

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 8, 2023

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December 8, 2023, 7:30pm 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 see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

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 cut-off for this product was 2:30pm ET on December 8. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 9 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his presidential bid for 2024 on December 8 in an obviously staged effort to seem that he was running at the request of Russian servicemen. Putin announced that he would run for president in the 2024 elections in conversation with Russian military personnel after the presentation of Gold Star medals in the Grand Kremlin Palace on December 8.[1] Putin quietly announced his presidential campaign after Artem Zhoga, commander of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) "Sparta" Battalion, claimed that the people of Donbas want him to run in the elections.[2] Zhoga specifically emphasized that Russia needs Putin as president to integrate occupied Ukrainian territories and restore peace. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov absurdly claimed that Putin's announcement was "completely spontaneous" and was "a reaction to people's appeal." [3] Russian Federation Council Chairperson Valentina Matvienko similarly framed Putin's announcement as a response to requests from Russians.[4] Russian State Duma Deputy Chairman of the Federal Assembly Sergey Neverov stated that the leading United Russia party "unconditionally supports" Putin's nomination as a presidential candidate and "will do everything for his victory." [5] Russian "Vostok" Battalion Commander Alexander Khodakovsky responded to Putin's announcement, claiming that although the results of the elections are already known, the "process needs to be arranged appropriately." [6] Khodakovsky claimed that new Russian political energies are emerging - implying that some Russians want to oust Putin - but that Russia does not need such "political games" during wartime. One Russian milblogger claimed that Russians are more concerned about the rising price of eggs than Putin's announcement.[7]

Putin's announcement of his presidential bid in a military setting indicates that his campaign may focus on Russia's war in Ukraine more than ISW previously assessed, although the extent of this focus is unclear at this time. ISW previously assessed that Putin's presidential campaign would likely not focus on the war in Ukraine and instead would focus on

domestic stability and criticisms of the West.[8] Putin's presidential bid announcement at a ceremony rewarding Russian military personnel fighting in Ukraine in a conversation with a DNR combatant suggests that the war in Ukraine may play a more significant role in his campaign strategy. These staged circumstances were possibly directed a very important constituency: Russians directly affected by the war in Ukraine including the roughly 2.2 million military personnel the Kremlin claims are currently under arms, personnel previously wounded, and their relatives (as well as relatives of those killed in action).[9] Relatives of Russian mobilized personnel have recently appealed to the Russian government and military for the release of their relatives from military service and for better treatment of mobilized servicemen in the Russian military, and the Kremlin has repeatedly attempted to censor these groups.[10] These Kremlin censorship attempts suggest that the Kremlin is concerned about the possible negative effects of these protests on Putin's image during the presidential campaign.[11] The Kremlin may be using Putin's military-focused announcement in an attempt to convince this large group of voters that the Russian military writ large supports Putin. Putin's announcement may alternatively aim to demonstrate that he has the support of the Russian military in order to make any further discussion of the war in Ukraine during his campaign unnecessary. The Kremlin may have tasked the Russian military with capturing Avdiivka, and possibly Kupyansk, before the March 2024 elections, and this exhibition of the military's support for Putin's candidacy is possibly meant as a hedging strategy should the Russian military be unable to meet these given deadlines.

Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of December 7 to 8. The Ukrainian Air Force reported on December 8 that Russian forces launched seven Shahed-131/136 drones and six S-300 missiles on the night of December 7 to 8 and 19 Kh-101/Kh-555 cruise missiles against Kyiv Oblast and infrastructure facilities in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast on the morning of December 8.[12] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces also launched an Iskander-M ballistic missile against an unspecified target.[13] Ukrainian forces downed five Shahed drones and 14 Kh-101/Kh-555 cruise missiles.[14] Ukrainian Kharkiv Oblast Head Oleh Synehubov reported that Russian S-300 missiles struck civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv City, Kharkiv Oblast, and Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces struck targets in Pavlohrad, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[15] Kyiv City Military Administration Head Serhii Popko stated that the December 8 strike was the first Russian cruise missile strike launched from a Tu-95MC strategic bomber against Kyiv City since September 20, 2023 -- 79 days ago.[16] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat stated that Russia has "somewhat restored" its cruise missile stockpiles by not launching large-scale strikes during the fall months.[17]

Imprisoned ardent nationalist and former Russian officer Igor Girkin forecasted on December 7 that there will be "no agreement" between Russia and Ukraine to end the war and "no freeze" of the frontlines in Ukraine, marking a notable shift from Girkin's prior claims that the Russian military intended to "freeze the frontline" until after the Russian presidential elections. Girkin stated during an interview with Russian news outlet *Baza* published on December 7 that the situation in Ukraine has "radically worsened" and that Russia has entered a period of "acute instability." [18] Girkin added that Russia's tactical successes during summer and fall 2023 do not "eliminate or balance" the facts that the war is entering its 21st month and that there is no end in sight. Girkin's interview with *Baza* was almost certainly approved by the Kremlin, and the Kremlin thus likely put constraints on what Girkin could and could not say about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other topics such as his criminal case, his patron within the *siloviki*, and the assassination of Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin. Girkin claimed in a letter on October 9 that he was "99 percent" certain that the Kremlin will decide to "freeze the frontline" until

after the 2024 presidential elections and that Russian forces would continue conducting a strategic defense on the existing frontline.[19] Girkin has repeatedly claimed and expressed great concern that there is a faction within the Kremlin in favor of freezing the current frontline in Ukraine competing with another faction in favor of continued Russian offensive operations for influence over Russian President Vladimir Putin.[20]

