

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 9, 2023

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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 conducted the largest missile strike across Ukraine of 2023 so far on March 9, but the attack likely only served Russian state propaganda objectives. Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces targeted Ukrainian critical infrastructure with 84 different missiles including 28 Kh-101/Kh-555 and 20 Kalibr cruise missiles, six Kh-22 anti-ship missiles, six Kh-47 Kinzhal hypersonic missiles, two Kh-31P supersonic anti-ship missiles, six Kh-59 guided missiles, and at least 13 S-300 air-defense missiles.¹ Russian forces also attacked Ukraine with eight Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones, which Ukrainian officials noted likely sought to distract Ukrainian air defense systems before the missile strikes.² Ukrainian forces reportedly shot down 34 of the 48 Kalibr and Kh-101/Kh-555 cruise missiles and four Shahed-136 drones.³ Ukrainian officials also noted that all eight of the Kh-31P and Kh-59 missiles did not reach their intended targets. Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat noted that Ukrainian forces did not have the capacity to shoot down some of the Russian missiles—likely referring to Kinzhal and S-300 missiles.⁴ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces conducted “high precision long range air, sea, and land-based missile strikes” targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure, military-industrial complexes, and energy infrastructure supporting the Ukrainian military as retaliation for the alleged incursion into Bryansk Oblast on March 2.⁵

Ukrainian officials, Russian milbloggers, and social media footage indicate that Russian forces overwhelmingly targeted energy infrastructure across Ukraine. The head of the Ukrainian state electricity transmission operator Ukrenergo, Volodymyr Kudrynskyi, stated that Russian missile strikes once again targeted Ukrainian energy infrastructure, but yet again failed to achieve Russia's ongoing goal of destroying Ukrainian power supplies.⁶ Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated that Russian strikes hit eight energy sites resulting in power outages in some areas of the country.⁷ The Kyiv City Military Administration reported that preliminary data showed that Russian forces may have used Kinzhal missiles to strike unspecified infrastructure, while social media footage showed smoke rising from one of Kyiv's thermo-electric power plants.⁸ Russian milbloggers amplified footage and reports of the aftermath of strikes on energy facilities in the cities of Kyiv, Dnipro, Vinnytsia, Odesa, Kirovohrad, and Kharkiv among others.⁹ ISW continues to assess that these missile strikes will not undermine Ukraine's will or improve Russia's positions on the frontlines.

The Kremlin likely deliberately launched missiles that Ukrainian air defenses cannot intercept to achieve results within the Russian information space despite the dwindling supplies of such missiles. Ihnat noted that Russia has up to 50 Kinzhal missiles and had used some missiles that it cannot replace. Russian President Vladimir Putin likely used these scarce missiles in fruitless attacks to appease the

Russian pro-war and ultranationalist communities, which have overwhelmingly called on him to retaliate for the Bryansk Oblast incident on March 2.¹⁰ Russian milbloggers and propagandists have also criticized the Russian missile campaign for failing to make Ukraine “freeze” over the winter in late February and early March before the spring season.¹¹ Putin likely attempted to offset these narratives with another missile attack similar to the ones that Russia conducted in the fall of 2022, using advanced missiles to guarantee some damage in Ukraine. Russian milbloggers did not overwhelmingly support today’s strikes, however, noting that the Kremlin needs to fundamentally change its targeting approach given that Ukraine has adapted to the established attack pattern against its energy infrastructure.¹²

Russian forces likely advanced northwest of Bakhmut on March 9 amidst a likely increased tempo of Russian offensive operations in the area. Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that Wagner Group fighters completely captured Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), and geolocated footage published on March 9 indicates that Wagner forces likely captured the settlement.¹³ The likely capture of Dubovo-Vasylivka corresponds with the potentially increased tempo of Russian offensive operations northwest of Bakhmut in recent days.¹⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted at least 30 percent of their assaults in Ukraine northwest of Bakhmut on March 8.¹⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff has not reported Russian assaults near Khromove since March 1, and Ukrainian forces have reportedly reestablished river crossings in the area after Russian forces reportedly destroyed a bridge in the area on March 4.¹⁶ ISW has assessed that Ukrainian forces have likely pushed Russian forces back from Khromove since the Ukrainian General Staff’s reporting of the March 1 assaults, and the reported establishment of pontoon bridges suggests that Ukrainian forces are strengthening their positions around the critical ground lines of communications (GLOCs) near Khromove. Russian forces may be temporarily focusing their operational efforts northwest of Bakhmut to set conditions for future offensive operations aimed against these strengthened Ukrainian positions around Khromove or intended to bypass them in a larger envelopment.

