Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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January 23, 2024, 8pm 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 1:40pm ET on January 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Western states reiterated their support for Ukraine and their commitment to the development of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) at the 18th Ukraine Defense Contact Group at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on January 23. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated that Belgium plans to provide Ukraine with 611 million euros (about \$663.4 million) worth of military aid in 2024.[1] US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin reiterated that the US believes that Ukraine is appropriately using military aid and stated that the United States continues to monitor and account for US security assistance delivered to Ukraine. Austin stated explicitly that the US has seen "no credible evidence of the misuse or illicit diversion of American equipment provided to Ukraine."[2] The US Department of Defense (DoD) Office of the Inspector General published a report on January 11 that stated that the failure to document certain aid provided to Ukraine in a timely manner was largely due to DoD limitations but that did not suggest that any of the material air had been misappropriated.[3] Austin reiterated US support for strengthening Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).[4] Umerov stated that Ukraine is ready to co-invest in technologies and joint production with interested companies in order to facilitate breakthroughs on the battlefield with "innovation and significant technological progress."[5] Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Press and Information Department Head Illarion Pavlyuk stated that Ukraine and unspecified officials discussed ways to increase weapons and ammunition production, the creation of an artillery production coalition, and the development of Ukraine's air force and air defenses.[6]

NATO concluded contracts on January 23 for the purchase over 200,000 artillery shells, likely either to allow NATO to send additional aid to Ukraine or to replenish NATO stockpiles. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and General Manager of the NATO Support and Procurement Agency Stacy Cummings signed contracts, reportedly with French company Nexter and German company Junghans Defense, on January 23 for the purchase of about 220,000 155mm artillery shells worth \$1.2 billion.[7] Stoltenberg stated that the war in Ukraine has become a "battle for ammunition," so it is important that NATO refill its stocks as the alliance continues to

support Ukraine. It is unclear if the contracts are meant to allow NATO to send additional ammunition to Ukraine or to fill NATO's own ammunition stockpiles. Western security assistance remains vital for Ukraine as any slow reduction or sudden collapse of Western aid will very likely eliminate Ukraine's ability to defend itself and could lead to the Russian military capturing significantly more territory in Ukraine, bringing Russian forward bases closer to the borders of NATO member states.[8] The replenishment of NATO stockpiles is also an important endeavor, as ISW also continues to assess that NATO rearmament is necessary to deter - and if necessary defeat - any future Russian attack on NATO's eastern flank, given that Kremlin officials have increasingly threatened NATO member states, and Kremlin-affiliated actors appear to be attempting to sow instability and set information conditions for possible future aggressive Russian actions against NATO members and other post-Soviet states.[9]

Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are struggling to compensate for Ukrainian drone and rear-area strikes at the level necessary to break out of positional warfare. A prominent Russian milblogger stated on January 23 that Russian forces need to figure out how to break out of positional warfare but that Russian forces are unable to concentrate in numbers sufficient to break through Ukrainian lines because Ukrainian forces strike all force concentrations larger than a battalion.[10] The milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces target Russian force concentrations even in near rear areas. The milblogger reported that Ukrainian forces still target small Russian groups of one-to-two infantry companies and of 10 armored vehicles with drone strikes, preventing Russian forces from even reaching Ukrainian forward defensive lines. The milblogger complained that Russian forces' only solution thus far has been to attack with 10-20 dismounted infantrymen with armored vehicles supporting at an "extreme" distance behind the infantry. A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger responded in agreement with the first milblogger, claiming that Ukrainian technological advancements have made it difficult for Russian forces to concentrate several divisions in a discrete geographic area without Ukrainian forces detecting the force concentration.[11] The milblogger emphasized that Russian forces need to both obtain indirect fire superiority over Ukrainian forces and overhaul Russian command-and-control (C2) to break out of positional warfare. The milblogger stressed that Russian forces on the frontline need to be able to quickly communicate to minimize the time between spotting and striking a target and that this change will only occur with a significant change in C2 processes.

