## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 12, 2023

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November 12, 2023, 3:55pm 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 1pm ET on November 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukraine appears to be intensifying attacks against Russian military, logistics, and other high-profile assets in rear areas in occupied Ukraine and Russia. The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on November 12 that Ukrainian partisans attacked a Russian military headquarters in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast on November 11, killing at least three Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and Rosgvardia officers.[1] The GUR's November 12 announcement follows a Ukrainian partisan attack against a former Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) People's Militia head on November 8; strikes against a Russian military base in occupied Skadovsk, Kherson Oblast and Black Sea Fleet assets in Crimea on November 9; and three rear-area strikes and partisan attacks in Russia on November 11.[2] Ukrainian forces have conducted a strike campaign specifically targeting occupied Crimea since summer 2023.[3]

The Russian government is attempting to downplay the extent of its efforts to strengthen control over the Russian information space. The Russian Ministry of Digital Development claimed on November 12 that it will only block specific virtual private network (VPN) services that an "expert commission" identifies as threats, likely aiming to prevent Russians from bypassing Russian censorship efforts and anonymizing themselves online.[4] The Ministry of Digital Development had responded to an inquiry from the "Novyi Lyudi" faction expressing concern over the Russian government's efforts to restrict access to information on the internet and fears that the Russian government will simply identify all VPN services as threats and block them.[5] The Russian government recently announced a ban on services that provide virtual and temporary mobile numbers starting on September 1, 2024, and Russians can use these mobile numbers in conjunction with VPN services to form anonymous online personas to evade Russian censorship efforts.[6] The Russian government is very unlikely to allow any VPNs to operate within Russia that would allow Russians to bypass censorship efforts and remain anonymous from the Russian government.

Russia continues to posture itself as a prominent security guarantor for authoritarian countries in Africa. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin stated during a television

interview with the "Voyennaya Priemka" program on November 12 that Russia will sign military cooperation agreements with six additional African countries in the near future.[7] Fomin stated that Russia currently has military agreements with 30 of the 54 African countries and added that Russia is "very active" on the African continent. Fomin did not specify which African countries Russia will sign agreements with, although Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov have met with delegations from Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, and Libya in recent months.[8] French-language outlet *Jeune Afrique* reported on November 11 that a group of Russian servicemen arrived in Burkina Faso to protect President Ibrahim Traore from future coup attempts, which Russian sources credited as an outcome of Shoigu's November 7 meeting with Burkinabe Minister of Defense and Veteran Affairs Brigadier General Kassoum Coulibaly.[9] The Kremlin appears to be using military agreements with Sahelian juntas to insert itself into the power vacuums created by the withdrawal of Western actors from the region, such as the UN's withdrawal from Mali.[10]

Russian forces conducted a limited series of missile strikes targeting southern Ukraine on November 12. Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces launched two Kh-59 cruise missiles and an Iskander ballistic missile at targets in southern Ukraine.[11] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian air defenses intercepted a Kh-59 cruise missile over Mykolaiv Oblast and that the second Kh-59 missile and the Iskander missile struck unpopulated areas.[12]

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- Ukraine appears to be intensifying attacks against Russian military, logistics, and other high-profile assets in rear areas in occupied Ukraine and Russia.
- The Russian government is attempting to downplay the extent of its efforts to strengthen control over the Russian information space.
- Russia continues to posture itself as a prominent security guarantor for authoritarian countries in Africa.
- Russian forces conducted a limited series of missile strikes targeting southern Ukraine on November 12.
- Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces made a marginal gain on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on November 12 amid ongoing ground operations.



