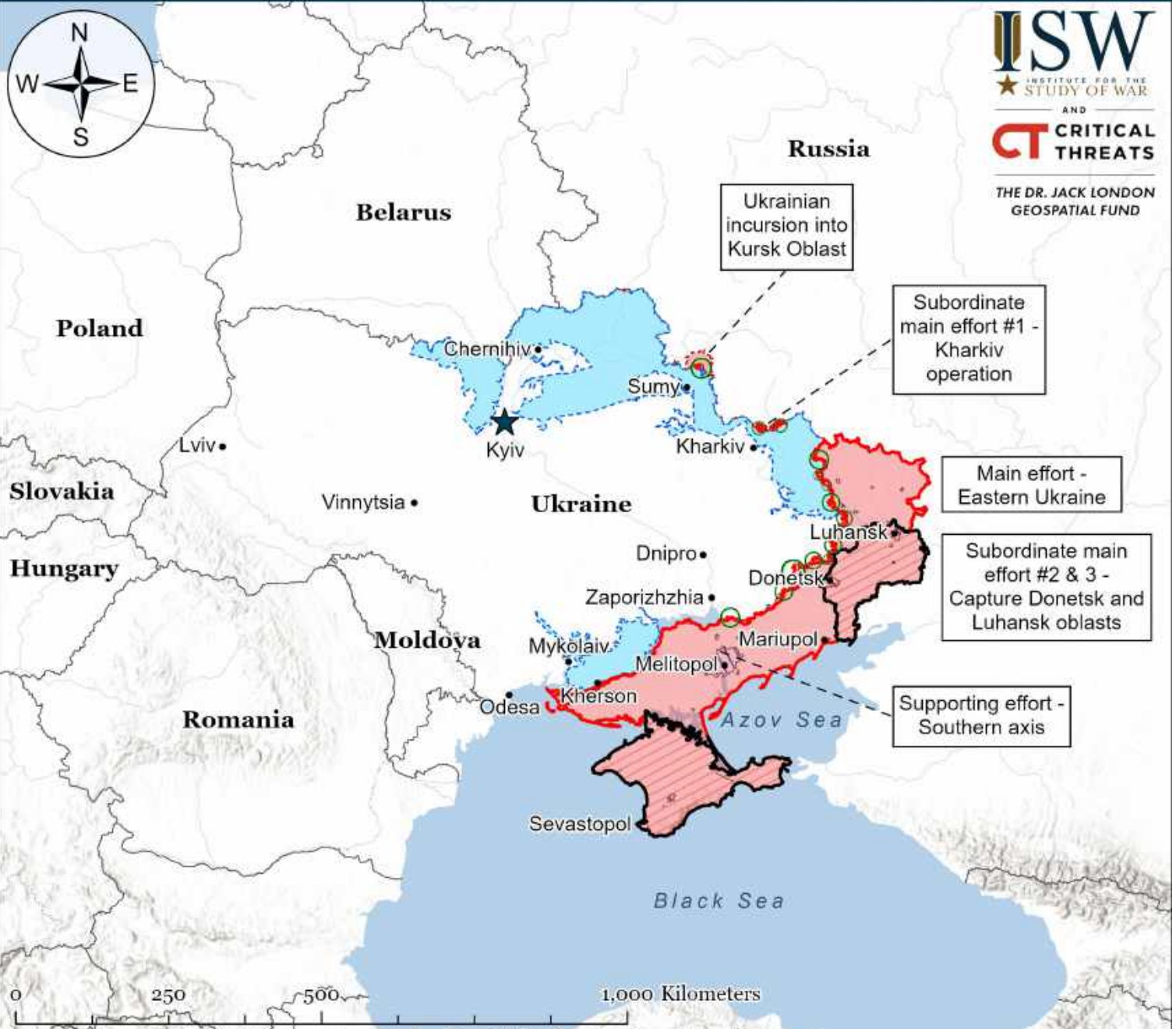


# Assessed Control of Terrain in the Russo-Ukrainian War

## March 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



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Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Daniel Mealie, Harrison Hurwitz, Derik Durbin, Benjamin Cordola, David Schulert, Julian Reich, and Carolyn Weinstein  
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- |                                                                |                                                  |                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Significant Fighting in the Past 24 Hours                      | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory | Russian Advances in Russia         |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before 24 February 2022 | Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives              | Claimed Russian Advances in Russia |
| Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory                | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare              | Ukrainian Advances in Russia       |
| Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine                           |                                                  |                                    |

Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 21, 2025, 7:15 pm ET

**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on March 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**The Kremlin is weaponizing ongoing ceasefire negotiations and deliberately misrepresenting the status and terms of a future ceasefire agreement in order to delay and undermine negotiations for a settlement to the war.** The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on March 21 that Ukrainian forces blew up the Sudzha gas distribution station in Kursk Oblast while withdrawing on the night of March 20 to 21 in order to discredit Russian President Vladimir Putin's "peace initiatives" and to provoke Russia.<sup>[1]</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff denied the Russian MoD's claim and stated that Russian forces shelled the station, causing a fire.<sup>[2]</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff warned that Russian authorities are attempting to mislead the international community and discredit Ukraine. Footage published on March 21 shows a fire at the station, although ISW cannot independently verify the cause of the fire.<sup>[3]</sup> Russian officials seized on the fire to claim falsely that Ukrainian forces violated the proposed 30-day ceasefire banning Russian and Ukrainian strikes on civilian and energy facilities, which is not yet formally in effect and terms of which remain disputed.<sup>[4]</sup> Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Russian forces are "implementing" an order from Putin to refrain from striking Ukrainian energy infrastructure in accordance with the US ceasefire proposal.<sup>[5]</sup> Russian milbloggers observed that the ceasefire proposal has not come into force yet, however, and acknowledged that Russia has continued nightly strikes on Ukraine, including Ukraine's port infrastructure in Odesa Oblast, in recent days.<sup>[6]</sup> Founder of the Kremlin-awarded *Rybar* telegram channel, Mikhail Zvinchuk, recently published a video of himself mocking US officials for believing that Russia is currently or intends to commit to the proposed temporary ceasefire in the area.<sup>[7]</sup> The exact contours of Putin's supposed order or a future moratorium on energy and infrastructure strikes between Russia and Ukraine remain unclear as of this report.

**Kremlin officials are leveraging narratives about Ukrainian strikes and combat operations in Russian territory to justify rejecting peace negotiations with Ukraine and continuing the war to a domestic Russian audience.** Peskov claimed in reaction to the Sudzha gas distribution station fire that Ukraine's denial of blowing up the station "shows how much one can believe and trust" Ukrainian officials.<sup>[8]</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova asked how the United States will "manage" Ukraine given Ukraine's alleged violation of the moratorium on energy infrastructure strikes (that has yet to be finalized and implemented).<sup>[9]</sup> Zakharova's and Peskov's comments are an effort to revive the narrative that Ukraine is the aggressor in this war, that Ukraine only acts under guidance or pressure from the West, and that the war in Ukraine is an existential risk to the Russian state to which Russia must respond.<sup>[10]</sup> Russian authorities

have also revived narratives accusing Ukrainian forces of targeting Russian nuclear power plants and committing war crimes against Russian civilians to undermine Ukraine's credibility and heighten the invented existential threat to domestic audiences. The Russian Investigative Committee published a summary on March 21 of ongoing criminal investigations, cases, and convictions of Ukrainian soldiers and high-level commanders for allegedly targeting the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) and civilians in strikes.<sup>[11]</sup> ISW recently assessed that the Kremlin was preparing to intensify narratives accusing Ukrainian forces of war crimes in Kursk Oblast to discredit the Ukrainian military, erode Western support for Ukraine, and spoil or delay talks about temporary ceasefire proposals.<sup>[12]</sup>

The Kremlin has pushed these narratives consistently throughout the war in an attempt to distract from Russia's actions. Russian forces have committed numerous war crimes on the battlefield and in occupied Ukraine and have endangered the occupied Zaporizhzhia NPP (ZNPP) by militarizing it, and a Russian long-range Shahed drone struck the containment structure of the Chernobyl NPP's Reactor No. 4 on February 14.<sup>[13]</sup> The Kremlin may seek to leverage its narratives falsely portraying Ukraine as recklessly endangering Russian NPPs and being an unsafe operator of the ZNPP to spoil US-Ukrainian bilateral talks, given recent US and Ukrainian official statements about possible US involvement in Ukrainian energy infrastructure, including the Russian-occupied ZNPP.<sup>[14]</sup>

