

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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March 25, 2024, 6:15pm ET

**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45pm ET on March 25. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 26 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**The March 22 Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) attack on Moscow’s Crocus City Hall is a notable Russian intelligence and law enforcement failure, and explaining currently available open-source evidence does not require any wider and more complicated conspiracy theory either within or against the Russian state.** Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed during an address on March 25 that “radical Islamists” committed the attack, but immediately and basely accused the United States of trying to cover the “Ukrainian trace” of the attack, directly accusing Ukraine of being the “customer” of the attack.[1] ISW continues to assess that the attack itself, as well as the claim pattern following the attack, is highly consistent with the way IS conducts and claims such incidents and has observed no evidence that Ukraine was involved in the attack.[2] Available open-source evidence indicates that the Crocus City Hall attack was the result of a significant Russian intelligence failure, not a conspiracy initiated by, or targeting, the Russian intelligence apparatus. Russian investigative opposition outlet *Dossier Center* reported on March 24 that Russian intelligence services were closely monitoring IS-K activities before the March 22 attack and alleged that the Russian Security Council received a warning that IS-K might use Tajik citizens for an attack in Russia a few days before IS-K carried out the attack on Crocus City Hall.[3] *Dossier Center* and other Russian insider and opposition outlets also noted that Russian law enforcement was very slow in responding to the incident and reported that security officers first arrived at Crocus City Hall an hour after the attack began, despite the fact that the Moscow Special Purpose Mobile Unit (OMON) headquarters is less than three kilometers away from the hall.[4]

Sources familiar with the US intelligence community previously noted that the United States warned Russia about “fairly specific” indicators that IS-K wanted to carry out attacks in Russia, and the US Embassy in Russia issued a warning on March 7 that it was monitoring reports of extremist plans to target large gatherings in Moscow, including concerts, over the preceding 24 hour period.[5] Putin dismissed the warnings as “provocative statements” on March 19, three days before the attack.[6] The Kremlin’s acknowledgement of the US intelligence warnings prior to the attack shows that the Russian government was aware of US warnings, but likely discounted them. The United States also notably warned Iran about an IS-K attack against Iran ahead of the IS-K attack against Kerman on January 4, 2024, a warning that Iran also apparently disregarded.[7]

The responses by both the Russian intelligence apparatus and law enforcement agencies must be situated in the wider domestic Russian context. Russian intelligence could well have decided to ignore the US intelligence warning because of the extreme distrust of the United States Putin has driven deep into the Russian information and security spaces. Russian authorities may have also been concerned about the second-order effects of acting on the intelligence by seeming to target Muslim communities within Russia, which would likely cause even more discontent and alienation in a community that Russia already discriminates against yet relies on for the forcible generation of manpower for its war in Ukraine.[8] The Kremlin may have balanced the cost of acting on intelligence from an adversary it does not trust with the risk of impacting a critical source of mobilizable manpower and found the risk of action too great. Russian law enforcement, for its part, has likely been conditioned to respond to mass-casualty events such as the 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis and 2004 Beslan School Siege, so the delay in Russian law enforcement’s deployment to Crocus City Hall may have resulted from conditioning about the need to proceed cautiously in what could have become a mass-hostage situation.[9] Those incidents evolved over the course of several days. Even during the 2015 attack on the Bataclan Theater in Paris the first armed responders did not enter the building until roughly 25 minutes after the attacker had begun shooting on the street but had to withdraw and wait about an hour and a quarter before sufficient backup arrived to start clearing the scene.[10]

**Kremlin officials’ and Russian ultranationalists’ continued insistence on blaming Ukraine for an attack that IS-K very likely committed may come at the expense of Russian internal security and civilian lives.** A Kremlin-awarded Russian ultranationalist milblogger doubled down on the narrative baselessly blaming Ukraine on March 24 and 25, widely amplifying other ultranationalist claims that IS and IS-K are incapable of conducting a terrorist attack as significant as the Crocus concert venue attack and that the IS claim is a ruse to hide Ukrainian and Western involvement.[11] Other Russian milbloggers further amplified this narrative, claiming that IS and IS-K are weakened and defeated and are now largely “media outlets.”[12] That assertion is demonstrably untrue, as CTP has repeatedly documented.[13] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the United States of making “excuses” for Ukraine in reporting that IS likely conducted the attack.[14] The IS claim of conducting the Crocus concert venue attack is notably consistent with prior IS-claimed attacks and IS risks discrediting itself in the global Salafi-Jihadi community by falsely claiming credit for high-profile attacks.[15] The Russian claims insisting on Ukrainian involvement, on the other hand, forward the Kremlin’s longstanding effort to justify its ongoing full-scale invasion of

Ukraine in the long-term by falsely portraying the existence of an independent and sovereign Ukraine as an existential threat to Russia. The Kremlin and its ultranationalist mouthpieces are evidently ignoring the clear threat that IS and IS-K operations inside Russian territory poses to Russia's internal security and its civilians to prioritize instead the informational impacts of falsely accusing Ukraine of involvement while also maintaining a level of access to the ethnic minority communities that may be vulnerable to recruitment by IS-K and similar groups in order to retain a mobilizable resource for the war in Ukraine. The Kremlin has likely decided that the informational value of blaming Ukraine for the Crocus attack is worth whatever internal security risks and civilian casualties Russia may suffer for failing to adequately address a radical Salafi-Jihadi threat within its borders.

