

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 13, 2023

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December 13, 2023, 8:45pm 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 1:30pm ET on December 13. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 14 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**The Kremlin appears to be returning to expansionist rhetoric last observed before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in an effort to resurface its claims that Ukraine is part of historically Russian territory and discuss the borders Russian leaders regard as appropriate for a rump Ukrainian state.** Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev misrepresented US President Joe Biden's response to a media question about whether the United States' policy is to win the war or help Ukraine to defend itself during a joint press conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on December 12.[1] Biden stated that the United States wants to see Ukraine win and that "winning means Ukraine is a sovereign, independent nation [...] that can afford to defend itself today and deter further aggression." Medvedev misrepresented Biden's statements to suggest that the United States would be content if Ukraine simply existed as a country but does not care what Ukraine's borders look like.[2] Medvedev claimed that Ukraine can still technically be a sovereign country if the whole country remains within the borders of Lviv Oblast, for example.[3] Medvedev also falsely claimed that Biden implied that the United States only supports Ukraine in defending itself but will not help Kyiv launch counteroffensives to liberate more of its land and people. Medvedev added that Ukraine could hypothetically "defend itself" as a rump state within the borders of Lviv Oblast.

Medvedev routinely and deliberately makes outlandish statements, but the timing of these statements and focus on the idea that Ukraine could exist only as a rump state within the territory of Lviv Oblast is consistent with earlier indicators that the Kremlin is returning to its domestic framing that Russia is fighting the war to "liberate its historic lands." Medvedev's comments follow shortly after Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova's December 9 interview with *AFP*, which had likely marked an official rhetorical shift in the Kremlin's framing of the war.[4] Zakharova reiterated the Kremlin's maximalist demands for full Ukrainian political capitulation and Kyiv's acceptance of Russia's military terms and introduced a vague prerequisite that Ukraine must withdraw its troops from "Russian territory" to resolve the war. ISW assessed at the

time that Zakharova was likely referring to the illegally annexed four Ukrainian regions – which are not fully under Russia’s occupation.[5] Zakharova’s statement, however, may have been purposely vague to allow Russia the freedom to define what it deems to be “Russian territories.” Medvedev’s and Zakharova’s comments closely parallel Russia’s long-standing information operation that Ukraine could be partitioned into Russian-controlled “Malorossiia” (most of Ukraine) and a small rump Polish-controlled western Ukraine.[6] ISW observed Russian propagandists intensify this information operation in the lead-up to the full-scale invasion and its notable decrease from then until now.

**The return of the Kremlin’s notion of a “partitioned Ukraine” is likely an organized effort to mislead the international community into rejecting key components of Ukraine’s sovereignty: its territorial integrity as defined in 1991 and its right to self-determination.** ISW assessed that the Kremlin used similar information operations in late 2021 and early 2022 to create conditions for Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine while misleading the West into the search for a diplomatic de-escalation.[7] Russia is still pursuing its maximalist objective of controlling all of Ukraine and is using these information operations to deter further military aid to Ukraine and to stall for time needed to rebuild its defense industrial complex (DIB) and reconstitute its military.

**Medvedev’s musings and Zakharova’s statement considered in the context of the information operations the Kremlin used before the full-scale invasion cast serious doubt on the notion that Moscow would be satisfied even with all the territory of the four Ukrainian oblasts it has illegally annexed, let alone with where the front lines currently stand. It is also noteworthy that the Kremlin appears to be revising its explicit territorial aims upward as US support for Ukraine appears to waver and Western voices reportedly argue for pressing Ukraine to offer territorial concessions.**

**Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 13 that Ukraine’s decision to transition to defensive operations is motivated by winter weather conditions and not a “crisis,” in response to a recent *New York Times (NYT)* article.**[8] Zelensky stated during a joint press conference at the Ukraine-Northern Europe Summit in Oslo, Norway on December 13 that winter weather slows both offensive and defensive operations and added that there were no Russian victories in 2023.[9] Zelensky stated that the most important objective for Ukrainian forces is to hold and destroy the Russian military in Ukraine.[10]

**Russian and Ukrainian sources continue to report on the impacts of challenging weather conditions on offensive and reconnaissance operations throughout the front, even as reported freezing and snowy winter conditions in eastern Ukraine offer the prospect of better conditions for maneuver.** Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk stated on December 13 that poor weather conditions are complicating Russian and Ukrainian combat operations in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast.[11] Humenyuk stated that fog and other weather conditions prompted by temperature fluctuations are making it difficult to conduct offensive operations and use drones and artillery.[12] Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Military Administration Head Artem Lysohor stated that poor weather conditions are affecting Russian air strikes and drone operations in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction.[13] A Russian milblogger claimed that mud, freezing rain, snow, and ice are impeding Ukrainian and Russian ground attacks north of Verbove in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[14] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces continued offensive operations near Bakhmut and Avdiivka despite “extremely unfavorable” weather conditions, including ice, which are negatively impacting

Russian FPV and aerial reconnaissance drones.[15] One Russian milblogger suggested that a recent snowstorm improved the conditions for ground operations in occupied Luhansk Oblast, however.[16] It will likely take more than one snowstorm and continual below-freezing temperatures to harden the ground enough to restore maneuver combat. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces are taking advantage of the challenging weather conditions to conduct ground operations while Ukrainian reconnaissance drones cannot operate.[17] Russian forces have likely committed to offensive operations in multiple sectors of the front during a period of the most challenging weather of the fall-winter season in an effort to seize and retain the initiative prior to the Russian presidential elections in March 2024 and to achieve informational effects in the United States and the West while Ukrainian forces establish and consolidate defensive positions to conserve manpower and resources for future offensive efforts.[18]

**A Russian “Storm-Z” assault unit instructor complained that deputy commanders of Russian irregular armed formations are spreading illogical and false claims that present an overly optimistic view of the situation on the front in the Russian media and information space.** The instructor stated that an unnamed Russian deputy commander of a “Russian Volunteer Corps” detachment “fooled” a “serious” media outlet by stating that volunteer units cut the last Ukrainian supply route near Bakhmut and Soledar (northeast of Bakhmut) and that taking control of this area would open up a route for Russian forces to advance to Kramatorsk.[19] The instructor stated that another deputy commander of a Volunteer Corps unit claimed that Ukrainian forces are abandoning their fortifications near Chasiv Yar (10km west of Bakhmut) and do not control the roads in the area and that these conditions will allow Russian forces to advance to Bohdanivka (5km northwest of Bakhmut) and create a “horseshoe” around Chasiv Yar. The deputy commander effectively claimed that Russian forces were threatening a settlement significantly further from their current lines to achieve a tactical victory in a contested area near Russian positions. The instructor stated that these various claims and forecasts were illogical and questioned if the deputy commanders had confused the names of settlements when making their assessments. The instructor compared the claims about creating a “horseshoe” around Chasiv Yar to repeated Russian claims that Russian forces have done the same around Avdiivka — claims which the instructor sarcastically noted have not prevented Russian forces from continually dying in the area. The instructor also referred to a December 13 post by a Russian milblogger, who, the instructor stated, usually provides adequate reporting from the front. The post highlighted a Russian serviceman from the Volunteer Corps operating near Bakhmut at the front who claimed that Bohdanivka is a “strategic” settlement that if captured will allow Russian forces to advance to Chasiv Yar and cut off Ukrainian logistics.[20] The instructor doubted the Volunteer Corps serviceman’s understanding of the word “strategic” and Ukrainian geography as the instructor stated that Russian forces would have to advance through several settlements in the lowlands to reach Chasiv Yar.[21]

