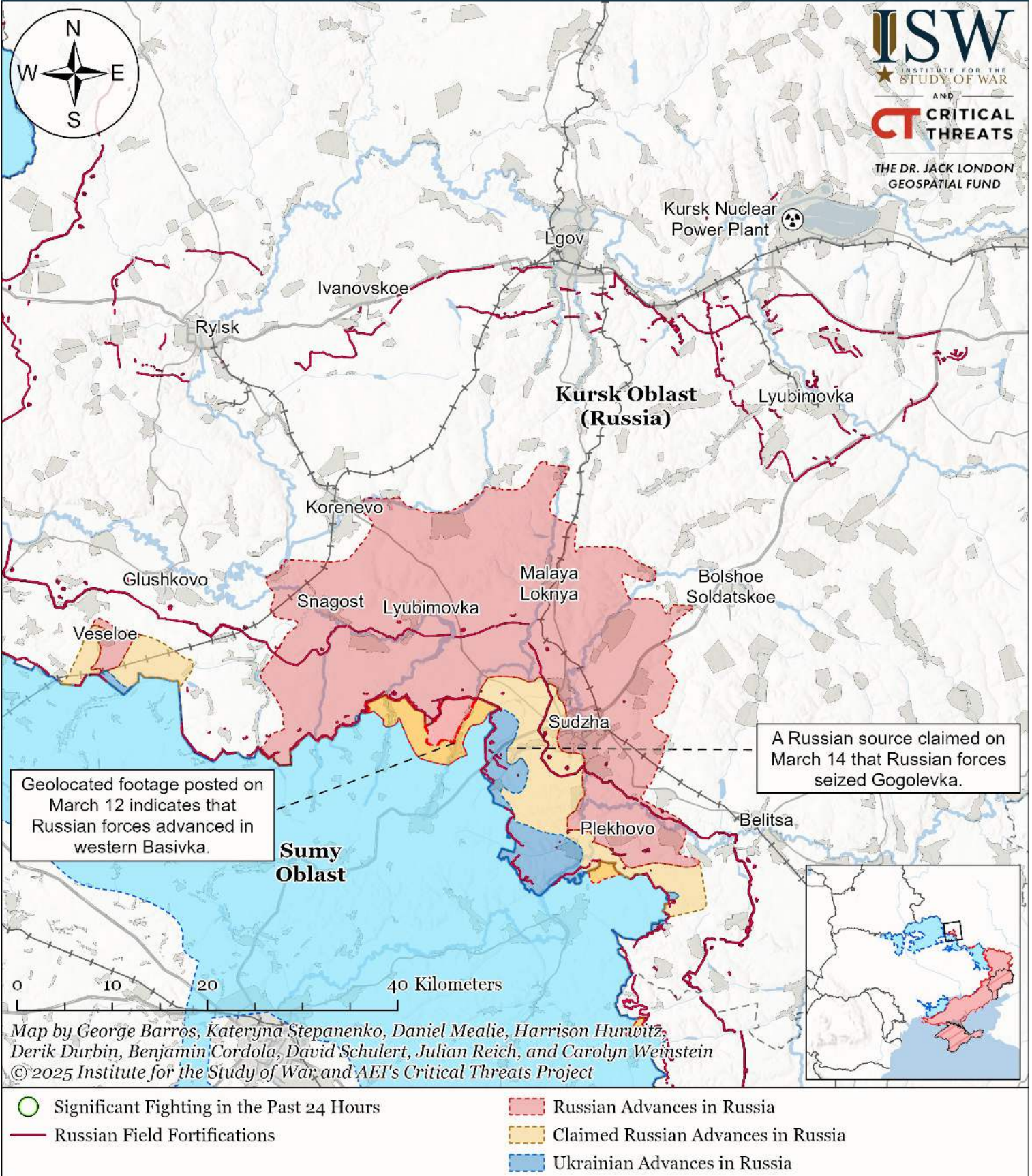


# Assessed Control of Terrain in the Kursk Direction

## March 15, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



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March 15, 2025, 3:15pm ET

*PDFs will temporarily be uploaded without images, due to a website issue. Once resolved, we will resume normal PDF formatting and update the incomplete content. We apologize for the inconvenience.*

