Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 28, 2023

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November 28, 2023, 7:45pm ET

Click here to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Click here to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

Click here to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30pm ET on November 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated a two-part conception of Russian identity in a speech on November 28: a "Russian nation" – claimed to include Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians – at the center of Russian identity; and a wider "Russian world" including other non-East Slavic ethnicities in both modern Russia and the former territory of the Soviet Union and Russian Empire. Putin made a lengthy speech on Russian identity at the World Russian People's Council on November 28. Putin reiterated his previous false claims that the "Russian nation" and people are composed of ethnic Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians who were artificially and violently divided via policy miscalculations during and after the fall of the Soviet Union, arguing Russia (the state) should unify this "Russian nation."[1] Putin defined the concept of the Russkiy Mir as a union of people who feel a spiritual connection to the "Motherland," consider themselves to be native Russian speakers, and are carriers of Russian history and culture regardless of their national or religious affiliation. Putin, however, pointed out that there cannot be Russia (as a state) or the Russkiy Mir without ethnic Russians and implied that current Russian citizens and "all other peoples who have lived and are living in [Russia]" make up Russia. Putin geographically defined the Russkiy Mir as the Ancient Rus' (Kyivan Rus), the Kingdom of Muscovy, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the contemporary Russian Federation, indicating that the Kremlin's concept likely also includes "Russian compatriots" in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Putin also expanded his definition of "Western Russophobia" to include claimed aggression against other ethnicities such as Tatars, Chechens, Yakuts, and Buryats, in addition to ethnic Russians. Putin also called on Russian federal subjects to strengthen and protect Russia's cultural and religious diversity. Putin previously outlined similar definitions of "ethnically Russian people" in his "Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" essay in July 2021.[2] Putin's November 28 speech draws a clear distinction between Putin's vision of the Russian nation as a "triune people" composed of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, while other regional identities in Russia make up Russia as a country and shared "Russian world." Putin's articulation of a Russian nation (including Ukrainians and dominated by Moscow) reiterates

longstanding Kremlin justifications for its invasion of Ukraine and aggression toward its neighbors, and Putin's claim that "western Russophobia" affects all the ethnicities in the Russian state is likely intended to rally support among Russian citizens who are not ethnically Russian for Putin's war.

Head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill of Moscow stated that Russia needs to "significantly adjust" its migration policies for the "preservation of Russian culture," highlighting the perceived superiority of ethnic Russians to other regional ethnicities. Kirill argued during a speech at the World Russian People's Council on November 28 that Russia's current migration policies allow self-segregated migrant communities in Russia to create "closed ethnic enclaves" that "are a breeding ground for corruption, organized ethnic crime, illegal migration, terrorism, extremism, and tension within Russian society."[3] Kirill stated that a migrant's economic productivity or Russian citizenship does not free them from the requirement to respect Russian society, people, and traditions. Kirill warned that migrants are "changing the appearance of Russian cities" and "deforming" Russia's singular linguistic, cultural, and legal traditions. Kirill added that Russian companies' profits cannot be more important than the values of the Russian state. Kirill's remarks follow several weeks of increasingly frequent anti-migrant rhetoric within Russian society and presentations of anti-migrant legislation by Russian officials.[4] Patriarch Kirill's anti-migrant and xenophobic rhetoric is more closely aligned with Russian government policies towards migrants and non-Russian ethnicities in Russia than Putin's claimed inclusivity under the "Russian world."

Russian officials appear to be attempting to further disenfranchise migrants living in Russia, likely to support ongoing efforts to coerce migrants into military service while also appeasing increasingly xenophobic Russian ultranationalists. Kremlin news wire *TASS* reported on November 28 that the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) drafted a proposed bill that would create a "controlled stay" regime in Russia for migrants who do not have legal grounds for staying in the country, including those with expired or nullified migration documents and those who have illegally entered Russia.[5] The bill will reportedly propose the following restrictions on migrants in Russia on the controlled stay regime: a ban on the migrants' ability to register legal entities and as individual entrepreneurs, engage in real estate transactions, purchase and sell vehicles, drive a car, obtain a driver's license, open a bank account, transfer money, or get married.[6] The draft bill will reportedly require migrants living under the regime to notify authorities about their residence and travel from Russia and will subject migrants who violate the restrictions to deportation or detention in a special facility.[7]