Girkin may be adjusting his forecast in response to private and/or public indications that Putin has sided with the latter faction. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on November 27 that the West is trying to “freeze” the war in Ukraine to rearm Ukraine for future attacks against Russia and advocated against negotiations, a likely Kremlin-sanctioned acknowledgement of the prolonged Russian war effort.[21] Lavrov also did not promote previous Kremlin information operations feigning interest in negotiations with Ukraine and freezing the war during his speech at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Council of Foreign Ministers on November 30.[22] ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin may have strategically allowed Russian opposition party Yabloko founder Grigory Yavlinsky to advocate for a ceasefire in Ukraine during an interview on December 5 to deter factions within the Kremlin that may want to freeze the frontline in Ukraine from publicly or privately voicing their opinions.[23] Girkin’s adjusted forecast is yet another indication that Putin retains his maximalist objectives and is unlikely to enter peace negotiations with Ukraine, except to buy time to reconstitute for future offensive operations.[24]

The Russian military has reportedly banned the use of civilian cars for military purposes likely as part of ongoing formalization efforts, sparking criticisms from Russian milbloggers. Russian milbloggers and Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Deputy Information Minister Daniil Bezsonov circulated an image of a putative Russian military order stating that the Russian military command prohibited Russian forces from using personal and humanitarian vehicles and that any vehicles from civilian government entities need to be logged on a military unit’s balance sheet.[25] The order also allegedly bans Russian soldiers who are not mechanics or who lack driver’s licenses from driving the vehicles. This measure, if reports are accurate, likely supports Russian formalization efforts to centralize administrative control over Russian military supplies, especially those not provided by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). This measure would also impact grassroots Russian efforts to provide Russian frontline soldiers with supplies, including civilian or dual-use vehicles.

The Russian information space largely criticized these alleged reforms as unnecessary and harmful. Bezsonov and Russian milbloggers claimed that this order will hinder Russian military movement, supplies and ammunition deliveries, and casualty evacuations, and will thus ultimately demoralize military personnel. Bezsonov claimed that this order is unreasonable because some DNR personnel have been trying to register their cars with the Russian MoD for a year and instead called for the Russian military to eliminate bureaucracy to make soldiers’ lives easier.[26] A milblogger claimed that Russian military personnel do not want to register their cars with the Russian military because the command will not allow a soldier to deregister a car and will then commandeer the car as MoD property.[27] Russian milbloggers have resisted prior Russian formalization efforts that impose greater rules on Russian military personnel, including requiring soldiers to register personal cars with their units and establishing grooming standards about beards.[28]

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) is expanding its ability to guard Russian officials and entities abroad likely to better surveil Russian and international actors outside of Russian territory. The FSB published amendments to its regulations on December 8

that allow it to offer protection services for various Russian representative offices and Russian companies in addition to the Russian diplomatic institutions to which the FSB already offers service.[29] The FSB would guard such entities, which could include trade and commercial entities, through a mutual agreement and at the entity's expense.[30] The FSB claimed to have made the amendments in response to the "growing number of protests and demonstrations" in front of Russian government and business offices abroad.[31]

Russian occupation officials continue efforts to artificially alter the demographic composition of occupied Ukraine. The Ukrainian Helsinki Union on Human Rights – a union composed of 26 human rights-focused nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – reported on December 6 that Russian authorities have resettled up to 800,000 Russian citizens in occupied Crimea and forced around 100,000 Ukrainian citizens to leave Crimea since 2014.[32] The Union reported that Russian authorities relied on policies such as preferential mortgage lending, relocation of Russian officials and their families, expulsion of Ukrainian citizens to mainland Ukraine, and "encouragement" of Ukrainian citizens to move to Russia to free up residences in Crimea and encourage Russian citizens to resettle.[33] The Union reported that Russian occupation authorities in other areas are implementing similar repopulation efforts. The Union reported that Russian authorities are currently struggling to encourage Russians to resettle in occupied Crimea due to the high intensity of hostilities near Crimea, however.[34]

Ukraine's partners continued to announce military and financial aid packages to Ukraine recently. Germany announced on December 7 that it delivered aid to Ukraine, including 1,750 155mm artillery shells, 10 reconnaissance drones, 70 grenade launchers, and 100,000 first aid kits.[35] Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also pledged \$4.5 billion to Ukraine, including \$1 billion in humanitarian aid to support Ukraine's recovery efforts and \$3.5 billion to fund credit guarantees for World Bank loans to Ukraine.[36]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his presidential bid for 2024 on December 8 in an obviously staged effort to seem that he was running at the request of Russian servicemen.**
- **Putin's announcement of his presidential bid in a military setting indicates that his campaign may focus on Russia's war in Ukraine more than ISW previously assessed, although the extent of this focus is unclear at this time.**
- **Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of December 7 to 8.**
- **Imprisoned ardent nationalist and former Russian officer Igor Girkin forecasted on December 7 that there will be "no agreement" between Russia and Ukraine to end the war and "no freeze" of the frontlines in Ukraine, marking a notable shift from Girkin's prior claims that the Russian military intended to "freeze the frontline" until after the Russian presidential elections.**
- **The Russian military has reportedly banned the use of civilian cars for military purposes likely as part of ongoing formalization efforts, sparking criticisms from Russian milbloggers.**

- **The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) is expanding its ability to guard Russian officials and entities abroad likely to better surveil Russian and international actors outside of Russian territory.**
- **Russian occupation officials continue efforts to artificially alter the demographic composition of occupied Ukraine.**
- **Ukraine's partners continued to announce military and financial aid packages to Ukraine recently.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, near Avdiivka, west and southwest of Donetsk City, in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and made confirmed advances near Avdiivka and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Udmurt Republic Head Alexander Brechalov announced on December 7 that the region formed and will soon deploy four new units to fight in Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 8 that Russia is trying to destroy Ukrainian children's connection to Ukraine and that swift intervention is necessary to maintain this connection during a speech at the first meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 8, 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 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.

