

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Senior Kremlin officials continue holding high-level meetings with Belarusian national leadership – activity that could be setting conditions for a Russian attack against Ukraine from Belarus, although not necessarily and not in the coming weeks. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin discussed unspecified bilateral military cooperation, the implementation of unspecified strategic deterrence measures, and “progress in preparing” the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Troops (RGV) in a January 19 phone call.¹ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in Minsk and discussed an unspecified Russo-Belarusian “shared vision” for Russia’s war in Ukraine on January 19.² Lavrov and Belarusian Foreign Minister Sergey Aleinik discussed how Russia and Belarus can defeat an ongoing Western hybrid war against the states and signed an unspecified memorandum of cooperation on “ensuring biological security.”³ This memorandum could be a leading indicator of the intensification of an existing Russian information operation falsely accusing Ukraine of developing chemical and biochemical weapons in alleged US-funded biolabs in Ukraine that was part of the Kremlin’s pretext for the February 2022 invasion.⁴

The most dangerous course of action (MDCOA) of a new Russian attack against Ukraine from Belarus in early 2023 seems less likely given current Russian military activity in Belarus. A new MDCOA of an attack from Belarus in late 2023 seems more likely. Russian forces currently deployed in Belarus are undergoing training rotations and redeploying to fight in eastern Ukraine.⁵ There are no observed indicators that Russian forces in Belarus have the command and control structures necessary for the winter or spring 2023 attack against Ukraine about which Ukrainian issued warnings in late 2022.⁶ It seems more likely that Russian forces may be setting conditions for a new MDCOA of attacking Ukraine from Belarus in late 2023 given recent Ukrainian intelligence reports that Russia and Belarus plan to conduct major exercises (Zapad 2023 and Union Shield 2023), likely in September 2023.⁷ ISW is thus adjusting its forecast; the current assessed MDCOA is a Russian attack against Ukraine from Belarusian territory in late 2023. This is not simply a deferment of the timeframe for the previous MDCOA. It is an entirely new MDCOA given that it would occur in different circumstances. Russia will have completed the Autumn 2022 annual conscription cycle and be well into the Spring 2023 cycle, on the one hand, and may well have completed one or more additional reserve call-ups by Autumn 2023. A delayed timeline for this COA could allow Russia’s military industry to gear up sufficiently to provide a greater proportion of the necessary materiel for a renewed invasion from Belarus than Russia can provide this winter. ISW continues to assess that a Russian attack against Belarus remains a highly unlikely scenario in the forecast cone this winter and unlikely but more plausible in Autumn 2023.

Russia’s nationalist military bloggers continue to criticize the idea of Russian forces attacking Ukraine from Belarus. Russian milbloggers continue to react negatively every time the idea of Russian forces attacking Ukraine from Belarus resurfaces. One milblogger stated that it is a bad idea for Russia to significantly expand the front from Belarus because Russian forces’ battlefield performance improved after compressing the front following Russia’s withdrawal from

upper Kherson.⁸ This milblogger stated that Russian forces do not have the capability to project deep into Ukraine along multiple axes of advance as Russia attempted to do in early 2022 and advocated that Russia prioritize reestablishing a strong conventional military capable of fighting NATO.⁹

Lavrov attacked the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), underscoring the infeasibility of the Kremlin supporting a third Minsk-type agreement. Lavrov accused NATO and the European Union of using the OSCE against Russia and falsely claimed that the OSCE agreed to the Minsk agreements (the failed ceasefire accords that the Kremlin coerced Ukraine into accepting in 2014-2015, which stipulated major political concessions undermining Ukraine's sovereignty) only to buy time to prepare for a war against Russia.¹⁰ Lavrov accused unspecified OSCE Special Monitoring Mission staff in Ukraine of aiding Ukraine in conducting military operations against civilians in Donbas.¹¹

The OSCE was a key neutral party in implementing the first two Minsk agreements in 2014 and 2015. Lavrov's attack against the OSCE indicates Moscow's unwillingness to engage in the future serious cooperation with the OSCE that would be necessary for another Minsk Accords-style ceasefire.¹² Lavrov's attack may also be an attempt to justify Russian forces' reported illegal commandeering of OSCE off-road vehicles to support Russian combat operations in Luhansk Oblast.¹³

Lukashenko continues to balance against the Kremlin by framing Belarus as a sovereign state within the Russia-dominated Union State. Lukashenko's readout of his meeting with Lavrov stated that he and Lavrov identified unspecified areas of cooperation to "preserve the sovereignty of the two countries in all respects."¹⁴ This rhetoric is consistent with Lukashenko's longstanding efforts to avoid ceding Belarusian sovereignty to the Kremlin-dominated Union State structure.¹⁵

The Kremlin is intensifying its information operation to promote a false narrative that the war will escalate if Ukraine receives weapons capable of striking Russian forces in occupied Crimea. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded on January 19 to a *New York Times* report that US officials are considering providing Kyiv with weapons capable of striking Russian military infrastructure in occupied Crimea and southern Ukraine.¹⁶ Peskov stated that Western provisions of long-range weapons to Ukraine that can threaten Russian forces in Crimea will bring "the conflict to a new qualitative level, which will not go well for global and pan-European security."¹⁷ Peskov added that even the discussion of providing such weapons is "potentially extremely dangerous," but then noted that Ukraine already has weapons that it uses to strike occupied territories in Ukraine. Crimea is legally Ukrainian territory and Ukraine is within its rights under the laws and norms of armed conflict to strikes Russian military targets in Crimea. It would be within its rights under international law and norms to attack targets in Russia as well, as the invading country retains no right to sanctuary for military targets within its own territory.