The restrictions of the proposed migration status likely aim to further alienate large numbers of migrants from economic and social life in Russia and make military service one of the few avenues for remaining in the country. Russian authorities are engaged in an ongoing widespread effort to coerce both migrants and naturalized Russian citizens into signing military contracts by threatening deportation and loss of citizenship.[8] Russian authorities are also engaged in a parallel effort to compel migrants to fight in Ukraine in exchange for Russian citizenship.[9] The proposed bill also likely aims to appease Russian ultranationalists who have increasingly called for harsh crackdowns on migrant communities and have bemoaned Russian migration policies.[10] One Russian ultranationalist called the restrictions half-measures and urged Russian authorities to enact even more restrictive policies on migrants.[11] The Kremlin appears to be continuing to struggle to

reconcile efforts to increase Russian industrial capacity while also coercing migrants into military service and disincentivizing them from working in Russia.[12] Efforts to appease Russian ultranationalists may explain the increasingly inconsistent and contradictory Kremlin policies concerning the coercion of migrants into military service and the growing strains on the Russian domestic labor force.[13]

The Kremlin continues to focus heavily on setting informational conditions for the upcoming 2024 Russian presidential elections and will likely formally commence Putin's "campaign" on December 14. The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on November 28 that Russian Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko held a closed meeting in November 2023 with the heads of occupation administrations and unspecified Russian federal subjects during which he delivered directives for strengthening preparations for elections.[14] These directives reportedly include allocating social assistance to voters from regional budgets and the intensifying rhetoric about supposed positive trends in the Russian economy.[15] This reported focus on economic well-being is consistent with previous reports that the Kremlin intends to downplay the Russian war in Ukraine ahead of the elections.[16] Kiriyenko reportedly ordered occupation heads to issue Russian passports to 85 percent of residents in occupied Ukraine before the presidential elections in March 2024, likely to support efforts to falsely claim large voter turnout and legitimize the Kremlin's control of occupied territories.[17] Russian Communist Party Head Gennady Zyuganov stated on November 28 that the Russian Federation Council will officially announce the start of the Russian presidential campaign on December 13, 2023.[18] Russian President Vladimir Putin will reportedly hold his annual live "Direct Line" forum and annual press conference in tandem on December 14, and the official start of the campaign on December 13 further suggests that the Kremlin plans to use the tandem event as the rollout for Putin's presidential campaign.[19]

Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated on November 28 that unspecified actors poisoned GUR Head Kyrylo Budanov's wife Marianna Budanova.[20] Yusov stated that Budanova is currently undergoing treatment and could not confirm or deny reports of the poisoning of GUR employees.[21] Ukrainian outlet *Ukrainska Pravda* reported, citing unspecified sources, that unspecified actors also poisoned other GUR employees who are now undergoing treatment.[22] An unspecified Ukrainian special services official told Ukrainian outlet *RBK-Ukraine* that Budanov had not been poisoned.[23]

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law significantly increasing Russian federal expenditures in 2024, reportedly including a record level of defense spending. Putin signed the law on the 2024 federal budget and the planned budgets for 2025 and 2026 on November 27.[24] The 2024 federal budget accounts for 36.66 trillion rubles (\$412.5 billion) in state expenses and a budget deficit of 1.6 trillion rubles (\$9.5 billion).[25] The Russian Finance Ministry estimated in October 2023 that 2023 budget expenditures amounted to 32.5 trillion rubles (\$365.7 billion), suggesting that the 2024 budget will account for a roughly 13 percent increase in overall expenditures.[26] Russian business journalists Farida Rustamova and Maksim Tovkalyo stated on November 15 that Russian authorities plan to spend 14 trillion rubles (\$157.5 billion) on defense and law enforcement, representing 39 percent of all federal government spending.[27] *Reuters* reported on October 2 that the 2024 budget would allocate 10.78 trillion rubles (\$121.3 billion) to national defense, representing 29.4 percent of the national budget.[28] The Russian Finance Ministry reportedly allocated 6.41 trillion rubles (\$72.1 billion) to defense in 2023, although this number is

likely higher given that a substantial portion of the Russian federal budget is still classified.[29] The roughly third or more of the federal budget going to defense spending, if true, will represent a record level of Russian defense spending.[30] The federal budget does not amount to the entirety of Russian spending on defense, however, as the Kremlin has relied on regional budgets and private business entities to augment funding for the ongoing war effort.[31] The draft budgets for 2025 and 2026 have roughly just as large expenditures as the 2024 budget, 34.38 trillion rubles (\$387.9 billion) and 35.59 trillion rubles (\$400.4 billion) respectively, and suggests that the Kremlin is planning to allocate large portions of its expenditures to support a long war effort in Ukraine.[32]

