Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan January 21, 2024, 3:55pm 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 12:45pm ET on January 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against targets in Leningrad and Tula oblasts, where repeated Ukrainian drone strikes may fix Russian short-range air defense systems defending potentially significant targets along expected flight routes. Ukrainian media, citing unnamed sources within Ukrainian special services, reported that Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against the Shcheglovsky Val Plant in Tula City, Tula Oblast and the "Novateka" plant and gas terminal near the port of Ust-Luga, Leningrad Oblast on the night of January 20 to 21.[1] The Shcheglovsky Val Plant reportedly manufactures Pantsir-S and Pantsir-S1 air defense systems, and the Ust-Luga complex reportedly processes stable gas condensate into light and heavy naphtha, diesel, kerosene, and naval fuel.[2] Russian sources amplified footage claiming to show explosions in Tula City and Ust-Luga, presumably the results of successful Ukrainian strikes.[3] Geolocated footage published on January 20 shows additional explosions over Smolensk City, indicating possible Ukrainian strikes in the area.[4] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian air defenses destroyed five drones over Tula, Oryol, and Smolensk oblasts.[5] Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a successful drone strike on Russian military facilities in Leningrad Oblast on January 18.[6]

A Russian insider source claimed on January 21 that Russian air defense coverage over Leningrad Oblast is poor and indicated that Russian air defenses in Leningrad Oblast are likely not arrayed to defend against strikes from the south.[7] Russian air defense systems in Leningrad Oblast are most likely positioned to defend against strikes from the northwest and west, as Russia has historically arrayed its air defense in the area to defend against hypothetical NATO attacks.[8] The Russian military is currently reforming the Leningrad Military District (LMD) with the expressed intent to prepare for a potential future conventional war against NATO and may be arranging military assets in a way to posture along the border with NATO members.[9] Ukrainian strikes in Leningrad Oblast may prompt Russian forces to reposition short-range air defense systems along expected flight routes of Ukrainian drones to defend potential targets of strategic value. Russian forces using short-range systems such as the Pantsir may not be able to cover all important potential targets in Leningrad Oblast without bringing additional systems into the area, and continued Ukrainian strikes in deep rear areas in Russia may thus increase pressure on Russia's air defenses overall.

Moldovan authorities accused Russian peacekeepers in Transnistria of numerous violations, including the improper use of drones, while conducting exercises in late December 2023, prompting an information attack by a pro-Kremlin mouthpiece. Members of the Moldovan delegation to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Joint Control Commission (JCC) demanded during a JCC meeting on January 18 that the JCC conduct an investigation into Russian peacekeepers for using small arms, drones, and imitation weapons during an exercise allegedly repelling a sabotage attack on the peacekeepers' outpost in the Moldovan security zone on December 22, 2023.[10] The Moldovan authorities stated that the Russian peacekeeping forces' presence and use of these weapons inside the security zone violates JCC protocols and that the Russian peacekeeping forces had not properly disclosed some of these weapons and drones as part of their arsenal. A prominent, Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed in response on January 21 that Moldovan authorities have been increasingly pressuring Russian-backed breakaway republic Transnistria by calling for the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers and through economic pressure.[11] The milblogger claimed that the Moldovan government imposed "double" duties on Transnistrian businesses that amount to roughly \$16 million over an unspecified timeframe and that will raise the cost of living in Transnistria. Recent changes to the Moldovan Customs Code require Transnistrian businesses to pay import customs duties to the Moldovan government, whereas previously Transnistrian businesses only paid duties to the Transnistrian government.[12] The milblogger claimed that this pressure supports the "forceful reintegration" of Transnistria into Moldova and that Russia should prepare for further escalation, reminiscent of recent accusations from Transnistrian President Vadim Krasnoselsky, [13] The Kremlin-affiliated