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

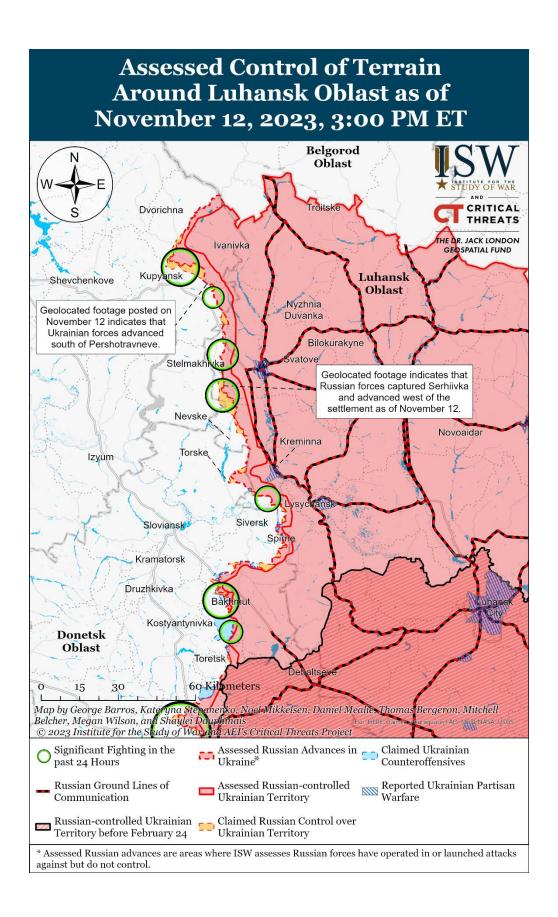
- Russian Main Effort Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives

#### Russian Main Effort - Eastern Ukraine

<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)

Russian forces continued offensive operations on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on November 12 and made confirmed advances. Geolocated footage published on November 12 shows that Russian forces advanced to positions west of Serhiivka (13km west of Svatove), corroborating Russian claims that Russian forces captured Serhiivka.[13] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces advanced near Lyman Pershi (12km northeast of Kupyansk), Kyslivka (20km southeast of Kupyansk), and Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna) on November 11.[14] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 12 that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful assaults near Synkivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk), Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk), Ivanivka (20km southeast of Kupyansk), Stelmakhivka (15km northwest of Svatove), Nadiya (15km southwest of Svatove), Novoyehorivka (16km southwest of Svatove), and the Serebryanske forest area (11km south of Kreminna).[15] A Russian milblogger also reported continued fighting near Synkivka, Ivanivka, Stelmakhivka, and Novoyehorivka.[16] Ukrainian Ground Forces Command Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Volodymyr Fityo stated that Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kupyansk direction but are regrouping because Russian forces have not achieved strategic successes in the past month of fighting.[17] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces seized the initiative in the Kupyansk area and surprised Ukrainian forces but have since failed to develop their battlefield successes.[18]

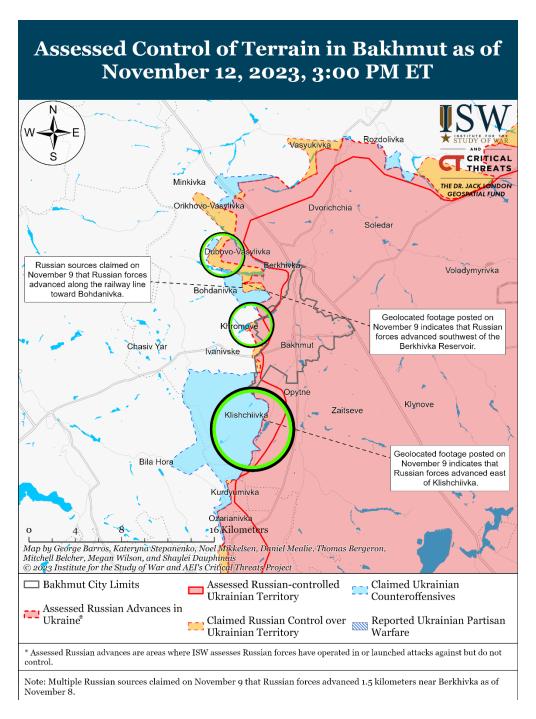
Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on November 12 and marginally advanced. Geolocated footage published on November 12 shows Ukrainian forces clearing a Russian position south of Pershotravneve (24km east of Kupyansk).[19] Russian military officials stated that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Synkivka, Zahoruykivka (16km east of Kupyansk), and Bilohorivka (13km south of Kreminna).[20]



# <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)

Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks near Bakhmut on November 12 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued to conduct assaults south of Bakhmut.[21] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled five Ukrainian assaults near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).[22]

