

# 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 2pm ET on February 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Ukraine has been defending itself against illegal Russian military intervention and aggression for 10 years.**<sup>1</sup> Russia violated its commitments to respect Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity and began its now decade-long military intervention in Ukraine on February 20, 2014 when Russian soldiers without identifying insignia (also known colloquially as “little green men” and, under international law, as illegal combatants), deployed to Crimea.<sup>2</sup> The deployment of these Russian soldiers out of uniform followed months of protests in Ukraine against pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich for refusing to sign an association agreement with the European Union (EU) that the Ukrainian Rada had approved.<sup>3</sup> The Yanukovich government killed and otherwise abused peaceful Ukrainian protestors, leading to an organized protest movement calling for Yanukovich's resignation. This Ukrainian movement — the Euromaidan Movement — culminated in Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity during which the Rada voted to oust Yanukovich who then fled to Russia with the Kremlin's aid. Russian President Vladimir Putin viewed these events as intolerable and launched a hybrid war against Ukraine as the Euromaidan Movement was still underway with the goal of reestablishing Russian control over all of Ukraine. Russia's military intervention in Crimea and the Donbas in 2014 violated numerous Russian international commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Russia's recognition of Ukraine as an independent state in 1991 and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum in which Russia specifically committed not to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty or territorial integrity.<sup>4</sup>

**Russia's grand strategic objective of regaining control of Ukraine has remained unchanged in the decade since its illegal intervention in Ukraine began.** Russia's overarching strategic objective in Ukraine, as first manifested in the

2014 invasion of Crimea and the Donbas, has been and remains the destruction of Ukraine's sovereignty and the re-establishment of a pro-Russian Ukrainian government subservient to Moscow's direction. Russia began immediate efforts to dismantle and eradicate Ukrainian identity in Crimea, consolidate its military presence on the peninsula, and forcibly integrate Crimea into the Russian Federation along multiple avenues, all while promoting a parallel political subversion campaign to destroy Ukraine's ability to resist dominant Russian influence.<sup>5</sup>

**Russia worked hard to obfuscate its grand strategic objectives of regaining control of Ukraine between 2014 and the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022.** The Kremlin successfully employed disinformation to obfuscate Russia's objectives in Ukraine for many Western leaders. Putin learned valuable lessons from the way the West responded to Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine and tailored Russia's information operations to mask his grand strategic intent towards Ukraine in the years leading up to the 2022 full-scale invasion. Putin succeeded in convincing many Western leaders that Russia had limited objectives in Ukraine: that Moscow only sought control over Crimea, or that Russia sought only to occupy parts of eastern Ukraine, for example.<sup>6</sup> Russia also obfuscated its true intentions in Ukraine by promulgating the lie that Russia's actions in Ukraine were aimed at preventing NATO expansion. The Euromaidan Movement and the Revolution of Dignity were never about NATO — they were about Ukraine's desire to associate with the EU. In the years between 2014 and 2022, however, Russia managed to pollute the global information space with the fallacy that pro-NATO policies in Ukraine forced Russia's hand. While the mechanisms Russia uses to cloak its intentions in Ukraine have adapted and evolved in the past decade, Russia's grand strategic objectives of controlling Ukraine and denying Ukrainians their right to choose their own future have persisted and likely will not change until Russia is defeated. The Kremlin continues information operations to persuade Western audiences and leaders that Russia has limited objectives in Ukraine in order to fuel calls for negotiations on terms that would destroy Ukraine's independence and damage the West.

**Russian military intelligence is reportedly learning from its failures in recent years and has renewed efforts against NATO states.**<sup>7</sup> The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) published a report on February 20 arguing that Russian special services aim to expand their capacity in several ways that pose strategic threats to NATO members, including rebuilding their recruitment, training, and support apparatus to better infiltrate European countries; adopting the Wagner Group's former functions and pursuing aggressive partnerships with African countries to supplant Western partnerships; and using Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov to significantly expand Russian influence among Chechen and Muslim populations in Europe and the Middle East to ultimately subvert Western interests.<sup>8</sup> RUSI noted that Russian intelligence services have suffered a slew of intelligence failures in the past several years, including the Russian Federal Security Service's (FSB) botched poisoning of now-deceased opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the FSB's overconfident assessment of Russian military capabilities ahead of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the mass expulsion of Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) operatives from embassies across the globe, and *Bellingcat's* exposure of the Russian Main Military Intelligence Directorate's (GRU) Unit 29155's failed poisoning of defected Russian intelligence officer Sergei Skripal.<sup>9</sup> RUSI noted that the GRU reformed

