

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 18, 2023

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June 18, 2023, 6:45pm 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 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 cutoff for this product was 2pm ET on June 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive actions on at least four sectors of the front on June 18 and made limited territorial gains. Geolocated footage suggests that Ukrainian forces made limited advances within 30km south of Kreminna.[1] Avdiivka City Military Administration Head Vitaliy Barabash reported that Ukrainian forces advanced more than a kilometer north of Avdiivka on the Donetsk City frontline over the past two weeks.[2] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations south, southwest, and southeast of Velyka Novosilka on the administrative border between western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts and made some localized advances.[3] Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast, and geolocated footage suggests that Ukrainian forces entered the western part of Pyatykhatky (41km southeast of Zaporizhzhia City), southwest of Orikhiv.[4] Ukrainian Tavrisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Valeriy Shershen stated that Russian forces continue to counterattack in western Donetsk and Zaporizhia oblasts, and that Ukrainian forces have "a lot of work." [5] Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov reported that Russian forces continue to transfer personnel and heavy military equipment from around Nova Kakhovka and Kakhovka in eastern Kherson Oblast to the Zaporizhia Oblast frontline via Melitopol.[6]

Ukrainian forces may be temporarily pausing counteroffensive operations to reevaluate their tactics for future operations. Head of the Estonian Defense Forces Intelligence Center Colonel Margo Grosberg stated on June 16 that he assesses "we won't see an offensive over the next seven days." [7] The *Wall Street Journal* similarly reported on June 17 that Ukrainian forces "have mostly paused their advances in recent days" as Ukrainian command reexamines tactics.[8] These reports are consistent with ISW's recent observations of the scale and approach of localized Ukrainian counterattacks in southern and eastern Ukraine.[9] ISW has previously noted that Ukraine has not yet committed the majority of its available forces to counteroffensive operations and has not yet launched its main effort.[10] Operational pauses are a common feature of major offensive undertakings, and this pause does not signify the end of Ukraine's counteroffensive.

A *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) interview with Russian prisoners of war (POWs) indicates

continued significant morale and command issues among frontline Russian units and the continued Russian use of “barrier forces” to shoot retreating soldiers.^[11] *WSJ* amplified the statements of three unidentified Russian POWs who voluntarily surrendered to Ukrainian forces during Ukrainian counteroffensive operations near Velyka Novosilka, on the administrative border between Donetsk and Zaporizhia oblasts. The POWs reported widespread fear of a Ukrainian counteroffensive among Russian forces on the frontlines. The POWs indicated that the Russian military command sees Russian conscripts and penal recruits as expendable, and claimed Russian officers order injured personnel deemed unfit for service back to the front line and use “barrier forces” to prevent penal recruits in “Storm-Z” units from retreating. Barrier forces are specialized units that threaten to shoot their own personnel either to prevent retreats or to force them to attack, and unverified social media footage recently circulated depicting Russian barrier troops shooting retreating Russian forces in Ukraine.^[12] The POWs also indicated that Russian forces struggle to supply and staff their units, including struggling to crew tanks and armored vehicles.^[13] The POWs expressed concern about returning to Russia in a POW exchange due to Russian laws prohibiting voluntary surrender to the enemy.

EU Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton announced on June 18 that the EU is accelerating arms deliveries to Ukraine. Breton referenced a pledge that the EU would supply a million high quality weapons to Ukraine over the coming year and stated that the EU is “going to step up our efforts to deliver arms and ammunition” as “this is a war of high intensity in which [high quality weapons] play a crucial role.”^[14]

Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly supported select Russian milbloggers’ proposal to create a Presidential Administration working group, likely in an effort to integrate prominent milbloggers into the pro-Kremlin information space. The working group would reportedly include members of the Russian presidential administration and aim to coordinate ideas on the war in Ukraine.^[15] It is unclear if and how Russian milbloggers will participate in the Presidential Administration working group, however. Putin’s support of a working group to focus on war reporting suggests that Putin intends to continue to publicly engage with pro-Kremlin milbloggers in an attempt to expand his support in the ultranationalist community. The Kremlin has previously coopted prominent Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers by offering them official roles on the Russian Human Rights Council and in the Mobilization Working Group likely in exchange for amplifying pro-Kremlin rhetoric.^[16]