Peskov's threats are part of a Russian information operation designed to discourage Western support to Ukraine and do not correspond to Russia's actual capabilities to escalate against the West. Kremlin officials have made similar threats regarding select Western security assistance in the past and will likely continue to do so in the future. Russia forces, however, do not have the capacity to escalate their conventional war effort in Ukraine and certainly are not capable of conducting successful conventional military operations against the West and NATO in their current state. Russia has severely weakened its military posture against NATO by deploying military units and equipment – including air defense systems – away from

NATO and to Ukraine and suffering horrific losses in men and materiel.¹⁸ The Kremlin never assessed that it could defeat NATO in a conventional war, moreover, an assessment that was at the heart of its hybrid warfare doctrine.¹⁹ The Kremlin seeks to minimize Western military aid to Ukraine by stoking fears of an escalation Russia cannot execute. Russian President Vladimir Putin's theory of victory likely depends on Putin's will to force his people to fight outlasting the West's willingness to support Ukraine over time.²⁰

The Kremlin is also very unlikely to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine and extraordinarily unlikely to use them against the West despite consistently leaning on tired nuclear escalation threats. Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev, in response to NATO Command's planned January 20 meeting in Germany, stated on January 19 that Western officials do not understand that the "loss of a nuclear power in a conventional war can provoke the outbreak of a nuclear war."²¹ Medvedev argued that "nuclear powers [like the Russian Federation] have not lost major conflicts on which their fate depends."²² Medvedev routinely makes hyperbolic and inflammatory comments, including threats of nuclear escalation, in support of Russian information operations that aim to weaken Western support for Ukraine and that are out of touch with actual Kremlin positions regarding the war in Ukraine.²³ Medvedev's consistently inflammatory rhetoric may suggest that the Kremlin has encouraged him to promote extremist rhetoric that aims to frighten and deter the West from giving further military aid to Ukraine over fears of escalation with Russia or that he is simply continuing a pattern of extremist rhetorical freelancing. ISW continues to assess that Russian officials have no intention of using nuclear weapons in Ukraine or elsewhere, and certainly not in response to the provision of individual weapons systems.²⁴

Russian President Vladimir Putin is increasingly siding with the adversaries of Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin, likely in an ongoing effort to degrade Prigozhin's influence in Russia. Putin met on January 18, 2023 with St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov – one of Prigozhin's overt enemies – for the first time since early March 2022 to discuss St. Petersburg's role in the Russian war effort.²⁵ Beglov stated that his administration formed three volunteer battalions that support Russia's invasion of Ukraine under the Russian Western Military District (WMD). ISW previously reported that Prigozhin had launched an intensive campaign petitioning Russian State Duma officials to remove Beglov from his office and had even called on the Russian Prosecutor General's office to investigate Beglov for treason for failing to adequately support the Russian war effort.²⁶ Prigozhin-affiliated outlets also published exposés on Beglov over summer 2022, claiming that Beglov deliberately impeded the advertising efforts for recruitment into the three local volunteer battalions.²⁷ Prigozhin had also suggested that he assisted Beglov in campaigning for the governor role – claiming that he had made Beglov's career and made several proposals to improve his administration.

Putin's demonstrative meeting with Beglov and their specific discussion of Beglov's contribution to the war effort directly challenges Prigozhin's ongoing effort to assert his own authority over Beglov and St. Petersburg. Putin had also recently reappointed Colonel General Aleksandr Lapin, former commander of the Central Military District (CMD) as the Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces despite Lapin receiving significant criticism from the *siloviki* faction of which Prigozhin is a prominent member.²⁸ Putin had also doubled down on the official rhetoric that only Russian forces contributed to the capture of Soledar, Donetsk Oblast, rejecting Prigozhin's claims that Wagner forces had accomplished the tactical victory.²⁹ Putin is likely attempting to reduce Prigozhin's prominence in favor of the re-emerging professional Russian military and Russian government officials.