A prominent Russian milblogger continued to highlight mid-level command problems among Russian forces operating on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast, amid continued complaints about weak Russian capabilities and the vulnerability of Russian ground lines of communications (GLOCs) on the east bank. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian personnel in smaller units such as the 1822nd Battalion did not know their commanding officers or details about their supervisory structure "for a long time." [33] The Russian milblogger claimed that unspecified company commanders in the 1822nd Battalion continually ordered units to capture islands in the Dnipro River Delta despite suffering heavy losses and conducting minimal casualty evacuations and that the 1822nd Battalion's personnel could not contact a higher-level commander to address their complaints.[34] The milblogger noted that the Russian military command ordered elements of the 1822nd Battalion to capture islands in the Dnipro River as a punishment while contract soldiers remain on the east bank, suggesting that the 1822nd is mainly staffed with mobilized personnel.[35] The milblogger claimed that "respected authorities" are investigating problems in the 1822nd Battalion and that mid-level Russian commanders are attempting to identify the personnel who originally voiced their complaints.[36] The milblogger concluded that Russian "Dnepr" Grouping of Forces Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky "inherited a difficult legacy" in reference to persistent problems among Russian forces operating in the east bank of Kherson Oblast.[37]

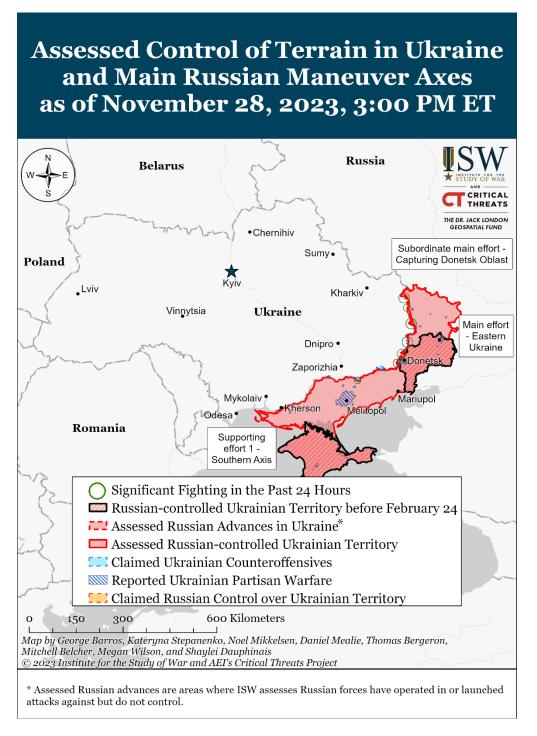
A Russian insider source claimed on November 28 that Russian authorities detained at least three additional Moscow-based Federal Security Service (FSB) employees in connection with a 5-billion-ruble (\$55.6 million) bribery case. The insider source claimed that Russian authorities detained "Ushakov" and two unnamed "Directorate M" employees.[38] The source claimed that Russian authorities are also holding two of the FSB's "Directorate T" employees in a pre-trial detention center and are investigating other senior FSB employees as part of the same investigation. ISW reported on November 17 that Russian authorities detained several FSB employees on November 10 and 16 for accepting a bribe to dismiss a corruption case against the Merlion Group of Companies, a Russian IT company and technology distributor.[39] ISW cannot confirm the most recent detentions, but they are consistent with the previously reported detentions.

Iranian Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Mehdi Farhi announced on November 28 that Russia and Iran finalized the purchase of Russian aircraft.[40] Iranian news agency *Tasnim*, citing Farhi, reported that Russia will provide Iran with an unspecified number of Su-35 fighter jets, Mi-28 attack helicopters, and Yak-130 combat training aircraft. Iranian media and the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technology reported in early September that the Iranian Air Force had received Russian Yak-130s based on social media footage.[41] *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty* observed that Iran last bought foreign aircraft from the Soviet Union in 1990.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated a two-part conception of Russian identity in a speech on November 28: a "Russian nation" claimed to include Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians at the center of Russian identity; and a wider 'Russian world" including other non-East Slavic ethnicities in both modern Russia and the former territory of the Soviet Union and Russian Empire.
- Head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill of Moscow stated that Russia needs to "significantly adjust" its migration policies for the "preservation of Russian culture," highlighting the perceived superiority of ethnic Russians to other regional ethnicities.
- Russian officials appear to be attempting to further disenfranchise migrants living in Russia, likely to support ongoing efforts to coerce migrants into military service while also appeasing increasingly xenophobic Russian ultranationalists.
- The Kremlin continues to focus heavily on setting informational conditions for the upcoming 2024 Russian presidential elections and will likely formally commence Putin's "campaign" on December 14.
- Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated on November 28 that unspecified actors poisoned GUR Head Kyrylo Budanov's wife Marianna Budanova.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law significantly increasing Russian federal expenditures in 2024, reportedly including a record level of defense spending.
- A prominent Russian milblogger continued to highlight mid-level command problems among Russian forces operating on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast, amid continued complaints about weak Russian capabilities and the vulnerability of Russian ground lines of communications (GLOCs) on the east bank.
- A Russian insider source claimed on November 28 that Russian authorities detained at least three additional Moscow-based Federal Security Service (FSB) employees in connection with a 5-billion-ruble (\$55.6 million) bribery case.
- Iranian Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Mehdi Farhi announced on November 28 that Russia and Iran finalized the purchase of Russian aircraft.
- Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, near Avdiivka, west and southwest of Donetsk City, in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced near Kupyansk and Avdiivka.
- Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov announced on November 27 that Chechnya formed two new regiments and one battalion subordinated under the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and an operational battalion subordinated under Rosgvardia.