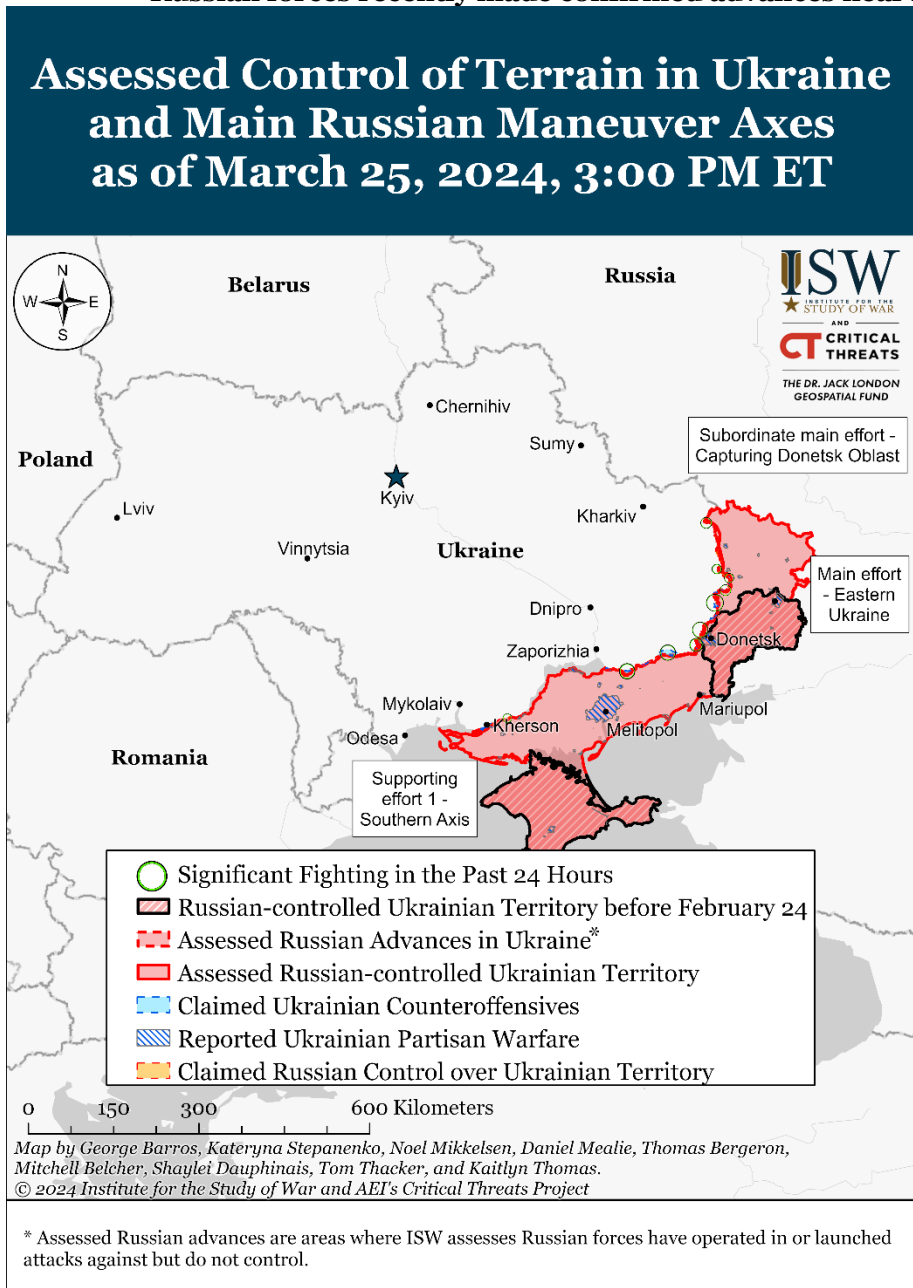
**The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed that Lieutenant General Esedulla Abachev became the Leningrad Military District (LMD) Deputy Commander as the Russian military continues the formal disbandment of the Western Military District (WMD) and recreation of the LMD and Moscow Military District (MMD).** The Russian MoD posted footage on March 25 showing Abachev awarding personnel of the Russian state border covering group who arrested the Crocus City Hall attackers in Bryansk Oblast and named Abachev as the LMD Deputy Commander, confirming speculation by insider sources about Abachev's new appointment in early March.[16] Russian sources credited LMD personnel, Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) border guards, and Chechen "Akhmat" personnel for arresting the Crocus City Hall attackers on March 23.[17] It is unclear why LMD personnel were operating in Bryansk Oblast in the first place, as Bryansk Oblast is part of the new MMD, but some individual units that are now part of the LMD may have been left over in Bryansk Oblast as military reforms and transitions are ongoing.[18] The Russian Western Grouping of Forces Spokesperson recently began wearing a MMD patch, suggesting that the process of disbanding and transferring the WMD is underway.[19] The process of transferring WMD formations into the MMD and LMD may cause some temporary confusion and inconsistencies, as evidenced by the presence of LMD personnel within the MMD during the Crocus City Hall arrests.

**Ukrainian officials stated that the Ukrainian strike on occupied Sevastopol, Crimea on the night of March 23 targeted more Black Sea Fleet (BSF) ships and caused more damage than initially reported.** Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on March 25 that Ukrainian forces struck the BSF ship repair plant in Sevastopol where the *Yamal* Ropucha-class landing ship was moored on March 23, making a hole in the *Yamal's* upper deck and forcing BSF personnel to continuously pump water out of the ship.[20] Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated that the March 23 Ukrainian strike on the BSF communications center caused substantial damage, which Pletenchuk assessed may significantly hinder the functioning of the BSF because the communications center supported the general activities of the fleet and may have also been responsible for the fleet's provisions, ongoing repairs, and other important functions.[21] Pletenchuk reported that Ukrainian forces also struck the *Ivan Khurs* Yury Ivanov-class reconnaissance ship on March 23 and that Ukrainian officials are verifying the damage to the ship.[22] GUR Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated that Ukrainian forces used Ukrainian Maritime Autonomous Guard Unmanned Robotic Apparatus (Magura) V5 naval drones to strike the *Ivan Khurs* and *Yamal* ships and that these Ukrainian naval drones are becoming more powerful and accurate.[23] Skibitskyi stated that Ukrainian forces also used the Magura V5 drones to strike the BSF's Akula-class and Serna-class ships in November 2023, the *Ivanovets* Tarantul-class corvette and the *Cesar Kunikov* Ropucha-class landing ship in February 2024, and the *Sergei Kotov* large patrol ship in March 2024.[24] Pletenchuk and Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces have rarely used Kalibr missiles in recent months because the BSF naval base in Sevastopol is the only BSF base that has the infrastructure needed to reload these missiles onto Kalibr-capable ships.[25] ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian strikes against BSF ships and infrastructure will likely continue to deter Russian forces from redeploying ships to Sevastopol and the western Black Sea and complicate the BSF's ability to maximize its combat capabilities.[26]

**The Kremlin continues to lean on long debunked narratives as part of its wider information operations aimed at discrediting and undermining Western support for Ukraine.** Russian Ambassador to the Hague Vladimir Tarabin reiterated the Kremlin's debunked claim that Ukraine is developing biological weapons in US- and NATO-funded biolabs in Ukraine during an interview published on March 25.[27] Tarabin also claimed that Ukrainian forces are "systematically" using a "wide range of toxic chemicals" against Russian military personnel in unspecified areas of the frontline, including chemical substances banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).[28] Tarabin's reliance on the already discredited biolabs narrative calls into question his other allegations. An unnamed Russian company command also claimed that Ukrainian forces are using phosphorus ammunition shells in unspecified areas of the Zaporizhia direction, which are not banned in conventional warfare by the CWC but are prohibited from use against civilians.[29] Russian forces have used white phosphorus against urban areas in Ukraine, risking civilian harm on several occasions.[30] Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, have been accusing the West of continuing to fund biolabs in Ukraine since before the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[31] Western publications, officials, and international organizations have long debunked this Russian narrative.[32] These Russian claims are not comparable to the Ukrainian and Russian reporting of Russian forces using chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile (CS) gas or chloropicrin (PS), both of which the CWC — which Russia ratified in 1997 — bans in warfare.[33] Several Russian and Ukrainian sources have provided evidence of the use of such banned chemical agents against Ukrainian positions on the battlefield.[34]

**Key Takeaways:**

- The March 22 Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) attack on Moscow’s Crocus City Hall is a notable Russian intelligence and law enforcement failure, and explaining currently available open-source evidence does not require any wider and more complicated conspiracy theory either within or against the Russian state.
- Kremlin officials’ and Russian ultranationalists’ continued insistence on blaming Ukraine for an attack that IS-K very likely committed may come at the expense of Russian internal security and civilian lives.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed that Lieutenant General Esedulla Abachev became the Leningrad Military District (LMD) Deputy Commander as the Russian military continues the formal disbandment of the Western Military District (WMD) and recreation of the LMD and Moscow Military District (MMD).
- Ukrainian officials stated that the Ukrainian strike on occupied Sevastopol, Crimea on the night of March 23 targeted more Black Sea Fleet (BSF) ships and caused more damage than initially reported.
- The Kremlin continues to lean on long debunked narratives as part of its wider information operations aimed at discrediting and undermining Western support for Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka on March 25.