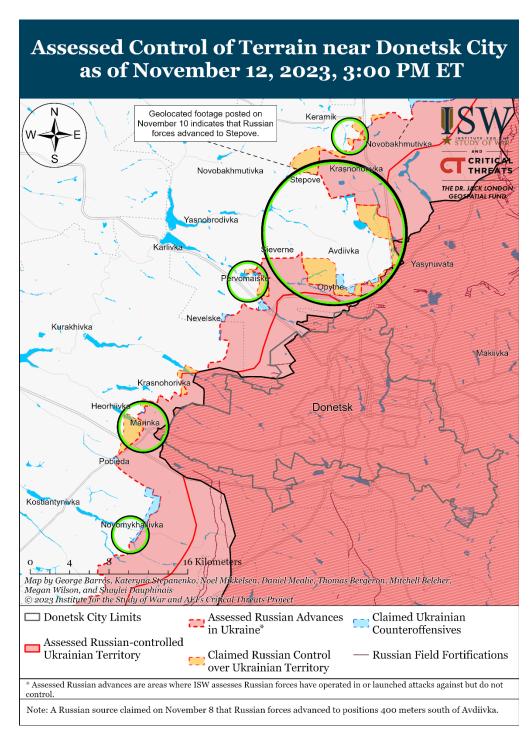
Russian forces continued limited localized offensive operations near Bakhmut on November 12 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled more than 10 Russian assaults near Dubovo-Vasylivka (8km northwest of Bakhmut), Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka, and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut).[23] Ukrainian Ground Forces Command Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Volodymyr Fityo reported that Ukrainian forces also repelled Russian assaults near Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut) and that Russian forces are conducting an active defense near Bakhmut.[24] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Russian forces have increased attempts to recapture previously lost positions in the Bakhmut direction.[25] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces out of positions near Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut) and Klishchiivka and that Russian forces have entrenched themselves in Klishchiivka.[26] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces regained control of the Berkhivka Reservoir north of Bakhmut, although it is unclear if the milblogger meant that Russian forces control all positions around the reservoir.[27] Another Russian milblogger amplified footage on November 11 purporting to show elements of the Russian 106th Airborne (VDV) Division operating in the Bakhmut direction.[28]



Russian forces continued offensive operations around Avdiivka on November 12 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled over 18 Russian assaults near Avdiivka, Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka), Tonenke (6km west of Avdiivka), and Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka).[29] Russian mibloggers claimed on November 11 and 12 that Russian forces continued to advance near Stepove (3km north of Avdiivka), with some milbloggers claiming that Russian forces reached the outskirts of the settlement and others claiming that Russian forces hold positions within the settlement.[30] A Ukrainian Telegram channel specifically covering the tactical situation around Avdiivka claimed on November 11 that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces out of Stepove after Russian forces had temporarily established

positions in the settlement.[31] ISW has not observed visual evidence of Russian forces holding positions on the outskirts of Stepove or in the settlement itself. Russian milbloggers claimed on November 11 and 12 that Russian forces are conducting heavy assaults west of the Avdiivka waste heap and near the Avdiivka Coke Plant in northern Avdiivka.[32] A Russian milblogger claimed on November 12 that Russian forces made marginal advances near the "Tsarska Okhota" restaurant immediately south of Avdiivka, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[33]

Ukrainian forces conducted recent successful counterattacks near Avdiivka and made marginal gains. Geolocated footage published on November 11 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced south of Avdiivka near the E50 (Donetsk City-Yenakiieve) highway on November 10.[34] A Russian milblogger claimed on November 12 that Ukrainian forces counterattacked and restored control over previously lost positions in the direction of Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka) in the past week.[35]

