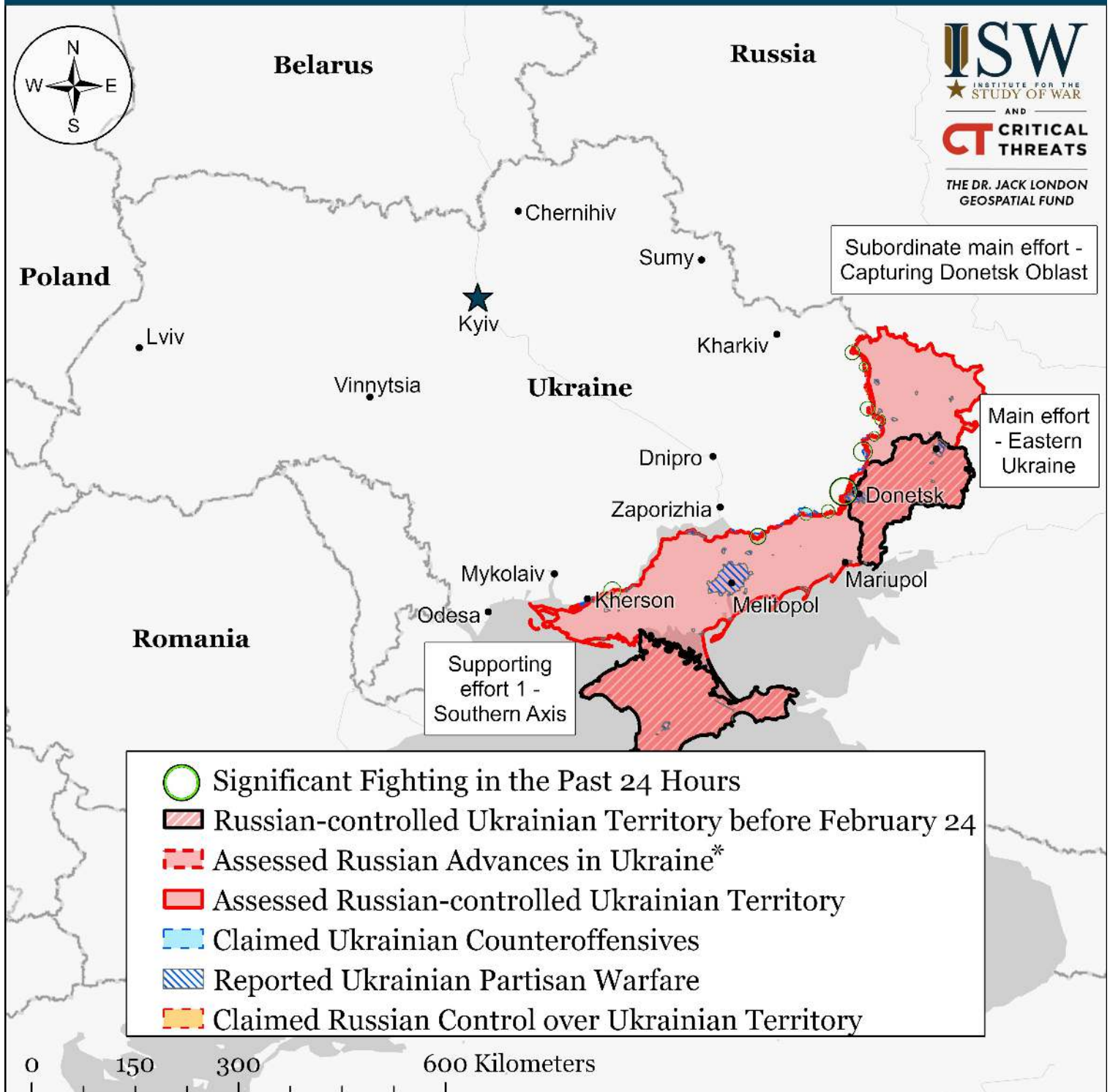


Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 15, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward,
Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 15, 2024, 8:50pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

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 map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:00pm ET on March 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces will likely continue ongoing offensive efforts to destabilize Ukrainian defensive lines in Spring 2024 while also preparing for a forecasted new offensive effort in Summer 2024. The provision of Western security assistance will likely play a critical role in Ukraine's ability to hold territory now and to repel a new Russian offensive effort in the coming months. Russian forces are attempting to maintain the tempo of their offensive operations throughout eastern Ukraine in an effort to prevent Ukrainian forces from stabilizing their defensive lines.[1] Russian forces are particularly concentrating on pushing as far west of Avdiivka as possible before Ukrainian forces can establish a harder-to-penetrate line in the area.[2] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on March 15 that Russian forces have concentrated their efforts on the Avdiivka direction and have been conducting daily mechanized and infantry assaults in an attempt to break through Ukrainian defenses.[3] Although Ukrainian forces have recently been able to slow Russian advances west of Avdiivka, pervasive materiel shortages caused by delays in Western security assistance appear to 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.[4] Russian forces will continue to use the advantages provided by possessing the theater-wide initiative to dynamically reweight their offensive efforts this spring and into the summer, likely in hopes of exploiting possible Ukrainian vulnerabilities.[5] Russian forces may be pressing their attempts at a breakthrough before difficult weather and terrain conditions in spring will likely constrain effective mechanized maneuver on both sides of the line and further limit Russian capabilities to make significant tactical advances while the ground is still muddy.[6] Russian forces have intensified offensive operations during similar conditions before, however, and Russian forces may seek to maintain the tempo of their offensive operations through spring regardless of difficult weather and terrain conditions in an effort to exploit Ukrainian materiel shortages before promised Western security assistance arrives in Ukraine.[7]

Ukrainian and Western officials are increasingly warning about both significant Ukrainian materiel shortages and a new large-scale Russian offensive this summer.[8] The intent and design of the Russian Summer 2024 offensive effort is not immediately clear and likely will not be until Russian forces launch it, but the Russian military command likely intends to capitalize on any gains it makes in the coming weeks as well as on forecasts that the Ukrainian military may be even less-well-provisioned this summer than it is now. **Well-provisioned Ukrainian forces have shown that they can prevent Russian forces from making even marginal gains during large-scale Russian offensive efforts, and there is no reason to doubt that Ukraine could further stabilize the frontline and prepare for repelling the reported Russian offensive effort this summer if materiel shortages abated.**[9]

Western and Ukrainian officials are expressing concerns about delays in Western security assistance to Ukraine ahead of this expected Russian offensive effort. EU High Commissioner Josep Borrell stated on March 14 that the West must increase and speed up its support for Ukraine as the next months will be “decisive” ahead of the expected major Russian offensive in the summer of 2024.[10] Borrell stated in an interview with *PBS* published on March 14 that Europe alone cannot, however, make up for the lack of US aid as the US has a much stronger and larger military capacity, as ISW has previously assessed.[11] The *Washington Post* reported on March 15 that a senior US official stated that there is no “bright” future for Ukraine if the US does not pass the supplemental aid package for Ukraine.[12] A senior advisor to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reportedly told the *Washington Post* that Russian forces are highly likely to make significant territorial gains in Summer 2024 if the US does not provide aid to Ukraine. The *Washington Post* reported that Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Michael Kofman assessed that the US supplemental aid package would allow Ukrainian forces to “buy time” but that Ukraine must also fix the “structural problem” related to its limited manpower resources.

