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August 21, 2025, 6:15 pm ET

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

The Kremlin continues to insist that the 2022 Istanbul negotiations are the only acceptable departure point for potential future negotiations on the war in Ukraine, thereby demanding that Russia and its allies reserve the right to veto any Western military assistance to Ukraine and that Ukraine be left neutered and defenseless against future Russian aggression. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated during a joint press conference with Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on August 21 that Russia will proceed on the issue of security guarantees for Ukraine based on its experience with the 2015 Minsk II agreement and 2022 Istanbul negotiations.[1] Lavrov claimed that the 2022 Istanbul negotiations were based on the concept of "eliminating the root causes" of the war in Ukraine, referencing the Kremlin's oft-evoked accusation that the "root causes" of the war include NATO's eastward expansion and Ukraine's alleged discrimination against Russian speakers and the Moscow-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church.[2] Lavrov claimed that the 2022 Istanbul negotiations would have ensured Ukraine's security "honestly and collectively" via a group of guarantor countries including United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent members, Germany, and Turkey. Lavrov similarly stated on August 20 during a meeting with Jordanian officials that Russia was ready to sign on to an agreement based on the 2022 Istanbul negotiations and that those negotiations are a "good example" of a way to negotiate an end to the war.[3]

Lavrov's recent statements lauding the 2022 Istanbul negotiations suggest that the Kremlin has selected Lavrov to be the predominant amplifier of the longstanding Russian narrative that the Istanbul negotiations are the necessary starting point for negotiations. An agreement based on the 2022 Istanbul negotiations would have crippled Ukraine by permanently banning it from joining NATO, imposing draconian limitations on the size of the Ukrainian military, and prohibiting Ukraine from receiving any Western military assistance.[4] The draft agreement also demanded that Russia and the UNSC, including the People's Republic of China (PRC, a key Russian ally), be granted the status of guarantor states and that guarantor states must act in concert in the event of a violation of the agreement, which would allow Russia to veto Western military assistance for Ukraine.[5] The draft Istanbul agreement notably imposes no limitations on Russia's military capabilities—effectively neutering Ukraine politically and militarily while protecting Russia's ability to reinvade Ukraine in the future on much more favorable terms even than it faced in 2022. The Kremlin likely understands that the 2022 Istanbul framework is a non-starter for Kyiv and therefore continues to invoke it in an effort to paint Ukraine as

unwilling to negotiate while Moscow continues to delay good-faith peacemaking efforts.

The Kremlin continues to categorically reject US-backed security guarantees for Ukraine and reveal its continued objectives of seizing control of all of Ukraine. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev explicitly rejected US- and European-led efforts to provide Ukraine with reliable security guarantees by reiterating on his English-language X (formerly Twitter) account on August 20 that "[Russia has] explicitly stated: No NATO troops as peacekeepers" and that Russia will not accept such a security guarantee.[6] Medvedev claimed that Ukraine does not need such security guarantees, contrary to the Trump administration's position on Ukraine's need for robust security guarantees.[7] Russian State Duma Deputy Alexei Zhuravlev claimed on August 21 that Ukraine should emulate Finland's negotiation model following World War II and become a neutral state and cede part of its territory and that negotiations will be based on battlefield dynamics.[8] State Duma Deputy Dmitry Belik echoed Zhuravlev's sentiments by claiming that Ukraine's attempts to alter its own territorial borders ignores the realities on the ground.[9] Kremlin officials often use the idea of "realities on the ground" to claim that Russia is in a superior position on the battlefield and to demand that Ukraine concede to Russia's demands.[10] Chairperson of the Russian Federation Council Committee on International Affairs Grigory Karasin claimed on August 21 that stakeholders must understand that Russia is concerned about its strategic security vis a vis Europe and NATO and that this raises questions about the overall viability of the entire negotiation process.[11] Several Kremlin officials claimed that Russia is defending new territories that are enshrined in Russia's Constitution and therefore international recognition of Russia's annexation is unnecessary, obfuscating the fact that Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea and Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts is illegal under international law.[12] Kherson Oblast occupation governor Vladimir Saldo claimed that Donbas and Novorossiia – which Russian officials have defined as all of eastern and southern Ukraine – are original Russian lands and cannot be part of any territorial concession to Ukraine.[13] Russian reserve Colonel Viktor Baranets claimed on August 20 that Russia may allow European peacekeeping troops in Ukraine in exchange for Ukraine ceding all of its southern oblasts, including Odesa, Mykolaiv, and perhaps Kharkiv, to Russia.[14] Russia notably does not occupy any part of Odesa Oblast and occupies slivers of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv oblasts.

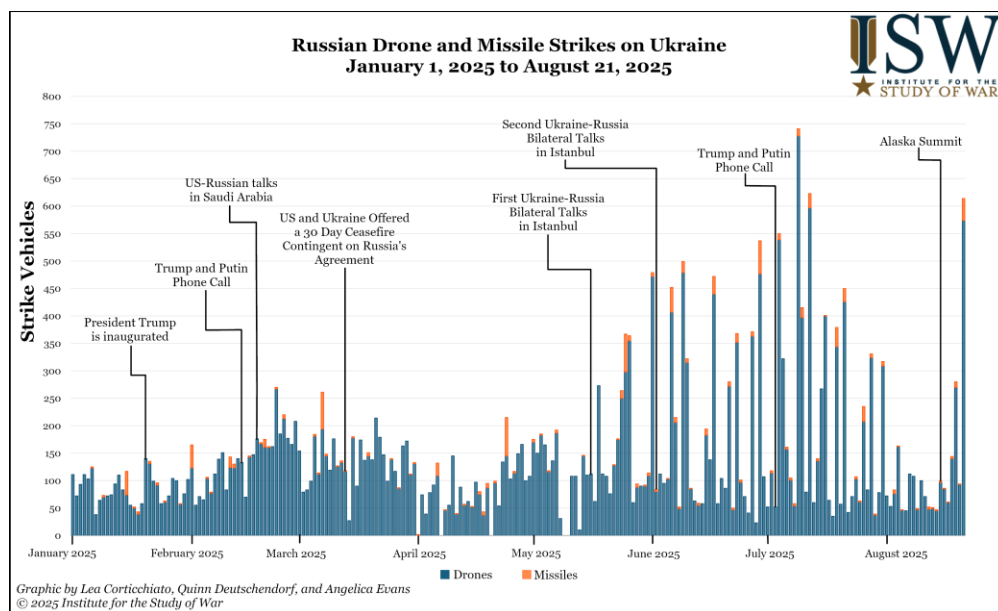
Reuters, citing three sources familiar with top-level Kremlin thinking, reported on August 21 that Putin continues to demand that Ukraine cede all of eastern Donbas, renounce ambitions to join NATO, and establish itself as a neutral state and refuse to host Western troops.[15] The sources added that Putin told US officials that he is willing to freeze Russian offensive operations in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts in exchange as well as return small unspecified parts of Kharkiv, Sumy, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts. The sources reported that Putin continues to demand that NATO fundamentally alter one of its core tenets and commit to a legally binding pledge to not expand eastward, a demand that would require the renegotiation and re-ratification of the NATO treaty by all NATO member states. Lavrov recently stated that the Kremlin's objective is to politically control all of Ukraine rather than to seize select Ukrainian territories such as Donetsk Oblast, further demonstrating that Russia remains unwilling to accept any agreement that falls short of Ukraine's full capitulation.[16] US President Donald Trump and US Vice President JD Vance have recently expressed the United States' willingness to contribute to the safeguarding of measures to prevent Russia from resuming its war in Ukraine.[17]

Russia is expending considerable diplomatic effort to court India, suggesting that the Kremlin continues to fear the impact of secondary sanctions. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on August 21 to discuss Russian-Indian relations and expanding economic investment in energy, including the oil supply, hydrocarbons, and nuclear energy.[18] Russian Deputy Energy Minister Roman Marshavin met with Indian deputy minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Pankaj Jain on August 20 to discuss expanding cooperation in the energy trade.[19] Lavrov held a joint conference with Jaishankar after the meeting and announced that Putin would likely visit India before the end of 2025, and Jaishankar stated that India "believe[s] that relations between India and Russia have been among the steadiest of the major relationships in the world after the Second World War." [20] Putin and other high-ranking Russian officials are spending considerable amounts of time and energy to stabilize and strengthen relationships with India, indicating that Russia views India as a critical source of revenue. ISW continues to assess that secondary sanctions will likely further impact the Russian economy by undercutting Russian oil revenues which are essential for the Kremlin's financing of its war against Ukraine.[21] Intensive Russian outreach to India suggests that Moscow is attempting to ensure that New Delhi does not curtail energy purchases from Russia because of these potential secondary sanctions.