Unit 29155 and formed a “Service for Special Activities” to increase operational security and data security and is beginning to recruit individuals with no military experience to make it harder for the West to identify them.<sup>10</sup> RUSI reported that Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko is in charge of creating “special committees” to run information operations against the West, an assessment that is consistent with previous reporting from the *Washington Post* about purported Kremlin documents outlining Kiriyenko’s roll in wide-scale disinformation campaigns.<sup>11</sup>

The Ukrainian Center for Combating Disinformation similarly reported on February 20 that Russian special services have significantly increased their operations in NATO member states and Ukraine as part of large-scale disinformation efforts aimed at demoralizing the Ukrainian military.<sup>12</sup> Estonian Security Police, for example, reported that Estonian security services have detained 10 people for participating in alleged Russian special services activity in Estonia between December 2023 and February 2024.<sup>13</sup> Such subversive control tactics likely support the Kremlin’s near- and medium-term goals of spoiling Western military assistance to Ukraine and rebuilding intelligence capacities in support of long-term objectives against NATO states.

**Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu preened themselves on the Russian seizure of Avdiivka.** Shoigu briefed Putin about the seizure of Avdiivka and the wider Russian war effort in Ukraine in a February 20 meeting during which Putin and Shoigu both amplified an information operation that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) began on February 19 that aims to sow resentment and distrust against the Ukrainian command for an allegedly chaotic Ukrainian withdrawal from Avdiivka.<sup>14</sup> Shoigu used the briefing and a subsequent interview with Kremlin newswire *TASS* to portray the five month long attritional Russian offensive operation to seize Avdiivka as an astounding success with minimal losses, despite the fact that Ukrainian and Russian estimates place Russian losses in the fight for Avdiivka between 16,000 and 47,000.<sup>15</sup> Shoigu argued that the Russian operation to seize Avdiivka was an operational success because Ukrainian forces had long fortified the settlement, but Shoigu did not claim that the seizure of the settlement would provide any specific operational benefits — as he recently claimed about the Russian seizure of other small settlements in Donetsk Oblast.<sup>16</sup> Shoigu also claimed that Russian forces conducted up to 450 high-precision airstrikes per day during the last days of the Russian effort to seize Avdiivka.<sup>17</sup> ISW assesses that Russian forces likely established temporary limited and localized air superiority during this time, and Shoigu is likely attempting to portray this temporary period as a persisting Russian capability.<sup>18</sup> Putin’s and Shoigu’s attempts to establish the seizure of Avdiivka as a major battlefield victory within the Russian information space likely aim to portray the Russian war effort in Ukraine as increasingly successful and portray Putin as a competent wartime president ahead of his assured reelection in March 2024.<sup>19</sup> The Kremlin’s efforts to highlight Russian success in Avdiivka also mutually supports increasing Russian efforts to use the seizure of the settlement to generate panic in the Ukrainian information space and weaken Ukrainian morale.<sup>20</sup>

**Shoigu also claimed that Russian forces completely seized Krynky in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast, although available open-source visual evidence and Ukrainian and Russian reporting suggests that Ukrainian forces**

**maintain their limited bridgehead in the area.** Shoigu claimed during his briefing with Putin that Russian forces cleared Krynky, although Putin claimed that Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) and “Dnepr” Grouping of Forces Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky told him that a handful of Ukrainian personnel remained in the settlement.<sup>21</sup> Shoigu refuted Teplinsky’s claim and portrayed Russian efforts to eliminate the bridgehead as a successfully completed effort and praised unspecified VDV elements and the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade as distinguished units for their role in the operation, a typical Kremlin accolade following the Russian seizure of a tactical objective.<sup>22</sup> ISW has not observed any visual evidence of recent notable Russian advances near the limited Ukrainian bridgehead in and near Krynky as of the time of this publication, and Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk reported that Ukrainian forces continue to gradually expand their bridgehead in the area.<sup>23</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that regular positional fighting continued near Krynky on February 19 and 20 and did not note any Russian success in the area.<sup>24</sup>

