Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 3, 2024

Karolina Hird, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 3, 2024, 5:45pm ET

Click <u>here</u> 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 <u>here</u> 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 <u>here</u> 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 12:15 pm ET on January 3. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 4 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia and Ukraine conducted a prisoner of war (POW) exchange on January 3 in what was the largest POW exchange of the war to date and the first official POW exchange since August 2023. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that over 200 Ukrainian soldiers and civilians returned to Ukraine from Russian captivity, including personnel of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, National Guard, Navy, and State Border Guard Service.[1] Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets later clarified that 230 Ukrainian personnel returned to Ukraine in the 49th POW exchange since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[2] Lubinets and Zelensky noted that many of the Ukrainian POWs fought and were captured on Snake Island and in Mariupol, suggesting that these soldiers had been in Russian captivity for nearly two years.[3] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), in turn, stated that 248 Russian military personnel returned to Russia as part of the exchange, and notably thanked the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for its role in mediating the exchange.[4] Russian sources disagreed on the exact number of Ukrainians returned in the exchange, with some claiming that it was 173 and others claiming that it was "up to 230."[5] Russian milbloggers generally praised the Russian MoD for securing the return of a greater ratio of Russian POWs to Ukrainian POWs, which Russian sources claimed was long overdue following a deeply unpopular POW exchange in September 2022 that swapped 215 Ukrainian POWs, including captured leaders of the Azov Regiment whom Russia had initially pledged to imprison at least until the end of the war, for 55 Russian POWs and political prisoners including Putin's personal friend, pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Medvechuk.[6]

The timing of Russia's apparent willingness to participate in the largest POW exchange since the beginning of the war, and the first exchange in nearly five months, is noteworthy. Representative of the Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War Petro Yatsenko stated on November 17, 2023, that Russia implemented a freeze on POW exchanges over summer 2023 for an unspecified reason.[7] As ISW has recently reported, there have been several incidents over the past few weeks of Russian forces using Ukrainian POWs in apparent violations of the Geneva Convention on POWs, including using a battalion of former Ukrainian POWs in active combat, using Ukrainian POWs as human shields, and summarily executing surrendered Ukrainian POWs who were clearly *hors de combat*.[8] The Russian leadership may have chosen to engage in such a large POW exchange at this

time to undermine reports of Russian abuses of Ukrainian POWs and posture Russia as interested in operating within the bounds of international law and norms. ISW has frequently assessed that senior Russian officials are often very invested in portraying Russia as adhering to humanitarian and other legal guidelines, and the timing of this POW exchange may be part of this wider informational effort.[9]

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated on January 3 that Ukraine plans to increase its defense industrial base (DIB) output six-fold in 2024.[10] Shmyhal reiterated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's December 27 statement that Ukraine's DIB production capacity tripled in 2023 compared to 2022 and highlighted the importance of additional drones, shells, ammunition, and armored vehicles for Ukrainian forces.[11] Shmyhal stated that the Ukrainian government has allocated more than 760 billion hryvnia (roughly \$20 billion) for payments to military personnel and more than 265 billion hryvnia (roughly \$7 billion) for the purchase, production, and repair of weapons in 2024.[12] Shmyhal also advocated for the reported Western plan to use frozen Russian assets to fund Ukraine's future reconstruction.[13] Shmyhal's comments come after several days of large-scale Russian strikes that reportedly primarily targeted Ukrainian DIB facilities and military infrastructure.[14] ISW previously assessed that reported Russian strikes against Ukrainian industrial facilities likely aim to prevent Ukraine from developing key capacities to sustain operations for a longer war effort.[15]

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced on January 3 that the NATO-Ukraine Council (NUC) will hold an emergency meeting in response to Russia's recent mass air strikes against Ukraine.[16] Kuleba called the upcoming meeting a "sign of Euro-Atlantic unity in the face of Russian terror" and noted that strengthening Ukraine's air defense will be one of the meeting's key topics.[17] The NUC met for the first time on November 29, 2023, to discuss the roadmap to full Ukrainian interoperability with NATO and steps to increase weapons and ammunition production.[18]

