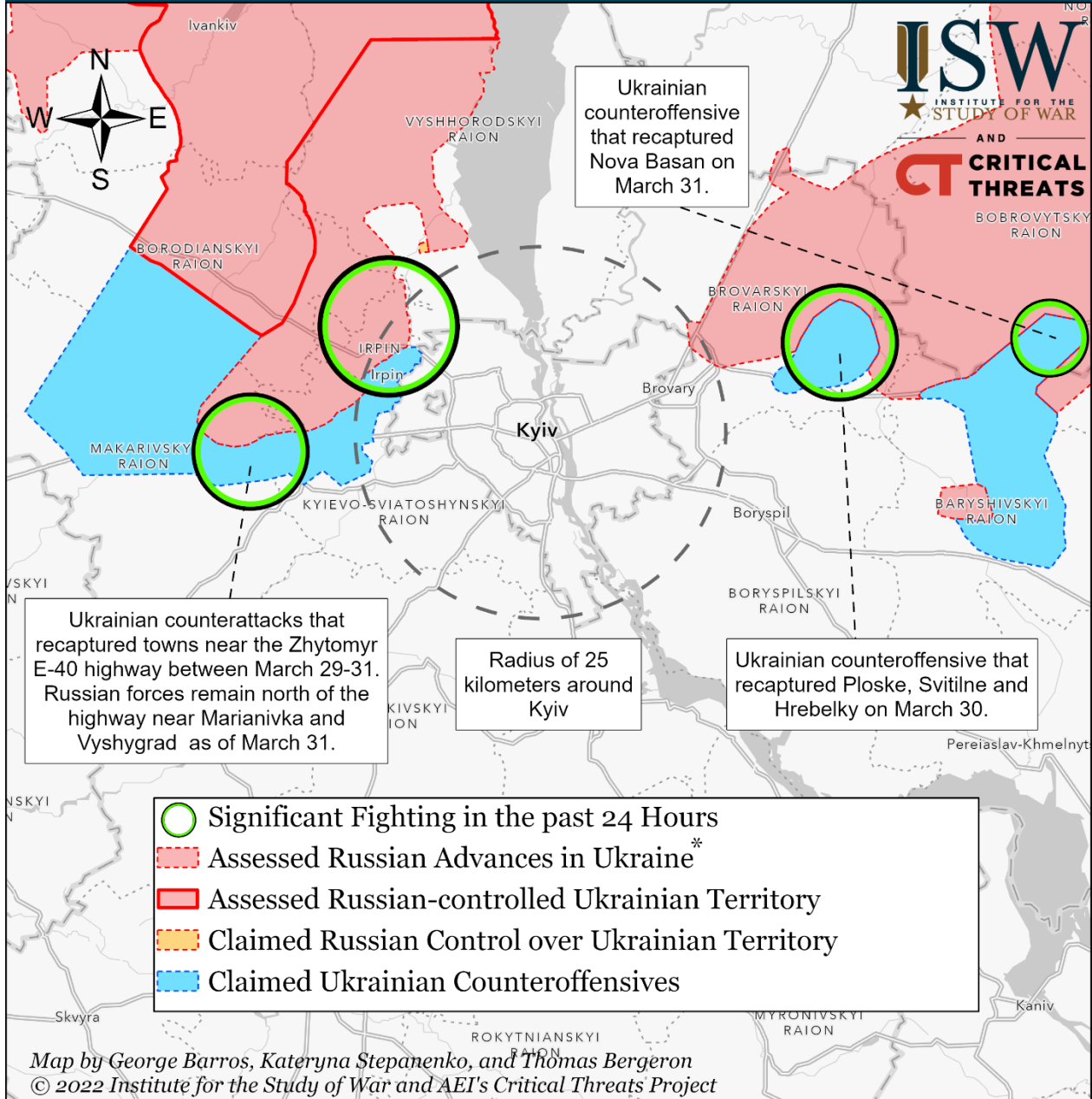
Subordinate supporting effort — Chernihiv and Sumy axis

Ukrainian forces are taking advantage of Russian force withdrawals of damaged units around Brovary to conduct successful counterattacks. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 31 that Russia continues to withdraw elements of its forces around Brovary for redeployment elsewhere, and the Kyiv Oblast administration stated its observed Russian forces withdrawing from Baryshivska, Kalityanska, and Velykodymerska on March 31.¹² Social media users reported that Ukrainian forces recaptured Ploske, Svitylnya, and Hrebelky (all east of Brovary) on March 30 and entered Nova Basan on March 31.¹³