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive actions on at least four sectors of the front on June 18 and made limited territorial gains.**
- **Ukrainian forces may be temporarily pausing counteroffensive operations to reevaluate their tactics for future operations.**
- **A *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) interview with Russian prisoners of war (POWs) indicates continued significant morale and command issues among frontline Russian units and the continued Russian use of “barrier forces” to shoot retreating soldiers.**
- **EU Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton announced on June 18 that the EU is accelerating arms deliveries to Ukraine.**

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly supported select Russian milbloggers' proposal to create a Presidential Administration working group, likely in an effort to integrate prominent milbloggers into the pro-Kremlin information space.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks north of Svatove and south of Kreminna.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces conducted limited ground attacks around Bakhmut and along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on the administrative border between western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.**
- **Russian sources claimed that Russian forces continued to repel Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast**
- **Some Russian ultranationalist figures are concerned that the Russian Ministry of Defense's efforts to formalize volunteer formations will trigger command changes and degrade combat effectiveness.**
- **Russian occupation officials are continuing to prioritize medical treatment for Russian military personnel in occupied Mariupol, reportedly significantly increasing the civilian mortality rate in the city.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 18, 2023, 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 these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

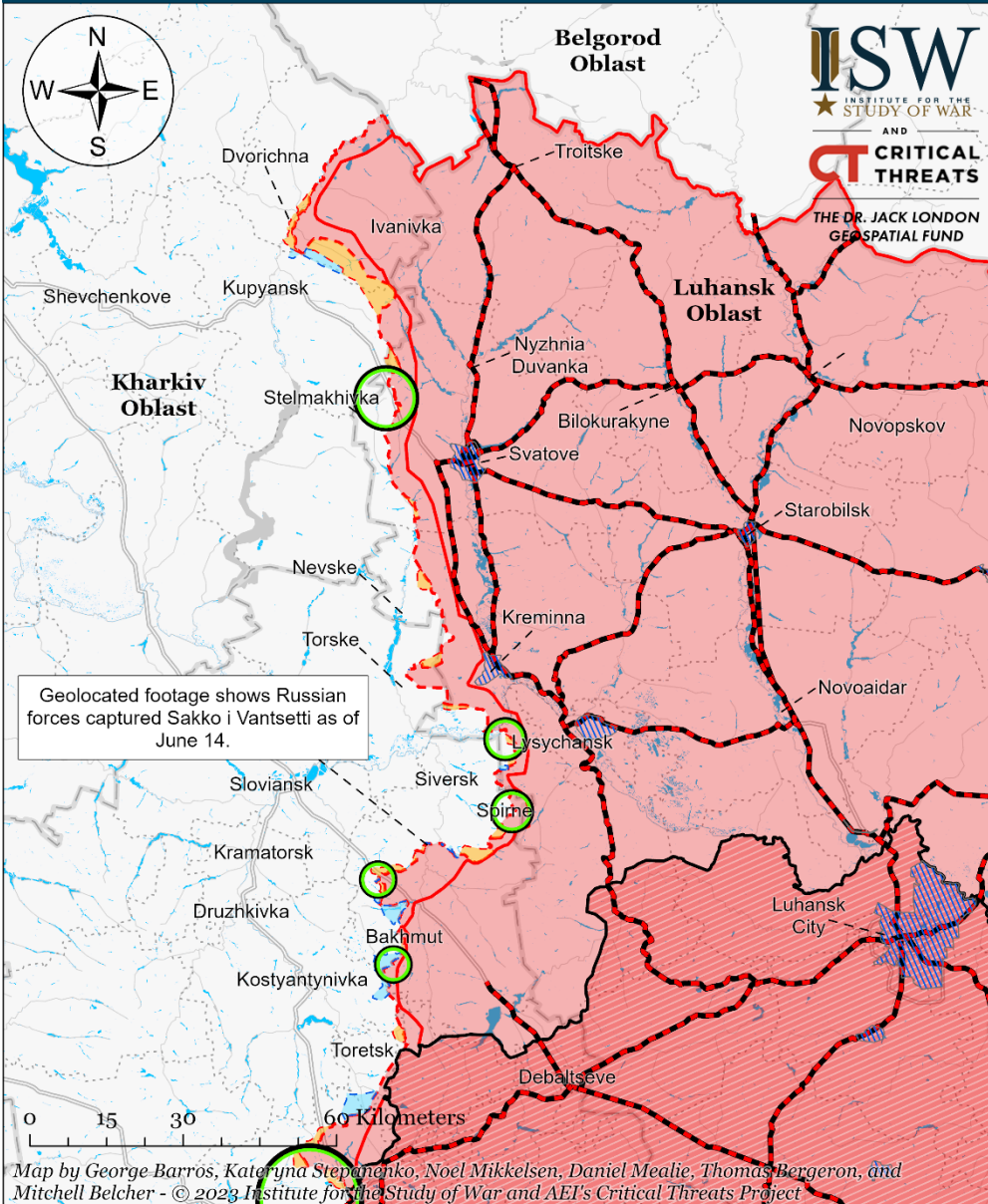
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

