

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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January 28, 2024, 8:30pm 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 January 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

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

Kremlin officials and mouthpieces continue to set information conditions to destabilize Moldova, likely as part of efforts to prevent Moldova's integration into the EU and the West among other objectives. Alexei Polishchuk, the director of the Second Department of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Countries at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), claimed in an interview with Kremlin newswire *TASS* published on January 28 that Moldova has begun to “destroy its ties” with CIS member states and the Russia-led CIS organization as a whole and that there are rumors that Moldova plans to leave the CIS by the end of 2024.[1] Polishchuk claimed that this decision would not benefit Moldovan interests or citizens and would be unprofitable for the Moldovan economy. Polishchuk also claimed that the settlement of the Transnistria issue in Moldova is in a “deep crisis” and that Moldova's economic pressure on Transnistria since the beginning of 2024 has “further delayed” any solution.[2] Polishchuk claimed that Russia is ready to fix deteriorating relations between Moldova and Transnistria “as a mediator and guarantor” to the settlement.[3] Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Serebrian stated on January 28 that Moldova would not return to the 5+2 Transnistria negotiating process that included Russia as long as Russian-Ukrainian relations do not improve and Russia's war in Ukraine continues.[4]

A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger, who has recently fixated on the Moldova-Transnistria conflict, continued to highlight alleged discontent in Moldova's breakaway and autonomous regions. The milblogger claimed that about 50,000 people in Transnistria participated in a rally protesting against Moldovan economic pressure on Transnistria on January 24.[5] The milblogger also stated that Sergei Ibrishim, the Head of the Main Directorate of Agro-Industrial Complex of Gagauzia, sent a request recently to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for Russia to send fertilizer to Gagauzia as humanitarian aid.[6] Ibrishim also reportedly claimed that Gagauzia's agricultural producers are unable to sell their products to Russia after Moldova's decision in July 2023 to leave the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly and asked Lavrov to abolish excise taxes and customs duties for Russian imports from Gagauzia.[7] Polishchuk's and the milblogger's comments are likely aimed at dissuading Moldova from leaving the CIS and Russia's wider sphere of influence, setting information conditions to create economic discontent within Moldova, and posturing Russia as an economic and security guarantor in Moldova.

Russia notably accused Ukraine of abandoning and disregarding the Minsk Agreements that had largely frozen the conflict after Russia's 2014 invasion in the lead up to Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and Russia may be setting information conditions to make similar claims against Moldova.[8] ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin is likely setting information conditions to justify future Russian aggression in Moldova under the guise of protecting its "compatriots abroad" and the "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) - concepts that are purposely based on vague definitions of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in foreign countries.[9] Russia may attempt to justify its aggression or destabilization efforts in Moldova by claiming that Transnistrian residents are in danger due to Moldova's alleged abandonment of the Transnistria settlement process. ISW recently observed suggestions that the Kremlin may be turning to rhetorical narratives that appeal to a wider audience beyond the "Russian World." [10]

Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin reiterated that the Kremlin is not interested in any settlements short of the complete destruction and eradication of the Ukrainian state, likely in an ongoing effort to justify the long-term and costly Russian war effort to domestic audiences. Naryshkin told Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin during a televised "impromptu" interview on January 28 that the Ukrainian state and government have "a very sad fate" and that "Russia will not stop halfway," presumably in its efforts to destroy Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[11] Naryshkin made a similar statement on January 27 during the opening of a memorial to the Soviet victims of Nazi genocide in Leningrad Oblast, claiming that "Russia will not stop halfway" in its fight with the current followers of Nazi ideology.[12] The similarity of both statements suggests that Naryshkin may be using pre-approved Kremlin rhetoric to signal to Russian citizens that the Kremlin is not open to negotiating with Ukraine or compromising in any settlement of the war Russia started, despite recent Western reports to the contrary.[13] Russian officials have consistently reiterated Russia's commitment to its maximalist objectives in Ukraine - which are tantamount to complete Ukrainian and Western capitulation- and statements by Russian officials suggesting that Russia is or has always been interested in peace negotiations with Ukraine are very likely efforts to feign interest to prompt preemptive Western concessions regarding Ukraine's sovereignty or territorial integrity.[14]

Naryshkin was notably involved in setting domestic information conditions in the lead-up to the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including furthering Russian claims that perceived Ukrainian aggression prompted by Ukraine's Western 'puppet masters' forced Russia to invade Ukraine and claims that the Ukrainian government is comparable to Nazi Germany.[15] Russian President Vladimir Putin ostentatiously humiliated Naryshkin during a televised Russian Security Council meeting on February 22, 2022, demanding that Naryshkin "speak plainly" when Naryshkin declared his support for the independence of occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.[16] Putin likely humiliated Naryshkin in February 2022 due to Naryshkin's failure to set the informational conditions to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the Russian domestic and international information spaces that Putin desired. Naryshkin's return to the Russian information space to further the perception of the Kremlin's commitment to the war in Ukraine could indicate that Putin has given Naryshkin another chance to prove his ability to set informational conditions, this time setting conditions domestically for a long war effort. If this hypothesis is correct, then Naryshkin will presumably be determined not to disappoint Putin again. Zarubin has also previously been involved in a number of Kremlin informational efforts, including filming and conducting interviews wherein Putin threatened Finland and the wider NATO alliance and attempted to portray himself as a gracious leader who cares about the well-being of Russian military personnel and an effective Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armed forces.[17]

