

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:15pm ET on March 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukraine is currently preventing Russian forces from making significant tactical gains along the entire frontline, but continued delays in US security assistance will likely expand the threat of Russian operational success, including in non-linear and possibly exponential ways. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in an interview with *CBS News* published on March 28 that Ukrainian forces managed to hold off Russian advances through winter 2023–2024 and that Ukrainian forces have stabilized the operational situation.[1] Ukrainian forces slowed the rate of Russian advances west of Avdiivka following the Russian seizure of the settlement on February 17, and Russian forces have only made gradual, marginal tactical gains elsewhere in Ukraine.[2] Zelensky stated that Ukrainian forces are not prepared to defend against another major Russian offensive effort expected in May or June 2024, however.[3] Russian forces will likely continue to maintain the tempo of their offensive operations through spring 2024 regardless of difficult weather and terrain conditions in order to exploit Ukrainian materiel shortages before the arrival of expected limited Western security assistance.[4] Russian forces also likely aim to force Ukraine to expend materiel it could otherwise accumulate for defensive efforts this summer and possible counteroffensive operations later in 2024 or in 2025.[5] Pervasive shortages may be forcing Ukraine to prioritize limited resources to critical sectors of the front, increasing the risk of a Russian breakthrough in other less-well-provisioned sectors and making the frontline overall more fragile than it appears despite the current relatively slow rate of Russian advances.[6]

ISW assesses that Russian forces have seized 505 square kilometers of territory since launching offensive operations in October 2023, and Russian forces gained almost 100 more square kilometers of territory between January 1 and March 28, 2024, than in the last three months of 2023 (although this rate of advance may be due to a combination of Ukrainian materiel shortages and more conducive weather conditions in the winter than in the fall). This marginal increase in the rate of Russian advance is not reflective of the threat of Russian operational success amid continued delays in US security assistance, however. Materiel constraints limit how Ukrainian forces can conduct effective defensive operations while also offering Russian forces flexibility in how to conduct offensive operations, which can lead to compounding and non-linear opportunities for Russian forces to make operationally significant gains in the future.[7] The opportunities to exploit Ukrainian vulnerabilities will widen as materiel shortages persist and as Ukraine continues to grapple with how to address manpower challenges.[8] The arrival of sufficient and regular Western security assistance and the resolution of Ukrainian manpower challenges would narrow these opportunities for Russian forces and provide Ukrainian forces with the ability to stop Russian forces from making even marginal tactical gains, to degrade Russian offensive capabilities, and to prepare for future counteroffensive operations to liberate more Ukrainian territory.[9]

The continued degradation of Ukraine’s air defense umbrella provides one of the most immediate avenues through which Russian forces could generate non-linear operational impacts. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stated that Russian forces launched 190 missiles of various types, 140 Shahed drones, and 700 glide bombs at targets in Ukraine between March 18 and 24.[10] Intensified Russian drone and missile strikes are likely once again placing pressures on Ukraine to prioritize the allocation of sparse air defense assets to defending population centers, critical infrastructure, and industrial facilities in the rear over positions along the frontline.[11] Kuleba stated that Russia’s widespread use of glide bombs along the frontline gives Russia a major battlefield advantage and that the only way to counter these tactics is for Ukrainian forces to shoot down the Russian aircraft conducting the strikes, which requires a sufficient number of air defense systems along the front.[12] Russian forces notably employed mass glide bomb strikes to tactical effect in their seizure of Avdiivka in mid-February and have steadily increased their use of guided and unguided glide bomb strikes against rear and frontline Ukrainian positions in 2024.[13] Ukrainian and Western officials have increasingly warned of a critical shortage of air defense missiles in the coming months, and the further degradation of Ukraine’s air defense umbrella would not only limit Ukraine’s ability to protect critical elements of its war effort in the rear but would also likely afford Russian aviation prolonged secure operation along the frontline.[14] This security would allow Russian forces to significantly increase glide bomb strikes at scale and possibly even allow Russian forces to conduct routine large-scale aviation operations against rear Ukrainian logistics and cities to devastating effect.[15] Expanded aviation operations could allow Russian forces to heavily degrade Ukrainian combat capabilities and isolate sectors of the battlefield in support of efforts to make operationally significant gains.

US security assistance that could establish a wider and more stable Ukrainian air defense umbrella would deny Russian forces these opportunities. Zelensky stated on March 28 that five to seven additional Patriot air defense systems would allow Ukraine to protect population centers, industrial facilities, and the Ukrainian military.[16] Kuleba also noted that Patriot air defense systems are needed to defend Ukraine against intensified Russian ballistic missile strikes, as Ukraine’s Soviet-era air defense systems are unable to intercept these missiles.[17] Kuleba added that stronger Ukrainian air defense along

the frontline would prevent Ukrainian forces from losing positions and enable Ukraine to force Russian forces to retreat from positions, likely in reference to the possible operational impacts of decreased Russian aviation operations.[18]

Russia’s ability to conduct opportunistic but limited offensive actions along Ukraine’s international border with Russia offers Russia further opportunities to constrain Ukrainian manpower and materiel, but Western aid provisions and Ukrainian efforts to address manpower challenges would ease the impacts of such Russian efforts. Zelensky told *CBS* that Ukrainian forces are constructing fortifications and defensive positions near Sumy City in response to a reported significant buildup of Russian forces in neighboring Bryansk Oblast and recent strikes on Ukrainian settlements in the area.[19] Sumy Oblast Military Administration Head Volodymyr Artyuk recently warned that Russia is conducting an information operation threatening a possible Russian attack on Sumy Oblast but stated that Ukrainian authorities have not observed any Russian strike groups near the borders with Sumy Oblast.[20] ISW has not observed visual evidence that Russian forces are concentrating forces in Bryansk Oblast in preparation for any significant military undertaking. Russian forces will likely only be able to conduct a large-scale offensive operation in one direction in the coming months, and it is unlikely that Russian forces would suddenly prioritize a whole new front over the operational directions that they have been focusing on in the past year and a half in Ukraine.[21] Russian forces could theoretically choose to concentrate forces at any point along the over three-thousand-kilometer-long frontline along the Russia-Ukraine and Belarus-Ukraine borders in addition to the frontline in Ukraine, forcing Ukraine to respond to Russian actions by re-allocating already scarce resources from other, more active sectors of the front. Ukraine already appears to be prioritizing its limited manpower and materiel resources to critical sectors of the frontline, and even limited transfers of Ukrainian materiel and personnel from active frontline areas could prove destabilizing.[22] Future Russian offensive operations are not necessarily limited to the existing frontlines in eastern and southern Ukraine, and the Russian military command may only have to deploy a limited number of Russian personnel to any previously inactive sector of the frontline to force Ukraine to redeploy necessary manpower and equipment to that area, potentially creating vulnerabilities that Russian forces could exploit.