**The Kremlin likely prematurely claimed the Russian seizure of Krynky to reinforce its desired informational effects ahead of the March 2024 presidential election, although the Kremlin is likely setting expectations that the Russian military may fail to meet.** Humenyuk identified Russian efforts to eliminate the Ukrainian bridgehead as a Russian effort to achieve informational objective ahead of the Russian presidential election, and Shoigu framed the Russian effort in east bank Kherson Oblast as similar to the seizure of Avdiivka.<sup>25</sup> Shoigu claimed that Russian forces have destroyed up to 3,500 Ukrainian personnel in east bank Kherson Oblast since the start of larger-than-usual Ukrainian ground operations in the area in October 2023.<sup>26</sup> Shoigu called the alleged Russian seizure of Krynky the official end of the Summer 2023 Ukrainian counteroffensive.<sup>27</sup> The Kremlin notably has delayed acknowledging the Russian seizure of the theater-wide initiative in Ukraine, likely out of potential concerns about Russian capabilities to advance, and Shoigu likely formally announced the “end” of the Ukrainian counteroffensive to publicly highlight that Russia has the initiative.<sup>28</sup> The Kremlin’s willingness to rhetorically address the tempo and initiative of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine may be due to increasing Kremlin confidence about Russian prospects and a conscious effort to support Kremlin narratives about the war as the presidential elections approach. The Kremlin may increasingly claim battlefield victories in Ukraine without full assurances of Russian tactical and operational success to support informational efforts that simultaneously glorify Putin and demoralize Ukraine, although such increasing rhetorical confidence may create expectations in the Russian information space that the Russian military cannot meet. Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov notably claimed that he expects that Russian forces will successfully complete Putin’s Special Military Operation by September 2024, a forecast that is extremely implausible.<sup>29</sup>

**The *New York Times* (NYT) reported that the Ukrainian withdrawal from Avdiivka may have left hundreds of Ukrainian personnel “unaccounted” for.** The *NYT* reported on February 20, citing two Ukrainian soldiers, that about 850 to 1,000 Ukrainian personnel “appear to have been captured or are unaccounted for” following the

Ukrainian withdrawal from Avdiivka.<sup>30</sup> The *NYT* reported that unspecified senior Western officials stated that the range of apparent Ukrainian personnel losses “seemed accurate.” The *NYT* reported that some unnamed Western officials stated that Ukrainian forces failed to conduct an orderly withdrawal from Avdiivka on February 16 and 17, which resulted in an apparent “significant number of soldiers captured.” Personnel who are “unaccounted for” include those killed in action, wounded in action, missing in action, and captured. ISW has not yet observed open-source visual evidence of massive Ukrainian personnel losses or the Russian captures of Ukrainian prisoners at such a scale, and the Russian information space customarily displays such evidence when it has it. The lack of open-source evidence does not demonstrate that the *NYT*’s report is false, however, and ISW continues to monitor the information space for evidence on which to base an assessment of the outcome of the Ukrainian withdrawal. The *Kyiv Independent* reported on February 20 that some Ukrainian forces conducted a disorderly withdrawal from the Zenit strongpoint south of Avdiivka and experienced high losses.<sup>31</sup> ISW has observed that this Ukrainian position was the only identified tactically encircled position at the time of the Ukrainian withdrawal from Avdiivka.

**Ukrainian officials launched an investigation into additional apparent Russian violations of the Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war (POWs) in Zaporizhia Oblast.**<sup>32</sup> The Ukrainian Prosecutor General stated on February 20 that it launched an investigation into footage published on February 20 showing Russian forces executing three Ukrainian POWs near Robotyne on February 18.<sup>33</sup> The killing of POWs violates Article III of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs.<sup>34</sup> The Ukrainian Prosecutor General previously launched investigations into footage showing a Russian execution of Ukrainian POWs and Russian soldiers using Ukrainian POWs as human shields near Robotyne in December 2023.<sup>35</sup> ISW has recently reported on several such apparent war crimes in Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts.<sup>36</sup> Russian President Vladimir Putin made a point of remarking on Russia’s treatment of Ukrainian POWs on February 20, claimed that Russia holds POWs in accordance with international conventions, and declared that Russian forces must act in the same way in Avdiivka, likely in an attempt to deflect responsibility for high-profile apparent Russian war crimes away from himself. Putin is likely concerned about international repercussions for his subordinates’ actions.<sup>37</sup> The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Putin in March 2023, which has likely impeded his ability to travel internationally, and Putin may have explicitly addressed Ukrainian POWs given recent international attention on Russian atrocities in Ukraine in order to protect himself against another such international legal ruling against him.<sup>38</sup>

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Ukraine has been defending itself against illegal Russian military intervention and aggression for 10 years.**
- **Russia’s grand strategic objective of regaining control of Ukraine has remained unchanged in the decade since its illegal intervention in Ukraine began.**

