

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 28, 2023

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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.

Russian forces launched a series of missile strikes against rear areas of Ukraine on the night of April 27. Ukrainian military sources confirmed that Russian forces launched 23 Kh-101/Kh-555 missiles from Tu-95 aircraft over the Caspian Sea and struck civilian infrastructure in Uman, Cherkasy Oblast; Dnipro City; and Ukrainka, Kyiv Oblast.¹ The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian air defense shot down 21 of 23 missiles and two UAVs.² The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) acknowledged the strike and claimed that the Russian aerospace forces conducted a coordinated missile strike against Ukrainian reserve deployment points and struck all intended targets.³ Geolocated footage shows large-scale damage to a residential building in Uman, with the death toll reaching 20 civilians, including children, as of 1700 local time on April 28.⁴

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed the appointment of Vice Admiral Vladimir Vorobyov as the new commander of the Baltic Fleet on April 28 following the transfer of former Baltic Fleet Commander Admiral Viktor Liina to the Pacific Fleet. Russian state media reported that the Russian MoD introduced Vorobyov as the new Baltic Fleet commander thereby confirming that Liina replaced Admiral Sergei Avakyants as Pacific Fleet command.⁵ ISW had previously reported that Liina may have been replacing Avakyants because of Pacific Fleet failures exposed during recent combat readiness exercises, and Russian officials claimed that Avakyants was moved to a new position as head of Russian military sports training and patriotic education centers after aging out of military service.⁶ Vorobyov has previously served as Chief of Staff and First Deputy Commander of both the Baltic and Northern Fleets.⁷

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on April 27 codifying conditions for the further large-scale deportation to Russia of residents of occupied areas of Ukraine. Putin signed a decree entitled “On the Peculiarities of the Legal Status of Certain Categories of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation” that defines those who are living in Russian-occupied territories who have declared their desire to retain their current citizenship and refuse to accept Russian passports as “foreign citizens and stateless persons currently residing in the Russian Federation.”⁸ The decree holds that such individuals may continue to reside in occupied territories until July 1, 2024, suggesting that these individuals may be subject to deportation following this date.⁹ This decree codifies coercive methods to encourage residents of occupied areas to receive

Russian passports and also sets conditions for the deportation of Ukrainians who do not agree to become Russian citizens. Russian authorities are also continuing other efforts to deport Ukrainians, particularly children, to Russia under various schemes.¹⁰ ISW continues to assess that all lines of effort aimed at deporting Ukrainians to Russia may constitute a violation of the Geneva Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, as well as a potential deliberate ethnic cleansing campaign.

Russian Defense Minister Army General Sergei Shoigu promoted the Kremlin's efforts to form a potential anti-Western coalition during a meeting of the defense ministers of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states in New Delhi, India. Shoigu stated on April 28 that the SCO meeting occurred against the backdrop of the establishment of a new multipolar world order, which the collective West is actively opposing.¹¹ Shoigu argued that the US and its allies are provoking conflicts with Russia and China and that the West is attempting to defeat Russia and threaten China through the war in Ukraine.¹² Shoigu invited SCO member states to participate in the 11th Moscow Conference of International Security and called on the SCO to develop a framework for exchanging military information, cooperation in joint military exercises, and the development of partnerships between the SCO and Russian-favored multilateral organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).¹³

The Kremlin has previously identified multilateral organizations without significant Western participation as its preferred bodies for international decision making and will likely continue to use such bodies to promote Russian President Vladimir Putin's envisioned geopolitical conflict with the West.¹⁴ ISW assessed that Putin tried to use Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow from March 20 to 22 to promote the idea of an anti-Western Russian-Chinese-based geopolitical bloc, but that Xi rebuffed Putin's rhetorical overtures.¹⁵ The Kremlin is likely aware that the attractiveness of such a bloc lies more with China's economic and political power than with Russia's increasingly isolated economy and degraded military capacity, which is why it likely chose the Chinese-favored SCO to promote the idea of a potential anti-Western coalition. The Kremlin is also likely attempting to secure through multilateral engagement with China desired benefits of a Chinese-Russian bilateral relationship that Putin was unable to obtain in his meeting with Xi. The Kremlin's attempts to use the SCO to support these efforts are unlikely to be more successful than its previous efforts to rally the rest of the world against the West and convince China that Russia is a reliable and equal security partner.