Russia launched the third largest strike of the war thus far against Ukraine on the night of August 20 to 21, targeting Western regions of Ukraine and causing significant damage to civilian infrastructure. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that overnight Russian forces launched 574 Shahed-type and decoy drones from over Kursk, Oryol, and Bryansk cities, Millerovo, Rostov Oblast, Shatalovo, Smolensk Oblast, Primorsko Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai, and occupied Hvardiiske, Crimea; four Kh-47 Kinzhal aeroballistic missiles from over Lipetsk and Voronezh oblasts; two Iskander-M/KN-23 ballistic missiles from over Voronezh Oblast; 19 Kh-101 cruise missiles from over Saratov Oblast; 14 Kalibr cruise missiles from over the Black Sea; and one unidentified missile from over occupied Crimea.[22] Ukrainian forces reportedly downed 546 drones, one Kh-47 Kinzhal aeroballistic missile, 18 Kh-101 cruise missiles, and 12 Kalibr cruise missiles.[23] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that drones and missiles struck 11 locations throughout Ukraine.[24] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones and missiles struck infrastructure in Lviv City; Lutsk, Volyn Oblast; Rivne Oblast; and Zakarpattia Oblast, causing civilian injuries and deaths.[25] Russia's August 20-21 strike notably targeted several areas in Ukraine's far-western oblasts that border Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland. Russia launched a cruise missile at Mukachevo, Zakarpattia Oblast, striking the "Flex" US electronics manufacturing company and causing a massive fire and injuring at least 19 employees.[26] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that "Flex" was a US-owned civilian enterprise that manufactured household goods such as coffee machines.[27] Russia likely struck the "Flex" enterprise to discourage the United States and Ukraine's European allies from investing in Ukraine or opening businesses within Ukraine.

Russia likely prepared for this strike for several weeks, stockpiling drones and missiles over the backdrop of ongoing US-Russian negotiations and the August 15 Alaska summit.[28] ISW observed that Russia was launching much smaller strike packages in the weeks leading up to the Alaska summit in order to posture itself to the United States as a good-faith negotiator, and assessed that Russia was likely to leverage the smaller-scale strikes to stockpile drones and missiles for renewed massive strikes

on Ukraine following the summit.[29] The size and composition of the August 20-21 strike package suggests that Russia successfully stockpiled significant numbers of both drones and missiles in the lead-up to the Alaska summit. Russian forces most recently launched Kalibr cruise missiles on July 21 and Kinzhals on August 4, suggesting that efforts to stockpile these munitions allowed Russian to use them in greater quantities during the August 20-21 strike series.[30]



The Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB) continues to innovate and scale production of long-range weapons. US President Donald Trump stated on August 21 that it is impossible for Ukraine to achieve victory against Russia if Ukraine is only able to use defensive weapons and systems and is “not allowed to play offense.”[31] The Associated Press (AP) reported on August 21 that Ukraine has launched mass production of its new FP-5 Flamingo cruise missiles which have a range of up to three thousand kilometers and can carry warheads up to 1,150 kilograms.[32] The AP reported that Ukraine currently produces one FP-5 cruise missile per day and aims to increase daily production capacity to produce seven FP-5 cruise missiles per day by October 2025. Ukraine continues to successfully invest in and expand the Ukrainian DIB capacity for producing medium- to long-range weapons systems capable of striking military and DIB facilities within Russia. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in December 2024 that Ukraine would work to scale its production capacity of Palyanytsya, Peklo, Ruta, Neptune, and Sapsan missiles.[33] Ukraine notably succeeded in increasing the range of Neptune anti-ship missiles to allow Ukrainian forces to strike military and DIB facilities located deeper within Russia.[34]

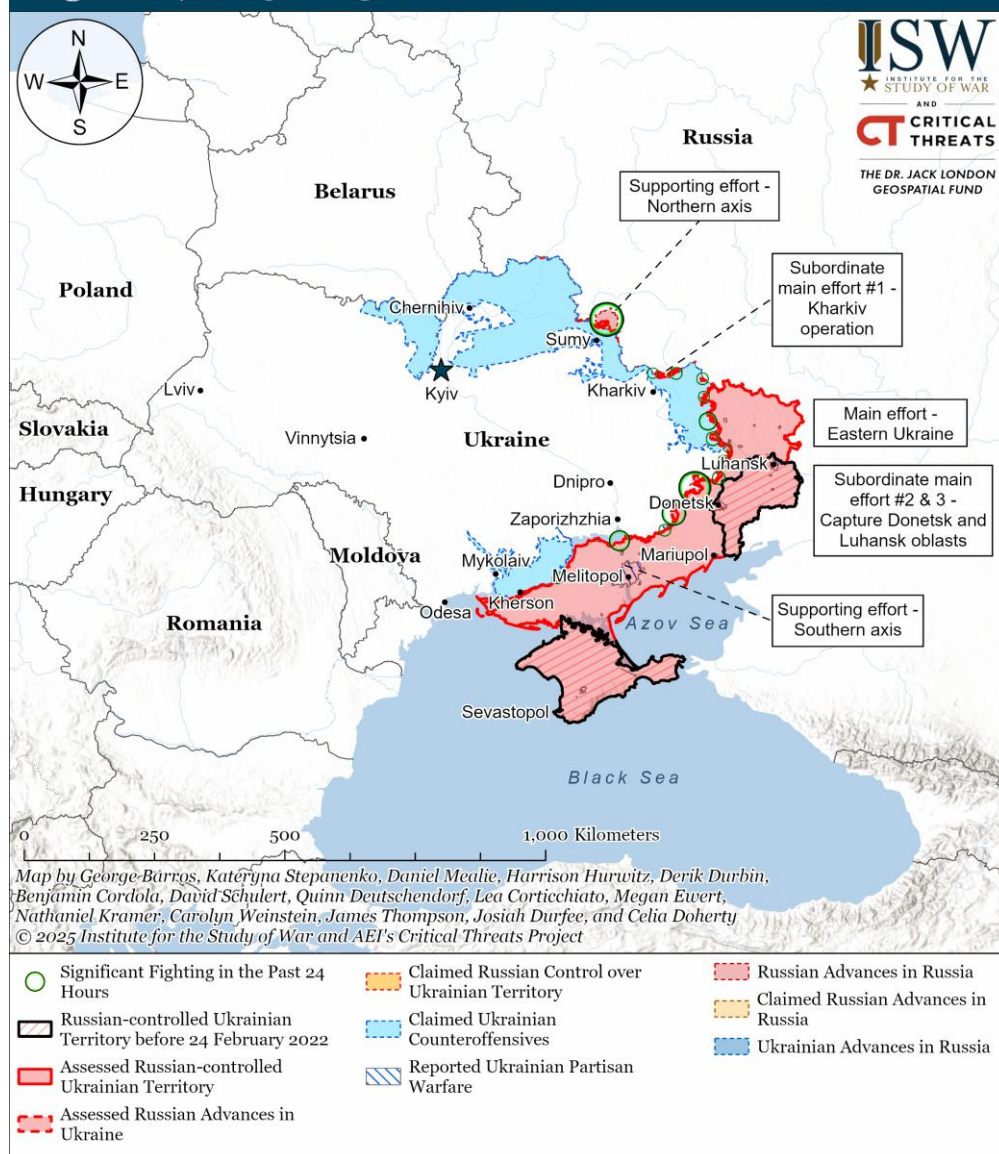
The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officially confirmed that it replaced former Northern Group of Forces and Leningrad Military District (LMD) Commander Colonel General Alexander Lapin with Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces Colonel General Yevgeny Nikiforov.[35] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) posted video footage of Nikiforov briefing Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov on August 21, confirming milblogger claims that Nikiforov replaced Lapin on August 8.[36] The Russian military command’s belated replacement of Lapin reflects Russian President Vladimir Putin’s reluctance to dismiss commanders

despite displayed command deficiencies, as the Russian military command reappointed Lapin to another high-profile command post despite prominent protest in the Russian information space highlighting Lapin's significant battlefield failures.[37] A Russian milblogger noted that a scandal involving the embezzlement of money allocated for fortifications in Kursk Oblast and the August 2024 Ukrainian incursion into the oblast marred Lapin's tenure in command of the Northern Group of Forces.[38] Russian milbloggers recently criticized Lapin due to Russia's failure to establish a buffer zone in northern Sumy and Kharkiv Oblasts.[39] Nikiforov, who began Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine as chief of staff of the Eastern Military District (EMD), commanded the Western Group of Forces and Western Military District from December 2022 and was appointed Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces in Spring 2024.[40] The Russian MoD sent Nikiforov to assist Lapin and organize efforts to stop the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024.[41] A Russian milblogger reportedly affiliated with the Russian Northern Group of Forces claimed on August 8 that Nikiforov is a relic of the "parquet army" of the 2000s who criticizes subordinates over minor mistakes.[42] ISW assesses that Nikiforov is unlikely to make any major changes, given his presence in the Northern Group of Forces sector for more than a year.