**The instructor’s complaint about Russian sources spreading unsubstantiated and maximalist claims largely aligns with ISW’s mapping practices.** ISW’s “claimed Russian control over Ukrainian territory” map layer reflects all the claims of ISW’s regular sources, including the most maximalist and unlikely, which is why this layer is often significantly different from ISW’s “assessed Russian advances” map layer. This phenomenon is particularly clear in ISW’s most recent control of terrain maps showing Avdiivka and Donetsk City, where the “Russian claims” map layer is up to 3.5 kilometers closer to Avdiivka than the geolocated “assessed Russian advances” map layer.[22] ISW has chosen this mapping approach to accurately reflect even the most maximalist Russian claims and compare these claims to geo-confirmed Russian advances. ISW has previously

observed Russian milbloggers criticize other actors in the Russian information space for distorting the reality of the Russian war efforts and overly positive reporting.[23] Russian milbloggers previously claimed that the Russian General Staff is increasingly requiring positive reports from frontline commanders, and the Russian military may be pressuring the commanders of irregular armed formations and other sources to provide similarly positive reports.[24]

**The Russian MoD is likely using formalized irregular unit commanders as a conduit to spread incorrect information about Russian battlefield successes within the Russian information space in order to circumvent the MoD's responsibility.** Kremlin state media is increasingly publishing interviews with servicemen and commanders of irregular formations, who appear to be making exaggerated claims about Russian successes on the battlefield.[25] The instructor observed that it is strange that sources who are not directly affiliated with the Russian MoD are making such exaggerated battlefield claims.[26] The Russian MoD has previously routinely spread exaggerated and absurd claims of Russian battlefield successes, which were subsequently quickly proven false, and Russian milbloggers have criticized the Russian MoD for this practice.[27] The Russian MoD has continually attempted to censor Russian milbloggers, and select milbloggers have exposed and complained about these efforts.[28] The Russian MoD is likely attempting to use irregular unit commanders and servicemen operating on the frontline to give a veneer of legitimacy to Russian MoD-controlled narratives because many Russians are likely unaware that numerous Russian irregular formations are indirectly controlled by the Russian MoD and other security forces.[29]

The Kremlin may also be using Russian milbloggers to promote irregular unit commanders' incorrect information. Russian President Vladimir Putin is reportedly considering the Russian milblogger who posted the alleged information from the Volunteer Corps serviceman near Bakhmut to be a "trusted person" in his presidential campaign, and ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin will likely use the March 2024 presidential election to leverage milblogger "trusted persons" to reestablish Kremlin dominance over the information space and conduct information operations.[30]

**Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes on the night of December 12 to 13.** Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces launched 10 Shahed-131/136 drones from occupied Balaklava, Crimea and launched 10 missiles, likely Iskander-M ballistic or S-300/400 anti-aircraft guided missiles, targeting Kyiv City.[31] Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian forces downed all of the missiles and drones, but that missile debris injured civilians in Kyiv City.[32] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat stated that the Russian military currently has a limited number of missiles and will not be able to conduct missile strikes *en masse* as Russian forces did in winter 2022 but will launch more Shaheds instead.[33]

**A Russian hacker group reportedly linked to the Main Directorate of the Russian General Staff (GRU) and a Russia-aligned hacker group both claimed responsibility for the cyberattack on Ukrainian mobile operator Kyivstar.** Pro-Russia hacker group Killnet claimed on December 12 that it conducted an attack on unspecified Ukrainian mobile operators and banks but did not offer any details or evidence of their involvement.[34] Russian hacker group Solntsepek claimed on December 13 that it "takes full responsibility for the cyberattack on Kyivstar" and posted screenshots allegedly showing Kyivstar databases and systems.[35] Solntsepek claimed that it conducted the cyberattack because Kyivstar provides communications to the Ukrainian military, government agencies, and law enforcement agencies.[36] Solntsepek claimed that it

destroyed 10,000 computers and more than 4,000 servers including all cloud storage and backup systems, but Kyivstar denied these claims.[37] Solntsepek implied that it was able to access the Kyivstar systems through the company's employees, and Kyivstar CEO Oleksandr Komarov stated on December 13 that hackers broke through Kyivstar's cyber security via a compromised account of one of the company's employees.[38] Ukrainian Head of the Rada Subcommittee on Cyber Security stated on December 13 that cyberattacks against Ukraine are constantly occurring and that the Ukrainian State Intelligence Service and private companies are regularly working to protect Ukrainian digital systems.[39] Solntsepek is reportedly known for claiming responsibility for attacks conducted by other groups and has reportedly been used as a front for GRU Military Unit 74455 "Sandworm." [40] Kyivstar stated on December 13 that Kyivstar restored voice communications in Ukraine and is continuing work to restore other services.[41]

**The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) stripped naturalized Russian citizens of their Russian citizenship for the first time, likely as part of ongoing migrant crackdowns aimed at coercing migrants into Russian military service while placating the xenophobic Russian ultranationalist community.** The MVD reported on December 13 that it stripped two naturalized Russian citizens of their Russian citizenship after Russian law enforcement arrested them on drug trafficking charges.[42] Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* noted that this is the first instance of Russian authorities stripping naturalized citizens of their Russian citizenship since the law, which expanded the list of crimes under which Russian authorities can revoke an individual's citizenship, came into force in October 2023.[43] Russian reporting did not specify what Russian authorities intend to do with the two individuals stripped of their Russian citizenship, however. The Russian government may send the two individuals to a migrant detention center where Russian authorities routinely coerce migrants without Russian citizenship into signing contracts with the Russian military.[44] Russian state-controlled outlet *RIA Novosti* reported on December 13 that Russian authorities arrested the former Head of the St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast MVD Migration Office, Andrei Kolesnikov, on suspicion of complicity in "legalizing over 100,000 foreigners" in 2022.[45] The Russian government is likely trying to publicize Kolesnikov's arrest in order to appease the Russian ultranationalist community, which supports the war in Ukraine and opposes the inclusion of migrants into Russian society while continuing to rely on migrants for crypto-mobilization efforts and to offset domestic labor shortages. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin does not have a clearly defined policy regarding migrants as Russian authorities continue to pursue incoherent and competing efforts to restrict migrant work in Russia, coerce them into the Russian military, and exploit their labor.

**Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky attended the second Ukraine-Northern Europe Summit in Oslo, Norway on December 13.**[46] Zelensky met with the leaders of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland at the Ukraine-Northern Europe Summit who jointly published a letter in *Financial Times* on December 12 stating that "this is a critical time for Ukraine, Europe, and global security" and that "Russia is eager to exploit divisions." [47] Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced that Denmark will approve a military aid package to Ukraine including ammunition, tanks, and drones valued at about \$1.1 billion.[48] Norwegian Prime Minister Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store announced that Norway would provide additional air defense equipment to Ukraine.[49] Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson stated that Sweden will approve a winter aid package to Ukraine to support civilian infrastructure.[50] Finnish President Sauli Niinisto announced that Finland is preparing its next aid package to Ukraine, which will consist of unspecified military equipment, and that Finland plans to double its ammunition

production.[51] US President Joe Biden similarly announced on December 12 that Ukraine will receive a military assistance package valued at \$200 million consisting of AIM-9M missiles, High-speed Anti-radiation (HARM) missiles; Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems, and artillery and small arms ammunition.[52]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **The Kremlin appears to be returning to expansionist rhetoric last observed before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in an effort to resurface its claims that Ukraine is part of historically Russian territory and discuss the borders Russian leaders regard as appropriate for a rump Ukrainian state.**
- **The return of the Kremlin’s notion of a “partitioned Ukraine” is likely an organized effort to mislead the international community into rejecting key components of Ukraine’s sovereignty: its territorial integrity as defined in 1991 and its right to self-determination.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 13 that Ukraine’s decision to transition to defensive operations is motivated by winter weather conditions and not a “crisis,” in response to a recent New York Times (NYT) article.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian sources continue to report on the impacts of challenging weather conditions on offensive and reconnaissance operations throughout the front, even as reported freezing and snowy winter conditions in eastern Ukraine offer the prospect of better conditions for maneuver.**
- **A Russian “Storm-Z” assault unit instructor complained that deputy commanders of Russian irregular armed formations are spreading illogical and false claims that present an overly optimistic view of the situation on the front in the Russian media and information space.**
- **The instructor’s complaint about Russian sources spreading unsubstantiated and maximalist claims largely aligns with ISW’s mapping practices.**
- **The Russian MoD is likely using formalized irregular unit commanders as a conduit to spread incorrect information about Russian battlefield successes within the Russian information space in order to circumvent the MoD’s responsibility.**
- **Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes on the night of December 12 to 13.**
- **A Russian hacker group reportedly linked to the Main Directorate of the Russian General Staff (GRU) and a Russia-aligned hacker group both claimed responsibility for the cyberattack on Ukrainian mobile operator Kyivstar.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) stripped naturalized Russian citizens of their Russian citizenship for the first time, likely as part of ongoing migrant crackdowns aimed at coercing migrants into Russian military service while placating the xenophobic Russian ultranationalist community.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky attended the second Ukraine-Northern Europe Summit in Oslo, Norway on December 13.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, north of and near Bakhmut, near Avdiivka, west of Donetsk**

City, along the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast and advanced in various sectors.

- The Chuvash Republic is offering bonuses to foreigners who fight in the war in Ukraine, likely as part of efforts to recruit migrants to the Russian military.
- Occupation authorities continue efforts to destroy Ukrainian national and historical identity.

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 13, 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

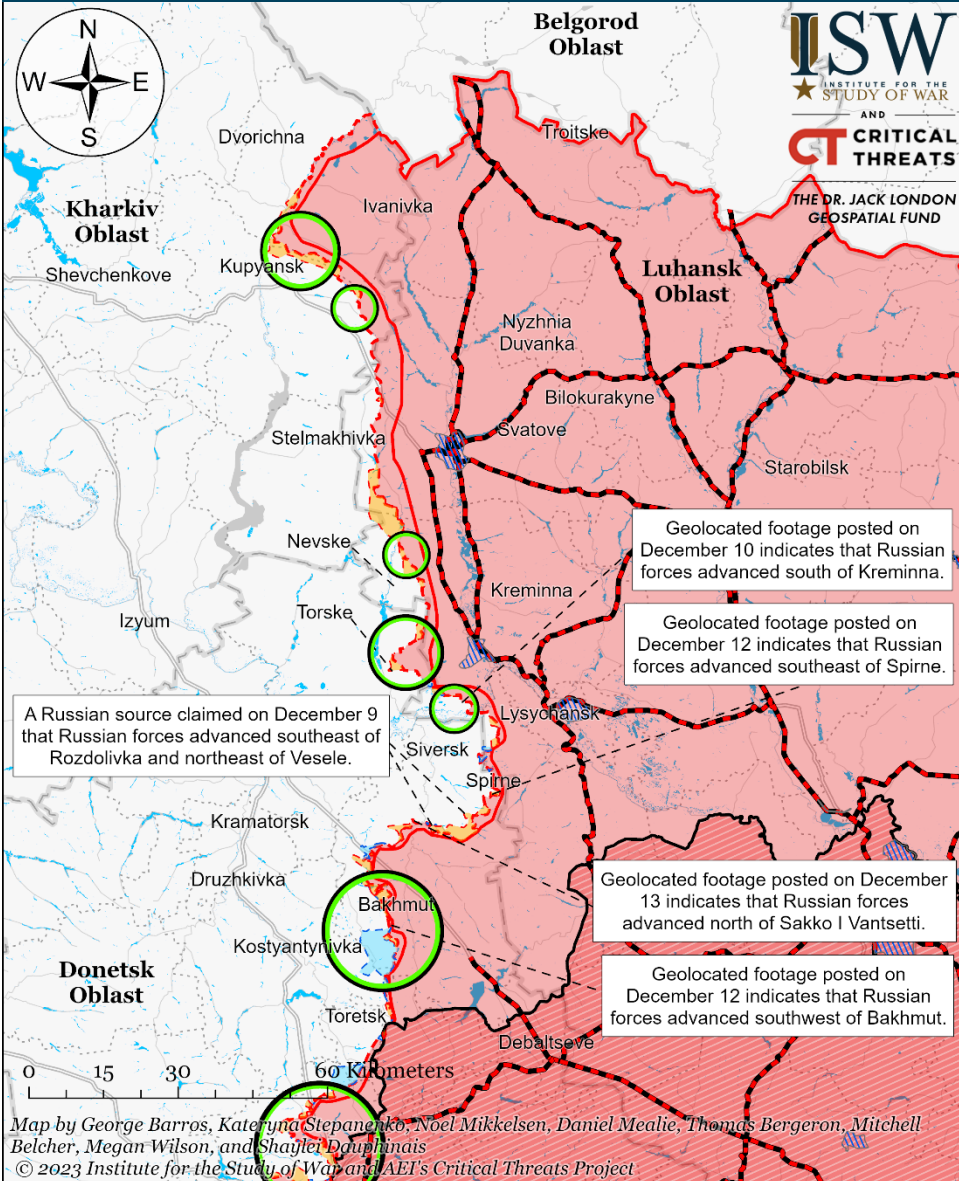
### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