- 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
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives

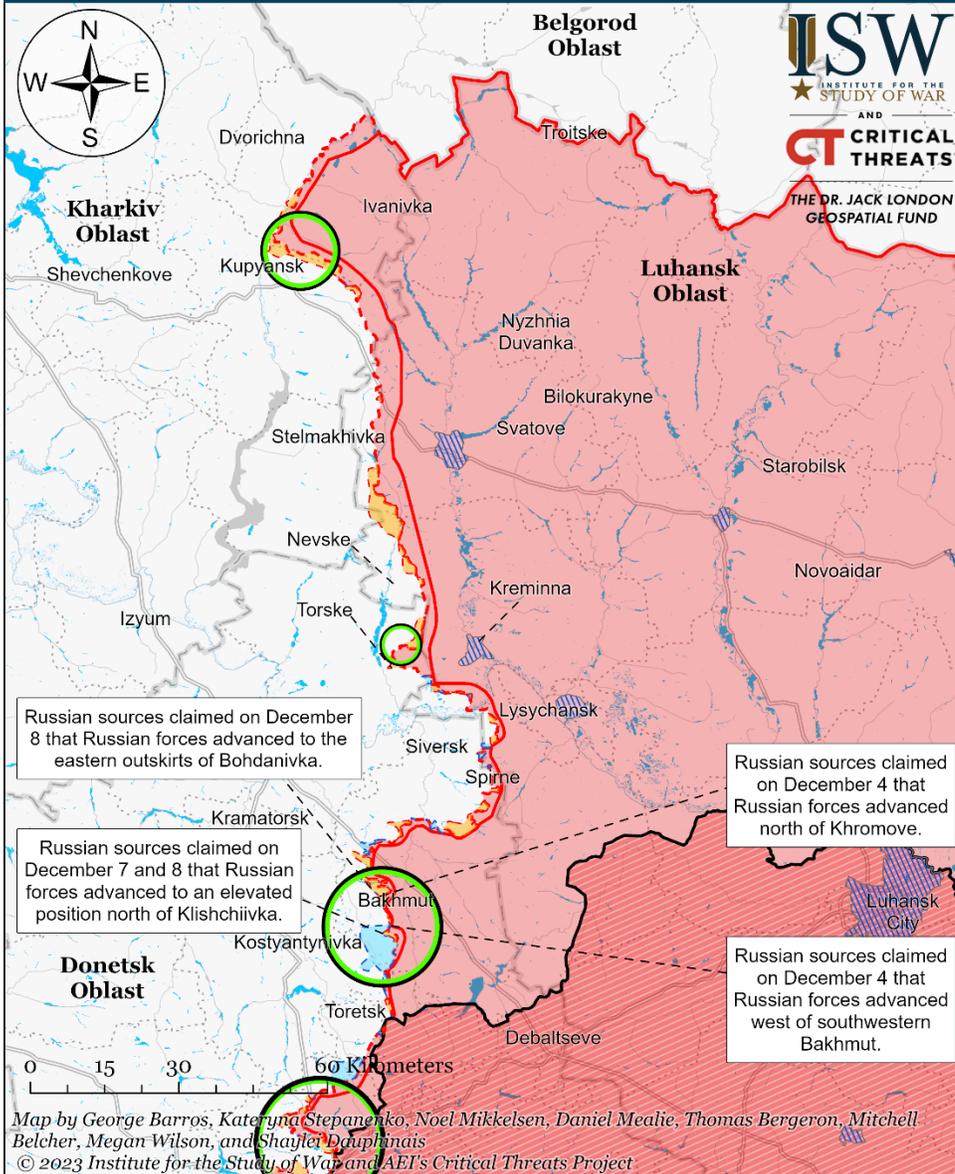
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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 offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kremlinna line on December 8 and reportedly made unconfirmed advances. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced east of Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk) and near Synkivka (9km east of Kupyansk) and Bilohorivka (13km south of Kremlinna), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of these claims.[37] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks in the Kupyansk direction near Synkivka and Ivanivka (20km southwest of Kupyansk) and in the Lyman direction near Spirne (25km south of Kremlinna) and Terny (17km west of Kremlinna).[38] Ukrainian Ground Forces Command Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Volodymyr Fityo stated that Russian forces are also attacking near Vesele (31km south of Kremlinna).[39] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Russian forces intensified offensive operations in the Lyman direction.[40] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 283rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (144th Motorized Rifle Division, 20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) unsuccessfully attacked east of Terny; elements of the 228th Motorized Rifle Regiment (90th Guards Tank Division, Central Military District) unsuccessfully attacked between Dibrova (6km southwest of Kremlinna) and Kuzmyne (3km southwest of Kremlinna); and elements of the 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] Army Corps) unsuccessfully attacked Bilohorivka from the southeast.[41] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are also attacking from Dibrova towards Yampolivka (17km west of Kremlinna) and near the Serebryanske forest area (10km southwest of Kremlinna).[42]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kremlinna line on December 8. Russian Western Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Sergei Zybinsky claimed on December 8 that Russian forces repelled five Ukrainian attacks near Synkivka and Lake Lyman northwest of Synkivka, and Russian Central Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Alexander Savchuk claimed that Russian forces repelled two Ukrainian attacks near Yampolivka.[43]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of December 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian sources claimed on December 8 that Russian forces advanced to the eastern outskirts of Bohdanivka.

Russian sources claimed on December 7 and 8 that Russian forces advanced to an elevated position north of Klishchiivka.

Russian sources claimed on December 4 that Russian forces advanced north of Khromove.

Russian sources claimed on December 4 that Russian forces advanced west of southwestern Bakhmut.