\* 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 these 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 the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.***

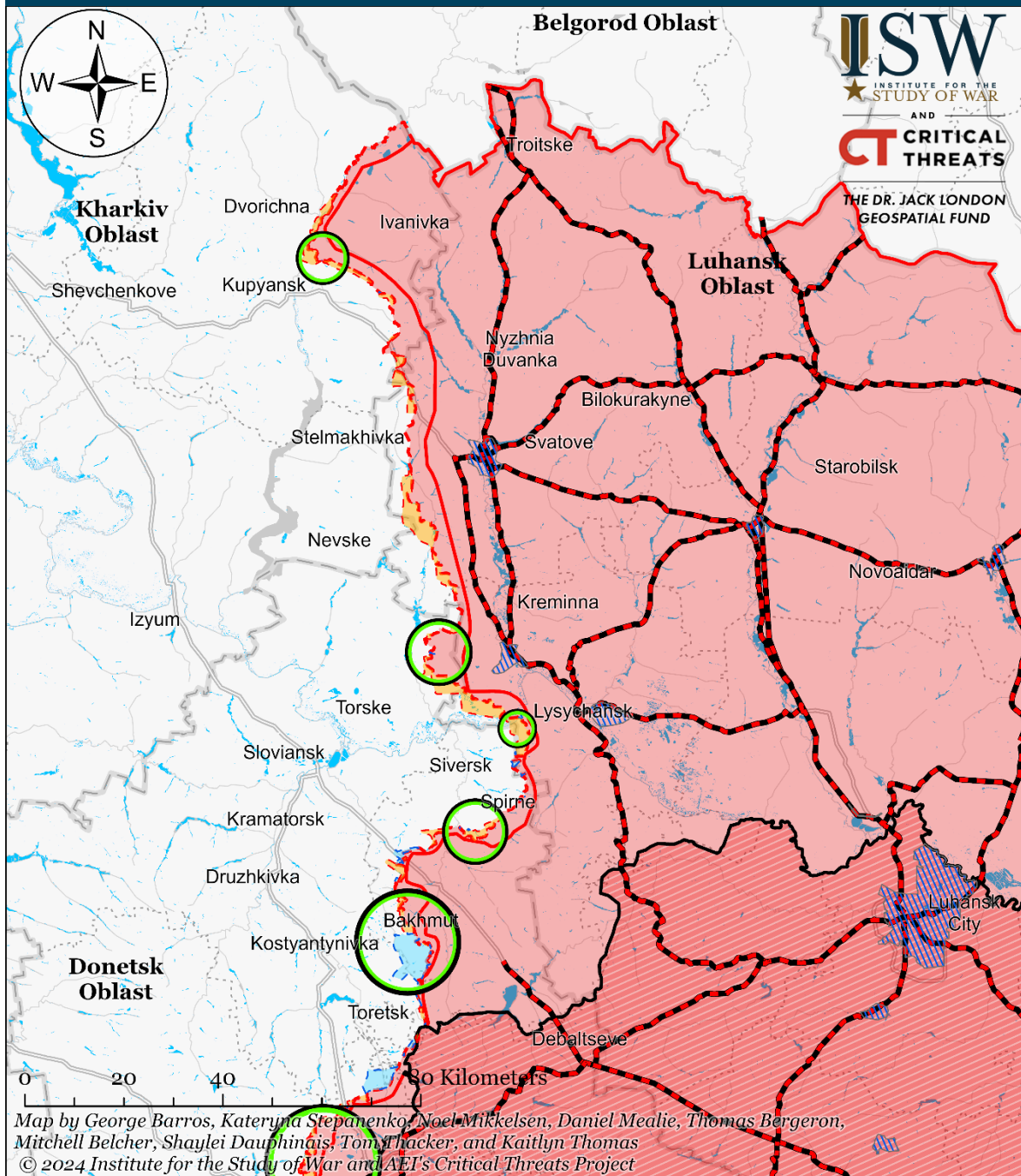
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Positional engagements continued along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 25, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that positional engagements continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; west of Kremlinna near Terny and Yampolivka; southwest of Kreminna near the Serebryanske forest area; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.[35] A Ukrainian brigade operating in the Lyman direction reported that Russian forces are conducting assaults in groups of 30 personnel with up to two or three armored vehicles near the Serebryanske forest area and that Russian forces have not conducted a large-scale, mechanized assault in this area since late December 2023.[36]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of March 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Shaylei Dauphinais, Tom Thacker, and Kaitlyn Thomas  
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

