

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 31, 2024

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January 31, 2024, 8:05pm 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 2pm ET on January 31. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 1 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Note: ISW added a new section on Russian air, missile, and drone campaign to track Russian efforts to target Ukrainian rear and frontline areas, grow its drone and missile arsenals, and adapt its strike packages.

Ukrainian forces struck Russian targets in the vicinity of Belbek airfield in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea on January 31. Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk amplified geolocated footage on January 31 showing a Ukrainian strike near the Belbek airfield and thanked Ukrainian forces for striking targets in occupied Crimea.[1] Additional geolocated footage published on January 31 shows large smoke plumes rising from the airfield.[2] ISW has yet to observe evidence indicating what Russian targets Ukrainian forces struck at or near the airfield. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces intercepted 20 Ukrainian missiles, 17 reportedly on the approaches to Sevastopol and three reportedly elsewhere over occupied Crimea.[3] The Russian MoD claimed that missile fragments fell in Lyubimivka (northwest of Sevastopol), and Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhayev claimed that missile fragments damaged buildings along Fedorivska Street and the "Ust-Belbek" garden association, both in the vicinity of the Belbek airfield.[4] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces used Storm Shadow cruise missiles in the strikes.[5] Ukrainian forces recently repeatedly targeted the Saky airfield (north of Sevastopol) as part of a multi-day strike campaign against Russian targets in occupied Crimea in early January 2024.[6] Ukrainian forces previously conducted a more extensive strike campaign against Russian military infrastructure and Black Sea Fleet (BSF) assets in the summer of 2023 that pushed Russian naval assets largely out of the western part of the Black Sea and that aimed to degrade the Russian military's ability to use Crimea as a staging and rear area for defensive operations in southern Ukraine.[7]

Russian President Vladimir Putin doubled down on his maximalist and purposefully vague territorial objectives in Ukraine on January 31. Putin stated during a meeting with his

election “proxies” that pushing the current frontline deeper into Ukraine is the most important goal for Russian forces across the theater.[8] Putin emphasized the idea of a “demilitarized” or “sanitary” zone in Ukraine that he claimed would place Russian territory – including occupied Ukraine – out of range of both frontline artillery systems and Western-provided long-range systems. Putin’s stated goal of pushing the front line so that Russia’s claimed and actual territories are outside of Ukrainian firing range is a vague goal that is actually unattainable as long as there is an independent Ukraine with any ability to fight. Putin would likely annex any Ukrainian territories Russia managed to capture in pursuit of this supposed objective (particularly in the four oblasts Russia has already claimed to have annexed but only partially controls), thus bringing the new Russian territories into range of Ukrainian systems in whatever remains of an independent Ukraine. A Russian nationalist milblogger expanded on this dilemma, noting that Russia would also have to capture Mykolaiv and Odesa cities to eliminate the threat of Ukrainian long range strikes against occupied Crimea and that Russian forces would need to capture the Slovyansk-Kramatorsk line in Donetsk Oblast to relieve the current front line.[9] The milblogger notably suggested even further territorial expansion by asking whether Russia wants Slovyansk to “bear the fate of an eternally frontline city.”[10] Putin’s January 31 statements do not represent significant inflections in Russia’s stated war aims or actual military capabilities but are rather likely intended to capitalize on existing narratives in Western media that could block short and long term Western military assistance to Ukraine and compel the West to negotiate with Russia on Russian terms.

Putin also included Kharkiv City, which he has previously described as “Russian,” in this hypothesized demilitarized zone, likely to capitalize on discussions surrounding the unlikely possibility of a Russian offensive effort along Kharkiv Oblast’s northern border from Belgorod Oblast.[11] Putin may intend to amplify these discussions to divert Ukrainian attention away from the ongoing Russian offensive operation along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast axis, but ISW continues to assess that Russian forces in Belgorod Oblast can conduct only tactical-level actions that would serve as feints to draw and fix Ukrainian forces along the border.[12] Putin is also likely trying to appeal to resurgent calls from Russian ultranationalists to create a “buffer zone” between Kharkiv and Belgorod oblasts to push Ukrainian MLRS and artillery away from the international border with Belgorod Oblast. Putin previously claimed that he would consider creating such a “buffer zone” during widespread discontent about limited cross border raids by pro-Ukraine forces into Belgorod Oblast in summer 2023, but the Russian military has yet to take any actions that suggest that Putin has seriously considered these calls.[13]

Putin also highlighted the Russian offensive effort near Avdiivka likely to portray that effort as successful to domestic Russian audiences and to further justify the Russian war in Ukraine.[14] Putin claimed that the “Veterany” Assault Brigade (Volunteer Assault Corps) fought ahead of regular Russian forces, broke through Ukrainian lines, and captured 19 houses near Avdiivka, which Putin characterized as one of the most important areas of the frontline. Putin stated that the “Veterany” Brigade “fights properly” and should be “educating young people.” Putin also reiterated boilerplate narratives that the Russian war in Ukraine is a struggle for Russian sovereignty that is purging Russian society of those who are against this sovereignty, thus unifying Russian society.[15]

Ukrainian and Russian forces conducted a prisoner-of-war (POW) exchange on January 31, exchanging 195 Russian POWs for 207 Ukrainian POWs.[16] Ukrainian officials reported that this was the 50th POW exchange, presumably since the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022.[17] Russian and Ukrainian officials stated that the United Arab Emirates

helped facilitate the POW exchange.[18] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated that the POWs on the preliminary list for the POW exchange planned for January 24 and later canceled due to the Il-76 crash in Belgorod Oblast were not part of the January 31 POW exchange.[19]

The European Union (EU) will reportedly fall short of its promise to provide Ukraine with one million artillery shells by March 1, 2024, as European leaders call on EU member states to intensify deliveries of ammunition to Ukraine. *Bloomberg* reported on January 31 that Western diplomats stated that EU partners will only deliver 600,000 artillery shells to Ukraine by the March 1, 2024 deadline.[20] European Union (EU) Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton stated on January 20 that the EU will have the capacity to produce one million shells per year by March or April 2024 and will ensure that it delivers the “majority” of the shells to Ukraine.[21] German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte acknowledged that the EU fell short of its promise to deliver one million shells to Ukraine by March 2024 in a letter published by the *Financial Times* on January 31.[22] The letter noted that new orders for artillery ammunition will not reach the battlefield in Ukraine until 2025 and urged the EU to find ways to accelerate the delivery of promised shells to Ukraine, either through provisions of existing stocks or through joint procurement efforts.[23]