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

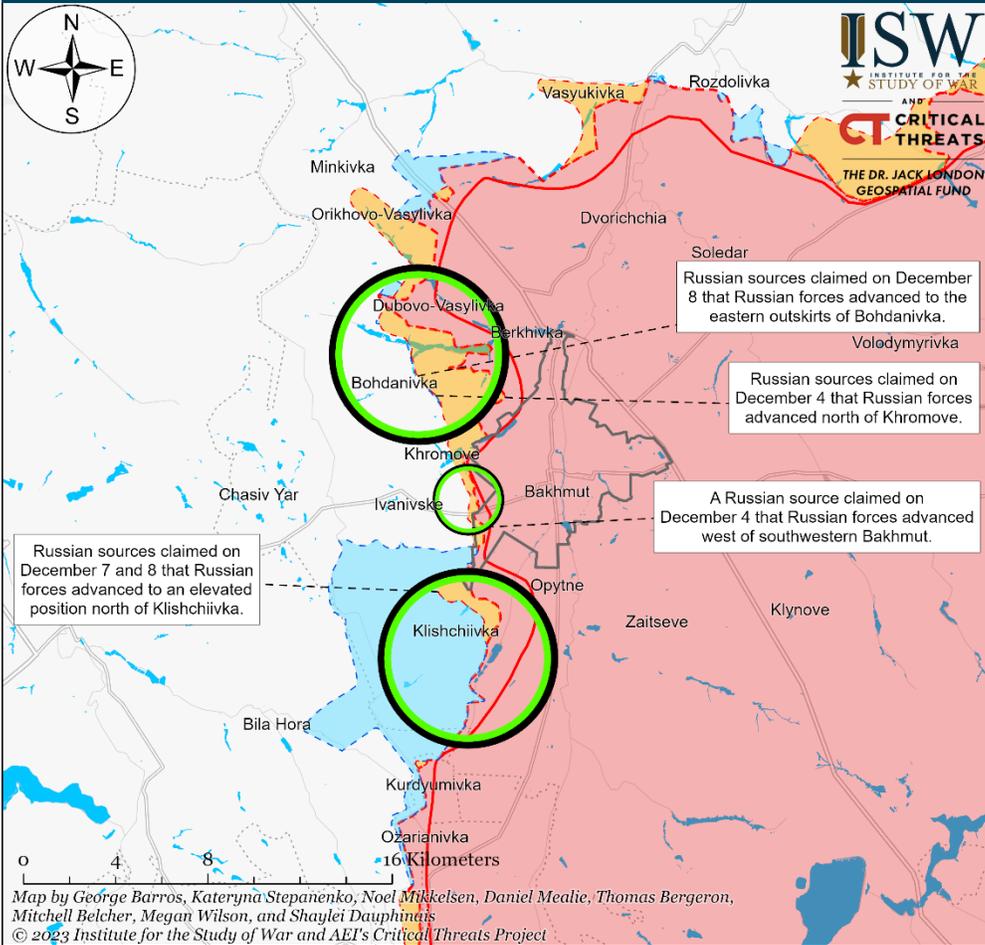
Note: A Russian source claimed on December 7 that Russian forces advanced more than one half kilometer in the dacha area southwest of Bakhmut. Russian sources claimed on December 6 that Russian forces advanced 1.5 to 2 kilometers near Vesele, Bakhmut Raion. A Russian source claimed on December 5 that Russian forces advanced 500 meters in the Klishchiivka direction.

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

Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations near Bakhmut but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances on December 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 8 that Ukrainian forces continued assault operations south of Bakhmut.[44] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked in the Bakhmut direction near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) on December 8.[45]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Bakhmut but did not make any confirmed advances on December 8. Russian milbloggers claimed on December 7 and 8 that Russian forces advanced to the eastern outskirts of Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut); south of the Berkhivka reservoir (about 2km northwest of Bakhmut) and Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut); in the heights north of Klishchiivka; and towards Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut).[46] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 8 that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Bohdanivka, Ivanivske, Klishchiivka, and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut).[47] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps [AC], Northern Fleet [NF]) are operating near Bohdanivka.[48] Another Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division and the 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade are operating near the Berkhivka reservoir.[49] Russian sources claimed that elements of the Russian 346th Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff Main Directorate [GRU]), 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] Army Corps), and Chechen ”Akhmat” Spetsnaz forces are operating near Klishchiivka.[50]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of December 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Megan Wilson, and Shaylei Dauphinais
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Bakhmut City Limits	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	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: A Russian source claimed on December 7 that Russian forces advanced more than one half kilometer in the dacha area southwest of Bakhmut. Russian sources claimed on December 6 that Russian forces advanced 1.5 to 2 kilometers near Vesele, Bakhmut Raion. A Russian source claimed on December 5 that Russian forces advanced 500 meters in the Klishchiivka direction.