Ukraine could overcome these vulnerabilities if it received US military assistance in a timely fashion and addressed its ongoing manpower challenges. Ukrainian officials recently reported that the Ukrainian military is prioritizing rotations and rest for frontline units and other efforts to optimize Ukraine’s military organization structure.[23] The need for rotations is only part of the manpower challenge Ukraine faces, however. ISW continues to assess that consistent provision of Western military assistance in key systems, many of which only the US can provide rapidly at scale, will play a critical role in determining Russian prospects in 2024 and when Ukrainian forces can attempt to contest the theater-wide initiative.[24] The course of the war over the rest of 2024 depends heavily on the provision of US military assistance and continuing non-US military support as well as on Ukraine’s ability to address its manpower challenges. **The forecast cone — the range of possible outcomes from most advantageous to most dangerous — is very wide and will remain so until it is clear whether the US will resume military support and Ukraine will address its manpower challenges. Both the US and Ukraine retain considerable agency in determining the course of the war this year and in coming years. This war’s immediate and long-term prospects remain highly contingent on decisions yet to be made in Washington, Kyiv, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and elsewhere and on the execution of those decisions in Ukraine.**

Russian President Vladimir Putin continued to make sensationalized statements as part of Russia’s ongoing reflexive control campaign, which aims to deter further Western military aid provisions to Ukraine and deflect attention from the growing Russian force posturing against NATO. Putin, during a visit to the Russian 344th Center for Combat Employment and Retraining of Army Aviation Pilots on March 27, reiterated basic truisms and several boilerplate narratives aimed at distracting Western policymakers with irrelevant and tired Russian threats, likely seeking to delay and influence important decisions regarding additional Western military aid to Ukraine and countering the Russian threat against NATO. Putin claimed that Russia has “no aggressive intentions” towards NATO states and that Russia “would not be doing anything in Ukraine” if it were not for “the coup d’état in Ukraine and subsequent hostilities in Donbas.”[25] Putin is once again injecting into the international media bloodstream the false narrative that the West and NATO are responsible for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin routinely falsely accuses Western countries of staging a coup in Ukraine in 2014 and Ukraine of violence against Russian-speaking residents of Donbas in an effort to deflect responsibility for the war in Ukraine and manipulate Western perceptions about Russia’s intent and capabilities.[26]

Putin dismissed claims that Russia wants to attack other countries, including Poland, the Baltic states, and the Czech Republic as “complete nonsense,” while adding that Russia is defending the people living on Russia’s “historical territories” in Ukraine. Putin’s denials of Russia’s increasingly aggressive posturing against NATO’s eastern flank are reminiscent of the Kremlin’s claims that Russian forces would not invade Ukraine in late 2021 and early 2022 (including right up to the eve of the full-scale invasion) — a line the Kremlin used to delay and deter any preparations to counter the Russian threat.[27] Putin’s denials of Russia’s imperialist aspirations are also incongruent with his own definition of the “Russian World” (“*Russkiy Mir*”) — an ideological and geographic conception that includes all of the former territories of Kyivan Rus, the Kingdom of Muscovy, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the contemporary Russian Federation.[28] The concept of the “Russian World” allows Putin to regard any territories that were once ruled by or claimed to be ruled by a

Russian regime as Russia’s “historical territories,” which include Poland and the Baltic states. Putin may elect to “protect” people the Kremlin describes as Russian “compatriots” in these claimed “historic territories” at the time of his choosing by replicating similar narratives he used to invade Ukraine.

Putin also attempted to scare NATO states away from supplying Ukraine with F-16 fighter aircraft and attempted to deter Western audiences from further financial commitments to Ukraine’s and NATO’s security. Putin stated that Russia will destroy F-16 aircraft in Ukraine just like it destroyed other Western-provided military equipment and threatened that Russia would target Western airfields if Ukraine used these facilities to facilitate strikes against Russia. These statements, presented in sensationalized fashion, are, in fact, statements of the obvious — naturally Russian forces will seek to destroy Ukrainian military equipment of any sort, and naturally Russia would regard bases from which such forces conduct military operations against Russian forces as legitimate targets — such is war. Such declarations deserve no attention, yet Putin uses them to achieve important informational effects. Putin and Russian sources previously deliberately overwhelmed the Western information space with reports and footage of destroyed Western-provided military equipment and other Ukrainian tactical losses in summer 2023 to discourage timely Western military aid support and confidence in Ukrainian forces during the counteroffensive period.[29] Putin additionally attempted to involve himself in the US domestic political debate over defense spending by claiming that Russia spends nearly ten times less on its defense budget than the United States — an irrelevance considering Russia’s far smaller GDP and the fact that the US is not committing its own combat forces (paid for by the US defense budget) to this war.[30] Putin’s mention of US defense spending also likely attempted to create a false perception that Russia is more successful on the battlefield despite having a smaller defense budget, obscuring the reality that Russia has partially mobilized its economy and imposed hardship on its people to support the war effort while the US and the West are maintaining their economies on a peacetime footing.

Putin’s March 27 statements are neither new nor surprising and best illustrate how the Kremlin routinely overwhelms the Western information space, often with irrelevant or decontextualized truths rather than with outright misinformation or disinformation, to shape global perceptions and advance its own long-term objectives. These statements should be analyzed alongside endless instances of the Kremlin reusing the same narratives, rather than as standalone inflections. Overwhelming, confusing, and manipulating the Western information space and perceptions are part of the Russian strategy of “reflexive control” — or a way of transmitting bases for decision-making to an opponent so that they freely come to a pre-determined decision.[31] Putin’s statements target the US and Western perception of costs, priorities, risks, and alignment with values to achieve the desired outcome of delaying Western military aid provisions to Ukraine or prevent NATO from recognizing and responding to the potential Russian threat in a timely manner. Putin’s statements and other Kremlin information operations are part of Russia’s principal effort to force the US and the West to accept and reason from Russian premises to decisions that advance Russia’s interests, as ISW has recently assessed.[32]

The Russian Investigative Committee unsurprisingly claimed that it has evidence tying Ukraine to the March 22 Crocus City Hall attack amid continued Kremlin efforts to link Ukraine and the West to the terrorist attack to generate more domestic support for the war in Ukraine. Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin claimed on March 28 that the Investigative Committee’s investigation into the Crocus City Hall attackers confirmed that the attackers received “significant amounts of money and cryptocurrency” from Ukraine that they used to plan the attack.[33] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin likely intends to capitalize on domestic fear and anger and hopes that perceptions of Ukrainian and Western involvement in the Crocus City Hall attack will increase domestic support for the war in Ukraine.[34] The Kremlin will likely continue to conduct information operations targeting the Russian population and international audiences claiming to have evidence linking Ukraine and the West to the Crocus City Hall attack. ISW remains confident that the Islamic State (IS) conducted the Crocus City Hall attack and has yet to observe independent reporting or evidence to suggest that an actor other than IS was responsible for or aided the attack.[35]