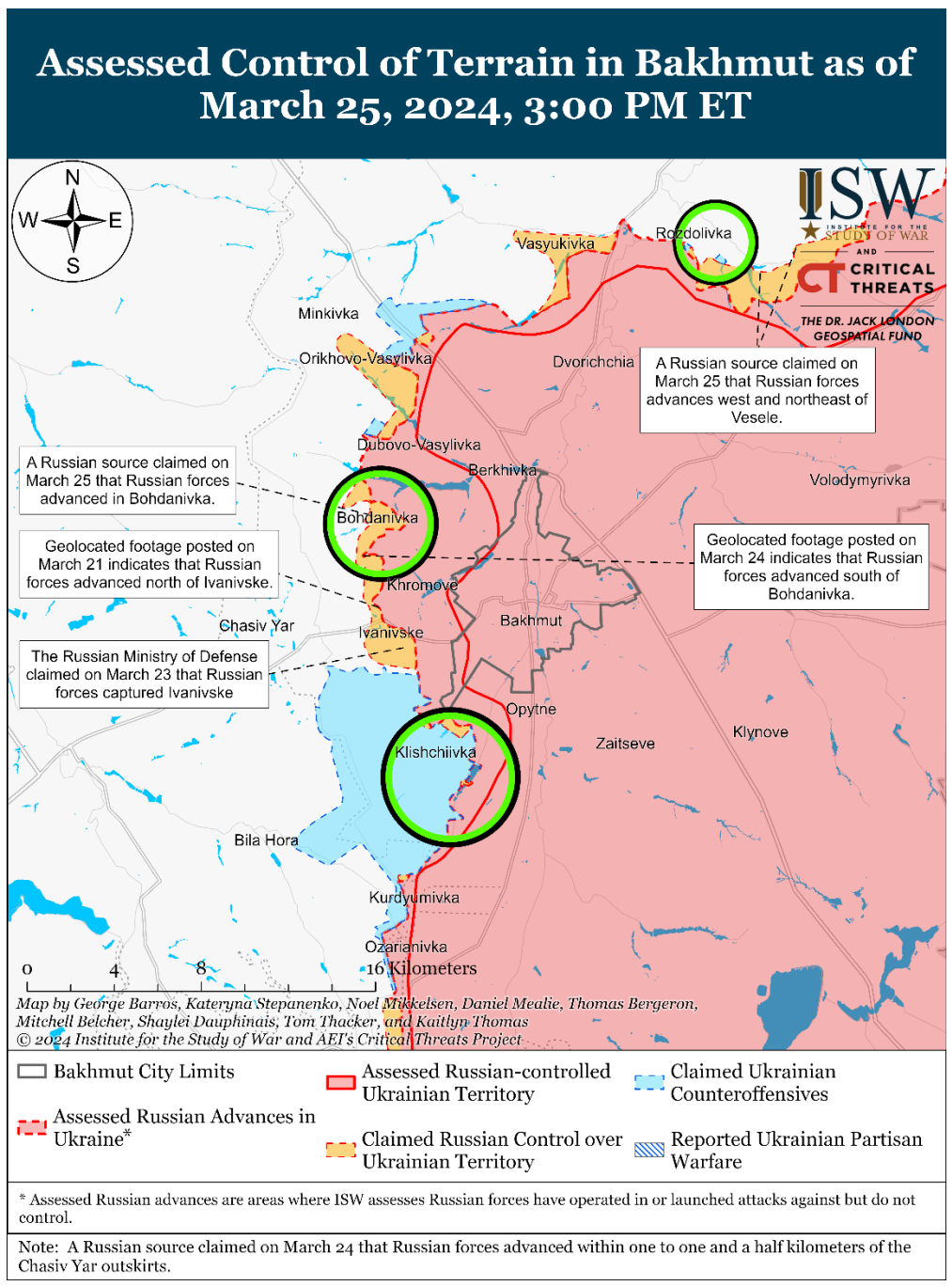
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.



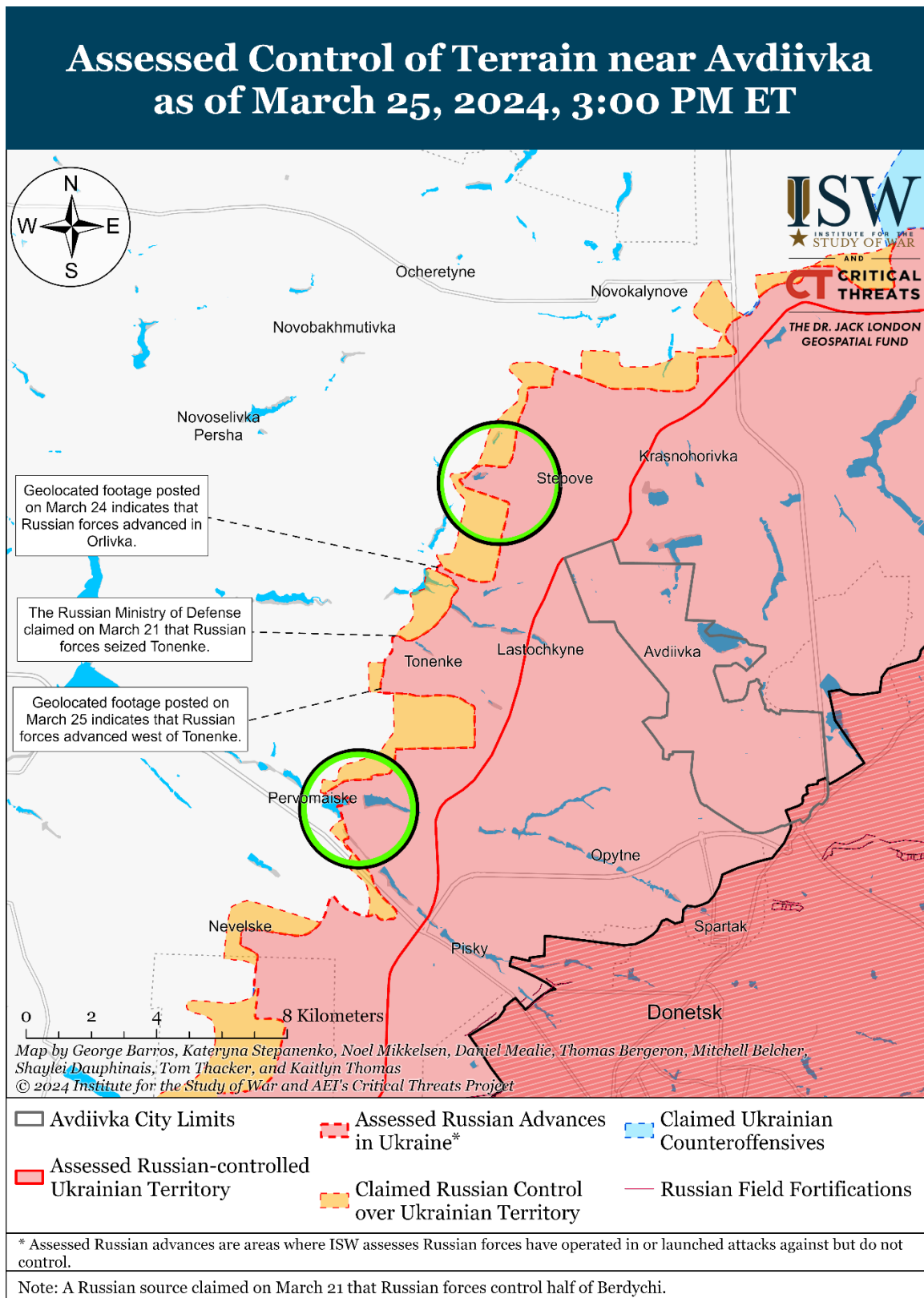
**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

Russian forces reportedly marginally advanced during intensified localized offensive operations northeast of Bakhmut near Siversk on March 25. A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced on the Rozdolivka-Vesele line (both northeast of Bakhmut and south of Siversk) and pushed Ukrainian forces to the northern bank of the Sukha Plotva River to the north of these settlements, but ISW has observed no visual confirmation of this claim.[37] Positional fighting continued north of Vesele.[38]