The threat of significant Russian gains in the coming months does not mean that there is no threat of Russian forces making such gains through offensive operations this spring. Relative Russian successes this spring, even tactical, may set conditions for Russian forces to pursue operationally significant gains in the summer. Neither would a Ukrainian ability to further stabilize the current frontlines this spring preclude Russia from pursuing a breakthrough this summer. Well-provisioned Ukrainian forces will likely be able to prevent any significant Russian advances both in Spring and Summer 2024 as long as sufficient Western security assistance arrives in the next months in a manner that allows Ukrainian forces to address current materiel shortages and prepare for and sustain future defensive operations.

Pressing shortages in air defense systems and missiles will likely dramatically reduce Ukraine’s ability to defend against Russian strikes both in rear and frontline areas in the coming weeks if not addressed rapidly. The *Washington Post* reported on March 15 that Ukrainian policymakers conveyed to Western official sources that Ukraine may use up some of its air defense systems by the end of March.[13] The Ukrainian officials reportedly stated that Ukraine has previously aimed to shoot down four out of every five missiles that Russian forces launch at Ukrainian rear cities but that Ukrainian air defense shortages may force Ukraine to only target one out of every five Russian missiles. Ukraine has already had to make difficult decisions regarding the placement of its limited air defense systems in rear and frontline areas, and Russian forces have recently taken efforts to strain Ukrainian air defenses both in rear population areas and along the frontline.[14] Russian

forces have recently experimented with strike packages with different means of penetrating and further pressuring the Ukrainian air defense umbrella.[15] Russian forces also utilized air strikes to tactical effect in the seizure of Avdiivka in mid-February and have intensified and improved their use of glide bombs along various sectors of the front.[16] A 60 percent reduction in Ukraine's ability to target - let alone shoot down - Russian missiles will further exacerbate these allocation issues. ISW continues to assess that the US remains the only immediate source of necessary air defense systems like Patriots.[17]

Russian forces have shown the capacity to adapt to fighting in Ukraine and will likely aim to scale lessons learned from the war in Ukraine to ongoing efforts to prepare the Russian military for a potential long-term confrontation with NATO. *Foreign Policy* reported on March 14 that Director-General of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service (EFIS) Kaupo Rosin told journalists that the Russian military is “turning into a learning organization” after the past two years of war in Ukraine and is currently resolving its battlefield problems within months.[18] Rosin stated that Estonian intelligence assesses that Russian forces have largely addressed battlefield issues with large amounts of manpower and materiel and that reforms relying on mass will likely result in a low-tech, Soviet-style Russian military with significant firepower and artillery.[19] Russian forces have addressed many tactical and operational challenges in Ukraine through their ability to field a greater amount of materiel and manpower than Ukrainian forces, notably seen with a reliance on manpower-intensive “meat assaults” to maintain a relatively high tempo of offensive operations.[20]

Notable Russian adaptations through mass are not the only adaptations that Russian forces have made in Ukraine, however, as the Russian military has demonstrated an uneven propensity for operational, tactical, and technological innovation and learning. The Russian defensive effort against the Ukrainian summer 2023 counteroffensive in western Zaporizhia Oblast was relatively successful largely due to the 58th Combined Arms Army's (Southern Military District [SMD]) ability to prepare for and conduct a doctrinally sound “elastic defense” that Russian forces had previously struggled to conduct in Ukraine.[21] That Russian defensive effort also successfully employed technological adaptations with electronic warfare (EW) systems and drones, and the 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) appears to have established some degree of effective reconnaissance-fire complex (RFC) to repel Ukrainian mechanized assaults.[22] It remains unclear to what degree the Russian military has internalized and disseminated these adaptations among different Russian force groupings in Ukraine, but the Russian military is attempting to adapt to the tactical and operational challenges of fighting in Ukraine at scale.[23] Ongoing Russian offensive operations suggest that the Russian command may have learned from previous operational campaign design mistakes, and the Russian military is employing select tactical-level adaptations on certain sectors of the front.[24] Continued widespread Russian tactical failures throughout Ukraine suggest that the Russian military command has struggled the most to internalize and disseminate adaptations at the tactical level, however.[25]

Rosin stated that Russia is currently attempting to restructure and expand in anticipation of a possible war with NATO in the next 10 years, and other Western intelligence agencies have previously made similar assessments.[26] ISW assesses that the ongoing recreation of the Leningrad and Moscow military districts (LMD and MMD) and efforts to create at least a dozen new formations are likely preparations for a potential future large-scale conventional war against NATO.[27] Russian forces will also likely attempt to ensure that the Russian military has widely scaled adaptations from its current conventional war in Ukraine to forces that it envisions potentially fighting a conventional war against NATO countries that do not have similar recent experiences to draw from.

Senior European officials stressed that a Russian victory in Ukraine would result in Russia posing a strategic threat to NATO security. European Union (EU) High Commissioner Josep Borrell stated on March 14 that a Russian victory in Ukraine that places Russian troops on the borders of Poland, Moldova, and the Baltic states would be an “unbearable” security cost to Europe and the United States.[28] Borrell noted that there is no alternative to NATO to ensure European security against a Russian threat and stated that Russia’s invasion acted as a “strategic wake-up call” for Europe to take more responsibility for its own defense capacities in the future.[29] French President Emmanuel Macron agreed with Borrell, stating that Russia’s war in Ukraine is “existential for our Europe and for France.”[30] Macron emphasized that a Russian victory in Ukraine would diminish European security and that if the situation in Ukraine deteriorates, Europe should “be ready to make sure that Russia never wins that war [in Ukraine].”[31] Director-General of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service (EFIS) Kaupo Rosin stated that a war between Russia and NATO is not inevitable but that the future of Europe heavily depends on the outcome of Russia’s war in Ukraine.[32]