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed that Russian-Chinese relations are at their “best period in their history” in a January 31 call with Chinese Defense Minister Admiral Dong Jun. Shoigu claimed that Russian-Chinese military cooperation is steadily developing and that the Russian and Chinese militaries regularly conduct operational and combat training exercises.[24] Shoigu claimed that Russian and Chinese defense and security cooperation has helped “reduce the potential for conflict.”[25] Shoigu and Dong emphasized a desire to increase Russian-Chinese strategic cooperation, and Dong reported that China provided unspecified “support” to Russia in the war in Ukraine despite continued US and European pressure.[26] Dong also stated that the US and Europe will not be able to interfere with “normal Russian-Chinese cooperation.”[27] Dong’s statement is a more overt rhetorical expression of Chinese support for Russia than statements from previous meetings between senior Russian and Chinese officials. Dong’s rhetorical support for Russia is likely primarily posturing against the West. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev recently made inflammatory comments about Japan likely in an effort to demonstrate Russia’s support of China’s opposition to the US alliance system in the Indo-Pacific.[28] ISW continues to assess that China is unwilling to establish the no-limits bilateral partnership with Russia that Russia desires.[29]

Kremlin officials and mouthpieces continued rhetorical efforts to prevent Moldova’s integration into the EU and to set information conditions to justify future Russian aggression against Moldova. Moldovan and Ukrainian officials reiterated on January 29 and 30 that Moldova and Ukraine are committed to resolving the Transnistrian conflict through diplomatic means and dialogue with Transnistria.[30] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger, who has recently fixated on the Moldovan-Transnistrian conflict, continued to claim that Moldova is engaging in military actions that threaten Transnistria, likely as part of efforts to justify future Russian aggression in the area as necessary to protect Transnistria.[31] The milblogger also responded to Ukrainian and Moldovan official statements, claiming that Moldova is only “verbally” interested in diplomatic solutions to the Transnistria conflict and is instead trying to use its economic policies to

“blackmail” Transnistria. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on January 31 that Moldova is economically “strangling” regions in Moldova that do not agree with the Moldovan government’s policies – likely referring to both Transnistria and Gagauzia, whose leaders have reportedly complained about Moldovan economic policies recently.[32] Zakharova claimed that the Moldovan government is using increased “Russophobic rhetoric” to divert attention from Moldova’s internal socio-economic and political problems.[33] Another Russian milblogger largely mirrored Zakharova’s claims, alleging that the Moldovan government is blaming Russia for Moldova’s socio-economic problems.[34] Kremlin narratives about alleged socio-economic issues in Moldova are likely aimed at promoting the idea that Moldova’s moves towards Western integration, particularly with the European Union (EU), are hurting Moldova’s economy and generating discontent among its population.

The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that it recently conducted a cyberattack on a Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) communications server. The GUR reported on January 30 that GUR hackers successfully hacked a Russian MoD server used to exchange information between Russian units. The GUR reported that Russia has installed the software on this server on various other strategic objects including military objects and that the GUR’s cyber operation is ongoing.[35] ISW has recently observed an increase in reported Ukrainian cyberattacks against Russian targets.[36]

Estonian Defense Forces Commander General Martin Herem stated that Russia may be behind recent GPS jamming in the Baltic region.[37] *Bloomberg* reported on January 31 that Herem stated that Russia may be “learning and testing” its jamming capabilities against the backdrop of the risk of future conflict with NATO. *Bloomberg* stated that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) previously confirmed the presence of Russian electronic warfare (EW) units in Kaliningrad Oblast, and Herem stated that Russia may also jam signals from ships in the Baltic Sea. Swedish Lieutenant Colonel Joakim Paasikivi previously stated that he believes that high GPS interference levels in December 2023 and January 2024 are a result of “Russian influence activities or so-called hybrid warfare.”[38]

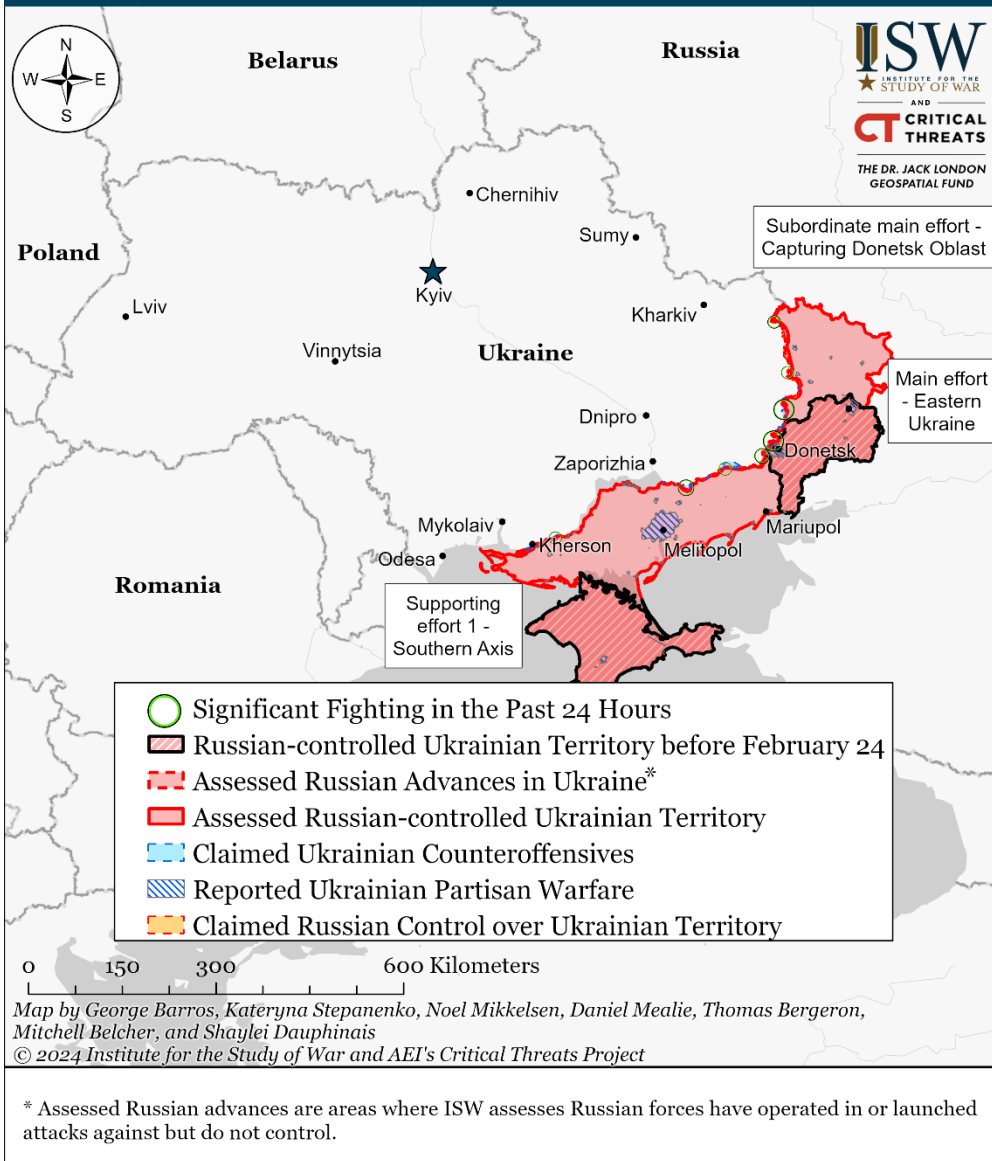
The Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers approved and submitted an updated version of a draft law on mobilization to the Verkhovna Rada on January 30.[39] The Verkhovna Rada withdrew the previous version of the draft law on mobilization for revisions on January 11 after discussions between Ukrainian legislators and political and military leadership.[40] The updated version of the draft law has not amended key provisions concerning the lowering of the mobilization age from 27 to 25 years of age, the discharge of servicemen after 36 months of service, and an effort to systematize Ukrainian mobilization infrastructure.[41] Deputy Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Digital Transformation Oleksandr Fedienko stated on January 31 that the Verkhovna Rada will likely consider the updated second draft law no earlier than March 2024.[42]