The Kremlin also continues to frame and justify a long-term Russian war effort as part of an existential geopolitical confrontation with the West and Nazism. Alexei Polishchuk, the director of the Second Department of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Countries at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), also stated during his interview with *TASS* that "the West incited neo-Nazi sentiments in Ukraine" and "made [Ukraine] anti-Russia." [18] Putin, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Naryshkin, and Russian State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin during the 80th anniversary of the breaking of the siege

of Leningrad on January 27 claimed that Russia is fighting “Nazis” in Ukraine and that a number of Western countries have adopted Nazi ideology.[19] Polishchuk’s claim that the West incited “neo-Nazi” ideals in Ukraine is likely part of the same coordinated Kremlin informational effort intended to justify geopolitical confrontation with the West and suggests that the Kremlin may increasingly label any perceived adversary and possibly the entire West as “Nazi.”[20] ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin may have decided that the simple narrative that Russia and other states are fighting a geopolitical “Nazi” force is a more effective immediate narrative than Putin’s attempt to appeal to Russian citizens and Russian speakers in the territory of the former Soviet Union and Russian Empire with the ideology of the “Russian World” (*Russkiy Mir*), which is based on purposefully amorphous ethnic identities that are not agreed upon and that are at odds with Russia’s multi-ethnic composition.[21] Polishchuk also reiterated long-standing Russian claims that the West controls Ukraine and that Russia has “always remained” open to peace negotiations.[22]

Ukrainian Navy Commander Vice Admiral Oleksiy Neizhpapa emphasized the importance of Ukraine’s ability to technologically adapt and develop as Russian forces continue to adapt to Ukrainian operations in a January 27 *Sky News* interview.[23] Neizhpapa’s statement is consistent with ISW’s assessment that Russian forces are adapting and learning on certain sectors of the front.[24] Neizhpapa also reiterated the Ukrainian assertion that Ukrainian forces should be able to use Western-provided systems to strike legitimate military targets in Russia.[25] Neizhpapa stated that the Ukrainian Navy would be “very happy” to accept two UK Type 23 frigates that the UK is considering decommissioning due to a shortage of sailors.[26] The Turkish government announced on January 2 that it would not allow the UK to transport two mine hunting ships to Ukraine via the Turkish Straits citing Article 19 of the Montreux Convention Regulating the Regime of the Turkish Straits, which stipulates that “vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers shall not...pass through the Straits.” Turkey would likely continue to use the Montreux Convention to prevent the UK from potentially transferring these two frigates through the Turkish Straits to Ukraine.[27] Turkey has used the Montreux Convention to deny access to Russian warships wishing to pass through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits since February 28, 2022, to Ukraine’s benefit.[28]

The Kremlin will likely use the withdrawals of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to continue efforts to expand Russian influence in Francophone Africa. The Malian, Burkinabe, and Nigerien juntas announced their immediate withdrawals from ECOWAS in a joint statement on January 28.[29] ECOWAS stated that it had not received “any direct formal notification” from Mali, Burkina Faso, or Niger about their intent to withdraw.[30] Kremlin newswire *TASS* cited the frustration of these states with ECOWAS’ “Western influence” as a reason for their withdrawal.[31] Russian milbloggers also celebrated the announcement as evidence of rapidly decreasing French influence in the Sahel.[32] The first contingent of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)-controlled Africa Corps reportedly arrived in Burkina Faso on January 24, and Kremlin officials recently met with Chadian junta officials in Moscow.[33] ISW continues to assess that Russia is attempting to expand its influence in western and central Africa, particularly focusing on Francophone African countries in the Sahel.[34]

Unnamed Indian government sources stated that India wants to distance itself from Russia, its largest arms supplier, because the war in Ukraine has limited Russia’s ability to provide India with munitions.[35] The unnamed Indian government sources told *Reuters* in a January 28 article that India will act carefully in order to avoid pushing Russia closer to China.[36] Indian think tank Observer Research Foundation’s Russia expert Nandan Unnikrishnan told *Reuters* that India is unlikely to sign “any major military deal” with Russia because it would cross a red line with the United States.[37] Indian government-run think tank Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses Eurasia expert Svasti Rao stated that the war in Ukraine has caused India to question Russia’s ability to supply India with spare parts.[38] ISW has routinely observed reports that Russia continues to face challenges repairing aircraft and other equipment and has not been able to produce missiles and artillery ammunition at pre-war levels for its own forces to use, making it highly unlikely that Russia will be able to export military equipment to India or its other customers at pre-war levels any time soon.[39] Russian President Vladimir Putin recently highlighted Russian-Indian economic and

military-technical cooperation in a meeting with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar likely in an effort to emphasize positive Russian-Indian relations amid Russian concerns that India is attempting to diversify its defense partners.[40]

Key Takeaways:

- **Kremlin officials and mouthpieces continue to set information conditions to destabilize Moldova, likely as part of efforts to prevent Moldova's integration into the EU and the West among other objectives.**
- **Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin reiterated that the Kremlin is not interested in any settlements short of the complete destruction and eradication of the Ukrainian state, likely in an ongoing effort to justify the long-term and costly Russian war effort to domestic audiences.**
- **The Kremlin also continues to frame and justify a long-term Russian war effort as part of an existential geopolitical confrontation with the West and Nazism.**
- **Ukrainian Navy Commander Vice Admiral Oleksiy Neizhpapa emphasized the importance of Ukraine's ability to technologically adapt and develop as Russian forces continue to adapt to Ukrainian operations in a January 27 *Sky News* interview.**
- **The Kremlin will likely use the withdrawals of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to continue efforts to expand Russian influence in Francophone Africa.**
- **Unnamed Indian government sources stated that India wants to distance itself from Russia, its largest arms supplier, because the war in Ukraine has limited Russia's ability to provide India with munitions.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna and Avdiivka amid continued positional fighting throughout the theater.**
- **A Russian source claimed that Rosgvardia is forming the 1st Volunteer Corps with remaining Wagner Group personnel and newly recruited volunteers (dobrovoltsy) following the Kremlin adoption of the law allowing Rosgvardia to form its own volunteer formations in December 2023.**
- **Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov stated on January 28 that Ukraine and Russia will conduct a prisoner of war (POW) exchange in the near future.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 28, 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