• Occupation administrations in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts signed an agreement to develop closer economic ties with Rostov and Voronezh oblasts on November 28.



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of

these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

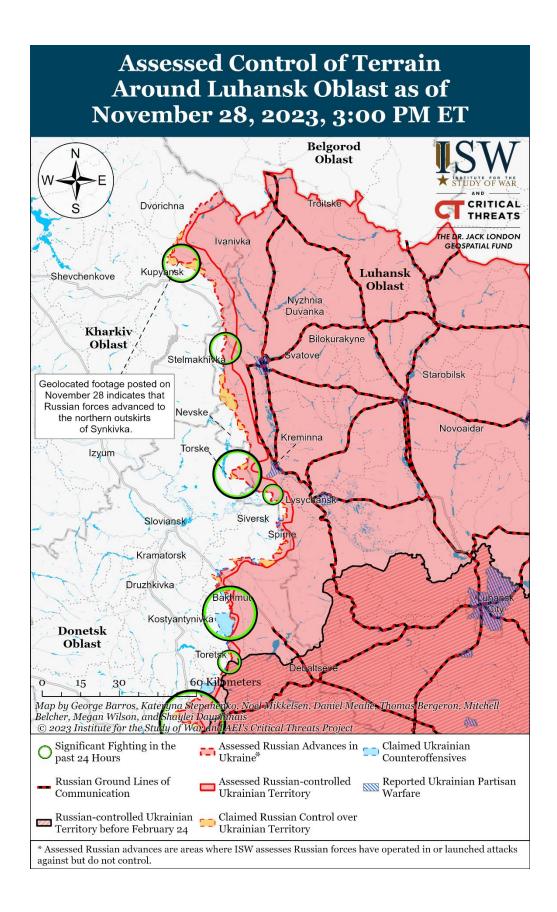
- Russian Main Effort Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 Capture the entirety of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

Russian Main Effort - Eastern Ukraine

<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 localized offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on November 28 and made confirmed gains. Geolocated footage published on November 27 and 28 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of Synkivka (9km northeast of Kupyansk) and west of Pershotravneve (20km northeast of Kupyansk).[42] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled more than four Russian assaults near Synkivka and Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk) in the Kupyansk direction and more than 12 Russian assaults near Stelmakhivka (15km northwest of Svatove), Yampolivka (17km west of Kreminna), Terny (18km west of Kreminna), Torske (15km west of Kreminna), and the Serebryanske forest area (10km south of Kreminna) in the Lyman direction.[43] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces continued offensive operations near Orlyanka (22km east of Kupyansk) but did not advance.[44] A Ukrainian commander operating in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction stated that Russian forces usually conduct assaults in infantry groups of 10 to 30 personnel each without armored vehicle support.[45]

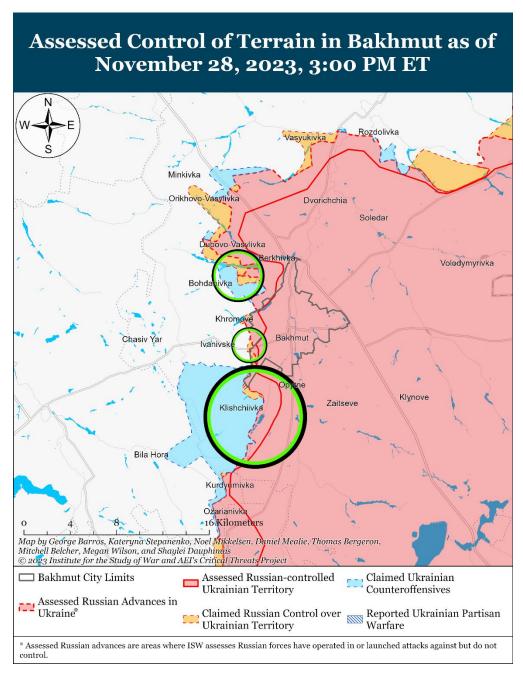
The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the Russian 6th Combined Arms Army (Western Military District) and other unspecified elements of the Russian Western Grouping of Forces repelled four Ukrainian assaults northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka on November 28.[46]