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev questioned the sovereignty of Latvia, a NATO member state, and threatened Latvian President Edgars Rinkēvičs following Medvedev's March 14 call for the total elimination of Ukraine and Ukraine's absorption into Russia under Medvedev's “peace formula.” Medvedev threatened Rinkēvičs' life in a post on March 15 and claimed that Russia will hang Rinkēvičs alongside the current “Nazi” Ukrainian government for “wish[ing] for the death of Russia.”^[33] Medvedev also claimed that

Latvia is a "non-existent country." ISW previously noted that Medvedev's sardonic and extreme March 14 "peace formula" more explicitly outlines real and central elements of the Kremlin's ideology and stated war aims and justifications.[34] Medvedev's March 15 post is a similarly explicit presentation of the Kremlin's ideological framing of the war in Ukraine as part of Russia's longer-term conflict with the West and NATO that Putin has previously alluded to by claiming that Russia is fighting a geopolitical "Nazi" force gaining power in the West.[35] Medvedev's threats against Rinkēvičs and the current Ukrainian government follow previous Kremlin efforts to assert its right, contrary to international law, to enforce Russian federal law on officials of NATO member and former Soviet states for actions taken within the territory of their own countries where Russian courts have no jurisdiction, effectively denying the sovereignty of those states.[36]

French President Emmanuel Macron stated on March 15 that he is not ruling out sending Western troops to Ukraine but that the current situation does not require it.[37] Macron stated that anyone advocating for "limits" on aid to Ukraine is choosing defeat and that "to have peace in Ukraine, [Europe] must not be weak." Macron noted that if France decides to send French troops to Ukraine in the future, the responsibility for the decision will lie solely with Russia. Macron stated that the West is doing everything possible to help Ukraine and that there can be no lasting peace in Ukraine without recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty and internationally recognized borders, including Crimea. *Politico* previously reported that France is building an alliance of countries open to potentially sending Western troops to Ukraine.[38]

Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed continued limited raids from Ukrainian territory into Russia's border region on March 15. Putin accused "Ukrainian forces" - referring to likely elements of the all-Russian pro-Ukrainian Russian Volunteer Corps (RDK), Freedom of Russia Legion (LSR), and Siberian Battalion - of conducting the cross-border raids into Belgorod and Kursk oblasts on March 12 to 15 in order to disrupt Russia's ongoing presidential election and turn international attention to Ukraine.[39] Putin claimed that the Russian people will respond to these raids with "even greater unity" and that pro-Ukrainian forces will not intimidate Russia. Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), claimed that Russian border units and the Russian military continued to repel assaults by pro-Ukrainian forces near Spodaryushino and Kozinka, Belgorod Oblast and Tetkino, Kursk Oblast on March 14 and 15.[40] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of Russia's 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian Main Military Intelligence Directorate's [GRU]) are also defending against the attacks on the borders of Belgorod and Kursk oblasts.[41]

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian oil refinery in Kaluga Oblast, and recent Ukrainian strikes against oil refineries reportedly caused a spike in Russian domestic oil prices. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted a drone strike against the Perviy Zavod oil refinery near Kaluga City overnight on March 14 to 15 and that Russia uses this refinery for military purposes.[42] Geolocated footage published on March 15 shows a drone impact and a large explosion at the Perviy Zavod refinery, which is reportedly the largest petrochemical complex in Kaluga Oblast.[43] Russian news outlet *RBK* reported on March 13 that the price of Russian AI-95 grade oil exceeded 60,000 rubles (about \$648) per ton for the first time since September 2023 due to Ukrainian strikes on Russian oil refineries and that the price of other grades of Russian oil similarly increased on March 13.[44] *RBK* also reported that the shutdown of the two main oil processing units at the Ryazan oil refinery and another main oil processing unit at the Nizhny Novgorod refinery due to Ukrainian

strikes on March 13 may reduce Russian gas production by eight to nine percent and significantly impact the Russian oil market.[45]

Several Russians made limited attempts to disrupt the first day of voting in the Russian presidential election on March 15. Russian opposition outlet *Sever Realii* reported on March 15 that the Russian Investigative Committee opened eight criminal cases against Russians who committed arson and damaged ballot boxes at polling stations throughout Russia and in occupied Ukraine.[46] Russian sources amplified footage of several Russians pouring dye, ink, or paint into ballot boxes, and Russian officials reported that some Russians also poured paint on ballot counting devices and set polling stations on fire.[47] The Moscow Prosecutor's Office warned that residents should not attend "Noon Against Putin" protests outside polling stations at noon on March 17.[48] Isolated public protests against the Russian presidential election and Russian President Vladimir Putin are highly unlikely to impact the course or outcome of the Russian presidential election unless there is widespread public participation, which is also unlikely.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian forces will likely continue ongoing offensive efforts to destabilize Ukrainian defensive lines in Spring 2024 while also preparing for a forecasted new offensive effort in Summer 2024. The provision of Western security assistance will likely play a critical role in Ukraine's ability to hold territory now and to repel a new Russian offensive effort in the coming months.**
- **Well-provisioned Ukrainian forces have shown that they can prevent Russian forces from making even marginal gains during large-scale Russian offensive efforts, and there is no reason to doubt that Ukraine could further stabilize the frontline and prepare for repelling the reported Russian offensive effort this summer if materiel shortages abated.**
- **The threat of significant Russian gains in the coming months does not mean that there is no threat of Russian forces making such gains through offensive operations this spring.**
- **Pressing shortages in air defense systems and missiles will likely dramatically reduce Ukraine's ability to defend against Russian strikes both in rear and frontline areas in the coming weeks if not addressed rapidly.**
- **Russian forces have shown the capacity to adapt to fighting in Ukraine and will likely aim to scale lessons learned from the war in Ukraine to ongoing efforts to prepare the Russian military for a potential long-term confrontation with NATO.**
- **Senior European officials stressed that a Russian victory in Ukraine would result in Russia posing a strategic threat to NATO security.**
- **Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev questioned the sovereignty of Latvia, a NATO member state, and threatened Latvian President Edgars Rinkēvičs following Medvedev's March 14 call for the total elimination of Ukraine and Ukraine's absorption into Russia under Medvedev's "peace formula."**
- **French President Emmanuel Macron stated on March 15 that he is not ruling out sending Western troops to Ukraine but that the current situation does not require it.**

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed continued limited raids from Ukrainian territory into Russia's border region on March 15.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian oil refinery in Kaluga Oblast, and recent Ukrainian strikes against oil refineries reportedly caused a spike in Russian domestic oil prices.**
- **Several Russians made limited attempts to disrupt the first day of voting in the Russian presidential election on March 15.**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Kupyansk and Avdiivka and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Ukrainian Treatment of Prisoners of War Coordinating Headquarters Representative Petro Yatsenko stated that Russia has intensified its efforts to recruit military personnel from abroad.**
- **Ukrainian sources and Russian opposition media reported that occupation officials continue coercive efforts to artificially inflate voter turnout and perceptions of support for Russian President Vladimir Putin in occupied Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 15, 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.