#### **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-Kreminna line on December 13 and recently made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on December 12 indicates that Russian forces marginally advanced southeast of Spirne (25km south of Kreminna).[53] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced east of Ivanivka (20km southeast of Kupyansk) and advanced one kilometer near the outskirts of Zahoruykivka (a disincorporated settlement 16km east of Kupyansk).[54] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 14 Russian attacks in the Kupyansk direction near Synkivka (9km east of Kupyansk) and Ivanivka and east of Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk); and at least two Russian attacks in the Lyman direction near Makiivka (23km northwest of Kreminna) and the Serebryanke forest area (10km southwest of Kreminna) and east of Terny (17km west of Kreminna).[55] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces also repelled Russian attacks near Pishchane (25km northwest of Svatove), Stepova Novoselivka (18km southeast of Kupyansk), and Pershotravneve (24km east of Kupyansk).[56] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 25th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Western Military District [WMD]) and 138th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th CAA, WMD) unsuccessfully attacked in the direction of Petropavlivka and elements of the 27th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Guards Tank Army, WMD) unsuccessfully attacked near Berestove (30km south of Kreminna).[57] Ukrainian Kharkiv Oblast Head Oleh Synhubov stated that Russian forces have not achieved success in the Kupyansk direction for several months.[58] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled eight Ukrainian attacks near Synkivka, Ivanivka, Lake Lyman (just northwest of Synkivka), and Yahidne (22km southeast of Kupyansk) and several Ukrainian attacks near Zarichne (17km west of Kreminna) and Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna).[59]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of December 13, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory

\* 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 10 that Russian forces advanced one and a half kilometers near Kreminna. A Russian source claimed on December 9 that Russian forces advanced up to two kilometers near Terny and Yampolivka. A Russian source claimed on December 9 that Russian forces advanced three and a half kilometers near Vesele since the beginning of the Russian offensive.

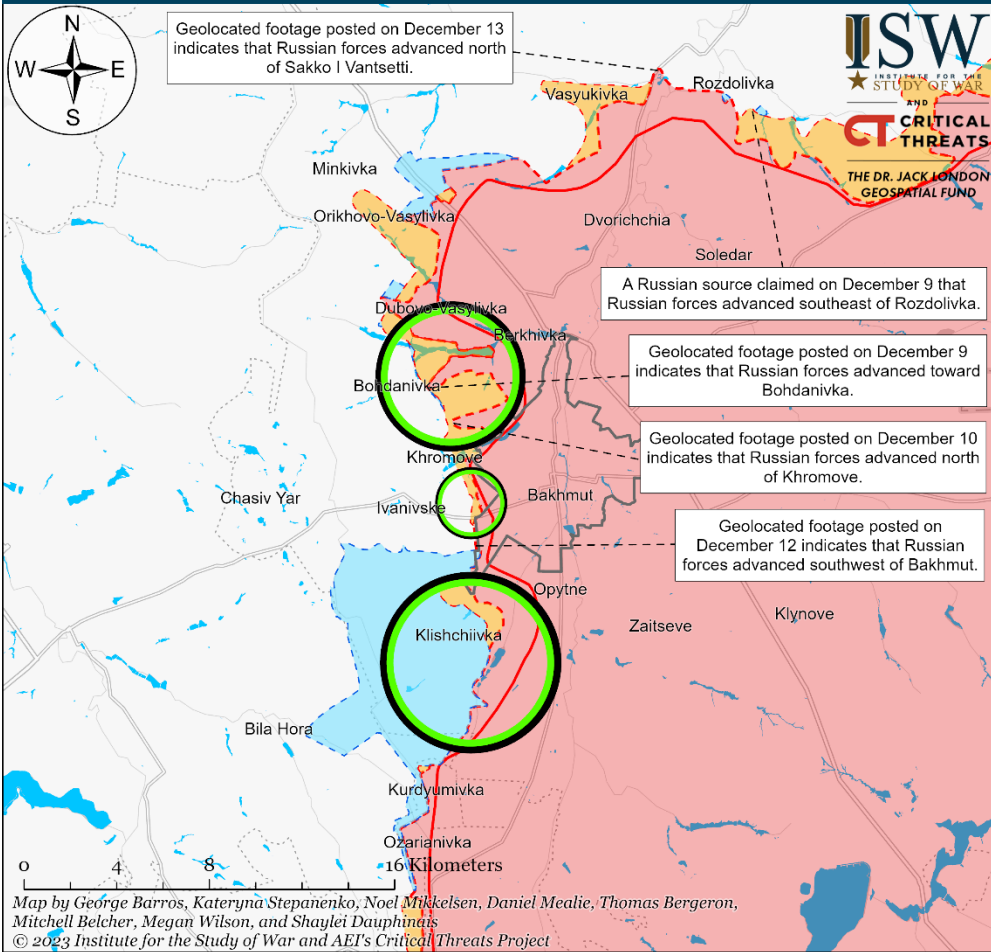
## **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks north of Bakhmut on December 13 and recently advanced. Geolocated footage published on December 12 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of Sakko I Vantsetti (15km north of Bakhmut).[60] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 123rd Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps) and 137th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (106th VDV Division) are operating north of Yakovlivka (17km northeast of Bakhmut) and marginally advanced near Bilohorivka (22km northeast of Bakhmut).[61]

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Bakhmut on December 13 and made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on December 12 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[62] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least five Russian attacks near Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka, and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut).[63] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced northeast and east of Bohdanivka and controlled a section of the Hryhorivka-Bohdanivka road (6-9km northwest of Bakhmut), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of these claims.[64] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced toward Ivanivske along a front two kilometers wide and to a depth of 700 meters, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[65] A Russian milblogger claimed that fighting is ongoing near Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut).[66] Oleksiy Tarasenko, an officer in a Ukrainian brigade operating near Bakhmut, stated that Russian forces are making some progress in the directions of Ivanivske, Klishchiivka, and Andriivka because the Russian military deployed “selected trained fighters” to these areas three weeks ago but that the Russian military more recently began deploying poorly equipped mobilized personnel to these areas slowing Russian progress.[67]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks south of Bakhmut on December 13. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Klishchiivka and Shumy (23km south of Bakhmut and 9km northwest of Horlivka).[68] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked near the waste heap north of Horlivka.[69]