**US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg stated that US officials will conduct "shuttle diplomacy" to engage bilaterally with both Ukrainian and Russian delegations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.** Kellogg stated during an interview on March 20 that US technical teams will conduct "proximity talks," which Kellogg described as "shuttle diplomacy between rooms," in Riyadh with Ukrainian and Russian delegations.<sup>[15]</sup> CBS Senior Correspondent Jennifer Jacobs reported on March 21 that sources familiar with the matter stated that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz will not attend the upcoming discussions in Riyadh.<sup>[16]</sup> Jacobs reported that US technical teams intend to meet with the Ukrainian delegation on March 23, the Russian delegation on March 24, and may meet with the Ukrainian delegation again later on March 24 if there is significant progress. Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministry representatives will also not participate in the Riyadh meetings.<sup>[17]</sup> Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 21 that the Ukrainian delegation will present a list of Ukrainian facilities that the strikes moratorium should protect.<sup>[18]</sup> US and Russian officials previously stated that the March 24 Riyadh meeting will focus on achieving a temporary maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea and laying the groundwork for a "full ceasefire."<sup>[19]</sup>

**Russia continues to strengthen its bilateral relations with North Korea, despite growing warnings from the US against deeper Russian-North Korean cooperation.** Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu traveled to North Korea on March 21 and met with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, likely to discuss Russian-North Korean ties.<sup>[20]</sup> US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce condemned North Korea's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine

on March 19, noting that North Korean support to Russia fuels and exacerbates the war in Ukraine.[21] Ukrainian and other Western officials have also continuously noted that North Korean involvement in Russia's offensive operations in Kursk Oblast and broader cooperation with Russia has particularly enhanced North Korea's military capabilities, posing potential security risks in the Asia-Pacific region.[22]

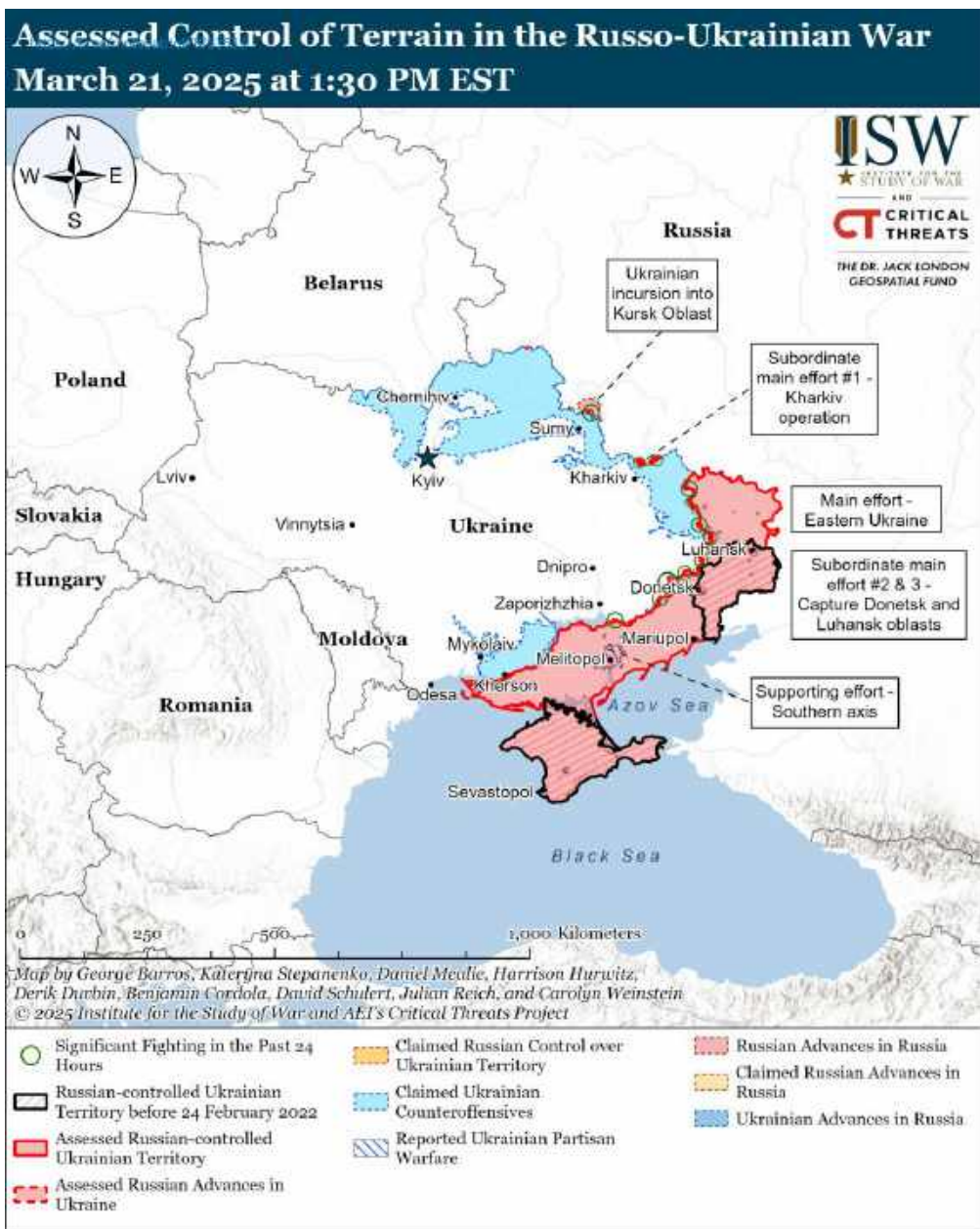
**Russian officials also continue to deepen ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC).** Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Head Alexander Bortnikov met with PRC Security Minister Wang Xiaohong in Beijing on March 21 to discuss Russia-PRC bilateral relations.[23] Wang noted that the PRC is prepared to support multi-level meetings between Russian and Chinese law enforcement agencies and security services and to strengthen partnership in the fight against terrorism and transnational crime. ISW has observed that the PRC has supported Russia's war effort in Ukraine through sanctions evasion, rhetoric, and even direct military aid while posturing itself as a neutral actor and mediator to end the conflict.[24]

**Ukraine's European allies continue efforts to provide Ukraine with military assistance and bolster Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).** Ukrainian Strategic Industries Minister Herman Smetanin announced on March 20 that an unspecified Ukrainian defense enterprise signed an agreement with Norwegian-Finnish ammunition manufacturer NAMMO to deepen bilateral defense industrial cooperation and create a joint venture for 155mm artillery shell production in Ukraine.[25] *Deutsche Welle* (DW) reported on March 21 that Germany's Bundestag Budget Committee and both houses of parliament approved an additional 3 billion euros (roughly \$3.3 billion) in military aid for Ukraine, in addition to Germany's pledged amount of 4 billion euros (roughly \$4.3 billion), for Ukraine in 2025 and 8.3 billion euros (roughly \$8.9 billion) pledged from 2026 to 2029.[26]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **The Kremlin is weaponizing ongoing ceasefire negotiations and deliberately misrepresenting the status and terms of a future ceasefire agreement in order to delay and undermine negotiations for a settlement to the war.**
- **Kremlin officials are leveraging narratives about Ukrainian strikes and combat operations in Russian territory to justify rejecting peace negotiations with Ukraine and continuing the war to a domestic Russian audience.**
- **US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg stated that US officials will conduct "shuttle diplomacy" to engage bilaterally with both Ukrainian and Russian delegations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.**
- **Russia continues to strengthen its bilateral relations with North Korea, despite growing warnings from the US against deeper Russian-North Korean cooperation.**

- Russian officials also continue to deepen ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- Ukraine's European allies continue efforts to provide Ukraine with military assistance and bolster Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Belgorod Oblast. Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Kupyansk, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- Ukrainian and Western defense officials estimated that the Russian monthly casualty rate is between 20,000 and 35,000 servicemembers.