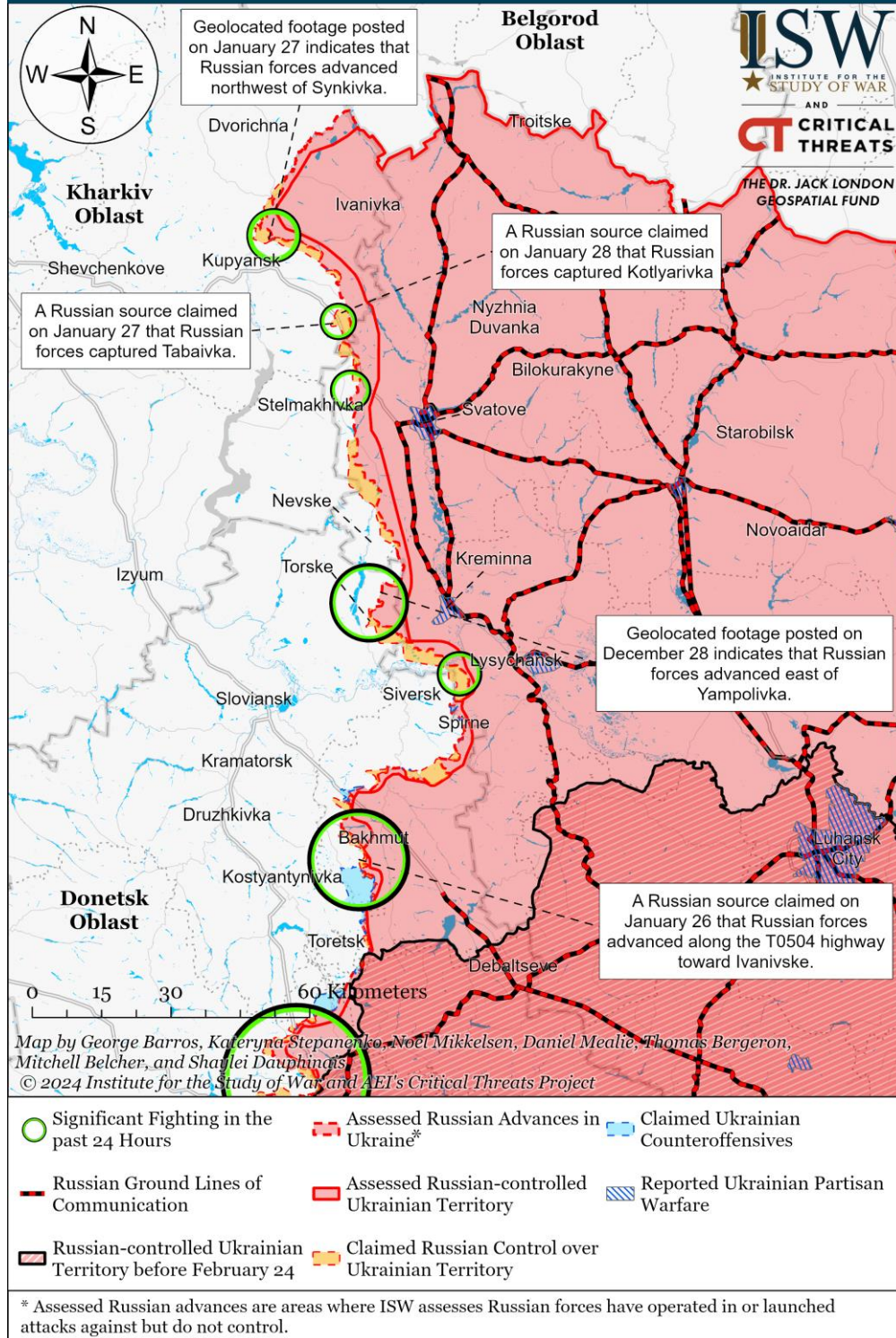
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces continued offensive operations northeast and east of Kupyansk on January 28 but did not advance. Positional engagements continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka and Petropavlivka.[41] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Volodymyr Fityo stated that Russian forces continue to prioritize the Kupyansk direction and that Russian combat activity is more intense along the Kupyansk-Lyman line than around Bakhmut.[42] Fityo added that Russian forces may shift their offensive focus from Kupyansk to elsewhere in eastern Ukraine and observed that Russian forces have increased their use of loitering munitions from 20 to 30 drones per day to 40 drones per day.[43]