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of December 13, 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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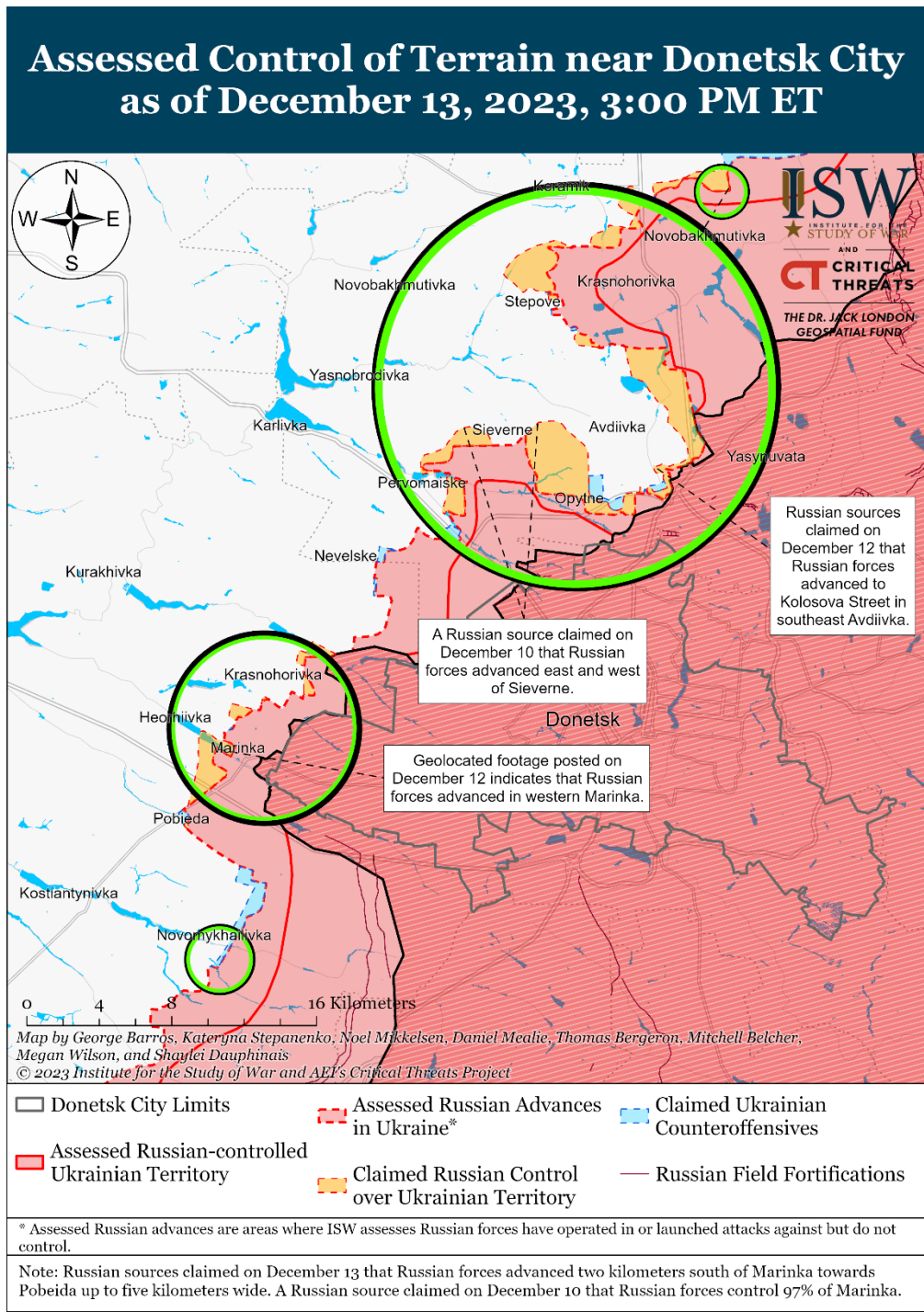
Bakhmut City Limits	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

\* 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 13 that Russian forces advanced up to two kilometers wide and at a depth of 700 meters in the Ivanivske direction. A Russian source claimed on December 11 that unspecified Ukrainian analysts claimed that Russian forces advanced in an area 2.91 kilometers wide and 840 meters in depth towards Bohdanivka and Khromove.

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Avdiivka on December 13 and recently made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on December 13 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced southeast of Stepove (3km northwest of Avdiivka).[70] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 51 Russian attacks east of Novokalynove (13km northeast of Avdiivka) and Novobakhmutivka (9km northwest of Avdiivka); near Stepove, Avdiivka, Pervomaiske (10km southwest of Avdiivka) and Nevelske (14km southwest of Avdiivka); and south of Tonenke (5km west of Avdiivka) and Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka).[71] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in the industrial zone (southwest of Avdiivka) and

east of the Avdiivka Coke Plant (northwest of Avdiivka), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[72] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces continued attacks near Stepove and north of Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka).[73]



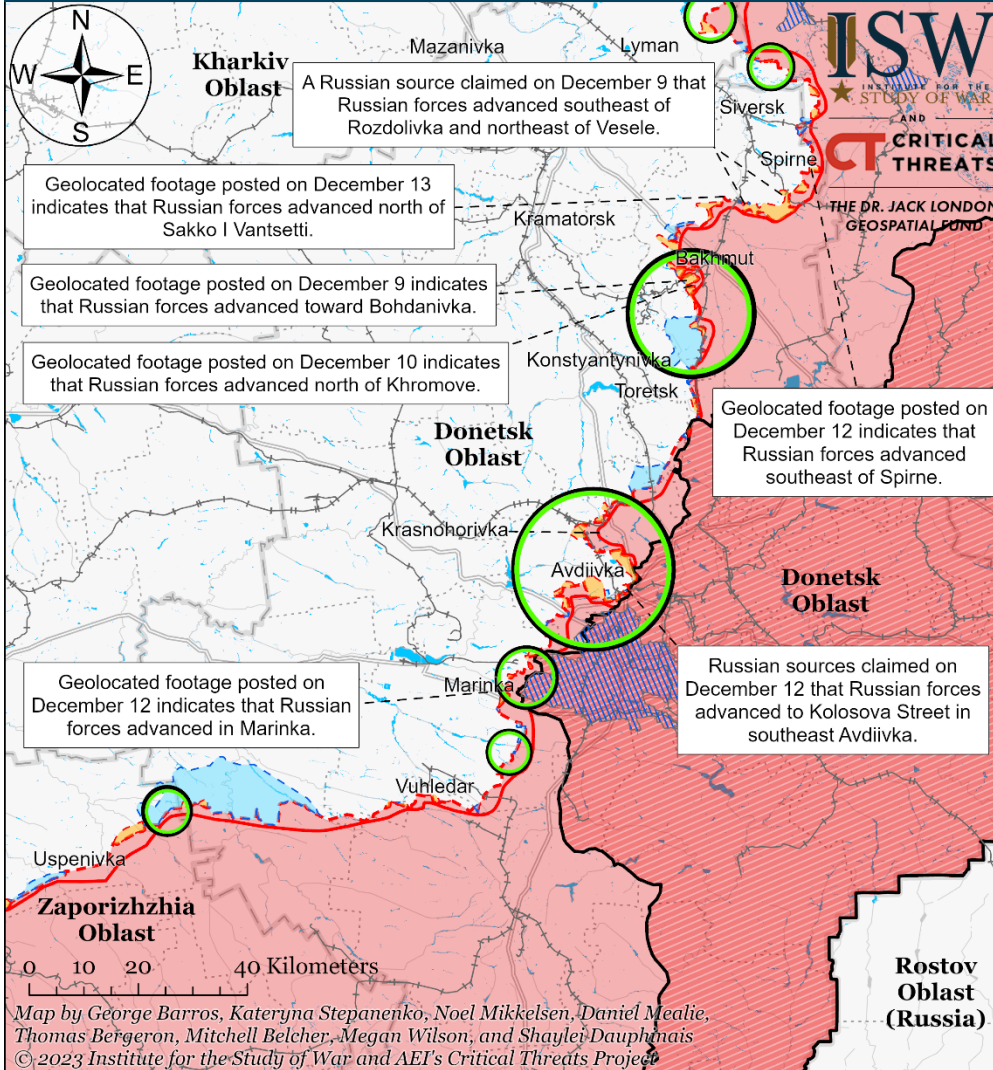
Russian forces continued offensive operations west of Donetsk City on December 13 and advanced. Geolocated footage published on December 12 showing Russian units of the 2nd Rifle Battalion and 163rd Tank Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military