Prigozhin nevertheless continues to use claims about the Wagner Group’s tactical success to elevate his position, likely deepening a conflict with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for influence in the Russian information space. Prigozhin claimed on January 19 that Wagner Group elements captured Klishchiivka, Donetsk Oblast, and emphasized that Wagner Group forces were exclusively responsible for the tactical advances south of Bakhmut.³⁰ This statement is the first time Prigozhin has personally broken news of a purported Russian tactical success and likely supports Prigozhin’s effort to promote himself as an independently successful wartime leader.³¹ Russian sources largely responded to Prigozhin’s claim as if it were an official confirmation that Russian forces took the settlement.³²

Prigozhin’s announcement generated widespread conversation among Russian milbloggers about the operational significance of the Russian capture of the settlement.³³ The Russian MoD’s announcement concerning the capture of Sil, Donetsk Oblast near Soledar on January 18 generated far less conversation and excitement amongst Russian milbloggers.³⁴ The Russian Ministry of Defense previously tried to downplay the Wagner Group’s involvement in the capture of neighboring Sil by referring to Wagner Group fighters as “volunteers of assault detachments” on January 18.³⁵ The Russian MoD has started to use more specific language for Russian units in its reporting on Russian operations likely in order to claim more responsibility for tactical advances and minimize Prigozhin’s ability to claim that Wagner Group forces are the only Russian forces that are able to secure tactical advances in Ukraine.³⁶ The Kremlin is likely aware that Prigozhin’s recent use of the Wagner Group’s tactical success has had a greater effect in the Russian information space than its own efforts to portray the Russian military as an effective fighting force.

Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov reportedly declared that the Wagner Group does not belong in the structure of the Russian Armed Forces.

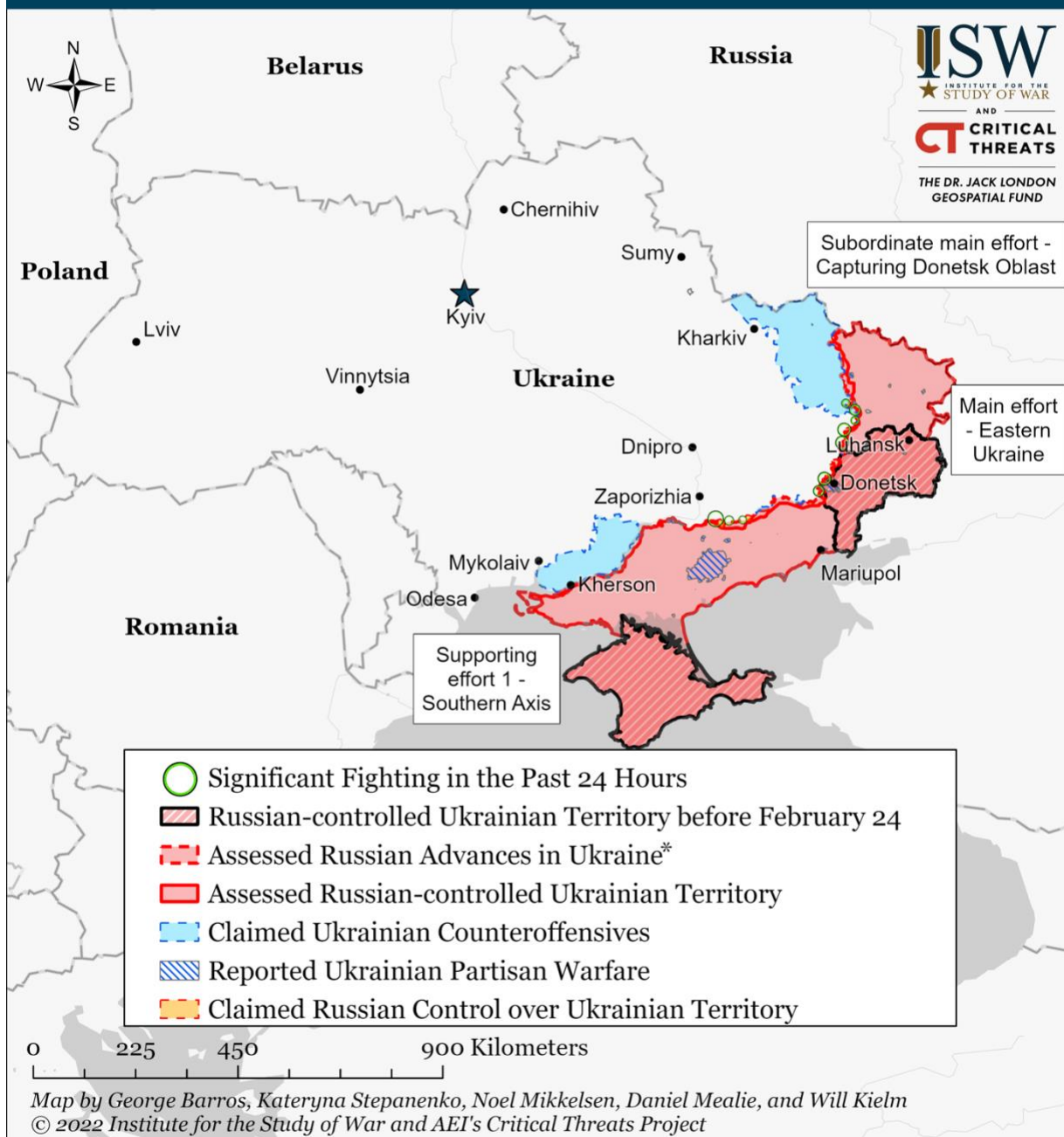
Gerasimov allegedly responded to Moscow City Duma parliamentarian Yevgeny Stupin’s inquiry on the status of the Wagner Group and its “operational interaction” with the Russian Armed Forces in an official letter, dated December 29, 2022, that Stupin shared on his Telegram on January 19.³⁷ Stupin stated that he had received numerous complaints from his constituents who have relatives serving in Wagner detachments that they are unable to contact officials that would connect them with their family members on the frontlines. Gerasimov stated in the letter that “the organization [Stupin] referred to as PMC Wagner does not belong to the structure of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” and that “[t]he Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is not responsible for Wagner servicemen.”³⁸ Stupin asserted that the letter is real, although ISW has no independent verification of his claim.