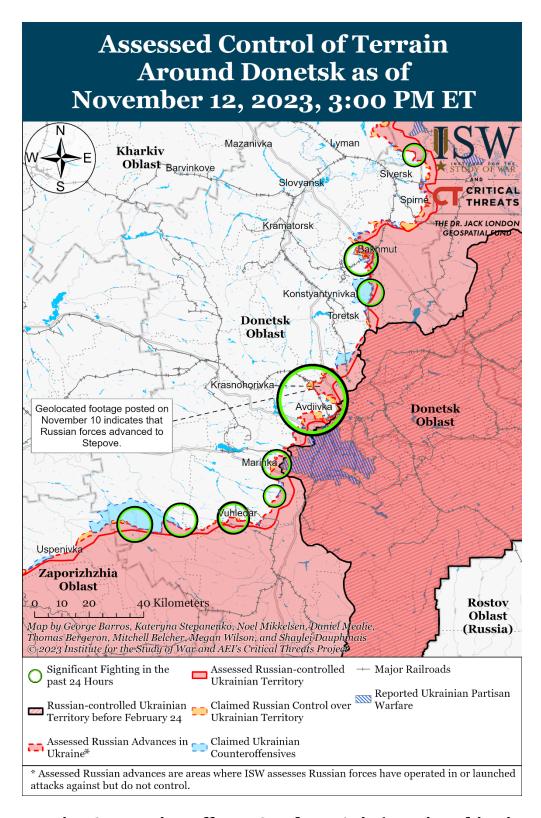


Russian forces continued offensive operations west and southwest of Donetsk City on November 12 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled over 22 Russian assaults near Marinka (immediately southwest of Donetsk City) and Novomykhailivka (11km southwest of Donetsk City).[36]

Ukrainian forces did not conduct any claimed or confirmed ground attacks west and southwest of Donetsk City on November 12.

Ukrainian forces recently made marginal gains in western Donetsk Oblast and reportedly conducted limited ground attacks on November 12. Geolocated footage published on November 11 shows that Ukrainian forces made marginal advances northeast of Mykilske (3km southeast of Vuhledar).[37] The Russian MoD claimed on November 12 that elements of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces repelled a Ukranian assault near Mykilske.[38]

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on November 12 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Vuhledar.[39] Russian milbloggers claimed that positional battles occurred near Vuhledar and that Russian forces are hesitant to approach the settlement due to heavy casualties that Russian forces suffered in failed attempts to capture Vuhledar during the Russian winter-spring 2023 offensive campaign.[40] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces attempted to break through Ukrainian defenses near Mykilske in the last week but did not specify an outcome.[41]



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

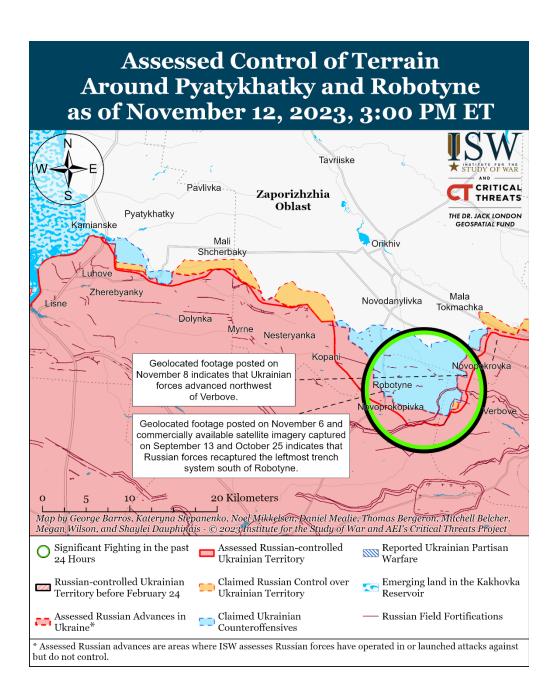
Ukrainian forces did not conduct any claimed or confirmed ground attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on November 12.