Head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill of Moscow defrocked a Russian Orthodox Church protodeacon who did not support Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russian Orthodox Protodeacon Andrei Kuraev posted an order dated April 28 defrocking him for "anti-church activities" signed by Patriarch Kirill.¹⁶ The Russian Orthodox Church had previously defrocked Kuraev in December 2020, but Patriarch Kirill imposed a moratorium on the execution of this decision to give Kuraev time to "rethink his position."¹⁷ Kuraev reportedly does not support Russia's invasion of Ukraine or the Russian Orthodox Church's support for the invasion.¹⁸ Russian authorities fined Kuraev 30,000 rubles for discrediting the Russian military in August 2022 after Kuraev wrote a blog post about the current war in Ukraine.¹⁹ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*

additionally reported that Kuraev has criticized the Russian Orthodox Church's structures and Patriarch Kirill, accusing the Russian Orthodox Church of being distant from its parishioners, bureaucratic, and inert.²⁰ Kuraev's defrocking supports ISW's assessment that the Russian Orthodox Church is not an independent religious organization but rather an extension of the Russian state and an instrument of Russian state power.²¹ Russian forces in Ukraine have reportedly gone out of their way to punish individual Russian Orthodox priests in Ukraine who were not fully cooperative with Russian military forces.²²

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces launched a series of missile strikes against rear areas of Ukraine on the night of April 27.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed the appointment of Vice Admiral Vladimir Vorobyov as the new commander of the Baltic Fleet following the transfer of former Baltic Fleet commander Admiral Viktor Liina to the Pacific Fleet.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree codifying conditions for the further large-scale deportation of residents of occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Army General Sergei Shoigu promoted the Kremlin's efforts to form a potential anti-Western coalition during a meeting of the defense ministers of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states in New Delhi, India.**
- **Head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill of Moscow defrocked a Russian Orthodox Church protodeacon who did not support Russia's invasion of Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces continued ground attacks near Kreminna and have made an incremental advance northwest of Kreminna as of April 28.**
- **Russian forces are increasing pressure against the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway.**
- **Russian forces continued routine indirect fire and defensive operations in southern Ukraine.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin tasked Russian officials with developing Russia's domestic drone industry likely as part of the Kremlin's effort to gradually mobilize Russia's defense industrial base (DIB).**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue to announce patronage programs with Russian federal subjects.**

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 continued ground attacks near Kreminna and have made an incremental advance northwest of Kreminna as of April 28. Geolocated footage posted on April 28 shows that Russian forces have advanced in an area about 10km northwest of Kreminna.²³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna), the Serebrianske forest area (10km south of Kreminna), and Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna).²⁴ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian troops unsuccessfully attacked towards Torske and Terny, both about 13km west of Kreminna.²⁵

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

Russian forces are increasing pressure against the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway. Geolocated footage posted on April 27 shows that Russian forces advanced to the Bakhmut Industrial College on the T0504 in southwestern Bakhmut.²⁶ Other geolocated footage shows Ukrainian forces conducting a controlled withdrawal from one building along the T0504, suggesting that Russian forces also advanced in that area.²⁷ The Ukrainian General Staff reported for the first time on April 27 that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian ground attack in the direction of Chasiv Yar (9km west of Bakhmut).²⁸

Russian forces continued ground attacks in and around Bakhmut on April 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued attacks within Bakhmut and that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks in the direction of Bohdanivka (5km northwest of Bakhmut).²⁹ Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group forces broke through Ukrainian defensive lines in central Bakhmut and continued attacking Ukrainian positions in northern, southern, and western Bakhmut.³⁰ The milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces attacked near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut) and Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut). One milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted counterattacks near Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut) and Bohdanivka.³¹

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on April 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks near Avdiivka, Sieverne (5km west of Avdiivka), Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka (22km southwest of Avdiivka), Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka), and Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).³² A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Krasnohorivka on April 27.³³ Another milblogger claimed on April 28 that Russian forces attacked Ukrainian positions on the southwestern approach to Avdiivka.³⁴

Ukrainian forces have advanced in western Donetsk Oblast as of April 28. Geolocated footage posted on April 28 shows that Ukrainian forces advanced southwest of Pavlivka (3km southwest of Vuhledar).³⁵ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces struck Ukrainian positions near Pavlivka.³⁶ Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed or claimed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on April 28.³⁷

Russian forces have likely allocated TOS-1A thermobaric artillery systems, military-district level assets, to the Avdiivka and western Donetsk Oblast axes, indicating potential preparations to intensify offensive operations. The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) posted footage on April 28 purportedly of Russian 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) forces firing a TOS-1A system in the Avdiivka direction, and the Russian MoD stated that Russian forces are operating thermobaric artillery systems in western Donetsk Oblast.³⁸ The utilization of TOS-1A systems in the Avdiivka and western Donetsk Oblast axes is unlikely to generate a decisive battlefield advantage for Russian forces, as ISW has previously assessed.³⁹

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

Russian forces continued routine indirect fire and defensive operations in southern Ukraine on April 28. The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian troops are defending in the Kherson and Zaporizhia directions.⁴⁰ Russian sources continued to speculate about a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive across the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast and across the Kakhovka Reservoir in Zaporizhia Oblast.⁴¹ Geolocated footage posted on April 28 shows Ukrainian forces striking Russian positions in Korsunka, Kherson Oblast.⁴²