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed concern for heightened ethnic tension in Russian society following the Crocus City Hall attacks and may be falsely blaming Ukraine and the West for the Crocus City Hall attack in order to divert domestic attention away from ethnic tensions. Putin claimed on March 28 that he is concerned over statements that “Russia is only for [ethnic] Russians” from “jingo-patriots,” likely referencing March 24 footage of Russian ultranationalists harassing a woman from Sakha Republic in the Moscow metro and shouting that “Russia is only for [ethnic] Russians.”[36] Putin’s choice to quote these random and unknown Russian ultranationalists is likely a deliberate attempt to signal to Russian ultranationalists, including more well-known milbloggers and media and political personalities, that they should stop enflaming ethnic tension in the wake of the Crocus City Hall attack. Putin likely wants to avoid heightened animosity against ethnic minorities in Russia, whom Russia has disproportionately targeted in force-generation efforts, and to avoid continued calls for anti-migrant policies. ISW continues to assess that Russia is unlikely to introduce any restrictions that would reduce the number of migrants in Russia or restrict new migrants from entering Russia given that Russia continues to heavily rely on Central Asian migrants to offset domestic labor shortages and to target Central Asian migrants for crypto-mobilization efforts.[37] Putin intends to falsely direct blame for the Crocus City Hall attack onto Ukraine and the West to generate domestic support for the war in Ukraine, but continued Russian

ultranationalist attempts to blame migrants and radical Islamists for the attack highlight the reality that the attack was a notable Russian intelligence and law enforcement failure.[38]

Ukrainian drone strikes against oil refineries in Russia are reportedly forcing Russia to import gasoline from Belarus. *Reuters* reported on March 27 that Russia has significantly increased gasoline imports from Belarus in March due to unscheduled repairs at oil refineries following Ukrainian drone strikes.[39] *Reuters* reported that Russia has imported 3,000 metric tons of gasoline from Belarus in the first half of March as compared to 590 metric tons in February and no gasoline imports in January.[40] Russia banned gasoline exports at the beginning of March to stabilize domestic prices, and the significant increase in Belarusian imports suggests that operational Russian refineries may be unable to prevent domestic gasoline prices from rising.[41] Ukrainian drone strikes against oil refineries have significantly disrupted Russia's refining capacity and will likely impact Russian exports of distillate petroleum products and the domestic prices of these goods.[42] Russian officials have noted that a reduction in primary oil refining in 2024 will likely lead to increases in Russian crude oil exports since Russia would not be able to refine as much as it usually does.[43]

An independent investigation found that international information operation campaigns linked to deceased Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin remained active, despite the Russian government shutting down media companies and organizations overtly linked to Prigozhin after his death. US cybersecurity company Mandiant reported on March 28 that several Prigozhin-linked information operation campaigns remain active, namely Newsroom for American and European Based Citizens Campaign, Cyber Front Z, and Togo-based Panafrican Group for Commerce and Investment.[44] Mandiant reported that these campaigns continue to target the US, Ukraine, Russia, and countries in Europe and Africa — all regions that Prigozhin-linked information operations targeted prior to Prigozhin's death. Mandiant did not assess the identity of actors managing these information operation campaigns since Prigozhin's death. ISW has observed reports that Russian Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko oversees multiple information operations targeting Russia's domestic information space, Ukraine, and the West.[45]

Kevin Mandia, the Chief Executive Officer of Mandiant, is an ISW board member.

Senior Russian officials are intensifying their victim-blaming of Armenian leadership as Armenia continues to distance itself from security relations with Russia after the Kremlin abandoned Armenia to its fate as it lost Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on March 28 that the Armenian leadership is consciously contributing to the deterioration of Russian-Armenian relations by making up far-fetched pretexts and distorting the last three and a half years of history.[46] Lavrov further blamed the Armenian leadership for defaming Russian border guards, Russian military personnel at Russia's 102nd Military Base in Gyumri, Armenia, and the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) "as a whole." Lavrov also claimed that the European Union (EU) mission in Armenia is "turning into a NATO mission." [47] Lavrov's increasingly critical statements suggest that the Kremlin is likely preparing a harsher and more concerted response as Armenia continues to take measures to distance itself from Russia and signals interest in strengthening relations with the West.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukraine is currently preventing Russian forces from making significant tactical gains along the entire frontline, but continued delays in US security assistance will likely expand the threat of Russian operational success, including in non-linear and possibly exponential ways.**
- **The continued degradation of Ukraine's air defense umbrella provides one of the most immediate avenues through which Russian forces could generate non-linear operational impacts.**
- **Russia's ability to conduct opportunistic but limited offensive actions along Ukraine's international border with Russia offers Russia further opportunities to constrain Ukrainian manpower and materiel, but Western aid provisions and Ukrainian efforts to address manpower challenges would ease the impacts of such Russian efforts.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin continued to make sensationalized statements as part of Russia's ongoing reflexive control campaign, which aims to deter further Western military aid provisions to Ukraine and deflect attention from the growing Russian force posturing against NATO.**
- **Putin's March 27 statements are neither new nor surprising, and best illustrate how the Kremlin routinely overwhelms the Western information space, often with irrelevant or decontextualized truths rather than with outright misinformation or disinformation, to shape global perceptions and advance its own long-term objectives.**

- **The Russian Investigative Committee unsurprisingly claimed that it has evidence tying Ukraine to the March 22 Crocus City Hall attack amid continued Kremlin efforts to link Ukraine and the West to the terrorist attack to generate more domestic support for the war in Ukraine.**
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- **Ukrainian drone strikes against oil refineries in Russia are reportedly forcing Russia to import gasoline from Belarus.**
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- **Senior Russian officials are intensifying their victim-blaming of Armenian leadership as Armenia continues to distance itself from security relations with Russia after the Kremlin abandoned Armenia to its fate as it lost Nagorno-Karabakh.**
- **Russian forces made confirmed advances near Donetsk City.**
- **Russia continues efforts to source ballistic missiles and other weapons from North Korea for use in Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 28, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