NATO member states continue initiatives to support Ukrainian operations in the air domain. Norwegian Defense Minister Bjørn Arild Gram announced on January 3 that Norway is providing two F-16 fighter jets and 10 instructors to train Ukrainian military personnel in Denmark.[19] Gram stated that Ukraine's partners will work "day and night" to establish a lasting and modern Ukrainian air force.[20] NATO also announced in a statement on January 3 that NATO's Support and Procurement Agency will support a coalition of member states, including Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, and Spain to purchase up to 1,000 Patriot missiles to strengthen the member states' air defenses, additionally noting that NATO partners have previously supplied Ukraine with Patriot systems.[21] It is unclear if Ukraine will receive any of the 1,000 Patriot missiles, or on what timeline. The \$5.5 billion contract will support the establishment of a Patriot missile production facility in Germany, increasing the available supply of Patriot missiles and replenishing member states' stockpiles.[22] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Valerii Zaluzhnyi stated on January 2 that Western-provided Patriot systems enabled Ukrainian forces to down a record number of 10 Kinzhal hypersonic missiles during Russian strikes overnight on January 1-2 and during the day on January 2.[23]

Kremlin-affiliated mouthpieces may be setting information conditions to blame the West for a potential future conflict in the Arctic. A prominent Russian milblogger, whom the Kremlin and Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) have recently rewarded for service to the Russian Armed Forces and whose channel has recently fixated on the Arctic region, amplified a post wherein another milblogger responded to comments from the Danish Foreign Ministry about how Denmark's chairmanship of the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) will focus on Arctic security after

Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project 2023

reports from the Danish Defense Intelligence Service and NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept listed Russian activity in the region as a possible cause of future regional instability.[24] The milblogger claimed that despite Danish statements about Denmark's hopes to keep the Arctic a region of low tension, Denmark views Russia as the main threat in the Arctic, suggesting that the milblogger views Denmark's response to Russian actions in the Arctic as unnecessary and inconsistent with other Danish signaling. Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov claimed on December 21, 2023, that Russia deployed forces to the Arctic not as a demonstration of military force but to ensure Russian economic development in the region, whereas Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, have increasingly blamed Western countries for preparing Arctic countries for a confrontation against Russia and claimed that Russia has been forced into responding by reforming the Leningrad Military District (LMD) in Russian's northwest to counter supposed threats from Finland and other NATO states.[25] Recent Kremlin and MoD statements and the Russian MoD-affiliated milblogger's post may be part of Kremlin efforts to set information conditions for Russia to blame Denmark and other Western Arctic countries for any future conflicts with Russia in the Arctic. These narratives are in line with Putin's declaration on January 2 that the West is Russia's "enemy" and his further implication that the war in Ukraine is an existential war for Russia against the West.[26]

Efforts driven by Kremlin mouthpieces to set such information conditions may be permeating the larger Russian information space. Another prominent Russian milblogger, who has previously amplified Kremlin narratives about Russia's maximalist goals of imperial reconquest in Ukraine, amplified a post claiming that the next regional "flare up" will be the Baltics and Nordic countries.[27] The post vaguely claimed that an unspecified actor, possibly the West, is preparing the Baltic and Nordic peoples for a confrontation with Russia and that the Baltic and Nordic countries have lacked sovereignty for a long time - echoing Kremlin narratives about how states that are not great powers - like Ukraine - do not have full sovereignty.[28] These informational lines are disturbingly similar to the justifications the Kremlin used to invade Ukraine in 2022 and to continue the invasion. There are no indications that Russia will seek conflict with NATO in the very near future, but Moscow began running similar information operations in Ukraine many years before Russian invasions in 2014 and 2022.

Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev characterized Russia as Kazakhstan's "main partner and ally" in an interview published on January 3 despite recent efforts to distance Kazakhstan from Russia. Tokayev emphasized the strength of current Russian-Kazakh relations and Russia's position on the world stage, claiming that "no problem in the world can be solved" without Russia's participation.[29] Tokayev's statement comes after Kazakhstan took over chairmanship of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) on January 1.[30] Tokayev has recently sought to balance maintaining friendly relations with Russia against allowing Kazakhstan to fall too far under Russian influence, likely reflecting an increase in tension that Russia's war in Ukraine has caused. Russia previously deployed airborne (VDV) elements to Kazakhstan as CSTO peacekeeping forces to help quell domestic anti-government protests in January 2022, but Tokayev reportedly refused to help Putin quell the Wagner PMC's June 2023 rebellion.[31] Tokayev also refused to recognize Russia's claimed independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's republics (DNR and LNR) following the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022 and subsequently refused to recognize Russia's illegal annexation of the DNR, LNR, and Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts in September 2022.[32] Russian society has also recently intensified violence towards, and disenfranchisement of, Central Asia migrant communities living in Russia, including Kazakh migrants. This has likely become a growing point of neuralgia in Russia's relationship with its Central Asian neighbors, especially as Russia has massively mobilized Central Asian migrants to fight in Ukraine. A Kazakh court recently sentenced a Kazakh citizen for mercenarism for fighting 3

with the Wagner Group in Ukraine, suggesting that Kazakh authorities feel discomfort around the idea of their citizens affiliating with Russia militarily.[33] Despite these evident frictions, Tokayev recently emphasized the extent of friendly Russian-Kazakh relations at the 19th Russian-Kazakh Regional Cooperation Forum in Ankara, Turkey on November 9, 2023, also likely to maintain strong ties with Russia while remaining relatively independent.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia and Ukraine conducted a prisoner of war (POW) exchange on January 3 in what was the largest POW exchange of the war to date and the first official POW exchange since August 2023.
- Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated on January 3 that Ukraine plans to increase its defense industrial base (DIB) output six-fold in 2024.
- Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced on January 3 that the NATO-Ukraine Council (NUC) will hold an emergency meeting in response to Russia's recent mass air strikes against Ukraine.
- NATO member states continue initiatives to support Ukrainian operations in the air domain.
- Kremlin-affiliated mouthpieces may be setting information conditions to blame the West for a potential future conflict in the Arctic.
- Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev characterized Russia as Kazakhstan's "main partner and ally" in an interview published on January 3 despite recent efforts to distance Kazakhstan from Russia.
- Russian forces made confirmed advances near Avdiivka and Donetsk City as positional engagements continued along the entire line of contact.
- The Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) "Vostok" Battalion stated on January 3 that the unit will continue to operate subordinated to Rosgvardia and will not be impacted by the Russian military's reported dissolution of the "Kaskad" operational combat tactical formation of the DNR's Internal Affairs Ministry (MVD).
- Russian authorities continue efforts to integrate occupied Ukraine into Russia using infrastructure projects and social outreach programs.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 3, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



attacks against but do not control.

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.