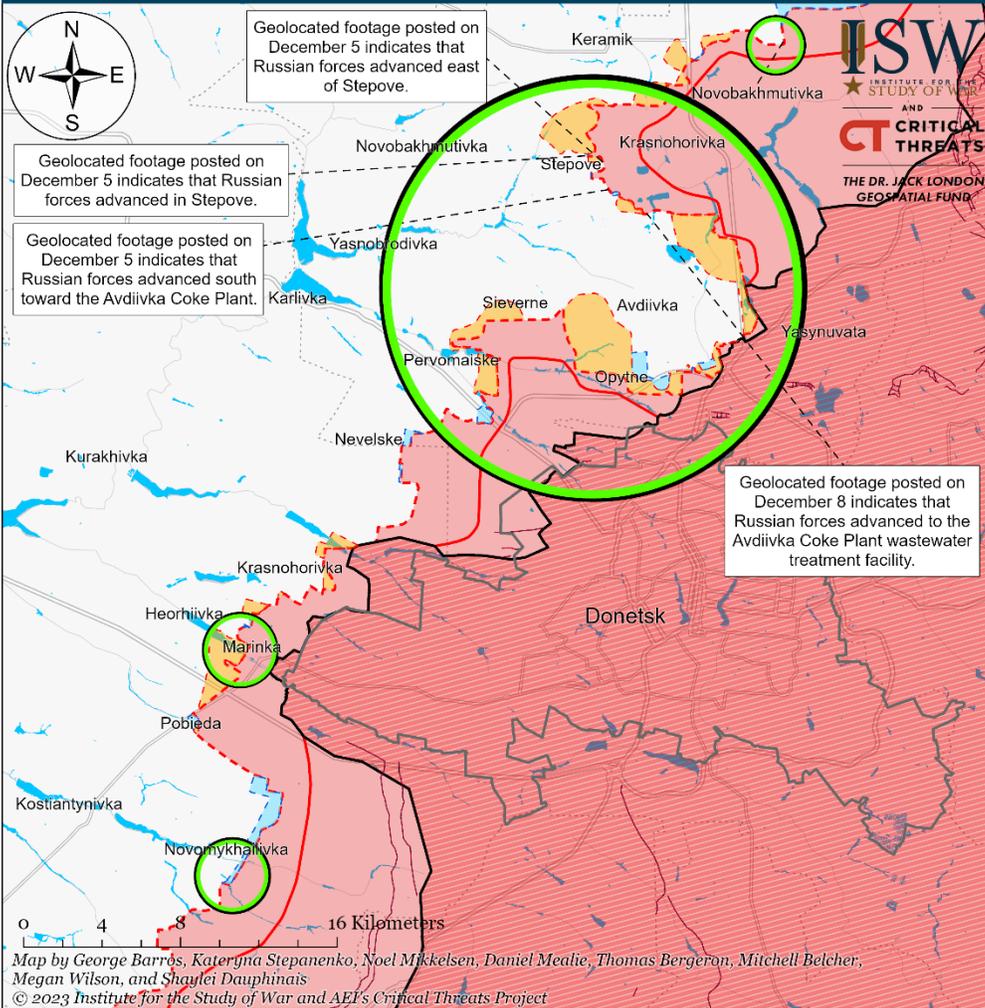
Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Avdiivka and made a confirmed advance on December 8. Geolocated footage published on December 8 indicates that Russian forces advanced to the sewage treatment plant south of Krasnohorivka (5km northwest of Avdiivka).[51] Russian sources claimed on December 7 and 8 that Russian forces advanced towards Novokalynove (13km northeast of Avdiivka), to the outskirts of the Avdiivka Coke Plant northwest of Avdiivka, and in the industrial zone southeast of Avdiivka.[52] Russian milbloggers claimed on December 8 that Russian forces are consolidating positions in Stepove (3km northwest of Avdiivka) and are clearing the settlement, whereas another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces maintain positions on the eastern

outskirts of Stepove.[53] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked east of Novobakhmutivka (9km northwest of Avdiivka); south of Tonenke (5km west of Avdiivka); and near Stepove, Avdiivka, and Pervomaiske (10km southwest of Avdiivka).[54] Russian sources claimed on December 7 and 8 that Russian forces also attacked north of the Avdiivka Coke Plant and near Ocheretyne (15km northwest of Avdiivka), Novokalynove, Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka, and the industrial zone).[55] A Russian milblogger claimed on December 8 that positional battles are ongoing in the Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka) and Tonenke directions.[56] A Russian source claimed that difficult weather conditions have slowed the tempo of both Russian and Ukrainian operations near Avdiivka.[57] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Oleksandr Shtupun stated that there are more than 40,000 Russian troops fighting in the Avdiivka direction and that Russian forces are redeploying reserves from Storm-Z units and mobilized personnel who lack training and provisions to the area in order to make up for losses.[58]

A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked west of Donetsk City in Marinka (on the western outskirts of Donetsk City) on December 8.[59]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations west and southwest of Donetsk City but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances on December 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Krasnohorivka (directly west of Donetsk City), Marinka, Pobieda (5km southwest of Donetsk City), and Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).[60] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces do not completely control Marinka and that fighting is ongoing in the northwestern part of the settlement.[61]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of December 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