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin continues to insist that the 2022 Istanbul negotiations are the only acceptable departure point for potential future negotiations on the war in Ukraine, thereby demanding that Russia and its allies reserve the right to veto any Western military assistance to Ukraine and that Ukraine be left neutered and defenseless against future Russian aggression.**
- **The Kremlin continues to categorically reject US-backed security guarantees for Ukraine and reveal its continued objectives of seizing control of all of Ukraine.**
- **Russia is expending considerable diplomatic effort to court India, suggesting that the Kremlin continues to fear the impact of secondary sanctions.**
- **Russia launched the third largest strike of the war thus far against Ukraine on the night of August 20 to 21, targeting Western regions of Ukraine and causing significant damage to civilian infrastructure.**
- **The Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB) continues to innovate and scale production of long-range weapons.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officially confirmed that it replaced former Northern Group of Forces and Leningrad Military District (LMD) Commander Colonel General Alexander Lapin with Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces Colonel General Yevgeny Nikiforov.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Novopavlivka. Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Russo-Ukrainian War August 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



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 Supporting Effort – Northern Axis

- 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, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas, and possibly advance into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Significant Activity in Belarus

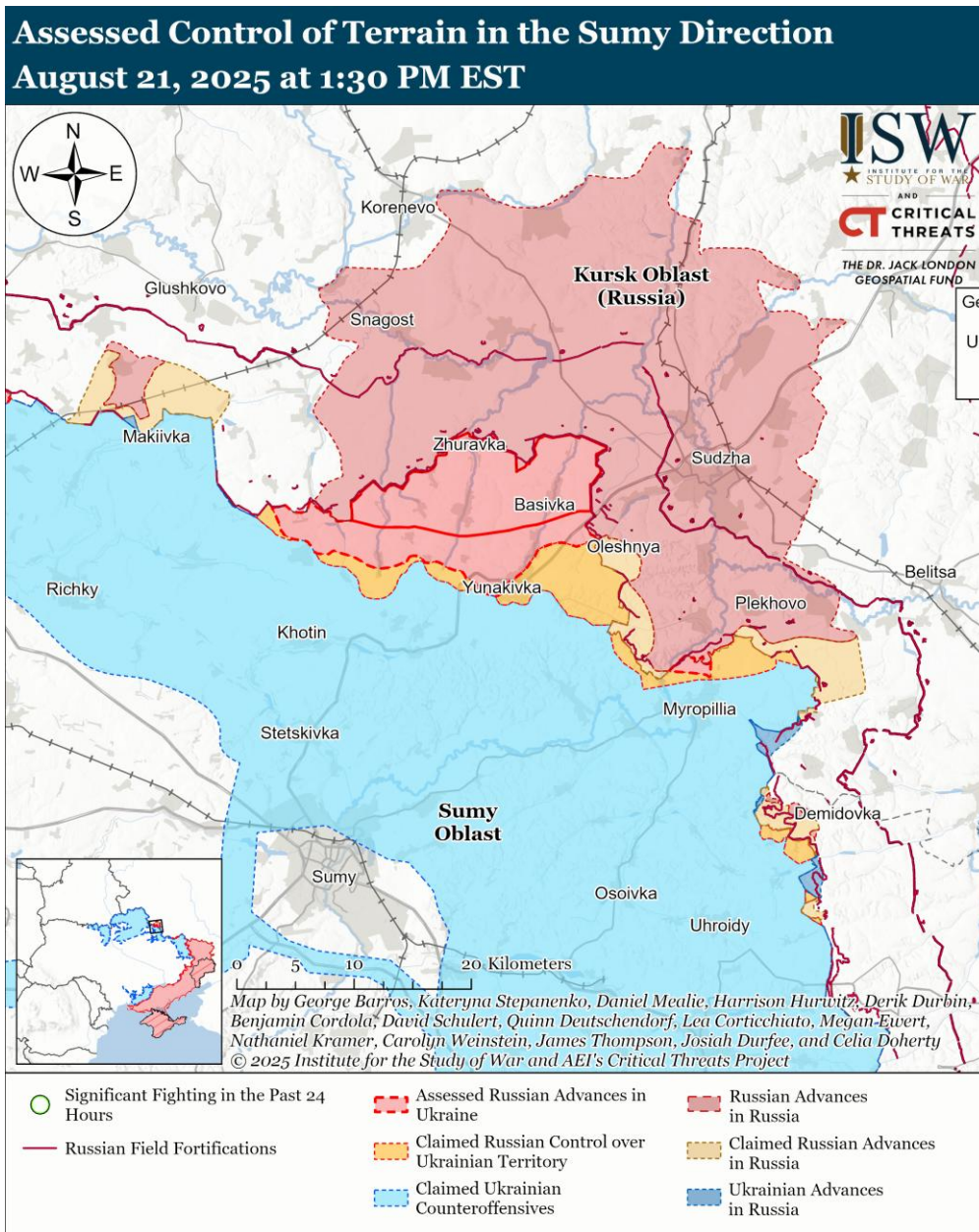
Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation

Fighting continued in unspecified areas of Kursk Oblast on August 21.[43]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on August 21 that elements of Ukraine’s Unmanned Systems Forces (USF), along with other unspecified Ukrainian forces, conducted long-range drone strikes against the Novoshakhtinsky Oil Refinery in Novoshakhtinsk, Rostov Oblast, which supplies Russian forces operating in Ukraine and is one of southern Russia’s largest oil product producers.[44] Ukrainian outlet *Militarnyi* reported on August 21 that the Novoshakhtinsky Oil Refinery can process 7.5 million tons of oil annually.[45] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces struck an unspecified military fuel and lubricant base in Voronezh Oblast overnight on August 20 to 21.[46]

Russian Supporting Effort – Northern Axis (Russian objective: Create defensible buffer zones in northern Ukraine along the international border and approach to within tube artillery range of Sumy City)

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Sumy direction on August 21 but did not advance.



Russian forces attacked northeast of Sumy City near Yunakivka, Novokostyantynivka, and Yablunivka on August 20 and 21.[47]

The spokesperson for a Ukrainian detachment operating in the Sumy direction stated that Russian forces launch roughly five daily assaults and conduct 30 to 50 KAB guided glide bomb strikes daily.[48] The spokesperson stated that Russian forces only conducted one infiltration attempt in this direction so far in August 2025 due to Ukrainian fortifications and combat positions in this area.

Sumy Oblast Head Oleh Hryhorov stated on August 21 that Russian drones struck a Ukrainian medical vehicle in Seredyna-Buda (northwest of Sumy City).[49]

Order of Battle: Anti-aircraft gunners of the Russian 137th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (106th VDV Division) and elements of the 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division) are reportedly operating in the Sumy direction.[50] Elements of the 51st VDV Regiment (106th VDV Division) are reportedly operating in Sadky (northeast of Sumy City).[51] Drone operators of the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Aida Detachment are reportedly operating near Kindrativka (north of Sumy City).[52] Drone operators of the Smuglyanka Detachment are reportedly coordinating strikes on Ukrainian positions near Nova Sich (north of Sumy City) with Akhmat Spetsnaz elements.[53] Drone operators of the 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are striking Ukrainian positions in the Sumy direction.[54] Elements of the 83rd Separate Guards VDV Brigade are reportedly operating south of Yunakivka.[55] Elements of the 810th Separate Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) are reportedly operating in Oleksiivka (north of Sumy City).[56]

Russian	Main	Effort	–	Eastern	Ukraine
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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 northern Kharkiv Oblast on August 21 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in forest areas west of Synelnykove (northeast of Kharkiv City).[57]

Russian forces continued ground attacks north of Kharkiv City near Lyptsi and northeast of Kharkiv City within Vovchansk and near Synelnykove on August 20 and 21.[58]

A Ukrainian company commander operating in the Kharkiv direction stated on August 21 that Russian forces in this direction have not used armored equipment “for a long time” and occasionally assault Ukrainian positions using motorcycles.[59] The company commander noted that Ukrainian forces’ use of drones in the Kharkiv direction has prevented Russian forces from accumulating equipment as far as 30 kilometers away from the frontline.