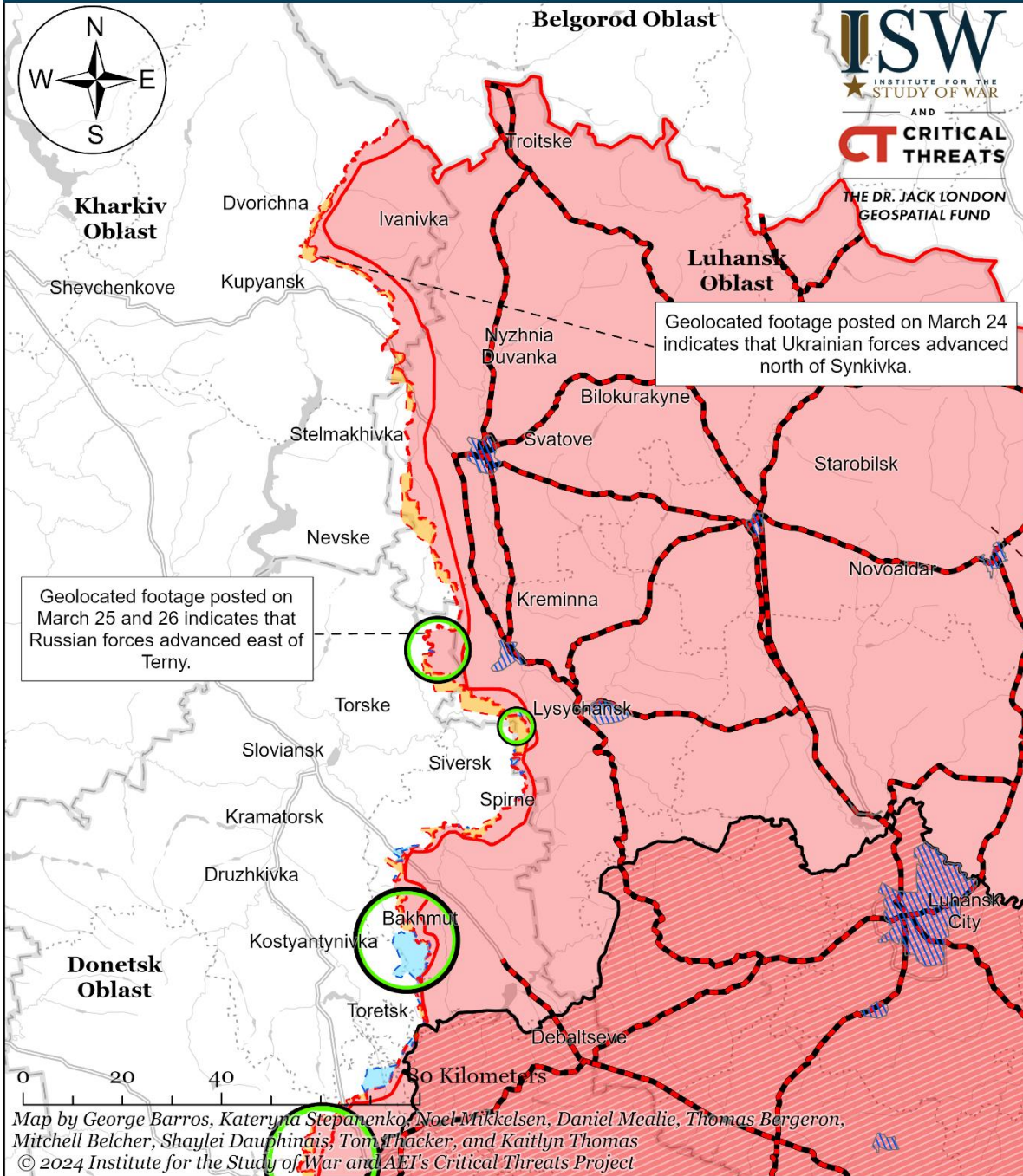
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

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 fighting continued along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 28. Positional fighting occurred northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka, west of Kreminna near Terny, and south of Kreminna near the Serebryanske forest area and Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).[48]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of March 28, 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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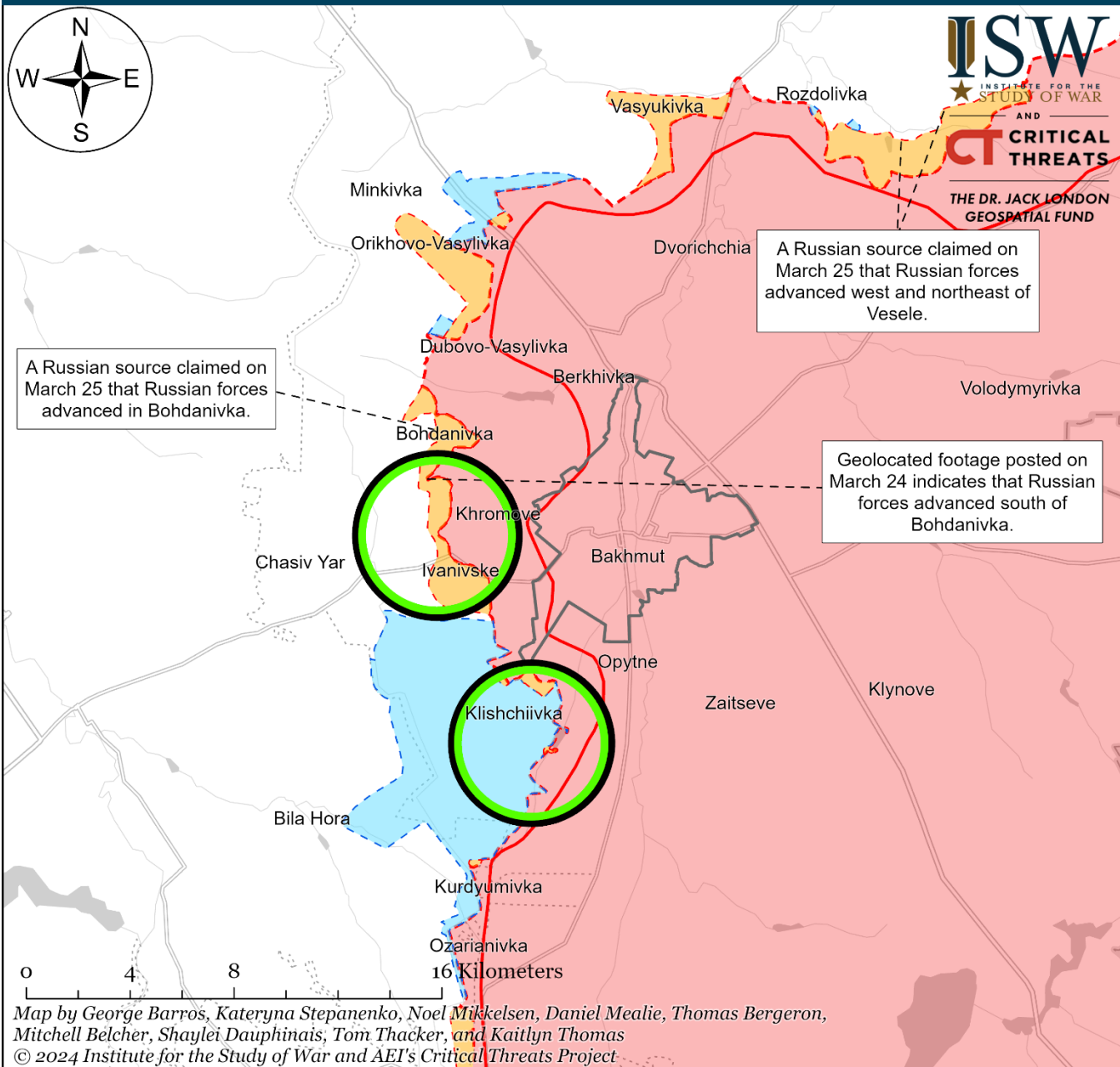
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory

* 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)

