

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 4, 2023

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March 4, 6:00 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.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain maps that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

**Russian forces appear to have secured a sufficient positional advantage to conduct a turning movement against certain parts of Bakhmut but have not yet forced Ukrainian forces to withdraw and will likely not be able to encircle the city soon.** Russian forces made one limited confirmed advance near Bakhmut on March 4.<sup>1</sup> As ISW reported on March 3, Ukrainian forces are likely setting conditions for a controlled fighting withdrawal out of particularly difficult sectors of eastern Bakhmut, although it is not clear that Ukrainian commanders have decided to withdraw at this time.<sup>2</sup> Russian sources claim that Wagner Group elements have made gains in northeastern and eastern Bakhmut over the past few days, creating a tactically challenging turning movement in urban areas in northern Bakhmut.<sup>3</sup> Ukrainian officials have recently reiterated that Ukrainian forces still control the situation in Bakhmut but have noted that circumstances are increasingly complicated and that the Wagner Group has committed its most advanced and prepared elements to assault operations in the area.<sup>4</sup>

Russian advances in Bakhmut have been slow and gradual and do not suggest that Russian forces will be able to encircle Bakhmut soon, much less that they will be able to take the city by frontal assaults. The Russians have, rather, managed to push close enough to critical ground lines of communication from the northeast to threaten Ukrainian withdrawal routes in a classical envelopment maneuver. **The purpose of a turning movement is to force the enemy to abandon prepared defensive positions and is different from the aim of an encirclement, which is to trap and destroy enemy forces. The Russians may have intended to encircle Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut, but the Ukrainian command has signaled that it will likely withdraw rather than risk an encirclement.** ISW assesses that Ukrainian forces are far more likely to withdraw than to become encircled and that the Ukrainians might still be able to hold their positions in Bakhmut if they choose to try. Russian forces have been suffering high casualties in these advances, and Ukrainian commanders' assessments of the likelihood that they can force Russian attacks to culminate near or behind their current positions balanced against the risk of losing access to essential withdrawal routes will likely guide the Ukrainian decision to stay or pull back.

**Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu met with Eastern Military District (EMD) Commander Colonel General Rustam Muradov in western Donetsk Oblast, likely to assess the extent of Russian losses around Vuhledar and the possibility of further offensives in this direction.** The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) published a video on March 4 purporting to show Shoigu visiting Muradov in an unspecified area of western Donetsk Oblast and claimed that Muradov delivered a report on the current situation and actions of Russian forces in his

area of responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Russian forces suffered catastrophic losses in a recent three-week offensive near Vuhledar, and severe personnel and equipment constraints are likely preventing Russian forces from making even marginal advances in this direction.<sup>6</sup> The Russian MoD may be considering whether transferring reserves of manpower and equipment to the Vuhledar area for renewed offensive operations is a worthwhile effort. The Russian MoD recently confirmed that Muradov is the EMD commander, and the substantial losses around Vuhledar have likely already caused Muradov significant reputational damage.<sup>7</sup> Shoigu may have therefore visited western Donetsk Oblast also to assess Muradov's continued suitability for the position of EMD commander. Shoigu's visit to Ukraine may suggest that the Russian MoD lacks confidence in Chief of the General Staff and theater commander of all Russian forces in Ukraine Army General Valery Gerasimov, who likely should have been the officer making this frontline visit or at least accompanying Shoigu.<sup>8</sup> Russia's military district commanders report to Gerasimov on operational matters, and Shoigu's publicized solo visit to western Donetsk appears to undermine Gerasimov.

**The Chinese government is reportedly displeased with the Kremlin over the publicization of arms sales discussions.** *The Economist* reported on March 2 that an unspecified European official claimed that the Chinese government wanted discussions of lethal aid to remain secret so that China could maintain its image as a neutral mediator.<sup>9</sup> *CNBC News* reported on March 3 that US officials have indicated that information regarding Chinese considerations to send Russia arms was an assessment "gleaned" from Russian officials.<sup>10</sup>

**Russian State Duma Defense Committee Head Andrey Kartapalov stated that Russian companies should purchase their own air defense systems to defend against drones.** A Russian state-owned news source reported that Kartapalov claimed on March 1 that Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) resources are focused on protecting critical state and military facilities. He argued that every "self-respecting corporation" should be able to purchase and install such systems for themselves.<sup>11</sup> This bizarre proposal would likely create further security issues for Russia, not resolve them, as the prospect of numerous companies fielding and presumably using their own air defense systems independent of the Russian military should alarm any sane Russian official. Kartapalov's statements are almost certainly an extension of the domestic panic inflamed by reports of the March 2 incursion into Bryansk Oblast and accusations of recent Ukrainian drones in Russian airspace. Kartapalov may have additionally hoped to place the onus of defense on individual enterprises to frame Ukrainian activity as a direct threat to domestic Russian affairs.