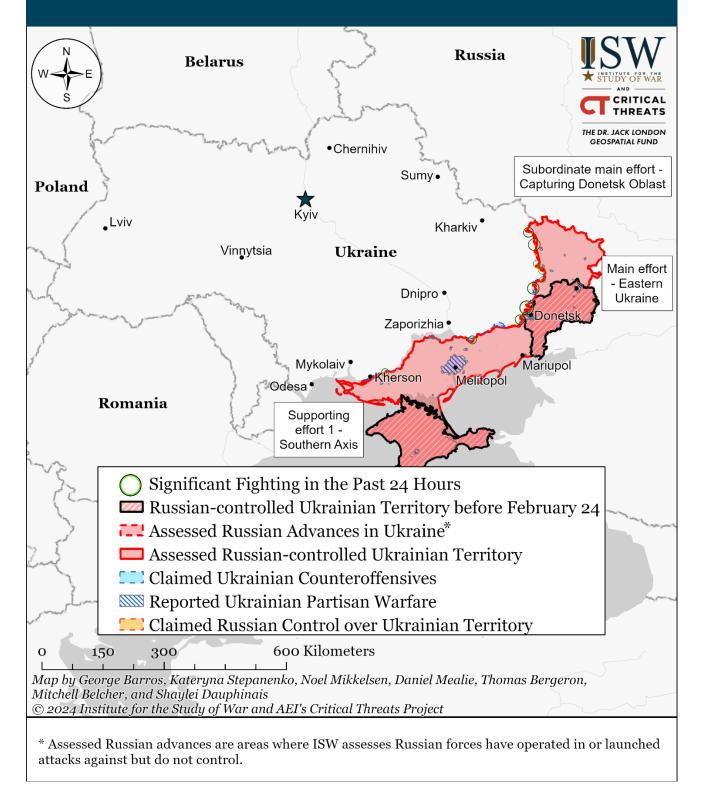
milblogger's claims and Krasnoselsky's accusations are likely part of an information operation aimed at destabilizing Moldova. which borders NATO member Romania, and justifying any future Russian escalation in the region.[14]

Russia is likely intensifying relations with North Korea as part of an effort to procure more artillery ammunition from abroad amid Russian munition shortages. The North Korean Foreign Ministry stated on January 20 that Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his willingness to visit North Korea "at an early date" (presumably in 2024) during his recent meeting with North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui in Moscow, [15] Putin last visited North Korea in 2000, and his renewed interest in deepening Russian-North Korean relations is likely part of increasing Russian efforts to procure munitions from abroad. [16] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov stated in a January 21 interview that North Korea provided a "significant amount of artillery ammunition," which allowed Russia to "breathe a little." [17] Budanov suggested that Russian forces would likely ammunition experience operationally significant artillerv shortages without North Korean-provided ammunition.[18] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated that North Korea delivered one million rounds of artillery ammunition to Russia from September to November 2023 and that the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) can produce in total two million rounds of 122mm and 152mm shells annually, which resulted in a deficit of 500,000 shells in 2023 and will likely result in a similar deficit in 2024.[19]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against targets in Leningrad and Tula oblasts, where repeated Ukrainian drone strikes may fix Russian short-range air defense systems defending potentially significant targets along expected flight routes.
- Moldovan authorities accused Russian peacekeepers in Transnistria of numerous violations, including the improper use of drones, while conducting exercises in late December 2023, prompting an information attack by a pro-Kremlin mouthpiece.
- Russia is likely intensifying relations with North Korea as part of an effort to procure more artillery ammunition from abroad amid Russian munition shortages.
- Russian forces advanced near Avdiivka amid continued positional engagements along the front.
- Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* reported on January 21 that likely Russian military commanders are mistreating troops at a training ground in Volgograd Oblast.
- Russian federal subjects continue to foster patronage networks in occupied Ukraine.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 21, 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.

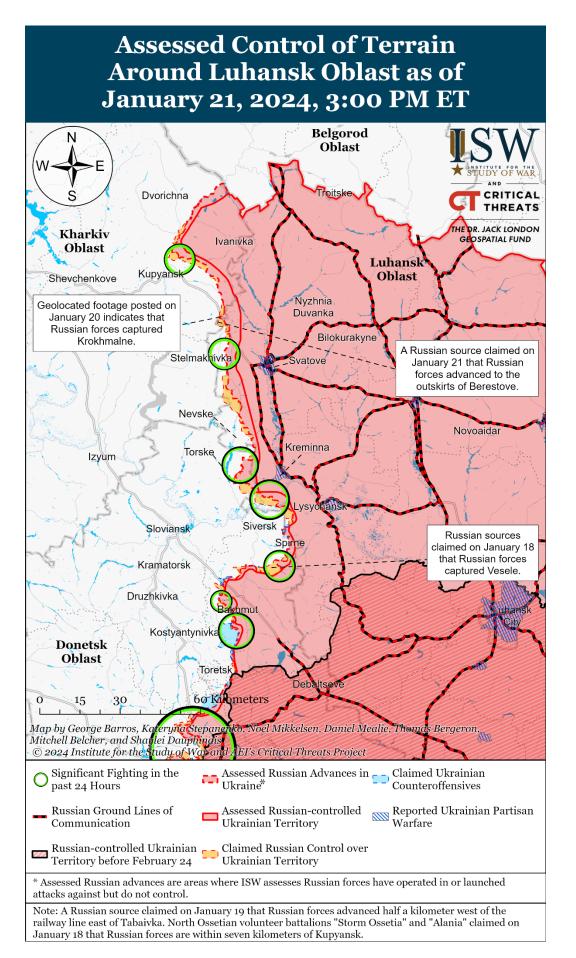
- Russian Main Effort Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort Southern Axis
- Russian 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