***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.***

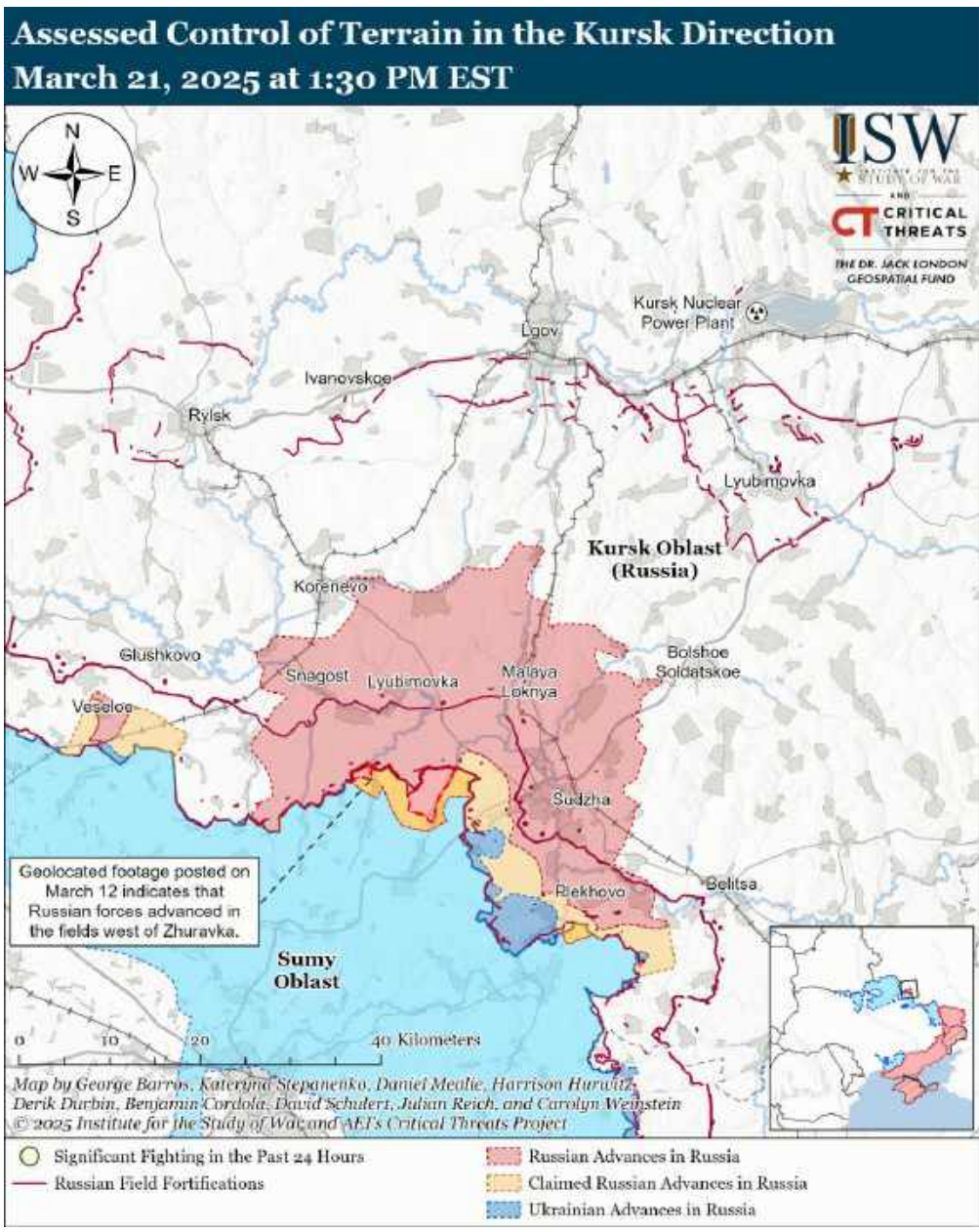
- Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of three subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv 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**

**Russian forces continue to attack limited Ukrainian positions in Kursk Oblast, although Russian advances have slowed in recent days.**

Russian milbloggers recently noted that intensified Ukrainian HIMARS strikes are complicating Russian efforts to push Ukrainian forces from their remaining positions south of Sudzha.[27]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian "Tiger" Volunteer Detachment are reportedly operating near the H-07 Sudzha-Yanikivka highway.[28]



**Russian forces advanced in northern Sumy Oblast.**

Assessed Russian advances: Footage published on March 12 and geolocated on March 20 indicates that Russian forces advanced west of Zhuravka (north of Sumy City), but this advance did not occur in the last week.[29]

Russian forces continued to attack Basivka (northeast of Sumy City) on March 21.[30] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are counterattacking near Yunkivka (south of Basivka).[31]

## **Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced in western Belgorod Oblast.**

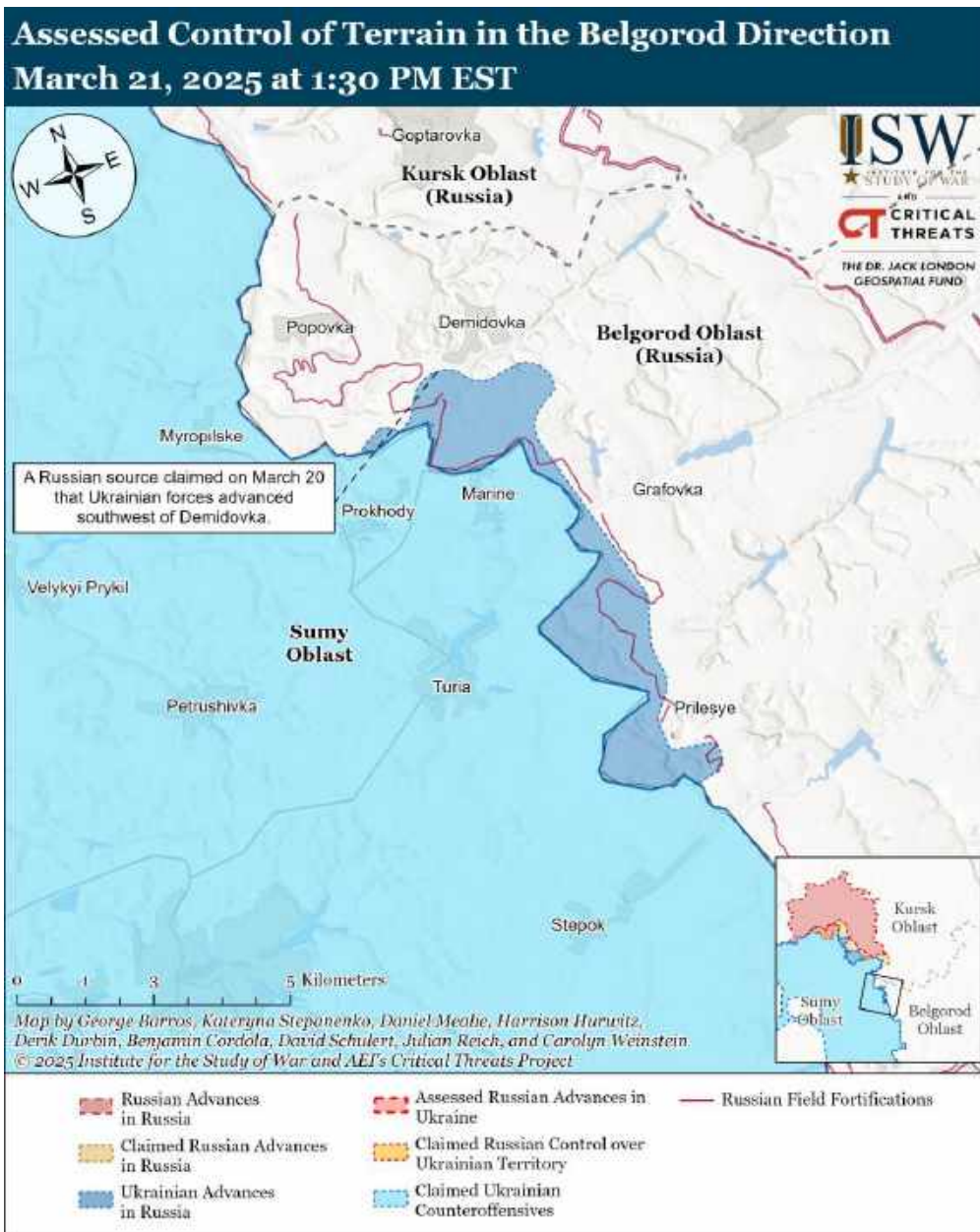
Assessed Ukrainian advances: A Russian milblogger published a map on March 20 acknowledging that Ukrainian forces advanced in the fields southwest of Demidovka (northwest of Belgorod City along the international border).[\[32\]](#)