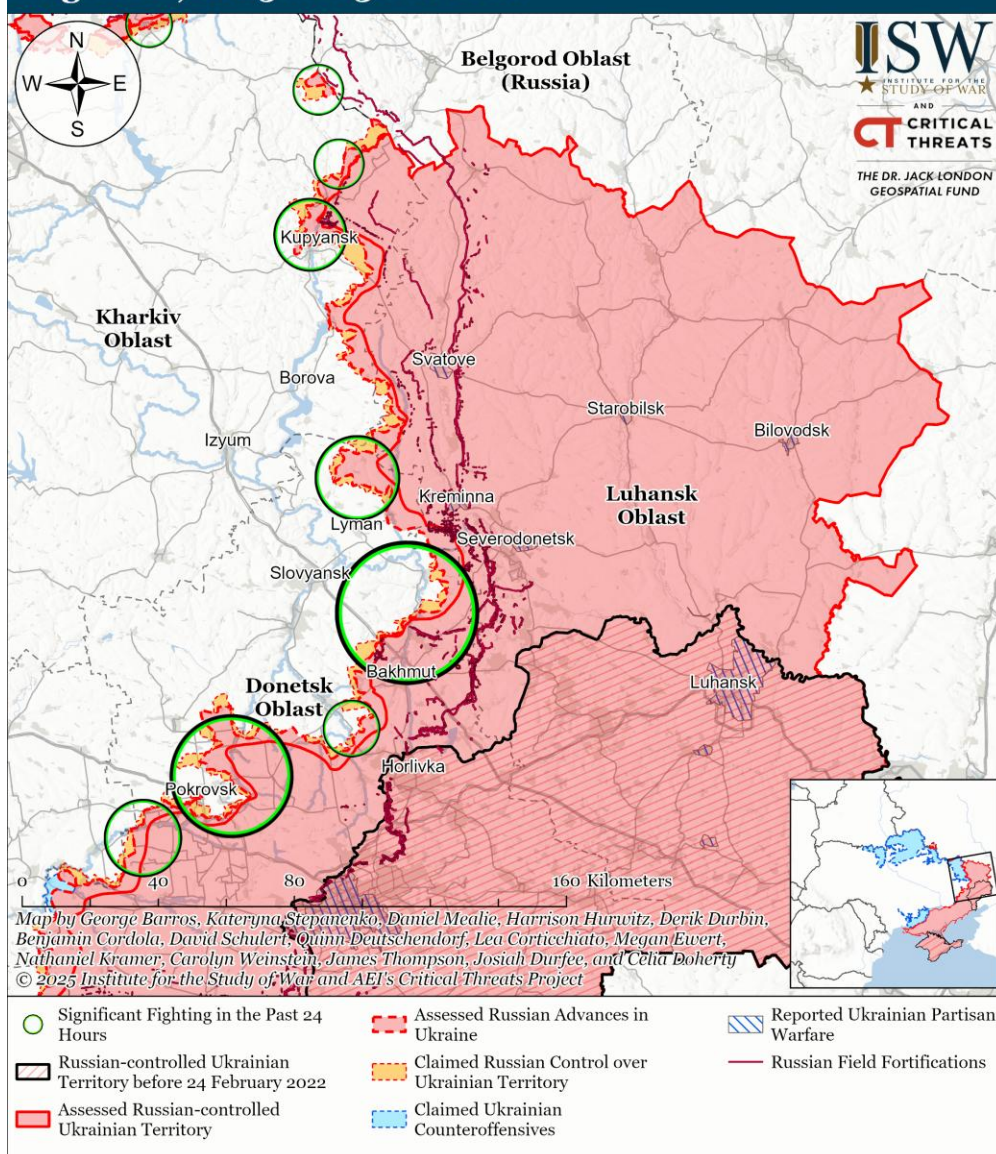
Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the Velykyi Burluk direction on August 21 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced one kilometer in forest areas towards Khatnie (northeast of Velykyi Burluk).[60]

Russian forces continued ground attacks northeast of Velykyi Burluk near Khatnie and Ambarne and southeast of Velykyi Burluk toward Katerynivka on August 20 and 21.[61]

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)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Luhansk Oblast August 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the Kupyansk direction on August 21 but did not advance.

Russian forces attacked near Kupyansk itself; north of Kupyansk near Holubivka; and northeast of Kupyansk near Fyholivka on August 20 and 21.[62] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked in Petropavlivka (east of Kupyansk).[63]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the Borova direction on August 21 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced southwest of Hrektivka (southeast of Borova).[64]

Russian forces attacked southeast of Borova toward Olhivka on August 20.[65]

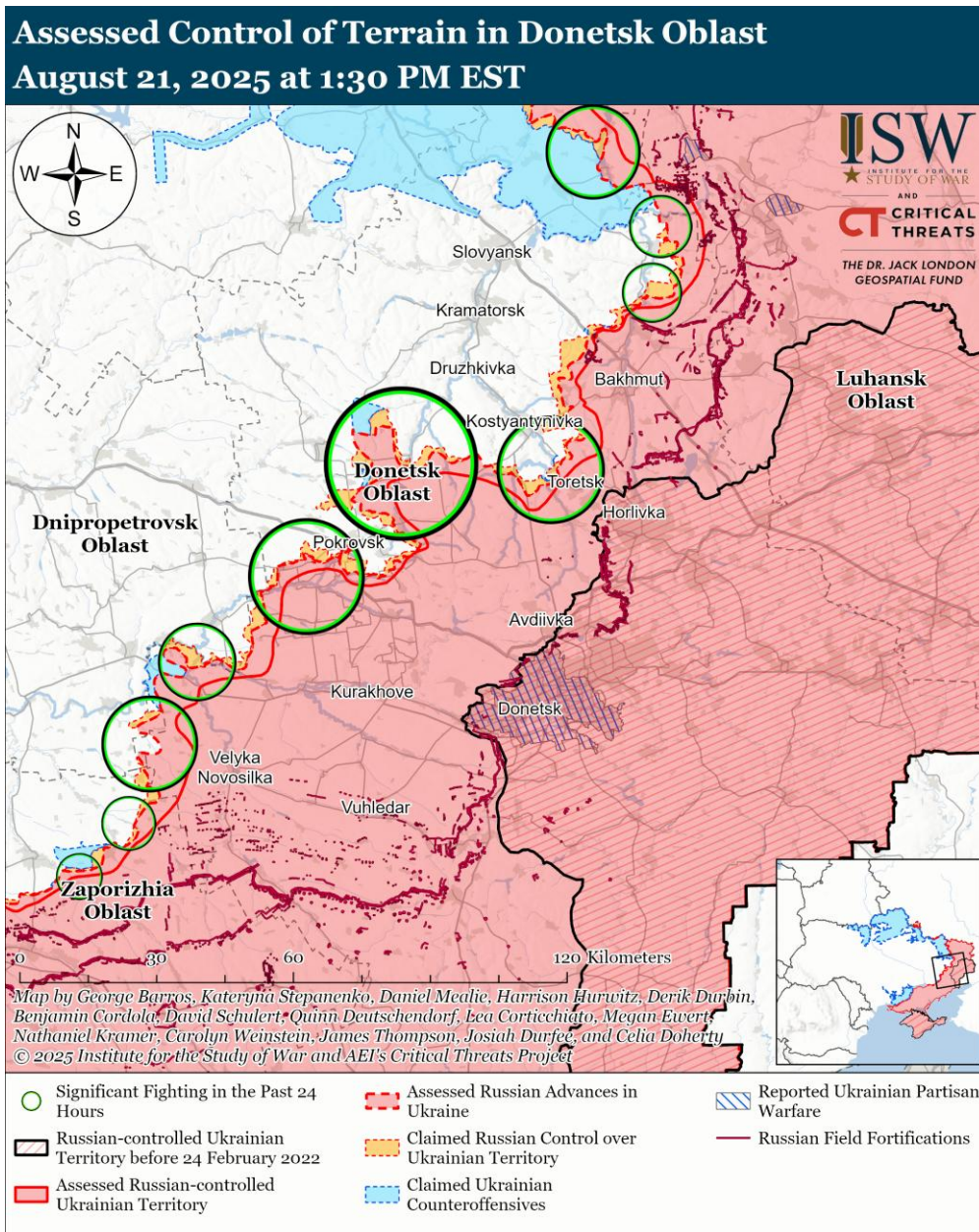
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Lyman direction on August 21 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces seized Serednie (northwest of Lyman) and advanced west of Kolodyazi (northeast of Lyman).[66]