District) raising a flag in Marinka (directly west of Donetsk City) indicates that Russian forces advanced in Marinka.[74] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 13 Russian attacks near Marinka, Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City), and Krasnohorivka (directly west of Donetsk City).[75] Multiple Russian milbloggers claimed on December 12 and 13 that Russian forces completely captured Marinka.[76] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy stated that Ukrainian forces continue to defend Marinka despite allegations that Russian forces completely captured the settlement.[77] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced along a front five kilometers wide and up to two kilometers in depth south of Marinka and toward Pobieda (5km southwest of Donetsk City), but also claimed that Ukrainian forces still operate in the northwestern outskirts of Marinka.[78] One Russian milblogger urged Russian sources to express restraint until the Russian MoD confirms the Russian capture of Marinka.[79]

The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Novomykhailivka on December 13.[80]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of December 13, 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 10 that Russian forces control 97% of Marinka. A Russian source claimed on December 9 that Russian forces advanced over an area one and a half kilometers wide and 580 meters deep on the northern outskirts of Bohdanivka. A Russian source claimed on December 9 that Russian forces advanced three and a half kilometers near Vesele since the beginning of the Russian offensive.

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

Russian and Ukrainian sources claimed that positional engagements continued along the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border on December 13.[81] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks north of Pryytune (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[82] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District) are continuing to operate near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[83]

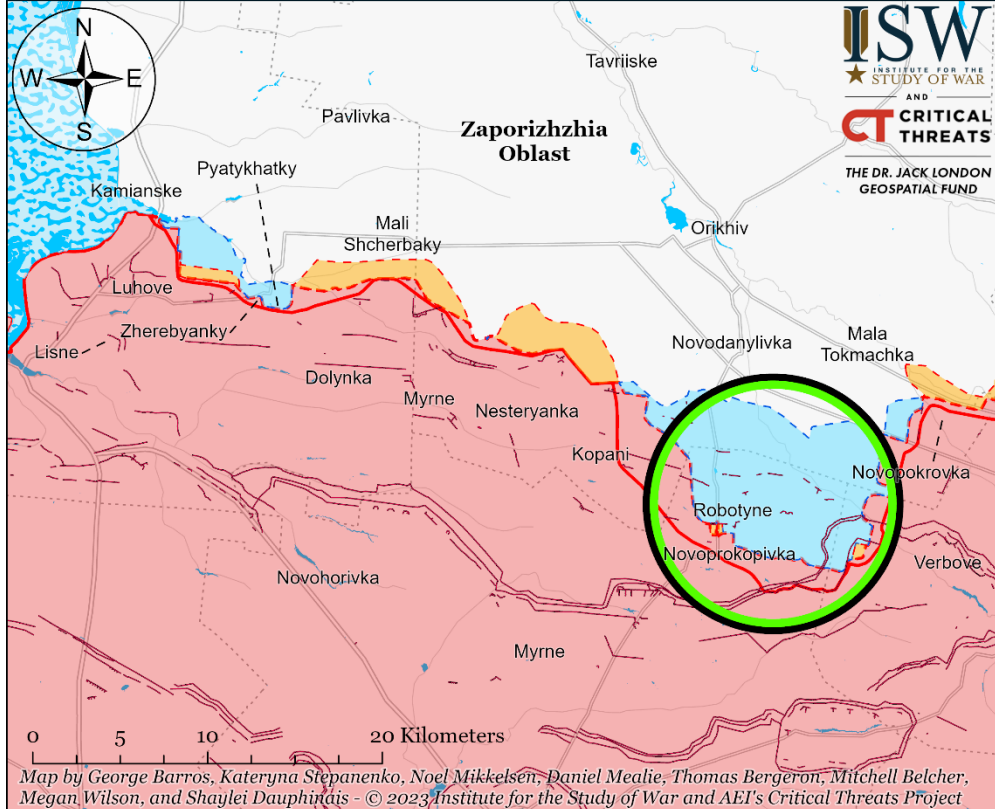


Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations near Robotyne in western Zaporizhia Oblast on December 13 but did not advance.[84] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian assault group north of Novoprokopivka (2km south of Robotyne).[85] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continued to attack north of Verbove (9km east of Robotyne) but noted that the intensity of Ukrainian attacks decreased due to mud, ice, and snow in the area.[86]

Russian and Ukrainian sources claimed on December 13 that Russian forces recently advanced near Robotyne. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 71st Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, Southern Military District) with support of the 76th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division and 136th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (58th CAA) launched several attempts to break into Robotyne over the past several days.[87] Mashovets noted that this grouping of Russian forces only advanced 800 meters and that Russian forces were far from capturing Robotyne and observed that elements of the 56th Guards VDV Regiment (7th Guards VDV Division) did not advance northwest of Verbove. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from their positions near Verbove and advanced 700 meters in the area.[88] Another milblogger claimed that SMD assault units recently advanced over 500 meters near Novoprokopivka.[89] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces attacked from the south and northeast of Robotyne but did not advance.[90] The Ukrainian General Staff claimed that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks south of Robotyne and west of Verbove.[91] A Russian milblogger indicated that elements of the 247th Guards VDV Regiment (7th Guards VDV Division) are operating near Verbove.[92]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of December 13, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