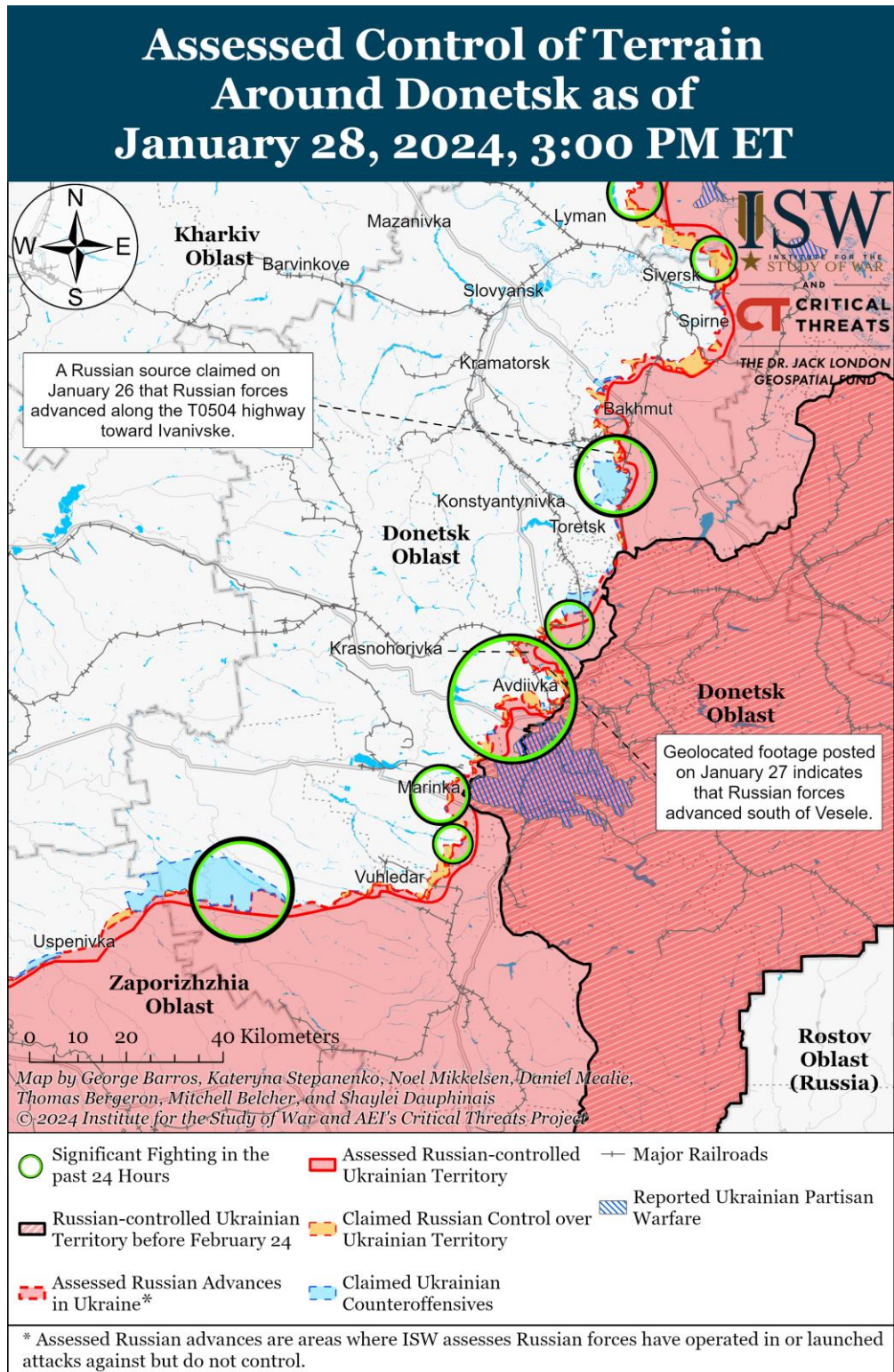
Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced southeast of Kupyansk (northwest of Svatove) on January 28, but Ukrainian military sources have not yet confirmed those claims. Russian milbloggers continued to claim that elements of the Russian 47th Tank Division (1st Guards Tank Army, Western Military District [WMD]) captured Tabaivka (southeast of Kupyansk) and the dominant heights in the area after seizing Krokhmalne (southeast of Tabaivka).[44] Russian sources also amplified a Ukrainian interactive map, which showed Tabaivka under Russian control.[45] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in Berestove (28km southeast of Kupyansk) and possibly seized Kotlyarivka (immediately northeast of Tabaivka).[46] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger assessed that Russian forces are likely attempting to push towards Kyslivka (immediately north of Kotlyarivka) because the settlement is located along the railway line at a commanding height.[47] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are developing an offensive in the Pishchane (20km southeast of Kupyansk) direction from Tabaivka in an effort to reach the Oskil River, and the Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks east of Pishchane and near Tabaivka and Stelmakhivka (northwest of Svatove and south of Berestove).[48] A Russian drive on Pishchane and localized attacks southeast of Kupyansk (northwest of Svatove) likely support Russian efforts to reach and disrupt Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) across the Oskil River south of Kupyansk rather than supporting a drive on Kupyansk itself.

Russian forces recently advanced west of Kreminna. Geolocated footage published on January 28 indicates that Russian forces advanced in a field east of Yampolivka (west of Kreminna).[49] Positional engagements continued west of Kreminna near Terny, Yampolivka, and Torske; southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova; and south of Kreminna near Dibrova and Bilohorivka.[50] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 3rd Motorized Rifle Division (20th Guards Combined Arms Army, WMD) are successfully fighting in the Lyman direction and that elements of its 752nd Motorized Rifle Regiment seized an unspecified Ukrainian position.[51]