In accordance with its policy against speculating about future Ukrainian actions, ISW is not covering reported leaks concerning possible changes in the Ukrainian command structure. ISW will continue to report official statements by Ukrainian government officials and organizations as they are made.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces struck Russian targets in the vicinity of Belbek airfield in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea on January 31.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin doubled down on his maximalist and purposefully vague territorial objectives in Ukraine on January 31.**
- **Ukrainian and Russian forces conducted a prisoner-of-war (POW) exchange on January 31, exchanging 195 Russian POWs for 207 Ukrainian POWs.**
- **The European Union (EU) will reportedly fall short of its promise to provide Ukraine with one million artillery shells by March 1, 2024, as European leaders call on EU member states to intensify deliveries of ammunition to Ukraine.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed that Russian-Chinese relations are at their “best period in their history” in a January 31 call with Chinese Defense Minister Admiral Dong Jun.**
- **Kremlin officials and mouthpieces continued rhetorical efforts to prevent Moldova’s integration into the EU and to set information conditions to justify future Russian aggression against Moldova.**
- **The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that it recently conducted a cyberattack on a Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) communications server.**
- **Estonian Defense Forces Commander General Martin Herem stated that Russia may be behind recent GPS jamming in the Baltic region.**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Bakhmut, near Avdiivka, and southwest of Donetsk City amid positional engagements along the entire line of contact on January 31.**
- **Russian forces reportedly formed a “secret” battalion of penal recruits to conduct offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast but are reportedly disbanding the battalion.**
- **Russian and occupation officials continue efforts to erase Ukrainian cultural and ethnic identity in occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 31, 2024, 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 Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- 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

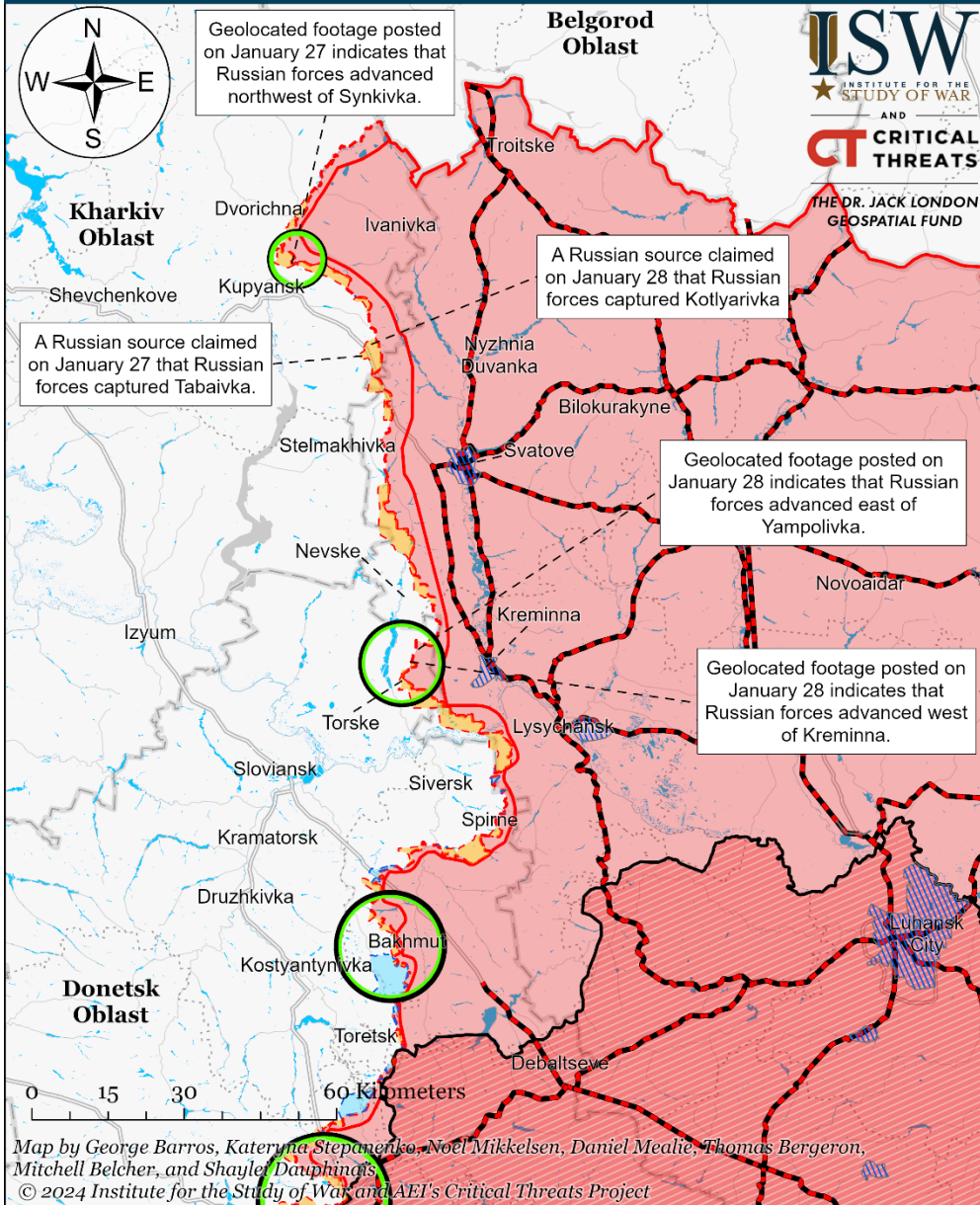
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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)