Russian forces attacked northwest of Lyman near Shandryholove and Serednie; north of Lyman near Karpivka, Zelena Dolyna, and Ridkodub; northeast of Lyman near Kolodyazi and Myrne; east of Lyman near Torske and Dibrova; and southeast of Lyman toward Yampil and in the Serebryanske forest area on August 20 and 21.[67]

Ukrainian Dnipro Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Viktor Trehubov stated on August 21 that Russian forces in the Lyman direction have accumulated significant manpower and continue to launch traditional mass frontal assaults on Ukrainian positions in the Serebryanske forest area (southeast of Lyman).[68] The spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Lyman direction stated that Russian forces in this direction continue to conduct small infantry assaults on Ukrainian positions and have recently increased their use of Lancet, Molniya, and other unspecified reconnaissance and first-person view (FPV) drones.[69]

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



Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Siversk direction on August 21 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced west of Vyimka (southeast of Siversk).[70]

Russian forces attacked near Siversk itself; northwest of Siversk toward Dronivka; north of Siversk near Serebryanka; northeast of Siversk near Hryhorivka; east of Siversk near Verkhnyokamyanske and Novoselivka; southeast of Siversk near Vyimka; south of Siversk near Pereizne; and southwest of Siversk near Fedorivka on August 20 and 21.[71]

Russian forces recently advanced in the Chasiv Yar direction.

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on August 20 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced west of Klishchiivka (southeast of Chasiv Yar).[72]

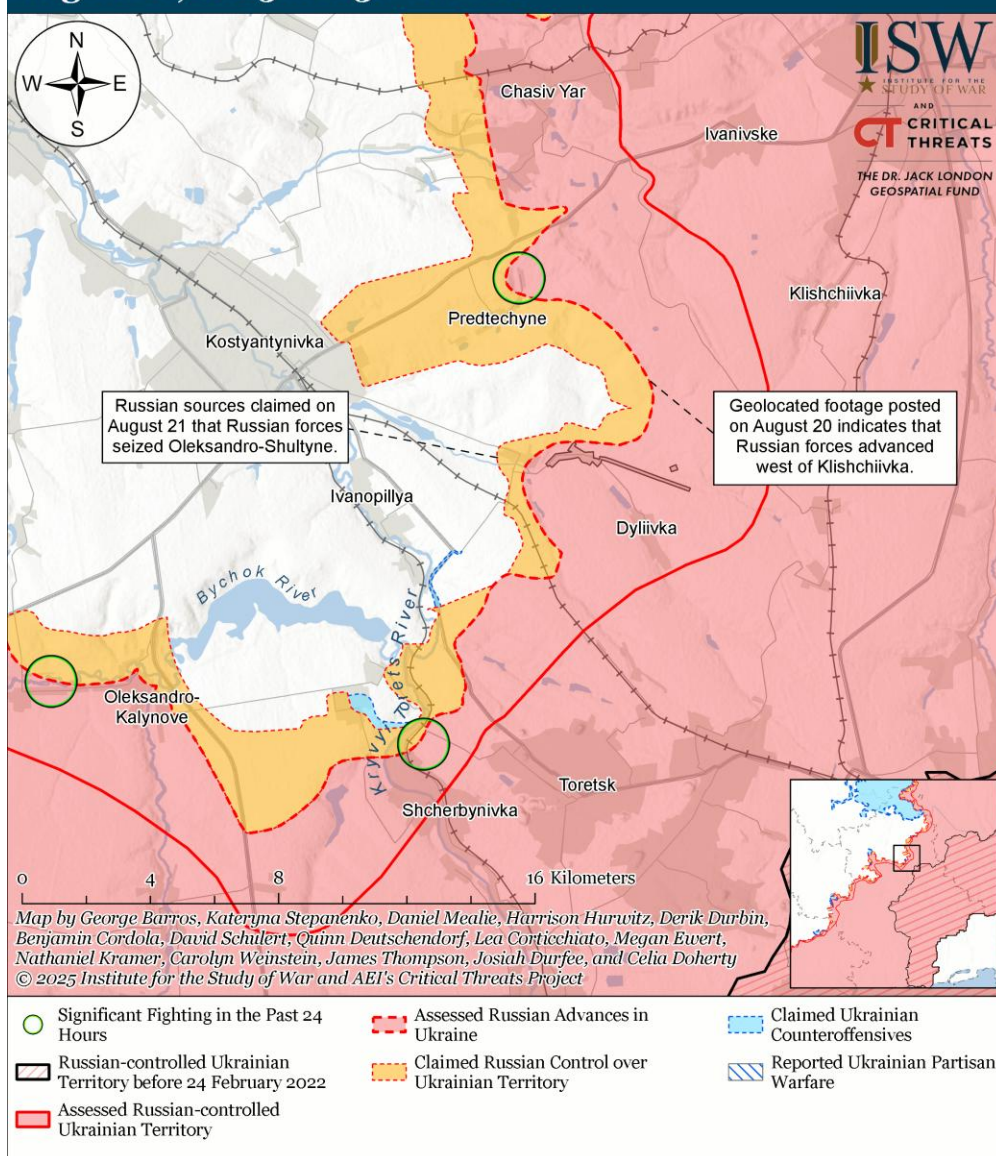
Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces entered the dacha area near Kostyantynivka (southwest of Chasiv Yar) from the east but that Ukrainian drone activity forced them to retreat.[73] Another milblogger refuted claims that Russian forces entered Predtechyne (south of Chasiv Yar) and eastern Kostyantynivka and advanced west of the Siverskyi-Donetsk Donbas Canal (south of Chasiv Yar), claiming that Russian staff officers above the brigade echelon systemically embellish reports of Russian gains for the Russian high command.[74]

Russian forces attacked south of Chasiv Yar near Stupochky and Predtechyne and southwest of Chasiv Yar near Kostyantynivka on August 20 and 21.[75]

Kramatorsk City Military Administration Head Oleksandr Honcharenko stated on August 21 that Russian forces struck Kramatorsk (northwest of Chasiv Yar) overnight with an FAB-250 unguided glide bomb, damaging civilian infrastructure.[76]

Order of Battle: Geolocated footage published on August 18 and geolocated on August 20 shows drone operators of the Russian 8th CAA (SMD), including its 439th Rocket Artillery Brigade and 238th Artillery Brigade, coordinating Lancet drone strikes against Ukrainian positions southeast of Kostyantynivka.[77] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division, including drone operators and sniper elements, are reportedly operating near Chasiv Yar.[78] Drone operators of the Grachi detachment of the 346th Separate Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff's Main Directorate [GRU]) and the 77th Motorized Rifle Regiment (reportedly of the 7th Military Base, 49th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly striking Ukrainian forces in the Kostyantynivka (Chasiv Yar) direction.[79]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Kostyantynivka Direction August 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Toretzsk direction on August 21 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces seized Oleksandro-Shulytne (north of Toretzsk) and credited elements of the Russian 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd CAA, formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC]) with using small group tactics to seize the settlement.[80] A Russian milblogger refuted the Russian MoD's claims of the seizure of Oleksandro-Shulytne and claimed that Russian forces are only fighting on the approaches to the settlement.[81] Another milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 103rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, SMD) seized and advanced north of Shcherbynivka

