



# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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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 5:30pm ET on December 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**US intelligence reportedly assessed that Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine in fall 2023 and through the upcoming winter aim to weaken Western support for Ukraine instead of achieving any immediate operational objectives.** The US intelligence community reportedly shared a declassified intelligence assessment with Congress on December 12 wherein US intelligence assessed that Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine aim to weaken Western support for Ukraine but have only resulted in heavy Russian losses and no operationally significant Russian battlefield gains.<sup>1</sup> This assessment of high Russian losses and lack of operationally significant Russian gains is consistent with ISW's assessment. US National Security Council Spokesperson Andrienne Watson reportedly stated that Russian forces have suffered more than 13,000 casualties and lost 220 combat vehicles along the Avdiivka-Novopavlivka axis (Avdiivka direction through western Donetsk Oblast) since launching offensive operations in October 2023.<sup>2</sup> Watson added that Russia appears to believe that a military "deadlock" through the winter will drain Western support for Ukraine and give Russian forces the advantage despite high Russian losses and persistent Russian shortages of trained personnel, munitions, and equipment.<sup>3</sup> ISW has assessed that Russian forces have been trying to regain the theater-level initiative in Ukraine since at least mid-November 2023 and have now likely committed to offensive operations in multiple sectors of the front during a period of the most challenging weather of the fall-winter season in an effort to seize and retain the initiative.<sup>4</sup>

**Russian forces may be conducting costly offensive operations at a time unfavorable for ground maneuver to time the potential shift in battlefield initiative with ongoing conversations in the West about continued support to Ukraine.** Russian forces launched a large offensive effort to capture Avdiivka on October 10 and subsequently intensified localized offensive operations elsewhere in eastern Ukraine while Ukrainian forces started to scale back counteroffensive operations on their own accord.<sup>5</sup> The Russian military command decided against waiting to prepare for

offensive efforts later this winter or in spring 2024 following the decreased tempo of Ukrainian counteroffensive operations, as they had done between the successful Ukrainian counteroffensives in summer and fall 2022 and the failed Russian winter-spring 2023 offensive.<sup>6</sup> The Russian military command's decision to launch offensive efforts in fall 2023 may have been an opportunistic reaction to a perceived wavering of Western support for Ukraine. The increased Western discussions about continuing military assistance to Ukraine following the relatively successful Russian defensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast was predictable and may have factored into the Russian command's calculations. The Kremlin has been orchestrating long running information operations aimed at deterring Western security assistance to Ukraine, and the Russian command may have determined that those information operations were yielding increasing returns and that Russian military efforts to seize the initiative could prompt further Western debates about aid to Ukraine.<sup>7</sup>

Russian forces have routinely conducted military operations in Ukraine aimed at shaping Western behavior instead of achieving operational battlefield objectives, and the US intelligence assessment that ongoing Russian offensive operations do not have an immediate operational military objective is entirely plausible.<sup>8</sup> Russian forces have yet to seize the initiative throughout Ukraine, but Russian forces may attempt to pursue an immediate operational objective if they do seize the initiative. The Russian military command has also reportedly conducted offensive operations with domestic political goals in mind, and internal Kremlin dynamics may be influencing Russian military decisions about ongoing Russian offensive operations.<sup>9</sup> ISW is not offering an assessment of the primary intent of ongoing Russian offensive operations at this time but concurs with the US intelligence community assessment that Russia has absorbed very high losses without making operationally significant gains or setting conditions to make such gains.

**US intelligence also assessed that the war in Ukraine has devastated the pre-war Russian military, although Russia has partially offset these losses and continues to prepare for a long war in Ukraine.** The declassified intelligence assessment reportedly stated that Russian forces have lost 87 percent of the total number of their pre-war active-duty ground troops and two-thirds of the tanks in their inventory before February 24, 2022.<sup>10</sup> The declassified intelligence assessment reportedly stated that Russian forces lost 315,000 personnel out of the 360,000 personnel, 2,200 out of 3,500 tanks, and 4,400 out of 13,600 infantry fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers that participated in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> The assessment reportedly stated that Russian ground forces have lost over a quarter of their pre-invasion stockpiles of military equipment as of late November 2023, reducing the complexity and scale of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine.<sup>12</sup>