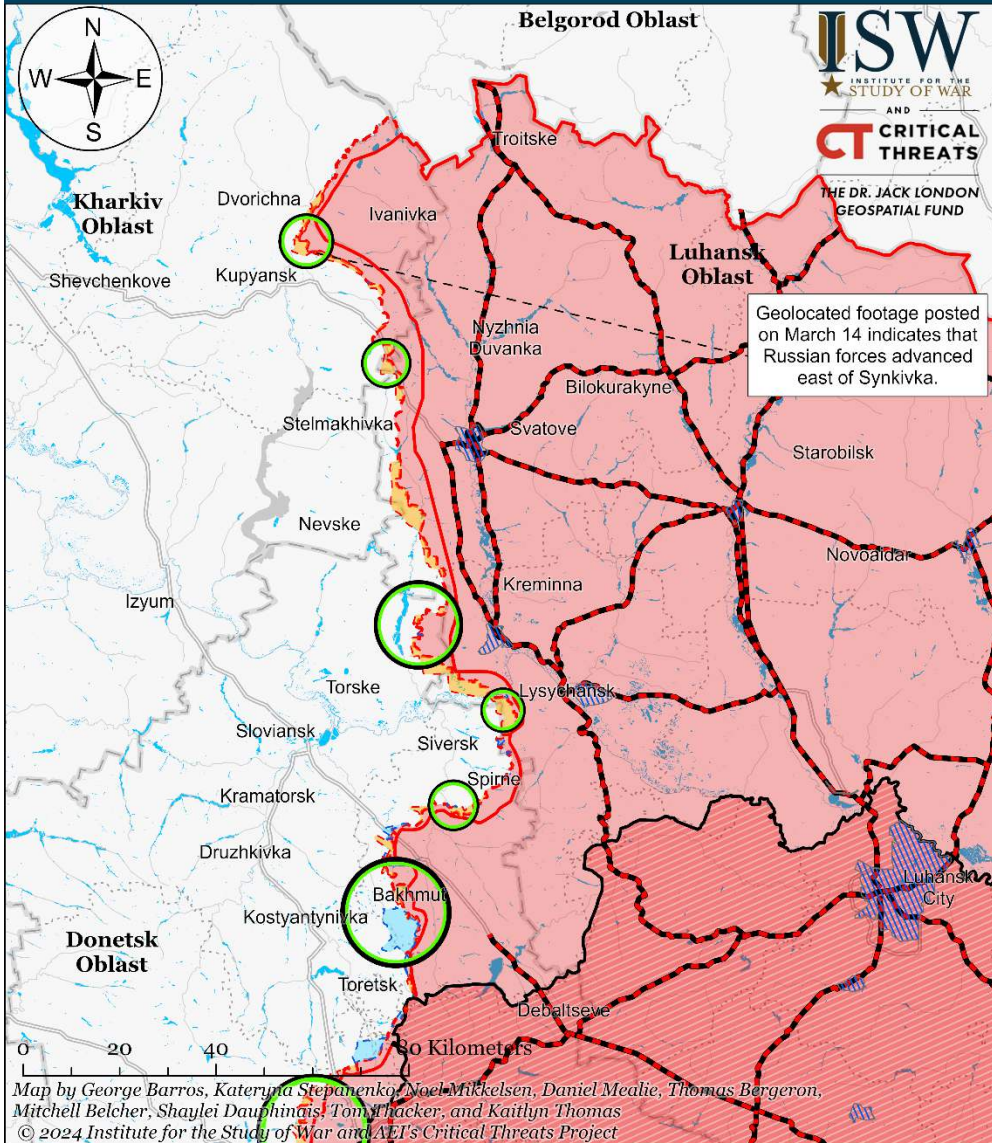
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety 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)

Russian forces recently marginally advanced northeast of Kupyansk amid continued positional fighting along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 15. Geolocated footage published on March 14 indicates that Russian forces recently marginally advanced east of Synkivka (northeast of Kupyansk).[49] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced 300 meters in an area east of Terny and Yampolivka (west of Kreminna) and that Russian forces also advanced in an unspecified area near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna), although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of Russian advances near Bilohorivka.[50] Positional engagements continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka and Pershotravneve; southeast of Kupyansk near Tabaivka; west of Kreminna near Terny and Yampolivka; southwest of Kreminna in the Serebryanske forest area; and near Bilohorivka.[51] Elements of the Russian 6th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] Army Corps [AC]) are reportedly operating near Spirne (south of Kreminna).[52]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of March 15, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 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 | |

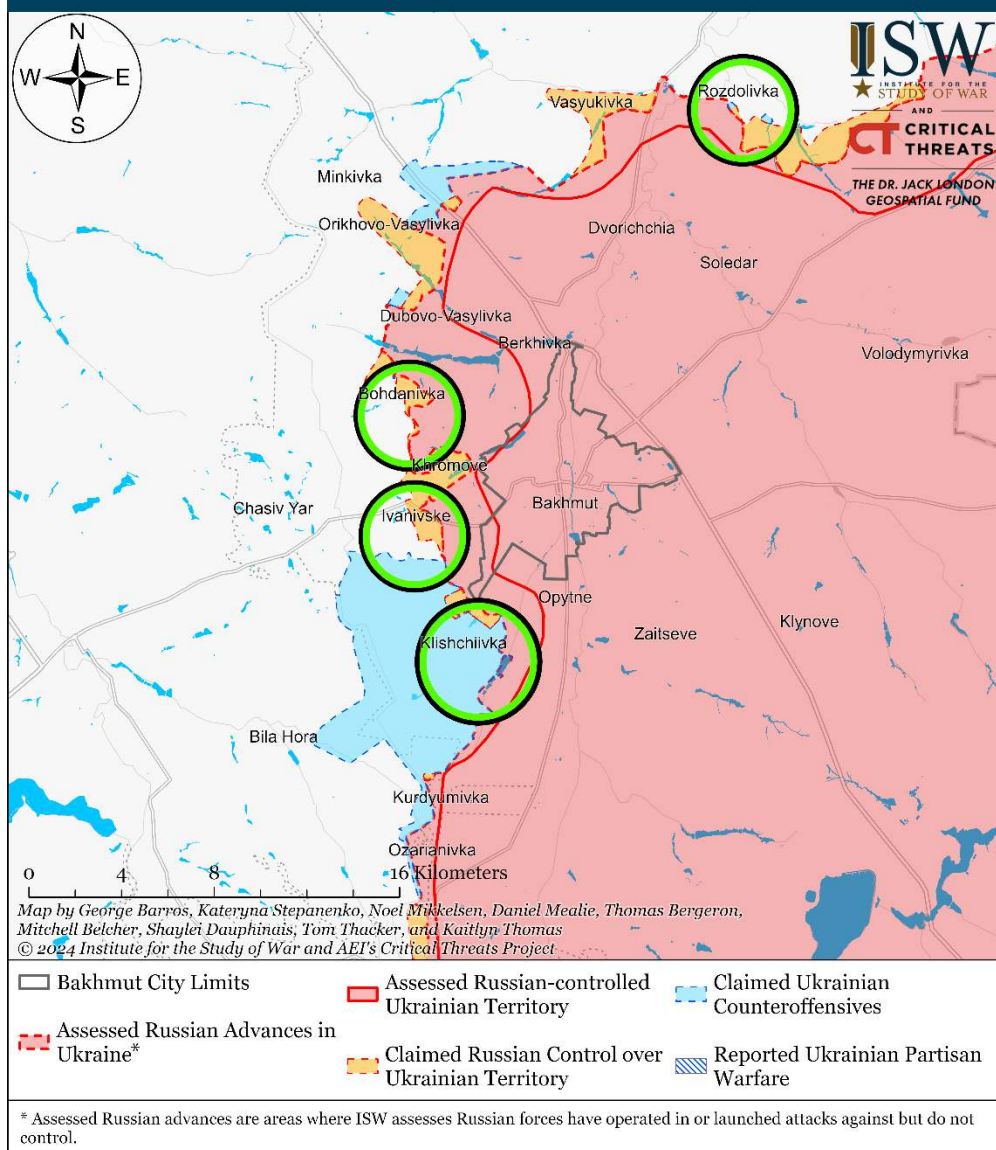
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: A Russian source claimed on March 15 that Russian forces advanced 300 meters in the area east of Yampolivka and Terny between March 13 and 14.