**The Wagner Group reportedly opened at least three new recruitment centers at Russian sports clubs between March 2 and 4, possibly to augment Wagner's recruitment base after losing access to prisoner recruits.** The Wagner Group reportedly opened at least three new recruiting centers collocated with Russian sporting clubs since Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin officially announced that Wagner launched recruiting efforts through Russian sports club on March 2.<sup>12</sup> The new Wagner recruiting centers are reportedly based at the "Dynamo" sports facility in Samara, the "Antares" Sports Club in Rostov, and the Russian Boxing Federation building in Tyumen.<sup>13</sup> This effort may seek to offset decreases in Wagner recruitment after the Wagner Group reportedly lost access to recruiting prisoners in early 2023. Prigozhin insinuated on March 3 that Russian government officials barred the Wagner Group from recruiting prisoners—just as the Russian Ministry of Defense sabotaged Wagner Group forces' ammunition supplies.<sup>14</sup> Prigozhin announced on February 9 that Wagner had completely stopped recruiting prisoners but did

not characterize it as the result of a Russian government ban at that time.<sup>15</sup> Russian media additionally reported that Wagner has opened a "Wagnernyok" youth club in St. Petersburg.<sup>16</sup>



### Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces appear to have secured a sufficient positional advantage to conduct a turning action against certain parts of Bakhmut but have not yet forced Ukrainian forces to withdraw and will not likely be able to encircle the city soon.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu met with Eastern Military District Commander Colonel General Rustam Muradov in western Donetsk Oblast, likely to assess the extent of Russian losses around Vuhledar and the possibility of a further offensive in this direction.**
- **The Chinese government is reportedly angry with the Kremlin over the publicization of arms sales discussions.**
- **Russian State Duma Defense Committee Head Andrey Kartapalov encouraged Russian companies to purchase their own air defense systems to defend against drones.**
- **The Wagner Group reportedly opened at least three new recruitment centers at Russian sports clubs between March 2-4, possibly to augment Wagner's recruitment base after losing access to prisoner recruits.**

- **Russian forces conducted offensive actions along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to encircle Bakhmut and conduct ground attacks along the Donetsk Oblast front line.**
- **Ukrainian sources continue to report that Russian forces are trying to set conditions for offensive operations in southern Ukraine.**
- **Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov continues apparent efforts to increase Chechen influence within Russia through promoting Chechnya's Special Forces (SPETSNAZ) and youth policy efforts.**
- **Russian occupation administrations are strengthening law enforcement measures in occupied territories.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 4, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



***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.***

- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1—Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

### **Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine**

#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1— Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces reportedly continued offensive operations near Svatove on March 4. Geolocated footage published on March 4 indicates that Russian forces likely secured gains north of Novovodyane (16km southwest of Svatove).<sup>17</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on March 3 that Ukrainian forces attempted to attack Russian positions northwest of Svatove near Kupyansk in Vilshana (15km northeast of Kupyansk) and Lyman Pershyi (12km east of Kupyansk).<sup>18</sup>

The reported Ukrainian evacuation of vulnerable citizens from Kupyansk does not suggest that Ukrainian forces believe that Russian forces threaten the city. Western media reported on March 3 that Ukrainian officials ordered the mandatory evacuation of vulnerable civilians from Kupyansk due to Russian shelling.<sup>19</sup> Russian forces are within the 25km range that allows them to shell Kupyansk with 152mm tube artillery, which poses considerable risk to civilians. Russian forces have conducted limited offensive operations northeast of Kupyansk over the past month without making any significant confirmed advances and are unlikely to secure the gains required to threaten the city at their current pace of operations. ISW has assessed that the closest Russian advances are about 13km northeast of Kupyansk, and it is unlikely that Russian forces in this area have the capability to rapidly advance 13km cross-country and assault Kupyansk itself, if they are able to advance that far at all, which they have not yet shown the capacity to do.