A separate Ukrainian counterattack reportedly recaptured Sloboda, just south of Chernihiv city, on March 30.¹⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff stated on March 31 that elements of Russia’s 2nd CAA, 41st CAA, and 90th Tank Division are operating around Chernihiv and concentrated on reinforcing their defensive positions around Chernihiv in the last 24 hours.¹⁵ The General Staff additionally stated that it expects Russian forces to intensify their fire against Ukrainian forces in the coming days to cover the redeployment of Russian forces.¹⁶

Ukrainian forces are likely conducting successful counterattacks in Sumy Oblast but the advances claimed by local authorities are likely false. Sumy Regional State Administration head Dmytro Zhyvytskyi claimed on March 31 that all of Sumy Oblast except the Konotop area has been liberated from Russian forces.¹⁷ This claim is highly likely to be false, as we have observed no evidence of Ukrainian forces pushing the Russian military back to the international border or completely relieving Sumy. However, Ukrainian forces are likely successfully conducting counterattacks toward Sumy, supporting similar operations in Chernihiv Oblast. ISW will update this assessment as more information is available.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kyiv as of March 31, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Ukrainian forces recaptured several towns near the Zhytomyr E-40 highway south east of Kyiv on March 29-31. Ukrainian forces recaptured Ploske, Svitilne and Hrebelky east of Brovary on March 30. Ukrainian forces also recaptured Nova Basan - a key point on the H-07 highway that runs east to Brovary on March 31. Ukraine's control of the H-07 highway will degrade Russia's ability to maintain forces near Brovary's eastern outskirts.

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Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv:

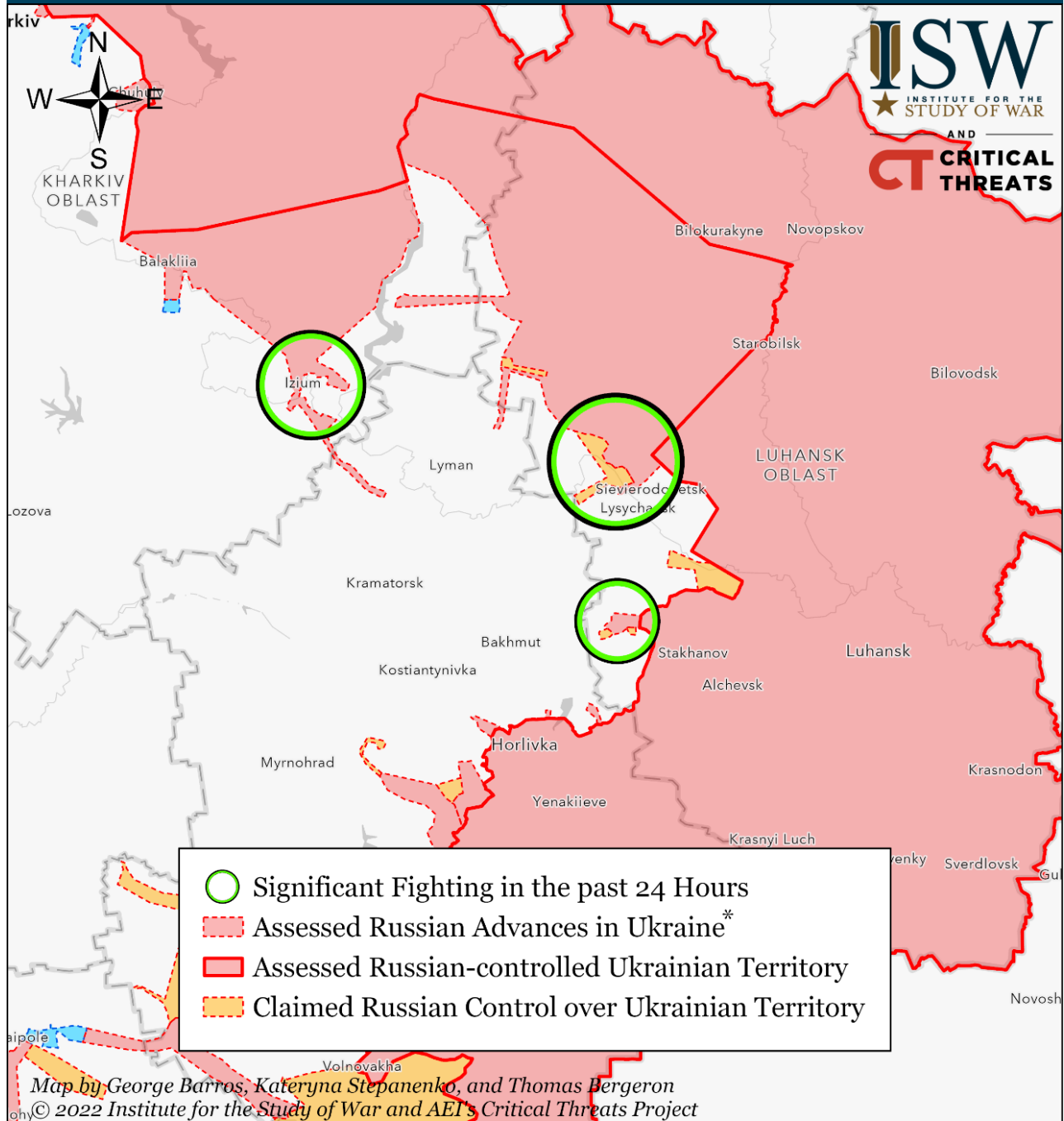
The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 30-31 that Russian forces are assembling forces previously withdrawn from other lines of Russian advance to form “strike groups” reinforced with artillery to the Izyum area.¹⁸ Russian forces likely intend to advance southeast from existing positions around Izyum to link up with Russian forces advancing west in Luhansk Oblast, but damaged Russian units redeployed from northeastern Ukraine will likely be of limited utility in the near future.

