

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 18, 2024
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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.

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 2:00pm ET on February 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces will likely be able to establish new defensive lines not far beyond Avdiivka, which will likely prompt the culmination of the Russian offensive in this area. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on February 18 that elements of the Russian Central Grouping of Forces completely captured Avdiivka, advancing 8.6 kilometers in depth in the area, and that Russian forces continue offensive operations to capture additional territory in Donetsk Oblast.¹ Several Russian milbloggers claimed on February 18 that Ukrainian forces lack well prepared defensive positions west of Avdiivka and that Russian forces will be able to advance further into western Donetsk Oblast behind “panicked” and “disorganized” Ukrainian forces withdrawing from Avdiivka.² ISW has still not observed footage of disorderly Ukrainian withdrawals to support these Russian claims and would expect to observe such footage if the withdrawal was disorderly on a large scale given the normal patterns of Russian sources with access to such material. One Russian milblogger claimed that a large-scale collapse of the Avdiivka front is “unlikely” as Ukrainian forces withdraw to prepared defensive lines, however, indicating that the Russian understanding (or presentation) of Ukrainian defensive capabilities on this sector of the front differs from source to source.³

Available imagery, which ISW will not present or describe in greater detail at this time to preserve Ukrainian operational security, does not support claims that Ukrainian forces lack prepared defensive positions west of Avdiivka. The Ukrainian command also recently committed fresh units to the Avdiivka front to counterattack advancing Russian forces and provide an evacuation corridor for Ukrainian units withdrawing from Avdiivka.⁴ These newly committed units are likely able to establish and hold defensive positions against Russian forces, degraded by their assaults on the town, west of Avdiivka. Russian forces, which have suffered high personnel and equipment losses in seizing Avdiivka, will likely culminate when they come up against relatively fresher Ukrainian units manning prepared defensive positions.

Delays in Western security assistance to Ukraine are likely helping Russia launch opportunistic offensive operations along several sectors of the frontline in order to place pressure on Ukrainian forces along multiple axes. Russian forces are currently conducting at least three offensive efforts—along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border, particularly in the directions of Kupyansk and Lyman; in and around Avdiivka; and near Robotyne in western Zaporizhia Oblast. After the withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from Avdiivka and the subsequent Russian claim of control over the entirety of Avdiivka, ISW and several Ukrainian and Western sources assessed that delays in Western security assistance, namely artillery ammunition and

critical air defense systems, inhibited Ukrainian troops from defending against Russian advances in Avdiivka.⁵ Critical Ukrainian shortages in Western-provided equipment and fears of the complete the cessation of US military aid have forced Ukrainian troops to husband materiel along the entire front, which has likely encouraged Russian forces to exploit the situation and launch limited offensive operations outside of the Avdiivka area, which they have done along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border area since early January 2024 and in western Zaporizhia Oblast over the past 48 hours. These Russian offensive efforts will likely hinder Ukrainian forces from preparing personnel and materiel for renewed counteroffensive operations, emphasizing the operational disadvantages that Ukraine will suffer if it simply digs in and attempts to defend for the rest of 2024 as some Western states and analysts advocate.⁶

Russian forces are likely seeking to take advantage of two windows of opportunity with the recent initiation of their simultaneous offensive operations—the period before the upcoming spring thaw and the nuanced dynamics of Western aid provision. Ukraine is heading into its *rasputitsa* season, the Spring period in which the frozen winter ground thaws and makes mechanized movement more difficult throughout the theater, thereby slowing (but notably not entirely stopping) offensive operations along the frontline. Some Russian milbloggers are already reporting that mud in southern Ukraine is inhibiting Ukrainian forces from bringing new reserves to Zaporizhia Oblast to reinforce against Russian offensive efforts, and these conditions will also likely slow Russian offensive momentum as the weather continues to warm.⁷ Russian forces are likely trying to secure tactical advances throughout the theater while the terrain and weather generally favor offensive movement in order to exhaust and attrit defending Ukrainian forces as well as to secure favorable positions for future operations before the *rasputitsa* begins in earnest. The Russian military command, furthermore, likely realizes that security assistance from Ukraine's European partners, particularly promised European deliveries of artillery ammunition, will begin to have effects in the medium term, likely before Fall 2024, and is trying to take advantage of Ukraine's current shell hunger to pressure Ukrainian troops throughout the theater while Ukraine experiences a relative (but likely temporary) artillery disadvantage.⁸ The eventual provision of more European security assistance to Ukraine, however, will not fill the gap in critical equipment that the full cessation of US military assistance would create, particularly with advanced air defense systems such as Patriot surface-to-air missiles. The scaling-up of European security assistance is necessary but not sufficient for Ukrainian forces to stabilize the front, let alone to regain the initiative in areas where Russian forces are pressing.