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 conducted limited ground attacks north of Svatove and south of Kreminna on June 18. Geolocated footage published on June 17 shows that Ukrainian forces made limited advances near Berestove (30km south of Kreminna) and Rozdolivka (32km southwest of Kreminna).[17] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations near Berestove (20km northwest of Svatove), Novoselivske (19km northwest of Svatove), Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna), and Spirne (25km south of Kreminna).[18] Footage published on June 17 and 18 purportedly shows elements of the 24th Separate Guards Spetsnaz Brigade operating along the Svatove-Kreminna line and elements of the 85th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic Army Corps) operating near Bilohorivka.[19]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of June 18, 2023, 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.

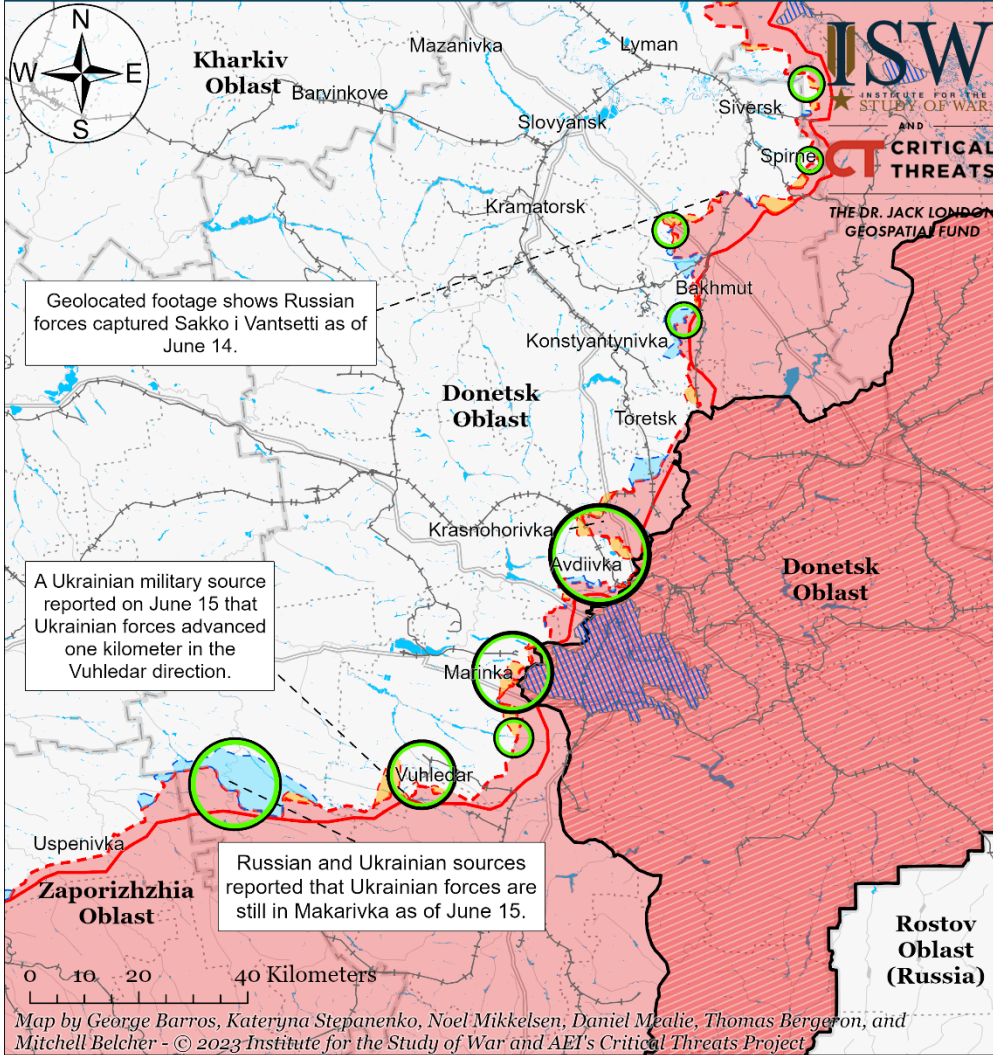
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Click here to read ISW’s retrospective analysis on the Battle for Bakhmut.