**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:00 am ET on March 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Russian milbloggers and Ukrainian officials continue to deny Russian President Vladimir Putin's unsubstantiated claim that Russian forces have encircled a significant number of Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast.** Russian milbloggers published maps on March 14 and 15 showing Russian and Ukrainian positions in Kursk Oblast that do not indicate Russian forces have encircled Ukrainian forces, and two Russian milbloggers explicitly denied Putin's claim that Russian forces encircled a significant number of Ukrainian forces in the area on March 13 and 14.[1] One milblogger characterized Putin's claims as a narrative intended to influence US President Donald Trump ahead of peace negotiations.[2] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted that Russian forces are unsuccessfully attempting to encircle Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast, that no encirclement currently exists, and stated that Putin is attempting to delay discussion of the US-Ukrainian 30-day ceasefire proposal by spreading these claims.[3] Independent Ukrainian sources also denied Putin's claims about Russian encirclements of Ukrainian forces and noted that Ukrainian forces maintain the ability to maneuver from their remaining positions in Kursk Oblast despite a difficult tactical situation.[4] ISW has still not observed any Russian milblogger claims or geolocated footage suggesting that Russian forces have encircled Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast. Ukrainian forces appear to maintain egress routes across the international border from their positions in Kursk Oblast as of this publication.

**Russian forces continued offensive operations in Kursk Oblast but have not completely pushed Ukrainian forces out of the area as of this publication.** Geolocated footage published on March 12 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in western Basivka (northeast of Sumy City in Sumy Oblast).[5] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed on March 15 that Russian forces seized Zaoleshenka (immediately west of Sudzha) and Rubanshchina (west of Sudzha), but ISW has not observed evidence to assess that Russian forces have seized the entirety of these settlements.[6] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces seized Gogolevka (west of Sudzha) and are clearing Guyevo (south of Sudzha).[7] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces maintain positions near Oleshnya and Gornal (both southwest of Sudzha).[8] Russian forces continued attacking near Rubanshchina, Gogolevka, and Guyevo.[9] Elements of the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade are reportedly operating near Gogolevka, and elements of the 810th Naval

Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla) are reportedly operating near Guyevo.[10]

**Ukrainian officials expressed concern about Russian ground operations in northern Sumy Oblast but doubt Russia's ability to conduct an effective concerted offensive operation against Sumy City.** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that the Russian military is accumulating forces along Ukraine's eastern border, indicating Russia's interest in "striking" Sumy Oblast.[11] Zelensky may be referring to Russian efforts to advance far enough into northern Sumy Oblast to get within artillery range of Sumy City. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that Russian forces are preparing for more "active actions" in the Sumy Oblast border area and to "strike" Sumy Oblast but not conduct an offensive operation against Sumy City.[12] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian assault groups and sabotage and renaissance groups continue to operate along the Sumy Oblast border and are attempting to advance into Ukraine.[13]

**The Kremlin is likely preparing to intensify a narrative that accuses Ukrainian forces of war crimes in Kursk Oblast in an attempt to discredit the Ukrainian military, erode Western support for Ukraine, and spoil or delay straightforward discussions about the 30-day ceasefire that US President Donald Trump proposed to Putin.** Russian President Vladimir Putin, other facets of the Russian government, Russian state media, and pro-Kremlin mouthpieces have recently intensified claims accusing Ukrainian forces of committing war crimes in Kursk Oblast during their seven-month incursion. Putin asked on March 13, in reaction to the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal, whether Russia should let Ukrainian forces leave Kursk Oblast "after they committed a lot of crimes against civilians" and reiterated claims on March 14 that Ukrainian forces committed "terrorism" in Kursk Oblast.[14] The Russian Investigative Committee announced on March 12 that it is opening investigations into alleged Ukrainian war crimes in areas of Kursk Oblast that endured heavy fighting and announced the conviction of two Ukrainian soldiers for alleged "terrorism" and "war crimes" in Kursk Oblast on March 14.[15] Russian ultranationalist voices, including those with Kremlin affiliations, have been amplifying Putin's statements and Russian state media claims accusing Ukrainian forces of war crimes, including executing civilians in Kursk Oblast, more frequently in recent days.[16] Russian state media has amplified pro-Kremlin voices, including Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexander Khinshtein, accusing Ukrainian forces of war crimes in Kursk Oblast since the start of the incursion in August 2024 but has intensified these efforts since February 2025.[17] These claims are unsubstantiated.