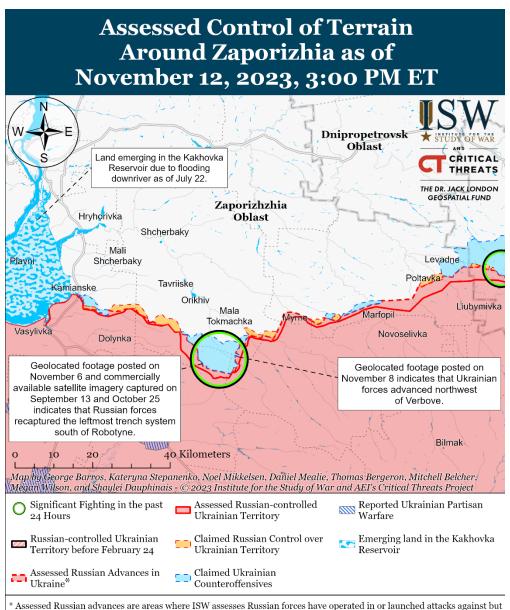
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on November 12 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported unsuccessful Russian assaults near Zolota Nyva (10km southeast of Velyka Novosilka) and Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[42] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces attacked south of Velyka Novosilka, including unsuccessful attacks near Staromayorske.[43] A Russian media aggregator claimed that Russian forces advanced near Staromayorske and Novodonetske (11km southeast of Velyka Novosilka) on November 11.[44] The Russian Vostok Battalion, which is deployed to the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, claimed that there is high activity along the entire Urozhaine-Staromykhailivka (9km south to 19km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) line and that their neighboring Russian troops went on the offensive, concluding that November 12 will be "an important day."[45]



Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on November 12 and reportedly advanced. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced near Novoprokopivka (just south of Robotyne) and took positions northwest of Verbove (10km east of Robotyne).[46] A Ukrainian military observer also reported that Ukrainian forces were successful west of Robotyne and knocked elements of the Russian 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade (58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) out of positions on tactical heights in the area.[47]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on November 12 and made marginal confirmed advances. Geolocated footage published on November 12 indicates that Russian forces made a marginal gain north of Kopani (6km northwest of Robotyne). [48] Additional geolocated footage published on November 6 indicates that Russian forces recently recaptured positions at previously lost trenches between Robotyne and Novoprokopivka. [49] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful assaults near Robotyne. [50] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 392nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (likely a mobilized unit) are storming Ukrainian positions near Pyatykhatky (26km northwest of Robotyne), although the North Ossetian volunteer battalions "Storm Ossetia" and "Alania" operating near Pyatykhatky claimed that there was no activity near the settlement. [51] The North Ossetian volunteer battalions claimed that there were recent unspecified counterattacks near Pyatykhatky, suggesting some level of ground activity in a sector of the front in western Zaporizhia Oblast that has been largely dormant since the early weeks of the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive. [52]