Russian forces continued offensive operations around Kreminna on March 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Nevske (17km north of Kreminna), Kreminna, and within 33km south of Kreminna near Hryhorivka, Bilohorivka, Spirne, and Vesele.<sup>20</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted assaults in the direction of Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna), Terny (17km west of Kreminna), and Yampolvika (17km west of Kreminna) and that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near

Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna).<sup>21</sup> Russian milbloggers amplified footage on March 4 purporting to show Russian assault units of the Central Military District capturing Ukrainian trenches in a forest area near Kreminna.<sup>22</sup> A Russian source claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces hold positions as close as 40 meters away from one another south of Kreminna.<sup>23</sup>

A Russian commander inaccurately framed Russian operations in Luhansk and Kharkiv oblasts as limited in scope, likely to set informational conditions for the potential culmination of the Russian offensive in this sector of the frontline. A BARS-13 (Russian Combat Reserve of the Country) commander stated on March 4 that Russian forces are conducting localized offensive operations to regain lost positions and push Ukrainian forces away from Russian-occupied Svatove and Belgorod Oblast.<sup>24</sup> The BARS-13 commander stated that Russian offensive operations in these areas "can hardly be called a full-fledged offensive," and that Russian forces are struggling to advance after pushing Ukrainian forces back from positions near Kreminna.<sup>25</sup> ISW assesses that Russian forces have likely committed almost the entirety of the 144th and 3rd Motorized Rifle Divisions of the 20th Combined Arms Army of the Western Military District as well as regiment-sized elements of the 98th, 76th, and 106th Air Assault Division of the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) to offensives along the Svatove-Kreminna line.<sup>26</sup> The commitment of the equivalent of three divisions to one discrete geographical area suggests that Russian forces intended to prioritize this axis of advance and make substantial gains in this area. ISW has previously assessed that the ongoing Russian offensive in Luhansk Oblast may already be nearing culmination because these elements have been committed to decisive offensive operations in this area for some time, and Russian sources are likely trying to set informational conditions for the potential Russian loss of the initiative.<sup>27</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of March 4, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