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

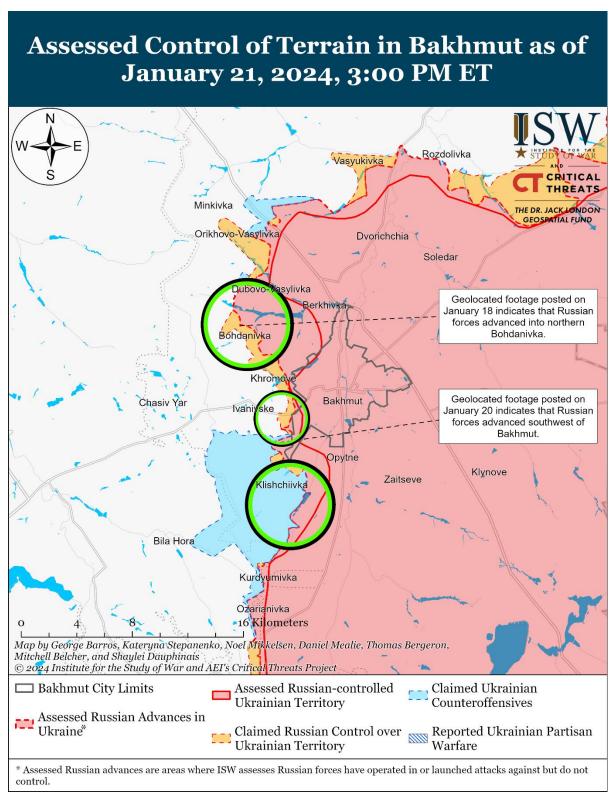
Russian forces reportedly advanced northwest of Svatove amid continued positional fighting along the Kupyansk-Svatove line on January 21, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced southwest of Krokhmalne (northwest of Svatove) and approached the eastern outskirts of Berestove (northwest of Svatove).[20] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces recently captured a four-kilometer-wide section of the R-07 (Svatove-Kupyansk) highway near Krokhmalne and an unspecified section of the R-07 highway near Novoselivske.[21] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces captured Krokhmalne, and Ukrainian Ground Forces Command Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Volodymyr Fityo acknowledged that Ukrainian forces withdrew from the settlement.[22] ISW observed geolocated imagery published on January 20 indicating that Russian forces captured Krokhmalne, and Russian sources claimed that the imagery shows elements of the Russian 47th Guards Tank Division (1st Guards Tank Army, Western Military District) in the settlement.[23] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated on January 21 that positional fighting continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka and Lake Lyman, east of Kupyansk near Petropavlivka, northwest of Svatove near Krokhmalne and Stelmakhivka, and west of Svatove near Kolomyichykha.[24] Fityo stated that Russian forces have lost 7,055 personnel in the Kupyansk and Lyman directions so far in January 2024 and that Russian forces lost roughly 14,000 personnel in these directions in December 2023.[25]

Positional engagements continued in the Lyman direction on January 21. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting occurred northwest of Kreminna near Zhytlivka, west of Kreminna near Terny and Yampolivka, southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova and the Serebryanske forest area, and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).[26] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted at least 13 assaults in the Lyman direction on January 21 as compared to at least 24 assaults on January 19 and at least 25 assaults on January 20.[27] A Ukrainian soldier who recently fought in the Serebryanske forest area stated in an interview published on January 21 that Russian forces have been able to use the forested area to better conceal artillery systems and rely on the forest's reduced visibility to commit larger groups to assaults.[28]