<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 south of Bakhmut on November 28 but did not make any confirmed or claimed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued assault operations south of Bakhmut.[47] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and in the direction of Chasiv Yar (13km west of Bakhmut).[48]

Russian forces continued ground attacks around Bakhmut on November 28 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut), Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka, and Andriivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).[49] A Russian milblogger claimed on November 27 that Russian forces advanced into Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut) itself, advanced near Berkhivka (3km north of Bakhmut), and achieved tactical successes near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[50] Other Russian milbloggers claimed on November 28 that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked dominant tactical heights northwest of Klishchiivka and near Khromove.[51] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 137th Guards Airborne (VDV) Regiment (106th Guards VDV Division) are operating near Soledar (9km northeast of Bakhmut).[52]

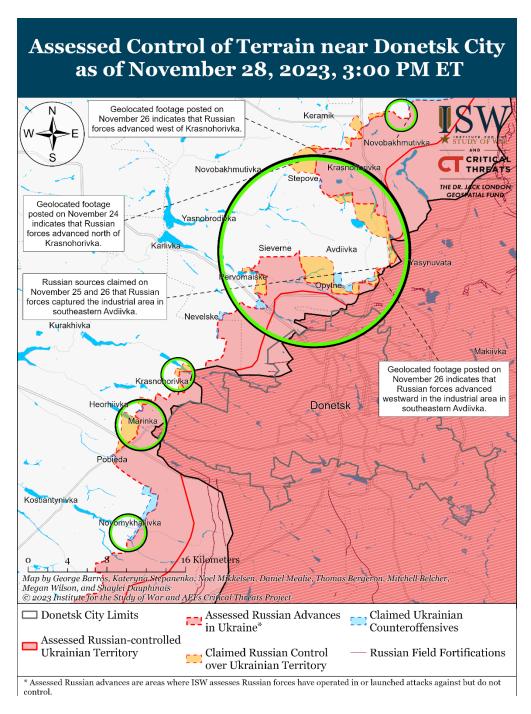


A Russian milblogger claimed on November 28 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack northwest of Horlivka near Mayorske (10km northwest of Horlivka).[53]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks northwest of Horlivka near Pivnichne (11km northwest of Horlivka) on November 28.[54]

Russian forces continued offensive operations around Avdiivka on November 28 and made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on November 28 indicates that Russian forces marginally advanced in the industrial zone southeast of Avdiivka.[55] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in the industrial area largely because the Russian military transferred armored vehicles of the Russian 239th Tank Regiment (90th Tank Division, 41st Combined Arms

Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) to the frontline, [56] ISW observed reports on November 6 that Russian forces deployed understrength elements of the 239th Tank Regiment to the Avdiivka area.[57] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks east of Novobakhmutivka (13km northwest of Avdiivka); northeast of Berdychi (7km northwest of Avdiivka); near Avdiivka, Stepove (3km north of Avdiivka), Opytne (4km south of Avdiivka), Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka), and Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka); and south of Tonenke (7km west of Avdiivka).[58] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced 1.5 kilometers east of the Avdiivka Coke Plant. [59] Ukrainian military observer Kostvantyn Mashovets claimed that elements of the Russian 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA, CMD) unsuccessfully attacked near Opytne and that Russian 35th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA, CMD) unsuccessfully attacked near Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka) and along the Pisky-Pervomaiske (8-11km southwest of Avdiivka) line. [60] Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting is ongoing south of Novokalynove (7km north of Avdiivka) and near Krasnohorivka (6km northwest of Avdiivka).[61] Another milblogger denied Russian claims that Russian forces completely captured the vineyards south of Avdiivka. [62] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed on November 27 that Russian forces withdrew from the outskirts of Stepove to preserve personnel, while other milbloggers claimed that fighting is ongoing near the settlement.[63] The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces are attacking with small infantry groups in the Avdiivka direction after suffering significant military equipment losses.[64]