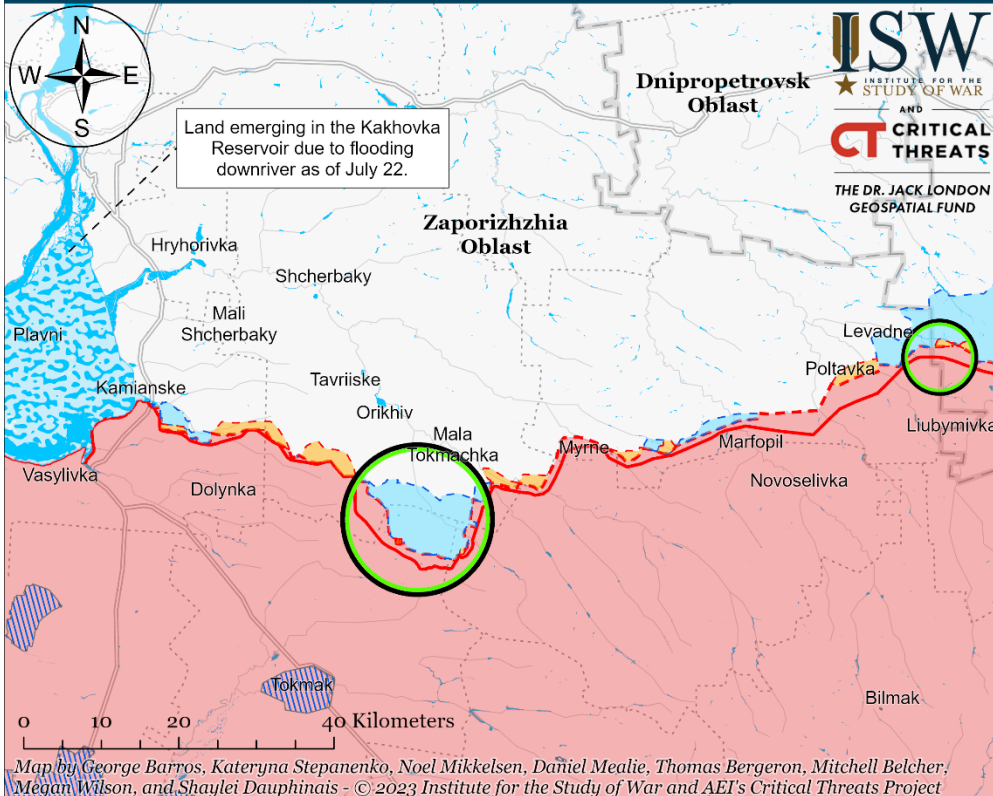
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Megan Wilson, and Shaylei Dauphinais - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- 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 Ukrainian source claimed on December 13 that Russian forces advanced 800 meters near Robotyne. A Russian source claimed on December 13 that Russian forces advanced 700 meters near Verbove. A Russian source claimed on December 11 that Russian forces advanced one kilometer along the N-08 highway near Novofedorivka between December 8 and 10. Russian sources claimed on December 9 that Russian forces advanced one kilometer towards Robotyne.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of December 13, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



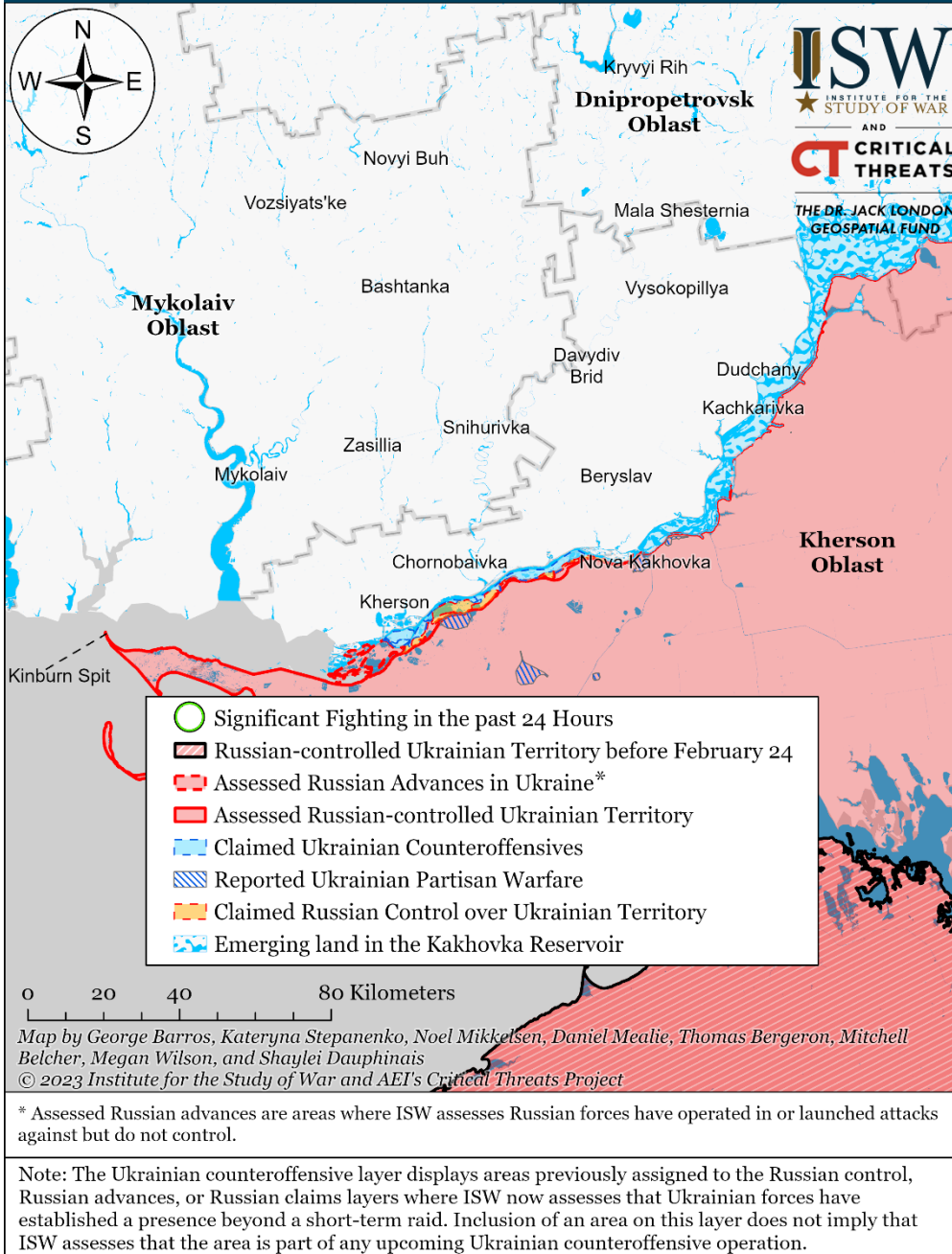
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Ukrainian forces continued to hold positions in occupied Kherson Oblast on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River as of December 13 despite poor weather conditions.[93] Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting is ongoing near Krynky (30km northeast of Kherson City and 2km from the Dnipro River).[94] Mashovets observed that Russian elements of the 328th and 337th VDV Regiments (both part of the newly formed 104th VDV Division) continued attacking Ukrainian positions in Krynky from the southwestern direction.[95] Mashovets quoted an unnamed Ukrainian source as saying that Russian forces continue to suffer equipment losses near Krynky.[96] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 126th Coastal Defense Brigade (22nd Army Corps, reportedly part of the forming 18th CAA) are operating in the Kherson direction.[97]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of December 13, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