The characteristics and problems of positional warfare that Russian milbloggers have identified in recent discussions overlap with many systemic issues in the Russian military that the milbloggers have been complaining about for a long time.[12] Russian milbloggers have complained generally about poor Russian C2 as it pertains to indirect fire, the attrition of Russian forces through unproductive "meat assaults" against Ukrainian positions, poor tactical and operational planning, and the struggle to counter Ukrainian drone operations on the front line and in near rear areas.[13] There are currently no indications that the Russian military command has materially improved on any of these identified issues at the operational level necessary to break through a positional front in one or more areas of the theater. Russian forces have recently proven themselves capable of making marginal tactical advances during intensified offensive efforts even with these systemic issues, however, particularly near Kupyansk in Kharkiv Oblast and Avdiivka in Donetsk Oblast.[14]

Russian forces conducted a series of missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of January 22-23 with a new strike package likely meant to penetrate Ukrainian air defenses. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched four S-300/S-400

ground-to-air missiles, 15 Kh-101/555/55 cruise missiles, eight Kh-22 cruise missiles, 12 Iskander ballistic missiles, and five Kh-59/Kh-31 missiles and that Ukrainian forces shot down all of the Kh-101/555/55 missiles, five Iskander missiles, and two Kh-59 missiles.[15] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces struck Kharkiv, Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Sumy oblasts.[16] This strike package is notably the first time in recent months that a large Russian missile strike series has not included Shahed-136/131 drones, which Russian forces have often used in an effort to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems.[17] A Russian source posted footage on January 23 purporting to show a Russian missile releasing decoy flares mid-air, and similar footage emerged of a Russian Kh-101 during a Russian strike in late December 2023.[18] This strike package may have utilized decoys in place of Shahed drones in order to experiment with the effectiveness of using such decoys and preserving Shaheds for other purposes. Ukrainian forces appear to have recently adapted to new Russian strike packages, and Russian forces are likely continuing to experiment with new strike packages with different means of penetrating Ukrainian air defenses and force Ukraine to deploy air defense systems to certain locations.[19] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat stated that Russian forces primarily launched ballistic missiles on January 22-23 and that Ukraine needs additional means to protect against these missiles.[20] ISW continues to assess that Russia is likely attempting to acquire more ballistic missiles from abroad, including from Iran and North Korea, because ballistic missiles may be more successful in striking Ukrainian targets in some circumstances.[21]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and Palestinian National Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al Maliki as part of efforts to deepen Russian relations with Middle Eastern actors. Lavrov met with Abdollahian and emphasized strengthening mutually beneficial Russian-Iranian cooperation.[22] Both officials reiterated their support for an "early ceasefire" in Gaza.[23] Lavrov and Abdollahian discussed unspecified agreements that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi made during Raisi's December 2023 visit to Moscow.[24] Lavrov also reiterated Russian support for an "early end to the bloodshed" and "the resumption of the Middle East settlement process" in a meeting with al Maliki.[25]

The Kremlin's domestic policy focus on the "Year of the Family" in 2024 is likely in part meant to address Russia's ongoing demographic crisis. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on January 23 officially defining families with three of more children as "large families" and establishing various social support measures for "large families."[26] Putin also emphasized that the family is the center of Russian "traditional values," echoing his previous statements on the importance of Russian families from his annual New Year's Eve address on December 31, 2023.[27] The Kremlin's focus on 2024 as the "Year of the Family" is likely meant to provide an ideological underpinning to Russian efforts to increase Russian birthrates and remedy Russian demographic issues. Russia has been reckoning with a demographic crisis since the beginning of the 1990s due to declining birthrates, an aging population, low life expectancy (particularly amongst males of working age), and high emigration levels.[28] Russia's war in Ukraine has also impacted some aspects of Russian demographics, particularly as men of reproductive and working age are the main Russian demographic fighting in Ukraine. Between 800 to 900 thousand Russians additionally fled the country after the start of the war in February 2022, including up to 700 thousand after Putin's partial mobilization order in September 2022.[29] A demographic forecast from the Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) in October 2023 notably forecasted that Russia's population will decrease to 138.77 million people by January 1, 2046 and that the rate of natural population decline will exceed 600,000 people per year between 2024-2032, slowing to

400,000 people per year from 2032-2046.[30] Social support measures for families with three or more children and other pro-natalist policies incentivize Russian women to have more children in order to receive payouts and other benefits from the Russian state, which the Kremlin likely hopes will gradually increase the birth rate in coming generations and slow down the overall pace of Russian population decline.