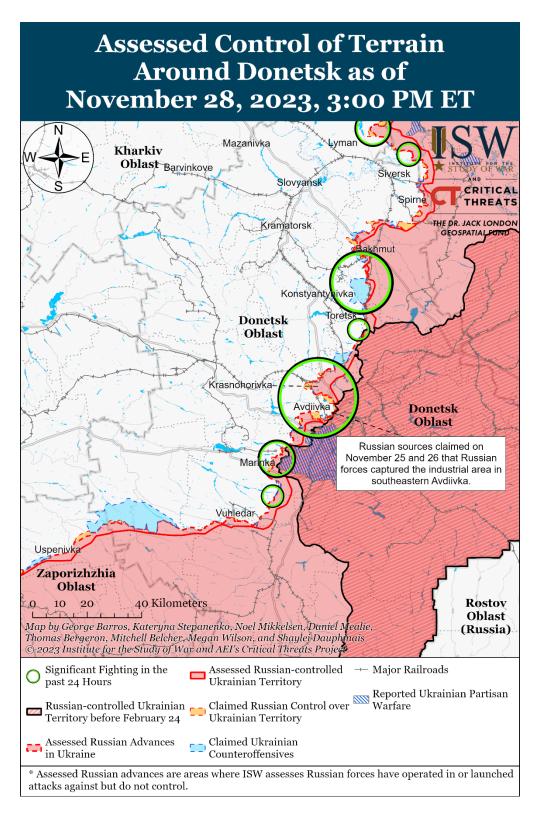


Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully counterattacked near Stepove on November 27 and November 28.[65]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations west and southwest of Donetsk City on November 28 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Krasnohorivka (directly west of Donetsk City), Marinka (immediately southwest of Donetsk City), and Novomykhailivka (11km southwest of Donetsk City).[66] Mashovets claimed that elements of the Russian 103rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) unsuccessfully attacked near Heorhiivka (9km

southwest of Donetsk City) and that elements of the Russian 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Guards Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, SMD) unsuccessfully attacked near Novomykhailivka.[67] A Russian soldier purportedly operating in the Marinka direction claimed that Russian forces lack sufficient air defense and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities because Ukrainian forces swiftly target Russian positions, forcing Russian units to continually relocate to new positions.[68]

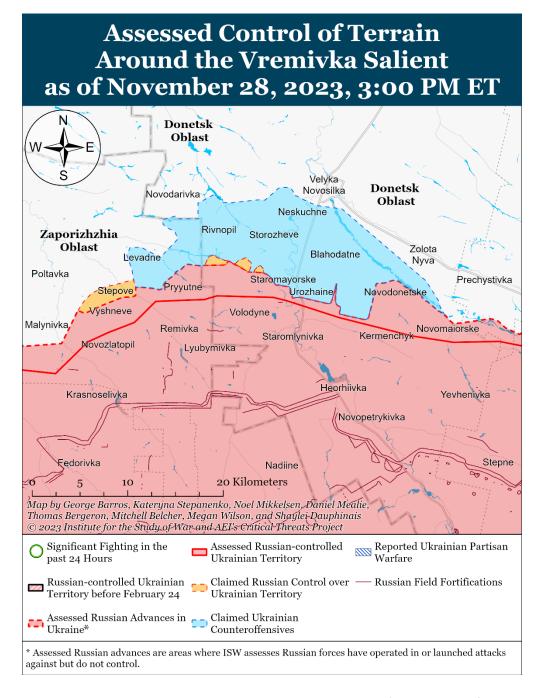
The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Heorhiivka on November 28.[69]



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

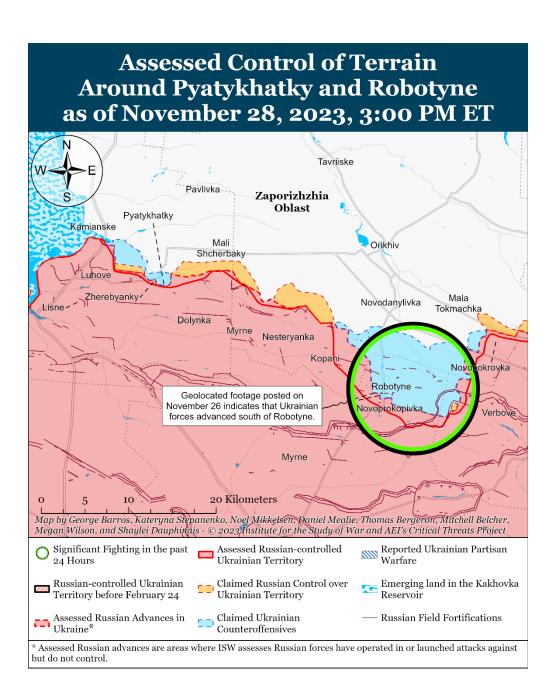
Ukrainian forces did not conduct any claimed or confirmed ground attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on November 28.