The Wagner Group’s offensive operation in eastern Bakhmut appears to have entered a temporary tactical pause and it remains unclear if Wagner fighters will retain their operational preponderance in future Russian offensives in the city. There have been no reports of Wagner fighters conducting offensive operations from eastern Bakhmut into central parts of the city since Russian forces captured all of eastern Bakhmut located east of the Bakhmutka River on March 7.¹⁷ Wagner fighters have been conducting highly attritional frontal assaults on eastern Bakhmut for nine months and are likely not prepared to conduct a crossing of the Bakhmutka River to the Bakhmut city center at this time. The frontal offensive on eastern Bakhmut likely consumed a significant amount of Wagner personnel and resources, although it is not yet evident whether this effort has caused Wagner’s offensive within Bakhmut itself to culminate. Ukrainian Eastern Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Serhiy Cherevaty stated on March 9 that an increasing number of unspecified Russian airborne and mechanized reinforcements have recently arrived at Bakhmut.¹⁸ The arrival of an increased number of conventional Russian forces to the area may suggest that Russian forces intend to offset the possible culmination of Wagner’s offensive operations in Bakhmut with new conventional troops. Wagner Group fighters may also be conducting a temporary tactical pause to wait for these conventional Russian reinforcements and replenish themselves in preparation for costly operations within central Bakhmut.

Russian forces may be preparing to resume offensive operations around Vuhledar, although persistent personnel and ammunition issues will likely continue to constrain

Russian forces from advancing. Social media footage published on March 8 reportedly shows personnel of the 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 58th Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District appealing to the Russian military command for more artillery ammunition before they replace the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Pacific Fleet near Vuhledar and conduct ground attacks in the area.¹⁹ The 155th Naval Infantry Brigade bore a significant proportion of the catastrophic losses that Russian forces suffered in their culminated three-week February offensive to capture Vuhledar and has reportedly been reconstituted at least seven times since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.²⁰ Russian forces may be rotating in the 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade to replace a severely degraded formation in hopes of renewing offensives near Vuhledar, although this one-for-one replacement does not represent a Russian reinforcement of this effort. Personnel of the 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade detailed that they need to conserve their artillery ammunition as Russian forces send the majority of artillery shells to forces fighting around Bakhmut.²¹ The 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade is unlikely to achieve tactical advances near Vuhledar that the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade, 40th Naval Infantry Brigade, and other Russian formations failed to make following months of preparation to start offensives in this direction. The likely degradation of other units in the area, significant equipment losses, and the reported continued artillery constraints will likely prevent Russian forces from securing significant tactical gains if they decide to resume offensives in the area.

Internal dynamics within the Russian military may be driving the potential resumption of costly offensives near Vuhledar that promise little operational benefit. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reportedly ordered Eastern Military District (EMD) commander Colonel General Rustam Muradov to take Vuhledar at any cost to settle widespread criticism within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) about the lack of progress and significant losses in the Vuhledar area.²² Shoigu recently visited Muradov in western Donetsk Oblast likely to assess the viability of the Vuhledar offensive as well as Muradov's continued role as EMD commander.²³ ISW previously assessed that Muradov would need new manpower and equipment reserves to follow through on Shoigu's reported instructions, and the one-for-one replacement of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade by the 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade does not represent a notable fraction of the reinforcements likely required.²⁴ It is still not clear if Shoigu has decided to provide Muradov with the necessary resources to resume offensives, but Muradov may decide that he needs to resume offensive operations regardless to demonstrate his competence as EMD commander. ISW assesses that Russian forces would need to advance upwards of 24km from the current frontlines around Vuhledar for this offensive to support operations elsewhere in Donetsk Oblast, a rate of advance that Russian forces have not achieved since the first months of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.²⁵ The resumption of costly offensives around Vuhledar would be a misallocation of already degraded forces to an increasingly nonsensical operational effort, but Muradov's personal motivations may cause Russian forces in the area to resume these operations nonetheless.