The Russian Baltic Fleet is conducting a coastal missile exercise likely to posture against ongoing NATO Steadfast Defender 2024 exercises. The Russian Baltic Fleet's Press Service reported on January 23 that Russian Bastion coastal missile defense system crews conducted electronic launches of Onyx missiles against mock adversary ships in the Gulf of Finland and also conducted camouflage and anti-sabotage exercises.[31] About 50 Russian military personnel participated in the exercises and used 10 pieces of specialized military equipment.[32] Russian officials often portray NATO exercises as escalatory against Russia despite routinely threatening NATO member states, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) called the NATO Steadfast Defender exercises "increasingly provocative and aggressive" after NATO announced the exercises in September 2023.[33] Russia's Baltic Fleet exercises are likely part of Russia's wider effort to posture against the wider NATO alliance in preparation for potential future conflict with NATO, as ISW has previously assessed.[34]

The Kremlin may intend to use the 2024 Russian presidential election as a referendum on Russia's war in Ukraine. Russian opposition politician and presidential candidate Boris Nadezhdin, who Russian opposition outlet Verstka and BBC's Russian Service described as the only Russian presidential candidate who opposes the Russian war in Ukraine, stated to Verstka in an interview published on January 23 that he believes that the Russian Central Election Commission (CEC) will have to register him as a candidate due to his broad support among the Russian public.[35] Nadezhdin stated to Verstka that his campaign is collecting signatures in support of his candidacy at a growing rate of 7,000 signatures per day but that he struggles to campaign and collect signatures. Nadezhdin's campaign announced on January 23 that Nadezhdin collected over 100,000 signatures - the amount the Russian CEC requires to register an independent candidate in the elections - but that these 100,000 signatures are thus far insufficient for the CEC's requirements.[36] The Russian CEC additionally requires that prospective presidential candidates submit signatures from over half of Russia's federal subjects (regions) by January 25 and that no more than 2,500 signatures from any one federal subject can count towards the 100,000 total.[37] Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported, citing an interlocutor in Nadezhdin's campaign, that some of the collected signatures are considered "imperfect" or "defective" and that Nadezhdin wants "perfect" signatures that the Russian CEC cannot contest.[38]

A Russian insider source claimed that the Kremlin has developed a mechanism to funnel all opposition votes to Nadezhdin, which will account for opposition votes to give voters the semblance of choice while ultimately ensuring the reelection of Russian President Vladimir Putin.[39] The insider source claimed that the Kremlin will pay off Nadezhdin in exchange for funneling opposition votes. Nadezhdin claimed to *Verstka* that his struggles to campaign, including censorship on Russian state television, show that he is not a "Kremlin puppet" despite his prior affiliations with the current presidential administration.[40] *BBC Russian Service* noted on January 22 that Nadezhdin's campaign initially struggled for attention but that he gained prominence in recent days, resulting in an influx in signatures.[41] The Kremlin may decide to allow Nadezhdin to run as an anti-war

candidate to use frame Putin's inevitable resurrection as a positive referendum on the war in Ukraine as the Kremlin seeks to prepare for a long-term war effort.

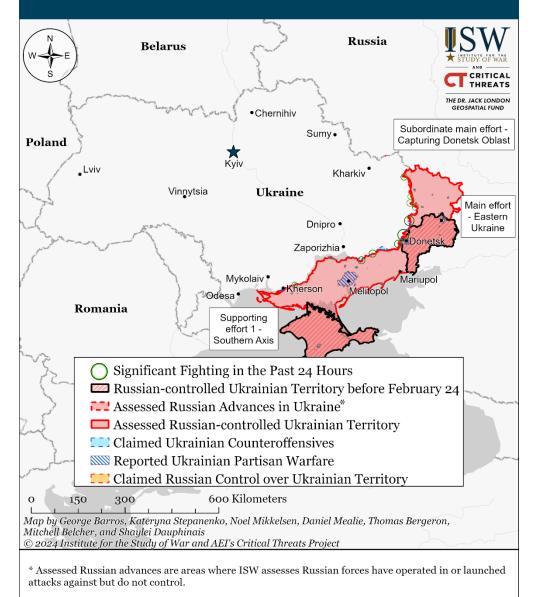
The Russian legal system is expanding the prosecution of extortion cases to broadly suppress sources of dissent. Russian government-affiliated outlet *Lenta* posted an investigation on January 23 detailing how Russian courts are increasingly using Article 163 of the Russian Criminal Code—the article defining extortion—to target various media organizations for perceived dissent.[42] *Lenta* reported that Russian legal experts see the extortion law as a "rubber law," a deliberately vague law that can have flexible interpretations and that courts can cross-apply to civil cases that they would not typically try under criminal extortion laws.[43] The most severe sentence for extortion can exceed the sentence for murder in some cases.[44] *Lenta* noted that employees of media and public relations companies and journalists are the most vulnerable to the expanded prosecution of extortion cases and reported that Russian courts initiated 19 extortion cases against journalists and bloggers in 2022-2023 alone.[45] A prominent Russian insider source noted that Russian courts continue to "churn out criminal cases" using a "vicious" interpretation of Russian extortion law.[46] ISW has previously reported on similar Russian legislative manipulations aimed at repressing domestic dissent by introducing a fear of criminal liability to cases that would typically be tried on a civil basis.[47]