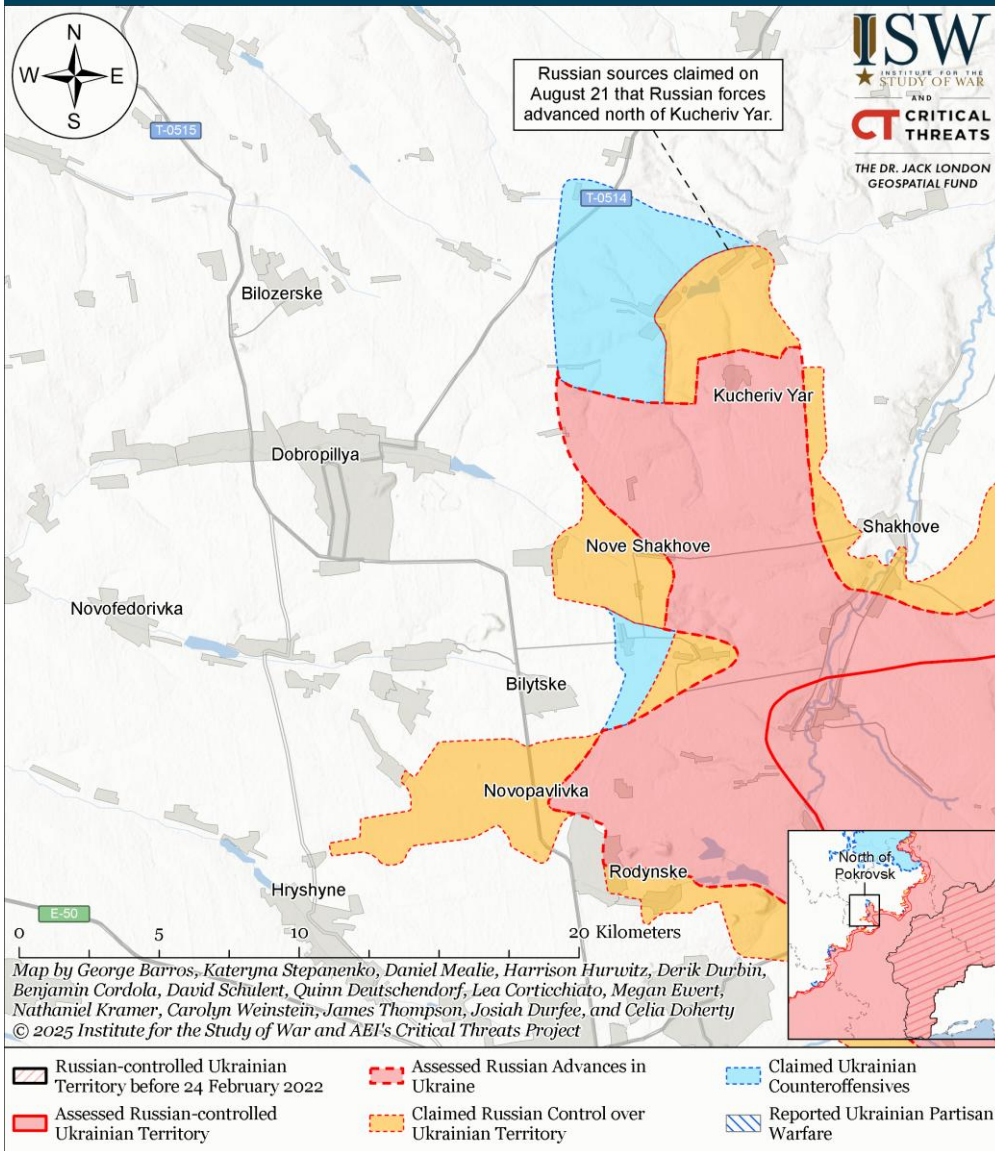
(west of Toretsk); elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA, SMD) advanced west and south of and within southwestern Katerynivka (northwest of Toretsk); and that unspecified Russian forces advanced south of Nelipivka (northwest of Toretsk).[82]

Russian forces attacked near Toretsk itself; north of Toretsk near Oleksandro-Shulyne; west of Toretsk near Shcherbynivka; and northwest of Toretsk near Nelipivka, Kleban-Byk, Yablunivka, Popiv Yar, Poltavka, and Pleshchiivka, and toward Stepanivka on August 20 and 21.[83]

A Ukrainian brigade operating in the Toretsk direction stated on August 20 that Russian forces in this direction launch small fireteam-sized infantry assaults with two personnel using anti-drone thermal imaging cloaks.[84] The brigade added that Russian infantry advance under the cover of windbreaks and ruins before reaching a designated rally point, where they hide while awaiting reinforcements.

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction on August 21 but did not make confirmed advances.

Assessed Control of Terrain North of Pokrovsk August 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Russian Order of Battle in the Dobropillya Salient As of August 21, 2025

Ukrainian military sources have stated the 51st and 8th Combined Arms Armies, along with the 68th Army Corps, are aiming to consolidate control along the Zapovidne-Mayak-Shakhove line.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nathaniel Kramer
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Legend:

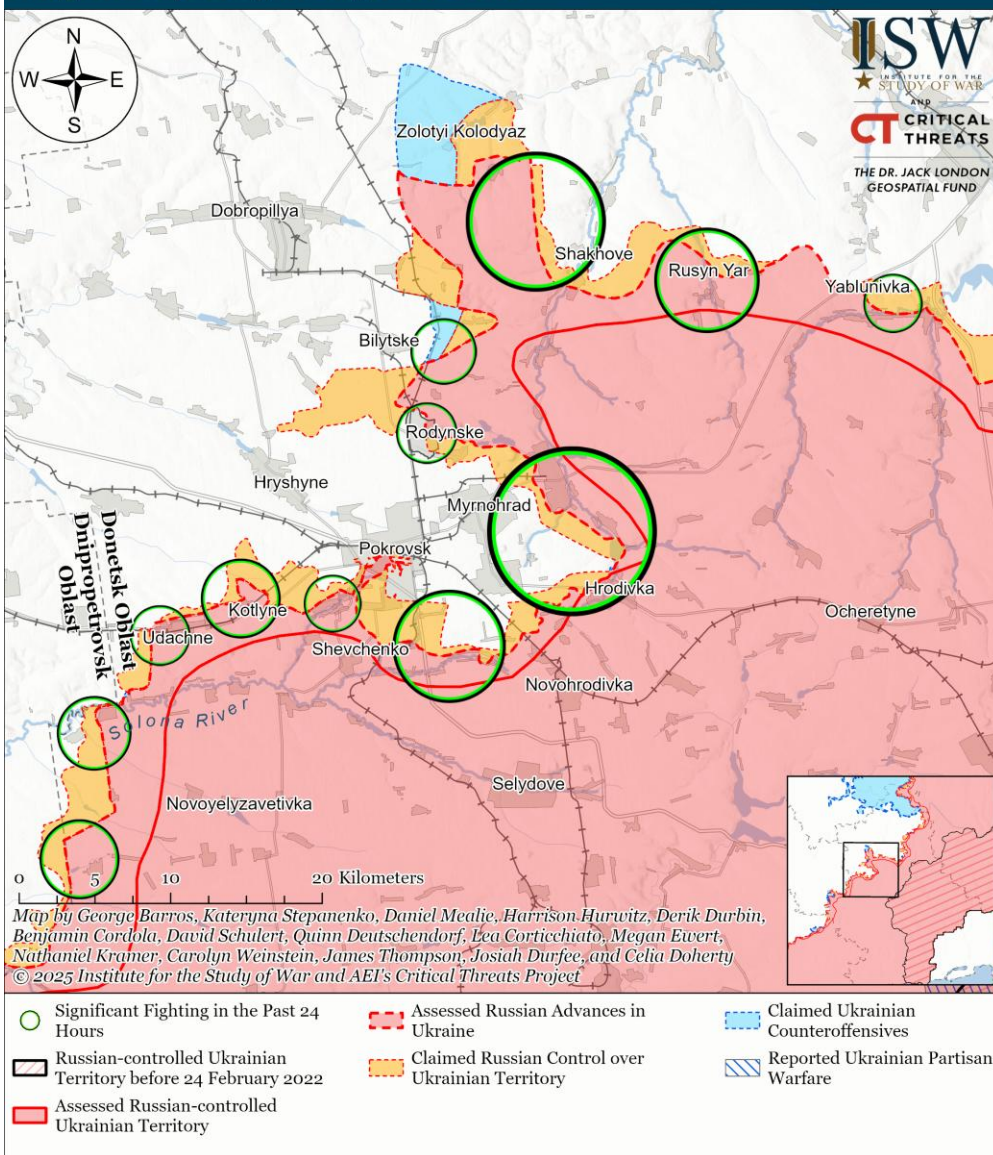
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before 24 February 2022
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Russian Order of Battle (NATO Symbology)