Russian forces reportedly advanced west of Bakhmut amid ongoing positional fighting in the area on March 25. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced near the railway northeast of Kanal (east of Chasiv Yar) and that fighting is ongoing on the outskirts of the settlement and near the Stupky-Holubovske 2 nature reserve (southeast of Chasiv Yar).[39] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced further into Bohdanivka (northwest of Bakhmut) and now control half of the settlement.[40] Positional fighting also continued southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka and south of Bakhmut near Niu York.[41] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division are reportedly fighting in Bohdanivka and east of Chasiv Yar.[42]

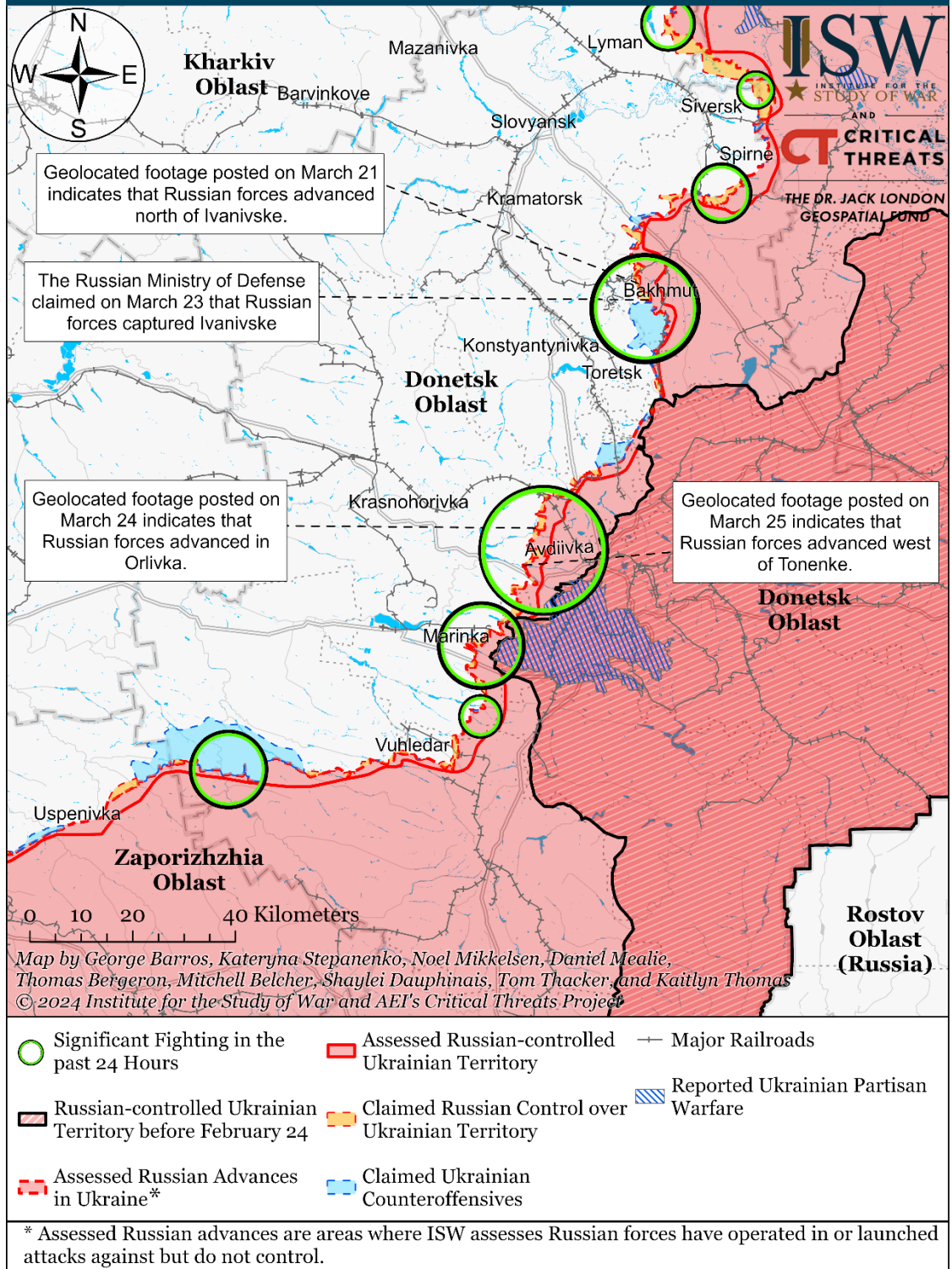


Russian forces recently advanced west of Avdiivka amid continued positional fighting in the area on March 25. Geolocated footage published on March 24 and 25 shows that Russian forces recently advanced further into western Orlivka and west of Tonenke (both west of Avdiivka).[43] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are attacking towards Semenivka (northwest of Orlivka) from Orlivka and between Orlivka and Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka).[44] Positional fighting also continued near Berdychi; west of Avdiivka near Tonenke and Umanske; and southwest of Avdiivka near Nevelske and Pervomaiske.[45] The “Sarmat” battalion of the Donetsk People’s Republic [DNR] “Pyatnashka” volunteer brigade is reportedly operating in Avdiivka.[46]



Positional fighting continued west and southwest of Donetsk City on March 25, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Positional fighting continued west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda and Novomykhailivka.[47] Elements of the Russian 14th Artillery Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka.[48]