Russian forces reportedly attacked and advanced in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on November 28. Russian sources claimed on the evening of November 27 and on November 28 that elements of the Russian 349th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) attacked along the Pryyutne-Staromayorske line (15km southwest to 9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and captured unspecified heights north of Staromayorske.[70] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.[71]



Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on November 28 and reportedly advanced. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction.[72] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces achieved unspecified success west of Robotyne towards Kopani (5km northwest of Robotyne) over the past several days.[73] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces supported by heavy equipment and armored vehicles unsuccessfully attacked west of Robotyne and near Novoprokopivka (just south of Robotyne).[74] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian armored assault near Verbove (9km east of Robotyne).[75] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces also repelled a Ukrainian attack near Novopokrovka (9km northeast of Robotyne).[76]

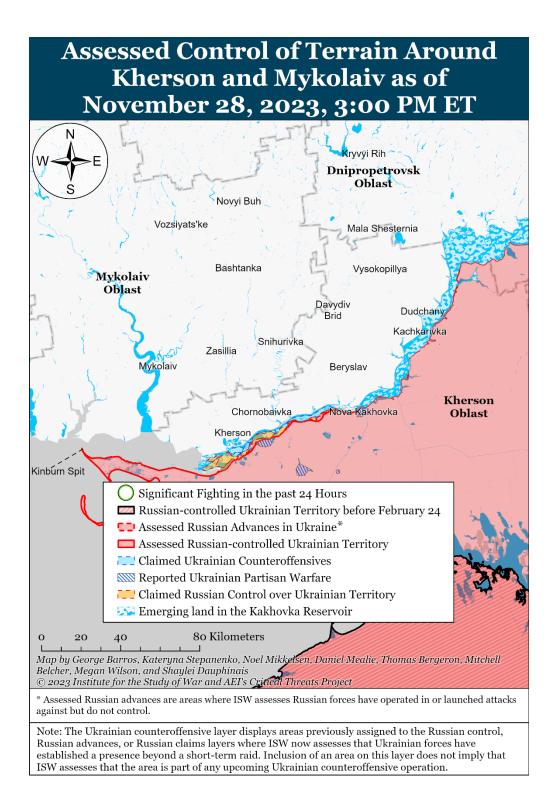
Russian forces continued ground assaults in western Zaporizhia Oblast on November 28 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Robotyne and Novoprokopivka.[77] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces recaptured positions in an unspecified forest area in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[78] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces counterattacked near Verbove and Robotyne on November 27.[79] A Russian milblogger claimed on November 28 that poor weather continues to create issues for Russian and Ukrainian aerial reconnaissance.[80]





Ukrainian and Russian sources reported on November 28 that Russian forces struck an enterprise in Zaporizhzhia City likely using an Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile.[81]

Ukrainian forces maintained positions and reportedly attacked in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on November 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued to hold positions in the east bank of Kherson Oblast.[82] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked near Poyma (10km southeast of Kherson City and 4km from the Dnipro River) and in a forest area near Krynky (30km northeast of Kherson City and 2km from the Dnipro River).[83]



Russian milbloggers claimed on November 28 that Russian forces continued efforts to dislodge Ukrainian forces from "firmly entrenched" positions in the east bank of Kherson Oblast.[84] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that fighting continues in Krynky and that Russian forces are concentrating significant manpower along the Poyma-Krynky line.[85] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 810th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and 61st Naval Infantry Brigade (Northern Fleet) are operating near Krynky.[86] Mashovets stated that elements of

the newly-formed Russian 104th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division deployed directly north and northeast of the Crimean Perekop Isthmus, far from the fighting in Kherson Oblast.[87]

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

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov announced on November 27 that Chechnya formed two new regiments and one battalion subordinated to the Russian MoD and an operational battalion subordinated to Rosgvardia.[88] Kadyrov claimed that he visited the "Akhmat-Rossiya" and "Akhmat-Chechnya" regiments, and the "Sheikh Mansour" Reserve Training Rifle Battalion. Kadyrov added that he also visited the new "Baysangur Benoevsky" Operational Battalion as part of Rodgvardia's North Caucasus Okrug. Kadyrov claimed that 3,000 Chechen servicemen who underwent training at the Russian Spetsnaz University and have prior combat experience in Ukraine are staffing the new Russian MoD and Rosgvardia units. Kadyrov later announced on November 28 that 200 servicemen of the "Baysangur Benoevsky" Operational Battalion and Sheikh Mansour" Reserve Training Rifle Battalion completed training at the Spetsnaz University and that 600 additional servicemen will undergo military training soon. Russian milbloggers previously criticized Kadyrov for naming the "Sheikh Mansour" Reserve Training Rifle Battalion after a military-political and religious figure in the Caucasus who actively fought against the Russian Empire in the late 18th century.[89]

Russian sources continue to restructure existing and form new irregular units to support Russia's war efforts in Ukraine. The Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) Operational Combat Tactical Formation "Kaskad" announced on November 28 that "Kaskad" drone operators that have fought as part of the Russian Combat Army Reserve (BARS) formation since October 2022 have restructured into the "GROM Kaskad" Unmanned Aviation Brigade.[90] The "GROM Kaskad" Unmanned Aviation Brigade is now operating on the western Donetsk Oblast frontline.[91] The Russian 1st "Hispaniola" Fan Volunteer Reconnaissance and Assault Brigade announced on November 28 that they are recruiting new personnel in Moscow and are constructing a new training base in Tambov Oblast.[92]

