



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 27, 2022

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The Russian military has likely recognized that its initial expectations that limited Russian attacks would cause the collapse of Ukrainian resistance have failed and is recalibrating accordingly. The Russian military is moving additional combat resources toward Ukraine and establishing more reliable and effective logistics arrangements to support what is likely a larger, harder, and more protracted conflict than it had originally prepared for. The tide of the war could change rapidly in Russia's favor if the Russian military has correctly identified its failings and addresses them promptly, given the overwhelming advantage in net combat power Moscow enjoys. Ukrainian morale and combat effectiveness remain extremely high, however, and Russian forces confront the challenge of likely intense urban warfare in the coming days.

Russian forces largely conducted an operational pause on February 26-27 but will likely resume offensive operations and begin using greater air and artillery support in the coming days.

Russian airborne and special forces troops are engaged in urban warfare in northwestern Kyiv, but Russian mechanized forces are not yet in the capital. Russian forces conducted limited attacks on the direct approaches to Kyiv on both banks of the Dnipro River, but largely paused offensive operations in northeastern Ukraine. Russian forces likely paused to recalibrate their – to date largely unsuccessful – approach to offensive operations in northern Ukraine and deploy additional reinforcements and air assets to the front lines.

Russian forces from Crimea slowly pushed north toward Zaporizhie and the southeastern bend of the Dnipro River and east along the Azov Sea coast toward Mariupol on February 27. Russian forces advancing east from Crimea began initial assaults against Mariupol the morning of February 27. These advances risk cutting off the large concentrations of Ukrainian forces still defending the former line of contact between unoccupied Ukraine and occupied Donbas.

Ukrainian resistance remains remarkably effective and Russian operations especially on the Kyiv axis have been poorly coordinated and executed, leading to significant Russian failures on that axis and at Kharkiv. Russian forces remain much larger and more capable than Ukraine's conventional military, however, and Russian advances in southern Ukraine may threaten to unhinge the defense of Kyiv and northeastern Ukraine if they continue unchecked.

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- **Russian forces likely conducted an operational pause on the Kyiv axis on February 26-27 to deploy additional supplies and forces forward. Russian forces will likely resume offensive operations against Kyiv in the next 24 hours. Russian troops have not yet**

committed heavy armor and artillery forces to fighting in Kyiv and will likely need to do so to take the city.

- **Russian forces largely conducted an operational pause on their current broad front of advance between Chernihiv and Kharkiv. Ukrainian forces continue to delay and inflict losses on the Russian advance but will likely not be able to halt further advances if the Kremlin commits additional reserves.**
- **Russian forces entered the city of Kharkiv for the first time on February 27 but remain unlikely to take the city without the use of heavier firepower.**
- **Russian forces have encircled Mariupol from the west and began initial assaults on the city. Russian forces have not made any major territorial gains from the east in Donbas after four days of fighting. Russian forces likely intend to pin Ukrainian forces in place on the line of contact to enable Russian forces breaking out of Crimea to isolate them.**
- **Russian forces continued to advance north towards Zaporzhia and, in conjunction with Russian advances on Mariupol, threaten to isolate Ukrainian forces on the line of contact in Donbas if they do not withdraw.**
- **Russian forces failed to seize Kherson after Ukrainian counterattacks reclaimed it on February 26. An unknown concentration of Russian forces remains on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River and threatens Mikolayiv, however.**
- **Russian successes in southern Ukraine are the most dangerous and threaten to unhinge Ukraine's successful defenses and rearguard actions to the north and northeast.**
- **Russian troops are facing growing morale and logistics issues, predictable consequences of the poor planning, coordination, and execution of attacks along Ukraine's northern border.**

Russian air and missile strikes targeted a Ukrainian airbase in western Ukraine to ground the remaining Ukrainian air force the night of February 26-27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces conducted 5 air and 16 missile strikes across Ukraine from midnight to 1pm local time, February 27.[1] Russian strikes targeted the Ivano-Frankivsk airfield, home to Ukraine's 114th Tactical Aviation Brigade.[2] Russian forces continue to refrain from using the full array of air and missile capabilities available to them. Russian forces will likely increase their use of fires in coming days to overcome heavier-than-anticipated Ukrainian resistance, however.