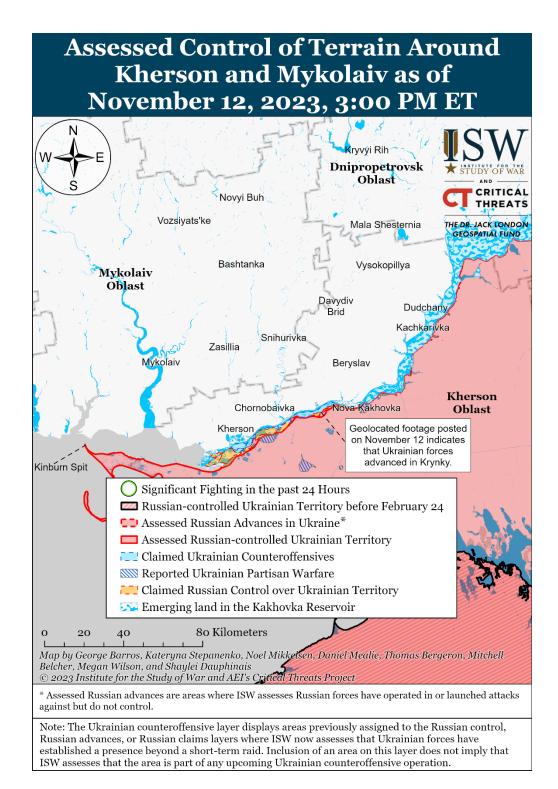


<sup>\*</sup> Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Ukrainian forces made a marginal gain on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on November 12 amid ongoing ground operations. Geolocated footage published on Novmeber 12 shows that Ukrainian forces made marginal advances further into Krynky (30km northeast of Kherson City and 2km from the Dnipro River).[53] Russian milbloggers continued to claim that Russian forces tried and failed to push Ukrainian forces from Krynky and that Ukrainian forces are conducting offensive operations near Poyma (10km southeast of Kherson City and 4km from the Dnipro River), Pishchanivka (13km southeast of Kherson City and 3km from the Dnipro River), and Pidstepne (17km east of Kherson City and 4km from the Dnipro River).[54] The milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces have transferred additional personnel to the Krynky area and that Ukrainian forces intend to cut Russian logistics lines and strike infrastructure connecting the Russian front line to rear areas in occupied Crimea, Kherson Oblast, and Zaporizhia Oblast.[55] One milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are advancing towards the E58 Oleshky-Kamianka highway and expressed concern that

Ukrainian forces may threaten Russian positions near the E58-E97 intersection south of the Poyma-Pishchanivka-Pidstepne line.[56] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported that Russian forces have committed relatively few units to defend the Oleshky-Nova Kakhovka Road and to respond to Ukrainian operations on the east bank, likely to conserve combat power within the broader "Dnepr" Group of Forces.[57]

Russian forces conducted air and artillery strikes against the west (right) bank of Kherson Oblast on November 12. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces conducted five airstrikes with 31 glide bombs and 55 artillery strikes with 290 shells against targets in the west (right) bank of Kherson Oblast, including Kherson City and Antonivka as well as Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast.[58] A Russian milblogger posted footage of elements of the Russian "Dnepr" Group of Forces striking a Ukrainian ammunition depot in the west bank of Kherson Oblast.[59] Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces conducted a missile strike against the Honchar library in Kherson City on November 11.[60]



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

Nothing significant to report.

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

Russian outlet *Izvestia* reported on November 8 and 12 that Russia is creating a stratospheric strike and reconnaissance complex (RUK).[61] Sources in the Russian MoD and defense industrial base (DIB) stated that Russia will suspend the RUK, comprised of several containers of radars, electronic reconnaissance systems, and optical-electronic stations, from an undetermined aircraft that can fly at high altitudes, including in the stratosphere. The RUK will have a modular configuration, allowing servicemen to install and remove different systems depending on the assigned mission. The RUK is capable of detecting battlefield and rear area targets in real time and providing target designations to artillery, aviation, and naval systems. *Izvestia* reported that Russia is testing the M-55 "Geophysica" high-altitude supersonic aircraft as a potential aircraft for the RUK. Russian military expert Dmitry Kornev told *Izvestia* that the RUK will primarily provide target designations for MLRS and Iskander missile systems, Su-34 and Su-34M bombers, and Kinzhal hypersonic systems. Kornev stated that Russian forces may also use the RUK for target designation for Kalibr cruise missiles and hypersonic Zircon missiles in the future. Russian milbloggers praised the RUK as the future of warfare.[62]

<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)

See topline text.

### **Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov continues to pander to his own nationalist base. Kadyrov announced the opening of the "Sheikh Mansur" volunteer battalion's base in Gudermes, Chechen Republic on November 11.[63] Kadyrov stated that Chechnya is proud to have a battalion bearing the name of Sheikh Mansur, an 18th century Chechen fighter who opposed Russian imperial rule. Kadyrov stated that Mansur "only wanted to achieve justice so everyone could live in peace and harmony" and freely practice their religion. Kadyrov announced the creation of this battalion on October 24, generating outrage from Russian ultranationalists.[64] ISW previously assessed that Kadyrov will likely continue to draw the ire of Russian ultranationalists who are increasingly opposed to migrants who come from predominantly Muslim Central Asia countries and other religious minorities in Russia with his continued efforts to appeal to his core Muslim constituencies.[65]

Russian officials continue information operations intended to invalidate Ukrainian identity. Russian National Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev denied the existence of Ukraine as a sovereign country and Ukrainian cultural identity in a Telegram post on November 12.[66] Medvedev also claimed that the Ukrainian government is illegitimate.

<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)

Belarusian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin visited the United Arab Emirates on November 12 and reportedly plans to sign a bilateral agreement on military cooperation.[67]

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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- [2] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-9-2023; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-10-2023; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-11-2023; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-8-2023
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- [6] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-19-2023
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