- **Russia worked hard to obfuscate its grand strategic objectives of regaining control of Ukraine between 2014 and the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022.**
- **Russian military intelligence is reportedly learning from its failures in recent years and has renewed efforts against NATO states.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu preened themselves on the Russian seizure of Avdiivka.**
- **Shoigu also claimed that Russian forces completely seized Krynky in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast, although available open-source visual evidence and Ukrainian and Russian reporting suggests that Ukrainian forces maintain their limited bridgehead in the area.**
- **The Kremlin likely prematurely claimed the Russian seizure of Krynky to reinforce its desired informational effects ahead of the March 2024 presidential election, although the Kremlin is likely setting expectations that the Russian military may fail to meet.**
- **The *New York Times* (NYT) reported that the Ukrainian withdrawal from Avdiivka may have left hundreds of Ukrainian personnel “unaccounted” for.**
- **Ukrainian officials launched an investigation into additional apparent Russian violations of the Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war (POWs) in Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian forces made a confirmed advance west of Avdiivka amid continued positional engagements along the entire frontline.**
- **The Kremlin continues to promote Russia’s efforts to expand its defense industrial base (DIB).**
- **Zaporizhia Oblast occupation authorities are expanding public services provision in occupied parts of the oblast to consolidate bureaucratic control and generate dependencies on the occupation administration.**

***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
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- 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)**

Positional engagements continued along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on February 20 but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that fighting continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Tabaivka; north of Kreminna near Zhytlivka; west of Kreminna near Terny, Torske, and Yampolivka; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.<sup>39</sup> Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash noted that the Russian grouping in the Kupyansk-Kreminna direction is comprised of 122,000 personnel: 42,000 in the Kupyansk direction, 57,000 in the Lyman direction (west of Kreminna), and 23,000 in the Siversk direction (south of Kreminna).<sup>40</sup> Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported that elements of Russia's 1st Tank Regiment and 15th Motorized Rifle Regiment (both of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Division, 1st Guards Tank Army, Western Military District [1st GTA, WMD]) are struggling to advance towards Kupyansk from the southeast near Tabaivka and Krokhmalne, so the Russian command has redeployed at least three assault units – each up to a company in size – to the area to support efforts to break through Ukrainian lines and advance northwest of Svatove.<sup>41</sup> Mashovets also noted that elements of the 6th Combined Arms Army (WMD) are trying to move across the Oskil River west of Synkivka to push on Kupyansk from the west bank of the river but are unable to do so because of heavy Ukrainian artillery fire.<sup>42</sup> Mashovets stated that elements of the 4th Tank Division (1st GTA, WMD) and 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army, WMD) are operating west of the Terny-Yampoliva area and struggling to eliminate Ukrainian positions on the Zherebets River west of Kreminna.<sup>43</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)**

Positional engagements continued near Bakhmut on February 20, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Positional engagements continued northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka and Khromove; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.<sup>44</sup> Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of

Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated that Russian forces continue attempts to advance to Chasiv Yar (west of Bakhmut) and are transferring reserves to the Bakhmut direction.<sup>45</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that the Russian military transferred some unspecified Russian forces from the Avdiivka direction to the Bakhmut area.<sup>46</sup> Elements of the Russian 331st Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th VDV Division) continue operating northwest of Bakhmut.<sup>47</sup>

Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Avdiivka. Geolocated footage published on February 20 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced on the eastern outskirts of Lastochkyne (northwest of Avdiivka).<sup>48</sup> Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) "Sparta" Battalion Commander and Speaker of the DNR Parliament Artem Zhoga claimed that Russian forces have cleared Avdiivka.<sup>49</sup> Positional engagements continued northwest of Avdiivka near Stepove and Lastochkyne; west of Avdiivka near Sieverne; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske and Nevelske.<sup>50</sup> Elements of the Russian 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District) and 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps [AC]) are reportedly operating near Lastochkyne and Pervomaiske, respectively.<sup>51</sup>

Russian forces reportedly advanced southwest of Donetsk City amid continued positional engagements on February 20. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in Pobieda (southwest of Donetsk City) along the O0532 (or T0524) Pobieda-Vuhledar highway, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.<sup>52</sup> Russian and some Ukrainian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces withdrew from Pobieda, although ISW has not observed visual evidence of a Ukrainian withdrawal at this time.<sup>53</sup> Positional engagements continue west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka and Pobieda.<sup>54</sup> Elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) and 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th AC, Eastern Military District) reportedly continue operating near Novomykhailivka.<sup>55</sup> Elements of the Russian 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA, Southern Military District) reportedly continue operating near Heorhiivka.<sup>56</sup>