Russian forces in northeast Ukraine continue to face morale and supply issues, likely due to poor planning and ad hoc command structures, as ISW previously forecasted.[3] The Ukrainian General Staff additionally reported Russian forces are "experiencing an acute shortage of fuel and food" and are increasingly using Belarusian rail networks to supply Russian forces in Ukraine.[4]

Russian ground forces are advancing on four primary axes, discussed in turn below:

1. Kyiv;
2. Northeast front;
3. Donbas (NOTE: Russian forces advancing out of Crimea have now encircled Mariupol from the west, and this section will now discuss those forces as part of the Donbas axis); and
4. Crimea-Kherson.

1) Kyiv axis: Russian forces likely conducted an operational pause on the Kyiv axis on February 26-27 to deploy additional supplies and forces forward. Russian forces will likely resume offensive operations against Kyiv in the next 24 hours. Russian forces committed additional reserves to fighting west of Kyiv. Russian troops have not yet committed heavy armor and artillery forces to fighting in Kyiv and will likely need to do so to take the city. Ukrainian forces are unlikely to capitulate.

- **Russian forces continue to assault Kyiv on a narrow front on the western bank of the Dnipro River. The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces remain concentrated in the Pripyet marshes in "northern operational areas" (likely around Chernihiv and Sumy) at 11am local time on February 27.[5] The Ukrainian General Staff reported at 1pm local time that Ukrainian forces continue to successfully**

defend the outskirts of Kyiv. No Russian forces have entered the central city as of this time. Russian forces have not yet committed heavy armor and artillery to urban fighting in Kyiv.

- Ukrainian forces retain defensive positions in western Kyiv Oblast. Ukrainian forces reported halting Russian advances in Bucha, west of Kyiv. Several videos emerged on February 27 of destroyed Russian motor rifle and VDV (Airborne) elements in the town.[6] Russian forces additionally entered Borodyanka on February 27.[7] Ukrainian forces conducted a counterattack against Russian VDV forces in Irpin on February 27.[8]
- Russian forces committed reserves from the 36th Combined Arms Army to fighting along the western flank of Kyiv. The Ukrainian General Staff reported 36th CAA elements deployed to Bucha, Kapitanivka and Belogorodka, on the western outskirts of Kyiv.[9] Russian forces are additionally deploying engineering and bridging units to the western approach to Kyiv.[10] These elements may enable a wider Russian effort to encircle Kyiv further west than Russia's currently narrow axis of advance into the city.
- Russian forces assembled additional reserves and combat support elements in Belarus on February 26-27. The Russian air force deployed ten helicopters of the 15th Army Aviation Brigade and two An-124 transport aircraft to the Machulishchi airfield in Minsk on February 27.[11] A large column of Russian vehicles was observed moving southeast from Minsk through Babruysk on February 27.[12] The Ukrainian General Staff additionally reported Russian forces are "experiencing an acute shortage of fuel and food" and are increasingly using Belarusian rail networks to supply Russian forces in Ukraine.[13] Russia redeployed a tactical aviation group of Su-34 aircraft from the Moscow region to the Baranovichi airfield in Belarus.[14] These aircraft will likely increase tactical air support to Russian operations in Kyiv in the next 24 hours.

2) Northeast axis: Russian forces largely conducted an operational pause on their current broad front of advance between Chernihiv and Kharkiv. Russian forces entered the city of Kharkiv for the first time on February 27 but remain unlikely to take the city without the use of heavier firepower. Ukrainian forces continue to delay and inflict losses on the Russian advance but will likely not be able to halt further advances if the Kremlin commits additional reserves.

- Russian forces did not secure any major advances in northeastern Ukraine on February 26-27 and likely conducted an operational pause to bring forward supplies and reinforcements. The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian elements from the Central Military District attacked Ichnya in the direction of Kyiv on February 27.[15] Ukrainian forces reportedly repelled a Russian assault near Pryluky by the 2nd and 4th Tank divisions in Sumy Oblast as of 10am local time on February 27.[16] Ukrainian forces claimed to destroy an entire BTG of the 4th Guards Tank Division near Slobozhanskyi, approximately 80km west of Kharkiv, on February 27.[17] Russian forces in northeast Ukraine have been halted on a line roughly running down the P67 highway since roughly 11am local time on February 26.[18]
- The Ukrainian General Staff reported that 14 Russian BTGs, including but not entirely drawn from the 41st Combined Arms Army, resumed attacks towards Kyiv along the east bank of the Dnipro River from the north at 10am local time on February 27 after an operational pause on February 26.[19] A Russian attempt to seize the encircled city of Chernihiv failed as of 10am local time on February 27.[20]
- Light Russian forces entered downtown Kharkiv on February 27 but have not yet secured the city. Ukrainian forces claimed to repel attacks by Russian motor rifle elements (including the 25th Motor Rifle Brigade, with Ukrainian forces taking confirmed prisoners) the night of February 27 after heavy fighting.[21] Russian forces began shelling of residential areas of the city throughout February on 27.[22] Russian forces are deploying additional artillery assets including thermobaric artillery to the Kharkiv axis as of February 27.[23] Russian forces likely seized Kup'yans'k, southeast of Kharkiv, on February 27.[24]