Russian authorities are likely establishing volunteer-based military formations under Russian state-owned energy companies in order to distribute responsibility and accountability for managing units, alleviate burdens on the national budget and regional budgets, and draw on the financial resources of those entities. The *BBC* reported on March 9 that the Russian Tax Service entered the Zaporizhia-based Sudoplatov volunteer battalion into the register of Russian legal entities—making the battalion a state unitary enterprise.²⁶ The *BBC* added that the Russian Tax Service registered the battalion under the same address as state-owned enterprises Tavria-Energo and State Grain Operator.²⁷ The registration may be connected to the emerging Kremlin effort to establish a state-controlled armed formation analogous to the Russian

Combat Army Reserve (BARS) units under Gazprom subsidiary Gazprom Neft.²⁸ The creation of state-controlled military formations legally nested under energy companies could allow the Kremlin to reduce logistical burdens on the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and regional administrations, delegate clear responsibility for recruitment, recruit volunteers without committing additional federal funding, and provide a hedge against the limitations of the Wagner Group private military company (PMC). The decision to register the Sudoplatov battalion in proximity with Tavria-Energo, an organization that, unlike Gazprom, is not included in the US Treasury Department's sanctions lists, may provide additional financial incentives, as Tavria-Energo may aid the Sudoplatov battalion in circumventing financial hurdles that a Gazprom Neft-affiliated volunteer formation would face.²⁹

The Transnistrian occupation government accused the Ukrainian government of plotting to kill Transnistria's president, likely as part of the ongoing Russian information operations to undermine Ukrainian credibility and destabilize Moldova. The Transnistrian occupation Ministry of Security Services accused six people, including Ukrainian nationals and Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) personnel, on March 9 of plotting to assassinate senior Transnistrian occupation officials and the occupation head Vadim Krasnoselsky.³⁰ The SBU stated that the Transnistrian authorities' accusation is a Kremlin information provocation.³¹ ISW has previously reported on increasing Russian information efforts to destabilize Moldova and even draw Transnistria into the war.³² The Kremlin also tried to undermine Ukraine's credibility through the recent claimed border incursions in Bryansk Oblast.³³

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces conducted the largest missile strike across Ukraine of 2023 likely only to advance Russian state propaganda objectives.**
- **Russian forces likely advanced northwest of Bakhmut amid a likely increased tempo of Russian offensive operations in the area.**
- **The Wagner Group's offensive operation in eastern Bakhmut appears to have entered a temporary tactical pause and it remains unclear if Wagner fighters will retain their operational preponderance in future Russian offensives in the city.**
- **Russian forces may be preparing to resume offensive operations around Vuhledar, although persistent personnel and ammunition issues will likely continue to constrain Russian forces from advancing.**
- **Internal dynamics within the Russian military may be driving the potential resumption of costly offensives near Vuhledar that offer little prospect of operational benefit.**
- **Russian authorities are likely formalizing structures to create and coopt volunteer-based military formations under state-owned energy companies in order to distribute accountability, reduce burdens on the national budget, and avoid sanctions.**
- **The Transnistrian occupation government accused the Ukrainian government of involvement in a claimed terrorist plot, likely as part of the Russian information operations to undermine Ukrainian credibility and destabilize Moldova.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks throughout the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations in and around Bakhmut but have not completed a turning movement or enveloped or encircled the city.**