Key Takeaways:

- Western states reiterated their support for Ukraine and their commitment to the development of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) at the 18th Ukraine Defense Contact Group at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on January 23.
- NATO concluded contracts on January 23 for the purchase over 200,000 artillery shells, likely either to allow NATO to send additional aid to Ukraine or to replenish NATO stockpiles.
- Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are struggling to compensate for Ukrainian drone and rear-area strikes at the level necessary to break out of positional warfare.
- Russian forces conducted a series of missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of January 22-23 with a new strike package likely meant to penetrate Ukrainian air defenses.
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and Palestinian National Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al Maliki as part of efforts to deepen Russian relations with Middle Eastern actors.
- The Kremlin's domestic policy focus on the "Year of the Family" in 2024 is likely in part meant to address Russia's ongoing demographic crisis.
- The Russian Baltic Fleet is conducting a coastal missile exercise likely to posture against ongoing NATO Steadfast Defender 2024 exercises.
- The Kremlin may intend to use the 2024 Russian presidential election as a referendum on Russia's war in Ukraine.
- The Russian legal system is expanding the prosecution of extortion cases to broadly suppress sources of dissent.

- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Kreminna, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City amid continued positional engagements along the entire line of contact on January 23.
- Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) government chairperson Yevgeny Solntsev announced on January 23 that a branch of the Russian Nakhimov Naval School in occupied Mariupol will start instructing its first cadets on September 1, 2024.
- Russian occupation authorities are likely deliberately misrepresenting population statistics in occupied areas to encourage people to relocated to occupied settlements.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 23, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are wellcovered 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
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Activities in Russian-Occupied Areas
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

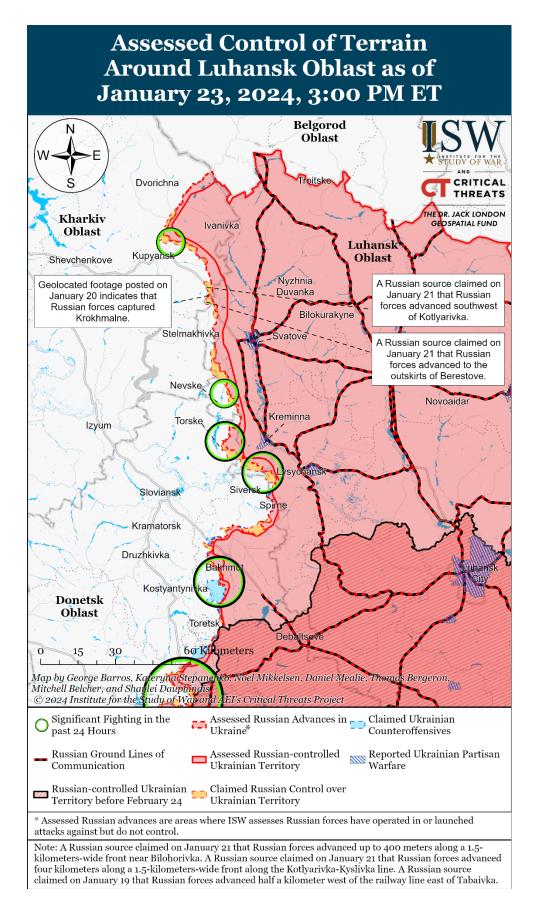
<u> Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine</u>