The Russian leadership has undertaken extensive force generation measures to offset manpower losses, however, and Ukrainian intelligence reported in September 2023 that Russian forces had 420,000 personnel in occupied Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> Partial mobilization began in September 2022 and ongoing Russian crypto-mobilization efforts have very likely offset the Russian losses reported by US intelligence, although new Russian personnel likely have lower combat capabilities than those they replaced.<sup>14</sup> The Russian military command is also pursuing long-term restructuring and expansion efforts to form strategic reserves and prepare for a potential future large-scale conventional war against NATO, although short-to-medium-term manpower requirements in Ukraine are likely undermining these efforts.<sup>15</sup> Russia has been gradually mobilizing its defense industrial base (DIB) to address materiel losses in Ukraine and sustain a prolonged war effort, although there are no indications that Russia has made significant progress in offsetting armored vehicle losses in Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 11 during a speech at the US National Defense University that Russian President Vladimir Putin is shifting the Russian economy and society to a war-time footing.<sup>17</sup>

**Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with various US officials, including President Joe Biden, and spoke to Congress about US military assistance to Ukraine in Washington, DC on December 12.** Zelensky met with Biden, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Charles Brown, House Speaker Mike Johnson, and other US officials.<sup>18</sup> Zelensky stated at a press conference with Biden that Ukraine has had important battlefield successes and thanked the US for its support and for fostering an effective partnership.<sup>19</sup> Biden announced that he approved a military assistance package valued at \$200 million for Ukraine including air defense and artillery ammunition and reiterated continued US support for Ukraine.<sup>20</sup> Zelensky also met with various US defense manufacturers about joint Ukrainian-US production of artillery and air defense munitions and systems.<sup>21</sup>

**Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes targeting Ukraine on December 12.** The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 15 Shahed-131/136 drones from occupied Balaklava Raion, Crimea, and two Kh-59 missiles at targets in Ukraine, and that Ukrainian air defenses destroyed nine of the drones and both missiles.<sup>22</sup> Ukrainian military officials reported that the missiles targeted Zaporizhia Oblast and Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.<sup>23</sup> Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that a Russian drone strike damaged an administrative building in Odesa City.<sup>24</sup>

**Ukrainian officials stated that Russian special services may have conducted the major cyberattack on Ukrainian mobile operator Kyivstar on December 12.** Kyivstar CEO Oleksandr Komarov stated that a powerful cyberattack targeted Kyivstar on the morning of December 12 and caused technical failures but did not compromise subscribers' personal data.<sup>25</sup> Komarov stated that the cyberattack partially destroyed Kyivstar's IT infrastructure and that it is unclear how long restoration will take.<sup>26</sup> Ukrainian officials stated that the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office opened criminal proceedings and that the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) is investigating the possible involvement of Russian security services in the attack.<sup>27</sup> Ukrainian Ground Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Volodymyr Fityo stated that the cyberattack did not cause any major problems for Ukrainian forces on the front.<sup>28</sup> The cyberattack disrupted Kyivstar's national roaming services in Ukraine; the ATMs of two major Ukrainian banks, PrivatBank and Oschadbank; streetlights in Lviv City; air raid warning systems in Sumy City, Kyiv Oblast, and Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast; and municipal hotlines in Rivne City and Dnipro City.<sup>29</sup>

**The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that GUR cyber units recently conducted a successful cyber operation against the Russian Federal Tax Service (FNS).** The GUR stated on December 12 that GUR cyber units broke into the FNS's central servers and 2,300 regional services throughout Russia and occupied Crimea and conducted two cyberattacks on unspecified dates, eliminating the configuration files that allowed the Russian tax system databases to function.<sup>30</sup> The GUR reported that Russian authorities have been unsuccessfully attempting to restore the FNS for four days.<sup>31</sup> The GUR, citing unspecified experts, stated that the effects of the attack will continue to paralyze the FNS until at least January 2024 and that Russian authorities may not be able to fully resuscitate the tax system.<sup>32</sup> The FNS denied the GUR's report that Ukrainian cyber units hacked the FNS and claimed that all tax services are operating normally.<sup>33</sup>

Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* noted that the FNS reportedly informed a Russian Telegram channel that users may have problems accessing its online services but that the FNS refused to explain the reasons for the problems.<sup>34</sup>

**Russian news outlet *RBK* reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin has designated prominent Russian milbloggers as “trusted persons” in his presidential election campaign for the first time.** *RBK* reported on December 12 that Putin has designated Russian ultranationalist *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reporter and Kremlin Human Rights Council member Alexander “Sasha” Kots as a “trusted person,” and is also considering designating milblogger Alexander Sladkov and *WarGonzo* Telegram channel founder Semyon Pegov as “trusted persons.”<sup>35</sup> Russian law allows presidential candidates to designate up to 600 individuals as “trusted persons” to campaign on behalf of a certain candidate and sometimes act on behalf of the candidate in certain cases.<sup>36</sup> *RBK* noted that Putin’s “trusted persons” will also include Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) “Sparta” Battalion Commander Artem Zhoga, whom the Kremlin portrayed as asking Putin to run for re-election in 2024, as well as individuals from organizations that support the Russian war in Ukraine, including the state-run “Defenders of the Fatherland” Foundation and the Families of Soldiers of the Fatherland Committee.<sup>37</sup> ISW has previously observed Putin rewarding the loyalty of Kots, Sladkov, and Pegov, and Putin is likely using this “trusted persons” designation to further reward ultranationalist milbloggers who are loyal to him.<sup>38</sup> The Kremlin will likely use the March 2024 presidential election to leverage these and likely other milbloggers to reestablish Kremlin dominance over the information space and conduct information operations about Putin and the election.<sup>39</sup>

**A St. Petersburg court sentenced three underage Uzbek migrants and their parents to deportation for extinguishing the Eternal Flame in St. Petersburg amid ongoing tension between Central Asian communities in Russia and Russian authorities.** Russian authorities detained the three minors in St. Petersburg on December 10 and circulated footage of the children extinguishing the Eternal Flame, a memorial to Soviet servicemen killed in the Second World War, in St. Petersburg with snow.<sup>40</sup> Russian news outlet *RBK* reported on December 12 that Russian authorities are holding one of the children in a temporary detention center for juvenile offenders and will also fine and deport the children’s parents for failing to register with Russian migration authorities.<sup>41</sup> Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported that Russian authorities regularly detain people on administrative offenses for crimes against Eternal Flame memorials throughout Russia, but that criminal cases are not uncommon.<sup>42</sup> The Russian State Duma approved amendments allowing Russian courts to fine or assign compulsory work to migrants convicted of a crime in place of deportation on December 11, suggesting that the Kremlin’s migrant policy has yet to be defined clearly.<sup>43</sup>

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **US intelligence reportedly assessed that Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine in fall 2023 and through the upcoming winter aim to weaken Western support for Ukraine instead of achieving any immediate operational objectives.**
- **Russian forces may be conducting costly offensive operations at a time unfavorable for ground maneuver to time the potential shift in battlefield initiative with ongoing conversations in the West about continued support to Ukraine.**

- US intelligence also assessed that the war in Ukraine has devastated the pre-war Russian military, although Russia has partially offset these losses and continues to prepare for a long war in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with various US officials, including President Joe Biden, and spoke to Congress about US military assistance to Ukraine in Washington, DC on December 12.
- Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes targeting Ukraine on December 12.
- Ukrainian officials stated that Russian special services may have conducted the major cyberattack on Ukrainian mobile operator Kyivstar on December 12.
- The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that GUR cyber units recently conducted a successful cyber operation against the Russian Federal Tax Service (FNS).
- Russian news outlet RBK reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin has designated prominent Russian milbloggers as “trusted persons” in his presidential election campaign for the first time.
- A St. Petersburg court sentenced three underage Uzbek migrants and their parents to deportation for extinguishing the Eternal Flame in St. Petersburg amid ongoing tension between Central Asian communities in Russia and Russian authorities.
- Russian forces conducted 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 on December 12 and advanced in some areas.
- The Russian State Duma adopted a series of laws on December 12 to help further bolster Rosgvardia’s and the Federal Security Service’s (FSB) force generation capacity.
- Russian occupation authorities continue to use the Kremlin-funded pseudo-volunteer “Dvizheniye Pervykh” (Movement of the First) youth organization to indoctrinate Ukrainian youth in occupied Ukraine with Russian and cultural national identities.