Putin likely intends to use this narrative falsely portraying Ukrainian forces as brutal war criminals - as the Kremlin did in late 2021 and 2022 to justify Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine - to spoil or delay discussions about a 30-day ceasefire, especially when contrasted with Putin's efforts to portray himself as a merciful leader.[18] Russian ultranationalist voices used Putin's and Russian state media's allegations of Ukrainian war crimes to support their calls for Russia to reject any ceasefire in Ukraine whatsoever and to justify the brutal treatment of Ukrainian forces on the battlefield.[19] ISW has frequently reported on the sharp uptick of confirmed Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the battlefield in 2024 and early 2025 likely under orders from the Russian military

command, and ISW observed a report of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs near Sudzha on March 13.[20]

**Russian forces conducted drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of March 14 to 15, including conducting their third double-tap strike against Ukraine in the past week.** The Ukrainian Air Force reported on March 15 that Russian forces launched two Iskander-M ballistic missiles from Kursk Oblast and 178 Shahed and decoy drones from Oryol, Bryansk, and Kursk cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[21] Ukrainian forces downed 130 drones over Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, Kirovohrad, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Odesa, and Mykolaiv oblasts and 38 drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that two ballistic missiles struck Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, and Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones struck civilian and critical infrastructure in Chernihiv and Sumy cities and Chornomorsk, Odesa Oblast.[22] Ukraine's State Emergency Service reported on March 15 that Russian forces conducted three drone strikes each one hour apart on a residential area of Bohoduhiv, Kharkiv Oblast, likely in an effort to injure and kill Ukrainian first responders in the area.[23] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces conducted double tap strikes against Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast with missiles on the night of March 11 to 12 and a hospital in Zolochiv, Kharkiv Oblast with drones on the night of March 13 to 14.[24]

**Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appointed the official Ukrainian delegation to "engage with Ukraine's international partners" in the negotiation process to end the war on March 15.** Ukrainian Presidential Office Head Andriy Yermak will lead the delegation, and the delegation will also include Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha, Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, and Deputy Presidential Administration Head Pavlo Palisa.[25] This is the same delegation who attended the US-Ukrainian meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on March 11.[26]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Russian milbloggers and Ukrainian officials continue to deny Russian President Vladimir Putin's unsubstantiated claim that Russian forces have encircled a significant number of Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations in Kursk Oblast but have not completely pushed Ukrainian forces out of the area as of this publication.**
- **Ukrainian officials expressed concern about Russian ground operations in northern Sumy Oblast but doubt Russia's ability to conduct an effective concerted offensive operation against Sumy City.**
- **The Kremlin is likely preparing to intensify a narrative that accuses Ukrainian forces of war crimes in Kursk Oblast in an attempt to discredit the Ukrainian military, erode Western support for Ukraine, and spoil or delay straightforward discussions about the 30-day ceasefire that US President Donald Trump proposed to Putin.**

- **Russian forces conducted drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of March 14 to 15, including conducting their third double-tap strike against Ukraine in the past week.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appointed the official Ukrainian delegation to "engage with Ukraine's international partners" in the negotiation process to end the war on March 15.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Chasiv Yar and Pokrovsk.**

***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.***

- Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of three subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – 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
- Significant Activity in Belarus

### **Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation**

***See topline text for reports of the situation in Kursk Oblast and northern Sumy Oblast.***

Ukrainian forces reportedly attempted to strike a Russian oil refinery in Volgograd Oblast on the night of March 14 to 15. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* geolocated footage on March 15 showing a fire after a reported drone strike to near Sarepta railway station south of Volgograd City in Krasnoarmeysky Raion.[27] A Russian source claimed that the drone strike caused a fire near an oil refinery.[28]