<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

The Russian Kharkiv Oblast occupation administration claimed on January 23 that a Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) unit captured Pletenivka, Kharkiv Oblast, less than two kilometers from the Kharkiv-Belgorod Oblast international border and south of Shebekino, Belgorod Oblast.[48] Russian milbloggers largely disputed the occupation administration's claim as false, however, and noted that there are no large-scale Russian offensive operations in the area.[49] ISW has not observed confirmation of the Kharkiv Oblast occupation administration's claim and has not observed indicators that the Russian force grouping in Belgorod Oblast is sufficient to launch large-scale offensive operations into northern Kharkiv Oblast.[50] ISW forecasted on January 9, however, that Russian forces may conduct small-scale tactical-level attacks across the Belgorod-Kharkiv Oblast border to fix and divert Ukrainian forces away from the Kupyansk axis.[51]

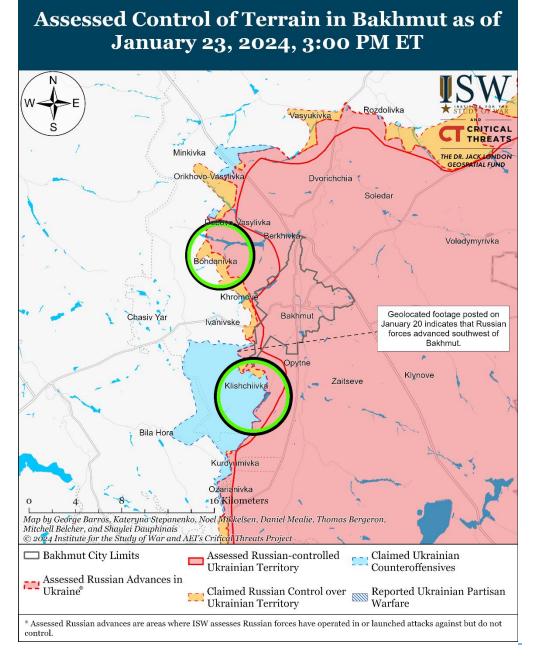
Russian forces continued intensified offensive operations southeast of Kupyansk on January 23 and reportedly advanced. Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army (Western Military District) advanced 650 meters in depth along a 2.2 kilometer-wide-front from the north to southwest of Krokhmalne (southeast of Kupyansk).[52] One milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced roughly two kilometers towards Tabakivka (just northwest of Krokhmalne) and Berestove (just southwest of Krokhmalne) in the past few days.[53] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of the milbloggers' claims, however. Positional fighting continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka.[54]

Russian forces recently marginally advanced west of Kreminna amid positional fighting continued in the Svatove-Kreminna direction on January 23. Geolocated footage published on January 23 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced west of Kreminna towards Yampolivka.[55] Positional fighting continued northwest of Kreminna near Makiivka and Novoyehorivka; west of Kreminna near Terny and Torske; south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka and in the Serebryanske forest area; and southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova.[56] Elements of the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz "Aida" detachment continue to operate in the Kreminna direction.[57]



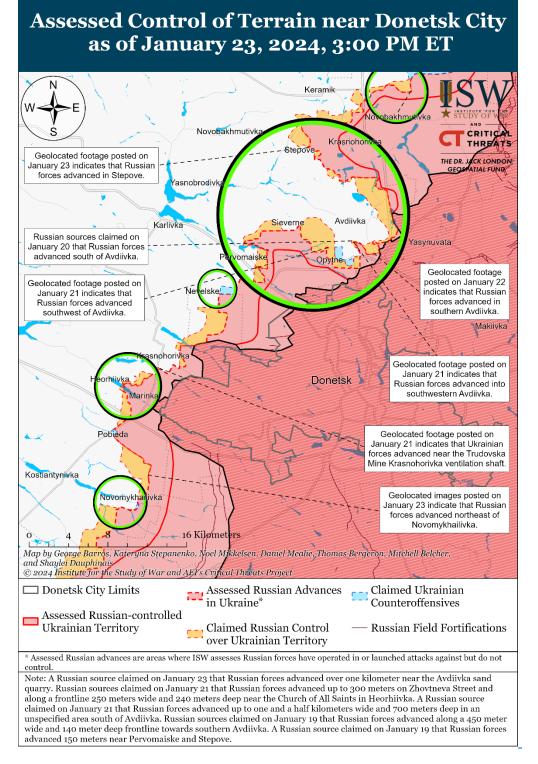
<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Positional engagements continued near Bakhmut, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area on January 23. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[58] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are pushing Ukrainian forces out of Bohdanivka, but that Ukrainian forces still control western Bohdanivka.[59] Elements of the Russian "Sever-V" Volunteer Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps) reportedly continue to operate near Bohdanivka.[60] Elements of the Russian 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC]); elements of the "Ruskiye Yastreby" (Russian Hawks) (33rd Motorized Rifle Regiment, 1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps]; and elements of the "Korsa" Artillery Battalion (31st Motorized Rifle Brigade, 1st DNR AC) are reportedly operating in the Horlivka direction south of Bakhmut.[61]