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

Russian forces recently marginally advanced near the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border as positional fighting continued in the area on February 20. Geolocated footage published on February 20 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced north of Shevchenko (southeast of Velyka Novosilka and southwest of Vuhledar).<sup>57</sup> Positional fighting continued southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Malynivka; south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske; and southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Shevchenko, Prechystivka, and Zolota Nyva.<sup>58</sup> Footage published on February 19 and 20 shows elements of the Russian 35th Combined Arms Army (Eastern Military District [EMD]) striking Ukrainian positions near Hulyaipole and elements of the Russian 11th Air and Air Defense Forces



Army (Russian Aerospace Forces and EMD) striking Ukrainian positions near Malynivka.<sup>59</sup>

There were no confirmed changes to the frontline in the Robotyne area on February 20.<sup>60</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces captured a tactically significant height between Robotyne and Verbove (northeast of Robotyne) and that Russian forces have advanced between 700 meters and two kilometers forward during offensive operations in the area since February 17.<sup>61</sup> The milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, including elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) and Russian Airborne (VDV) elements, continued attacking Robotyne from the west and south between Verbove and Robotyne.<sup>62</sup> Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continue counterattacks in and near Robotyne to recapture lost positions.<sup>63</sup> Elements of the Russian BARS-1 (Russian Combat Army Reserve) formation are reportedly operating near Verbove, and elements of the Russian 136th Artillery Regiment (likely a reconstituted Soviet-era unit) are operating in the Orikhiv direction.<sup>64</sup>

Positional fighting continued near Krynyky on east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on February 20 despite Russian military officials' claims that Russian forces completely captured the settlement.<sup>65</sup> Geolocated footage published on February 19 shows Ukrainian forces conducting a HIMARS strike against a Russian mobile Zala drone launcher near Stara Mayachka.<sup>66</sup> Footage posted on February 20 shows the Russian 81st Volunteer Spetsnaz Brigade operating near Krynyky.<sup>67</sup>

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

Russian forces conducted a medium-sized combined drone and missile strike against Ukrainian rear areas on the morning of February 20. Ukraine's Air Force reported that Russian forces launched two S-300/S-400 missiles from Belgorod Oblast; one Kh-31 air-to-surface missile from occupied Zaporizhia Oblast; and 23 Shahed-136/131 drones from Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai.<sup>68</sup> Ukrainian forces destroyed all 23 Shaheds over Kharkiv, Poltava, Kirovohrad, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts.<sup>69</sup> Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat reported that Russian forces are increasingly operating A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft closer to Russian borders and in the direction of Belarus due to recent successful Ukrainian shootdowns of Russian aircraft, including fighter bombers and an A-50 over the Sea of Azov in January.<sup>70</sup>

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

The Kremlin continues to promote Russia's efforts to expand its defense industrial base (DIB). Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed on February 20 that Russia has

increased the production of tanks by a factor of six and is also focused on modernizing tanks.<sup>71</sup> Ukrainian sources previously stated that Russia's reported tank production numbers in recent years largely reflect restored and modernized tanks drawn from storage rather than new production.<sup>72</sup> Latvian Defense Ministry's State Secretary Janis Garisons stated on December 13 that Russia can "produce and repair" about 100-150 tanks per month, and Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev suggested in March 2023 that Russian can produce roughly 125 tanks per month.<sup>73</sup> Russia's ability to modernize and use tanks retrieved from storage still gives Russian forces an advantage on the battlefield in the overall number of available tanks for operations.

Russian First Deputy Presidential Chief of Staff Sergei Kiriyenko and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Trutnev reportedly created the "Soyuz" volunteer detachment comprised primarily of athletes.<sup>74</sup> Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on February 20 that Kiriyenko and Trutnev raised 634 million rubles (\$6.8 million) from Russian businesses, including Russian-state owned nuclear company Rosatom and Russian-state owned bank Sberbank, and recruited personnel through the Russian Union of Martial Arts (RSBI).<sup>75</sup> *Vazhnye Istorii* reported that personnel of the "Soyuz" volunteer detachment trained at the Russian Special Forces University in Gudermes, Chechnya, and that RSBI Co-Chairman Ramil Gabbasov is the commander of the detachment.<sup>76</sup> The "Soyuz" volunteer detachment reportedly deployed to Ukraine at an unspecified time after its creation in December 2023.<sup>77</sup>