Volgograd Oblast Governor Andrei Bocharov claimed on March 15 that Russian forces downed drones over southern Volgograd City and Kotovsky, Gorodishchensky, and Kalachevsky raions of Volgograd Oblast.[29] Bocharov claimed that falling drone debris caused a fire in Krasnoarmeysky Raion.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on March 15 that Ukraine has successfully conducted a strike using the Ukrainian "Long Neptune" missile.[30] Zelensky noted that the missile has a one-thousand-kilometer range. Open-source X (formerly Twitter) users speculated that Ukrainian forces may have used a modified long-range Neptune missile to strike the Tuapse oil refinery in Krasnodar Krai on the night of March 13 to 14.[31]

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

#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Kharkiv Oblast (Russian objective: Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City)**

**Russian forces continued limited ground attacks northeast of Kharkiv City near Vovchansk on March 14 and 15 but did not make confirmed advances.[32]**

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced into a forest belt on the southwestern outskirts of Vovchansk.[33]

Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Pavlo Shamshyn and a soldier in a Ukrainian battalion operating in the Kharkiv direction reported that Russian forces are attempting to create underground passages to support continued attacks in the Vovchansk direction.[34]

#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

**Russian forces continued limited offensive operations in the Kupyansk direction on March 15 but did not make confirmed advances.**

Unconfirmed claims: Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported that Ukrainian forces recently pushed Russian forces from Fyholivka (northeast of Kupyansk).[35]

Russian forces continued ground attacks northeast of Kupyansk near the international border near Kamyanka and Krasne Pershe and east of Kupyansk near Petropavlivka on March 14 and 15.[36] A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Fyholivka.[37]

**Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Borova direction on March 15 but did not make confirmed advances.**

Russian forces continued ground attacks northeast of Borova near Zahryzove, east of Borova near Kopanky, and southeast of Borova near Novovodyane and Novoyehorivka on March 14 and 15.[38]

The commander of a Ukrainian assault battalion operating in the Borova direction reported that Russian forces have resumed offensive operations in the Borova direction after a two-week (since about March 1) lull due to significant personnel losses.[39] The commander stated that 20 to 25 Russian personnel attack per day in the Borova direction.

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 752nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (3rd Motorized Rifle Division, 20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) and 16th Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff's Main Directorate [GRU]) are reportedly operating in the Svatove (east of Borova) direction.[40]

**Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Lyman direction but did not make confirmed advances.**

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russia forces advanced west of Balka Zhuravka (formerly Nevske) and northwest of Novosadove (both northeast of Lyman).[41]

Russian forces attacked north of Lyman towards Nove; northeast of Lyman near Balka Zhuravka, Yampolivka, and Ivanivka; and east of Lyman near Torske and the Serebryanske forest area on March 14 and 15.[42]

**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

**Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Siversk direction on March 15 but did not advance.**

Russian forces attacked north of Siversk near Dronivka; northeast of Siversk near Bilohorivka and Hryhorivka; east of Siversk near Verkhokamyanske; and southwest of Siversk near Ivano-Darivka on March 14 and 15.[43]

**Russian forces recently advanced in the Chasiv Yar direction.**

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on March 10 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in northern Chasiv Yar.[44]

Russian forces attacked near Chasiv Yar itself, northeast of Chasiv Yar near Orikhovo-Vasylivka, south of Chasiv Yar near Stupochky, and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Kurdyumivka on March 14 and 15.[45]

**Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk direction.**

Assessed Ukrainian advances: Geolocated footage published on March 14 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced along Mykhaila Hrushevskoho Street in northern Toretsk.[46]

Russian forces attacked near Toretsk itself, northeast of Toretsk near Dachne and Druzhba, and southwest of Toretsk near Sukha Balka on March 14 and 15.[47] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces counterattacked in the Toretsk direction.[48]

A Russian milblogger claimed on March 14 that frontline Russian commanders in the Toretsk direction are submitting false reports about premature Russian advances in the area.[49]

Order of Battle: Elements of the 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment and 163rd Tank Regiment (both of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating in Toretsk.[50]