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

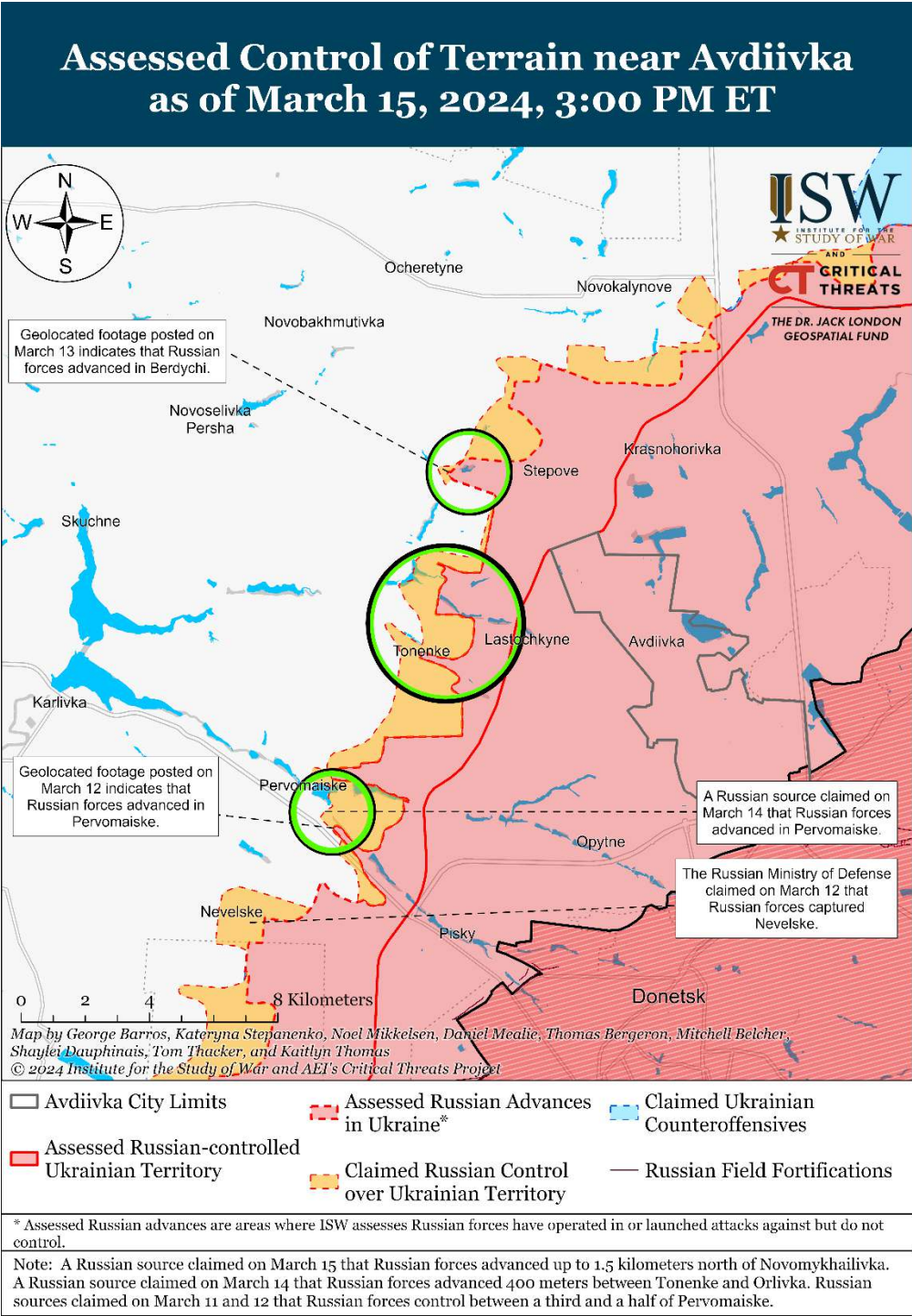
Positional fighting continued near Bakhmut on March 15, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. The commander of a Ukrainian battalion operating in the Bakhmut area stated that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces from unspecified positions in the Bakhmut direction and that Russian forces have not advanced on the outskirts of Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut) in the past week and a half.[53] Positional fighting continued northeast of Bakhmut near Bilohorivka (21km northeast of Bakhmut) and Rozdolivka; northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka; and south of Bakhmut near Niu York.[54] Elements of the Russian 106th Airborne (VDV) Division are operating north of Soledar (northeast of Bakhmut), and elements of the 238th Artillery Brigade (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are operating near Horlivka (south of Bakhmut).[55]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of March 15, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Avdiivka amid continued positional fighting in the area on March 15. Geolocated footage published on March 13 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced westward within Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka).[56] Russian milbloggers claimed on March 14 and 15 that Russian forces also recently advanced up to 400 meters in depth between Orlivka and Tonenke (both west of Avdiivka) and within Pervomaiske (southwest of Avdiivka), although ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims.[57] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces control heights northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka and Ocheretyne that complicate Russian advances in the area and that Ukrainian mechanized operations near Berdychi also pose challenges to attacking Russian forces.[58] Positional fighting continued northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka, Berdychi, and Semenivka; west of Avdiivka near Orlivka and Tonenke; and