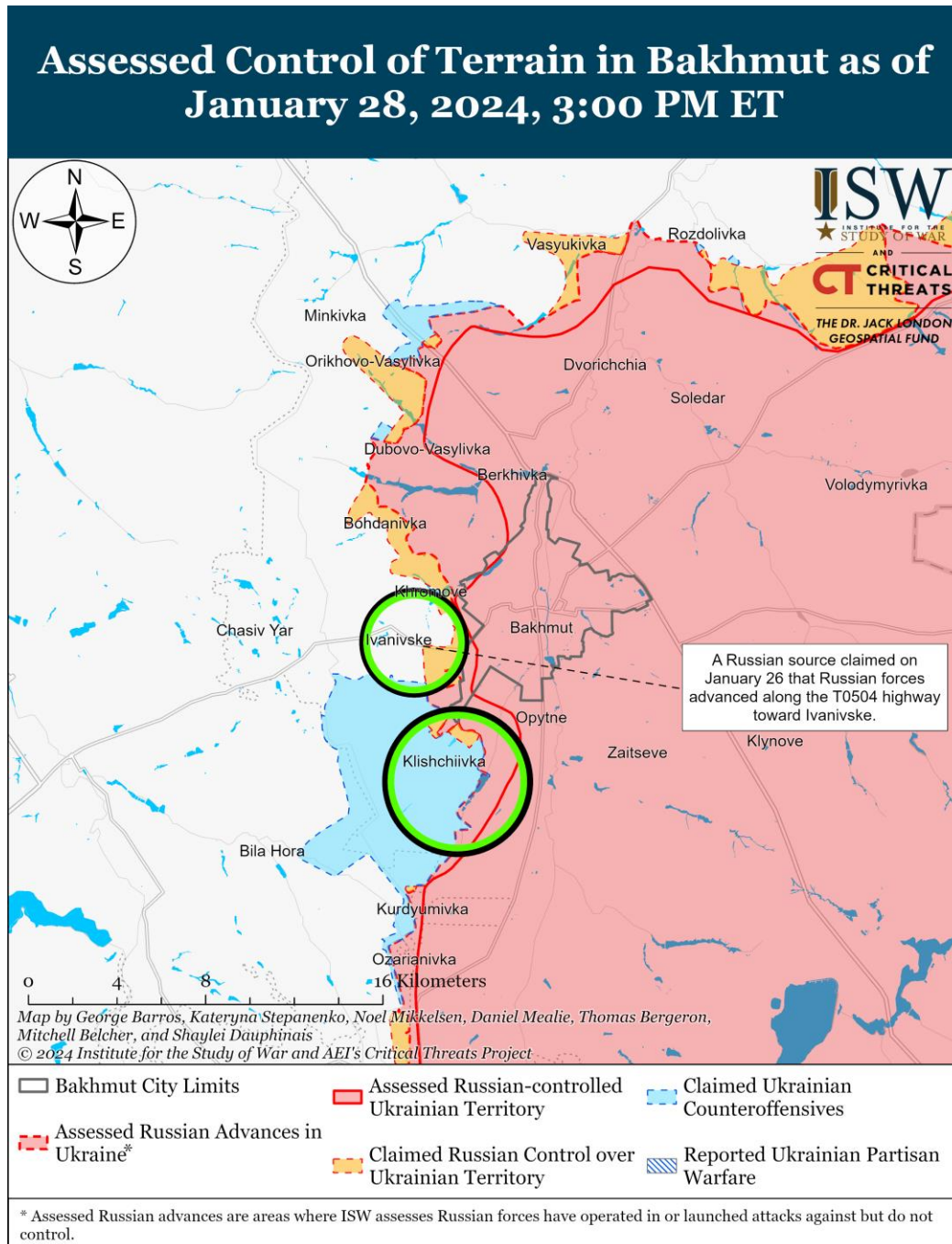
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of January 28, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