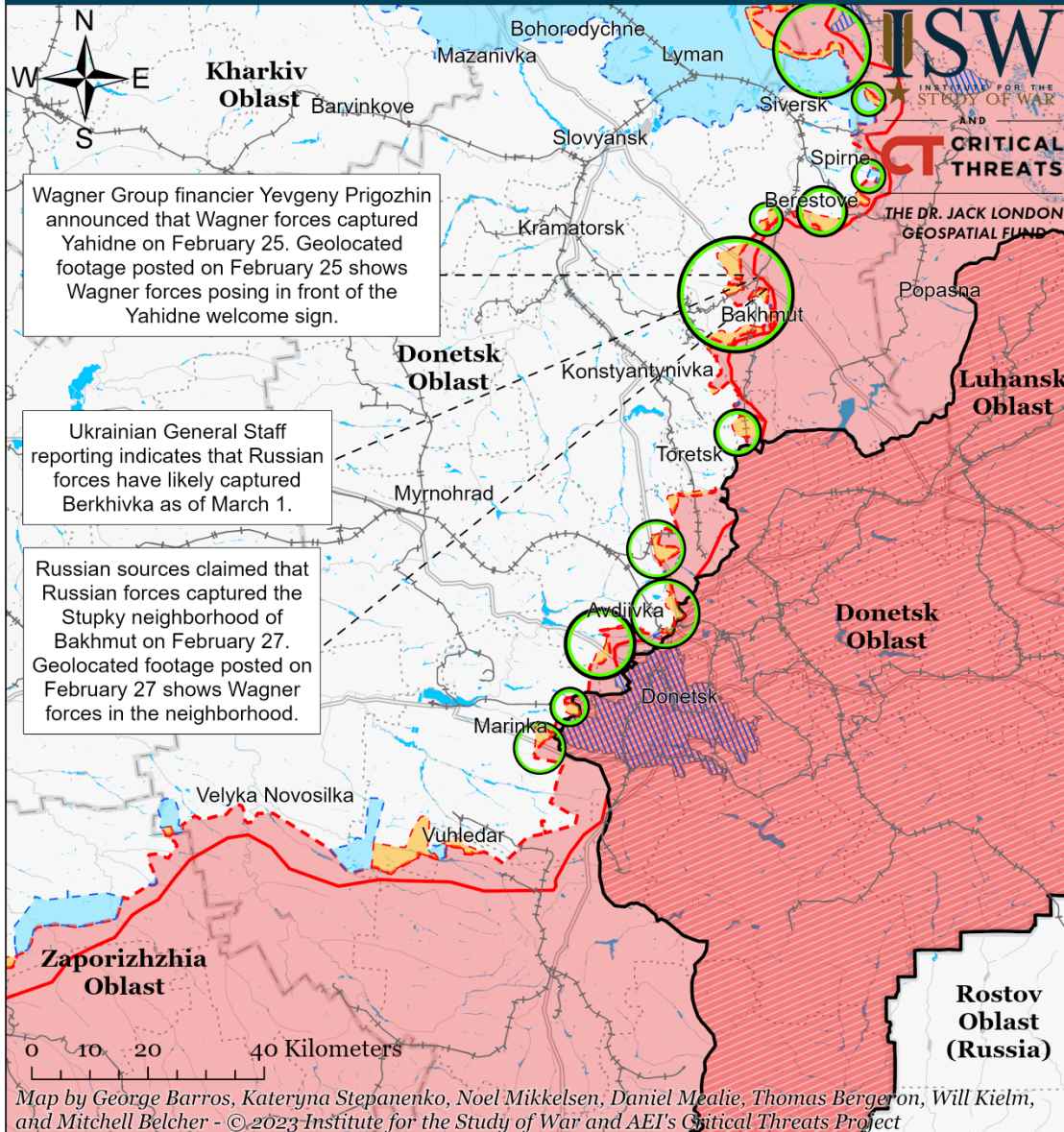


## **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

Russian forces continued efforts to encircle Bakhmut on March 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; north of Bakhmut near Vasyukivka (13km north); northwest of Bakhmut near Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest), Orikhovo-Vasylivka (10km northwest), Bodhanivka (8km northwest), and Hryhorivka (10km northwest); and west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west).<sup>28</sup> Geolocated footage posted on March 4 shows Ukrainian forces striking Russian positions on the east bank of the Berkhivka reservoir, indicating that Russian troops have made advances about 5km northwest of Bakhmut.<sup>29</sup> Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that the situation in Bakhmut is difficult but under control and remarked that Russian forces blew up the bridge that connects Bakhmut with Khromove to the west.<sup>30</sup> ISW observed geolocated footage of the Khromove bridge on March 3 that indicated that Ukrainian forces destroyed the bridge to inhibit Russian movement to the west of Bakhmut.<sup>31</sup> It is unclear who destroyed the Khromove bridge, but its destruction will in any case limit the abilities of Russian forces to approach Ukrainian positions in and around Khromove from positions in Bakhmut. Russian sources widely claimed that Ukrainian troops are withdrawing from Bakhmut but that certain Ukrainian elements remain within the city.<sup>32</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group forces cleared the “Tavr” meat processing plant in northeastern Bakhmut and are advancing towards central Bakhmut along streets in eastern and southwestern Bakhmut.<sup>33</sup> Milbloggers additionally claimed that Wagner troops attacked Ukrainian positions west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske and Khromove.<sup>34</sup> A Wagner Group-affiliated milblogger noted that the only remaining bridge out of Bakhmut is a bridge across the T0504 Kostiantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway in Ivanivske.<sup>35</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on March 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attacked Ukrainian positions in Avdiivka itself and around Avdiivka near Severne (5km west of Avdiivka), Novokalynove (10km north of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka (9km north of Avdiivka), and Kamianka (5km northeast of Avdiivka); on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Vodyane, Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Krasnohorivka (the Krasnohorivka just northwest of Donetsk City and not the one 9km north of Avdiivka); and on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Marinka and Pobieda.<sup>36</sup> Footage posted on March 4 shows a Ukrainian brigade destroying a Russian assault group near Avdiivka, resulting in the loss of three Russian tanks, five BMP infantry fighting vehicles, and the capture of six Russian prisoners.<sup>37</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, particularly elements of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) 1<sup>st</sup> Army Corps, are fighting along the outskirts of Donetsk City and in Marinka.<sup>38</sup> Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed or claimed ground attacks southwest of Donetsk City in western Donetsk Oblast on March 4.<sup>39</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 4, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