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin tasked Russian officials with developing Russia's domestic drone industry likely as part of the Kremlin's effort to gradually mobilize Russia's defense industrial base (DIB). Putin visited a drone production facility at the Rudnevo industrial park in Moscow on April 28 and then attended a meeting at which he stressed the importance of developing Russia's domestic drone production.⁴³ Putin framed the development of the Russian drone industry as a matter of "technological sovereignty" and instructed Russian officials to increase Russia's ability to develop and product drone components indigenously, possibly suggesting that Russia's dependence on Iran and other third parties for military drones has unnerved the Kremlin.⁴⁴ Putin announced that the Kremlin will create demand for domestic drones through state orders and that special operators will make large purchases and then lease out drones.⁴⁵ First Deputy Prime Minister Andrey Belousov reported to Putin that the Russian government has drafted and approved a state order amounting to 4.4 billion

rubles (roughly \$59 billion) for the production of drones through 2030.⁴⁶ Belousov also highlighted plans for opening research and production facilities throughout Russia, establishing direct financial support measures for drone producers, and creating educational programs to train drone designers and operators.⁴⁷ Belousov claimed that Russia will produce 670,000 drones, including 16,000 medium and heavy drones, by 2030, likely an unrealistic goal given that Belousov stated that the current Russian drone market is comprised of 32,000 drones, two-thirds of which are imported.⁴⁸ Drones are continuing to play a significant tactical role in Ukraine, and the Kremlin's announced plan to increase drone production by a 2030 deadline indicates that the Kremlin is continuing to gradually mobilize specific parts of Russia's DIB instead of conducting a wider economic mobilization. ISW has previously assessed that the Kremlin wants to avoid a wider economic mobilization that would create further domestic economic disruptions and corresponding discontent.⁴⁹

Putin was likely also attempting to address widespread criticism from Russia's ultranationalist community about the lack of government support for drone production. Russian milbloggers have routinely criticized the Russian government for not supporting volunteers who produce small drones from commercially available components and send them to Russian forces in Ukraine.⁵⁰ Putin stated at the meeting that he fully supports proposals that would see children learn to manage, collect, and design drones in school, a measure that some prominent milbloggers have endorsed.⁵¹

A Russian State Duma Deputy reportedly stated that Russian officials may apply sanctions intended to punish draft dodgers to citizens eligible for military service who do not report their place of work or study as well as their residence.⁵² Duma Deputy Andrei Lugovoi reportedly made the comments in an article he published on April 28 and then subsequently deleted.⁵³

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 authorities continue to announce patronage programs with Russian federal subjects. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation authorities and Chuvashia Republic Head Oleg Nikolaev signed an agreement on April 27 establishing Chuvashia as the patron of occupied Berdyansk Raion, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁵⁴

Ukrainian officials continue to draw attention to Russia's illegal deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Ukrainian People's Deputy Maria Mezentseva announced on April 28 that Ukraine has provided the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) a list of 19,000 Ukrainian children forcibly deported by Russia.⁵⁵ Mezentseva stated that the ICRC has the authority to visit the children placed in Russian camps, foster families, and other places where Russian authorities are illegally keeping children but that it is unknown when these visits will take place.⁵⁶ The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on April 28 that Russian occupation authorities intend to withdraw Ukrainian children from schools in Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast, at the end of the school year and force their parents to travel with them to Russia under the pretext of evacuation.⁵⁷

Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured

this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.)

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. An unspecified Belarusian tank battalion participated in tactical exercises as part of a brigade tactical exercise at an unspecified location on April 28.⁵⁸ Unspecified elements of a Belarusian reconnaissance battalion also conducted an exercise to cross a water obstacle in BMP-2s on April 28.⁵⁹

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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⁵⁰ <https://t.me/rybar/44965> ; <https://t.me/MedvedevVesti/13440> ; <https://t.me/rybar/44534> ; <https://t.me/vladlentarsky/19887> ; <https://t.me/vsokygovorit/10979> ; <https://t.me/MedvedevVesti/13335>

⁵¹ <https://t.me/rybar/44534>

⁵² <https://t.me/mobilizationnews/11552>

⁵³ <https://t.me/mobilizationnews/11552>

⁵⁴ <https://t.me/BalitskyEV/1028>; <https://t.me/vrogov/8969>

⁵⁵ <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-mezentseva-chervonyi-khrest-vykradeni-dity/32383511.html>

⁵⁶ <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-mezentseva-chervonyi-khrest-vykradeni-dity/32383511.html>

⁵⁷ <https://sprotyv.mod.gov dot ua/2023/04/28/okupanty-planuyut-deportuvaty-ditej-z-gorlivky/>

⁵⁸ <https://t.me/modmilby/26477>

⁵⁹ <https://t.me/modmilby/26460>