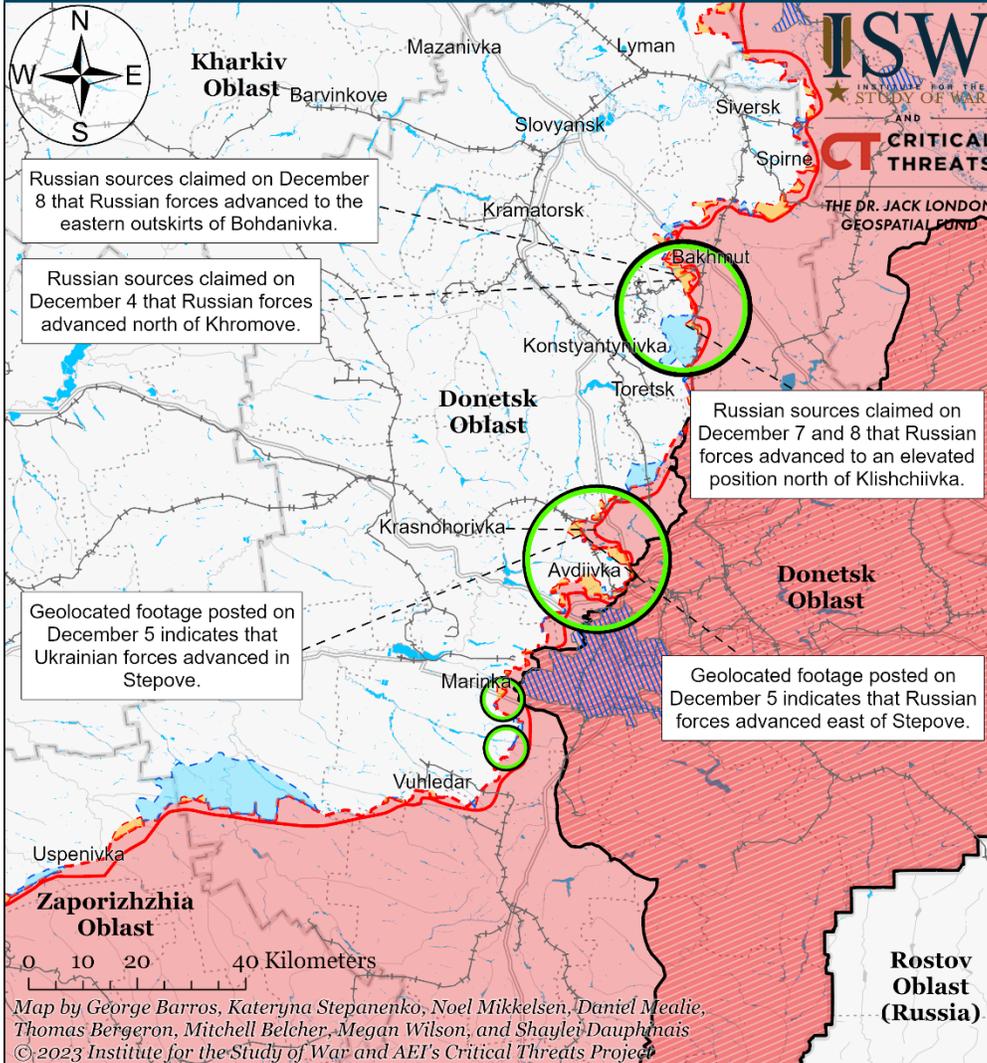


- Donetsk City Limits
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Russian Field Fortifications

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

Note: A Russian source claimed on December 4 that Russian forces advanced up to 600 meters along the forest belt southeast of Stepove.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of December 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



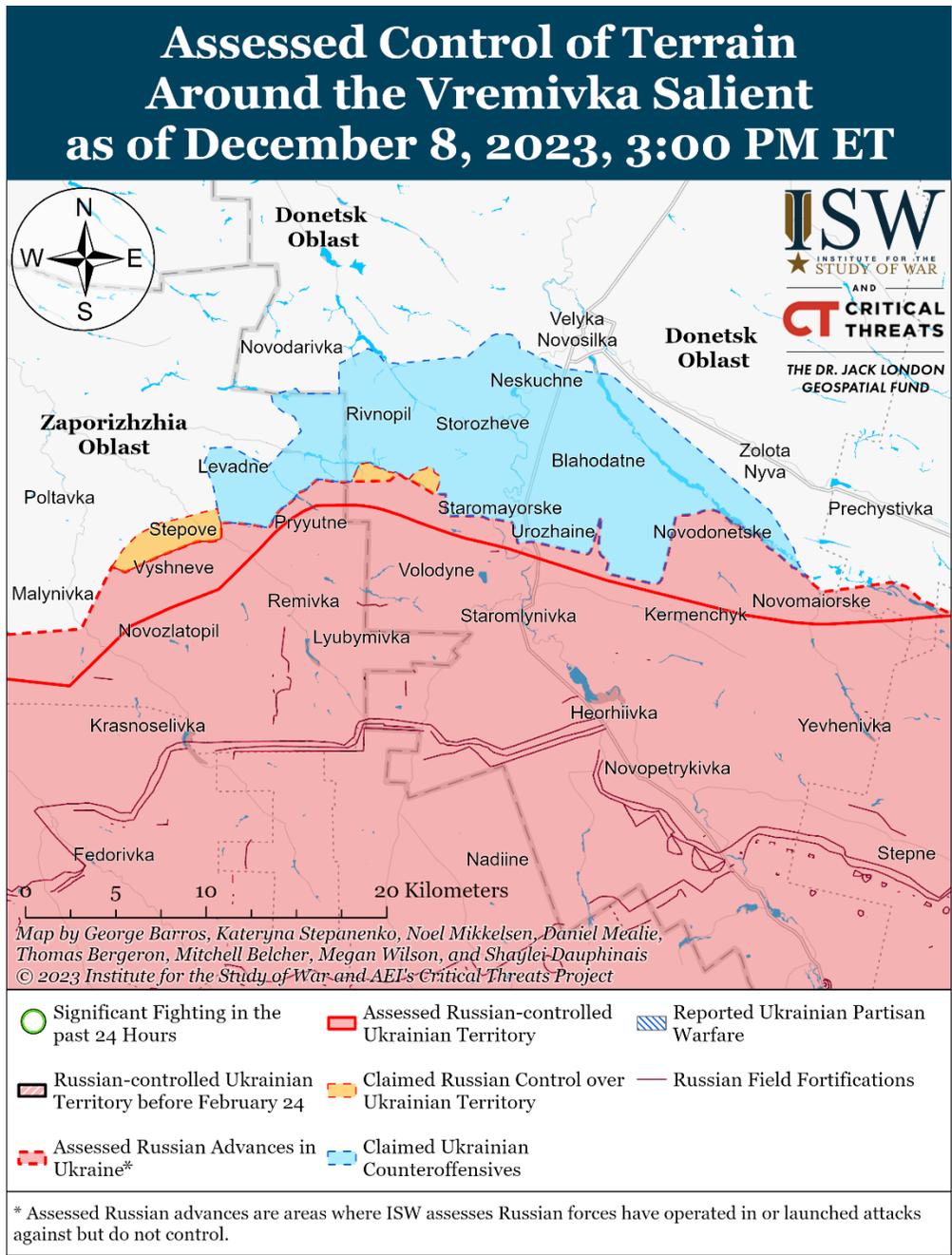
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads
- 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: A Russian source claimed on December 7 that Russian forces advanced more than one half kilometer in the dacha area southwest of Bakhmut. Russian sources claimed on December 6 that Russian forces advanced 1.5 to 2 kilometers near Vesele, Bakhmut Raion.