**Russian forces recently advanced in the Pokrovsk direction.**

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on March 14 indicates that Russian forces advanced along Tsentralna Street in eastern Pishchane and along Lysohirska Street in western Shevchenko (both south of Pokrovsk).[51]

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed on March 15 that Russian forces advanced south of Yasenove (southwest of Pokrovsk) in an area up to 3.1 kilometers wide and 1.5 kilometers deep.[52] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced in southern Shevchenko and consolidated positions as Russian forces attempt to recapture the settlement.[53]

Russian forces continued attacking near Pokrovsk itself; northeast of Pokrovsk near Tarasivka; east of Pokrovsk near Vodyane Druhe, Oleksandropil, Novotoretske, Yelyzavetivka, Svyrydonivka, and Promin; southeast of Pokrovsk near Hrodivka and Lysivka; south of Pokrovsk near Shevchenko, Pishchane, and Novopavlivka; west of Pokrovsk towards Serhiivka; and southwest of Pokrovsk near Kotlyne, Udachne, Uspenivka, Kotlyarivka, Nadiivka, and Bohdanivka on March 14 and 15.[54] A Russian milblogger claimed that fighting in the Pokrovsk direction is characterized by Ukrainian counterattacks.[55]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 506th Motorized Rifle Regiment (27th Motorized Rifle Division, 2nd CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) are reportedly operating near Uspenivka and elements of the "Vega" Spetsnaz Detachment (24th Guards Spetsnaz Brigade, Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff [GRU]) are reportedly operating in the Pokrovsk direction.[56]

### **Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kurakhove direction on March 15 but did not make any confirmed advances.**

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed on March 15 that Russian forces advanced in an area up to 4.5 kilometers wide and 1.5 kilometers deep west of Rozdolne (southwest of Kurakhove).[57] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in an area up to 1.5 kilometers wide and 500 meters deep near Rozlyv (southwest of Kurakhove).[58]

Russian forces attacked west of Kurakhove near Kostyantynopil and Andriivka and southwest of Kurakhove near Rozlyv on March 14 and 15.[59] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Kostyantynopil.[60]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 14th Spetsnaz Brigade (GRU) are reportedly operating near Kostyantynopil.[61]

### **Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Velyka Novosilka direction on March 15 but did not make any confirmed advances.**

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed on March 15 that Russian forces seized positions on the outskirts of Vesele (northwest of Velyka Novosilka) and advanced in an area up to one kilometer deep and two kilometers wide near Shevchenko (northwest of Velyka Novosilka).[62] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced toward Otradne (north of Velyka Novosilka) and up to Vesele and continue to advance along the Mokri Yaly River and south of the Vovcha River.[63] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in an area up to 1.8 kilometers wide and one kilometer deep west of Skudne (northwest of Velyka Novosilka).[64]



Russian forces attacked north of Velyka Novosilka near Dniproenerhiya; northwest of Velyka Novosilka near Burlatske, Shevchenko, and Pryvilne; west of Velyka Novosilka near Vilne Pole; and southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Novopil on March 14 and 15.[65] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked in the direction of Komar (north of Velyka Novosilka) and Vilne Pole and near Burlatske, Dniproenerhiya, and Shevchenko.[66] Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Pryvilne and Novosilka (west of Velyka Novosilka).[67]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating near Vilne Pole.[68] Elements of the Russian 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th CAA, EMD) and 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) are reportedly operating near Velyka Novosilka and Dniproenerhiya.[69]

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

#### **Russian forces continued intensified ground attacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast on March 15 but did not advance.**

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in the outskirts of Shcherbaky and Maly Shcherbaky (northwest of Robotyne) and that elements of the Russian 247th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) seized Pyatykhatky (west of Shcherbaky) and are advancing towards Stepove (north of Pyatykhatky) and Kamyanske (northwest of Pyatykhatky).[70]

Russian forces attacked northwest of Robotyne near Stepove, Shcherbaky, and Pyatykhatky on March 14 and 15.[71]

Russian forces continued attacks in the Kherson direction on March 15 but did not advance.[72]

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

See topline text.

### **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)**

Nothing significant to report.

### **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.*

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

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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