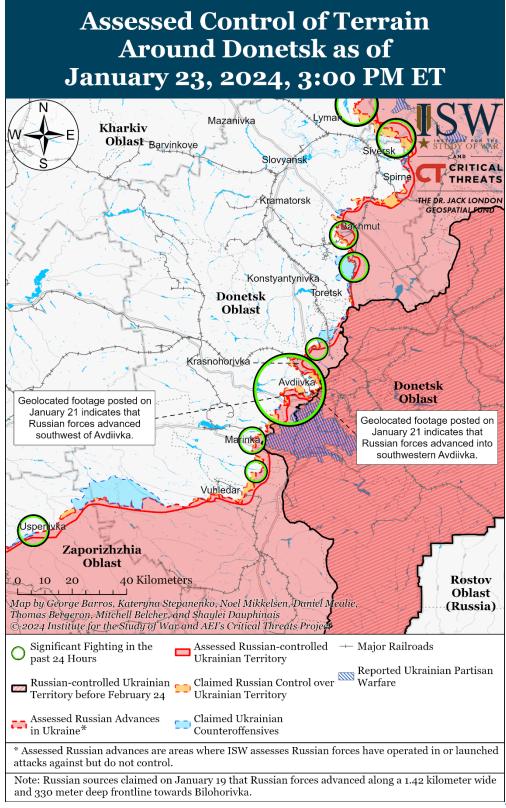
Russian forces recently advanced near Avdiivka as positional engagements continued in the area on January 23. Geolocated footage published on January 23 indicates that Russian forces advanced in western Stepove (northwest of Avdiivka).[62] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional fighting continued northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka and Stepove; west of Avdiivka near Sieverne; south of Avdiivka near Opytne; southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske and Nevelske; and near Avdiivka itself.[63] A Russian source claimed that Russian forces advanced over one kilometer near the Avdiivka quartz sand quarry north of Avdiivka, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[64] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces continue to operate in the Vynohradnyky vineyard area southeast of Avdiivka.[65] Elements of the Russian 80th Tank Regiment

(90th Tank Division, 41st CAA, Central Military District) and the "Viking" special purpose detachment are reportedly operating in the Avdiivka direction.[66]



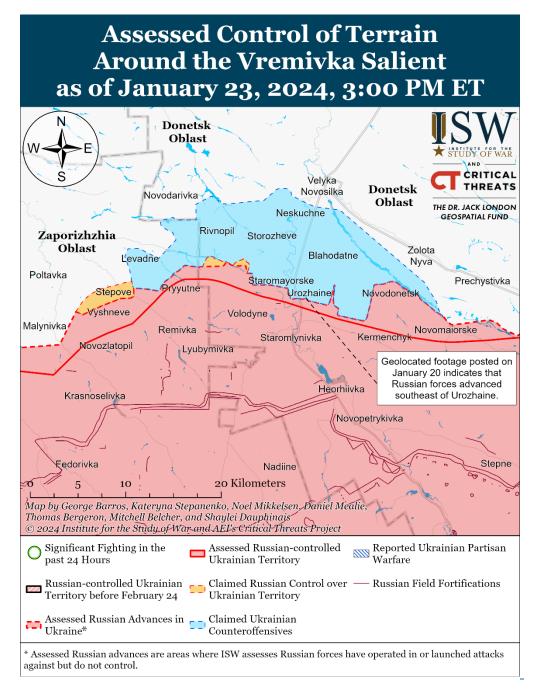
Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Donetsk City as positional engagements continued in the area on January 23. Geolocated footage published on January 23 indicates that Russian forces

advanced northeast of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[67] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued southwest of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and Novomykhailivka.[68] Elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) and elements of the Russian 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating near Heorhiivka.[69]