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

Russian forces reportedly continued limited offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on December 8 but did not advance. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces attacked near Staromayorske and Urozhaine (both about 9km south of Velyka Novosilka) as well as Zolota Nyva (11km southeast of Velyka Novosilka).[62] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces did not conduct any ground attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, however.[63]



Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on December 8 but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Robotyne, west of Verbove (9km east of Robotyne), and west of Novofedorivka (21km southeast of Orikhiv).[64] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces also repelled Ukrainian attacks near Nesteryanka (11km southwest of Orikhiv) and Uspenivka (11km southeast of Orikhiv).[65] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that poor weather conditions prevent both Russian and Ukrainian forces from making significant advances or operating large reconnaissance drones in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast.[66]



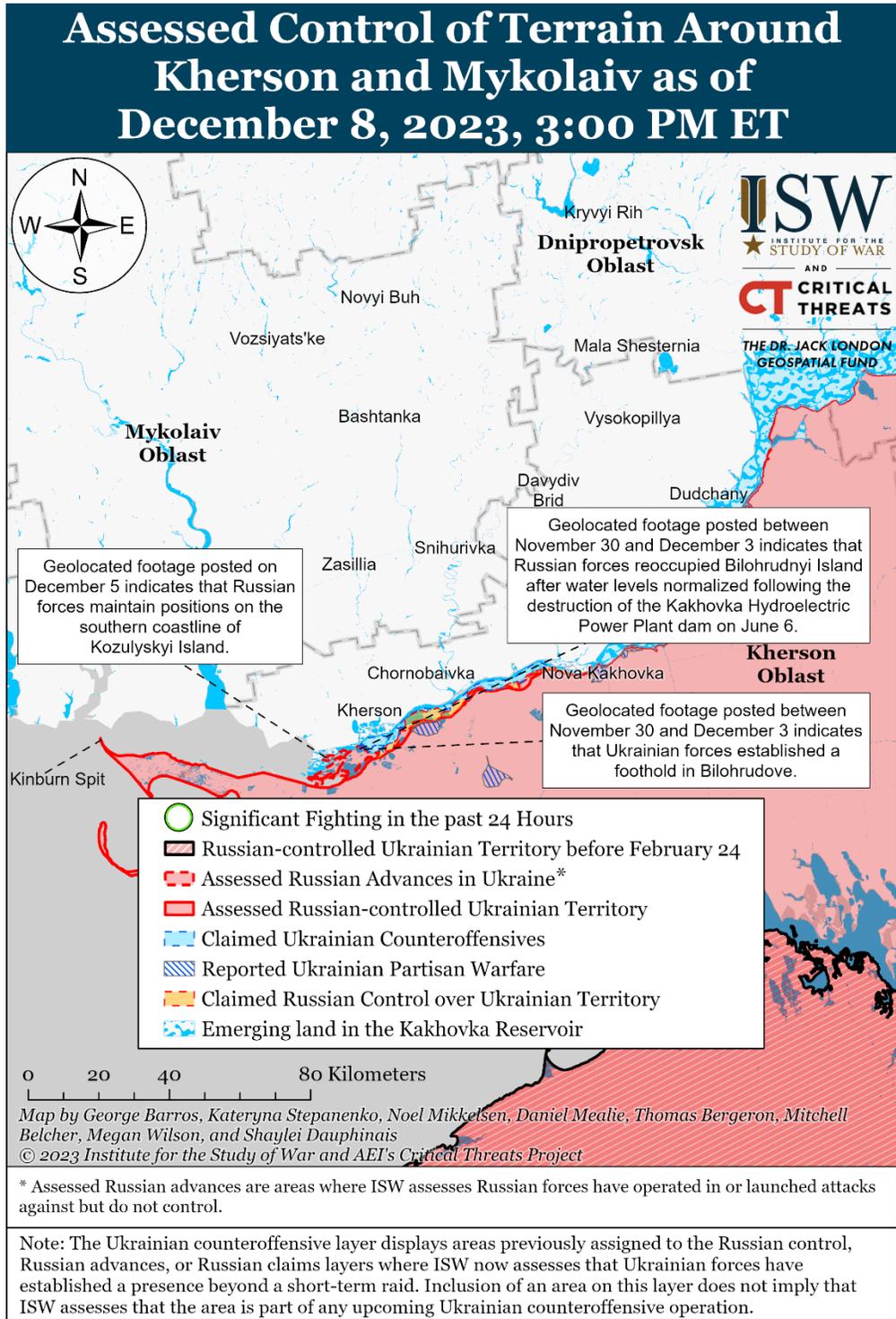
Russian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on December 8 and recently advanced. Geolocated footage published on December 7 shows that Russian forces made an advance south of Robotyne towards Novoprokopivka (2km south of Robotyne).[67] The Ukrainian

General Staff reported on December 8 that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks near Robotyne and west of Verbove.[68] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Russian forces are taking advantage of the reduced tempo of Ukrainian offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast to reorganize their force grouping and create operational reserves but noted that Russian forces currently cannot allocate significant resources to these reserves.[69]



Ukrainian forces continued ground operations in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on December 8. Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting continues in Krynky (30km northeast of Kherson City and 2km from the Dnipro River) and that Ukrainian forces have increased the tempo of operations in the area.[70] A milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces temporarily advanced south of Krynky before Russian artillery fire forced Ukrainian forces back again on December 7-8.[71] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces thwarted multiple Ukrainian attempts to land sabotage and reconnaissance

groups on the east bank between December 3 and 8.[72] Other milbloggers claimed on December 8 that Russian forces are increasing the intensity of glide bomb strikes against Ukrainian positions in this area.[73] Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces have changed defensive tactics in east bank Kherson Oblast and are now trying to exhaust Ukrainian personnel on the east bank with heavy air and artillery strikes.[74]



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

Udmurt Republic Head Alexander Brechalov announced on December 7 that the region formed and will soon deploy four new units to fight in Ukraine.[75] Brechalov stated that the newly-formed "Yevgeniy Dragunov" Separate Anti-Aircraft Missile Battalion, the "Cheptsya" Anti-Aircraft Missile Division, the "Varmun" Motorized Battalion, and the "Kama" Air Assault (VDV) Division will soon deploy to Ukraine. Brechalov claimed that Udmurt residents staffed these new units after signing unspecified contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). These units appear to be Russian irregular formations with unknown strengths that likely do not correspond with the doctrinal end strengths of their reported echelons. Authorities in the Republic of Udmurtia are likely recruiting local volunteers to staff these units to immediately reinforce the frontlines in Ukraine.