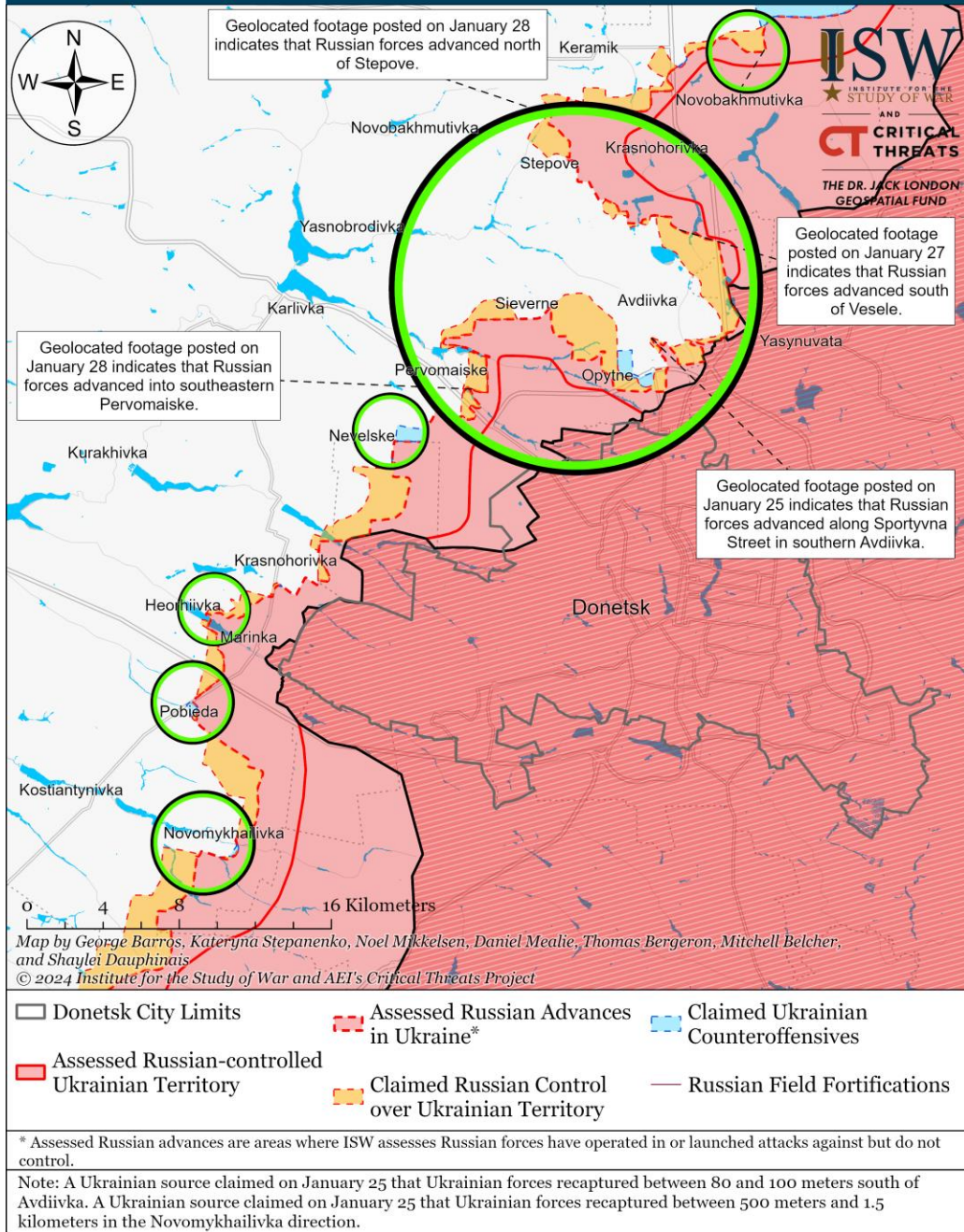


Positional engagements continued near Bakhmut on January 28, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in the area. Positional engagements continued northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; southwest of Bakhmut near Andriivka and Klishchiivka; and south of Bakhmut near Pivnichne and Shumy.[52] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced near Ivanivske and Bohdanivka, although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[53] Elements of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Bakhmut.[54]



Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka amid continued positional engagements in the area on January 28. Geolocated footage published on January 28 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of Stepove (northwest of Avdiivka) and in southeastern Pervomaiske (southwest of Avdiivka).[55] Positional engagements continued northwest of Avdiivka near Ochertyne, Novobakhmutivka, and Stepove; near Avdiivka itself; west of Avdiivka near Tonenke; and southwest of Avdiivka near Sieverne, Pervomaiske, and Nevelske.[56] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces expanded their zone of control near the “Tsarska Okhota” restaurant on Avdiivka’s southern outskirts, with one milblogger claiming that there are unconfirmed reports that Russian forces completely control the restaurant.[57] A Ukrainian serviceman serving in the Avdiivka direction stated that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces out of the “Tsarska Okhota” restaurant and that Russian forces are constantly changing their tactics in the Avdiivka direction.[58] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are struggling to advance since the “wedge” in which Russian assault groups and detachments are operating is too narrow, likely referring to Avdiivka’s southern outskirts.[59] Elements of the Russian 1st “Slavic” Brigade (1st Donetsk People’s Republic [DNR] Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Spartak (south of Avdiivka).[60]

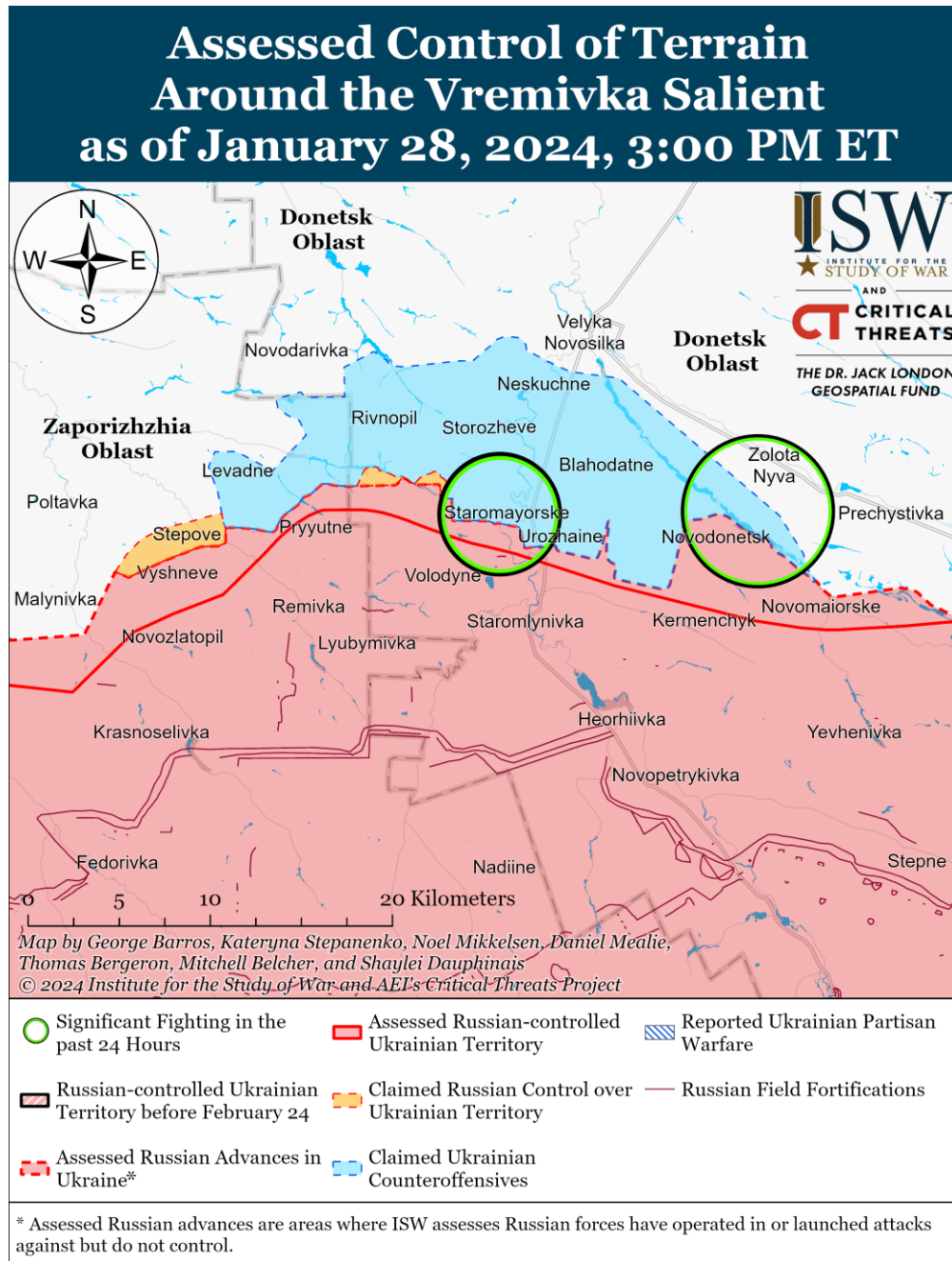
Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of January 28, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