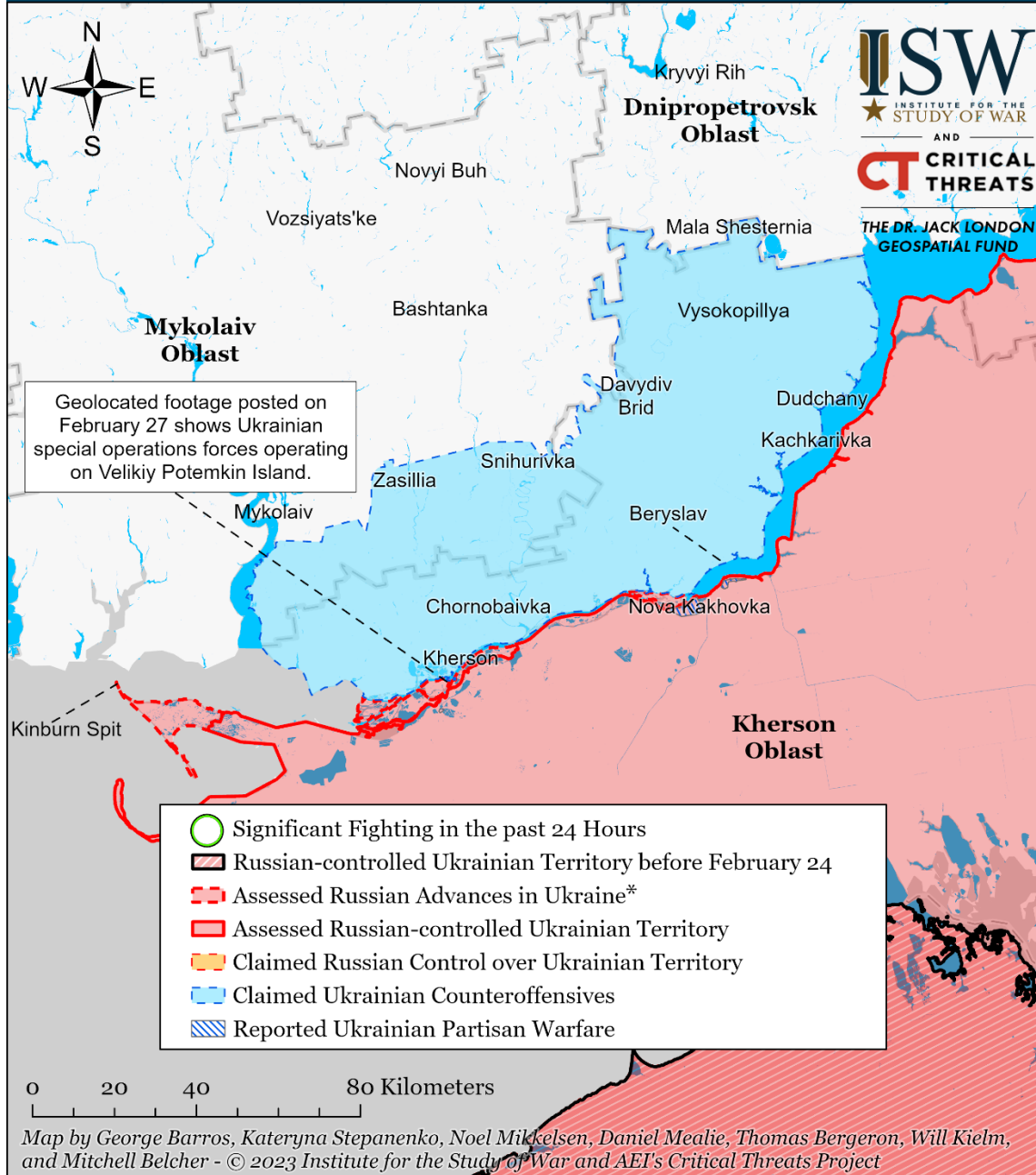
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

## **Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Ukrainian sources continue to report that Russian forces are trying to set conditions for offensive operations in southern Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 4 that Russian forces are attempting to improve their tactical positions in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts to resume offensive operations in some areas.<sup>40</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff has recently changed its language to include information concerning the situation in Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts in the same section, and it is unclear whether these reports refer to offensive preparations in both or just one of the oblasts. ISW has not observed any indicators that Russian forces are preparing for sustained offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast or any offensive activity in Kherson Oblast. Some Ukrainian officials have suggested that Russian forces could attempt to launch a decisive offensive effort towards Zaporizhzhia City, but ISW continues to assess that Russian forces do not have the necessary combat power accumulated in Zaporizhia Oblast to launch a large-scale offensive in this sector of the frontline.<sup>41</sup> Russian forces would be highly unlikely to reach Zaporizhzhia City in the case of such an offensive.

