Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 2

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Frederick W. Kagan, and George Barros July 2, 6:45 pm ET

Click <u>here</u> 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.

Ukrainian forces likely conducted a deliberate withdrawal from Lysychansk, resulting in the Russian seizure of the city on July 2. Geolocated footage showed Russian forces casually walking around northern and southeastern neighborhoods in Lysychansk in a way that suggests that there are few or no remaining Ukrainian forces in the city as of July 2.¹ Ukrainian military officials did not publicly announce a troop withdrawal but neither did they report on defensive battles around Lysychansk. Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Vadym Denysenko vaguely noted that Russian forces have a "high probability" of capturing Lysychansk but that they will have a difficult time advancing in Donetsk Oblast past Slovyansk and Kramatorsk.² Ukrainian National Guard Spokesperson Ruslan Muzychuk rejected reports of Russian forces seizing and encircling Lysychansk, but these denials are likely outdated or erroneous.³ The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Ambassador to Russia, Rodion Miroshnik, had previously claimed that Ukrainian forces began withdrawing from Lysychansk on June 28.⁴ ISW will continue to monitor the situation.

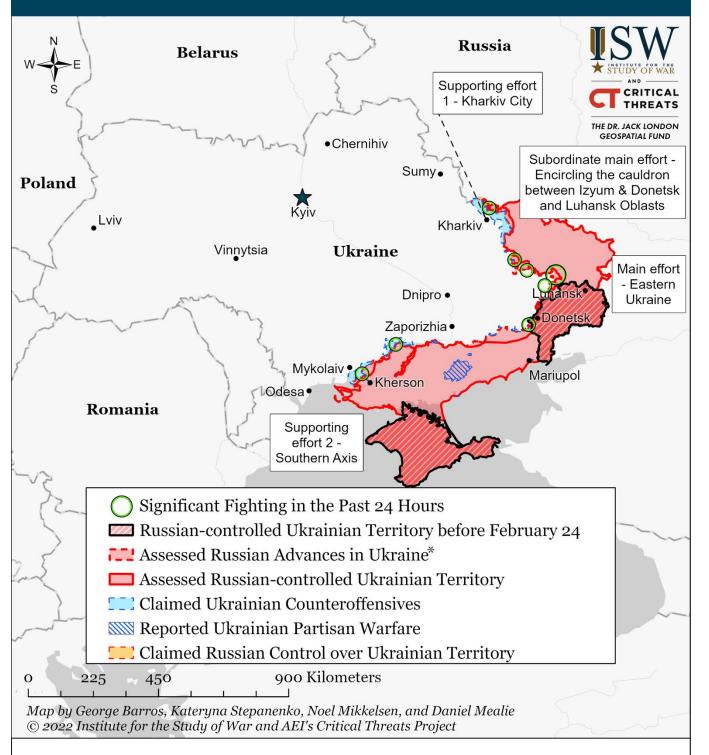
Russian forces will likely establish control over the remaining territory of Luhansk Oblast in the coming days and will likely then prioritize drives on Ukrainian positions in Siversk before turning to Slovyansk and Bakhmut. A Ukrainian withdrawal to Siversk would allow Ukrainian forces reduce the risk of immediate encirclement, but Ukrainian forces may continue a fighting withdrawal to a line near the E40 highway from Slovyansk to Bakhmut.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov inspected Russian troop groupings in Ukraine on July 2.5 The Russian MoD posted a slideshow of images that reportedly prove that Gerasimov still holds his position as Chief of General Staff and that he had recently been in Ukraine, but notably did not include any video footage of Gerasimov's purported inspection of Russian troops. This post was likely a response to recent speculation that Gerasimov had been removed from his post as part of the Kremlin's purge of high-level Russian military leadership due to Russian failures in Ukraine. The Russian MoD amplified a claim that Ukrainian media has been lying about Gerasimov's removal and stated that Gerasimov is still serving as the Chief of the General Staff.⁶ The hasty presentation of a slideshow that does not clearly demonstrate that Gerasimov was recently performing his duties in Ukraine suggests that the Russian leadership is sensitive to rumors of a purge of senior Russian officers or possibly to the impression that the senior most officers are absent or uninvolved in the conflict. The Kremlin likely also seeks to retain or rebuild trust in Russian military leadership against the backdrop of major organizational restructuring, failures, and high casualties, as ISW has previously reported.⁷