Positional engagements continued near Bakhmut on March 28, with neither side making any confirmed gains. Russian and Ukrainian forces engaged in positional battles northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Chasiv Yar, Novyi and Kanal districts (eastern part of Chasiv Yar), and Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[49] A Ukrainian crew commander of a drone detachment reported that there are seven to 10 Russian troops for every Ukrainian soldier in the Bakhmut direction and that Russian forces have increased their use of glide bombs in the area compared to 2023.[50] The commander added that the situation in the Bakhmut direction is difficult because of Russian glide bomb strikes and ongoing Ukrainian manpower shortages. A spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade noted that Ukrainian forces recently observed Russian motorcycle groups unsuccessfully attempting to advance in the Bakhmut area and that Russian forces are continuing to attack with in small groups with intensive drone, artillery, and aerial support.[51] A Russian milblogger similarly observed that Russian forces began using buggies and motorcycles to conduct attacks on Ukrainian positions in the Bakhmut direction.[52] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Northern Fleet) are continuing to operate in the Bakhmut direction.[53] Elements of the Russian 6th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] Army Corps [AC]) reportedly continued to operate near Spirne (southeast of Siversk and northeast of Bakhmut).[54]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of March 28, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



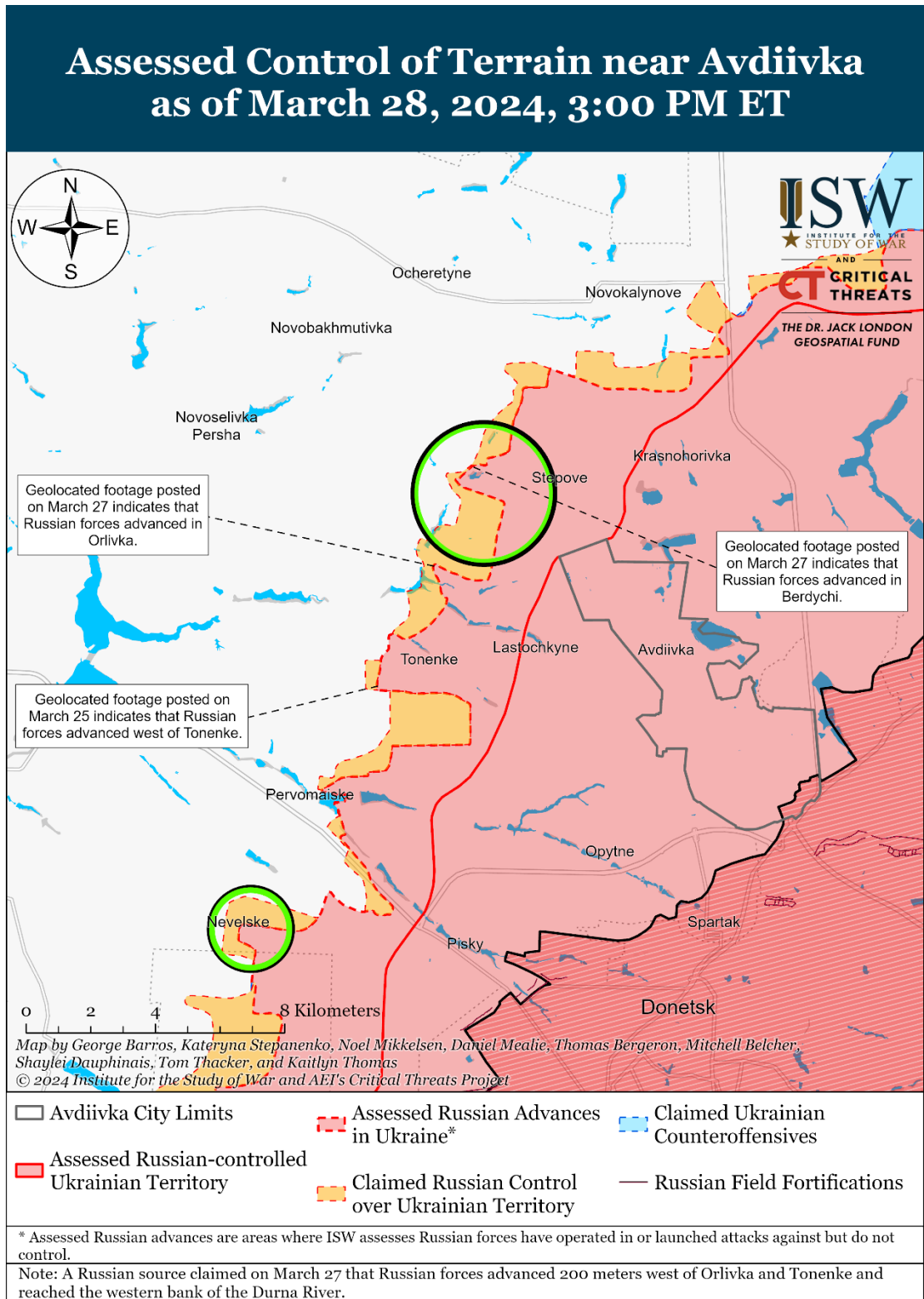
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Shaylei Dauphinais, Tom Thacker, and Kaitlyn Thomas
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- Bakhmut City Limits
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