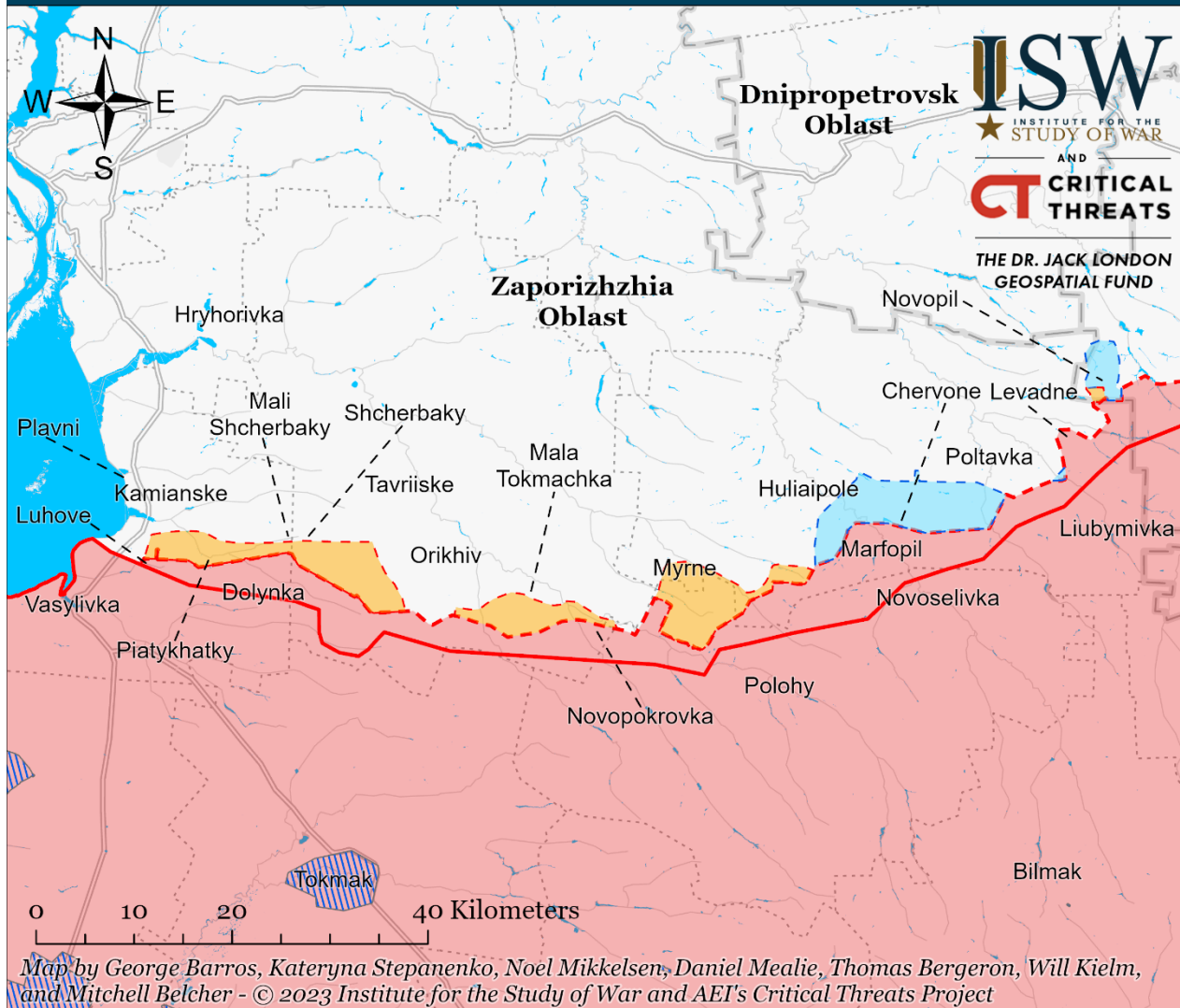
Russian forces continued routine fire west of Hulyaipole and in Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts on March 4.<sup>42</sup> Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces shelled Kherson City and Nikopol in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and Ochakiv in Mykolaiv Oblast.<sup>43</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 4, 2023, 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.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of March 4, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

## **Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)**

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov continues efforts to increase Chechen influence within Russia through promoting Chechnya's Special Forces (SPETSNAZ) and youth policy efforts. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) head Denis Pushilin visited SPETSNAZ University in Gudermes, Chechnya with Kadyrov and praised the experience of its instructors on March 3.<sup>44</sup> Kadyrov also stated that his son, Chechen Regional Chairman of the All-Russian Public State Movement of Children and Youth "Movement of the First" Head Akhmat Kadyrov, met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Chechnya on March 4 to discuss youth policy.<sup>45</sup>

Russian officials continue to make contradictory statements regarding plans to change the conscription age for upcoming conscription cycles. A Russian state-owned news source stated on March 3 that Russia's Federation Council Defense Committee Head, Viktor Bondarev, claimed that Russian deputies plan to introduce a bill in spring 2023 to raise the age of conscription for Russian soldiers in alignment with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's December 21, 2022 proposal.<sup>46</sup> Shoigu proposed shifting the conscription bracket from 18-27 years of age to 21-30 years of age.<sup>47</sup> Russian Duma Defense Committee Chairman Andrei Kartapolov has made contradictory statements about changes to the conscription age at different points since January 11.<sup>48</sup> These rhetorical inconsistencies indicate that partial mobilization and present conscription levels are insufficient to meet Russian personnel needs and that Russian authorities are likely exploring avenues for expanding force generation capacity without resorting to full-scale mobilization efforts.