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced and are consolidating positions on the outskirts of Demidovka and Prilesye (south of Demidovka).[\[33\]](#) Another milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces have not advanced into Demidovka as of March 20.[\[34\]](#)

Russian milbloggers claimed that small groups of Ukrainian infantry are attacking near Demidovka, Grafovka (southeast of Demidovka), and Prilesye.[\[35\]](#)

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla) are operating in the border area of Belgorod Oblast.[\[36\]](#)





**Maxar satellite imagery collected on March 21 indicates that Ukrainian drone strikes damaged an ammunition and weapons storage area at Engel's Airbase in Saratov Oblast (see embedded imagery below).** Ukrainian forces struck Engels Airbase on the night of March 19 to 20, and Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported that the Ukrainian strike destroyed a large number of Russian Kh-101 cruise missiles.[37]



*Ammunition depot at Engels Airbase on December 7, 2024. Source: Satellite image ©2024 Maxar Technologies*



*Ammunition depot at Engels Airbase on March 21, 2025. Source: Satellite image ©2025 Maxar Technologies*

**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 offensive operations in the Kharkiv direction on March 21 but did not advance.**

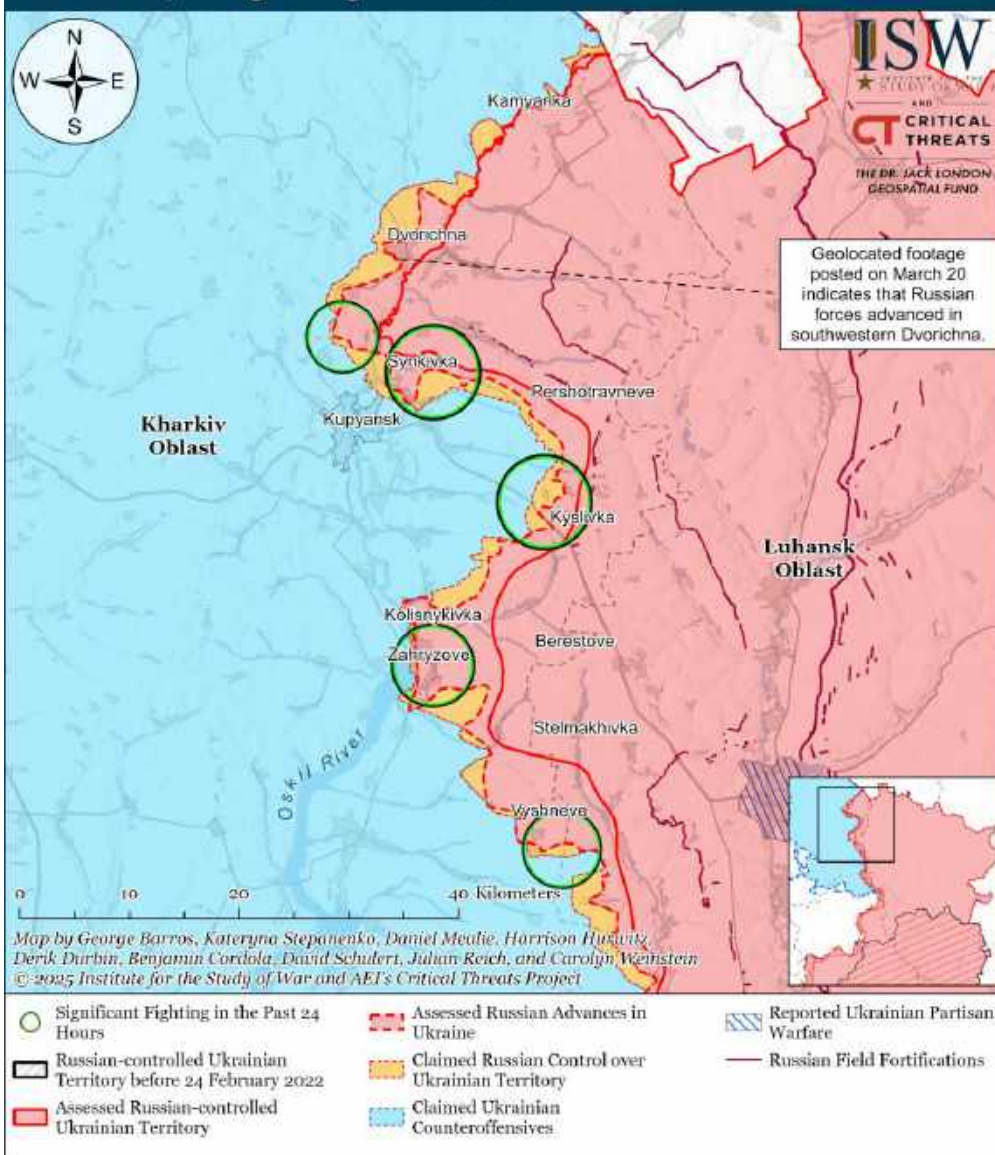
Russian forces attacked north of Kharkiv City near Hlyboke and northeast of Kharkiv City near Vovchansk on March 20 and 21.[38]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 44th Army Corps (AC) (Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are reportedly using unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) to strike Ukrainian positions in the Kharkiv direction, and drone operators of the Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz "Vakha" Battalion reportedly continue to operate in the Kharkiv direction.[39]

**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 recently advanced in the Kupyansk direction.**

**Assessed Control of Terrain in the Kupyansk Direction**  
**March 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST**



Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on March 21 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in southern Dvorichna (northeast of Kupyansk).[\[40\]](#)

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in the northern outskirts of Petropavlivka (east of Kupyansk).[\[41\]](#)

Russian forces attacked northwest of Kupyansk near Mala Shapktivka, north of Kupyansk near Kindrashivka, northeast of Kupyansk near Lyman Pershyi and Dvorichna, east of Kupyansk toward

Petropavlivka, and southeast of Kupyansk near Pishchane on March 20 and 21.[42]

Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces reported on March 21 that Ukrainian forces repelled an at least reinforced platoon-sized Russian mechanized assault in the Kupyansk direction on the morning of March 20 and destroyed two tanks, two infantry fighting vehicles, and one armored personnel carrier.[43]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian "Antagonist" drone group are reportedly operating in the Kupyansk direction.[44]

**Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Borova direction on March 21 but did not advance.**

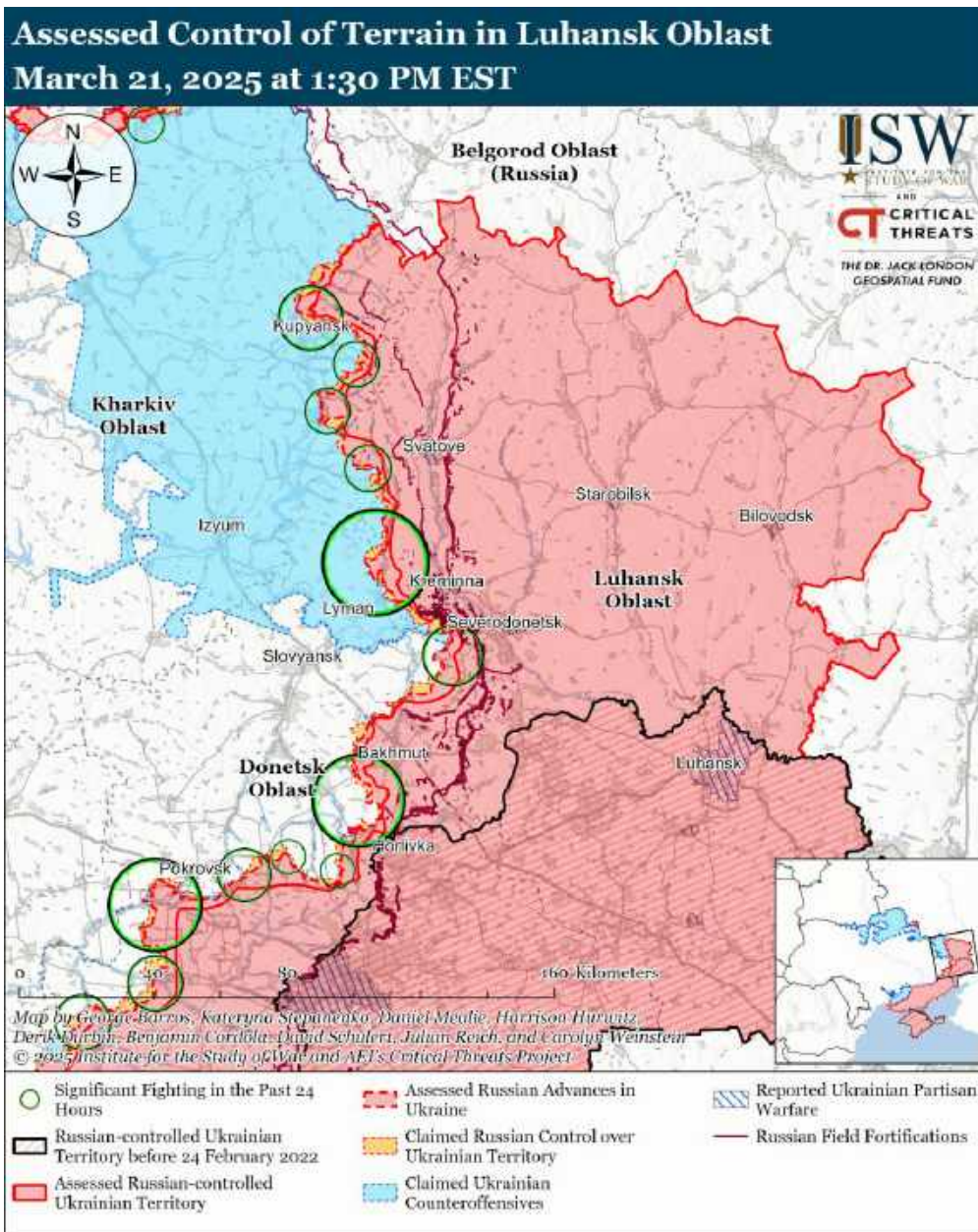
Russian forces attacked northeast of Borova near Kruhlyakivka and Zahryzove, and east of Borova near Kopanky and Nadiya; and southeast of Borova in the direction of Novomykhailivka and Katerynivka on March 20 and 21.[45]

**Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Lyman direction on March 21 but did not make confirmed advances.**

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian source claimed on March 21 that Russian forces advanced near Kreminna (northeast of Lyman).[46]

Russian forces attacked northeast of Lyman near Yampolivka, Zarichne, and Ivanivka and toward Zelene Dolnya and Nove and east of Lyman near Torske on March 20 and 21.[47]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) are reportedly operating in the Lyman direction.[48]



**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 21 but did not make confirmed advances.**

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Zolotarivka (east of Siversk) and north of Verkhokamyanske (east of Siversk).<sup>[49]</sup>

Russian forces attacked northeast of Siversk near Bilohorivka, east of Siversk near Verkhokamyanske, and southeast of Siversk near Ivano-Darivka on March 20 and 21.<sup>[50]</sup>

The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Siversk direction stated that Russian forces are attacking in small infantry groups with motorcycles and civilian vehicles in the Siversk direction.<sup>[51]</sup> The spokesperson noted that Russian commanders tell their soldiers to buy these vehicles with their own money or walk five to 10 kilometers to the contact line before conducting combat missions. The spokesperson added that Russian forces first attack with elderly, injured, and disabled soldiers and then send better trained infantry to attack in subsequent waves.

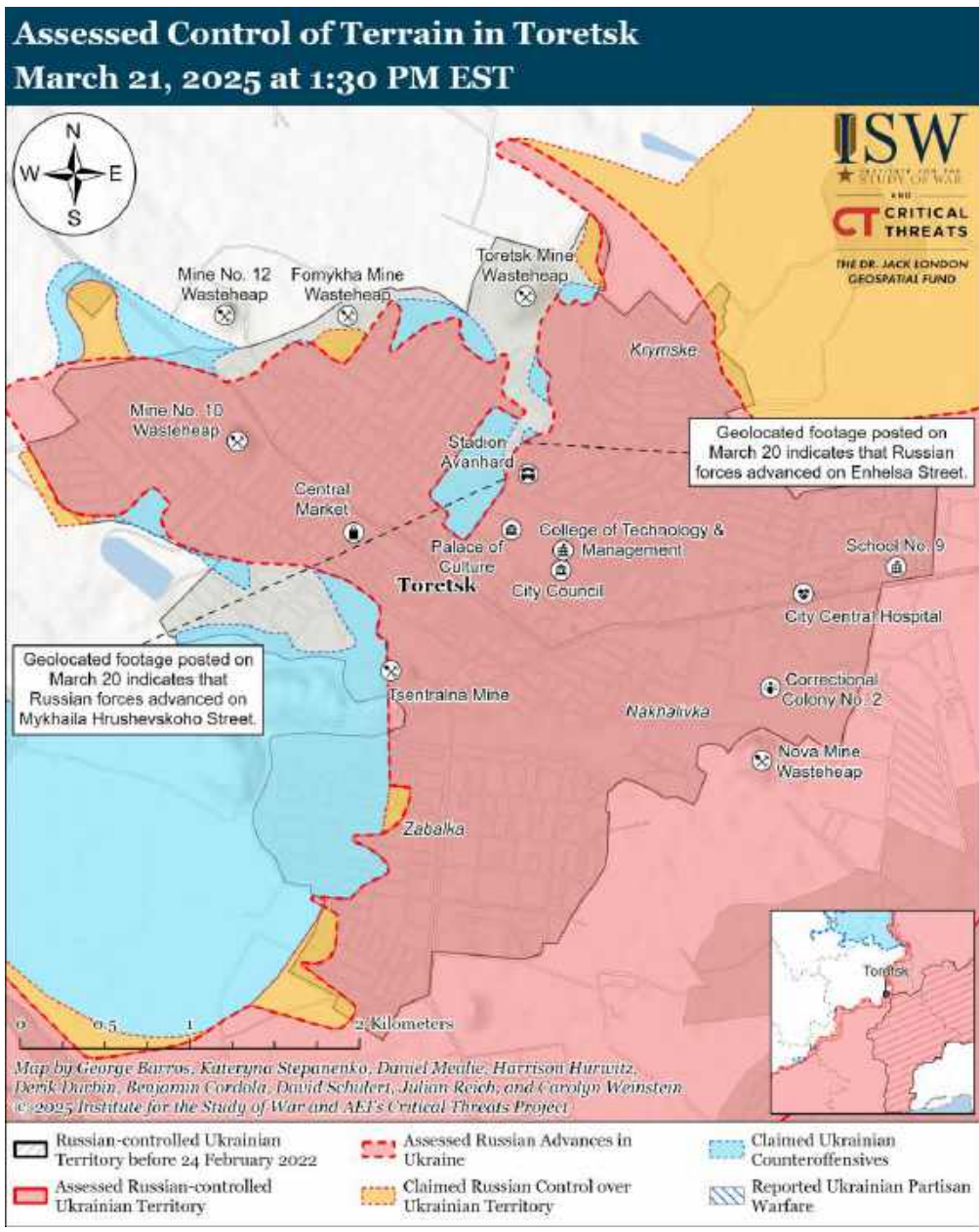
**Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Chasiv Yar direction on March 21 but did not advance.**

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division seized several streets in Shevchenko Microraiion in southwestern Chasiv Yar.<sup>[52]</sup>

Russian forces attacked near Chasiv Yar itself, north of Chasiv Yar near Minkivka, and south of Chasiv Yar near Stupochky, Dylivika, Predtechyne and in the direction of Oleksandro-Shulyne on March 20 and 21.<sup>[53]</sup>