### **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)**

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 20 that Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB) manufacturers have started serial production of 2S22 155mm self-propelled "Bohdana" artillery systems.<sup>78</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the "Bohdana" artillery system can shoot 100 shells per day and only needs to fire one shell to "warm up" the artillery barrel whereas Soviet-era Msta-B artillery systems need to fire two shells to do so.<sup>79</sup>

Swedish Minister of Defense Pål Jonson announced a \$683 million security assistance package to Ukraine on February 20, Sweden's largest aid package for Ukraine to date.<sup>80</sup> Jonson stated that the package will include artillery ammunition, RBS70 portable air defense systems, anti-tank missiles, Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles, hand grenades, 10 CB-90 fast assault watercraft, and 20 boats.<sup>81</sup> The aid package also includes roughly 1 billion Swedish Kroner (\$96.5 million) for the joint Swedish-Danish procurement of CV-90 armored vehicles for Ukraine.<sup>82</sup>

Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair announced on February 19 that Canada will send more than 800 SkyRanger R70 drones to Ukraine as part of an upcoming aid package.<sup>83</sup> Blair stated that the drones are valued roughly at \$95 million and that the package is a part of the \$500 million of security assistance that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced in June 2023.<sup>84</sup>

Ukraine continues to sign agreements with German manufacturers aimed to expand Ukraine's DIB. Ukrainian defense industry company Ukroboronprom announced on February 20 that it signed a memorandum of understanding with Germany company MDBA Deutschland GmbH for the research, development, and production of air defense systems, specifically for countering drones.<sup>85</sup> Germany company Dynamit Nobel Defense announced on February 20 that it is considering localizing production of Panzerfaust-3 anti-tank weapons in Germany as part of cooperation agreements that it signed with Ukroboronprom on February 17.<sup>86</sup>

Germany is reportedly planning to provide Ukraine with long-range strike capabilities. German outlet *BILD* reported on February 20 that the Bundestag plans to vote on an aid package for Ukraine in the coming week that will include artillery ammunition, equipment, and weapons to Ukraine.<sup>87</sup> *BILD* reported that the draft proposal includes the delivery of additional long-range weapons systems "to enable targeted attacks on strategically relevant targets" in the Russian rear and suggested that these systems might be Taurus missiles.<sup>88</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)**

Zaporizhia Oblast occupation authorities are expanding public service provision in occupied parts of the oblast to consolidate bureaucratic control and generate dependencies on the occupation administration. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky stated on February 20 that Russian authorities are opening the largest "My Documents" public services center in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast, which will provide over 30 public services to over 137,000 people.<sup>89</sup> The available public services include registration for real estate services, individual insurance account registration (SNILS), compulsory medical insurance, tax identification numbers, and other similar services.<sup>90</sup> The "My Documents" service functions throughout the Russian Federation and abroad to provide various public service documents to Russian citizens and is now operating in occupied Ukraine likely to force residents of occupied areas to interact with Russian bureaucratic organs to receive documents for the most basic public services.<sup>91</sup> ISW has assessed that such bureaucratic control programs allow occupation authorities to collect private data on residents of occupied areas and renders occupied areas reliant on the occupation administration for bureaucratic support.<sup>92</sup>

## **Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

Russia continues attempts to use its BRICS chairmanship to forward its foreign policy objects and expand Russian influence abroad. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela on February 20, and Maduro stated that Venezuela intends to join BRICS in the near future.<sup>93</sup> Maduro amplified boilerplate Kremlin narratives attempting to portray Russia as winning its war in Ukraine and blaming the West and NATO for the onset of the war.<sup>94</sup>

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko reiterated Kremlin narratives on February 20 that attempt to portray the West as conflict-seeking and a threat to both Russia and Belarus.<sup>95</sup> Lukashenko accused the West of attempting to sow internal instability in Belarus and conduct false flag attacks ultimately aimed at undermining Belarusian sovereignty.<sup>96</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)**

Nothing significant to report.

**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://ips.ligazakon.net/document/T150337?an=82>; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/20/crimea-anniversary-war-ukraine>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ips.ligazakon.net/document/T150337?an=82>

<sup>3</sup> <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/about-ukraine/european-integration/eu-ukraine-association-agreement#:~:text=On%20September%2016%2C%202014%2C%20the,Agreement%20to%20come%20into%20force>

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