Positional fighting continued in the Kupyansk direction on January 31, but there were no confirmed changes to this area of the frontline. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District [WMD]) established a foothold in a forest area north of Synkivka (northeast of Kupyansk), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this reported Russian advance.[43] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting occurred northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka and southeast of Kupyansk near Kyslivka, Kotlyarivka, Tabaiivka, Berestove, and Krokhmalne.[44] A Ukrainian commander operating in the Kupyansk direction stated that Russian forces' main objective in the area was the capture of Kupyansk-Vuzlovy (immediately east of Kupyansk) and Kupyansk and that the capture of Synkivka would provide the quickest route for Russian forces to advance to these settlements.[45] Elements of the Russian 47th Tank Division (1st Guards Tank Army, WMD), including its 272nd Motorized Rifle Regiment, are reportedly operating near Tabaiivka and Krokhmalne, and elements of the 27th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Guards Tank Army, WMD) are reportedly operating near Berestove.[46]

Positional fighting continued in the Kreminna area on January 31, but there were no confirmed changes to this area of the frontline. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting occurred west of Kreminna near Terny, Torske, and Yampolivka; southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova and Kuzmyne; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).[47]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of January 31, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shaylee Dauphinais
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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	

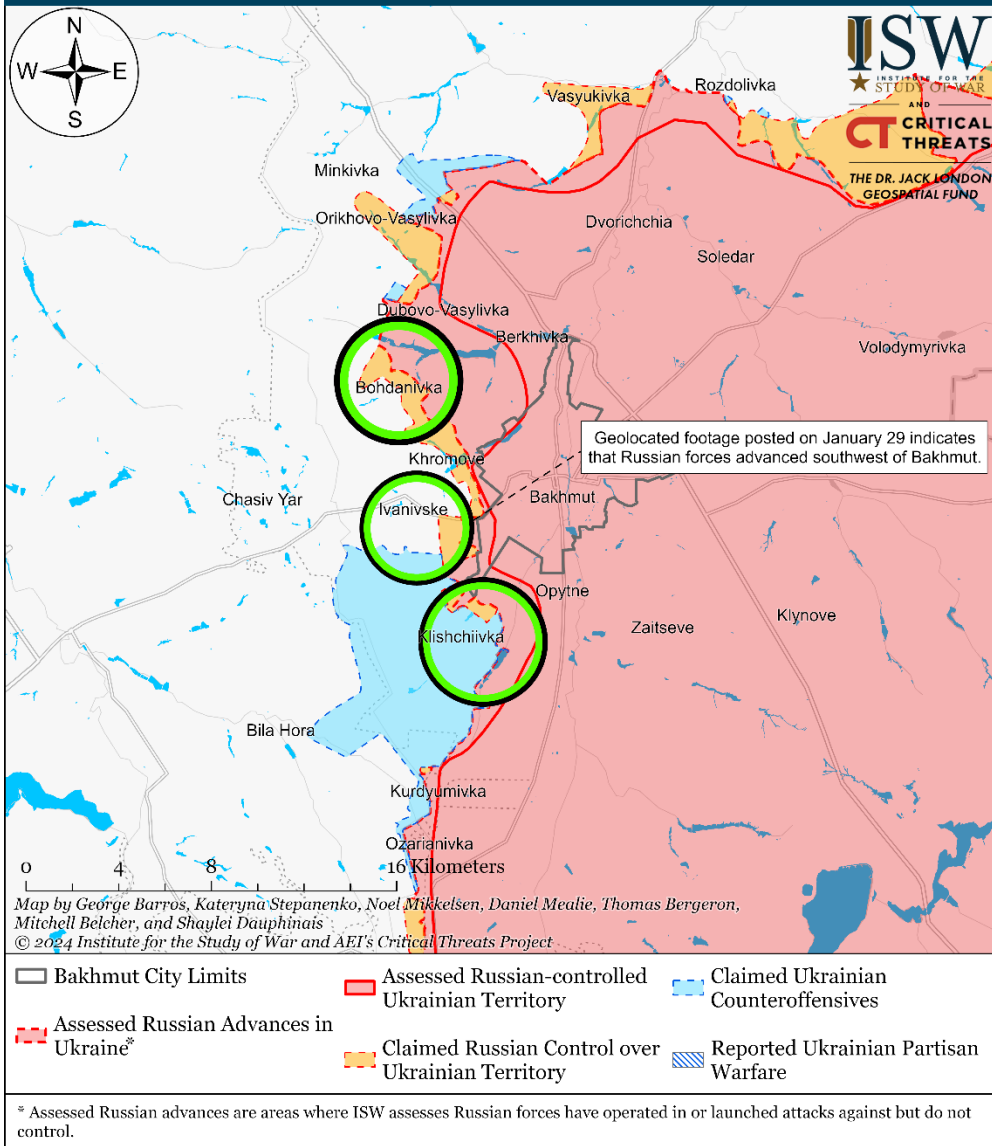
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: A Russian source claimed on January 29 that Russian forces advanced along a front one and a half kilometers wide and 750 meters deep near Synkivka.

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 recently made a confirmed advance near Bakhmut amid continued positional engagements in the area on January 31. Geolocated footage published on January 30 indicates that Russian forces advanced east of Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut).[48] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Khromove and Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[49] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division reportedly continue to operate northwest of Bakhmut and elements of the “Sever-V” Volunteer Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps) are reportedly operating near Hryhorivka (northwest of Bakhmut).[50]