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC], Southern Military District [SMD]) reportedly continue operating near Oleksandro-Shulyne.<sup>[54]</sup> Elements of the Russian 215th Reconnaissance Battalion (98th VDV Division) reportedly continue to operate near Chasiv Yar.<sup>[55]</sup>

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

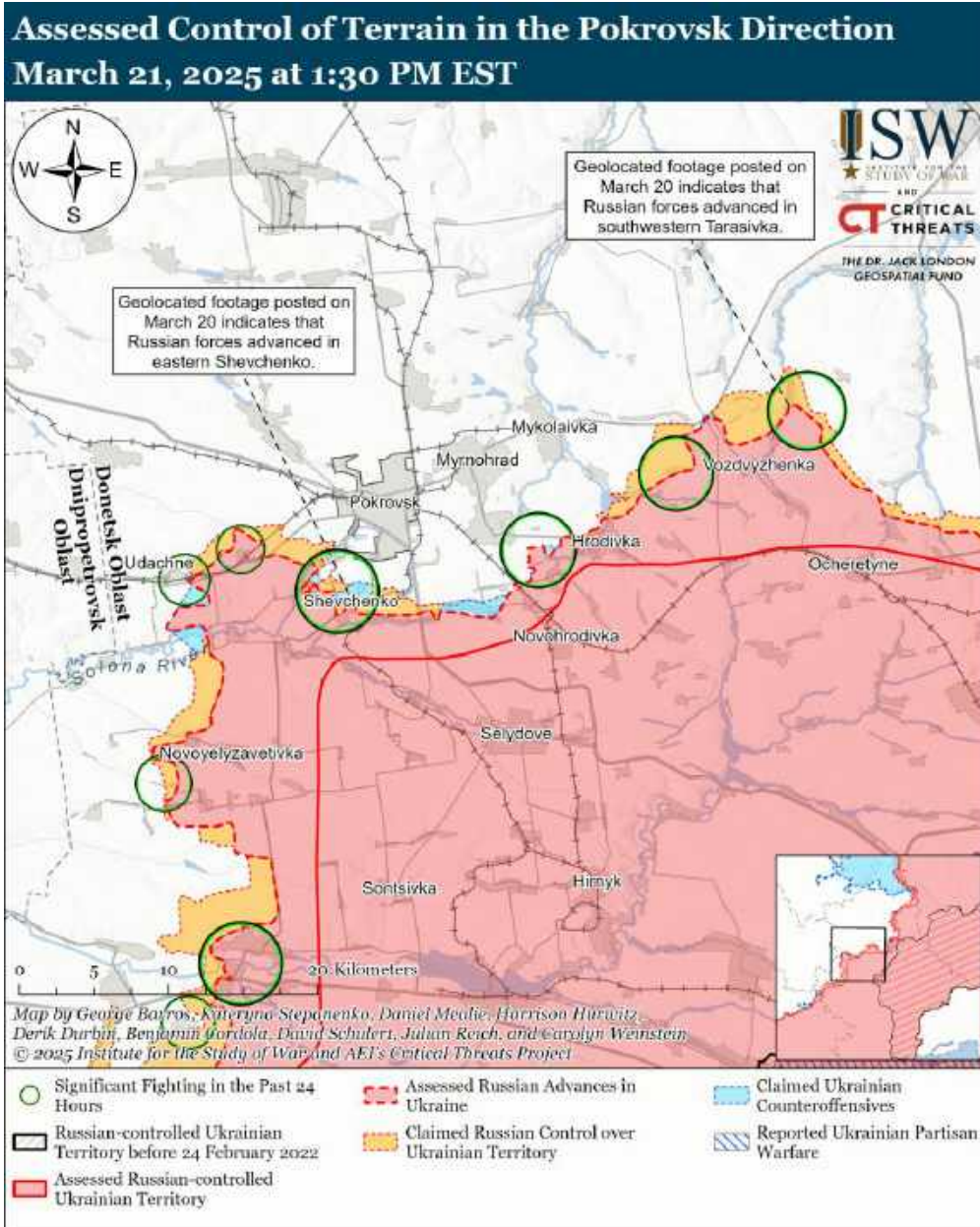


Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on March 20 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced along Enhelsa and Mykhaila Hrushevskoho streets in central Toretsk.[56]

Russian forces attacked near Toretsk itself, north of Toretsk near Dachne, east of Toretsk near Druzhba, and south of Toretsk near Panteleymonivka on March 20 and 21.[57]

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





Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on March 20 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced within southwestern Tarasivka (east of Pokrovsk) and eastern Shevchenko (south of Pokrovsk).[58]

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in Pishchane (south of Pokrovsk) and in western Uspenivka (southwest of Pokrovsk).[59]

Russian forces continued ground assaults near Pokrovsk itself; east of Pokrovsk near Zelene Pole, Tarasivka, Yelyzavetivka, Novotoretske, and Promin; southeast of Pokrovsk near Lysivka; southwest of Pokrovsk near Zvirove, Kotlyne, Udachne, Preobrazhenka, Nadiivka, Zaporizhzhia, and Bohdanivka and in the directions of Muravka and Kotlyarivka on March 20 and 21.<sup>[60]</sup> A Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Uspenivka and Preobrazhenka.<sup>[61]</sup>

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 33rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating near Tarasivka, and elements of the 506th Motorized Rifle Regiment (27th Motorized Rifle Division, 2nd CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) are reportedly fighting in Uspenivka.<sup>[62]</sup> Drone operators of the Russian 3rd Motorized Rifle Battalion of the 20th Motorized Rifle Regiment (possibly a reformed Soviet unit) are reportedly striking Ukrainian positions near Novobakhmutivka.<sup>[63]</sup> Elements of the Russian "Medvedi" drone battalion are reportedly operating in the Pokrovsk direction.<sup>[64]</sup>

Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov inspected the Russian Central Group of Forces on March 21 and heard reports from Russian Central Military District (CMD) commander Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev and field commanders.<sup>[65]</sup>

### **Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kurakhove direction on March 21 but did not make confirmed advances.**

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced west of Kostyantynopil (west of Kurakhove).<sup>[66]</sup>

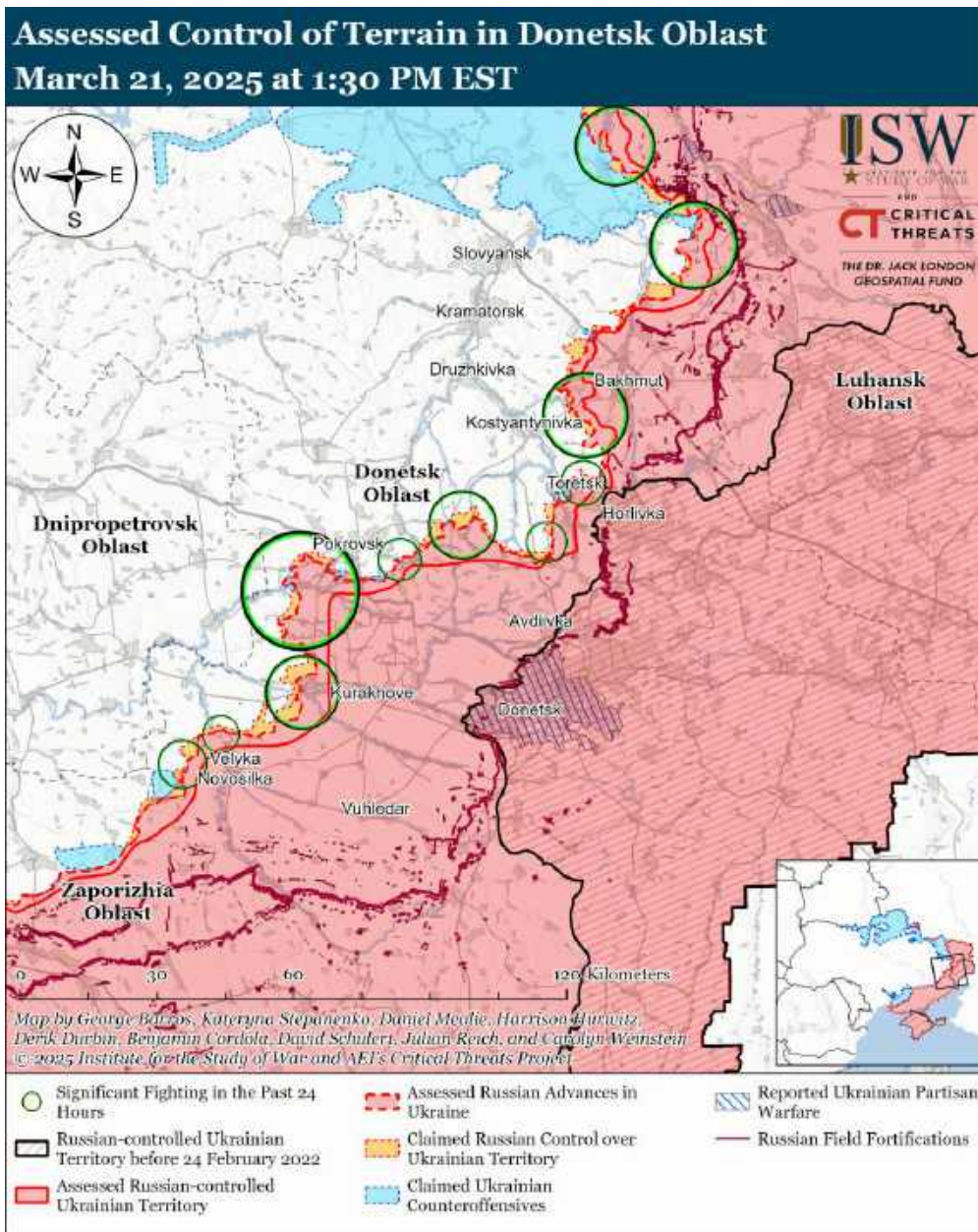
Russian forces continued ground attacks west of Kurakhove near Andriivka, Kostyantynopil, and Oleksiivka and southwest of Kurakhove near Rozlyv on March 20 and 21.<sup>[67]</sup>