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

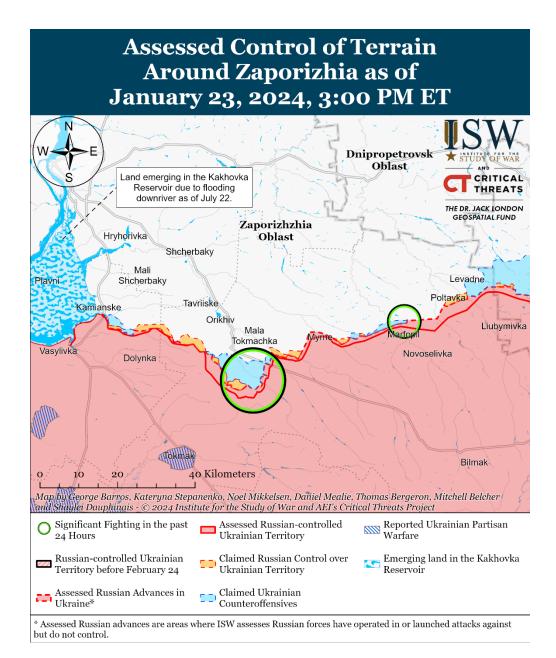
Limited positional engagements continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia border area on January 23.[70] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults south of Chervone (35km southwest of Velkya Novosilka in far eastern Zaporizhia Oblast).[71] Elements of the 305th Artillery Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District) are reportedly operating south of Velyka Novosilka.[72]



Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhia Oblast on January 23, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation deputy Vladimir Rogov claimed that Russian forces counterattacked west of Robotyne and regained several positions, although ISW has not yet seen visual evidence of this purported advance.[73] Russian and Ukrainian

sources reported continued positional fighting near Robotyne and Verbove (east of Robotyne).[74] Elements of the Russian 503rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (19th Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]), 291st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD), and 22nd Separate Guards Special Purpose (Spetsnaz) Brigade, and Russian airborne (VDV) forces are reportedly operating in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[75]





Limited positional engagements continued on east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on January 23. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported ongoing fighting near Krynky.[76] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are conducting attacks in and around Krynky less frequently, but that Russian forces cannot regain positions or clear the settlement due to constant Ukrainian drone operation in the area.[77] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces are taking advantage of clearer weather conditions in southern Ukraine to intensify drone strikes against Kherson Oblast and Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast.[78]



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

Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) government chairperson Yevgeny Solntsev announced on January 23 that a branch of the Russian Nakhimov Naval School in occupied Mariupol will start instructing its first cadets on September 1, 2024.[79] Kremlin newswire *TASS* reported that the school can

accommodate 560 cadets.[80] Russian occupation authorities have already mobilized Ukrainian citizens to fight in the Russian military against Ukraine and may use recruitment into to the Nakhimov Naval School to intensify these efforts.[81]

Unnamed US officials told the *New York Times (NYT)* in an article published on January 22 that North Korean missiles provided to Russia are as accurate as Russian-produced missiles.[82] The US officials also told the *NYT* that Russian forces are likely launching North-Korean provided missiles in an attempt to overwhelm Western-provided air defense systems. The *NYT* reported that North Korea has likely provided Russia with fewer than 50 missiles, although unnamed US and European officials assess that North Korea could have transferred more. ISW continues to assess that Russia seeks to deepen Russian-North Korean relations as part of an effort to procure more missiles and artillery ammunition from abroad.[83]

An Uzbek court reportedly sentenced an Uzbek citizen to five years in prison for mercenarism for signing a contract with the Wagner Group. A Russian news aggregator claimed that an Uzbek court sentenced Uzbek citizen Alexey Khamatkhanov for signing a Wagner contract even though he did not fight in Ukraine.[84] The Russian news aggregator claimed that Khamatkhanov arrived in Russia in May 2023 but did not deploy to Ukraine with Wagner due to its "reorganization" after the Wagner rebellion in June 2023.[85] Uzbekistan previously sentenced an Uzbek citizen to prison for fighting in the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) military from 2014-2015.[86]

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

Russian engineering company Dogeotech's Director Alexei Devyatilov told Kremlin newswire *TASS* in an article published on January 23 that the Russian military will soon conduct tests on new bunkers for fortification systems.[87] Devyatilov stated that Dogeotech designed a squad bunker, platoon bunker, and a shelter bunker and that the shelters range from 2.5 meters to six meters wide and from 1.5 tons to 2.5 tons.[88] *TASS* reported that the Russian military has been using Dogeotech-designed fortifications in the Donetsk direction since March 2023.[89]

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

Click here to read ISW's new analysis on Ukrainian long-term efforts to develop a selfsufficient DIB with US and European support.