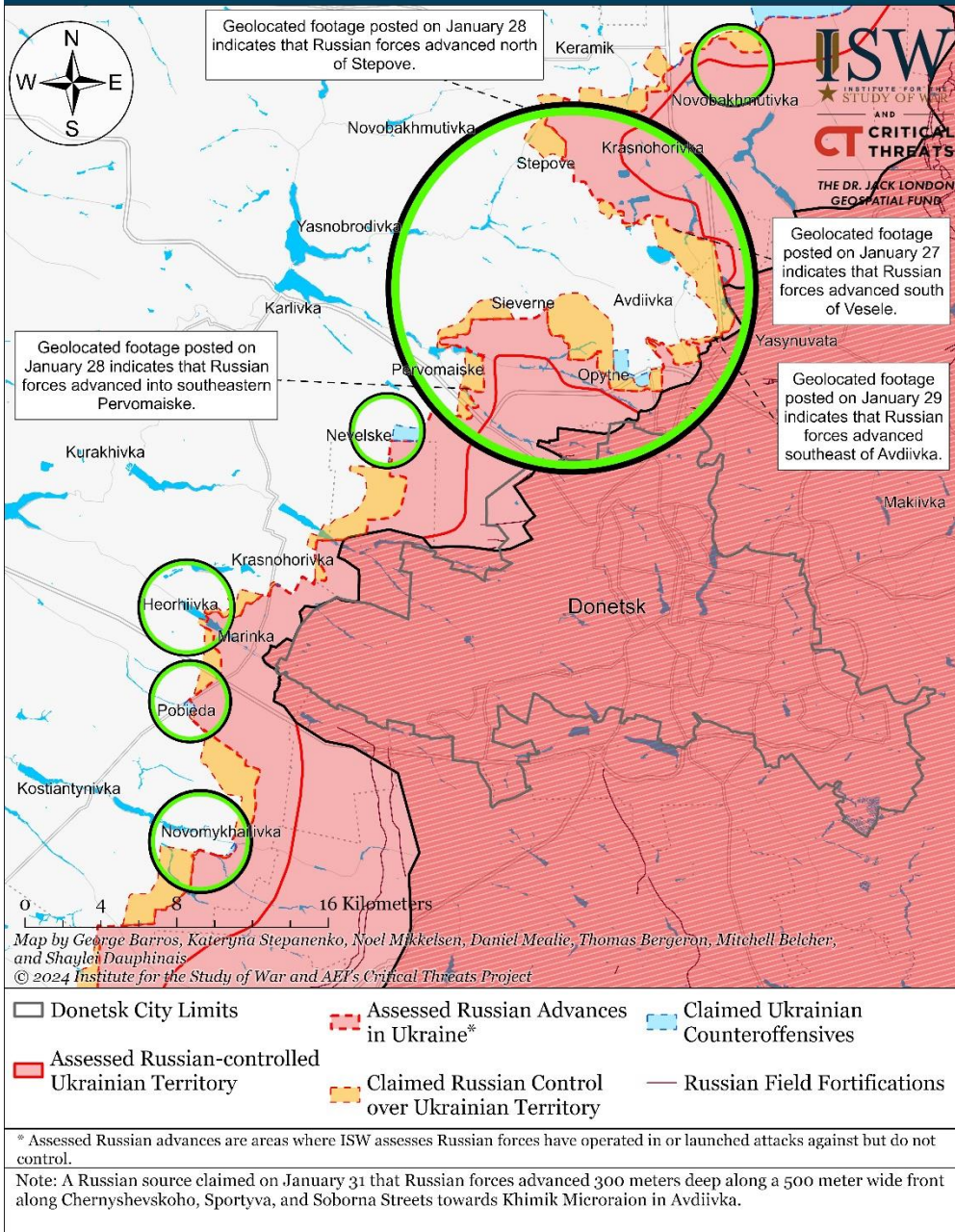
Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of January 31, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka amid continued positional engagements in the area on January 31. Geolocated footage published on January 31 indicates that Russian forces marginally advanced along Sportyvna Street in the southernmost residential area in Avdiivka.[51] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced along a front up to 500 meters wide to a depth of 300 meters along Chernyshevskoho, Sportyvna, and Soborna Streets in southern Avdiivka.[52] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued northwest of Avdiivka near Stepove; near the Avdiivka coke plant in northwestern Avdiivka; in southern and southeastern Avdiivka; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske and Nevelske.[53] Ukrainian Donetsk Oblast Military Administration Head Vadym Filashkin stated that Russian forces launched 24 glide bombs at Avdiivka on January 30.[54] Ukrainian military observer

Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC]) are operating near Vesele and Kamyanka (both northeast of Avdiivka); elements of the Russian 15th and 30th Motorized Rifle Brigades (both of the 2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) are reportedly operating near Novobakhmutivka and Berdychi (both northwest of Avdiivka); and elements of the Russian 1st Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC) and the 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA, CMD), with reinforcements from the 1487th Motorized Rifle Regiment and the 87th Infantry Regiment (both of the 1st DNR AC), are reportedly attacking from Opytne (south of Avdiivka), near the Tsarska Okhota restaurant area on Avdiivka's southern outskirts, and from the industrial zone southeast of Avdiivka.[55]

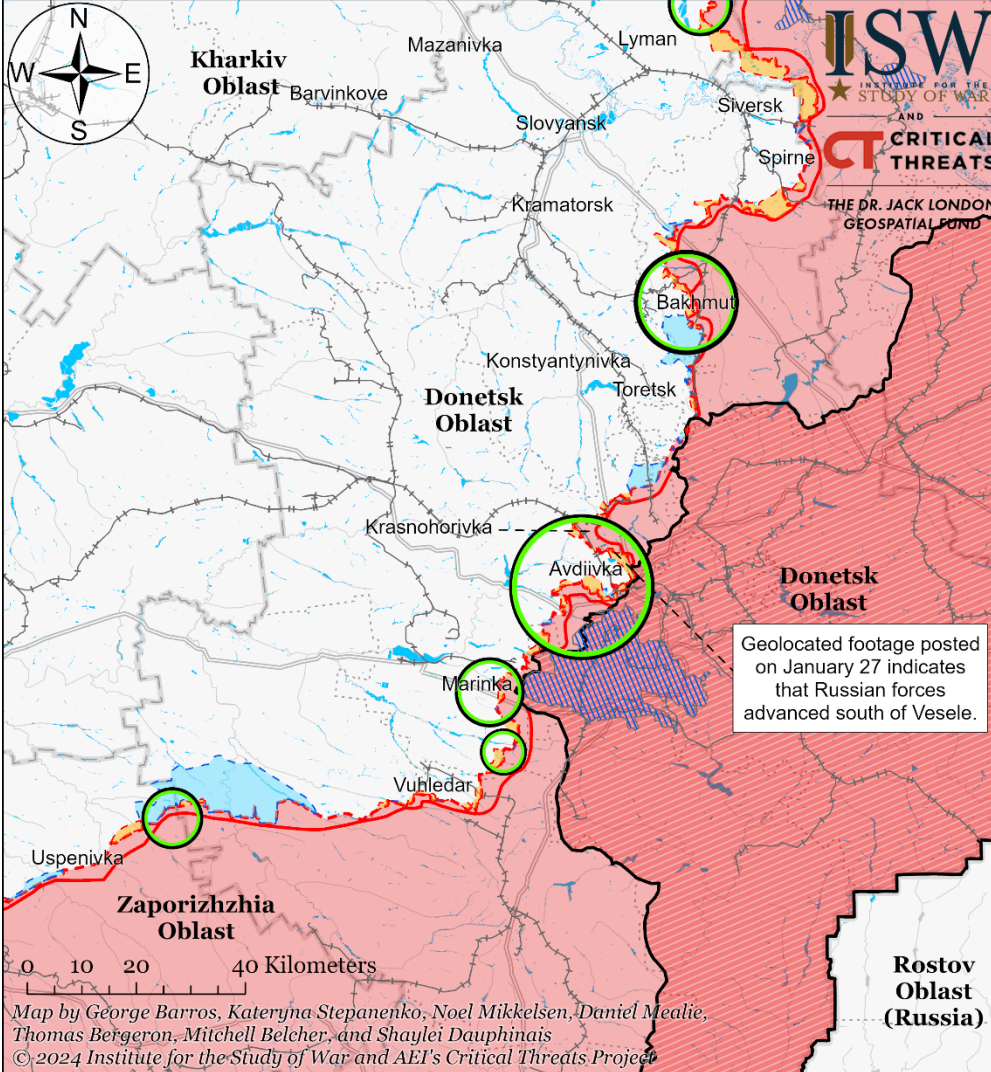
Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of January 31, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently made confirmed advances southwest of Donetsk City during renewed mechanized assaults in the area. Geolocated footage published on January 30 indicates that Russian forces advanced west of Solodke (about 7 kilometers southwest of Novomykhailivka) and shows that Russian forces sustained about a company's worth of heavy armored vehicle losses during assaults in the area.[56] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 30 that Russian forces lost two tanks, six MT-LB armored fighting vehicles, and one BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicle during an attack near