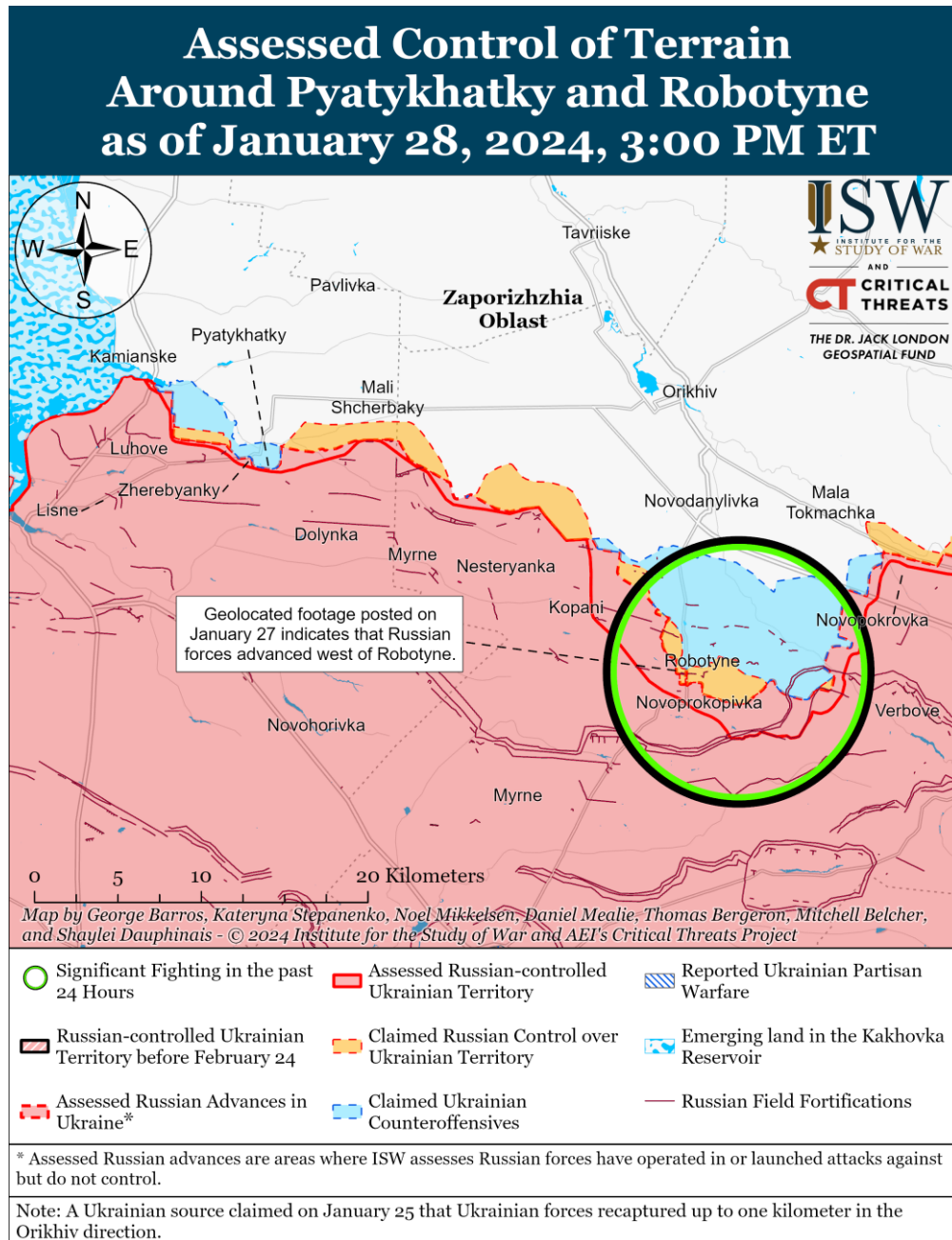
Positional engagements continued west and southwest of Donetsk City on January 28, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area. Positional engagements continued west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda and Novomykhailivka.[61] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Oleksandr Shtupun stated that Russian forces have increased their use of first-person view (FPV) drones in the Marinka direction.[62] Elements of the Russian 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating near Heorhiivka.[63]

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

Positional fighting continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on January 28, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area. Positional engagements continued south of Zolota Nyva (southeast of Velyka Novosilka), west of Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka), and north of Pryyutne (southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[64] Elements of the Russian 114th Motorized Rifle Regiment and 143rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (both of the 127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) reportedly continue operating near Pryyutne.[65] Elements of the Russian 83rd Air Assault (VDV) Brigade are also reportedly operating near Pryyutne.[66]



Ukrainian forces reportedly advanced in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on January 28, amid continued positional engagement in the area. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces regained several positions west of Robotyne, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[67] Positional engagements continued west of Robotyne, near Novoprokopivka (just south of Robotyne), west of Verbove, and near Novofedorivka (both east of Robotyne).[68] Elements of the Russian 291st Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) reportedly continue to operate in the Zaporizhzhia direction.[69]