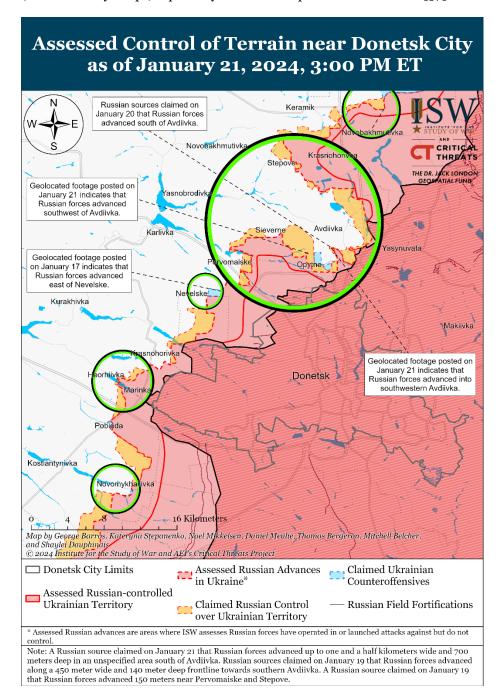


<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

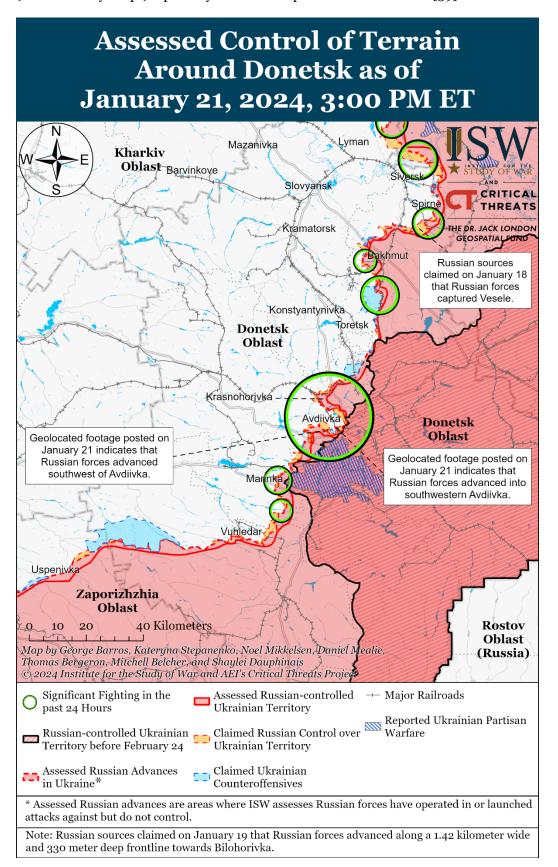
Positional engagements continued near Bakhmut on January 21, but there were no confirmed changes in this area of the frontline. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported fighting northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka, in the direction of Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut), southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka, and northwest of Horlivka near Pivnichne and Shumy.[29] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division reportedly continue to operate northwest of Bakhmut.[30]



Russian forces recently made confirmed advances south and southwest of Avdiivka. Geolocated footage published on January 21 shows that Russian forces advanced in the "Tsarska Okhota" restaurant area along Soborna Street (south of Avdiivka) and along a tree line southwest of Avdiivka.[31] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Russian forces advanced along Kolosova and Lermentova streets, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this alleged advance.[32] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional engagements continued northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka and Stepove; near the Avdiivka Coke plant in northwestern Avdiivka; west of Avdiivka near Sieverne; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske, Vodyane, and Nevelske.[33] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskyi and Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Oleksandr Shtupun stated that Russian forces are preparing to intensify activity in the Avdiivka direction and have concentrated over 40,000 personnel in the area.[34] Tarnavskyi noted that Russian forces have not conducted any airstrikes in the Tavriisk direction (Avdiivka through western Zaporizhia Oblast) in the past two days.[35] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 1st Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps), the 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Volunteer Assault Corps) are operating south of Avdiivka.[36] Elements of the Russian 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) reportedly continue to operate near Avdiivka.[37]