Clear evidence indicates that Wagner Group has operated under the direction of the Russian chain of command.³⁹ A Bellingcat investigation found that Wagner founder Dmitry Utkin reported to current Western Military District Commander Lieutenant General Evgeny ⁴⁰ – among other Russian military intelligence officials – when Nikiforov was the Chief of Staff of the Russian 58th Combined Arms Army in 2015.⁴¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense recently claimed on January 13 that Russian forces worked with the Wagner Group to capture ⁴¹. ISW assesses that Gerasimov’s apparent letter is, at the very least, another pointed effort by the Russian government to undermine Prigozhin’s influence. Its release at this time is noteworthy in this respect. Gerasimov was appointed overall commander of the Russian war effort in Ukraine on January 11, for one thing, and Stupin’s publication of the nearly month-old correspondence comes in the midst of a concerted Kremlin campaign to clip Prigozhin’s wings, on the other.⁴²

Key Takeaways

- Senior Kremlin officials continue holding high-level meetings with Belarusian national leadership – activity that could be setting conditions for a Russian attack against Ukraine from Belarus, although not necessarily and not in the coming weeks.
- A new Russian attack against Ukraine from Belarus in early 2023 seems less likely given current Russian military activity in Belarus, although an attack from Belarus in late 2023 seems more plausible.
- Ultranationalist Russian milbloggers continue to criticize the idea of Russian forces attacking Ukraine from Belarus.
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov attacked the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), underscoring the infeasibility of the Kremlin supporting a third Minsk-type agreement.
- Lukashenko continues to balance against the Kremlin by framing Belarus as sovereign state within the Russian-dominated Union State.
- The Kremlin continues to falsely promote a narrative that the war will escalate if Ukraine receives weapons with the capability to strike Russian forces in occupied Crimea.
- An extremist Kremlin ally reintroduced nuclear escalation rhetoric aimed at scaring Western policymakers away providing additional military aid to Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin is increasingly siding with the enemies of Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin, likely in an ongoing effort to reduce Prigozhin's influence in Russia.
- Prigozhin's continued use of the Wagner Group's claimed tactical success to elevate his position is likely deepening a conflict with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for influence in the Russian information space.
- Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov may have officially declared that the Wagner Group does not belong in the structure of the Russian Armed Forces and that the Russian military does not collaborate with Wagner despite ample evidence to the contrary.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly continued counteroffensive operations near Svatove, and Russian forces conducted limited counterattacks near Kreminna.
- Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Klishchiivka amidst ongoing Russian offensive operations around Soledar, Bakhmut, and Avdiivka.
- Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted localized offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast.
- Russian officials are reportedly continuing to prepare for a second wave of mobilization.
- Ukrainian partisans may have conducted an IED attack in Zaporizhia Oblast.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