The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian aircraft and loitering munitions targeted four Ukrainian command posts and an S-300 air defense system south of Izyum on March 31, though ISW cannot independently confirm this claim.¹⁹ Russian forces continued to shell Kharkiv but did not conduct any assaults on the city in the past 24 hours.²⁰

Supporting Effort #1a—Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts:

Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian assaults throughout Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, particularly concentrated on Popasna and Rubizhne, in the past 24 hours.²¹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported at 6:00 am local time on March 31 that Ukrainian forces repelled five enemy attacks over the previous 24 hours and claimed to have destroyed 10 tanks, 18 armored and 13 unarmored vehicles, and 15 artillery systems.²² The General Staff additionally stated that the Russian air force intensified its operational tempo in the Donbas region in the past 24 hours.²³ The Russian General Staff claimed that LNR forces captured Zhytlivka (northwest of Severodonetsk) and Zolota Nyva (southwest of Donetsk) on March 31, but ISW cannot verify this claim.²⁴

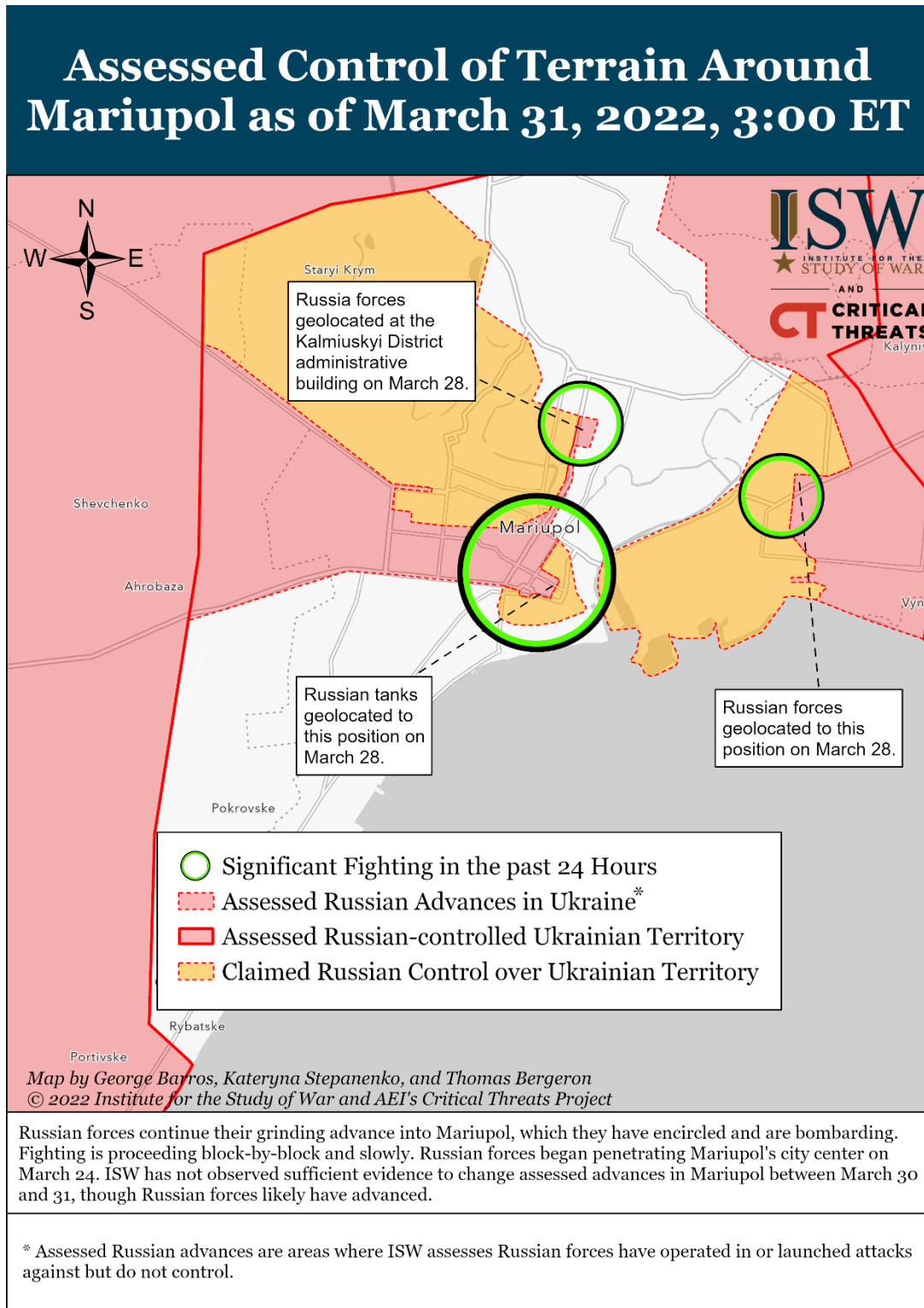
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of March 31, 2022, 3:00 ET