- **Russian forces continued offensive operations along the outskirts of Donetsk City and near Vuhledar.**
- **Russian strikes completely disconnected the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast, from all external power sources for 10 hours.**
- **Ukrainian officials reported that Russian occupation authorities are preparing for a spring 2023 mobilization wave in occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that may include male teenagers born in 2006.**
- **Russian officials and occupation authorities are continuing efforts to integrate occupied territories into the Russian political and bureaucratic systems.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 9, 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 continued to conduct ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful operations towards Hryanykivka (54km northwest of Svatove), Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna), and Spirne (25km southeast of Kreminna).³⁴ Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai reported that Chervonopopivka (6km northwest of Kreminna) remains contested and that control of the settlement changes frequently, and that Russian forces retreated from advanced positions near Chervonopopivka to reconstitute.³⁵ Haidai also stated that Russian forces attack less frequently near Svatove than on other areas of the front.³⁶ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces fought northwest of Kreminna near Ploshchanka (16km northwest) and the Zhuravka gully (18km northwest).³⁷ Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces are trying to advance south of Kreminna from Fedorivka (33km southwest) to Vesele (31km south) and conducted ground attacks near Vyimka (26km south) and Spirne (25km southeast).³⁸ The milblogger also reported that Russian forces have not succeeded in advancing near Bilohorivka despite weeks of offensive operations.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of March 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



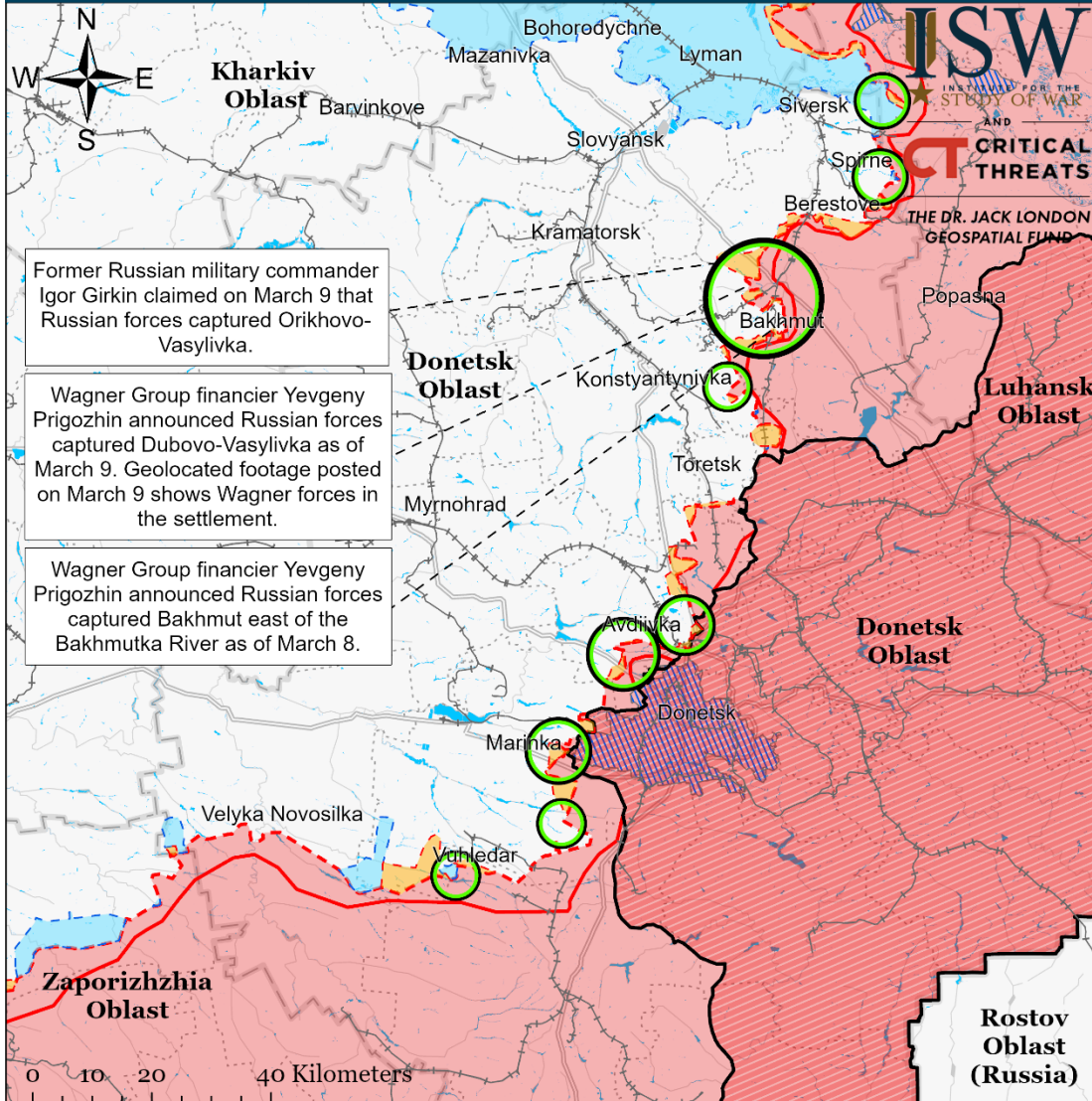
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued offensive operations in and around Bakhmut on March 9 but have not completed a turning movement, envelopment, or encirclement of the city. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut, within 11km northwest of Bakhmut near Orikhovo-Vasylivka and Dubovo-Vasylivka, and within 15km southwest of Bakhmut near Ivanivske and Oleksandro-Shulytne.³⁹ Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that Wagner Group fighters completely captured Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), and geolocated footage published on March 9 indicates that Wagner forces likely captured the settlement.⁴⁰ Prigozhin added that fighting is ongoing on the outskirts of Dubovo-Vasylivka.⁴¹ Another Russian milblogger claimed that Wagner fighters and conventional Russian forces jointly captured Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut), although ISW has not observed any visual confirmation of these claims.⁴² Geolocated footage published on March 8 indicates that Russian forces secured marginal gains in southern Bakhmut along the T0513 highway.⁴³ Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner fighters conducted assaults towards the western parts of Bakhmut, near Bohdanivka (5km west of Bakhmut), on northern parts of Bakhmut from Yahidne (2km north of Bakhmut), and on the southern parts of Bakhmut from Opytne (2km south of Bakhmut).⁴⁴ The Russian milblogger also claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted counterattacks in the eastern part of Bakhmut.⁴⁵