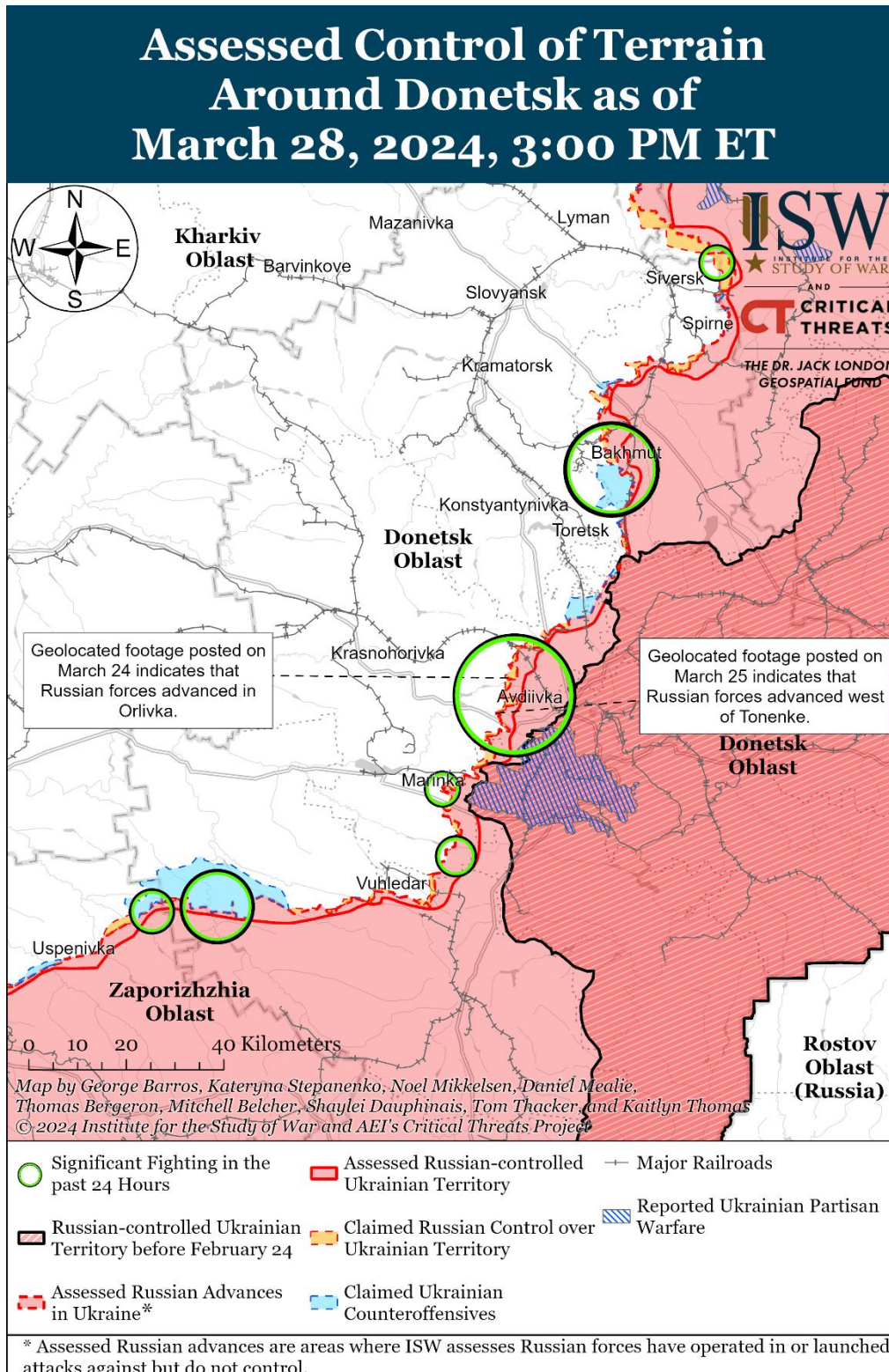
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: A Russian source claimed on March 27 that Russian forces advanced along a 1.85 kilometer wide and 1.15 kilometer deep frontline east of Chasiv Yar. A Russian source claimed on March 27 that Russian forces are 500 meters from the Chasiv Yar administrative city limits. A Russian source claimed on March 24 that Russian forces advanced within one to one and a half kilometers of the Chasiv Yar outskirts.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced to the O0542 (Avdiivka-Novobakhmutivka) highway within Semenivka (northwest of Avdiivka) on March 27, but ISW has not observed evidence confirming these claims.[55] The deputy commander of a Ukrainian assault brigade reported that Russian forces are trying to advance towards Semenivka and that Russian forces in the area can rotate personnel, commit new units to the battlefield, and replenish their brigades with more personnel.[56] The deputy commander added that Russian forces recently began using armored vehicles including tanks and observed that Russian forces lost several unspecified units when fighting for Orlivka (west of Avdiivka). Positional battles continued northwest of Avdiivka near Semenivka and Berdychi; west of Avdiivka near Tonenke; and southwest of Avdiivka near Nevelske and Pervomaiske.[57] Elements of the Russian 3rd Guards Special Purpose Brigade (subordinate to the General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate [GRU]) are reportedly operating near Berdychi.[58]

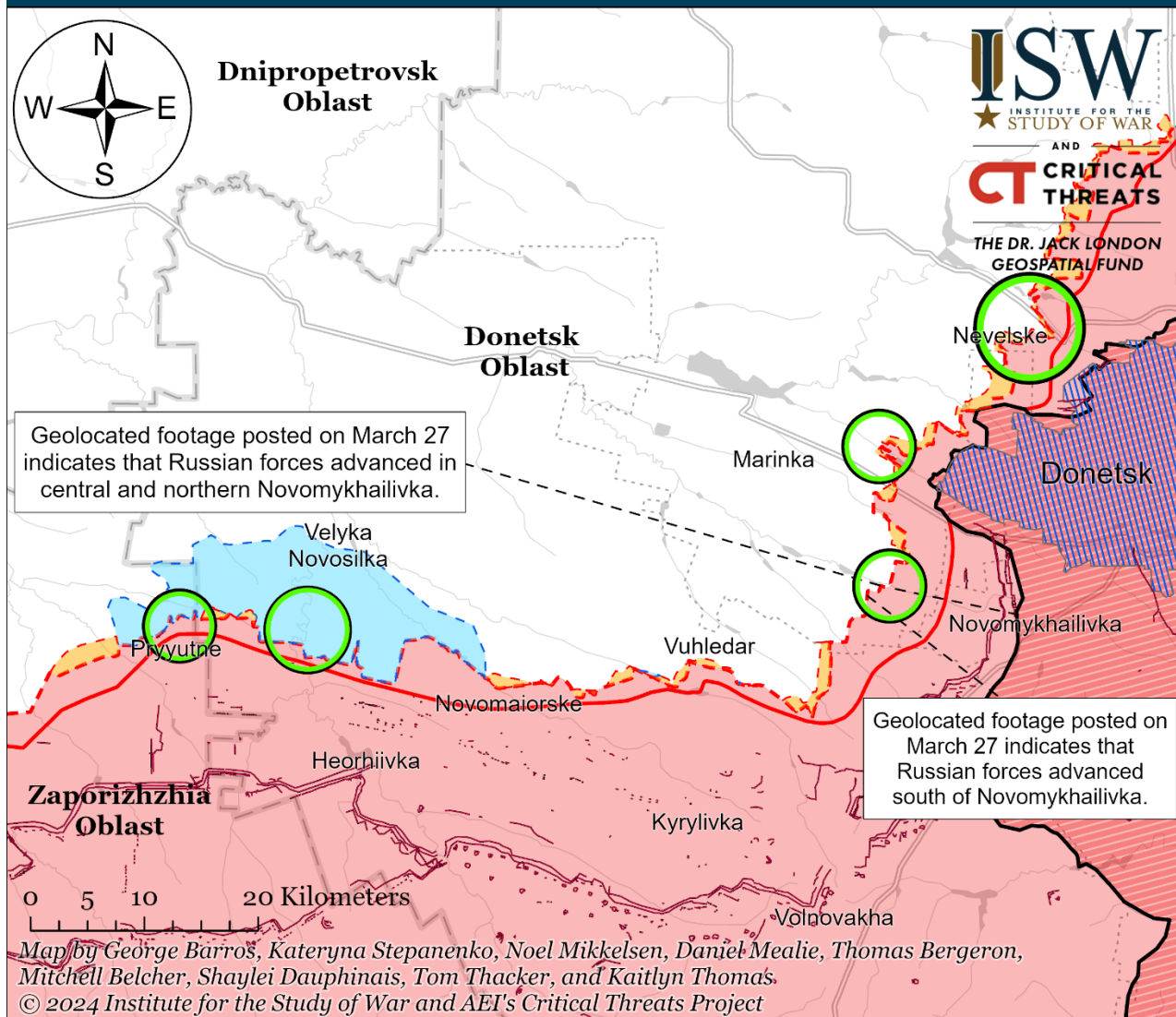


Russian forces recently advanced in and near Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City). Geolocated footage published on March 27 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in central Novomykhailivka and in the fields north of the settlement, and Russian milbloggers similarly claimed that Russian forces advanced in central Novomykhailivka.[59] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are not withdrawing from Novomykhailivka and are using first person vision (FPV) drones and cluster munitions in the area, which significantly complicate Russian efforts to advance.[60] Positional battles continued west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and Krasnohorivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda and Novomykhailivka.[61] Elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) are reportedly continuing to operate near Novomykhailivka and elements of the Russian 8th Combined Arms Army (Southern Military District [SMD]) are operating near Pobieda.[62]