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Supporting Effort #2—Mariupol:

Russian forces likely continued to advance in Mariupol on March 31.²⁵ DNR and LNR officials claimed that DNR forces are involved in Russian operations in Mariupol alongside Russian forces.²⁶



Supporting Effort #3—Kherson and advances northward and westwards:

Ukrainian forces conducted successful counterattacks in several areas along the southern front on March 31. Ukrainian forces recaptured Orlove, Zagradiivka, and Kochubeyevka in northern Kherson Oblast.²⁷ Ukrainian Air Assault Forces additionally claimed to recapture Zatyshshya, Malynivka, Vesele, Zelenyi Hai, and Chervone in Zaporizhia Oblast on March 31.²⁸ The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces concentrated their efforts on maintaining their current positions.²⁹

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces will likely capture Mariupol or force the city to capitulate within the coming days;
- Russian reinforcements may enable a renewed Russian offensive through Slovyansk to link up with Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast;
- Russian withdrawals from near Kyiv and Chernihiv will become significant if Russian troops begin to pull back from front-line positions around either city.



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¹ <https://iz dot ru/1313474/2022-03-31/prezident-rossii-vladimir-putin-podpisal-ukaz-o-prizyve-134-500-chelovek-na-srochnuiu-sluzhbu>.

² <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/explainer-russian-conscription-reserve-and-mobilization>.

³ <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/explainer-russian-conscription-reserve-and-mobilization>.

⁴ <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/explainer-russian-conscription-reserve-and-mobilization>.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284860703827015>.

⁶ <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russia-mobilizes-reinforcements-syria-and-africa-ukraine>.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284290707217348>;

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⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284647860514966>;

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⁹ <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1509191946987884551>.

¹⁰ <https://tsn dot ua/ato/pivdennu-chastinu-buchanskogo-rayonu-kiyivschini-viyskovi-zachischayut-vid-voroga-2025079.html>; <https://twitter.com/prostokolian/status/1509394063795052550>

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¹¹ <https://t.me/kyivoda/2845>; <https://t.me/kyivoda/2845>; <https://t.me/kyivoda/2845>; <https://t.me/kyivoda/2845>.

¹² <https://t.me/kyivoda/2845>.

¹³ <https://twitter.com/Danspiun/status/1509502112450891788>;

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¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284647860514966>;
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¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284290707217348>.
¹⁷ <https://tsn dot ua/exclusive/u-zvilnenih-vid-okupantiv-gromadah-schodnya-znahodyat-trupi-lyudey-yaka-situaciya-u-sumah-ta-oblasti-31-bereznnya-2025298.html>; https://censor dot net/ua/news/3330162/u_zvilnenyh_vid_okupantiv_gromadah_sumschyny_pratsyuyut_sapery_tryvaye_zachystka_vid_drg_jyvyskyi.
¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284860703827015>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284290707217348>.
¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2126754004155082>.
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²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284647860514966>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284290707217348>.
²² <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284486550531097>.
²³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284647860514966>.
²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2126754004155082>; <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2126754004155082>.
²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284647860514966>.
²⁶ <https://t.me/millnr/7916>; <https://t.me/millnr/7916>; https://t.me/nm_dnr/7337.
²⁷ <https://www.slovoidilo dot ua/2022/03/31/novyna/suspilstvo/zsu-zvilnyly-okupantiv-try-sela-xersonshhyni>;
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https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=5283518798345616&id=100000626452784
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²⁸ <https://zlochiv dot net/ukrainski-viyskovi-zvilnyly-5-naselenykh-punktiv-na-zaporizhzhii>;
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²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/284647860514966>.