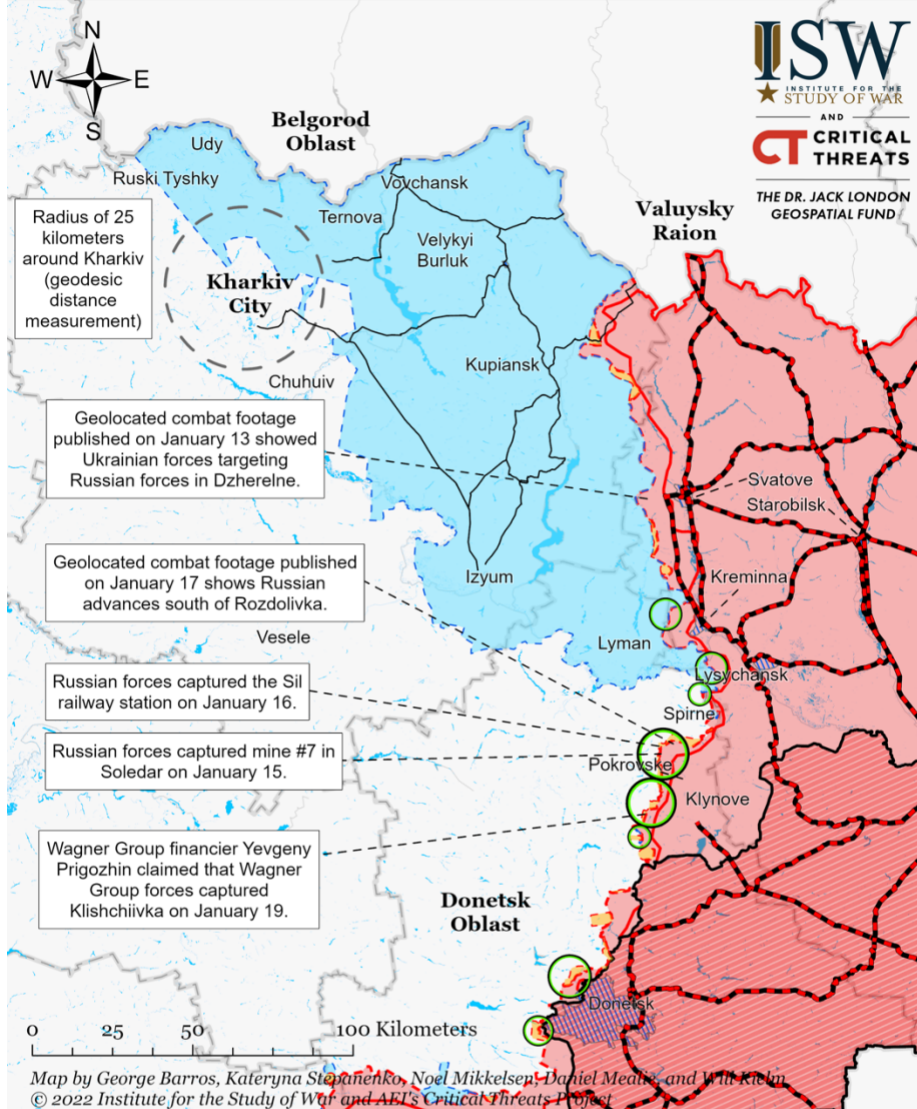


* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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.

- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and one supporting effort);
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of January 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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| | Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours | | Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory |
| | Key Ukrainian Roads | | Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine* | | Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives |
| | Russian Ground Lines of Communication | | Assessed Russian-controlled 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.

The Ukrainian Main Defense Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine published an audio intercept on December 22 in which a Russian soldier operating in the vicinity of Chervonopopivka supported reports that Ukrainian forces captured part of the R-66 Kreminna-Svatove road in the vicinity of Zhytlivka (just south of Chervonopopivka). The Ukrainian General Staff has repeatedly reported since November 30 that Russian forces shelled Chervonopopivka, indicating Russian forces no longer control Chervonopopivka. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to establish a position in Chervonopopivka on November 27, indicating Ukrainian maneuvers near Chervonopopivka. The R-66 runs through Chervonopopivka and the road's capture by Ukrainian forces would be consistent with the evidence presented in the intercepted phone call plus the Ukrainian General Staff's reports.