Units of Russian mobilized soldiers have begun to record complaints about integration with and subjugation to Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) forces in addition to continuing complaints about DNR command. Russia's 1252<sup>nd</sup> regiment – composed of mobilized soldiers from Mordovia and Mari El – recorded a video complaint published to social media on March 3 that asked Putin to address their mistreatment under LNR commanders in Lysychansk. The soldiers claimed LNR commanders disbanded their unit and improperly reassigned them, deployed them to positions that do not match their training, and failed to equip them sufficiently.<sup>49</sup> A Russian news source amplified on March 3 another video complaint against DNR commanders recorded by the wives of soldiers in Russia's 1439<sup>th</sup> regiment - composed of mobilized soldiers from Irkutsk Oblast. The women stated that DNR commanders ordered their husbands to storm Avdiivka, allowed Ukrainian forces to surround them, and then abandoned them.<sup>50</sup> Soldiers from the 1439<sup>th</sup> regiment have thrice recorded their own viral complaints regarding their treatment under DNR commanders.<sup>51</sup> A Russian opposition source published on March 3 another complaint about the poor treatment of mobilized soldiers under DNR command from the wife of a covertly-mobilized soldier from Shakhtarsk, Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine.<sup>52</sup>

Russian official responses to these complaints remain inconsistent. Irkutsk Oblast Governor Igor Kobzev posted on March 4 that Irkutsk Oblast representatives traveled to the front lines in Ukraine to investigate the complaints of the 1439<sup>th</sup>-regiment mobilized soldiers. Meanwhile, Russian commanders unsuccessfully endeavor to silence the complaints, as ISW has previously reported.<sup>53</sup> A Russian opposition news source posted a video on March 3 in which the 1439<sup>th</sup> regiment soldiers

begin to film an appeal to Putin before a speaker off camera warns, “they’re coming,” and the video cuts off.<sup>54</sup>

Russian federal subjects (regions) continue to shoulder the financial burdens of Russian mobilization. An Ufa, Bashkortostan Republic, news source cited statements from Bashkirian authorities that they have spent hundreds of millions of rubles (millions of US dollars) out of the regional budget to implement the 2022 mobilization plan, pay the families of fallen soldiers, provision mobilized and volunteer soldiers, and more.<sup>55</sup>

Russian authorities continue to prosecute limited domestic resistance to Russian mobilization and to the war in Ukraine. Several Russian sources reported on March 4 that Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officers detained a Moscow resident and charged her with treason for financially assisting Ukrainian forces.<sup>56</sup> A Russian legal rights organization noted that this is the first known case of treason based on the provision of financial aid to Ukraine.<sup>57</sup> A Russian opposition news source reported on March 3 that Russia’s First Eastern District Military Court sentenced a Vladivostok resident to seven years imprisonment for setting fire to an unspecified military registration and enlistment office on June 8 after an unidentified customer allegedly offered him a 100,000-ruble (\$1,326) reward to destroy the office.<sup>58</sup> A Russian state-owned news source claimed on March 4 that the Russian supreme court in occupied Crimea sentenced a Saint Petersburg resident to six years imprisonment for attempting to swim from Crimea to Odesa and join Ukrainian forces.<sup>59</sup>

**Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)**

Russian occupation authorities continue to increase law enforcement measures in occupied territories. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian occupation officials in Simferopol, Crimea created volunteer police patrols out of fear of Ukrainian partisan activity and due to the shortage of law enforcement personnel.<sup>60</sup> Kherson Occupation Administration Head Vladimir Saldo used the alleged Ukrainian attack in Bryansk Oblast to announce that the Kherson occupation administration is strengthening internal checkpoints and patrols and introducing measures to identify terrorists.<sup>61</sup> Saldo also claimed that Russian forces will strengthen control of the line of contact.<sup>62</sup> Russian occupation officials may weaponize discourse surrounding the Bryansk Oblast incident to further consolidate repressions against residents of occupied areas.