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces entered Lysychansk and advanced within the city on July 2.
- Russian forces are conducting offensive operations southwest of Lysychansk likely to push westward towards Siversk and complete the capture of the entirety of Luhansk Oblast.
- Russian forces continued unsuccessful ground assaults north of Slovyansk.
- Russian forces conducted limited attacks southwest of Donetsk City but did not make any confirmed gains.
- Ukrainian troops are likely planning to threaten Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) throughout Kharkiv Oblast using Western-supplied weapons.
- Ukrainian counterattacks and partisan activity continue to force Russian troops to prioritize defensive operations along the Southern Axis.
- Proxy leadership may be setting conditions for the direct annexation of proxy republics by the Russian Federation.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



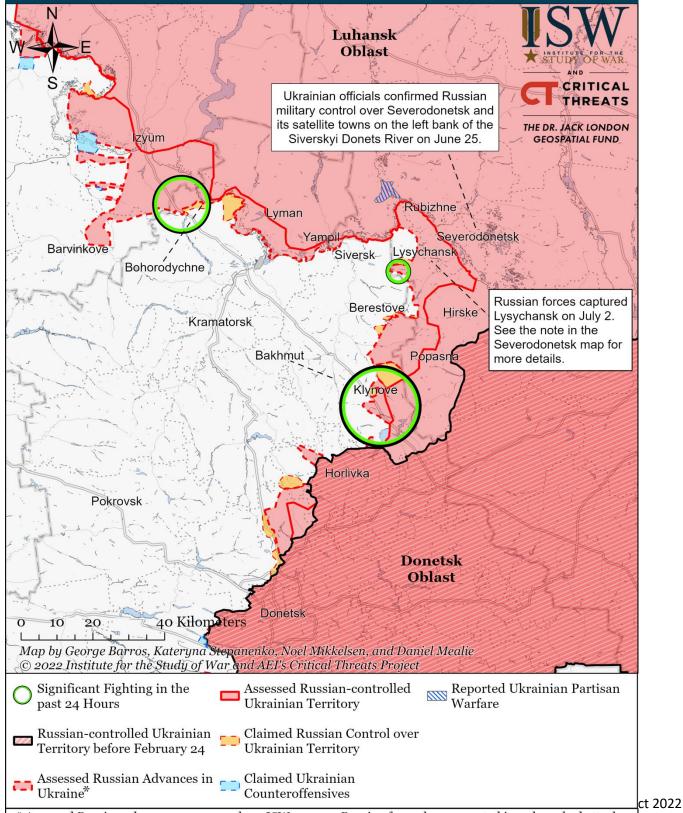
^{*} Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those 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 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.

- Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and three supporting efforts);
- Subordinate Main Effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts
- Supporting Effort 1—Kharkiv City;
- Supporting Effort 2—Southern Axis;
- Mobilization and force generation efforts;
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

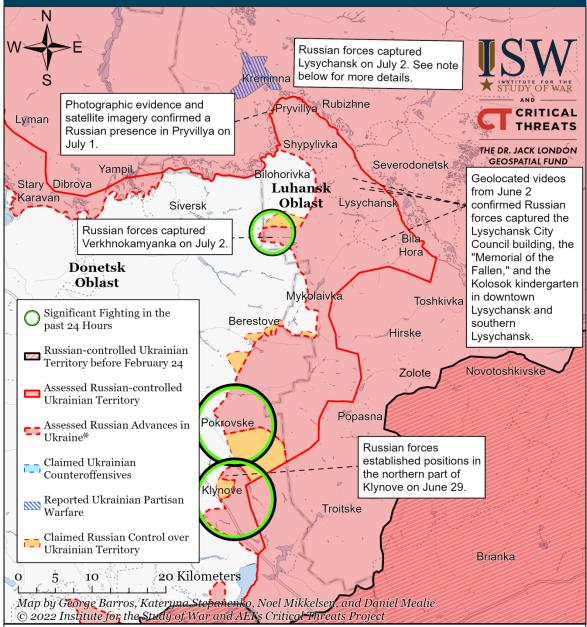
Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of July 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Severodonetsk as of July 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: Russian forces likely captured Lysychansk on July 2. It's unclear whether Russian forces have fully cleared and secured Lysychansk of July 2. Geolocated videos posted on July 2 show Russian forces casually walking around multiple locations in downtown Lysychansk. The relaxed behavior of these Russian troops indicates that there is likely no remaining organized Ukrainian defense in Lysychansk. Premier Russian news outlet RIA Novosti claimed that Russian forces captured Lysychansk on July 2. The Ukrainian General Staff evening report on July 2 did not mention Ukrainian defensive activity in Lysychansk as it previously had. Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs Vadym Denysenko gave an interview on July 2 in which he said, "Unfortunately, as of now, the probability of [Russian Forces] capturing Luhansk Oblast is very high," indicating that Ukrainian forces likely lost Lysychansk. It's unclear if Russian forces encircled any Ukrainian troops in the city. Some Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces vacated the city, whereas Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that Russian forces trapped an unspecified number of Ukrainians troops in the city. Ukrainian forces likely successfully withdrew from Lysychansk as they did from Zolote and Hirske around June 24. Russian forces likely captured Shepilove and Novodruzhesk as they claimed, though ISW has no secondary evidence to confirm this at this time. Bilohorivka is the last uncontested settlement in Luhansk Oblast as of this publication.