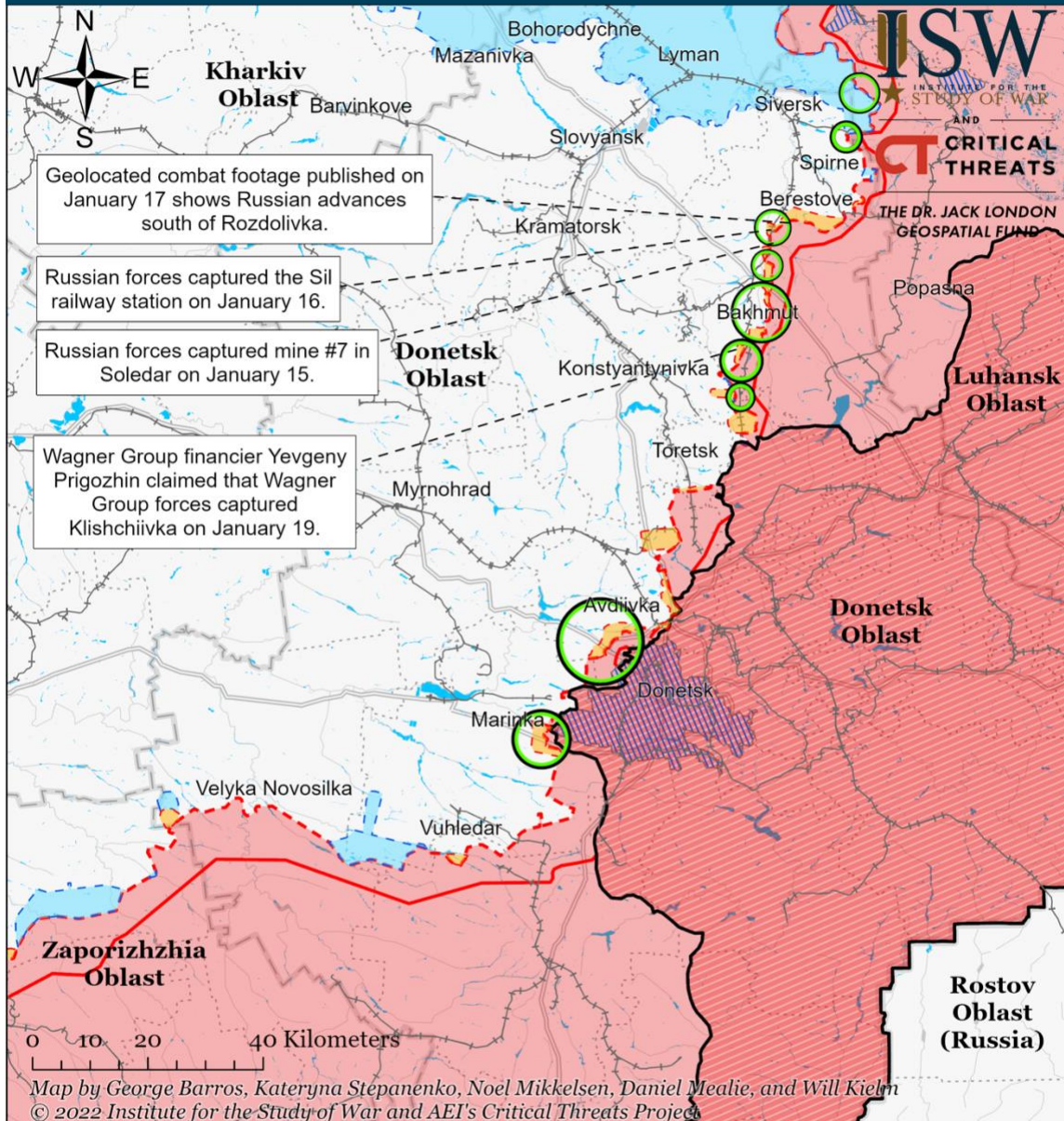
Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

Eastern Ukraine: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)

Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations near Svatove on January 19. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a counteroffensive to capture Novoselivske (15km northwest of Svatove) and advanced to the railway station in the eastern part of the settlement.⁴³ A milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are waiting for reinforcements to continue the counteroffensive to liberate Kuzemivka (15km northwest of Svatove), which they claimed is not under Ukrainian or Russian control.⁴⁴ ISW does not make assessments about specific future Ukrainian operations, however. The milblogger also claimed that Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups are operating along the frontline from Kolomyychikha (10km west of Svatove) to Kamianka (63km northwest of Svatove) to assist in target designation for Russian artillery units.⁴⁵ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that elements of the Western Military District (WMD) are operating in the northern sector of the Svatove-Kreminna line.⁴⁶

Russian forces continued limited counterattacks to regain lost positions near Kreminna on January 19. Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai reported that there is heavy fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces on the outskirts of Kreminna and near Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna).⁴⁷ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Terny, Donetsk Oblast (17km west of Kreminna) and Bilohorivka, Luhansk Oblast (12km south of Kreminna).⁴⁸

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- 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.

Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

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

Russian forces continued offensive operations around Soledar on January 19. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Soledar itself, Verkhokamianske (20km northeast of Soledar) and Sil (3km northwest of Soledar).⁴⁹ Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted assaults towards Ukrainian fortified positions along the Krasnopolivka-Rozdolivka-Vesele line (within 7km north of Soledar) and in the direction of Blahodatne (2km west of Soledar).⁵⁰ Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces engaged in combat near Paraskoviivka (5km southwest of Soledar).⁵¹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also repelled a Russian assault near Krasna Hora (5km southwest of Soledar).⁵²

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) amid ongoing offensive operations around Bakhmut on January 19. Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that Wagner Group fighters exclusively captured Klishchiivka and that fighting is ongoing around the settlement, although ISW cannot independently confirm that Russian forces have captured the settlement.⁵³ Russian sources asserted that the capture of Klishchiivka would allow Russian forces to cut off the Kostiantynivka- Bakhmut highway (TO504 highway) and threaten Ukrainian forces in Chasiv Yar (13km west of Bakhmut).⁵⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut itself and near Klishchiivka, Oleksandro-Shulytne (17km southwest of Bakhmut), and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).⁵⁵ Geolocated footage published on January 18 indicates that Russian forces have likely made marginal advances in the northeastern outskirts of Bakhmut.⁵⁶ Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces made marginal advances in the eastern and southern outskirts of Bakhmut.⁵⁷

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Donetsk City-Avdiivka area on January 19. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults within 32km southwest of Avdiivka near Vodyane, Marinka, Pobieda, and Paraskoviivka.⁵⁸ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces attacked near Nevelske (15km southwest of Avdiivka) and broke through Ukrainian defenses near Pobieda (32km southwest of Avdiivka), reaching a local railway station, although ISW cannot independently verify that Russian forces did so.⁵⁹ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that elements of the Southern Military District (SMD) are operating on the western outskirts of Donetsk City and that elements of the Eastern Military District (EMD) are operating in western Donetsk Oblast.⁶⁰ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued routine indirect fire along the line of contact in Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.⁶¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 19, 2023, 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.