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the outskirts of Donetsk City on March 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Avdiivka; within 9km north of Avdiivka near Kamianka and Krasnohorivka; and within 36km southwest of Avdiivka near Sieverne, Pervomaiske, Nevelske, Marinka, and Novomykhailivka.⁴⁶ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces broke through Ukrainian defenses near Sieverne (7km west of Avdiivka) from the direction of Opytne (3km south of Avdiivka).⁴⁷ A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces retreated from positions south of Avdiivka to fortified positions in Avdiivka’s industrial zone.⁴⁸ The milblogger claimed that elements of the Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) 2nd Army Corps captured Vesele (7km north of Avdiivka), although the milblogger claimed that the formation is a former Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) People’s Militia formation and therefore may have meant the DNR 1st Army Corps.⁴⁹ Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces cut a section of the H-20 highway near Vesele and attacked in the direction of Oleksandropil (17km north of Avdiivka).⁵⁰

Russian forces conducted localized assaults near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City) on March 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Vuhledar.⁵¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Former Russian military commander Igor Girkin claimed on March 9 that Russian forces captured Orikhovo-Vasylivka.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced Russian forces captured Dubovo-Vasylivka as of March 9. Geolocated footage posted on March 9 shows Wagner forces in the settlement.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced Russian forces captured Bakhmut east of the Bakhmutka River as of March 8.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher - ©2023 Institute for the Study of War and AET's Critical Threats Project

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

* 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 forces conducted a likely HIMARS strike against a Russian transport hub in Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast on March 9. Russian occupation authorities accused Ukrainian forces of conducting a strike against an auto transport enterprise in Volnovakha (north of Mariupol at the N20 and T0509 intersection), and geolocated imagery shows severe damage to the building and some busses.⁵² Russian sources claimed that the strike destroyed 10 civilian buses.⁵³ Wagner Group forces reportedly used busses to transport Wagner personnel through southern Ukraine, as ISW has previously reported.⁵⁴