<u>Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts</u> (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

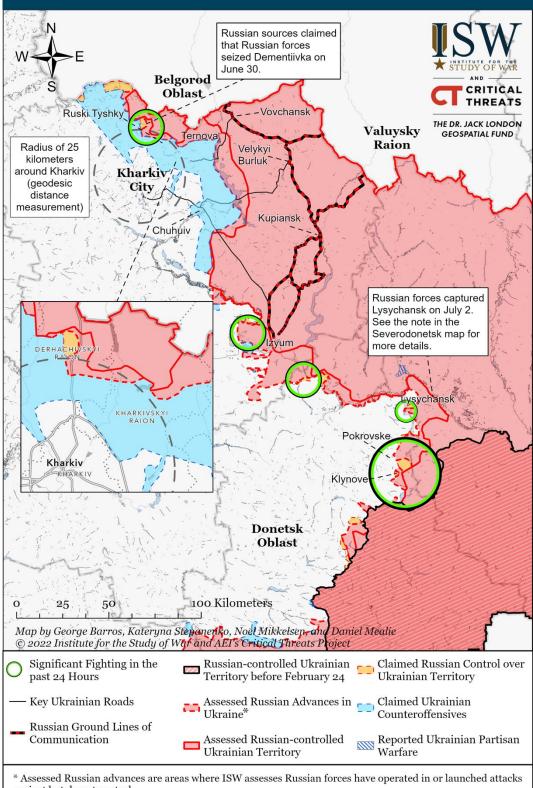
Russian forces entered Lysychansk and advanced within the city on July 2, likely after Ukrainian forces conducted a controlled withdrawal from the city. Kremlin-sponsored outlet *RIA Novosti* claimed that Russian forces seized Lysychansk, but it is unclear if Russian forces fully cleared and secured the city. Geolocated footage showed Russian forces hanging a red banner in Lysychansk's city center and walking around the city's northern neighborhood. Chechen units also advanced to the southeastern part of Lysychansk, with geolocated footage showing them outside the Lysychansk City Council building. The footage in both areas shows Russian forces freely walking around the city and taking group photos, suggesting that Ukrainian defenders had already withdrawn. Ukrainian officials did not announce a withdrawal from Lysychansk, but the Ukrainian General Staff notably did not discuss any Ukrainian defensive activity around Lysychansk. Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed earlier in the day that Russian forces have encircled Ukrainian forces in Lysychansk and noted that Chechen units were preparing for street fights and full-scale attack to seize the city, but then announced that Russian forces had captured the city in full. The inconsistencies in Kadyrov's claims may suggest that Russian forces expected to face remaining Ukrainian resistance in the city but found that the Ukrainians had instead withdrawn.

Russian forces continued to launch assaults southwest of Lysychansk, likely in an effort to reach the Luhansk Oblast administrative borders and push towards Ukrainian positions in Siversk. The Ukrainian General Staff confirmed that Russian forces established positions in Verkhnokamyanka, situated approximately 15km southwest of Lysychansk and just 13km east of Siversk. The successful assault also implies that Russian forces blocked the northeastern part of the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway (which ISW has assessed Ukraine has been unable to use as a major GLOC for some time). The Ukrainian General Staff also noted that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian reconnaissance-in-force around Berestove, approximately 18km southeast of Siversk and 26km northeast of Bakhmut. Recurrent Russian offensive and reconnaissance operations around Berestove and west of Lysychansk suggest that Russian forces may prioritize a drive on Siversk over an immediate attack on Bakhmut. The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) also posted footage outside of the Pryvillya welcome sign, and a satellite image of a Russian pontoon bridge confirms that Russian forces crossed the Siverskyi Donets River just southeast of Kreminna. The LNR Militia also repeated previous Russian claims that Russian forces seized Shepilove, 6km southwest of Pryvillya, on July 1. Russian forces will likely also push on Siversk from the Pryvillya area now that they have advanced to Lysychansk itself.

Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations north of Slovyansk on July 2. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces resisted a Russian assault on Bohorodychne, approximately 20km northwest of Slovyansk.¹⁷ Slovyansk Mayor Vadym Lyakh reported that Russian forces shelled Slovyansk on the night of July 1, and Russian Telegram channel Voproste published footage of Russian forces reportedly using incendiary munitions against Ukrainian positions in the Slovyansk direction.¹⁸ Geolocated combat footage additionally showed Ukrainian forces targeting Russian positions with drones and artillery in Sulyhivka (approximately 20 km east of Bohorodychne) on July 1, likely as part of continued Ukrainian counterattacks southwest of Izyum.¹⁹

Russian forces resumed unsuccessful and limited attacks southwest of Donetsk City and continued artillery fire and airstrikes around Avdiivka.²⁰ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to advance to Novomykhailivka.²¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of July 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



against but do not control.

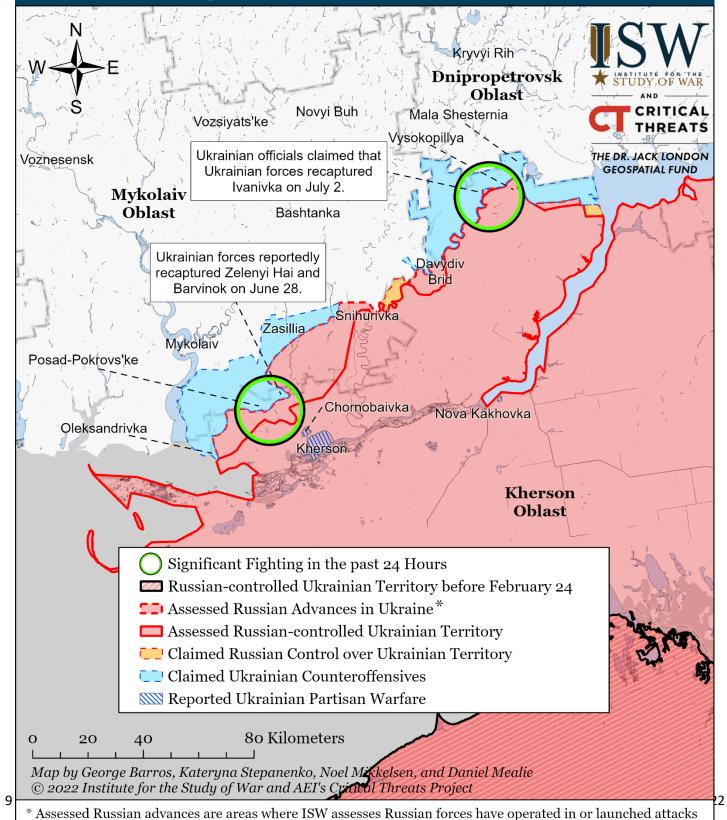
Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated on June 20 that Ukrainian forces have nearly reached the Ukrainian-Russian border. ISW will map Ukrainian counteroffensives when we observe corroborating evidence. We expanded Ukrainian counteroffensives in Rtyshchivka, just southwest of Chuhuiv, based on the Ukrainian General Staff report that Ukrainian forces repulsed a Russian reconnaissance-in-force attempt on the settlement on June 20.

<u>Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City</u> (Russian objective: Defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum and prevent Ukrainian forces from reaching the Russian border)

Ukrainian forces plan to continue to threaten Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) running from Belgorod, Russia, to southern Kharkiv Oblast with Western-supplied long-range rocket artillery. The Chief of Staff of the Ukrainian Kraken Special Unit, Konstiantyn Nemichev, stated that Ukrainian forces will use US-provided HIMARS rocket artillery systems to disrupt Russian GLOCs running through Vovchansk, Kupyansk, and Izyum. Kupyansk is a significant logistical hub for Russian forces operating on the Kharkiv axis and is located approximately 50km from the frontline. Vovchansk lies approximately 15-20 km from the frontline, but Russian operations in northern Kharkiv have prevented Ukrainian forces from targeting Vovchansk with indirect fire thus far. Russian GLOCs to Izyum are the most exposed, approximately 15km east of the nearest frontline, and NASA FIRMS heat anomaly detection has observed heat anomalies consistent with indirect fire attacks in wooded areas west of Izyum in recent weeks. Most Russian major ammunition depots and support stations along the Kharkiv axis would be within the range of HIMARS systems that would cover the Kharkiv axis.

Russian forces continued localized and unsuccessful assaults northwest of Kharkiv City on June 1. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks on Dementiivka, approximately 25km northwest of Kharkiv City.²² Russian forces are reportedly using electronic warfare systems in settlements on the international border, likely aimed at disrupting systems at Ukrainian command and control centers.²³

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



against but do not control.