Russian and Ukrainian forces conducted limited ground attacks around Bakhmut on June 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut) and Stupochky (12km southwest of Bakhmut).[20] Russian Southern Group of Forces Spokesperson Vadim Astafyev claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Mayorsk (21km southwest of Bakhmut).[21] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Pivnichne (20km southwest of Bakhmut).[22]

Russian and Ukrainian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on June 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Avdiivka, Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City), and Novomykhailivka (10km south of Marinka).[23] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks southwest of Avdiivka, near Stepove (2km north of Avdiivka), and from Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka).[24] Astafyev claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Novokalynove (11km northwest of Avdiivka).[25] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), Nevelske (13km southwest of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka (5km north of Marinka), and Marinka.[26] Avdiivka City Military Administration Head Vitaliy Barabash reported that Ukrainian forces advanced over one kilometer north of Avdiivka over the past two weeks.[27]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of June 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

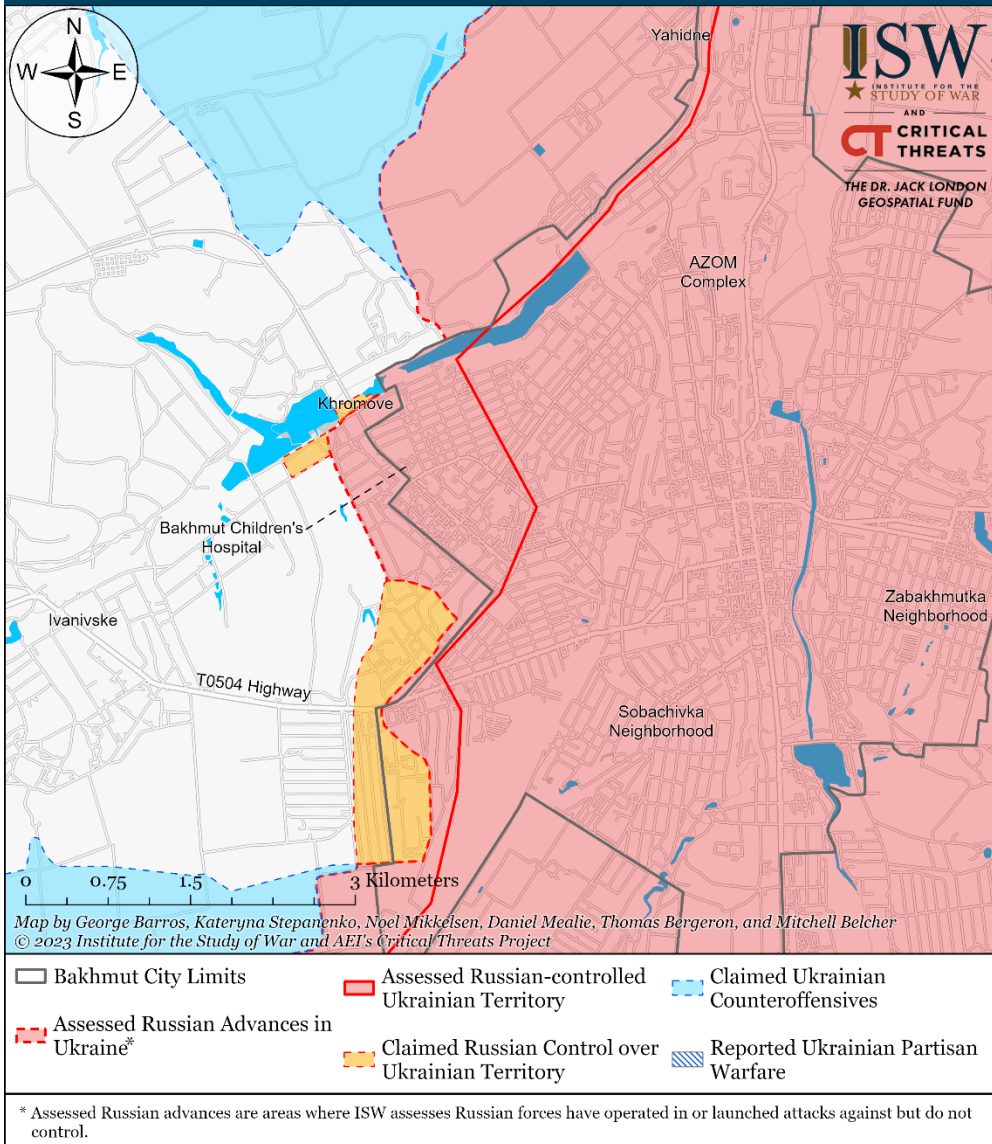