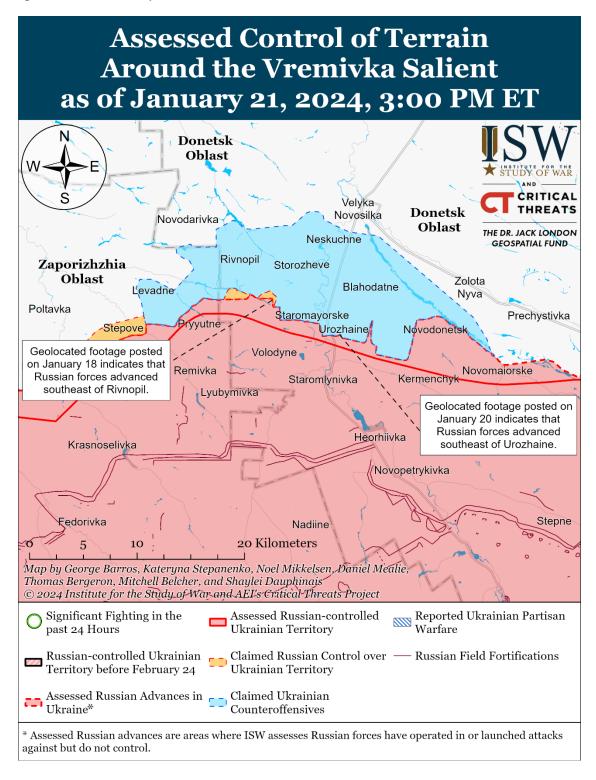


Positional engagements continued west and southwest of Donetsk City on January 21, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported fighting west of Donetsk City near Marinka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka.[38] Elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) reportedly continue to operate near Heorhiivka.[39]



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

Positional fighting continued in western Zaporizhia Oblast on January 21, but there were no confirmed changes to the front line. Positional engagements continued near Robotyne and Novoprokopivka (south of Robotyne) and west of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[40] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported that elements of the Russian 237th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (76th VDV Division) unsuccessfully attempted to push Ukrainian forces out of positions west of Verbove over the past day [41] Mashovets also reported that elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd MRD, 5th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) and 104th VDV Regiment (76th VDV Division) conducted unsuccessful assault operations near Robotyne.[42]



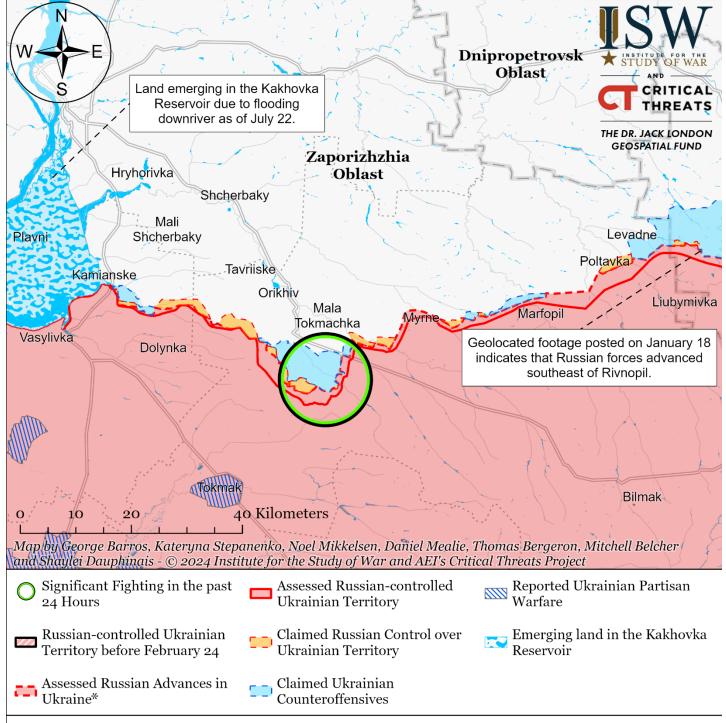
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of January 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



but do not control.

Note: A Russian source claimed on January 17 that Russian forces advanced up to one-half kilometer and recaptured previously lost positions west of Verbove.

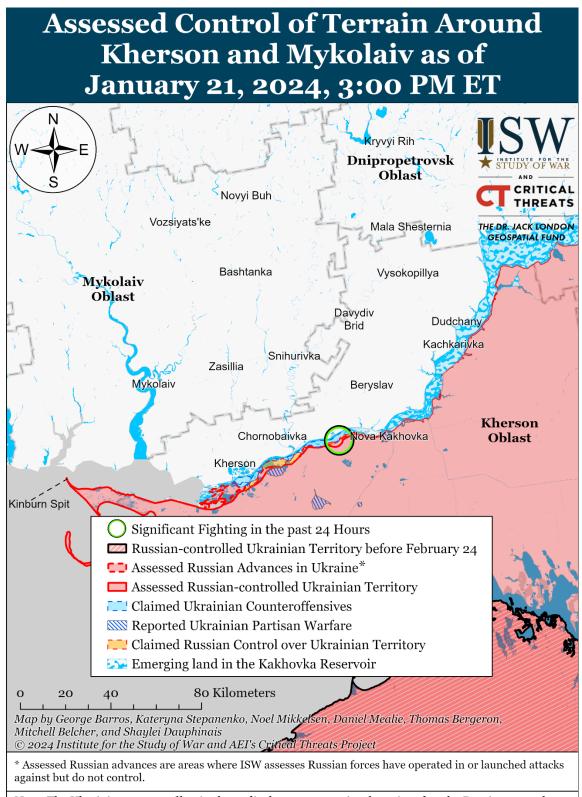
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of January 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