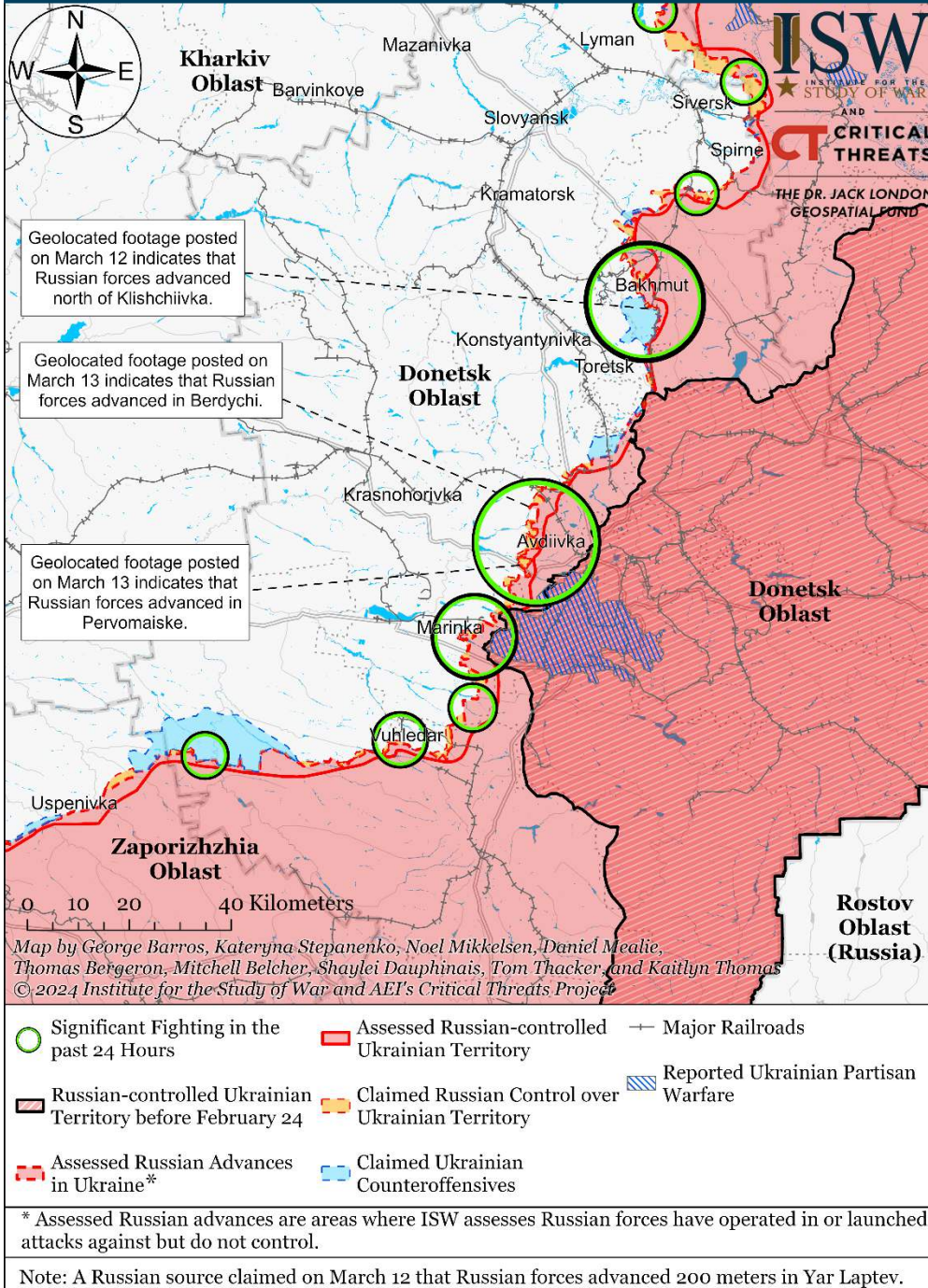
southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske and Nevelske.[59] Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces are conducting assaults with small infantry groups in the Avdiivka direction.[60] Elements of the Russian 1st Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People’s Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC]) are operating in the Avdiivka area.[61]



Positional fighting continued west and southwest of Donetsk City on March 15, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced up to