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- + Major Railroads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

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

Note: Avdiivka City Military Administration Head Vitaliy Barabash reported on June 18 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than a kilometer north of Avdiivka on the Donetsk City frontline over the past two weeks.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of June 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Russian forces continued localized attacks in the Vuhledar area on June 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks on Vuhledar and Vodyane (6km northeast of Vuhledar).^[28]

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on the administrative border between western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts on June 18. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)

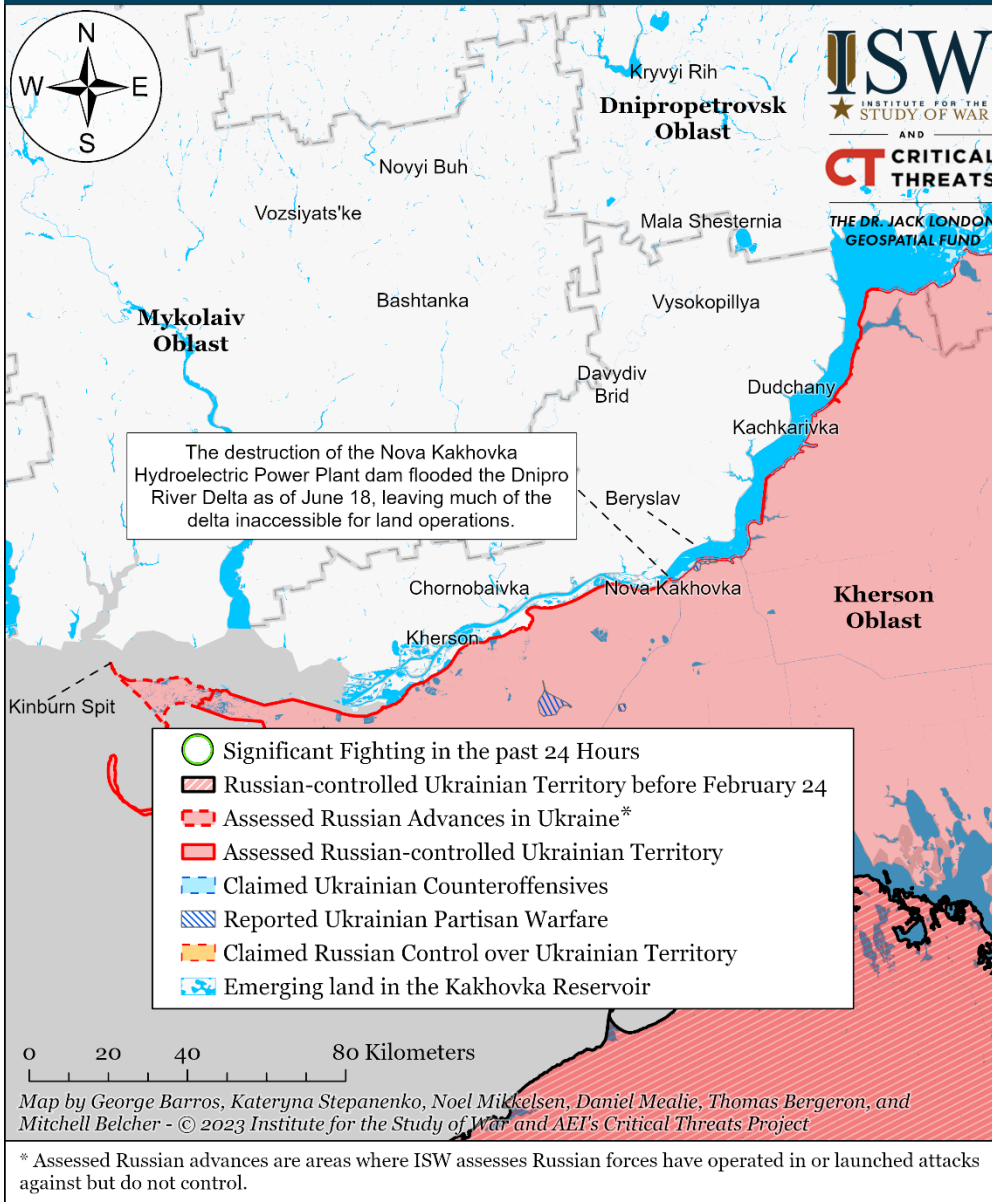
and other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks: southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Novodonetske, southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Rivnopil and Novodarivka, and south of Velyka Novosilka near Urozhaine.[29] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced near Urozhaine but that Russian forces still control the settlement.[30] A Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian 60th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) is operating near recently liberated Makarivka (6km southeast of Velyka Novosilka).[31]