### **Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Velyka Novosilka direction on March 21 but did not make confirmed advances.**

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced south of Novosilka (west of Velyka Novosilka), 1.5 kilometers near Vilne Pole, and 500 meters near Vesele (both northwest of Velyka Novosilka).<sup>[68]</sup>

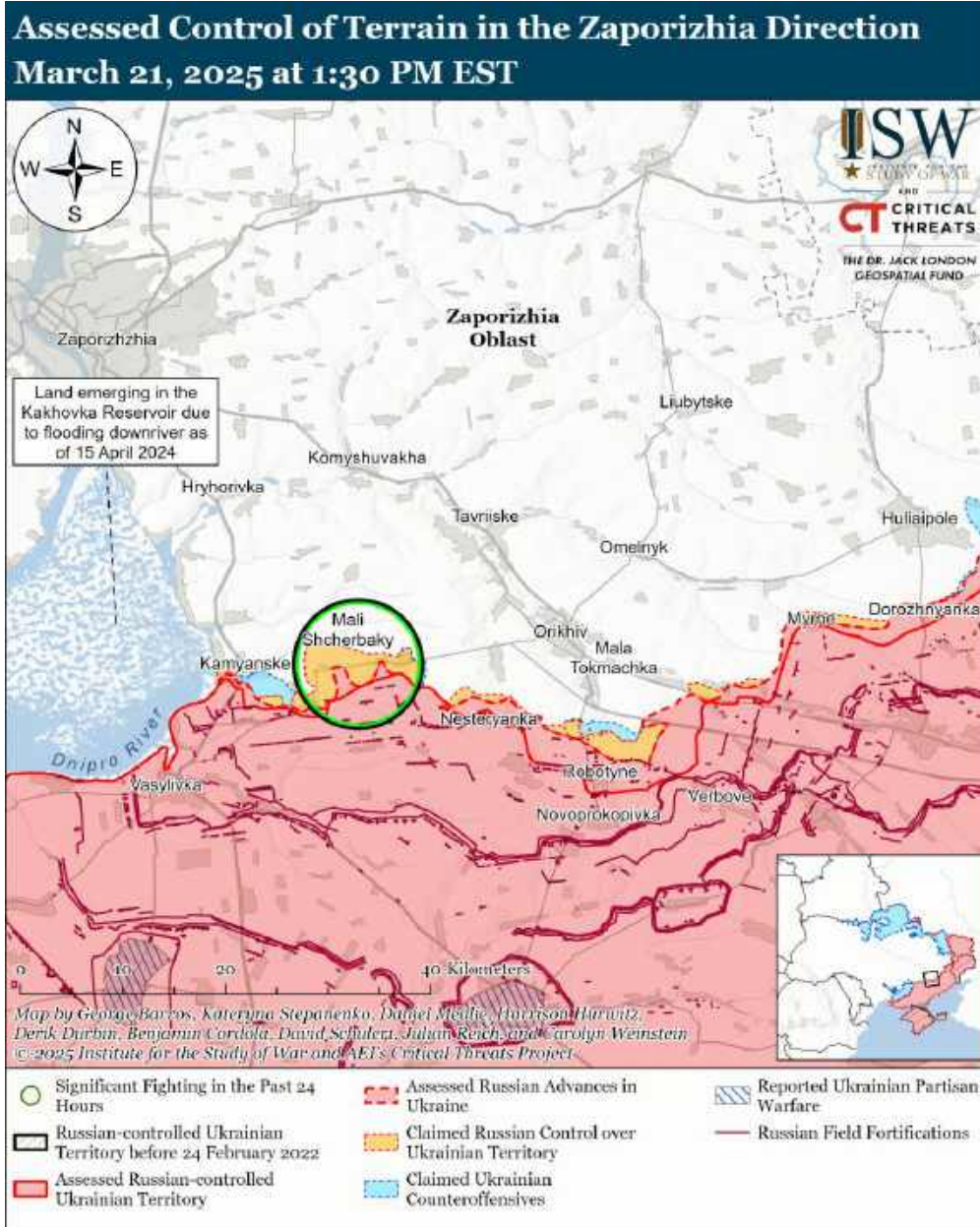
Russian forces continued ground attacks west of Velyka Novosilka near Novosilka, northwest of Velyka Novosilka near Shevchenko and Vilne Pole, and north of Velyka Novosilka near Dniproenerhira on March 20 and 21.[69] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked south of Vesele and near Novodarivka (southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and Vilne Pole.[70]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian 36th Motorized Rifle Brigade (29th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) and 30th Spetsnaz Company (reportedly of the 36th CAA, EMD) and artillery elements of the 30th Artillery Brigade (36th CAA) are reportedly operating in the Velyka Novosilka direction.[71]



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

Russian forces continued ground attacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast on March 21 but did not make any confirmed advances.