^{*} Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: A Russian source claimed on January 17 that Russian forces advanced up to one-half kilometer and recaptured previously lost positions west of Verbove.

Positional fighting continued on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on January 21, but there were no confirmed changes to the front line. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that fighting continued in and near Krynky on the east bank.[43] Elements of the Russian 26th Motorized Rifle Regiment (70th Motorized Rifle Division, 18th Combined Arms Army) reportedly continue to operate near Krynky.[44]



Note: The Ukrainian counteroffensive layer displays areas previously assigned to the Russian control, Russian advances, or Russian claims layers where ISW now assesses that Ukrainian forces have established a presence beyond a short-term raid. Inclusion of an area on this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the area is part of any upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive operation.

Russian and occupation officials claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful missile strikes targeting occupied Crimea on January 21. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian air defenses intercepted three Ukrainian missiles over the Black Sea near the western coast of Crimea on January 21.[45] Crimean occupation authorities temporarily closed the Kerch Strait Bridge due to the strike.[46] Russian officials periodically close the bridge for safety reasons following Ukrainian strikes likely due to the threat of further strikes that may target the bridge.[47]

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

Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* reported on January 21 that likely Russian military commanders are mistreating troops at a training ground in Volgograd Oblast. *Mobilization News* reported that unspecified actors, likely Russian commanders, are beating and abusing personnel in the "242nd Regiment of military unit No. 46217," likely the 242nd Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade, 8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District), at a training center in Volgograd Oblast.[48] The 20th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade is based in Volgograd City.[49] Russian military personnel told *Mobilization News* that they have to sleep in unheated tents and purchase their own uniforms and equipment and that no one is training them.[50] The personnel reported that they only rehearse formations before the arrival of high-ranking officers.[51]

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed on January 21 that elements of the Russian 94th Operational Regiment (46th Separate Operational Brigade, Rosgvardia's North Caucasus District) returned to occupied Ukraine and intend to rotate into an unspecified "critical" sector.[52]

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

Kremlin newswire *TASS* reported on January 19 that Russian company HiderX is creating an "invisibility suit" that will camouflage and shield Russian military personnel from Ukrainian thermal imaging equipment.[53] HiderX told *TASS* that the suit is coated in an unspecified chemical composition and based completely on Russian technology. HiderX stated that the suit weighs roughly 350 grams and can fit in a pocket and that testing for the suit will be completed by the end of January 2024.

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

Click here to read ISW's new analysis on Ukrainian long-term efforts to develop a self-sufficient DIB with US and European support.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Dmytro Klimenkov met with Christian Moore, the political advisor of the US Embassy in Ukraine, on January 21 and discussed Ukraine's progress in reforming its procurement system to be in line with NATO standards.[54] Klimenkov stated that Ukraine is working to reform its procurement organization, budget process, and institutions to adhere to NATO standards.

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

Russian federal subjects continue to foster patronage networks in occupied Ukraine. The Kherson Oblast occupation administration stated on January 21 that ophthalmologists from the Republic of Mordovia are treating patients in occupied Kalanchak Raion, Kherson Oblast, and that over four teams totaling 30 doctors from the Republic of Mordovia have treated patients and helped develop medical infrastructure in occupied Kalanchak Raion in 2023.[55]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

The Kremlin is attempting to justify Russia's war in Ukraine as necessary to prevent Ukrainian strikes on Russian-occupied territory in Ukraine. Russian sources claimed on January 21 that Ukrainian forces struck a market in occupied Donetsk City with Western-provided weapons.[56] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) accused the West and Ukraine of violating international law and claimed that the strike demonstrates Russia's need to achieve its military objectives in Ukraine in order to prevent security threats originating from Ukrainian territory.[57] The *New York Times* reported on January 21 that it cannot independently confirm the actors behind the strike, and Ukrainian officials have yet to comment on the strike.[58]

<u>Significant Activity in Belarus</u> (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)

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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