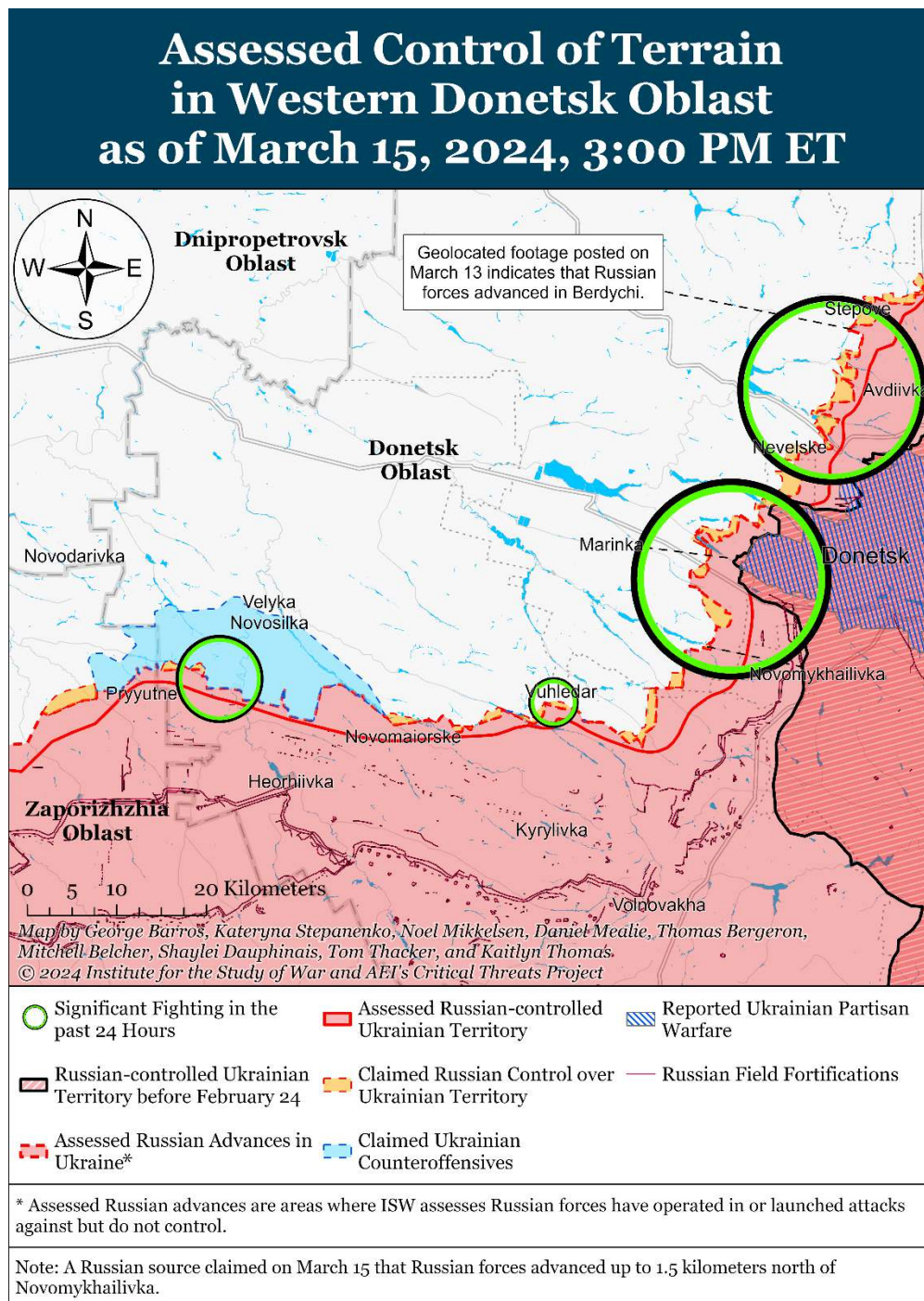
1.5 kilometers in depth north of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City), although ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[62] Positional fighting continued west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka, Pobieda, and Vodyane.[63] Elements of the Russian 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, SMD) are reportedly attacking near Pobieda, and elements of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Battalion of the 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th AC, Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating near Novomykhailivka.[64]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 15, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



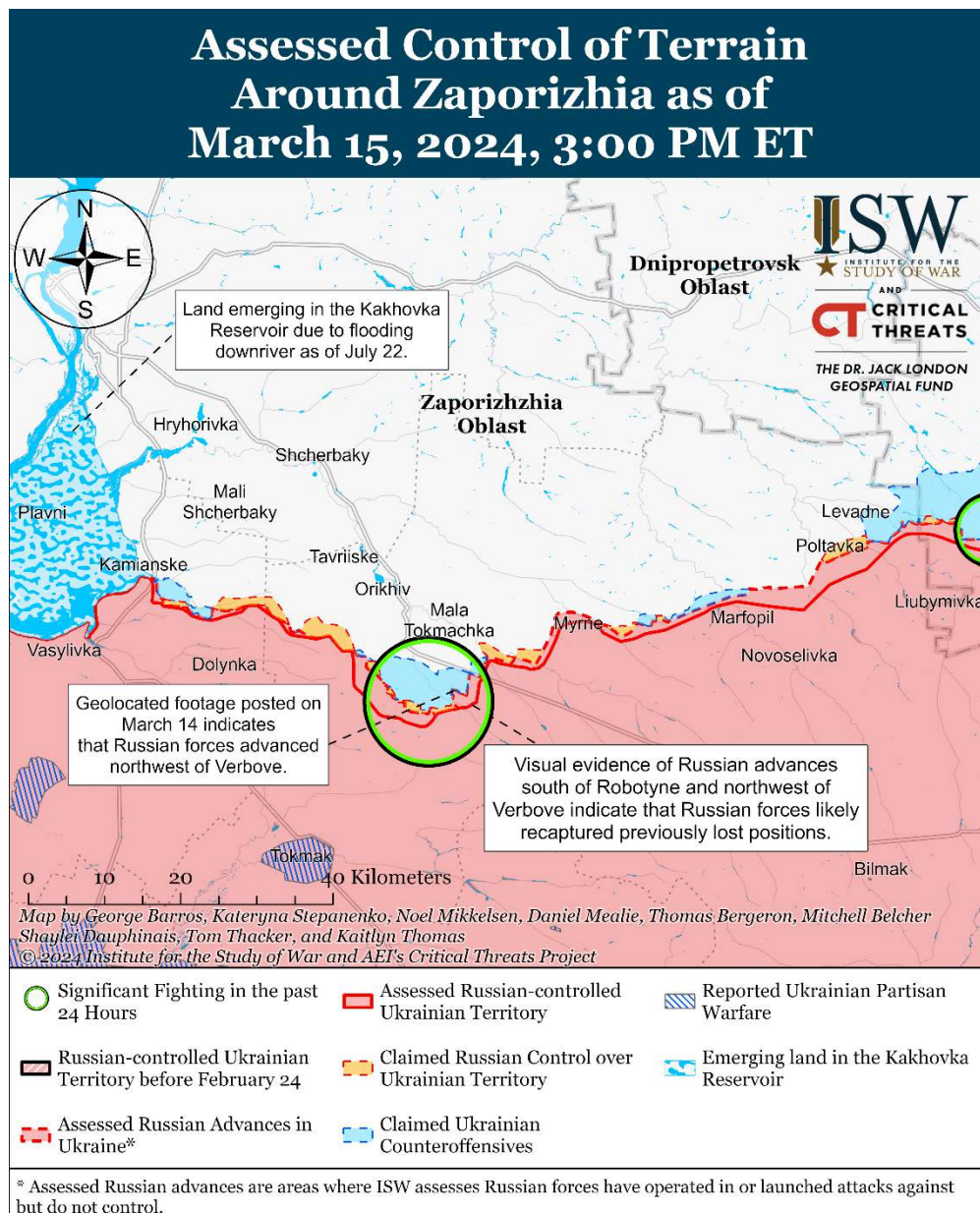
Positional fighting continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on March 15. Positional fighting occurred southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Novodonetske, Shevchenko, and Volodymyrivka and south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske and Urozhaine.[65] Elements of the Russian 3rd

Motorized Rifle Battalion of the 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, EMD) are reportedly operating near Staromayorske and elements of the 26th Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Protection Regiment (36th CAA, EMD) are reportedly operating near Volodymyrivka.[66] Aviation elements of the Russian 11th Air Force and Air Defense Army (Russian Aerospace Forces [VKS] and EMD) reportedly conducted glide bomb strikes near Vuhledar.[67]