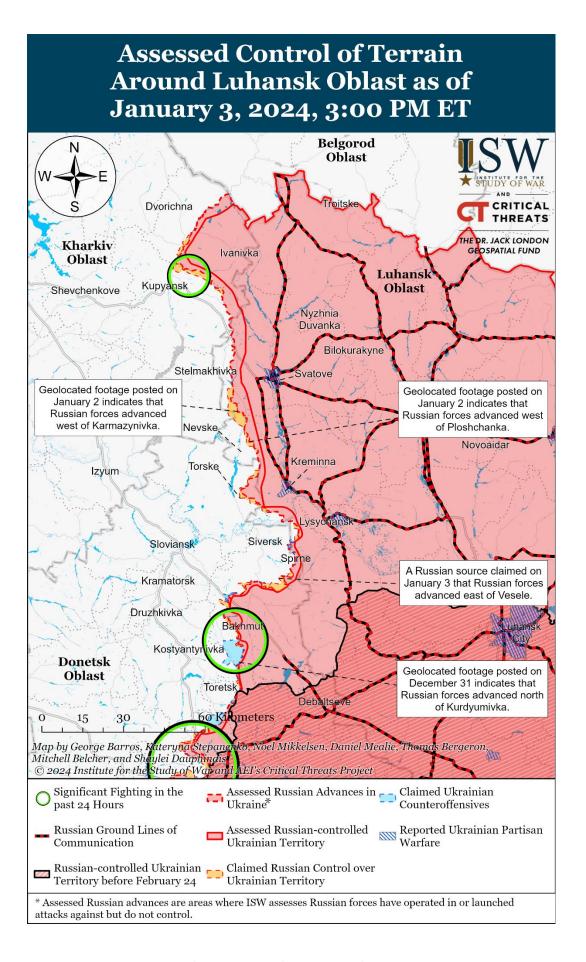
- Russian Main Effort Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 Capture the entirety of 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 and Ukrainian forces continued positional engagements along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on January 3, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Positional fighting continued northeast and east of Kupyansk near Synkivka, Lake Lyman, and Petropavlivka and west and southwest of Kreminna near Terny and the Serebryanske forest area.[35] A Russian milblogger claimed that one of their subscribers is deployed near Synkivka and reported to the milblogger that Ukrainian artillery fire and drone strikes are inhibiting Russian advances near Synkivka more significantly than Ukrainian mine fields.[36] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported that Russian forces are regrouping and conducting glide bomb strikes in the Lyman direction.[37]

Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that Russian forces conducted a missile strike that destroyed a school in the Osnovianskyi urban raion in Kharkiv City on the night of January 2.[38]