ISW recoded the northeast section of Velykyi Potomkin Island in Kherson Oblast from reported Ukrainian counteroffensives to Russian claims based on Russian milblogger reports and video footage published on January 5 that claimed Russian forces recaptured that part of the island where Ukrainian forces placed a flag on January 2. ISW cannot confirm if Russian forces recaptured the same positions as Ukrainian forces as of January 5. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 3 that the island is in a gray zone because Russian forces are still operating in the northern part of the island. Geolocated footage published on January 2 does show Ukrainian forces striking Russian positions on an adjacent island east of Velykyi Potomkin Island, which indicates that Russian forces are still operating within the Dniester River delta areas.

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

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces continued localized offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast on January 19. Zaporizhia Oblast Occupation Deputy Vladimir Rogov claimed that Russian forces captured four unspecified settlements near Orikhiv, a Ukrainian-controlled settlement about 56km southeast of Zaporizhzhia City.⁶² A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted a localized offensive operation around Orikhiv and that Russian reconnaissance and sabotage groups are conducting reconnaissance-in-force operations near Mali Shcherbakyy (18km west of Orikhiv), Stepove (21km west of Orikhiv), Mala Tokmachka (10km southeast of Orikhiv), and Nesteryanka (12km southwest of Orikhiv).⁶³ The Russian milblogger added that Ukrainian formations are spreading information that they lost control of these four settlements, and Rogov may have been referring to these settlements in his original announcement. The Ukrainian General Staff responded to these Russian claims by asserting that Ukrainian artillery defeated elements of the Russian 58th Combined Arms Army that attempted this attack.⁶⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff published geolocated footage that showed Ukrainian artillery striking Russian forces south of Stepove and reported that Ukrainian forces eliminated three Russian tanks and about 30 servicemembers.⁶⁵

Russian forces continued routine fire along the contact line in Kherson, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Mykolaiv oblasts on January 19.⁶⁶ One Ukrainian official reported that Russian forces continue to use incendiary munitions against civilian infrastructure in occupied territories.⁶⁷

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

A Russian source continued to indicate that Russian authorities are likely preparing for a second wave of mobilization. A Russian milblogger reported on January 19 that a Russian citizen went to a military enlistment office in Krasnodar to sign up as a volunteer but officials there told him to “wait for the next mobilization or go to Grozny [in the Chechen Republic].”⁶⁸ The report stated that the military enlistment officials told the man that the reasons for prohibiting him from signing up as a volunteer are “secret.”⁶⁹ This report may indicate that Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov is continuing efforts to build up his parallel military structure. ISW assesses that the officials’ mention of Grozny, Chechen Republic implies some sort of connection between the Russian state and Kadyrov’s parallel military recruitment efforts in Chechnya. ISW previously reported on Kadyrov’s routine promotion of his efforts to create Chechen-based parallel military structures to garner favor with Russian President Vladimir Putin, counteract Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin’s growing influence, and expand Kadyrov’s own political and military influence.⁷⁰

The Russian State Duma is moving forward with a project to confiscate the property of Russians who fled Russia. Russian sources reported on January 18 that several unspecified State Duma deputies are working on implementing the confiscation (nationalization) of the property of Russians who fled the country.⁷¹ ISW previously reported that Chairman of the Russian State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin proposed on January 12 that Russia amend its criminal code to legalize the confiscation of private property of Russians who fled the country.⁷² Not all Russian officials support this approach, however. ISW also reported that Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov opposed Volodin’s proposal, instead argued for creating incentives for Russians to return home, and stated that Russian citizens who left the country “are all our citizens, all equally, and could

have different reasons for leaving.”⁷³ The senior Russian leadership continues to distance itself from these discussions and could be pushing Volodin as the face of such an unpopular order to make the official Kremlin line appear more reasonable in comparison. The Russian State Duma and its officials consistently support Kremlin directives and are not independent of the Russian executive branch, indicating that Volodin’s proposal may have come from -- or at least has the private support of -- the Kremlin. ISW has previously reported that both Putin and Prigozhin have set conditions for nationalization of Russian private property.⁷⁴

The Russian Armed Forces continue to struggle with desertion and low morale among servicemembers. The *BBC*’s Russian service shared a special report on January 19 that Russian courts have received over 900 criminal cases under the Russian Criminal Code – most being under the article on “unauthorized abandonment of a unit” since the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.⁷⁵ *Meduza* previously reported that the Russian government made amendments to the Criminal Code on September 24 that increased punishments for “crimes against military service” such as desertion, insubordination, and disobedience just five days after Putin declared mobilization.⁷⁶ The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) shared intercepted audio on January 18 of a demoralized Russian servicemember complaining about the high death rates in his unit and their dwindling supply of military equipment.⁷⁷

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

Ukrainian partisans may have conducted an IED attack in Kyrylivka, Melitopol Raion, Zaporizhia Oblast. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on January 19 that Ukrainian partisans used an IED to attack a house holding a group of Russian servicemembers.⁷⁸ Russian sources did not report on any partisan activity in Zaporizhia Oblast on January 19.