the Solodke-Kostyantynivka line.[57] Additional geolocated footage published on January 30 indicates that Russian forces advanced northeast of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[58] A Russian milblogger claimed on January 31 that further Russian advances near Solodke would create conditions for Russian forces to encircle Novomykhailivka.[59] Russian forces notably conducted mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast that resulted in significant losses starting in January 2023 while simultaneously conducting offensive operations in the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border area and Donetsk Oblast.[60] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka, Heorhiivka, and Pobieda.[61]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 31, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

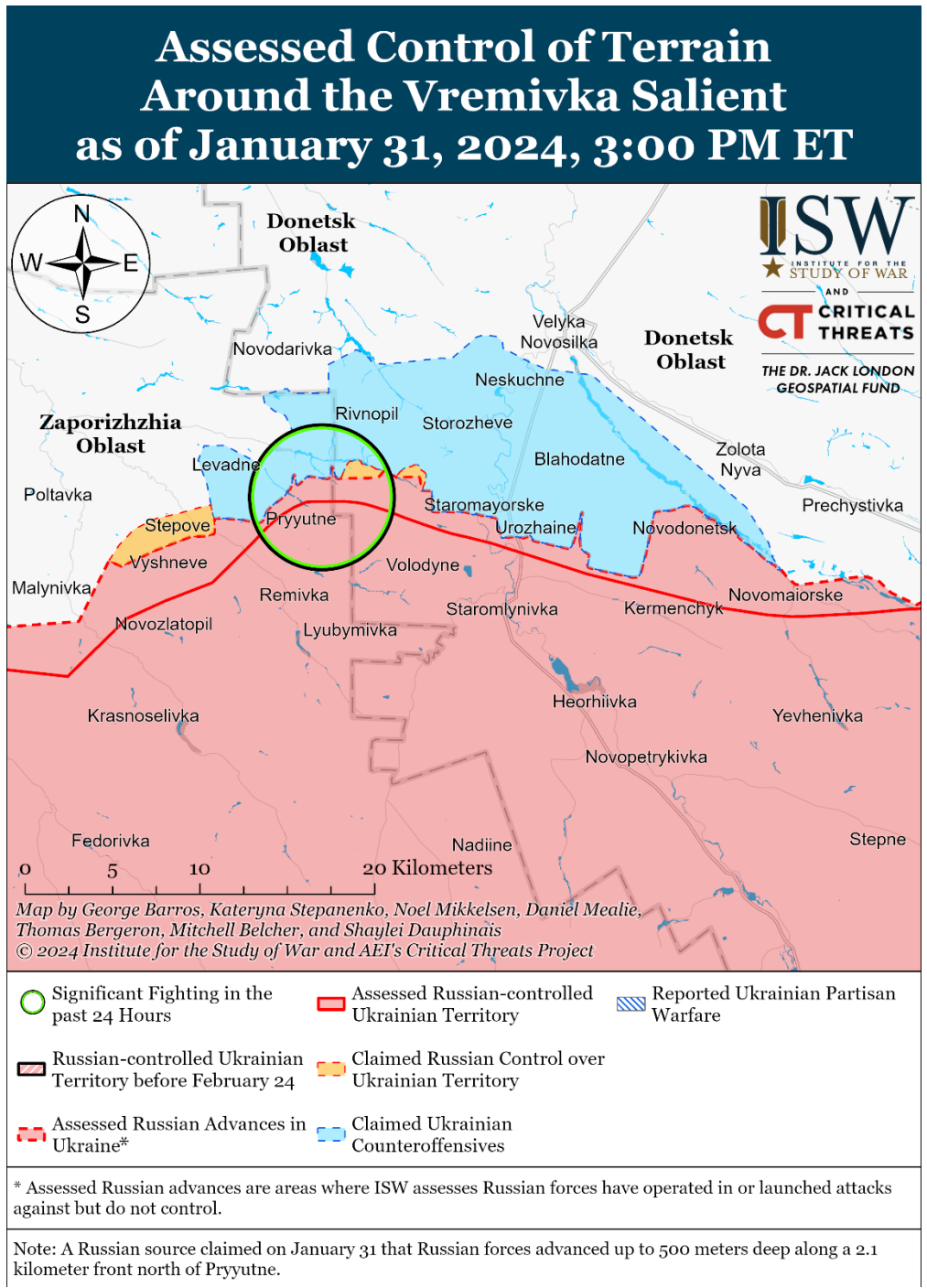


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads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