Elaborate corruption schemes enabling individual servicemen to nominally partake in combat and receive state compensation are reportedly widespread in the Russian military. Russian exiled opposition outlet *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, citing unnamed Russian servicemen and their relatives, reported that Russian servicemen are systematically bribing Russian officials to receive leave, rotations, falsified documents about injuries sustained in combat, and permission to not partake in combat operations.[93] A relative of a Russian serviceman fighting in a "Storm-Z" unit told *Novaya Gazeta Europe* that her son's unit had not fought in combat due to "multimillion bribes." The relative shared an audio message in which a serviceman stated that servicemen in his "Storm-Z" unit have been gathering their salaries to bribe and buy gifts for Russian generals to not partake in combat for six months. An unnamed Russian officer from a motorized rifle unit told *Novaya Gazeta Europe* that such corruption schemes are widespread across the Russian military and claimed that servicemen can purchase false medical records detailing serious injuries for \$10,000 to \$50,000, vacation for \$5,000 to \$10,000, or a transfer from one frontline to another for \$500 to \$3,000.

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

Russian state outlets and milbloggers claimed on November 28 that Russia developed a capability that will allow Russian Su-57 fighter aircraft to carry mini-drones and deploy them from the air.[94] Kremlin outlet *Ria Novosti*, citing an unnamed source, claimed that Russia plans that the Su-57 will be able to launch several attack, reconnaissance, and electronic warfare (EW) mini-drones at once and control a group of drones. The source claimed that dozens of dropped drones would allow fighter jets to break through enemy air defenses by overloading their information channels and via a concentrated strike on enemy systems. This innovation will likely not substantially increase Russian intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities. There are only ten Su-57 aircraft in service with the Russian military and the Su-57 program has been plagued with a variety of problems and delays since the airframe's first test flight in 2010.[95]

<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)

Occupation administrations in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts signed an agreement to develop closer economic ties with Rostov and Voronezh oblasts on November 28. Donetsk Peoples Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin and Luhansk Peoples Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik signed an agreement on the creation of the "Donbas Commonwealth" with Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubev and Voronezh Oblast Governor Aleksandr Gusev in Rostov Oblast.[96] The commonwealth agreement will reportedly help develop cooperation between the two Russian oblasts and the two occupation administrations in trade, industry, investment, agricultural industry, and other sectors of the economy.[97] Pushilin previously stated on February 18, 2023, that the agreement would constitute a "roadmap" for the implementation of joint projects.[98] It is unclear if the agreement has formally created a new interregional entity under the name of the "Donbas Commonwealth" or if the commonwealth is just a title for a series of interregional economic agreements and projects between the two Russian oblasts and the two occupation administrations.[99]

A Ukrainian official reported that Russian authorities continue to rebuff Ukrainian efforts to negotiate future exchanges of prisoners of war (POWs). Representative of the Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War Petro Yatsenko stated on November 27 that Ukrainian officials continue to submit proposals for POW exchanges to Russia but that Russian officials are not considering them.[100] Yatsenko stated that Russia has suspended POW exchanges in an attempt to cause domestic issues in Ukraine and create the impression that Ukrainian authorities are not working on the issue of repatriating Ukrainian POWs.[101] Yatsenko added that Russia has not created medical commissions with neutral countries that could visit detention facilities to identify Ukrainian POWs in need of medical care, as Ukraine has done for Russian POWs.[102]

The Ukrainian Resistance Center warned on November 27 that Russian occupation administrations have received instructions to prepare new lists of "unaccompanied" children to deport to Russia and that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova are still overseeing this effort.[103] A local Russian source in occupied Kherson Oblast claimed on November 27 that Kherson Oblast occupation officials are creating a special center for children left without parental care and that Lvova-Belova supported the initiative.[104] The Russian source claimed that the Russian Ministry of Labor and Social Protection will receive ownership of the children's facility.[105]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

The Kremlin is likely attempting to revive its persistent information operation that the Ukrainian forces are conducting chemical warfare experiments in order to discredit the Ukrainian forces. Head of the Russian Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirilov claimed on November 28 that the Ukrainian forces may use chemical weapons on the frontlines and accused the Ukrainian forces of killing at least 15 people by poisoning food using chemical weapons.[106] The Kremlin previously promoted similar narratives in March 2022.[107]

<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)

A Russian milblogger posted footage on November 27 purporting to show internal troops of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) training with alleged Wagner Group instructors.[108]

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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