Russian occupation authorities are continuing efforts to deter and detain Ukrainian civilians and partisans in occupied territories. The Kherson Oblast Occupation Ministry of Internal Affairs claimed on January 19 that Kherson Oblast occupation authorities detained two Ukrainian citizens in Henichesk and near Skadovsk, Kherson Oblast, on allegations that they provided Ukrainian forces with information on Russian military personnel movements, equipment, and checkpoint locations.⁷⁹ The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Internal Ministry announced on January 19 that LNR law enforcement will not penalize Luhansk Oblast residents who voluntarily surrender weapons and ammunition following an incident in which LNR law enforcement arrested an individual reportedly carrying explosives in Kadiivka, Luhansk Oblast.⁸⁰ Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Military Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on January 19 that Russian occupation authorities are raiding homes and looting private farms when searching for possible Ukrainian collaborators in occupied Kherson Oblast.⁸¹

Russian occupation officials claimed that they are not enforcing passportization measures for Ukrainian “evacuees.” Kherson Occupation Administration Head Vladimir Saldo claimed on January 19 that Russian officials continue to provide housing to evacuated residents from occupied Kherson Oblast but no longer require that Ukrainian citizens obtain Russian passports prior to applying for housing certificates under Russian law.⁸²

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to target Ukrainian children to consolidate societal control in occupied territories. Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on January 19 that Russian occupation authorities threaten to deprive Ukrainian parents of their rights should they not send their children to Russian schools in Luhansk Oblast.⁸³ Video footage posted to social

media on January 18 shows Ukrainian children dressed in Russian uniforms shouting “I am Russian” in Mariupol.⁸⁴

Russian occupation officials are continuing to restrict movement of civilians in occupied Ukrainian territories. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on January 19 that Russian forces are blocking all civilian movement into and out of Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast to use civilians as human shields -likely in connection with their recent start of offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast.⁸⁵ The Ukrainian Resistance Center added that Russian forces have trapped 10,000 to 15,000 civilians in Enerhodar and that Russian forces shelter military equipment and personnel among civilians.⁸⁶ Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that Russian forces and occupation authorities torture residents who attempt to leave Melitopol and other occupied settlements.⁸⁷ Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on January 19 that Russian occupation authorities are blocking residents from entering and leaving Rubizhne, Lysychansk, and Severodonetsk, Luhansk Oblast, to search for possible Russian deserters.⁸⁸

Russian occupation authorities continue to face administrative issues in maintaining a sufficient pro-Russia workforce in occupied territories. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on January 19 that Russian occupation authorities are offering doctors in Russia 4,500 – 18,000 rubles (\$65-\$260) from the Russian pension fund to work in occupied territories as Ukrainian doctors are continuing to refuse to sign contracts with Russian officials.⁸⁹ The Ukrainian Resistance Center noted on January 19 that Ukrainian doctors in occupied territories are informally treating locals.⁹⁰

ISW will continue to report daily observed indicators consistent with the current assessed most dangerous course of action (MDCOA): a renewed invasion of northern Ukraine possibly aimed at Kyiv.

ISW’s MDCOA warning forecast about a potential Russian offensive against northern Ukraine in fall 2023 remains a worst-case scenario within the forecast cone. ISW currently assesses the risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine from Belarus as low, but possible, and the risk of Belarusian direct involvement as very low. This new section in the daily update is not in itself a forecast or assessment. It lays out the daily observed indicators we are using to refine our assessments and forecasts, which we expect to update regularly. Our assessment that the MDCOA remains unlikely has not changed. We will update this header if the assessment changes.

Observed indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- See topline text.

Observed ambiguous indicators for MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- The Belarusian Ministry of Defense reported that Russian and Belarusian pilots continued conducting the second stage joint combat training tasks as part of the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV) on January 19.⁹¹ The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced that these exercises are occurring at the Machulishchi, Baranovichi and Lida airfields.⁹²
- Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced that artillery elements of the Belarusian 6th Separate Guards Mechanized Brigade conducted unspecified tasks in an unspecified location as part of a combat readiness check on January 19.⁹³

- Social media users observed Belarusian military trucks loaded on a train at the Brest-Yuzhny railroad station in Belarus on January 19.⁹⁴

Observed counter-indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of January 19 and reported that Russian and Belarusian air forces continue conducting exercises.⁹⁵

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

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<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-update-17>

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⁶ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-15>

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<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-12-2023>

⁸ https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/7063

⁹ https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/7063

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- ²⁷ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-28>
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