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

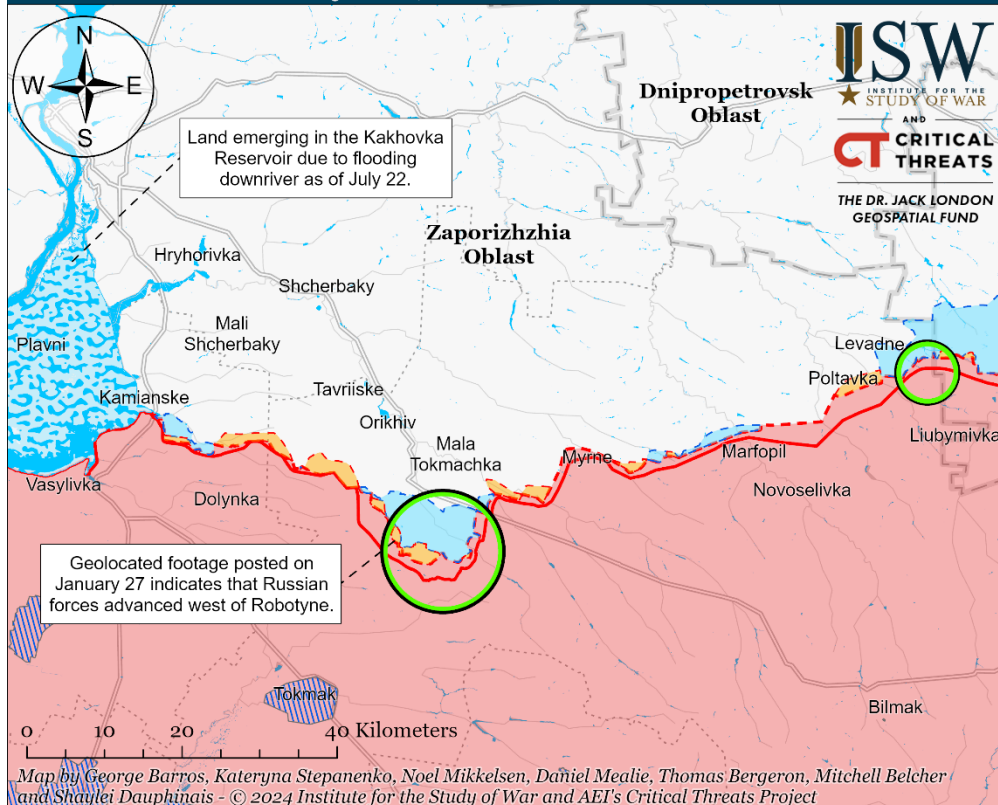
Russian forces reportedly advanced in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on January 31. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 500 meters deep along a 2.1 kilometer front north of Pryyutne (southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and that elements of the Russian 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) advanced west of Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of these claims.[62] The Ukrainian General staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian attack north of Pryyutne.[63]



Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on January 31, but there were no confirmed changes to this area of the frontline. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Robotyne.[64] Elements of the Russian 503rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (19th Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, Southern Military District) reportedly continue to operate near Novoandriivka (northwest of Robotyne).[65] Elements of the Russian 25th Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Protection Regiment (5th CAA, EMD) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhzhia direction.[66]



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of January 31, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher and Shaqile Dauphinais - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

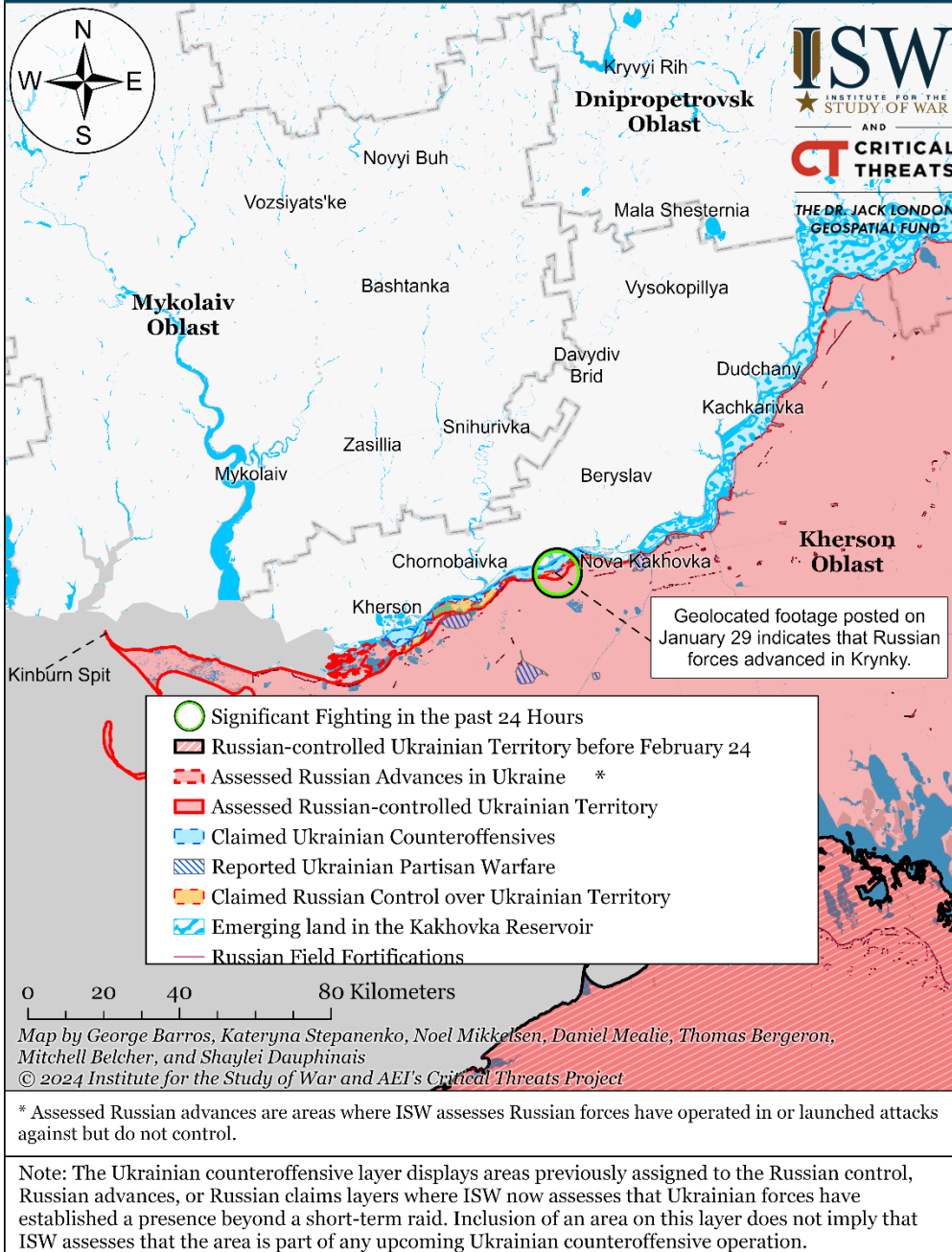


* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: A Russian source claimed on January 31 that Russian forces advanced up to 500 meters deep along a 2.1 kilometer front north of Pryutne.