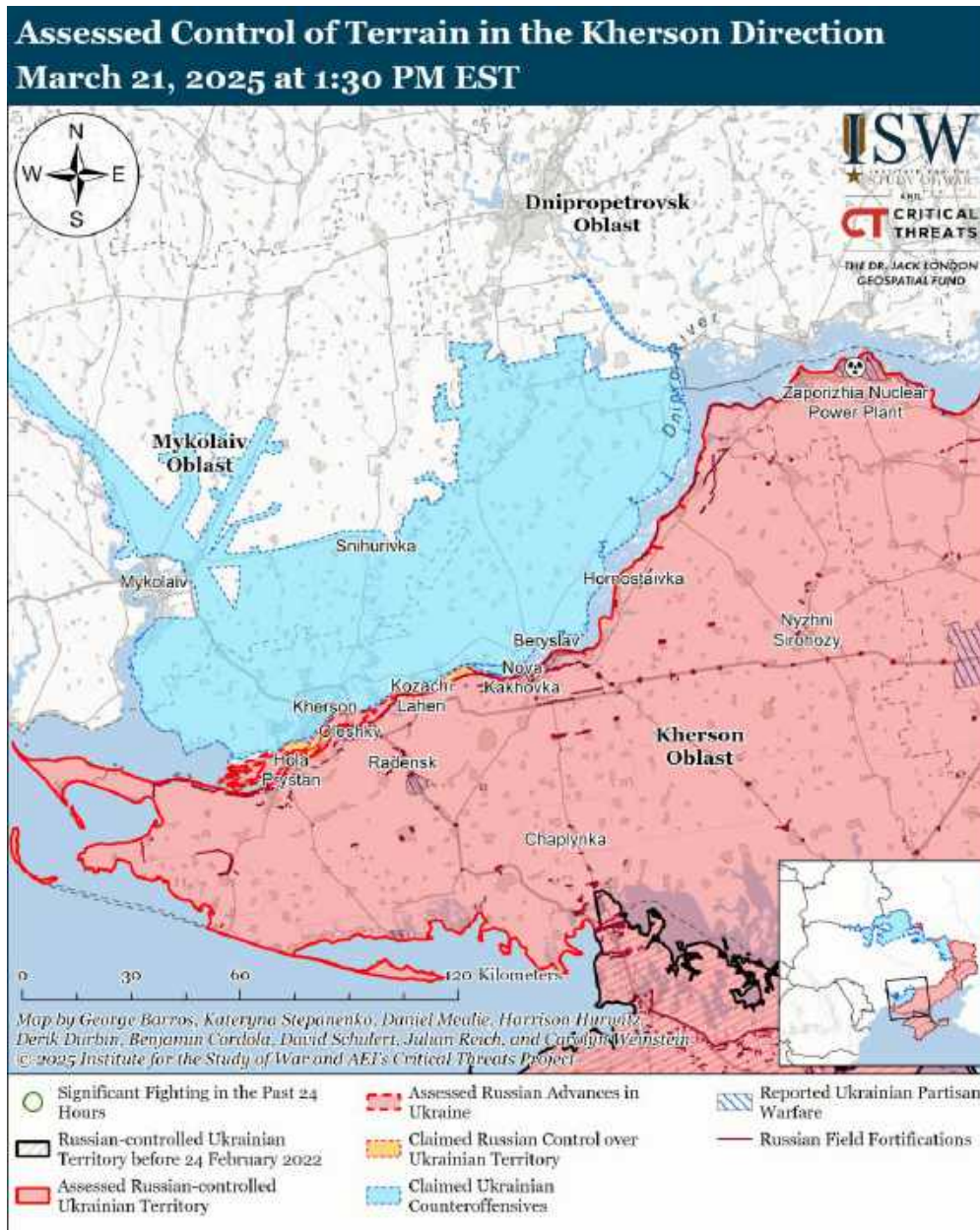
Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 71st and 291st Motorized Rifle Regiments (both of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) advanced north and northeast of Robotyne, that Russian forces advanced northwest of Pyatykhatky, that Russian forces seized Zherybyanky (northwest of Robotyne), and that elements of the 247th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) seized southern Lobkove (northwest of Robotyne).<sup>[72]</sup>

Russian forces attacked northwest of Robotyne near Lobkove, Stepove, Mali Shcherbaky, and Shcherbaky on March 20 and 21.[73]

Ukrainian Southern Defense Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn stated that the Orikhiv direction is the most active area in southern Ukraine and that Russian forces have conducted 150 assaults in the area since the "start of spring." [74] Voloshyn stated that Russian forces are attempting to advance to within artillery range of the eastern and southern suburbs of Zaporizhzhia City and major Ukrainian logistics routes between Zaporizhzhia City and eastern Ukraine.

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian "Smuglyanka" Detachment are reportedly operating in the western Zaporizhzhia direction.[75]

Russian forces attacked in the Kherson direction on March 21 but did not advance.[76]



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

Russian forces conducted drone strikes against Ukraine overnight on March 20 to 21. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 214 Shahed and other drones from Kursk and Bryansk cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[77] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 114 Shahed drones and that 81 drones were "lost," likely due to electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones hit Khmelnytskyi, Sumy, and Kyiv oblasts and civilian and port infrastructure in Odesa City.[78]

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister for Reconstruction Oleksiy Kuleba reported that Russian forces conducted a drone strike against Odesa City as Czech President Petr Pavel met with Kuleba in the city on March 21.<sup>[79]</sup>

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

Ukrainian and Western defense officials estimated that the Russian monthly casualty rate is between 20,000 and 35,000 servicemembers. A Ukrainian drone brigade commander stated on March 20 that Russian forces deploy between 30,000 and 35,000 additional Russian soldiers to Ukraine monthly and that Ukrainian forces remove 20,000 Russian soldiers from the battlefield per month.<sup>[80]</sup> The commander attributed high Russian casualties to poor training and a “low” degree of familiarity with the weapons Ukrainian forces use against Russian units. The commander added that Russian forces are unable to sustain multi-pronged offensive operations, which may indicate that Russian forces are unable to fully staff their military units. The United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defense (UK MOD), citing data from the Ukrainian General Staff, estimated on March 21 that Ukrainian forces have killed 250,000 Russian soldiers since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and that Russian casualties have reached over 900,000 troops in total.<sup>[81]</sup> The UK MOD added that 35,140 Russian troops were killed and wounded in February 2025 alone, for an average of 1,255 daily casualties. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi echoed these estimates on March 21, adding that Russian forces have lost over 540,790 casualties since the beginning of 2024.<sup>[82]</sup>

Russian authorities continue efforts to militarize society in Russia and in occupied Ukraine by integrating veterans into military-patriotic education programs. Russian opposition outlet *Novaya Europa* reported on March 21 that Russian schools have hosted an average of 93 veterans’ lectures on “lessons of courage” per day for schoolchildren as young as kindergarten since January 2025.<sup>[83]</sup> *Novaya Gazeta* reported that Russian schools have already taught almost 40,000 such lessons since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and that at least 99 Russian schools employed Russian veterans to teach “basic military training, first aid procedures, methods of protection against weapons of mass destruction, and basic drone operations” to Russian schoolchildren. *Novaya Gazeta* estimated that at least 200 Russian schools are expecting veterans to become teachers upon their return from the frontlines. Ukraine’s Resistance Center reported on March 21 that Russian occupation officials recently held qualifying sessions of the “Zarnitsa 2.0” games in occupied Luhansk Oblast, which force Ukrainian children to participate in tactical and combat training and to learn Russian military history.<sup>[84]</sup> Russian state media outlet *Komsomolskaya Pravda* announced on January 31, 2025, that applications for the “Zarnitsa 2.0” games in occupied Luhansk Oblast opened and described the program as the flagship project of the “Movement of the First” youth military-patriotic organization.<sup>[85]</sup>

Russian officials continued their efforts to downplay problematic trends in the Russian economy. The Russian Central Bank voted on March 21 kept the key interest rate at 21 percent, and Russian Central Bank head Elvira Nabiullina claimed that the “likelihood of a further increase in the key rate has decreased.”[86] The Russian Central Bank estimated the Russian annual inflation rate to be approximately 10.2 percent as of March 17 and predicted that levels will fall to 7 or 8 percent in 2025, and down to 4 percent in 2026.[87] These claims are likely part of an ongoing Russian narrative aiming to posture the Russian economy as strong and stable, despite increasing inflation and a lack of viable long-term sanctions mitigation techniques.[88]

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the Russian government on March 19 to accelerate Russia’s drone production in an effort to “achieve technical leadership by 2030.”[89] Putin ordered the Russian government to create a unified system for real-time drone identification and to simplify conditions for domestic drone operations by developing a new Russian airspace (likely setting aside low altitudes in some areas) for drones by June 1, 2025. Putin also ordered the establishment of a government system to oversee unmanned aviation and to simplify regulations on the experimental use of drones to facilitate drone use in different economic fields. Putin instructed Russian officials to organize and report the conclusions of an international forum on drones by September 1, 2025. Putin also ordered the allocation of extra funds for the development of low-orbit satellite systems for drone communications and operation.

Russian forces are continuing to innovate drone capabilities. Russian milbloggers claimed on March 20 that the Russian "Malye Kosmicheskie Apparaty" (Small Spacecraft) research center began the development of “Kolibri” satellite communication terminals to remotely control drones via Russian spacecraft.[90] The research center currently produces similar communications systems, namely the “Dolphin” system, to support marine and ground communication stations. A Ukrainian source posted photos on March 20 and 21 purportedly showing an experimental Russian heavy bomber drone with 8 rotor engines.[91] The source speculated that this “octocopter” drone would be difficult to stabilize in the air due to its excess of engines — unlike Ukrainian Mavic and Vampire drones.[92]

### **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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