Russian forces attacked near Pokrovsk itself; north of Pokrovsk near Rodynske and toward Bilytske; northeast of Pokrovsk near Krasnyi Lyman, Zapovidne, Kucheriv Yar, Novoeconomichne, Mykolaivka, Myrolyubivka, Zatyshok, Volodymyrivka, and Fedorivka; east of Pokrovsk near Promin and toward Myrnohrad; southeast of Pokrovsk near Lysivka; south of Pokrovsk near Novoukrainka; and southwest of Pokrovsk near Zvirove, Kotlyne, Udachne on August 20 and 21.[87]

Ukrainian Dnipro Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Viktor Trehubov reported that Russian forces are simultaneously exerting pressure on Pokrovsk itself and on Kostyantynivka and Dobropillya with the aim of identifying and exploiting weaknesses in Ukrainian defenses.[88] Trehubov reported that Ukrainian fires are complicating Russian forces' ability to accumulate forces within the Dobropillya penetration.

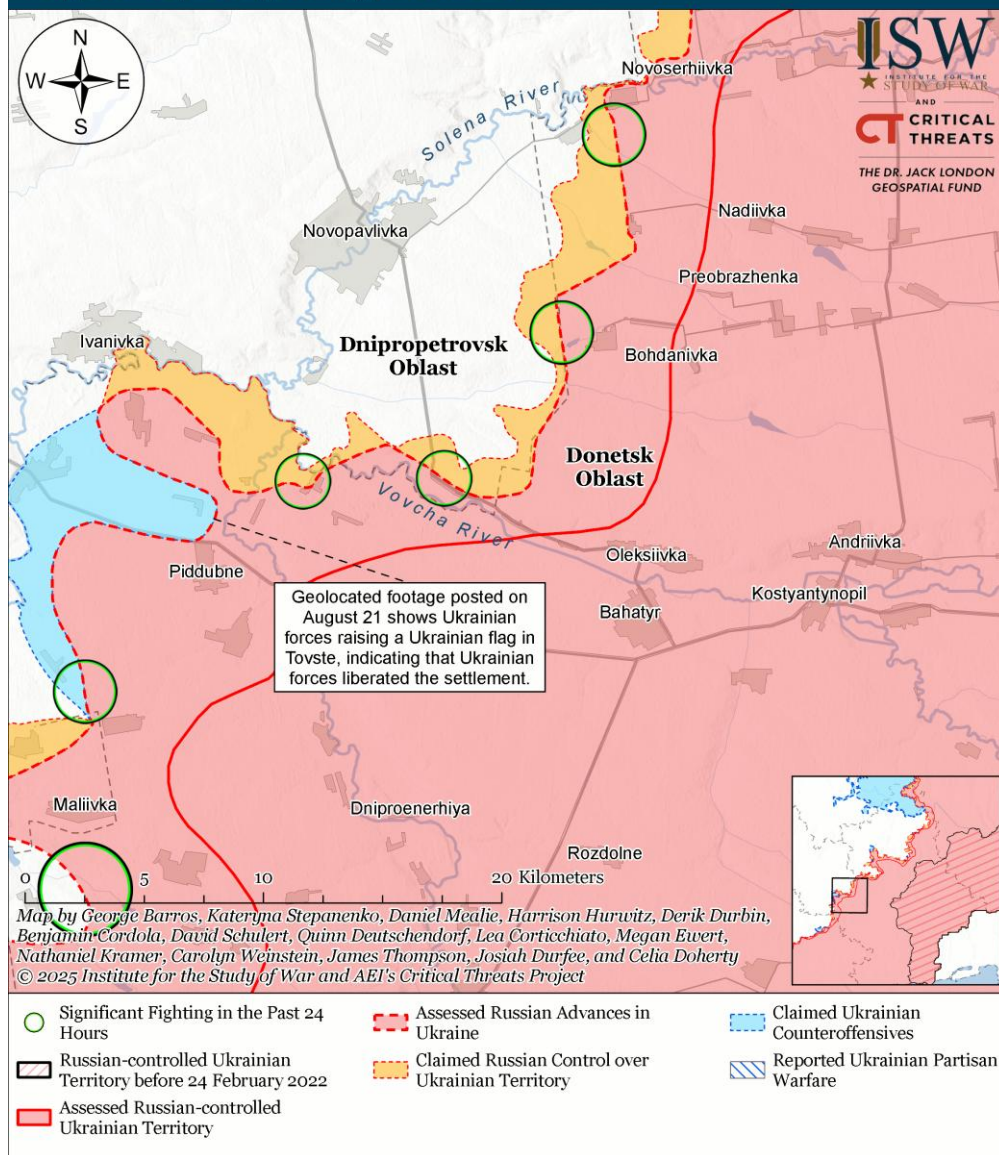
Order of Battle: Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported that the Russian 51st CAA (formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC], SMD) leveraged elements of its 1st Motorized Rifle Brigade to expand the penetration near Dobropillya westward toward Zapovidne and eastward toward western Shakhove.[89] Mashovets reported that elements of the 8th CAA (SMD) are expanding the left flank of the penetration. Mashovets's reporting indicates that the Russian military command may be improving command coherence along its command seams in a mutually reinforcing effort to expand the Russian forces' penetration and consolidate positions. Drone operators of the Russian 80th Sparta Reconnaissance Battalion (51st CAA) reportedly continue to strike Ukrainian positions near Myrnohrad.[90]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Pokrovsk Direction August 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Novopavlivka direction.

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Novopavlivka Direction August 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Assessed Ukrainian advances: Geolocated footage published on August 21 shows Ukrainian forces raising a flag in central Tovste (southwest of Novopavlivka), indicating that Ukrainian forces recently retook the settlement.[91]

Russian forces attacked near Novopavlivka itself; northeast of Novopavlivka near Muravka; southeast of Novopavlivka near Horikhove, Novoukrainka, and Dachne; south of Novopavlivka near Filiya; and southwest of Novopavlivka near Tovste on August 20 and 21.[92] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Novomykholaivka (northeast of Novopavlivka).[93]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 11th Air Force and Air Defense Army (Russian Aerospace Forces [VKS] and Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly conducting FAB unguided glide bomb strikes against Ukrainian forces within Ivanivka (southwest of Novopavlivka).[94]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Velykomykhailivka direction on August 21 but did not make confirmed advances.