Russian forces continued to attack near Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka) in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on March 28, but did not advance.[63] Elements of the Russian 11th Air and Air Defense Forces Army (Main Command of the Russian Aerospace Forces and Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly continuing to conduct airstrikes near Staromayorske.[64]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Donetsk Oblast as of March 28, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

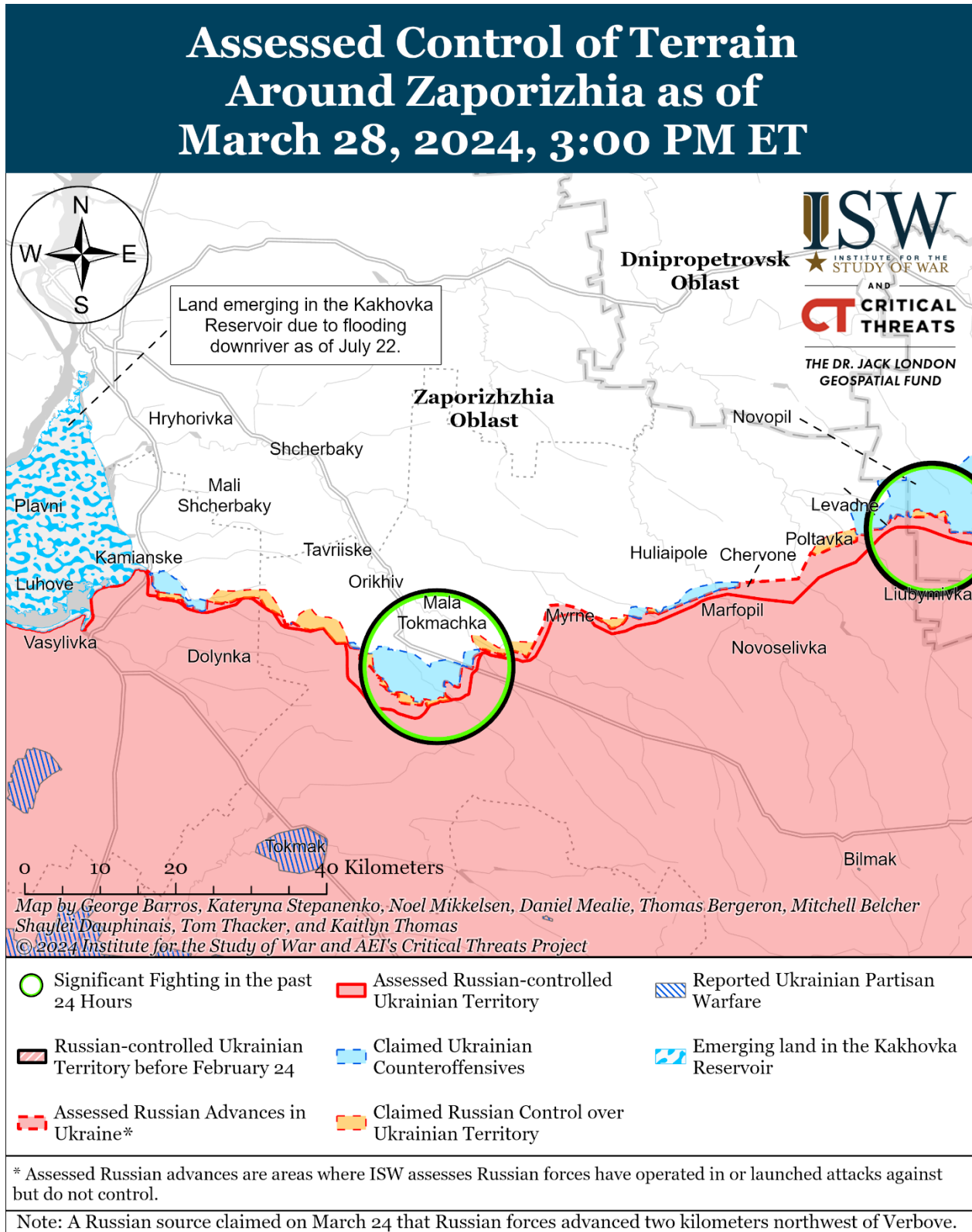


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- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Field Fortifications

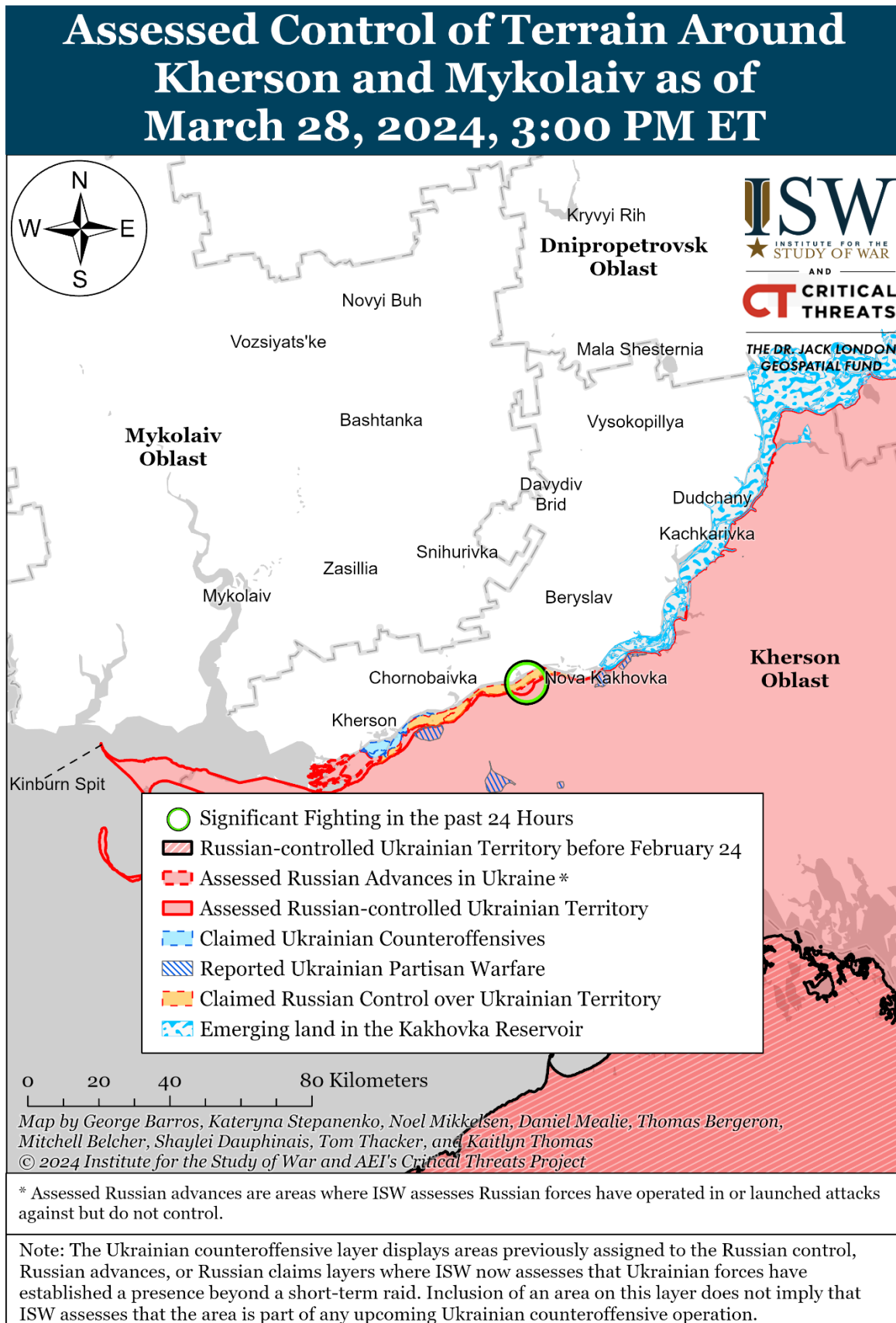
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Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on March 28, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Positional engagements continued near Robotyne and northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[65] Elements of the Russian 429th Motorized Rifle Regiment (19th Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhzhia direction.[66] Elements of the Russian 38th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (35th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating in the Polohy direction.[67]