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces continued to repel Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on June 18. Numerous Russian sources claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces continued to fight for control over Pyatykhatky (26km southeast of Orikhiv) on June 18, with many claiming that the village is currently a contested “gray zone.”[32] Geolocated footage published on June 18 indicates that Ukrainian forces reached the western part of Pyatykhatky, and a Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces established positions on the western side of the settlement.[33] Some milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces liberated the entire settlement, while others claimed that Russian forces forced Ukrainian units to retreat after striking the settlement with TOS-1A thermobaric artillery systems.[34] The Russian MoD and other Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations south of Orikhiv, and a Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces regained some positions near the Orikhiv-Robotyne T0408 highway.[35] The milblogger noted that Ukrainian attacks were partially successful in the Robotyne (15km south of Orikhiv) direction, and another milblogger noted that Ukrainian forces advanced by 300m on the Robotyne-Pyatykhatky line.[36]

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov revealed that the Chechen “Vostok-Akhmat” volunteer battalion is operating on the Orikhiv-western Zaporizhia Oblast frontline alongside elements of the 42nd Guards Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District).[37] Kadyrov specified that Major Vakhy Khambulatov commands the “Vostok-Akhmat” battalion and that Major General Ivan Popov is the commander of the 58th Combined Arms Army.[38] Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov reported that Russian forces are deploying additional personnel and heavy military equipment from Nova Kakhovka and Kakhovka areas in eastern Kherson Oblast to the Zaporizhia Oblast frontline via Melitopol.[39]

Ukrainian forces and partisans continued to undermine Russian rear positions in southern Ukraine on June 18. Fedorov reported that Ukrainian partisans sabotaged a section of the railroad connection near Melitopol.[40] The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces struck Russian manpower concentration points in the Skadovsk and Kherson regions, and Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Military Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed a Russian ammunition depot in Rykove, Henichesk Raion.[41] Kherson Oblast Occupation Head Vladimir Saldo claimed that Ukrainian forces launched missile strikes against Lazurne, Skadovsk Raion and Rykove.[42] Russian sources claimed that elements of the Russian 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade and 61st Separate Naval Infantry Brigade (both of the Northern Fleet) struck Ukrainian military equipment located on the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River.[43]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of June 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Some Russian ultranationalist figures are concerned that the Russian MoD's efforts to formalize volunteer formations will trigger command changes and degrade combat effectiveness. Russian milbloggers claimed that the Russian MoD previously replaced the experienced commanders of Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) people's militias with ineffective and inexperienced commanders.[44] The milbloggers claimed that the timing of the MoD's recent order

formalizing volunteer units during a Ukrainian counteroffensive is worrisome, and that the MoD may worsen these volunteer formations in the same manner the MoD worsened the DNR and LNR militias.