*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**

### **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 localized offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on December 12 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least eight Russian assaults in the Kupyansk direction near Synkivka (9km northeast of Kupyansk), Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk), and Ivanivka (20km southwest of Kupaysnk) and two Russian assaults in the Lyman direction near Makiivka (23km northwest of Kreminna).<sup>44</sup> A Russian milblogger noted that the tempo of Russian offensive operations along the Synkivka-Petropavlivka line has decreased and that Russian forces are attempting to exhaust Ukrainian forces in the area.<sup>45</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces intensified offensive operations near the Serebryanske forest area and that Russian and Ukrainian forces fought in combat engagements near Hryhorivka (11km south of Kreminna).<sup>46</sup>

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on December 12. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that unspecified elements of the Russian Western Grouping of Forces repelled three Ukrainian assaults near Synkivka, Petropavlivka, and Terny (17km west of Kreminna) and that unspecified elements of the Russian Central Grouping of Forces repelled five Ukrainian assaults near Kirovsk (17km west of Kreminna) and Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna).<sup>47</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces with tank support unsuccessfully attacked near Shyroka Balka (11km west of Kreminna).<sup>48</sup>

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

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations northeast and south of Bakhmut on December 12 and recently advanced south of Bakhmut. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky posted footage of Ukrainian forces raising a flag over the Horlivka waste heap (22km southeast of Bakhmut or just west of Horlivka) uncontested, signaling their control of the area.<sup>49</sup> Russian milbloggers acknowledged that Ukrainian forces control the waste heap.<sup>50</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are taking advantage of the strong winds impacting Russian reconnaissance drones to conduct reconnaissance-in-force along the Horlivka-Mayorske line (20-24km southwest of Bakhmut).<sup>51</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Pazeno, Luhansk Oblast (20km northeast of Bakhmut).<sup>52</sup>

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Bakhmut on December 12 but did not make any confirmed advances. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in the direction of Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut) and Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut) and north of Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut).<sup>53</sup> A Russian milblogger, amplifying alleged unspecified Ukrainian military observers, claimed on December 11 that Russian forces advanced up to 440 meters

in depth towards Ivanivske and 840 meters in depth east of Bohdanivka and north of Khromove.<sup>54</sup> The milblogger claimed that poor weather conditions and ice slowed Russian advances on December 11.<sup>55</sup> Another Russian milblogger claimed on December 12 that Russian forces recaptured positions near Klishchiivka (9km south of Bakhmut) and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut) and along the Oo506 (Bakhmut-Chasiv Yar) highway.<sup>56</sup> The Ukrainian General staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 14 Russian attacks near Bohdanivka, Ivanivske, Klishchiivka, Andriivka, and Pivnichne (21km southwest of Bakhmut and just west of Horlivka).<sup>57</sup> A Ukrainian reserve officer stated that Ukrainian forces repelled most Russian attacks near Khromove and Klishchiivka.<sup>58</sup> Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov posted footage claiming to show elements of the “Kamerton” detachment of Chechen “Akhmat” Spetsnaz and the 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] 2nd Army Corps) capturing positions west of Klishchiivka.<sup>59</sup> The Russian MoD posted footage claiming to show elements of the Russian 331st Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th Guards VDV Division) operating near Bakhmut.<sup>60</sup>