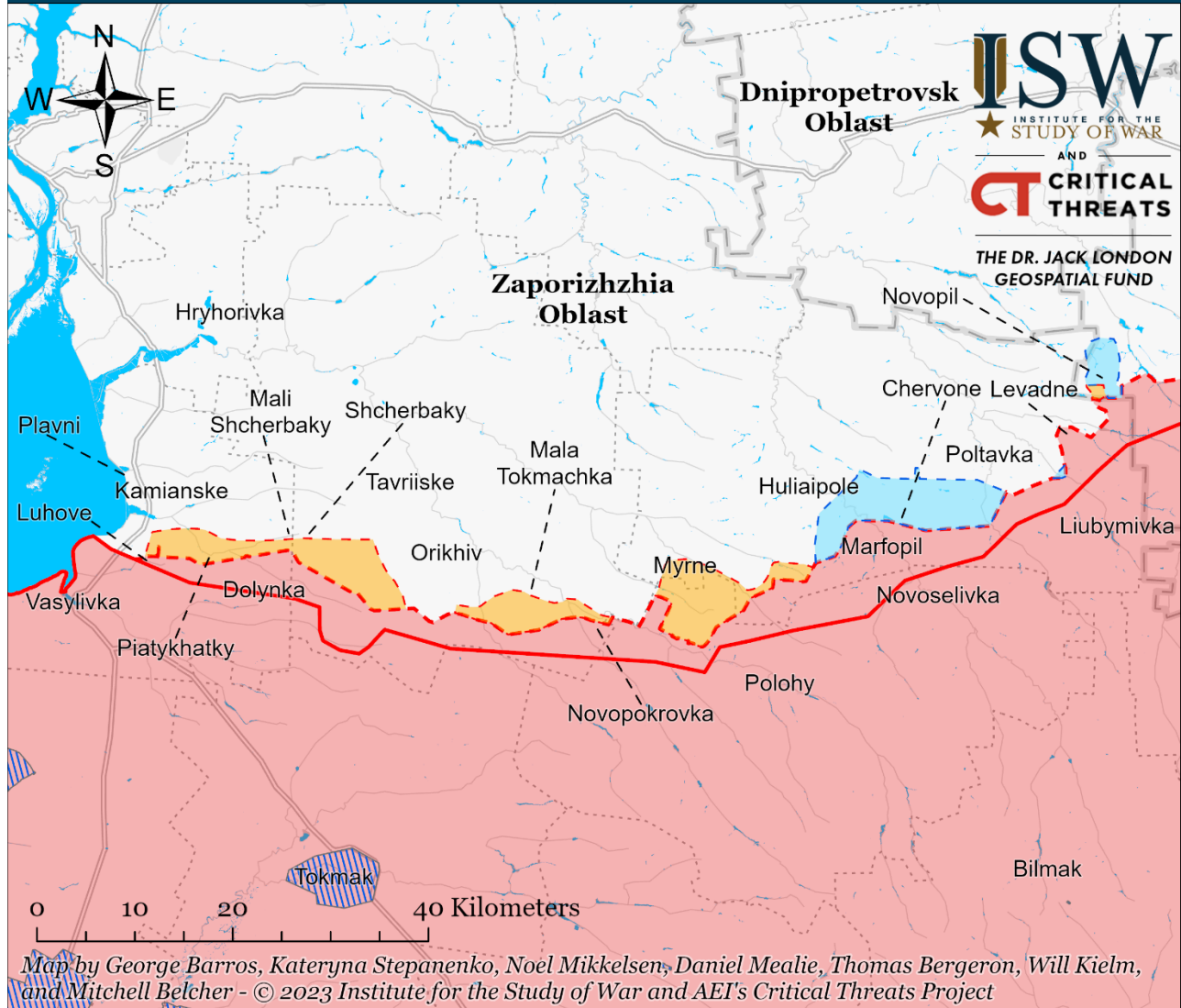
Russian strikes completely disconnected the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast, from all external power sources for 10 hours on March 9.⁵⁵ Ukrainian nuclear energy operator Energoatom reported that the ZNPP went into full blackout mode, forcing the plant to rely on emergency backup diesel generators to sustain the ZNPP's essential functions.⁵⁶ International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi emphasized that this is the first time the ZNPP lost all external power since November 2022, and the sixth time in the ZNPP's history.⁵⁷ The ZNPP had never lost all power prior to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Grossi expressed frustration at complacency in allowing the security situation at the ZNPP to deteriorate and called for an immediate commitment to protecting the ZNPP.⁵⁸