Positional engagements continued in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast near Krynky on January 31.[67] Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces recently intensified infantry assaults in the east bank of Kherson Oblast and that 70 percent of Russian personnel sustained casualties in these assaults.[68] Humenyuk stated that Russian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro River are attempting to increase their use of first-person view (FPV) drones up to 70 drones per day, but that Ukrainian forces can regularly down half of them with small arms fire and electronic warfare (EW) systems.[69] Geolocated footage published on January 31 indicates that elements of the Russian 337th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (104th VDV Division) continue operating near Krynky.[70]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 31, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

Ukrainian military officials stated that Russian forces launched one Kh-59 cruise missile, three Iskander-M ballistic missiles, and 20 Shahed-136/131 drones at Ukraine on the night of January 30 to 31.[71] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 14 Shaheds over Mykolaiv, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, and Kharkiv oblasts.[72]

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

Russian forces reportedly formed a “secret” battalion of penal recruits that conducted offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast but are reportedly disbanding the battalion. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Current Time* outlet stated on January 31 that Russia formed the secret “Storm Gladiator” Battalion of former penal recruits to conduct infantry-led “meat assaults” and that Wagner and Chechen Akhmat personnel train the battalion.[73] *Current Time* stated that the Russian military formed the “Storm Gladiator” Battalion in September 2022, reorganized the battalion multiple times, and is now disbanding the battalion due to high casualties. *Current State* stated that the battalion is named after former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Lieutenant General Ivan “Spartak” Popov, who the Russian command removed from his command due to public insubordination.[74] *Current Time* stated that the 58th CAA attempted to use the “Storm Gladiator” Battalion to distinguish itself from other formations as the battalion only recruits young, physically fit, unmarried prisoners who have combat experience from previous wars or were in law enforcement or military structures.

Russian forces reportedly continue to struggle to form irregular formations and subsume the Wagner Group. A Russian insider source claimed that the Russian “Volunteer Corps” has turned into a “scam” because the corps was supposed to attract Wagner personnel who did not want to sign contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) or Rosgvardia.[75] The insider source claimed that the “Volunteer Corps” struggles with fuel and lubricants provisions and funding issues, noting that some personnel claim to have not received payment since the end of 2023. The insider source claimed that the Volunteer Corps’ patron, First Deputy of the Main Directorate of the Russian General Staff (GRU) Lieutenant General Vladimir Alekseyev, deliberately assumed control of the Volunteer Corps in order to funnel personnel from irregular, non-MoD formations into MoD formations to “atone” for Alekseyev’s prior support of the Wagner Group.

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

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited the Ural Transport Engineering Plant (Uraltransmash) on January 31 and received reports on the plant’s artillery system production and repairs.[76] Uraltransmash General Director Oleg Yemelyanov claimed that Uraltransmash has increased its production of self-propelled artillery systems by over six times since 2022 and noted that the first batch of new “Coalition SV” artillery systems is at the final stage of production. Shoigu criticized Uraltransmash’s head designer for delaying the release of a new artillery system and emphasized the necessity of speeding up testing and beginning serial production of new systems as quickly as possible.

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

The German government announced further military assistance deliveries to Ukraine on January 31. The German government updated its tracker of assistance to Ukraine to reflect an additional 24 armored personnel carriers, four tracked all-terrain vehicles, an unspecified number of IRIS-T missiles, over 1,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, three mine clearing tanks, 14 mine ploughs, one naval mine clearance system, and one Satcom surveillance system.[77]

The United States and Ukraine continued efforts to formalize oversight mechanisms to track US military assistance to Ukraine. US Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink stated on January 30 that the Inspector Generals of the US Department of State (DoS), Department of Defense (DoD), and USAID met with Ukrainian Defense Minister Umerov about security assistance oversight.[78] Umerov stated on January 31 that the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and US DoD signed a memorandum of understanding expressing both sides' commitment to strengthening control and transparency over US security assistance to Ukraine.[79]

Ukraine continues efforts to ramp up domestic and joint weapons production. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Dmytro Klimentov met with Czech Intergovernmental Defense Cooperation Agency (AMOS) Director Ales Vytecka and representatives of Dutch and Danish defense industries on January 30 and noted the need to increase the procurement and production of ammunition, mines, and drones.[80] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on January 30 that Ukraine is ramping up its domestic production of these weapons, especially long-range drones.[81]

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 and occupation officials continue efforts to erase Ukrainian cultural and ethnic identity in occupied territories. Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik stated on January 31 that Russian Human Rights Council Chairperson Valery Fadeyev visited occupied Luhansk Oblast and intends to form and chair a board of trustees for the Luhansk Oblast occupation academy of culture and arts.[82] Pasechnik stated that Fadeyev intends to chair the board of trustees and integrate the Luhansk Oblast occupation academy of culture and arts into existing Russian cultural initiatives, including those targeting youth and students, through the "Luhansk Project." [83]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov purposefully misrepresented the ongoing NATO Steadfast Defender 2024 exercises as a threat against Russia and claimed that Russia is taking "appropriate measures" in response.[84] ISW continues to assess that Russia will attempt to misrepresent these exercises as a threat to Russia despite the exercises' defensive nature in response to real Russian aggression against Ukraine and overt Russian threats to NATO states.[85]

Russian sources attempted to downplay a recent *Reuters* article stating that India seeks to distance itself from Russia, India's largest arms supplier.[86] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger and other Russian sources questioned the validity of the article and claimed that India is slowly diversifying its arms suppliers but is not attempting to transition to buying only Western systems.[87] The milbloggers claimed that India is attempting to expand its domestic arms industry and continues to need Russia for the supply of weapon and equipment components.[88] ISW continues to assess that Russia seeks to maintain close bilateral relations with India due to India's increasing importance as a customer for Russian oil exports and its potential as a partner in defense production.[89]

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

Belarusian Deputy Head of the Department of International Military Cooperation Colonel Dmitri Ryabikhin stated on January 30 that Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus are a "guarantor of...collective security within the Union State" and that this is "not the deployment [of nuclear weapons], but [their] return." [90] Belarusian Chief of the General Staff and First Deputy Defense Minister Major General Viktor Gulevich stated on January 31 that the new Belarusian military doctrine states that Russian nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus are "one of [Belarus'] main factors of strategic deterrence." [91]

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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