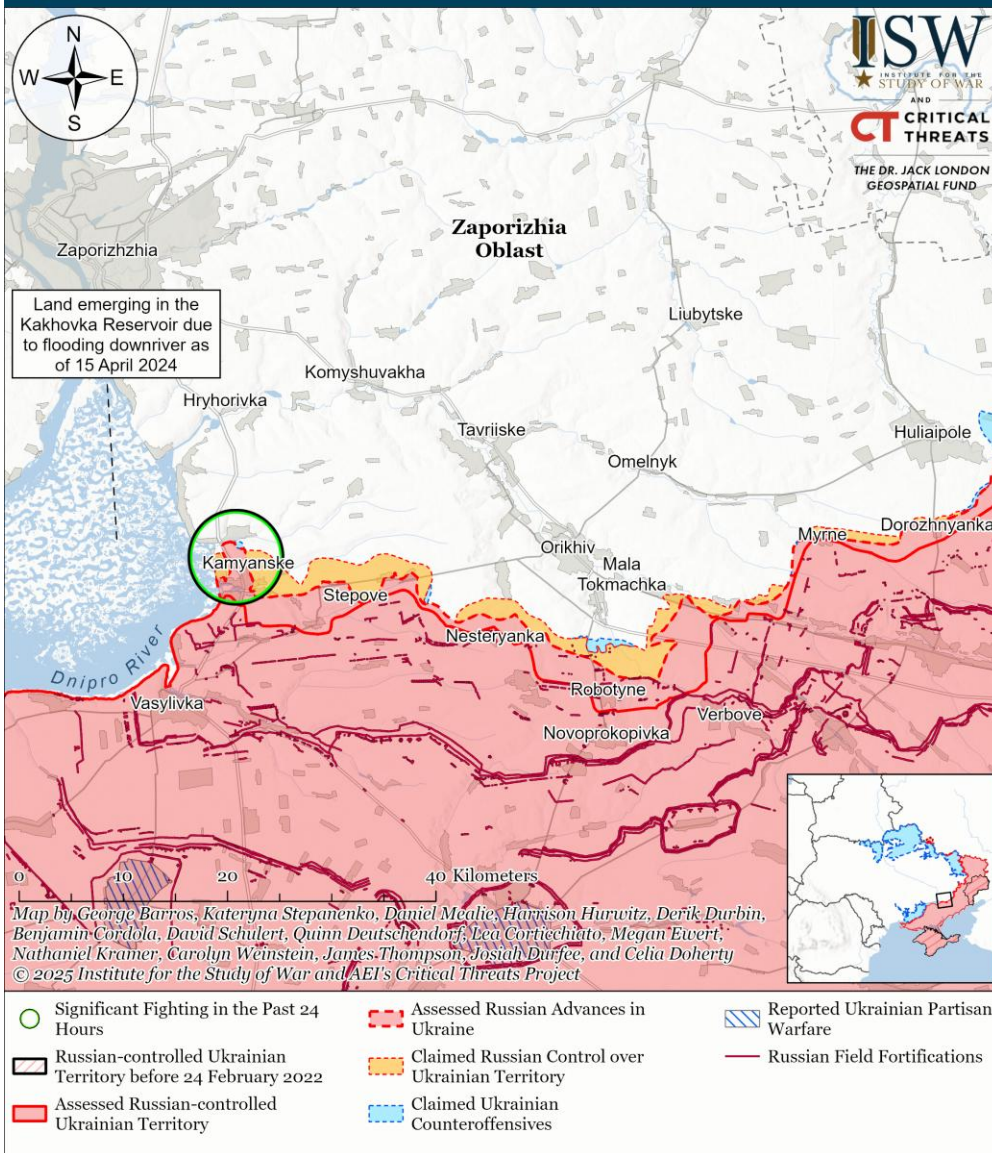
Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced west of Novoheorhiivka (southeast of Velykomykhailivka).[95] The milblogger also claimed that Russian forces consolidated positions in eastern Oleksandrohrad (east of Velykomykhailivka).[96]

Russian forces attacked northeast of Velykomykhailivka near Andriivka-Klevtsove and toward Lisne; east of Velykomykhailivka near Voskresenka and Sichneve; and southeast of Velykomykhailivka near Vilne Pole, Novoheorhiivka, and Shevchenko and toward Komyshevakh on August 20 and 21.[97]

Trehubov reported that Russian forces are actively conducting FAB unguided glide bomb strikes in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, likely to prepare the battlefield for ground assaults.[98]

Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions, secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes, and advance within tube artillery range of Zaporizhzhia City)

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Zaporizhia Direction August 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Russian forces continued offensive operations in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast on August 21 but did not advance.

Russian forces attacked northeast of Hulyaipole near Olhivske, Zelene Pole, and toward Novohryhorivka on August 20 and 21.[99]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian 336th Naval Infantry Brigade (Baltic Fleet), the 38th Motorized Rifle Brigade (35th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]), and the Nemets group of the 291st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly striking Ukrainian positions in the Zaporizhia direction.[100]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on August 21 but did not advance.

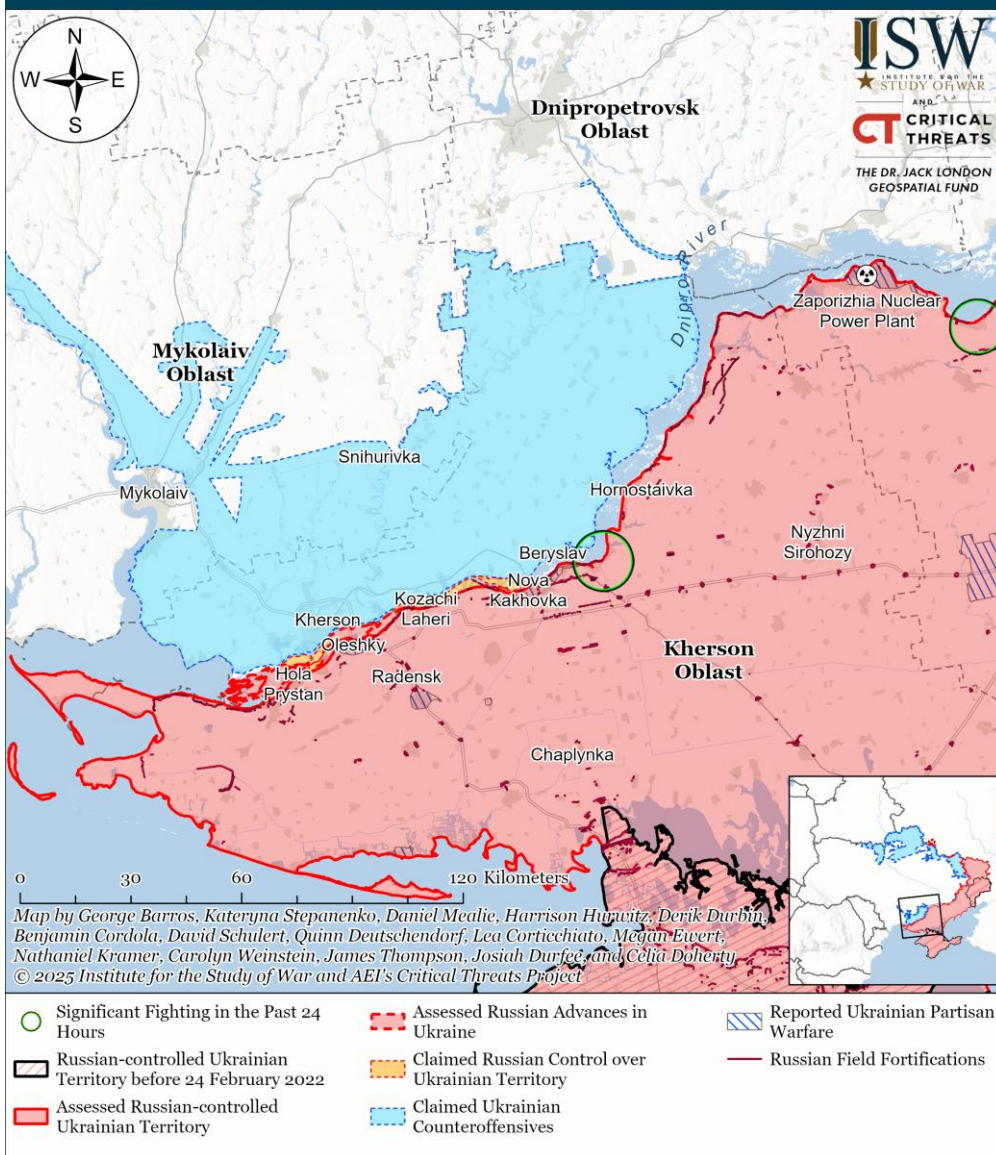
Russian forces attacked southeast of Orikhiv near Mala Tokmachka; west of Orikhiv near Plavni, Stepnohirsk, and Kamyanske; and northwest of Orikhiv toward Prymorske on August 20 and 21.[101]

Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported on August 21 that Russian forces launched 40 unguided aerial rockets (NARs) at Bilohirya (southeast of Orikhiv).[102]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating in Mala Tokmachka.[103]

Russian forces continued limited attacks east of Kherson City near the Antonivsky road and railway bridges on August 21 but did not advance.[104]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Kherson Direction August 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on August 21 that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian boat in the Black Sea near occupied Zaliznyi Port, Kherson Oblast, with an unspecified high-precision missile.[105]

Ukraine's Special Operation Forces (SOF) reported that overnight on August 20-21 SOF elements struck Russian rail cars near occupied Dzhankoi, Crimea, which were carrying fuel and lubricants for Russian forces operating in southern Ukraine.[106] Geolocated footage published on August 21 indicates that Ukrainian drones struck the base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's 95408th military unit in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea, overnight on August 20 to 21.[107] Ukrainian outlet *Militarnyi*

reported on August 21 that the base currently houses elements of the Russian General Staff's Main Directorate (GRU).[108]

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

See topline text.

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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