The Ukrainian government continues to allocate portions of the federal budget to purchase weapons and military equipment for Ukraine's defense. The Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers allocated roughly 657 million hryvnia (about \$17.5 million) to strengthen Ukraine's defensive capabilities, including with the purchase and modernization of weapons and purchase of ammunition, optical and thermal imaging devices, drones, and weapons maintenance.[90] The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) will allocate between one and 10 million hryvnia (roughly \$26,700 to \$267,000) for each of its combat brigades, prioritizing higher budget allocations to brigades deployed to combat zones.[91] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denis Shmyhal announced on January 23 that the Ukrainian government allocated 9.6 billion hryvnia of the military personal income tax to the Ukrainian MoD for urgent Ukrainian defensive needs, including for the purchase of weapons, equipment, and ammunition.[92] Shmyhal announced that the Ukrainian government also decided to allocate 10 percent of the military personal income tax directly to Ukrainian military units.

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

Russian occupation authorities are likely deliberately misrepresenting population statistics in occupied areas to encourage people to relocate to occupied settlements. Mariupol occupation head Oleg Morgun told Kremlin newswire *TASS* on January 23 that the population of Mariupol is now 240,000—50 percent of its pre-war population.[93] Morgun claimed that ongoing Russian reconstruction efforts in Mariupol are encouraging people to either return to or relocate to Mariupol. Ukrainian Mariupol Mayor Advisor Petro Andryushchenko responded to Morgun's statements on January 23 and noted that Russian forces destroyed at least half of the livable infrastructure in Mariupol, so Mariupol cannot support 240,000 people at this time, suggesting that the Morgun's figures are deliberately wrong.[94] Morgun's claims are likely meant to frame Mariupol as desirable city to live in to encourage people to move to Mariupol. ISW previously assessed that Russia is trying to forcibly repopulate occupied areas of Ukraine with Russians in order to permanently change Ukraine's demographics and to create a false guise of legitimacy for the occupation of Ukraine.[95]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated a boilerplate Russian information operation aimed at placing the onus for negotiations on the West in an interview with *CBS News* on January 23. Lavrov claimed that Russia is open to considering proposals to end the war and that the West forced Ukraine to reject a peace proposal in April 2022.[96] Russian President Vladimir Putin, Lavrov, and other senior Russian officials continue to deny Ukrainian statehood and emphasize maximalist objectives in Ukraine, however, suggesting that Russia is not interested in engaging in negotiations in good faith.[97]

A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger continues to amplify criticisms of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan while continuing to portray Russia as the only mediator capable of creating a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The milblogger claimed that Pashinyan attempts to portray himself and his administration as making sacrifices toward peace while actually holding little power.[98] The milblogger also claimed that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev refused all avenues of negotiations except through Russia and that Azerbaijan is ready to sign a peace treaty with Russia.[99] Russian sources continue to amplify criticisms and negative portrayals of Pashinyan likely to punish him for increasingly anti-Russian policies.

Russian sources continue to portray Moldovan efforts to reduce Russian influence in Moldova as futile. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Moldova's Center for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation will hold its first meeting in January 2024, but that its efforts to combat Russian influence are weak given that unspecified recent polls allegedly indicate negative attitudes toward the West and Moldovan government.[100] Another Russian milblogger claimed that an alleged proposal to rename the Moldovan Ministry of Defense to the "Ministry of National Defense," the same designation Romania uses, is evidence of Moldovan attempts to "merge with Romania."[101]

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

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov stated on January 23 that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko will meet before the end of this week.[102] Lukashenko stated on January 22 that he and Putin will meet to discuss the meeting agenda of the upcoming Union State Supreme Council meeting.[103]

Belarusian Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and First Deputy Minister of Defense Major General Viktor Gulevich stated on January 23 that Belarusian forces are taking additional measures to build out their electronic warfare, radar, and radio engineering forces due to an alleged NATO air force concentration near the Belarusian border.[104]

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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