The Russian capture of Avdiivka after four months of intensified offensive operations exemplifies the way that Russian forces pursue offensive operations that do not necessarily set conditions for wider operational gains but still force Ukraine to commit manpower and materiel to defensive operations. Russian forces have been fighting near Avdiivka for most of the full-scale invasion thus far and intensified operations to capture the city in mid-October 2023.⁹ In the subsequent four months since October, Russian forces managed to advance nearly nine kilometers in Avdiivka according to Russian estimates.¹⁰ Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy stated on February 18 that during this four month period, Russian forces lost over 47,000 personnel, 364 tanks, 248 artillery systems, 748 armored fighting vehicles, and five aircraft.¹¹ Russian forces were also unable to complete a full operational encirclement of Avdiivka within that four-month window, and Ukrainian forces appear to have been able to withdraw in mainly good order. A Russian milblogger and volunteer with the 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC]) remarked on the rate of Russian losses compared with the territory gained on February 17, suggesting that even some Russian sources are cognizant of the extremely high price these limited Russian gains have cost.¹² The milblogger claimed that Russian forces suffered 16,000 "irrecoverable losses" (likely those killed in action, whereas Tarnavskiy's estimate may have also included wounded) in the Avdiivka direction since October 2023.¹³ The milblogger also sardonically noted that the tank regiments and tank divisions that were operating

near Avdiivka “distinguished” themselves by advancing a few kilometers in four months and taking massive personnel losses.¹⁴ By contrast, according to the milblogger, Ukrainian forces suffered far fewer losses and were able to withdraw to prepared defensive positions mostly on their own terms, meaning that exhausted and attrited Russian forces will now have to once again fight Ukrainian troops on new lines. Russian forces succeeded in drawing Ukrainian forces to Avdiivka and away from other areas of the front and forcing Ukrainians to use up already limited Ukrainian stores of critical equipment but did so without securing major operational gains. This outcome is likely to recur in ongoing offensive operations on the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border line and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.

Russian forces have not yet demonstrated an ability to secure operationally significant gains or conduct rapid mechanized maneuver across large swaths of territory, and the capture of Avdiivka should not be taken as demonstrating this capability. ISW distinguishes between tactical gains, relevant at the tactical level of war in the near vicinity of the fighting, and operational gains which are significant at the operational level of war and affect large sectors of the entire front line. When ISW assesses that a given advance has or has not made “operationally significant” gains we are referring to this distinction. Since the intensification of Russian offensive efforts in Avdiivka in October 2023, Russian forces managed to traverse fewer than 10 kilometers through and around Avdiivka. Avdiivka is nearly 60 kilometers from the Donetsk Oblast border, however. Russian forces would need to conduct widespread and competent cross-country maneuvers to reach the borders of the oblast in a period of less than years and would have to go even further and through more fortified territory to reach the Slovyansk-Kramatorsk area in northern Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces have not displayed the capability to conduct such maneuvers, either near Avdiivka or in any other sector of the front. Russian offensive efforts to take Kupyansk could plausibly force Ukrainians to the left bank of the Oskil River, but Russian forces in this area have remained largely impaled on small tactical positions in the Kupyansk direction for months.¹⁵ Russian offensive efforts south of Orikhiv are unlikely to advance past Orikhiv itself or even to reach Orikhiv quickly, given the climatological challenges discussed above.

Ukrainian officials are investigating two instances of apparent Russian violations of the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war (POWs) in occupied Donetsk Oblast. The Ukrainian General Prosecutor’s Office reported that it is investigating footage published on February 18 showing Russian forces executing six injured Ukrainian POWs near Avdiivka and footage showing Russian forces executing two Ukrainian POWs near Vesele (northwest of Bakhmut).¹⁶ The killing of POWs violates Article III of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs.¹⁷

Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for failing to recognize 1st Donetsk People’s Republic Army Corps (DNR AC) Commander Lieutenant General Sergei Milchakov and the “Veterany” Assault Brigade (Volunteer Corps) for aiding in the Russian capture of Avdiivka, highlighting continued tension between Russian regular and irregular forces. A prominent Russian milblogger complained that Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated Russian Central Grouping of Forces commander Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev for capturing Avdiivka, but not Milchakov, who the milblogger claimed has led the 1st DNR AC since its previous commander’s death in Popasna, Luhansk Oblast.¹⁸ Russian milbloggers also complained that Putin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu did not credit the “Veterany” Assault Brigade with the Russian capture of Avdiivka, although noted that the Russian MoD later edited its statement to credit the “Veterany” Assault Brigade.¹⁹ The Russian MoD may have edited its statement to credit the “Veterany” Assault Brigade in an effort to prevent wider complaints from spreading in the Russian ultranationalist information space and appeal to Russian volunteer servicemen (*dobrovoltsy*). Tension between Russian regular and irregular forces – especially the 1st DNR

Army Corps and DNR-affiliated formations – has continued throughout the war despite, and likely in part because of, ongoing Russian efforts to formalize irregular formations.²⁰

The *Washington Post* reported that the Kremlin has been orchestrating a large-scale effort to spread disinformation in the Ukrainian media since January 2023, corroborating recent Ukrainian official reports about Russian information operations that use fake Telegram channels to infiltrate the Ukrainian information space.²¹ The *Washington Post* reported on February 16 that it gained access to more than 100 Kremlin documents obtained by unspecified European intelligence services that show that the Kremlin has been overseeing Russian troll farms that use social media and fake news articles on Telegram, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to penetrate Ukrainian media and promote various Kremlin narratives. These narratives include claims about exaggerated Ukrainian losses and how the West intends to replace Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, among many others. Russian First Deputy Presidential Chief of Staff Sergei Kiriyenko reportedly tasked a team of Kremlin officials and political strategists, including Kiriyenko’s deputy, Alexander Kharichev, who is reportedly known for “fixing” Russian elections to produce the Kremlin’s desired outcome, to oversee these efforts in January 2023. The *Washington Post* reported that Russian trolls were producing over 1,300 texts and 37,000 comments on Ukrainian social media every week by March 2023. The documents reportedly indicate that Kiriyenko identified the effort’s four key objectives at a meeting in January 2023: discrediting Ukrainian military and political leadership, splitting the Ukrainian elite, demoralizing the Ukrainian military, and disorienting the Ukrainian population. The documents reportedly showed that officials at nearly weekly meetings highlighted some of the fake posts in Ukrainian media that garnered high numbers of views, including a post alleging that the Ukrainian state is not helping the families of killed Ukrainian military personnel, which received two million views, and a post claiming that former Ukrainian commander-in-chief General Valerii Zaluzhnyi could become the next Ukrainian president, which received 4.3 million views. Kiriyenko also reportedly tasked another deputy, Tatyana Matveeva, to oversee a similar effort aimed at spreading disinformation and fake news in European information spaces, including in France and Germany, and the team overseeing the information operations in the Ukrainian media tried to reuse the disinformation spread in European media, including allegations that Zelensky is involved in military procurement corruption schemes.²² The Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation reported on December 21, 2023, that Russian actors planned to promote several information operations aimed at degrading Ukrainian morale through a network of fake Telegram channels disguised as official accounts of Ukrainian regional officials and military brigades that would promote several narratives, including those about alleged divisions between Ukrainian political and military leadership and allegations of Ukrainian government corruption.²³

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced on February 18 that Denmark is donating its “entire artillery” to Ukraine.²⁴ The Danish government had not issued an official statement with details of the announcement at the time of this writing, and it is unclear if Denmark will give Ukraine all of its artillery guns, all of its artillery ammunition stocks, or both.

The US is reportedly turning to India and China to engage Russia about Russia’s reported intent to launch an unspecified anti-satellite nuclear weapon into space. The *New York Times* (*NYT*) reported on February 17 that US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken spoke with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar at the Munich Security Conference about the possibility of Russia deploying a nuclear weapon into space that would, if detonated, disrupt American, Chinese, and Indian satellites and affect global communications systems. Blinken reportedly urged Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to speak to Russian President Vladimir Putin about the matter. The *NYT* reported that Wang reiterated the importance of the peaceful use of outer space for China. The *NYT* stated that US officials agree that if Russia deployed a nuclear

weapon into orbit in space, Russia would likely not detonate it but would keep it in low orbit as a deterrence measure. *Reuters* reported on February 15, however, that analysts following Russian space programs indicated that Russia is likely trying to deploy a nuclear powered-device to carry out attacks against satellites and not a weapon with a nuclear warhead.²⁵ Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met with Wang on February 17 to discuss Chinese-Ukrainian trade and the need for stable peace in Ukraine, suggesting that China is hesitant to support Russia's war in Ukraine at the level Russia desires, as ISW continues to assess.²⁶