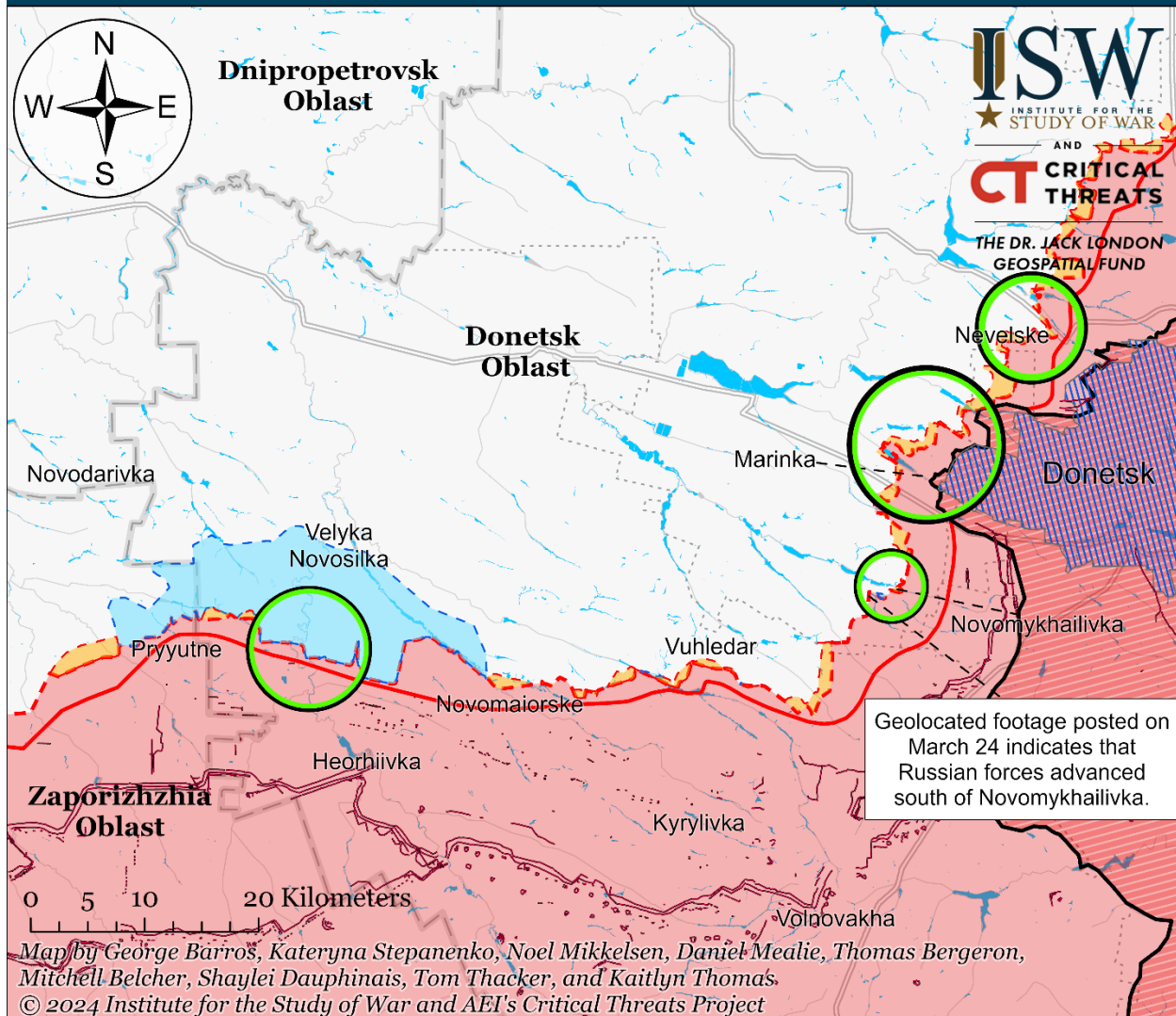
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET





Positional fighting continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on March 25, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Positional fighting continued south of Velyka Novosilka near Urozhaine and Staromayorske.[49] Elements of the Russian 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) reportedly operate in the south Donetsk direction, and elements of the Russian 11th Air Force and Air Defense Army (Russian Aerospace Forces [VKS] and Eastern Military District [EMD]) reportedly strike Ukrainian forces near Malynivka (southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[50]

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Donetsk Oblast as of March 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



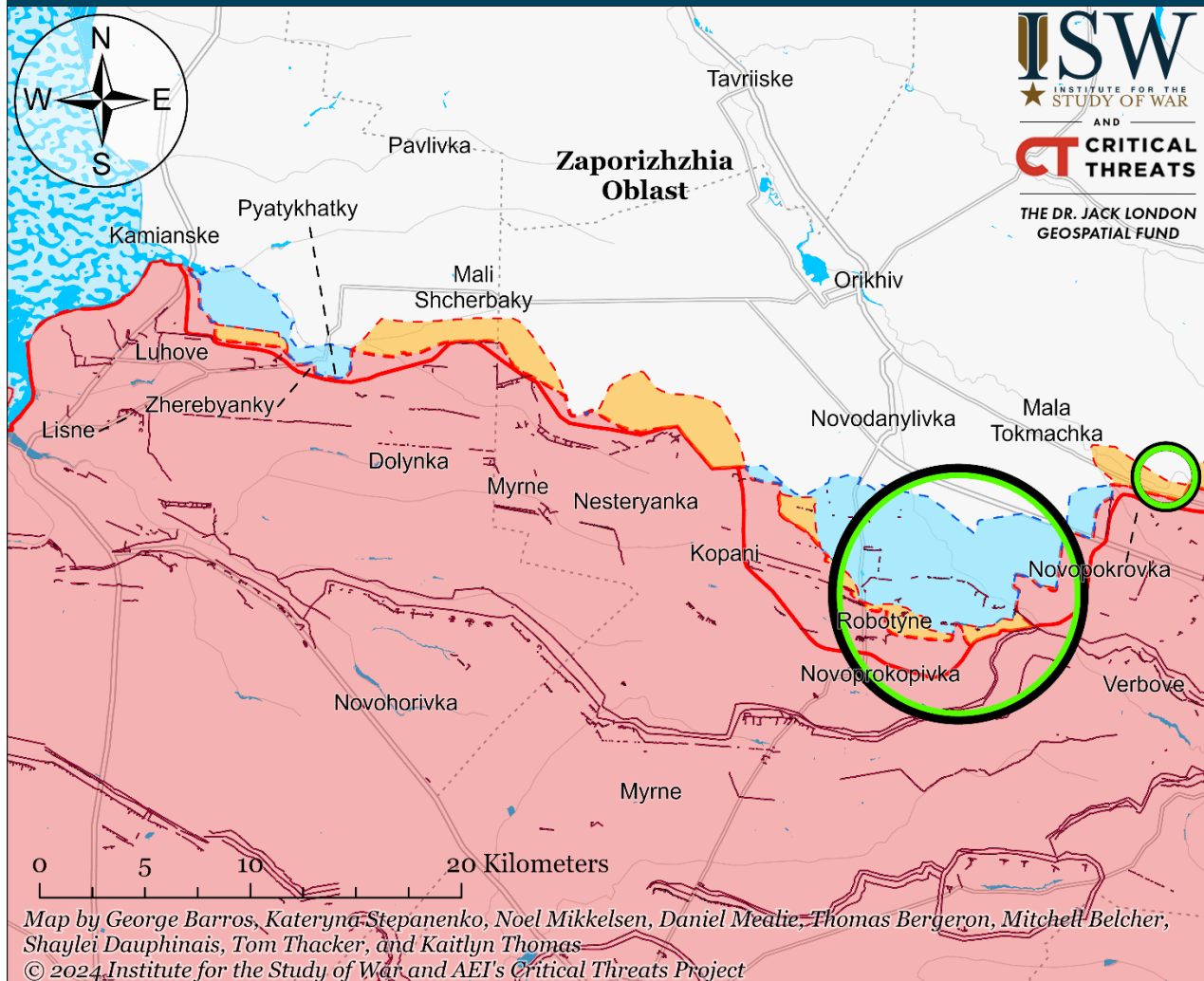
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian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

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

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

Russian forces reportedly advanced in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on March 25, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[51] Positional engagements continued near Robotyne and northwest of Verbove.[52]

## Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of March 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