3) Donbas axis: Russian forces have encircled Mariupol from the west and began initial assaults on the city. Russian forces have not made any major territorial gains from the east in Donbas after four days of fighting. Russian forces likely intend to pin Ukrainian forces in place on the line of contact to enable Russian forces breaking out of Crimea to isolate them. The Russians may be content to leave them there while concentrating on capturing Kyiv and imposing a new government on Ukraine. They may alternatively seek to encircle and destroy them or force them to surrender.

- Russian forces advancing on Mariupol from the west, through Berdyansk, likely began initial assaults on the city on February 27.[25] Russian artillery systems redeployed from Melitopol towards Mariupol the night of February 26.[26] Russian forces likely seek to pin Ukrainian forces in place in Mariupol. Russian forces could alternatively attempt to reduce the Mariupol pocket in the next 48 hours.
- US intelligence sources reported 2,000 Russian Naval Infantry conducted a landing west of Mariupol and began advancing on the city throughout February 27.[27] This operation is likely Russia's first commitment of its Naval Infantry to operations in southern Ukraine.
- Russian forces did not conduct any major attacks along the line of contact in Donbas or in Luhansk Oblast on February 27. Ukrainian forces remain largely in place on the line of contact in Donbas. ISW's initial assessment that Russian forces would likely attempt an envelopment through Luhansk Oblast was incorrect.[28] Russian forces likely seek to achieve a larger envelopment using forces breaking out from Crimea and currently advancing on Mariupol from the west.

4) Crimea axis: Russian forces continued to advance north towards Zaporzhia and threaten to isolate Ukrainian forces on the line of contact in Donbas if they do not withdraw. Russian forces failed to seize Kherson after Ukrainian counterattacks reclaimed it on February 26. An unknown concentration of Russian forces remains on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River and threatens Mikolayiv, however.

- Russian forces from the 20th Motor Rifle Division advanced north towards Zaporzhia from Melitopol on February 27.[29] These forces likely seek to take Zaporzhia in the coming days. They may then either continue north to Dnipro City, or pivot east to isolate Ukrainian forces in Donbas.
- Russian forces failed to take Kherson on February 27, but the Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces are regrouping for an offensive towards Kherson and Mykolayiv.[30] Ukrainian forces repelled a second Russian attempt to seize Kherson on February 27.[31] ISW cannot confirm the extent of possible Russian advances into the city. Ukrainian air defenses remain active in the city, however shooting down an Su-25 and a Mi-24 on February 26.[32] A Ukrainian TB2 drone additionally struck a Russian column near the Kherson airport on February 27.[33]
- An unknown concentration of Russian forces remains west of the Dnipro River and entered the outskirts of Mykolayiv on February 27.[34] Russian forces assaulting Kherson likely seek to support these forces to continue advances west towards Odesa.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reported that elements of Russia's Black Sea Fleet left port to strike the Ukrainian Navy on February 27.[35] ISW cannot confirm the extent or focus of Russian naval operations.
- Russian forces may additionally be preparing for an additional line of advance from Belarus into Western Ukraine. ISW previously reported a Russian armored column assembling in Stolín, Belarus on February 25 to support a possible advance into Rivne Oblast, in western Ukraine.[36] Russian forces have not launched a ground attack as of publication. A Russian offensive in western Ukraine would likely seek to cut Ukraine off from ground shipments of Western aid through Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces will likely resume major offensive operations on February 28 after a temporary operational pause.
- Russian forces advancing north and east from Crimea threaten to cut off Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine if Kyiv does not withdraw them in the coming days.
- Russian forces face growing morale and supply issues but will likely be able to overcome these handicaps.
- Russian forces continue to refrain from using their likely full spectrum of air and missile capabilities. The Ukrainian air force also remains active. Russian operations will likely steadily wear down Ukrainian air capabilities as well eventually taking the Ukrainian air force out of the fight.
- Russia has sufficient conventional military power to reinforce each of its current axes of advance and overpower conventional Ukrainian forces defending them.



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