Some Russian commanders are reportedly withholding nongovernmental military aid from frontline units. Russian milbloggers amplified footage on June 18 showing bullet holes in vehicles that Russian military personnel purchased with their own money for military purposes.[45] The milbloggers claimed that the commander of the Russian 103rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) - allegedly “Colonel Kutaev” - deliberately shot the vehicles likely because he did not want to Russian servicemen to accept military supplies or equipment outside of official MoD provisions. The milbloggers noted that there are Russian commanders who refuse to leverage support from nongovernmental organizations dedicated to helping supply Russian military units with equipment, drones, and vehicles.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin continues to compete with the Russian MoD and portray Wagner as more disciplined than regular Russian forces. Prigozhin claimed that 32,000 Russian convicts completed service with Wagner and returned to Russia.[46] Prigozhin claimed that these recruits have a 0.25 percent recidivism rate and that this rate is 80 percent lower than the recidivism rate among Russian prisoners in total. The Russian MoD notably blocked Wagner’s penal colony recruitment and began its own penal recruitment efforts in winter 2023.[47] Russian President Vladimir Putin similarly claimed on June 13 that Russian convict recruits, likely referring to those recruited by the MoD, have a recidivism rate of 0.4 percent as compared to the regular recidivism rate of 40 percent, and Prigozhin is likely altering and amplifying this claimed statistic.[48] Prigozhin suggested on June 17 that Russian MoD will prevent volunteers from ever completing their military contracts after the Russian military command assumes official control over irregular formations and is likely attempting to promote Wagner forces against the backdrop of the Russian MoD’s formalization efforts.[49]

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

Russian occupation officials are continuing to prioritize medical treatment for Russian military personnel in occupied Mariupol, reportedly significantly increasing the civilian mortality rate in the city. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on June 18 that the civilian mortality rate in Mariupol from “natural” causes significantly intensified to a peak of 400 deaths per week – 2.6 times higher than Ukraine’s national mortality rate during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Mariupol has no functional medical system because all medical facilities are treating Russian military personnel. Russian forces have consistently used civilian medical infrastructure in occupied Ukraine for their own needs, and are struggling to compensate for the resulting shortage in available healthcare personnel and beds.[50]

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

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in

Belarus, as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to increase their control over Belarus and other Russian actions in Belarus.

Belarus continues defensive posturing along the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on June 18 that Belarusian forces established a 1,000-kilometer-long defensive line along the international border with Ukraine.^[51]

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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<https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1670172335444312065>; https://t.me/toro_ua/46
[2] <https://suspilne.media/510057-ukrainski-vijskovi-prosunulisa-bils-ak-na-odin-kilometr-na-avdiivskomu-napramku-barabas/>
[3] https://t.me/mod_russia/27555; https://t.me/mod_russia/27548 <https://t.me/wargonzo/13326>;
https://t.me/z_arhiv/22130; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/89439; <https://t.me/epoddubny/16435>; <https://t.me/rybar/48636>; https://t.me/voin_dv/3230

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[5] <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/06/18/na-tavrijskomu-napryamku-syly-oborony-ukrayiny-zahopyly-chotyry-bmp-2-bronetransporter-ta-rem-voroga-valerij-shershen/>
[6] https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/2305
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[10] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-10-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-9-2023>

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- [12] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-12-2023>
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- [14] <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-accelerate-arms-shipments-ukraine-eu-industry-chief-2023-06-18/>
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- [19] https://t.me/sons_fatherland/10640; https://t.me/grey_zone/19194
- [20] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0290qTFZhZypCJLn57UAWUCNv8hSuxn8y6wRQGhHz5b4k9f7aW2QYTTpRLW7c3DhCxl>
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- [23] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0281sJpdC8B9Qu1L9uLm6ovfy7TGk5fj6PiT9TBYRbfAKZBDKD2Eq4dDtFnG7Gsrjtl>; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0290qTFZhZypCJLn57UAWUCNv8hSuxn8y6wRQGhHz5b4k9f7aW2QYTTpRLW7c3DhCxl>
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- [29] https://t.me/mod_russia/27555; https://t.me/mod_russia/27548; <https://t.me/wargonzo/13326>; https://t.me/z_arhiv/22130; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/89439; <https://t.me/epoddubny/16435>; <https://t.me/rybar/48636>; https://t.me/voin_dv/3230
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