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces will likely be able to establish new defensive lines not far beyond Avdiivka, which will likely prompt the culmination of the Russian offensive in this area.**
- **Delays in Western security assistance to Ukraine are likely helping Russia launch opportunistic offensive operations along several sectors of the frontline in order to place pressure on Ukrainian forces along multiple axes.**
- **Russian forces are likely seeking to take advantage of two windows of opportunity with the recent initiation of their simultaneous offensive operations—the period before the upcoming spring thaw and the nuanced dynamics of Western aid provision.**
- **The Russian capture of Avdiivka after four months of intensified offensive operations exemplifies the way that Russian forces pursue offensive operations that do not necessarily set conditions for wider operational gains but still force Ukraine to commit manpower and materiel to defensive operations.**
- **Russian forces have not yet demonstrated an ability to secure operationally significant gains or conduct rapid mechanized maneuver across large swaths of territory, and the capture of Avdiivka should not be taken as demonstrating this capability.**
- **Ukrainian officials are investigating two instances of apparent Russian violations of the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war (POWs) in occupied Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for failing to recognize 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps (DNR AC) Commander Lieutenant General Sergei Milchakov and the "Veterany" Assault Brigade (Volunteer Corps) for aiding in the Russian capture of Avdiivka, highlighting continued tension between Russian regular and irregular forces.**
- **The *Washington Post* reported that the Kremlin has been orchestrating a large-scale effort to spread disinformation in the Ukrainian media since January 2023, corroborating recent Ukrainian official reports about Russian information operations that use fake Telegram channels to infiltrate the Ukrainian information space.**
- **Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced on February 18 that Denmark is donating its "entire artillery" to Ukraine.**
- **The US is reportedly turning to India and China to engage Russia about Russia's reported intent to launch an unspecified anti-satellite nuclear weapon into space.**
- **Russian forces recently made a confirmed advance in western Zaporizhia amid continued positional engagements along the entire line of contact on February 18.**
- **Russian occupation officials continue to use educational programs as means of Russifying occupied Ukraine.**

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 Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

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 reportedly redeployed units to the Kupyansk-Svatove area. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on February 18 that the Russian command redeployed units of the 7th Motorized Rifle Regiment (11th Army Corps, Baltic Sea Fleet) to the area east of Ivanivka (east of Kupyansk) from Belgorod and Bryansk oblast border areas, where the Russian command initially redeployed them in early January 2024.²⁷ Mashovets also stated on February 18 that elements of the Russian 2nd Motorized Rifle Division (1st Guards Tank Army, Western Military District) unsuccessfully attempted to advance towards the Kyslivka-Kotlyarivka line (northwest of Svatove) from the Tabaivka-Krokhmalne area (south of the Kyslivka-Kotlyarivka line).²⁸ Mashovets stated that Russian forces in the Tabaivka-Krokhmalne area have redirected their efforts to advancing towards Pishchane (west of Krokhmalne) and that the redeployment of elements of the 7th Motorized Rifle Regiment near Ivanivka is “directly and immediately” related to failures by elements of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Division to make significant advances in the Tabaivka area.

Positional engagements continued near Kreminna on February 18, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued west of Kreminna near Terny, Yampolivka, and Torske and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.²⁹ Mashovets stated that Russian forces introduced almost the entire 67th Motorized Rifle Division (25th Combined Arms Army [CAA], reportedly either Central Military District [CMD] or Eastern Military District), including its 31st and 27th Motorized Rifle Regiments, 19th Tank Regiment, and an unspecified number of attached units, to the Yampolivka direction (west of Kreminna).³⁰ Russia formed the 25th CAA in 2023,

and its constituent elements are likely not staffed to full doctrinal end strength.³¹ Mashovets stated at least three reinforced Russian motorized rifle battalions are operating in the first echelon near Yampolivka but have failed to advance towards Yampolivka itself.³² Mashovets has previously stated that the Russian command likely redeployed various Russian units to the Lyman direction to relieve elements of the 90th Tank Division (41st CAA, CMD) and allow the full 90th Tank Division to deploy to the Avdiivka direction, where some of the 90th Tank Division's constituent elements had already been operating.³³ The redeployment of elements of the 67th Motorized Rifle Division could be intended to replace Russian forces in the area that redeployed to the Avdiivka direction rather than meant as providing operational-level reinforcements. Elements of the Russian 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade and the "GORB" detachment (both of the 2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Bilohorivka.³⁴