Positional engagements continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast, including near Krynky, on March 28.[68] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces continue to conduct assaults in east bank Kherson Oblast with groups of 10 to 15 personnel without armored vehicle support and that Russian forces lose 30 to 40 personnel in the area each day.[69]



A Russian milblogger claimed on March 28 that Russian forces destroyed a Ukrainian naval drone near the Kinburn Spit in Mykolaiv Oblast, although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[70]

Russian sources claimed on March 28 that Russian forces shot down a Russian Su-27 or Su-35 aircraft in a friendly fire incident off the coast of occupied Sevastopol, Crimea.[71] Russian sources also claimed that the pilot ejected, and that Russian authorities rescued him.[72]

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

Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of March 27 to 28. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched three Kh-22 cruise missiles and a Kh-31P anti-radar missile from the Black Sea, an S-300 missile at Donetsk Oblast, and 28 Shahed-136/131 drones from Kursk Oblast and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[73] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 26 Shahed drones over Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhia oblasts, and Ukrainian officials reported that the three Kh-22 cruise missiles and the Kh-31P cruise missile lost their combat capabilities over the Black Sea.[74] Kharkiv Oblast Military Administration Head Oleh Synehubov stated that Russian drone strikes damaged civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv City.[75]

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

Russia continues efforts to source ballistic missiles and other weapons from North Korea for use in Ukraine. North Korea-focused outlet *NK Pro* reported on March 27 that two Russian aircraft, including a Russian cargo plane reportedly involved in delivering North Korean missiles to Russia for use in Ukraine, traveled between North Korea and Russia on the night of March 20 to 21.[76] *NK Pro* reported that the cargo plane likely flew from Vladivostok to Pyongyang and that an unspecified South Korea-US intelligence source stated that the plane picked up unspecified cargo 50 feet in length, presumably short-range ballistic missiles. *NK Pro* noted that the other aircraft, a Russian Tu-154 passenger aircraft likely transporting a Russian government delegation, has flown between Vladivostok and Pyongyang at least four times over the past month.

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MOD) 344th State Center for Combat Use and Retraining of Flight Personnel in Torzhok, Tver Oblast on March 27 and inspected samples of Russian flight equipment and aviation weapons.[77] Putin reportedly inspected Chrysanthemum missiles for the Mi-28NM attack helicopter and met with pilots and the widows of deceased Russian military personnel who served in Ukraine.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu presented a Gold Star medal to Russian Central Grouping of Forces Commander Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev on March 28.[78] Russian officials previously praised the Central Grouping of Forces and Mordvichev for the seizure of Avdiivka.[79]

An unspecified Russian defense industrial base (DIB) source told Kremlin newswire *TASS* on March 27 that the Russian Sevmash enterprise will provide two Project 955AM "Borey-AM" nuclear submarine strategic missile cruisers for the Northern and Pacific Fleets in 2024.[80] The source stated that the Russian MoD contracted the construction of the cruisers in 2021 and that the Pacific and Northern Fleets will each have six of the cruisers by 2030.

A Russian insider source claimed on March 28 that Russian authorities instructed Russian law enforcement agencies to compile lists of and monitor "potentially dangerous" former convicts returning to Russia after completing military service contracts in Ukraine.[81] Russian authorities reportedly told local authorities and law enforcement to avoid classifying former convicts as "heroes of Russia" or allowing them to teach "lessons of courage" at Russian schools immediately after they return from Ukraine without additional checks and evaluations. Russian forces have previously widely recruited convicts from Russian penal colonies to serve six-month contracts in Storm-Z units.[82]

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

A source within the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) told Kremlin newswire *TASS* on MAR 28 that Russia is modifying Onyx supersonic anti-ship missiles with new active homing heads to strike Ukrainian ground targets with higher accuracy.[83] Another source told *TASS* that Russia is also working to protect Onyx missiles from Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) systems.

Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade developed the new "Cheburashka" system that allows Russian forces to intercept a drone's visual feed.[84] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that frontline Russian units are attempting to develop better methods of countering drones and that intercepting a drone's

visual feed allows Russian forces to locate the drone and momentarily activate the closest EW systems to down the drone, letting Russian forces avoid constantly operating EW systems. More isolated and temporary activation of EW systems helps Russian forces avoid situations when Russian EW systems interfere with Russian drone operations.

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

ISW is not publishing coverage of Ukrainian defense industrial efforts today.

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 of Ukraine today.

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov warned on March 28 that Russian actors are conducting the “Perun” and “Maidan-3” information operations through Russian embassies and official events in unspecified “neutral” countries.[85] The GUR previously reported that the “Perun” information operation aims to destabilize Ukrainian and Western political environments, deflect Russia’s responsibility for its invasion of Ukraine, and deliberately misrepresent living conditions in occupied Ukraine in foreign media.[86] The “Maidan-3” information operation aims to sow panic and discontent in the Ukrainian population and drive a wedge between civilians and military and political leadership in Ukraine.[87] Budanov assessed that these information operations have certain successes, and ISW had previously assessed that Russia uses its diplomatic channels to influence international support for Ukraine.[88]

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.

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