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 9, 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 Zaporizhzhia as of March 9, 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)

Russian authorities likely are intensifying recruitment efforts in occupied Ukrainian territories. Ukrainian officials reported on March 9 that Russian occupation authorities are preparing for a spring 2023 mobilization wave in occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and that local military recruitment officers requested that educational institutions submit rosters of all boys born in 2006 by April 1.⁵⁹ ISW first reported on March 6 that Ukrainian officials observed instances of occupation authorities registering male teenagers born in 2006.⁶⁰ Zaporizhia Oblast Occupation Head Yevheny Balitsky also claimed on March 9 that occupation authorities began forming the “Zaporizhia People’s Militia” (“narodnoe opolcheniye”—not an army corps as in occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts), an alleged all-volunteer reserve of current and former Zaporizhia Oblast residents.⁶¹

Friction between and differences in the treatment of mobilized Russian soldiers and Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR/LNR) forces continue to fuel complaints and public appeals. A Russian milblogger amplified a video on March 8 of a crowd of soldiers in Russia’s 1004th Regiment, composed of mobilized soldiers from Kaliningrad, arguing with their commander about their subordination to DNR forces. The soldiers accused DNR commanders of dividing the 1004th Regiment’s elements and sending them on frontal assaults without breaks. They demanded Russian commanders reassign them to territorial defense forces—as Russian officials allegedly promised they would be when they were called up—and threatened to start a fight or commit mass suicide.⁶² A Russian opposition news source stated on March 8 that approximately 500 residents of occupied Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts signed an appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin requesting the demobilization of Luhansk and Donetsk oblast residents over the age of 50. The residents reportedly argued that LNR and DNR soldiers should have equal rights and obligations as all Russian citizens, but LNR and DNR forces do not grant mobilized Luhansk and Donetsk oblast soldiers the dismissal rights afforded by the Russian military.⁶³

Russian authorities continue to prosecute limited Russian resistance to mobilization and the Russian war in Ukraine. A Russian state-backed news agency reported on March 9 that a Karelia Republic court sentenced an 18-year-old student to two months imprisonment for treason due to his social media calls to help Ukraine and prevent the Russian military from achieving its goals.⁶⁴ Russian youth activist organization “The Civil Alliance of Russia” stated on March 8 that Russian security forces arrested its vice chairman for allegedly attempting to sabotage a railway in Petrozavodsk, Karelia Republic.⁶⁵

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 officials and occupation authorities are continuing efforts to integrate occupied territories into the Russian political and bureaucratic systems. Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik claimed that Russia’s “United Russia” ruling political party began accepting documents to register as candidates for preliminary voting in occupied Luhansk Oblast on March 9.⁶⁶ Secretary of the Luhansk branch of United Russia and Chairman of the LNR People’s Council Denis Miroshnichenko is the first registered candidate for preliminary voting in occupied Luhansk Oblast.⁶⁷ Miroshnichenko claimed that residents in occupied Luhansk Oblast may submit documents for

candidacy until April 27.⁶⁸ Pasechnik claimed that United Russia will form candidate lists for deputies for the People’s Council of the LNR and deputies of the city council in Luhansk City based on the results of the preliminary voting for final voting at an unspecified time.⁶⁹

Russian officials continue to set conditions for the September local elections in occupied territories. Kherson Occupation Administration Head Vladimir Saldo claimed on March 9 Russian officials have established a regional election commission in occupied Kherson Oblast that has begun work to form territorial election commissions in occupied territories.⁷⁰ Saldo also claimed that occupied Kherson Oblast will hold elections for deputies of the Kherson Oblast occupation legislative administration in September 2023.⁷¹