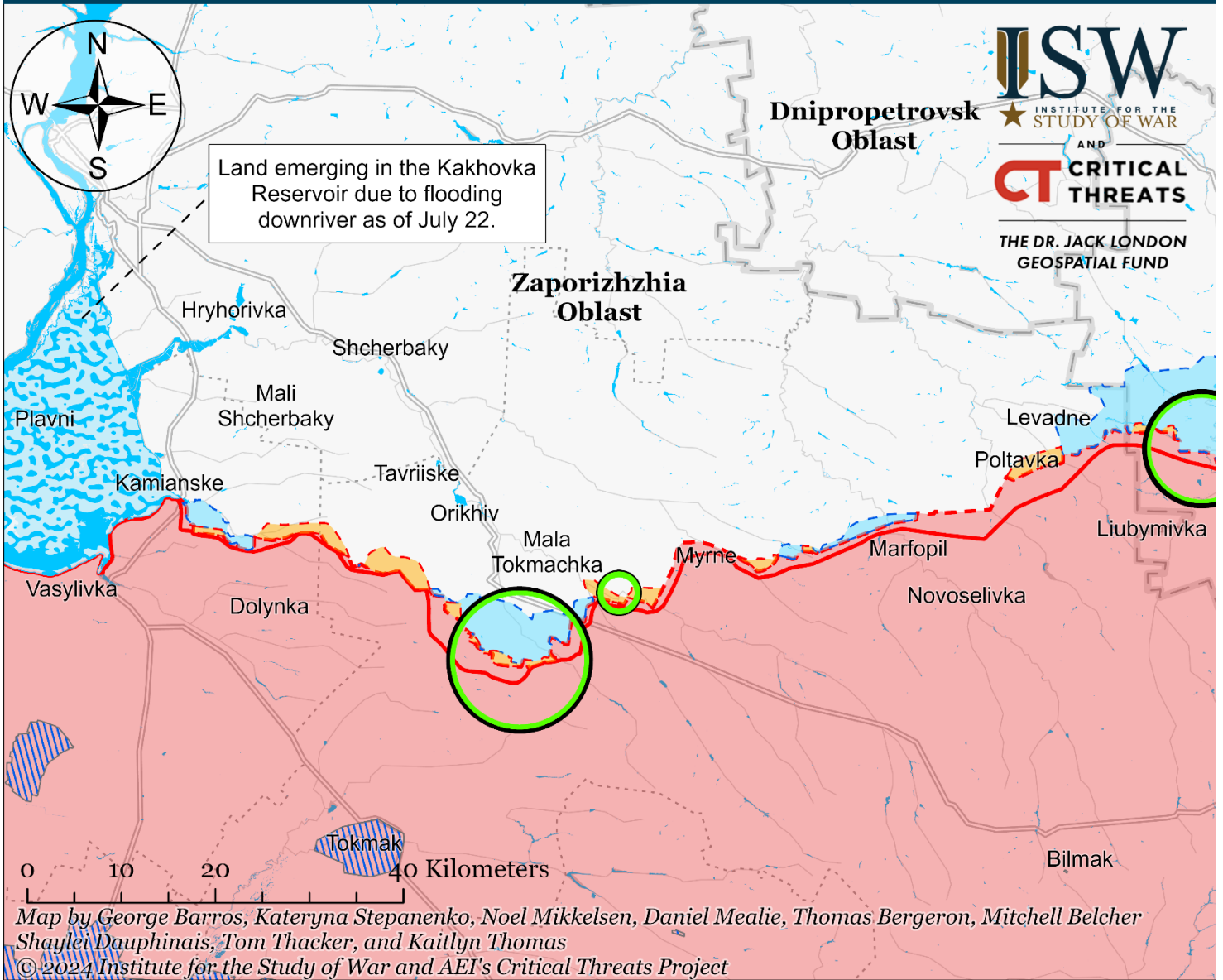


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|---|--|---|
| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours                 | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory  | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare     |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory | Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir |
| Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*                     | Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives              | Russian Field Fortifications            |

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

Note: A Russian source claimed on March 24 that Russian forces advanced two kilometers northwest of Verbove.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of March 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



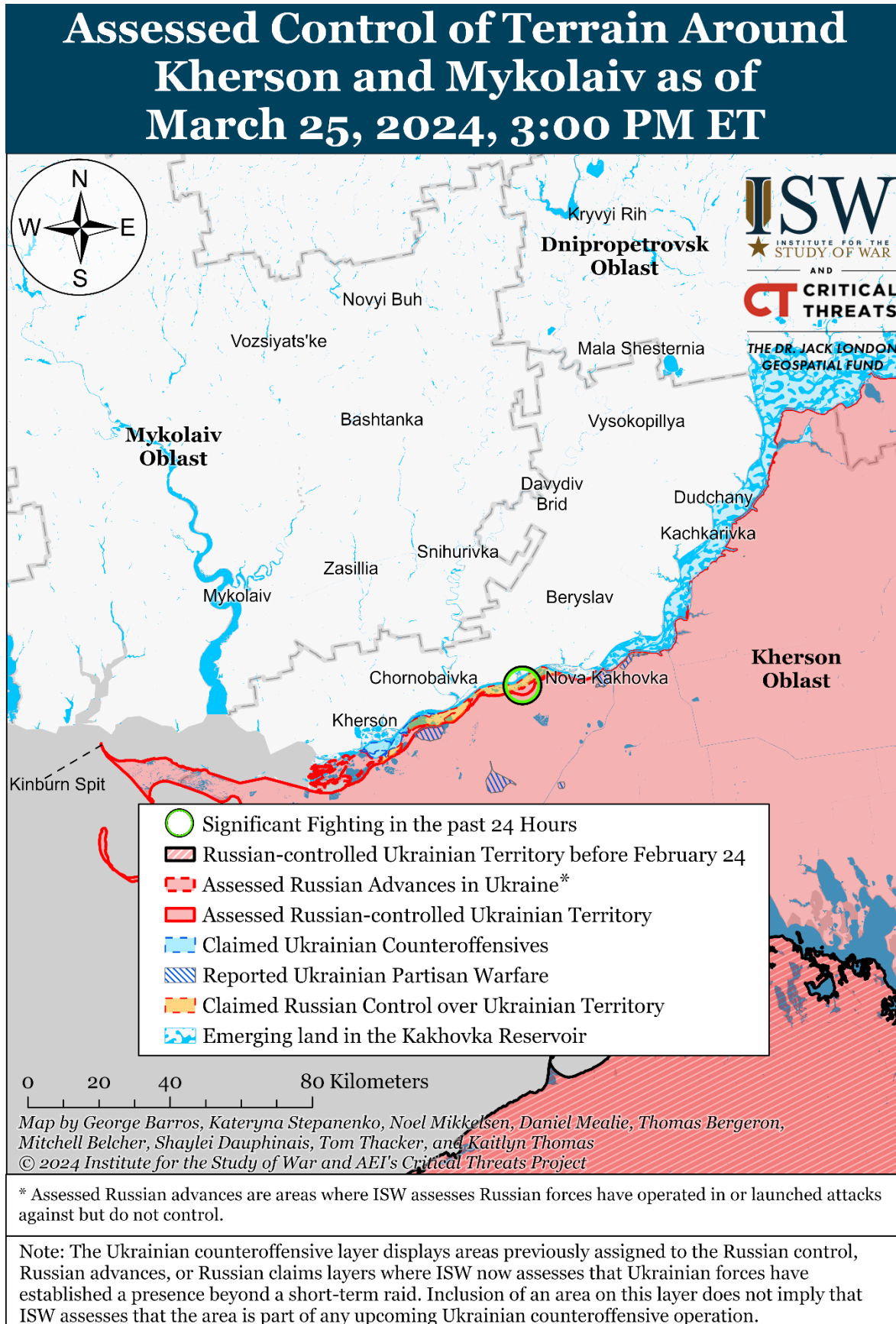
- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours                 | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory  | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare     |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory | Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir |
| 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.