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

The Ukrainian General Staff reported limited and unsuccessful Russian attacks near Vyimka (northeast of Bakhmut) on February 18.³⁵

Limited positional engagements continued near Bakhmut on February 18, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported positional fighting near Bohdanivka (northwest of Bakhmut), Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut), and Klishchiivka and Andriivka (both southwest of Bakhmut).³⁶ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced towards Ivanivske, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.³⁷ Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division and 58th Spetsnaz Battalion (1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) are reportedly operating in the Bakhmut direction.³⁸

Russian forces continued to clear recently captured positions in Avdiivka on February 18 after the Russian military command announced that Russian forces "completed the capture" of the settlement of February 17.³⁹ ISW has not yet observed footage showing such clearing operations but has no reason to doubt that Russian forces are currently clearing and consolidating positions as Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from the settlement over the past two days. Russian milbloggers widely claimed that Russian forces are clearing positions in Avdiivka, and a prominent Russian milblogger noted that limited Ukrainian forces likely remain at the Avdiivka Coke Plant and are still trying to withdraw.⁴⁰ The spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade reported that Ukrainian forces still control an unspecified part of Avdiivka, likely on the outskirts of the settlement, and Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Dmytro Lukhoviiv stated that the situation in Avdiivka has stabilized as Russian forces conduct fewer assaults.⁴¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces advanced eight kilometers in depth on February 17 and captured a total area of nearly 32 square kilometers in Avdiivka.⁴² Russian sources claimed that Russian forces are now trying to break through Ukrainian defenses near Lastochkyne (just west of Avdiivka) and are using small infantry groups for assaults on the outskirts of the settlement.⁴³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported the Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Lastochkyne.⁴⁴ Elements of the 1st "Slavic" Brigade and "Sparta" Battalion (both of the 1st DNR AC); the "Veterany" Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps); 30th and 15th Motorized Rifle Brigades (both of the 2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]); and 35th, 55th and 74th Motorized Rifle Brigades (41st CAA, CMD) continue to operate in and around Avdiivka.⁴⁵

Limited positional engagements continued southwest of Avdiivka on February 18 but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported fighting near Pervomaiske and Nevelske.⁴⁶

Positional engagements continued west and southwest of Donetsk City on February 18, but there were no confirmed changes to this part of the frontline. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported fighting west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda and Novomykhailivka.⁴⁷ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are developing offensive operations towards Kurakhove from the Heorhiivka area.⁴⁸

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

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks south of Prechystivka (southeast of Velyka Novosilka) and west of Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka) on February 18.⁴⁹

Russian forces made a marginal confirmed gain in western Zaporizhia Oblast following reports of renewed offensive operations on this sector of the front. Geolocated footage posted on February 18 shows that Russian forces recently advanced along a windbreak north of Kopani (6km northwest of Robotyne).⁵⁰ Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 1.7 kilometers northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne) and up to two kilometers near Robotyne itself, although ISW has not observed visual evidence confirming such extensive Russian advances.⁵¹ The Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces stated on February 18 that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian attack consisting of "a fairly large number of personnel" with about 30 vehicles in an unspecified area in the Zaporizhia direction (likely near Robotyne) on February 17, which corresponds with numerous Russian claims that Russian forces renewed offensives towards Robotyne on February 17.⁵² A Russian milblogger complained that Russian forces used modernized Soviet era T-55 main battle tanks with poor anti-drone protection and weak hull and turret armor in a large assault near Robotyne on February 17.⁵³ Elements of the Russian 76th Airborne (VDV) Division and 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District) reportedly continue operating near Robotyne.⁵⁴ Elements of the Russian 7th VDV Division reportedly continue operating in the Zaporizhia direction.⁵⁵

Positional engagements continued in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast near Krynyky on February 18.⁵⁶ Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that assault units of the Russian 26th and 28th Motorized Rifle Regiments (70th Motorized Rifle Division, 18th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]); 144th Motorized Rifle Brigade (18th CAA, SMD); 328th and 337th VDV Regiments (104th VDV Division), 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), and "Storm" assault detachments continue to attack Ukrainian positions near Krynyky.⁵⁷