Russian occupation authorities are intensifying filtration measures and law enforcement efforts in occupied territories, likely in response to continued Ukrainian partisan activities. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on March 9 that Russian President Vladimir Putin tasked the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) with improving the “anti-terrorism system” on the ground and intensifying work against Ukrainian partisans.⁷² Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Military Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on March 8 that Russian occupation authorities are intensifying security measures at checkpoints in occupied Kherson Oblast.⁷³ Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo announced on March 9 that he signed an order to strengthen control of all checkpoints in occupied Kherson Oblast, citing threats of “terrorism” as justification to intensify filtration measures.⁷⁴ Saldo claimed that authorities in occupied Zaporizhia, Luhansk, and Donetsk oblasts will soon introduce similar measures.⁷⁵ Saldo also claimed that officials of the territorial and regional branches of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs opened a police laboratory for genetic research in occupied Kherson Oblast.⁷⁶ Saldo claimed that the laboratory has begun conducting examinations of evidence left at crime scenes and emphasized expectations that the laboratory will have a significant impact on the identification of those engaging in criminal activity.⁷⁷

Russian forces continue to forcibly evacuate Ukrainian children to Russia. Head of the “Save Ukraine” fund Myroslava Kharchenko stated on March 9 that were 38 children present in Bakhmut on March 7 but that only 19 children remain as of March 9, stating that Russian forces have forcefully evacuated an unknown number of those children to Russia.⁷⁸ Kharchenko also stated that Russian forces are using drones to target busses evacuating Ukrainian children from areas of combat in occupied territories, recalling instances in which Russian forces dropped mines around moving evacuation busses holding children.⁷⁹

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.

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on March 9 that Russia is planning a large-scale provocation on the Ukrainian-Belarusian border on March 11 to falsely portray Ukrainian forces as threatening Belarusian critical infrastructure.⁸⁰ The GUR emphasized that Ukrainian forces do not conduct operations on Belarusian territory.

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.

1

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dX2SbAxXZnt3fZSPXyGxe28qXWvz9sJB25o4sd5oAHsGVJWcKqCZ2St2CvzoBt5jl> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0WNnrBDcGRWJPBokBfNQ7wob9ZLf41AmKVPviMU4xaKFZrQA5jrgwiGzN3MxFwpD8l>; <https://t.me/kpszsus/2384>; <https://t.me/kpszsus/2385>

² <https://armyinform.com> dot ua/2023/03/09/devyat-raket-bulo-zbyto-nad-mykolayivshhynoyu-try-nad-hersonshhynoyu-shist-nad-odeshhynoyu-nataliya-gumenyuk/

³ <https://armyinform.com> dot ua/2023/03/09/vorog-z-troh-moriv-zavdav-masovanogo-raketnogo-udaru-po-ukrayini-cziyeyi-nochi-yurij-ignat/; <https://t.me/CinCAFU/402>

⁴ <https://suspilne> dot media/408354-zelenskij-pidtrimav-aktivistiv-u-tbilisi-zinka-vpiznala-sina-na-video-z-rozstrilom-ukrainca-379-den-vijni-onlajn/

⁵ https://t.me/mod_russia/24711

⁶ <https://suspilne> dot media/408354-zelenskij-pidtrimav-aktivistiv-u-tbilisi-zinka-vpiznala-sina-na-video-z-rozstrilom-ukrainca-379-den-vijni-onlajn/

⁷ <https://kyivindependent> dot com/national/ukraine-war-latest-russia-launches-largest-missile-attack-against-ukraine-since-january

⁸ <https://twitter.com/MaxRTucker/status/1633689731753017345>

⁹ <https://t.me/readovkanews/54291>; <https://t.me/milinfo/97807>; <https://t.me/sashakots/38785>;

<https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10959>; <https://t.me/rybar/44418> ; <https://t.me/readovkanews/54283>;

<https://t.me/kommunist/16266>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/54292>; <https://t.me/rybar/44418>

¹⁰ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-2-2023>

¹¹ https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko_en/status/1631259048384372739

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