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

Russian forces recently made confirmed advances in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Geolocated footage published on March 14 indicates that elements of the Russian 247th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) recently advanced north and northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[68] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued near Robotyne and Verbove.[69] Elements of the Russian 38th Motorized Rifle Brigade (35th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) and elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhzhia direction.[70]



Ukrainian forces maintain positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast near Krynyk as of March 15 amid continued positional engagements in the area.[71]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 15, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Ukrainian outlet *Defense News* reported on March 14 that the Kakhovka Reservoir is refilling with water again, which will weaken the soil and prevent military equipment, including amphibious vehicles, from traversing it.[72] *Defense News* stated that satellite imagery between October 2023 and March 2024 shows that the Kakhovka Reservoir is filling with water from melted snow and that the biggest water accumulations are east of Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast. The Kakhovka Reservoir significantly

dried up after Russian forces destroyed the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP) dam in June 2023.[73]

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 14-15 and during the day on March 15. The Ukrainian Air Force stated that Russian forces launched 27 Shahed-136/131 drones overnight from occupied Crimea and Kursk Oblast and that Ukrainian forces shot down all 27 drones over Kirovohrad, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Khmelnytskyi, Vinnytsia, and Kyiv oblasts.[74] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces struck Kharkiv and Donetsk oblasts with seven S-300/400 missiles, Poltava Oblast with a Kh-59 missile, and residential buildings in Vinnytsia Oblast with Shahed drones on the night of March 14-15.[75] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian Iskander-M ballistic missiles struck civil infrastructure in Odesa City, killing at least 19 Ukrainian civilians and wounding at least 70.[76]

Ukrainian Kharkiv Oblast Prosecutor's Office Head Oleksandr Filchakov stated on March 14 that Russian forces have struck six Ukrainian oblasts with 50 North Korean missiles since December 2023.[77] Filchakov reported that North Korean missiles are of low quality with an imperfect control system and a flight range of about 700 kilometers. Filchakov stated that Ukrainian forces have observed many of the North Korean missiles exploding in the air before striking their intended targets.

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

Ukrainian Treatment of Prisoners of War Coordinating Headquarters Representative Petro Yatsenko stated that Russia has intensified its effort to recruit military personnel from abroad.[78] Yatsenko stated that Russia's coercive force generation campaign targeting Russian prisoners and former Wagner Group personnel has run out of force generation capacity, so Russia has intensified recruiting in states with "difficult economic situation[s]." Yatsenko stated that the number of Cuban citizens fighting for Russia in Ukraine is increasing because Russia feels confident in its relations with Cuba and that many foreigners from India, Africa, Nepal, Serbia, Latin America, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq are serving in the Russian military.

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

Russian forces continue efforts to develop their drone operation capabilities. Russian Center for Integrated Unmanned Solutions General Director Dmitry Kuzyakin stated that Russian forces are developing a new military specialty for first-person view (FPV) drone operators and that the development of new drone technology can lead to the emergence of many military specialties.[79] The Russian State Commission on Radio Frequencies told Russian state-affiliated news outlet *Izvestia* that it has proposed changes that would allow Russian drone operators to use special radio frequencies to communicate with aircraft crews as drone operators currently use standard frequencies that are often overloaded, causing issues.[80] *Izvestia* reported that these new frequencies will allow Russia to increase its usage of drones for civilian transportation, and this change may also benefit Russian forces as they attempt to strengthen their drone operations.[81]

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

Note: ISW will be publishing its coverage of Ukrainian defense industrial efforts on a weekly basis in the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. ISW will continue to track developments in Ukrainian defense industrial efforts daily and will refer to these efforts in assessments within the daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment and other ISW products when necessary.

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)

Note: ISW will be publishing coverage of activities in Russian-occupied areas twice a week in the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. ISW will continue to track activities in Russian-occupied areas daily and will refer to these activities in assessments within the daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment and other ISW products when necessary.

Ukrainian sources and Russian opposition media reported that occupation officials continue coercive efforts to artificially inflate voter turnout and perceptions of support for Russian President Vladimir Putin in occupied Ukraine. Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated on March 14 that Putin tasked Russian and occupation officials with falsifying a 75 percent voter turnout and 75 percent level of support for Putin in occupied Ukraine but noted that occupation officials will likely claim that a higher percentage of residents (85 percent) voted and supported Putin in order to please Putin.[82] Skibitsky stated that the Kremlin will use these numbers to falsely demonstrate support for Putin in occupied Ukraine.[83] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii (IStories)* reported on March 13 that Russian authorities have registered 4.5 million voters in occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts despite estimates that only 2.5 million adults currently live in occupied Ukraine.[84] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on March 13 and 14 that occupation authorities are forcing an estimated 100,000 Russian workers and Central Asia migrants living in occupied Ukraine to vote there in order to artificially inflate voter turnout numbers.[85] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that occupation authorities are also conducting door-to-door visits and listing residents who refuse to vote as "disloyal." [86] Occupation authorities are holding propaganda events in support of Putin's election campaign and promising pensioners and university-age students, including those in Russia, monetary benefits if they vote in occupied Ukraine.[87] Ukrainian partisan organization Yellow Ribbon stated on March 15 that occupation authorities are forcefully transporting people to polling stations in occupied Henichesk, Kherson Oblast.[88]

Ukrainian partisans reportedly detonated an improved explosive device (IED) in occupied Kherson Oblast during voting for the Russian presidential election on March 15. Kherson Oblast occupation election commission and occupation administration head Vladimir Saldo claimed that Ukrainian "provocateurs" detonated an IED near a polling station in occupied Skadovsk, Kherson Oblast but that

the explosion did not cause any casualties.[89] Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko also reported explosions in Skadovsk on March 15.[90]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian authorities attempted to portray the first official day of voting in the Russian presidential election as having a significant turnout in order to create a veneer of legitimate and meaningful elections. The Russian Central Election Commission (CEC) claimed that just under 29 percent of all eligible voters had cast their ballots by 2000 Moscow time on March 15.[91] Russian state news outlet *RIA Novosti* cited an interlocutor as reporting that the voter turnout in Belgorod Oblast exceeded 50 percent despite the ongoing cross-border raids in the oblast.[92] Russian opposition outlet *SOTA* reported that a local branch of Russian state television channel *Rossiya-1* in Belgorod Oblast reported a 3.92 percent turnout by 1345 Moscow time on March 15 and an implausible increase to 52 percent by 1500.[93] CEC Chairperson Ella Pamfilova claimed that more than 333,600 international observers observed the first day of the election but that various actors attempted to interfere in the elections, including an alleged 10,000 cyberattacks against the virtual voting portal.[94] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported that there were almost no independent observers at polling stations throughout Russia and that most of the observers are affiliated with the Kremlin and Russian Public Chambers.[95]

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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