Russian occupation authorities continue to prepare occupied territories for the September 10 Russian regional elections. Zaporizhia Occupation Administration Head Yevgeny Balitsky claimed on March 4 that the first meeting of the Election Commission took place in occupied Zaporizhia in preparation for United Voting Day.<sup>63</sup> Balitsky stated that the Election Commission has 10 members with the right to vote and thanked the Russian Central Election Commission and chairperson Ella Pamfilova for their help in organizing election commissions in occupied areas.<sup>64</sup>

**Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured**

**this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.**

**ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.**

Russian forces continue conducting training rotations in Belarus before deploying to fight in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian Border Guard Spokesman Andriy Demchenko stated on March 4 that the Russian force size in Belarus fluctuates but generally does not exceed 9,000 – 10,000 personnel at any given time.<sup>65</sup> Demchenko stated that Russian forces in Belarus redeploy from Belarus to Russia to support the Russian force group fighting in eastern Ukraine.<sup>66</sup> Demchenko stated that replacement Russian forces will likely deploy to Belarus after Russian forces redeploy from Belarus, keeping the overall number of Russian personnel in Belarus more or less equal over time.<sup>67</sup> Independent Belarusian monitoring group The Hajun Project reported on March 3 that Russia and Belarus expanded the duration of their ongoing joint exercises until at least March 13.<sup>68</sup> The Hajun Project reported that Russian forces are intensively training at several training grounds throughout Belarus, including the Osipovichsky, Domanovo, Lepelsky, and Obuz-Lesnovsky training grounds.<sup>69</sup> These reports support ISW's assessment that the Russian military is utilizing Belarusian training grounds and trainers to train mobilized Russians to compensate for Russia's degraded training capacity.<sup>70</sup>

**Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://twitter.com/EdsenTheWeather/status/1632014727688617985?s=20>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-3-2023>

<sup>3</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/54010>; <https://t.me/rybar/44221>

<sup>4</sup> <https://suspilne dot media/399485-oleksandr-sirskij-rozpoviv-pro-situaciu-v-bahmuti/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/24551](https://t.me/mod_russia/24551)

<sup>6</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar03012023> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021323>

<sup>7</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021723>

<sup>8</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar012523>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.economist.com/china/2023/03/02/chinese-arms-could-revive-russias-failing-war>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/04/us-intel-on-china-considering-lethal-aid-for-putins-war-was-gleaned-from-russian-officials.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://tass dot ru/politika/17167181>; <https://www.moscowtimes dot ru/2023/03/04/vgosdume-predlozhili-kompaniyam-samim-zakupat-pvo-dlya-zaschiti-otdronov-a35818>; <https://meduza dot io/news/2023/03/04/v-gosdume-posovetovali-rossijskim-kompaniyam-zakupatsya-pvo-dlya-zaschity-ot-ukrainskih-dronov>

<sup>12</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-2-2023>



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<sup>13</sup> <https://stepnaya-now dot ru/2023/03/04/v-rostove-otkrylsa-tsentr-nabora-bojtsov-dlya-chvk-vagner/>; <https://www.1rnd dot ru/news/3557543/v-rostove-otkrylsa-centr-nabora-bojcov-dla-cvk-vagner>; <https://dzen dot ru/a/ZAI02XaeEBSdSzvR>; <https://ng72 dot ru/news/77419>; [https://news.rambler dot ru/army/50304120/?utm\\_content=news\\_media&utm\\_medium=read\\_more&utm\\_source=copylink](https://news.rambler dot ru/army/50304120/?utm_content=news_media&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copylink); <http://samara-news dot net/society/2023/03/03/306727.html>; <https://progorodsamara dot ru/news/view/prigozin-zaavil-ob-otkrytii-v-samare-centra-cvk-vagner-na-ul-lva-tolstogo-3-marta>

<sup>14</sup> <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/19744>; <https://t.me/voenkors/318>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-23-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Offensive%20Campaign%20Assessment%2C%20February%2016%2C%202023%20PDF.pdf>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Operations%20Assessments%20February%2022%202023.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-9-2023>

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<sup>19</sup> [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-03-3-23/h\\_2ae2f3841a1386e6b1bce01e70c05b34](https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-03-3-23/h_2ae2f3841a1386e6b1bce01e70c05b34);

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<sup>21</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/11226>

<sup>22</sup> <https://t.me/voenacher/40653>; <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/19742>

<sup>23</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/54014>

<sup>24</sup> [https://t.me/russkiy\\_opolchenec/35983](https://t.me/russkiy_opolchenec/35983); <https://t.me/dolgarevaanna/3207>

<sup>25</sup> [https://t.me/russkiy\\_opolchenec/35983](https://t.me/russkiy_opolchenec/35983); <https://t.me/dolgarevaanna/3207>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-19-2023>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://twitter.com/EdsenTheWeather/status/1632014727688617985?s=20>

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<https://t.me/rybar/44238>; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/79669](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/79669); [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/79666](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/79666)

<sup>33</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/54010>; <https://t.me/rybar/44221>

<sup>34</sup> <https://t.me/rybar/44221>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/11226>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/54010>;  
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