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 28, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Positional engagements continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast near Krynky on January 28, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area.[70] Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk reported that Russian forces will likely soon conduct a troop rotation in the Kherson direction because Russian forces are having difficulties forming assault groups due to recent high casualties.[71] Humenyuk stated that the Russian command continues to prohibit Russian forces from using vehicles during assaults in the Kherson direction and that Russian forces often conduct infantry attacks in groups

of 10 to 15 personnel.[72] Humenyuk also stated that Russian forces have intensified the use of first-person view (FPV) drones in Kherson Oblast to drop munitions on Ukrainian positions and populated areas in the past several days.[73] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) reportedly continue to operate near Krynky.[74]

Ukrainian Navy Commander Vice Admiral Oleksiy Neizhpapa stated in a January 27 interview with *Sky News* that Ukraine's main goals in the Black Sea are to prevent Russian vessels from attacking Ukraine and to allow vessels to access Ukrainian ports.[75] ISW assessed that the Ukrainian strike campaign in summer and fall against Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) vessels and infrastructure limited the BSF's ability to operate in the western part of the Black Sea and prevented Russia from threatening commercial vessels using Ukraine's grain corridor.[76]

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

The Ukrainian Air Force stated that Russian forces launched eight Shahed-136/131 drones from Krasnodar Krai; two Iskander-M ballistic missiles from Voronezh Oblast; three S-300 missiles; and one Kh-59 cruise missile and that Ukrainian forces shot down four of the drones and the Kh-59 missile.[77] Ukrainian military officials stated that Russian forces struck civilian and critical infrastructure in Poltava, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts.[78] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat stated that Russia has about 900 high-precision long-range missiles of various types and that Russia's missile stocks are mostly unchanged after its three large, combined strike series between December 29 and January 8 because Russia manufactured missiles to replace those used.[79] Ihnat stated that Russia is producing about 100 missiles a month and is mostly using ballistic missiles in recent strike series.

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

A Russian source claimed that Rosgvardia is forming the 1st Volunteer Corps with remaining Wagner Group personnel and newly recruited volunteers (*dobrovoltsy*) after the Kremlin adopted a law allowing Rosgvardia to form its own volunteer formations in December 2023.[80] Several prominent Russian milbloggers amplified a claim that Rosgvardia tasked Wagner Group's remaining 15th, 16th, and 17th Assault Detachments with recruiting volunteers after the Kremlin adopted the law. The Kremlin only allowed the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to legally form volunteer formations prior to the passing of the law allowing Rosgvardia to form its own volunteer formations.[81] The source claimed that remaining Wagner detachments do not operate as part of the Wagner Group private military company (PMC) and are recruiting volunteers to serve for six months in Ukraine or nine months in Africa with Rosgvardia. The source added that the 15th, 16th, and 17th Assault Detachments will each have up to 2,200 fighters and make up Rosgvardia's 1st Volunteer Corps. The source cited unspecified forecasts as saying that the 15th Assault Detachment will serve as a reserve detachment, the 16th Assault Detachment will fight in Ukraine alongside other Rosgvardia units, and the 17th Assault Detachment will be an assault formation. The 1st Volunteer Corps will reportedly have symbols and attributes slightly different from those of Wagner PMC.

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

Nothing significant to report.

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

Nothing significant to report.

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)

Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov stated on January 28 that Ukraine and Russia will conduct a prisoner of war (POW) exchange in the near future.[82] Budanov noted that Ukraine will do everything possible to find out what happened with the Il-76 crash and stated that neither Russia nor Ukraine can fully explain what happened.[83] Budanov emphasized that the Kremlin has not released footage that would prove that Ukrainian POWs were on board the Il-76.

Ukrainian sources reported that occupation authorities continue efforts to militarize and indoctrinate Ukrainian children into Russian national and cultural identities. Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated on January 28 that Rosgvardia is planning to create a “Voin” military training and patriotic education center for Ukrainian children in occupied Ukraine.[84] Fedorov also stated that occupation authorities organize meetings between Ukrainian children and Russian servicemen, veterans, and security personnel.[85] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that the Russian Ministry of Education is recruiting Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine to teach history, physical education, and basics of life safety in schools in occupied Ukraine and Russia.[86]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian information space actors continue disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining Western support for Ukraine. French news outlet *TV5 Monde* reported on January 27 that online Russian bots - who use fake names and profile pictures – have been flooding Western fact-checking organizations and media since September 2023 with requests to verify heavily edited images or deep fakes in order to “keep them busy” investigating outlandish fake news and prevent them from effectively combating more sophisticated Russian information operations.[87] *TV5 Monde* reported that hundreds or even thousands of bots involved in the “Matryoshka” program have recently flooded French media outlets with requests to verify visuals making fun of or discrediting Ukrainian officials and that at least 800 bots in another program, named “Doppelganger,” have been amplifying deep fakes of Western media personalities making anti-Ukraine statements for several months.[88] *TV5 Monde* reported that German authorities recently identified a vast “pro-Russian disinformation campaign” using thousands of fake X (formerly Twitter) accounts to publish messages harmful to Ukraine.[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)

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met on January 28 in St. Petersburg.[90] Putin and Lukashenko will participate in the Union State Supreme State Council meeting on January 29, and ISW will cover these events in the January 29 assessment.

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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- [1] <https://tass dot ru/interviews/19836483>
- [2] <https://tass dot ru/interviews/19836483>
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- [4] <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moldovan-negotiator-rules-out-moscow-role-solving-separatist-issue-2024-01-28/>
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