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Avdiivka at a higher tempo on December 12 and made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on December 12 indicates that Russian forces advanced southwest of Avdiivka.<sup>61</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian armored groups and infantry advanced into the southwestern city limits of Avdiivka, although ISW has not observed visual evidence of the milbloggers’ maximalist claim.<sup>62</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced in the direction of Novokalynove (13km northeast of Avdiivka) and on the outskirts of Tonenke (5km west of Avdiivka) and Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka).<sup>63</sup> Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces continued attacks near Keramik (14km northwest of Avdiivka), the Avdiivka Coke Plant (on the northwestern outskirts of Avdiivka), and Pervomaiske (10km southwest of Avdiivka).<sup>64</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 42 Russian attacks east of Novokalynove and Novobakhmutivka (9km northwest of Avdiivka); near Stepove (3km northwest of Avdiivka), Avdiivka, Pervomaiske, and Nevelske (14km southwest of Avdiivka); and south of Sieverne and Tonenke.<sup>65</sup> Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy stated that Russian forces launched a massive offensive with armored vehicles in the Avdiivka direction on December 10 and continued these assaults with air support.<sup>66</sup> A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger characterized renewed Russian assaults on Avdiivka as the beginning of “the next stage” of Russia’s offensive operations around the settlement.<sup>67</sup> The spokesperson for a Ukrainian unit serving in the Avdiivka direction stated on December 12 that Ukrainian forces counterattacked and pushed Russian forces from positions near Stepove on December 11.<sup>68</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks west and southwest of Donetsk City on December 12 and made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on December 11 indicates that Russian forces advanced northwest of Marinka (directly west of Donetsk City).<sup>69</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in northern Marinka and near Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City) but noted that Russian forces do not completely control Marinka.<sup>70</sup> One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City), while another milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near the settlement.<sup>71</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 14 Russian attacks near Krasnohorivka (directly west of Donetsk City), Marinka, and Novomykhailivka.<sup>72</sup> The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Novomykhailivka.<sup>73</sup>

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

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area near Novoselivka (12km southeast of Hulyaipole).<sup>74</sup>

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances on December 12. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked north of Pryyutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).<sup>75</sup> The “Vostok” Battalion operating in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast stated that poor weather conditions are making it almost impossible to use communications systems or drones.<sup>76</sup> A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces advanced near Staromayorske and Urozhaine (both 9km south of Velyka Novosilka) on December 11, although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.<sup>77</sup>

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances on December 12. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked along the Robotyne-Verbove-Novofedorivka line (up to 15km northeast of Robotyne).<sup>78</sup>

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on December 12 and recently made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on December 10 indicates that Russian forces advanced east of Novoprokopivka (2km south of Robotyne).<sup>79</sup> Russian Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky claimed on December 12 that Russian forces significantly advanced northeast of Novopokrovka (13km northeast of Robotyne), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.<sup>80</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked west of Verbove (9km east of Robotyne) and west of Novopokrovka.<sup>81</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also attacked near Robotyne and from Novofedorivka (15km northeast of Robotyne).<sup>82</sup> The Russian MoD stated that elements of the Russian 7th Airborne (VDV) Division are operating in the Zaporizhia direction.<sup>83</sup>

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted offensive operations on east bank Kherson Oblast and made claimed advances on December 12. Geolocated footage published on December 11 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced south of Krynyky (30km northeast of Kherson Oblast and 2km from the Dnipro River).<sup>84</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed on December 12 that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from unspecified positions near Krynyky.<sup>85</sup> A Russian source claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces are fighting in meeting engagements in Krynyky and that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully tried to gain a foothold in the forest area near the settlement.<sup>86</sup> Russian sources claimed that there are unconfirmed reports that Ukrainian forces landed in other unspecified areas of the east bank of the Dnipro River.<sup>87</sup>

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian “Dnepr” Grouping of Forces Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky ordered the creation of assault units modeled after the “shock battalions” of the White Army during the Russian Civil War that broke through enemy defenses and raised morale in other units.<sup>88</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff stated that the personnel in these new shock units have low discipline and motivation, however.