The Russian MoD claimed that Russia further simplified the procedure for issuing combat veteran certificates for participants of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Russian MoD announced on December 8 that Russian fighters will no longer need to apply to receive their veteran certificates because the MoD will automatically issue these certificates based on the already-available information about the combatant.[76] The simplification of this procedure may be part of an ongoing Russian formalization effort that seeks to reestablish Russia's administrative control over irregular forces involved in the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russian regional authorities continued efforts to forcibly coerce migrants into military service. Russian opposition and local outlets reported that Udmurt military police raided a migrant community in Izhevsk and reportedly will force migrant men aged 18 to 27 into military service.[77] Udmurt officials are reportedly offering to allow migrant men older than 27 to sign a contract with the Russian MoD to fight in Ukraine. Vladivostok City officials reportedly conducted a similar raid on migrant taxi drivers and issued summonses to the military registration office to 10 detained migrants.[78] *BBC's* Russia service reported that Russian officials also recruited detained migrants who attempted to cross the Russian-Finnish border to fight in Ukraine before returning some of these migrants to the Republic of Karelia from Rostov Oblast.[79] *BBC's* Russia service reported that some migrants refused to deploy to Ukraine after realizing that Russia intended to commit them to battle in exchange for dropping their deportation cases.

Russia reportedly continues to defend its border with Ukraine with a limited number of conscripts. A Russian conscript told Russian outlet *Mozhem Obyasnit (We Can Explain)* that there are almost no Russian border guards defending the Russian state border in Bryansk Oblast.[80] The conscript claimed that at least 10 conscripts had died as a result of shelling on the Russian-Ukrainian state border.

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

The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russian forces are trying to copy Ukrainian naval drones that have been targeting the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF).[81] GUR Representative Andriy Yusov stated that Russian forces are collecting fragments of Ukrainian naval drones and are trying to improve their drone production.

A Ukrainian head of a volunteer organization stated that Russia is actively relying on automatic optical drone navigation and that Ukraine does not have a systematic way to counteract Russian

automation.[82] Head of the Ukrainian "Victory Drones" volunteer initiative (and director of the Aeronautics Support Center) Maria Berlinskaya stated that Russia is increasingly trying to automate its drones, shift towards automatic optical navigation, and move to launching "drone swarms" to overwhelm Ukrainian forces. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have launched 3,083 Shahed 136/131 drones since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine based on data published by the Ukrainian General Staff.[83]

A Russian milblogger amplified footage purporting to show that Russian forces installed the first sets of "Soltik-BL" DMR AES256 radio communications systems for armored vehicles, which will allow these vehicles to receive a publicly available standard connection with relay capability.[84] The milblogger specified that volunteers produced the "Soltik-BL" DMR AES256 systems.

Radio Liberty's Schemes project found that Russian security services spied on Ukrainian state and private infrastructures since 2014 via thousands of security cameras that operated on Russian "TRASSIR" software belonging to the Russian "DSSL" company.[85] *Schemes* found that the companies storing information from these security cameras are linked to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

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

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 8 that Russia is trying to destroy Ukrainian children's connection to Ukraine and that swift intervention is necessary to maintain children's Ukrainian identity during a speech at the first meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.[86] Zelensky stated that forced deportation is one of Russia's most "cynical" war crimes and that Russian authorities are teaching children lies about Ukraine and the war. Zelensky noted that Russia's crimes against Ukrainian children and families are "organized" efforts to erase the national identity of young Ukrainians. ISW continues to assess that Russia's forced deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children likely constitutes a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.[87]

Russian state news wire *RIA Novosti* reported that Russian officials detained Russian "Donbas Railways" Director Vladimir Kabatsyi in Donetsk City on December 8 under suspicion of abuse of power.[88]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov reiterated that Russia will not negotiate with Ukraine on Ukraine's terms in response to US Deputy National Security Advisor Jonathan Finer on December 8. Finer stated that the US wants to position Ukraine in such a way that Russia will need to decide to negotiate on Ukraine's terms or confront a stronger Ukraine by the end of 2024.[89] Peskov responded by stating that Finer's comments are "absolutely unrealistic." [90] The Kremlin consistently signals that it is not interested in any negotiations that do not offer Russia full capture of Ukraine.

A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger criticized the Russian government for missing an opportunity to provide Kyrgyzstan with Russian school textbooks to further spread Russian ideology in Central Asia.[91] The milblogger commented on Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan

Akylbek Japarov’s announcement that Kyrgyzstan will replace Soviet STEM and hard sciences textbooks with textbooks from Oxford and Cambridge.[92] The milblogger claimed that Kyrgyzstan is now increasingly advocating for the Kyrgyz language and national identity and noted that Russian officials’ inaction allowed the United Kingdom to occupy an ”extremely important niche” in the Kyrgyz education sphere.[93]

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

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met with United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan on December 8.[94] Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Al Nahyan on December 6.[95]

Belarusian military officials met with Egyptian officials on December 8 during the International Exhibit for Defense and Military Industries (EDEX-2023) in Cairo, Egypt. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced that a Belarusian military delegation, headed by Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense Forces Commander Major General Andrei Lukyanovich, met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Egyptian Air Force Commander Air Marshal Mahmoud Foad Abd El-Gawad, and Egyptian Air Defense Forces Commander Lieutenant General Mohamed Hegazy Abdul Mawgoud in Egypt to discuss bilateral military cooperation and the modernization of air defense systems.[96]

Belarusian military officials, including Assistant to the Belarusian Defense Minister for International Military Cooperation Colonel Valery Revenko, attended the Commonwealth of Independent State’s (CIS) Coordination Meeting on International Military Cooperation in Moscow on December 8.[97]

A Russian milblogger claiming to be affiliated with the Wagner Group amplified footage on December 7 claiming to show elements of the Belarusian “Typhoon” Spetsnaz Detachment of military unit 5522 training with Wagner instructors.[98]

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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