Supporting Effort #2-Southern Axis (Russian objective: Defend Kherson and Zaporizhia **Oblasts against Ukrainian counterattacks)**

Russian forces continued to focus on defensive operations along the Southern Axis on July 2.24 The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian counteroffensive activity forced Russian troops to withdraw from previously-held positions in Ivanivka (northwestern Kherson Oblast).25 Ukraine's Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast are preparing occupied settlements for "circular" defense, which indicates that Russian troops are likely engineering 360-degree fortifications in occupied territory.²⁶ Ukrainian partisan and counteroffensive activities continue to pressure Russian forces to prioritize defensive operations, likely at the expense of Russian forces pursuing territorial gains in southern Ukraine.²⁷ Russian forces conducted air, artillery, and missile strikes against Ukrainian positions and infrastructure in Kherson, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts.²⁸

Mobilization and force generation efforts (Russian objective: expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

Russian military leadership continues to rely on ad hoc composite units to support offensive operations in Ukraine. Russian media reported on July 2 that a volunteer battalion of the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Northern Fleet is preparing to deploy to Ukraine.²⁹ This battalion consists of reservists, volunteers, military policemen, servicemembers from coastal defense units, and sailors from various naval vessels, which likely means that the volunteers are inadequately trained and do not have the requisite infantry experience to be effective in high-intensity combat. Some of the servicemembers of the battalion notably fought in the early stages of the war and are being redeployed.³⁰ The composite nature of this battalion indicates that Russian military leadership continues to struggle with proper and consistent constitution of combat-ready units.

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of occupied areas; set conditions for potential annexation into the Russian Federation or some other future political arrangement of Moscow's choosing)

Proxy leadership may be setting conditions for the direct annexation of proxy republics into the Russian Federation. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin announced on July 2 that he replaced four DNR public administration officials with "experienced" Russian ministers in order to institute the "Russian paradigm of public administration."³¹ Pushilin had previously announced the reorganization of the DNR government in June. The measures taken to streamline the governmental practices and frameworks of the DNR with the Russian system suggest that proxy officials are likely preparing to integrate the DNR directly into the Russian Federation.32

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¹ https://twitter.com/Suriyakmaps/status/1543176243398557696; https://twitter.com/AyazK100/status/1543187076853555200; https://twitter.com/COUPSURE/status/1543213343233785856; https://t.me/miroshnik r/7830; https://t.me/millnr/9033; https://twitter.com/michaelh992/status/1543248682329509890;

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icEQhgMdT8U&t=514s&ab_channel=%D0%A0%D0%91%D0%9A-%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97%D0%BD%D0%B0

³ https://www.dot.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/07/2/7355994/

⁴ https://t.me/miroshnik r/7782

⁵ https://www.dot.bfm.dot.ru/news/503595

⁶ https://t.me/mod_russia/17339; https://t.me/mod_russia/17331

⁷ https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-25;

https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-21

⁸ https://t.me/rian ru/169579

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¹¹https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02uYvAvrDSWUV1kmjtB7mMj4XvQB6JZMqn13M8fj7ctsNg8DYTBprV8DWmH7997rYnl;

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¹² https://t.me/RKadyrov 95/2481

¹³https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02uYvAvrDSWUV1kmjtB7mMj4XvQB6JZMqn13M8fj7ctsNg8DYTBprV8DWmH7997rYnl

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¹⁷https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02FgozgAcN5uCV97HV2WntNenUTg5S7aF8ZtBvH7gUej8jkaH3FSib3igsRgK Pxbmvl;

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¹⁸ https://t.me/Bratchuk Sergey/14813; https://t.me/vorposte/23696

¹⁹ https://twitter.com/Blue Sauron/status/1542964386205138945;

https://twitter.com/JoshuaKoontz__/status/1542984666055073792

²⁰https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02uYvAvrDSWUV1kmjtB7mMj4XvQB6JZMqn13M8fj7ctsNg8DYTBprV8DWmH7997rYnl;

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²⁵https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02uYvAvrDSWUV1kmjtB7mMj4XvQB6JZMqn13M8fj7ctsNg8DYTBprV8DWmH7997rYnl

²⁶ https://t.me/zoda gov ua/9934

²⁷ https://t.me/Bratchuk Sergey/14834

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²⁹ https://m.vk dot com/wall-123538639 2747743

³⁰ https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1543195360977461248

³¹ https://t.me/pushilindenis/2403

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