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



The Russian State Duma adopted a series of laws on December 12 to help further bolster Rosgvardia's and the Federal Security Service's (FSB) force generation capacity. The Duma adopted a law that allows Rosgvardia to create and use volunteer formations at the decision of Russian President Vladimir Putin and stipulates that these formations will perform certain unspecified defense tasks during periods of mobilization, martial law, conditions of armed conflict, and special military operations.<sup>89</sup> The Duma also approved a law allowing Russian conscripts to serve in the FSB Border Service.<sup>90</sup> The Duma approved another bill that introduces criminal penalties for discrediting Rosgvardia volunteers, similar to existing laws against discrediting the Russian military and irregular formations, and for providing assistance to countries that prosecute Rosgvardia volunteers.<sup>91</sup>

Putin signed a law on December 12 that provides additional recruitment incentives and social support for Russians who serve in Ukraine. The new law amends the Russian employment code to provide Russians who serve in Ukraine and their families the right to priority employment.<sup>92</sup> This preferential labor law may also support ongoing Russian efforts to address domestic labor shortages. Putin also signed a law providing companies that employ Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine and FSB veterans with a special "social enterprise" status likely to incentivize Russian enterprises to employ Russian war veterans to also address domestic labor shortages.<sup>93</sup>

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

Russian sources claimed that Russia has begun mass production of a new type of attack drone. Russian sources, including a prominent state-affiliated propagandist, claimed on December 12 that Russia has begun mass producing the "Termite" helicopter-type drone armed with 80mm missiles with a target engagement range of up to six kilometers.<sup>94</sup> Ukrainian military analyst Alexander Kovalenko stated on December 1 that the "Termite" drones do not threaten Ukrainian forces as they are larger and slower than Shahed drones, which makes them easy targets for Ukrainian forces to shoot down.<sup>95</sup>

### **Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)**

Russian occupation authorities continue to use the Kremlin-funded pseudo-volunteer "Dvizheniye Pervykh" (Movement of the First) youth organization to indoctrinate Ukrainian youth in occupied Ukraine with Russian and cultural national identities. Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhaev posted footage on December 12 showing him giving Russian passports to young members of the Movement of the First organization in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea.<sup>96</sup> The Movement of the First organization is responsible for establishing youth education programs in Russia and occupied Ukraine aimed at militarizing and indoctrinating youth and reportedly has 67 branches in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast alone.<sup>97</sup>

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

Russian government officials continue attempts to exacerbate alleged tensions between Ukrainian political and military leaders. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova reiterated

claims on December 12 that the West is considering removing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and replacing him with another senior Ukrainian military or political official.<sup>98</sup> Zakharova added that a new leader of Ukraine would not change the situation in Ukraine “in any way,” however. Zakharova’s addition likely attempts to justify Russia’s continued maximalist goals in Ukraine while furthering attempts to promote internal Ukrainian political tensions.

Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Head Alexander Bortnikov reiterated a longstanding information operation that Ukrainian and Western intelligence services are responsible for the increase in “terrorist” activities in Russia and aim to spread “neo-Nazi” ideology to foment mass unrest.<sup>99</sup> Bortnikov also suggested that Ukrainian special services were involved in a recent school shooting in Russia, a claim that Russian milbloggers parroted shortly after the incident.<sup>100</sup>

### **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 signed a law on December 12 ratifying a Russian-Belarusian agreement on the creation and operation of joint combat training centers.<sup>101</sup> Russia opened permanent training centers in Belarus in 2021 and has used the centers and joint military exercises with Belarusian forces to support a permanent Russian military presence in Belarus.<sup>102</sup>

**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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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/12/politics/russia-troop-losses-us-intelligence-assessment/index.html> ; <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/12/us/politics/russia-intelligence-assessment.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/12/politics/russia-troop-losses-us-intelligence-assessment/index.html> ; <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/12/us/politics/russia-intelligence-assessment.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/12/politics/russia-troop-losses-us-intelligence-assessment/index.html> ; <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/12/us/politics/russia-intelligence-assessment.html> ;

<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/12/12/white-house-ukraine-intel-declassified-00131296> ; <https://www.voanews.com/a/declassified-us-intelligence-reveals-massive-russian-losses-in-ukraine/7395271.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-9-2023>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-9-2023> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar101223> ;

<sup>6</sup> <https://isw.pub/Ukr111122> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021923>

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