The Chuvash Republic is offering bonuses to foreigners who fight in the war in Ukraine, likely as part of efforts to recruit migrants to the Russian military. The Chuvash Republic Ministry of Labor stated

on December 12 that the Chuvash Republic will give 150,000 rubles (about \$1,660) to foreigners who signed a military contract through the military enlistment and registration office of the Chuvash Republic after September 1, 2023.[98]

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

Russian forces are reportedly using maritime vessels to supplement the air defense systems in occupied Crimea. Ukrainian Spokesperson for the Naval Forces Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on December 13 that Russian forces are using the *Tsiklon* Project 22800 Karakurt-class corvette as an air defense system from its base in Sevastopol.[99] Pletenchuk stated the Russian military has recently replenished the composition of the Black Sea Fleet with two additional Karakurt-class corvettes being built in Republic of Tatarstan. Pletenchuk stated that Russian Kalibr missiles include 40 to 60 foreign parts, including microelectronics.

Russian arms manufacturer Lobaev Arms is reportedly developing a new lightweight sniper rifle. Lobaev Arms founder Vladislav Lobaev told Russian state outlet *RIA Novosti* on December 12 that Lobaev Arms is developing a new self-loading rifle to replace the LAR-10 “Counter” rifle.[100] The new rifle will reportedly weigh 3.6 kilograms – one kilogram less than the Counter rifle – and will include replaceable cylinders that allow the rifle to work as a sniper rifle and a machine gun. Lobaev claimed that the first prototype of the new rifle should be ready for testing in February-March 2024.

### **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)**

Occupation authorities continue efforts to destroy Ukrainian national and historical identity. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on December 13 that occupation authorities held a “Narodov Rossii” (“Peoples of Russia”) festival in occupied Luhansk City and forced Ukrainian school children to participate.[101] Occupation authorities attempted to convince the children to identify as Russian by falsely claiming that the Ukrainian identity is fake.[102]

Russian authorities claimed to have detained 18 alleged Ukrainian intelligence operatives in occupied Crimea. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed on December 11 that the FSB detained 18 members of a network of Ukrainian special service operatives in occupied Crimea in 2023.[103] The FSB claimed that the operatives intended to commit high-profile sabotage and terrorist acts against the Russian military, FSB, and Crimean occupation administration personnel, including the assassination of Crimean occupation head Sergei Aksenov. The FSB suggested that the detentions prevented 14 sabotage and terrorist acts in Crimea and that Russian authorities are further investigating the detainees. A Russian milblogger claimed that the FSB’s work in Crimea is one of the best results of Russia’s fight against Ukrainian and Western intelligence services.[104]

The Donetsk People’s Republic’s (DNR) FSB Directorate detained the advisor to the DNR Minister of Industry and Trade Sergey Goloshchapov, Director of the “Donetsk Industrial Company” Aleksei Petrusenko on suspicion of large-scale looting on December 12.[105] The detainees reportedly stole processed scrap metal and sold several of the Donetsk Industrial Company’s workshops without approval, costing the company an estimated 518 million rubles (approximately \$5,800,000).[106]

## **Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

See topline text.

### **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)**

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on December 13 that elements of the Belarusian 38th Separate Guards Air Assault Brigade conducted training exercises at the Brest Training Ground in Belarus.[107]

**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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BABEL STREET

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<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoJ35PSqDVxj3hB6vL94TiiERgDQ3ogC5Xuxx5RnuMFDbNAiKBKuRscQvSHTrWw58Jl>

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[73] <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/58135> ; <https://t.me/wargonzo/16988>

[74] <https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1734675597920522568>; <https://t.me/tankistrossii100/2224>; <https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1734675761406042170>

[75] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2n6JgL8EBPwtWRt8vRjW4kEAM4xtXuKqA6QBY6rZXxneDN8nCQmgTMrLHFTRPgQgJl> ;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoJgkf5WxeQfS5jp363npZFUTAuhPdhrYS4dxs2jNQik9D5gvf8fT7Nqif2sgIA72Gl> ;  
<https://www.facebook.com/PresscentrTavria/posts/pfbidosQAqMuN7k1BjNvuAjFrpQqimp1pCD7k5H9TZ1goB6nmCaEVTy1ekB28Qf3p2o6cpl>  
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[76] [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/30686](https://t.me/dva_majors/30686) ; [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/30692](https://t.me/dva_majors/30692) ; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/58154> ; [https://t.me/multi\\_XAM/1096](https://t.me/multi_XAM/1096) ; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/58142> ;  
[https://t.me/dva\\_majors/30690](https://t.me/dva_majors/30690); <https://t.me/tankistrossii100/2224> ;  
<https://t.me/RVvoenkor/58108> ; <https://t.me/vrogov/13290> ;  
<https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/5425> ; [https://t.me/voin\\_dv/6247](https://t.me/voin_dv/6247)  
; <https://t.me/sashakots/43866> ; <https://t.me/RtrDonetsk/21899> ; <https://t.me/sashakots/43888>  
; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/52712> ; [https://t.me/notes\\_veterans/14145](https://t.me/notes_veterans/14145)

[77] <https://t.me/otarnavskiy/382>

[78] [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/106254](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/106254) ; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/106254](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/106254) [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/30726](https://t.me/dva_majors/30726) ; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/58160> ; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/106282](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/106282) ; [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/30694](https://t.me/dva_majors/30694) ; <https://t.me/rybar/54970>

[79] [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/106230](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/106230) ; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/106244](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/106244)

[80] [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/33494](https://t.me/mod_russia/33494)

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[85] [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/33497](https://t.me/mod_russia/33497) ; [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/33503](https://t.me/mod_russia/33503)

[86] <https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/5435>; <https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/5431>

[87] <https://t.me/zvizdecmanhustu/1483>

[88] [https://t.me/negumanitarnaya\\_pomosch\\_Z/13114](https://t.me/negumanitarnaya_pomosch_Z/13114)

[89] <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/58100>

[90] <https://t.me/wargonzo/16988>

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[92] <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/58163>

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- [103] <http://www.fsb dot ru/fsb/press/message/single.htm%21id%3D10439859%40fsbMessage.html>  
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- [104] [https://t.me/notes\\_veterans/14148](https://t.me/notes_veterans/14148)
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- [107] <https://t.me/modmilby/34564> ; <https://t.me/modmilby/34579>