Note: A Russian source claimed on March 24 that Russian forces advanced two kilometers northwest of Verbove.



The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 25 that Russian forces conducted an unsuccessful attack on Ukrainian positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast.[53] Elements of the Russian 80th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Northern Fleet) are reportedly operating in the Kherson direction.[54]





### **Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign (Russian Objective: Target Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure in the rear and on the frontline)**

Russian forces conducted drone strikes against southern Ukraine on the night of March 24 to 25 and missile strikes against Kyiv City on the morning of March 25. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched nine Shahed-136/131 drones from occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea on the night of March 24 to 25 and that Ukrainian forces destroyed eight Shaheds over Mykolaiv and Odesa oblasts.[55] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that a Shahed struck an energy facility in Mykolaiv Oblast.[56] The Southern Operational Command also reported that Russian forces launched a Kh-31P anti-radar missile over the Black Sea prior to the Shahed strikes to disrupt Ukrainian air defense systems but that the missile failed midair.[57] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched two unspecified ballistic missiles from occupied Crimea at Kyiv City on the morning of March 25 and that Ukrainian forces destroyed both missiles.[58] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal later clarified that Russian forces launched unspecified "hypersonic" missiles in the strike targeting Kyiv City.[59] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces launched Zircon missiles at Kyiv City.[60] Sources in the Ukrainian State Security Service (SBU) told the *Kyiv Post* that the March 25 Russian strikes against Kyiv City targeted SBU offices.[61]

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

Nothing significant to report.

### **Russian Technological Adaptations (Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)**

The KB BARS Design Bureau and Margelov Ryazan Airborne Command School reportedly developed and produced the "BARS-30" electronic sighting system for the AGS-17 automatic grenade launcher and delivered the system to Russian forces in Ukraine.[62] The "BARS-30" system reportedly allows operators to accurately aim and adjust fire in all weather conditions during the day or night.

### **Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)**

Ukraine's international partners continue efforts to provide Ukraine with critical artillery ammunition. Finland and Canada announced on March 20 that both countries will join the Czech-led initiative to source artillery ammunition for Ukraine from outside the European Union (EU).[63] Finnish Defense Minister Antti Häkkinen stated that Finland will provide €30 million (\$33 million) to the initiative, and Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair announced that Canada will contribute over 40 million CAD (\$29 million).[64] Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský reiterated on March 19 that the Czech initiative has sourced over 300,000 shells for Ukraine thus far and that the first batch of shells will arrive in Ukraine before June 2024.[65]

Ukraine's European partners also continue efforts to support Ukrainian drone, anti-drone, aviation, and air defense capabilities. Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles announced on March 21 that Australia will join the UK- and Latvia-led coalition to provide drones to Ukraine.[66] The Lithuanian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported on March 22 that Lithuania delivered an unspecified number and type of anti-drone systems to Ukraine.[67] The Czech Republic also announced the transfer of its last two available Mi-24/25 helicopters to Ukraine on March 21.[68] Dutch Defense Minister Kajsa Ollongren stated on March 20 that the Netherlands will purchase and provide over €150 million (\$163 million) in ammunition for F-16 aircraft in addition to the €200 million (\$217 million) Dutch contribution to Ukrainian drone efforts.[69] The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on March 22 that a new £60 million (\$76 million) package provided through the International Fund for Ukraine will provide Ukraine with new advanced surveillance drones, including £20 million (\$25 million) for Ukraine's air defense needs.[70]

Ukraine continues efforts to bolster its domestic defense industrial base (DIB) by increasing technological innovation and defense production. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi identified the development and manufacturing of unmanned systems as one of his priorities and assigned Colonel Vadym Sukharevskyi to supervise the development of drones and their flexible integration into the Ukrainian military.[71] Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov stated on March 21 that Ukraine is already producing domestically 90 percent of necessary drone components, including for long-range and naval drones.[72]

Denmark reaffirmed its bilateral commitment to Ukraine during the Danish-Ukrainian Defense Industry Conference on March 23–25. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov highlighted the importance of joint Danish-Ukrainian technological and defense production and thanked his Danish counterparts for facilitating increased cooperation with

Ukraine.[73] The Ukrainian MoD additionally signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Danish Defense Procurement and Logistics Organization on March 25.[74]

European states continue efforts to build out their own DIBs. French-government owned weapons manufacturer Nexter reported on March 19 that it will increase its production of artillery shells by a factor of eight over the next three years.[75] French Armed Forces Minister Sébastien Lecornu previously named Nexter as one of three French defense companies that has a partnership with Ukraine.[76] Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu announced on March 18 that German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall will build a gunpowder plant in Romania as part of a €400 million (\$433 million) joint project between Rheinmetall and the European Commission.[77]

**Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)**

*ISW is not publishing coverage of activities in Russian-occupied areas today.*

**Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

See topline text.

**Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)**

Nothing significant to report.

**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] <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/73732>

[2] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar032424>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar032324>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar032224>

[3] <https://dossier dot center/teract/>

[4] <https://dossier dot center/teract/>; <https://t.me/dossiercenter/321>; <https://t.me/vchkogpu/47009>; <https://t.me/astrapress/52377>; <https://t.me/vchkogpu/47002>

[5] <https://twitter.com/MarquardtA/status/1771284591443112321>; <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/23/europe/us-had-warned-russia-isis-was-determined-to-attack-intl-hnk/index.html>; <https://ru.usembassy.gov/security-alert-avoid-large-gatherings-over-the-next-48-hours/>

[6] <https://tass dot ru/politika/20283597>

[7] <https://apnews.com/article/kerman-us-warning-isisk-bombings-bcb47f04165b3eb7b9bc7b4868c8399c>

[8] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar032424>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar032324>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar010224>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar010724>

[9] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39586814>; <https://www.rferl dot org/a/beslan-massacre-tragedy-timeline/27218740.html>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20067384>

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