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

Ukrainian military officials reported on February 18 that Russian forces launched 14 Shahed-136/131 drones at Ukraine from occupied Crimea and Kursk Oblast, six S-300 anti-aircraft guided missiles from occupied Donetsk Oblast, three Kh-22 cruise missiles from Voronezh Oblast, a Kh-59 guided missile from occupied Zaporizhia Oblast, and an unspecified number of Iskander-M ballistic missiles from unspecified

launch points on the night of February 17 to 18.⁵⁸ Ukrainian air defenses and electronic warfare (EW) systems intercepted and destroyed 12 Shahed drones and a Kh-59 missile over Chernihiv, Sumy, Poltava, Kirovohrad, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts.⁵⁹ Ukrainian officials reported that three Russian Kh-22 missiles and an unspecified number of Iskander-M missiles struck Kramatorsk and Slovyansk, Donetsk Oblast, killing civilians and damaging civil infrastructure.⁶⁰ Ukrainian officials reported that two unspecified Russian missiles also struck a school in Selydove, Donetsk Oblast.⁶¹

The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed another Russian Su-34 aircraft in eastern Ukraine on the morning of February 18.⁶² Ukrainian forces reportedly downed two Russian Su-34s and one Su-35 over Donetsk Oblast on February 17.⁶³

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

Nothing significant to report.

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

Russian news outlet *Shot* reported on February 18 that Ural Technoport Company recently began to mass produce a new drone variety, the “Antonov” drone, in Chelyabinsk Oblast, which is more resistant to wind and poor weather conditions than other drones.⁶⁴ The “Antonov” drone is reportedly capable of flying up to 140 kilometers per hour and carrying a payload weighing up to three kilograms. *Shot* claimed that the Ural Technoport Company will produce up to 500 “Antonov” drones per month for the Russian military for use in Ukraine. A Russian milblogger claimed that the “Antonov” drone is still undergoing tests.⁶⁵

Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)

German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall announced on February 17 that it will open a new ammunition plant in Ukraine with a local Ukrainian joint venture partner. Rheinmetall noted that the plant will produce a “six-digit” number of 155mm caliber shells per year. Rheinmetall already announced that it will establish a repair center in Ukraine for Leopard tanks and other German-provided military equipment.⁶⁶

Ukrainian Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov stated on February 18 that the Ukrainian-made analog of the Russian Lancet loitering munitions has passed preliminary testing and that Ukrainian forces will soon test the model in combat.⁶⁷ Fedorov initially announced the Lancet analog on February 7.⁶⁸

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte stated on February 17 that the Netherlands is “on schedule” to provide Ukraine with at least 24 F-16 aircraft but did not specify a date for the transfer.⁶⁹ Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvydas Anušauskas stated that the first F-16s may appear in Ukraine by June 2024.⁷⁰ The Netherlands is currently leading an international coalition alongside Denmark to provide F-16 aircraft to Ukraine and is involved in training efforts for Ukrainian pilots in Romania.⁷¹

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)

Russian occupation officials continue to use educational programs as a means of Russifying occupied Ukraine. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky stated on February 18 that he attended a meeting of the supervisory board of the “Znanie” (Knowledge) Society, and that the organization will educate “a new generation of scientists and educators who are already becoming the driving force of cultural change” in occupied Ukraine.⁷² “Znanie” is a Russian public non-profit that carries out education work in Russia and occupied Ukraine as part of a presidential mandate on “mass educational organization.”⁷³ Russian occupation officials appear to have recently intensified efforts to train Ukrainian youth to staff public service positions in the future, likely in an effort to provide a personnel pool for Russian occupation organs operating in occupied areas.⁷⁴

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev, a notable Russian nationalist and extreme voice in the Russian government, reiterated a Russian information operation aimed at undermining the continued provision of Western military aid to Ukraine. Medvedev claimed on February 18 that continued Western support for Ukraine could force Russia to use nuclear weapons against the West.⁷⁵ Medvedev routinely espouses alarmist nuclear rhetoric, and his February 18 statements are not an inflection in Russian rhetoric.

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)

Nothing significant to report.

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

¹ https://t.me/mod_russia/35757 ; https://t.me/mod_russia/35747 ; https://t.me/tass_agency/232252

² https://t.me/dva_majors/34812 ; <https://t.me/wargonzo/18258> ; <https://t.me/wargonzo/18273> ; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/54082> ; https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/9801 ; https://t.me/negumanitarnaya_pomosch_Z/14972

³ <https://t.me/sashakots/45058>

⁴ <https://suspilne dot media/686862-v-gur-zaavili-so-zabezpecuvali-evakuacijnij-koridor-dla-vihodu-ukrainskih-vijsk-z-avdiivki/> ; <https://t.me/DIUkraine/3480> ; <https://gur dot gov.ua/content/avdiivka.html>

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