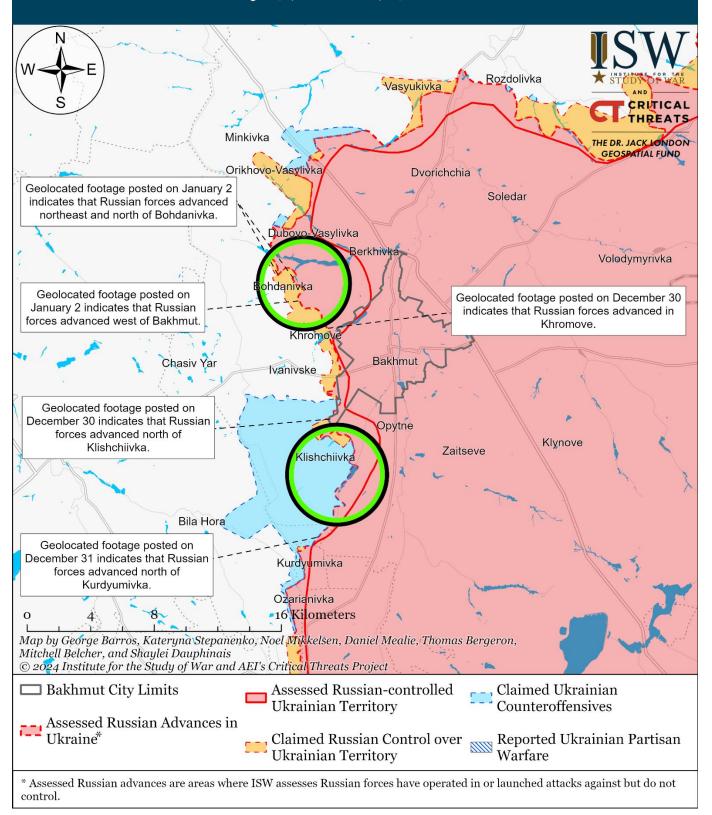


Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

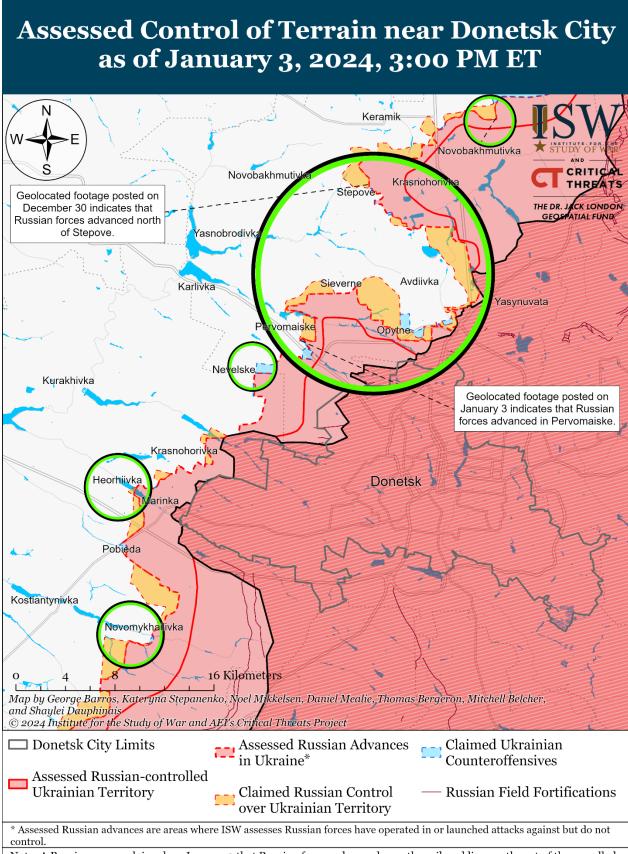
A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced northeast of Bakhmut on January 3, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area.[39] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces resumed attacks on the northeastern and eastern flanks of Vesele (about 18km northeast of Bakhmut) and posted a map claiming that Russian forces advanced in these areas.[40] ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of these Russian advances near Vesele.

Russian forces recently made a confirmed advance northwest of Bakhmut. Geolocated footage posted on January 2 shows that Russian forces, likely elements of the 98th Airborne (VDV) Division, advanced north of the Oo5o6 Bakhmut-Khromove road between Bohdanivka and Khromove.[41] Several milbloggers also claimed on January 3 that Russian forces advanced northwest of Bakhmut in forest areas along the Oo5o6.[42] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi noted that intense fighting is ongoing near Bohdanivka and that Russian forces are trying to advance towards Chasiv Yar (west of Bakhmut).[43] Milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Kurdyumivka, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of Russian gains in this area.[44] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported positional engagements northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka and Khromove, west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske, and southwest of Bakhmut near Kurdyumivka, Klishchiivka, and Andriivka.[45] Elements of the Russian 98th and 106th VDV Divisions and of the Northern Fleet reportedly continue to operate in the Bakhmut direction.[46]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of January 3, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently made a confirmed advance southwest of Avdiivka. Geolocated footage posted on January 3 shows that Russian forces made a marginal gain on the northwestern bank of the Izmaylovsky Pond on the outskirts of Pervomaiske (southwest of Avdiivka).[47] A Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces crossed the railway line northeast of Stepove (just northwest of Avdiivka) and advanced up to 500 meters from the "Toshmash" dacha area in the direction of Berdychi.[48] Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces achieved tactical success near Berdychi.[49] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these purported Russian gains in the Stepove-Berdychi area, however. Positional engagements continued northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka, Stepove, and Berdychi; on the northwestern and southeastern outskirts of Avdiivka; and southwest of Avdiivka near Nevelske and Pervomaiske.[50] Elements of the Donetsk People's Republic 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) and Russian Spetsnaz continue to operate in the Avdiivka area.[51]



Note: A Russian source claimed on January 2 that Russian forces advanced over the railroad line northwest of the so-called Toshmash dacha area and advanced approximately 500 meters. A Russian source claimed on December 31 that Russian forces control approximately one-third of Stepove.

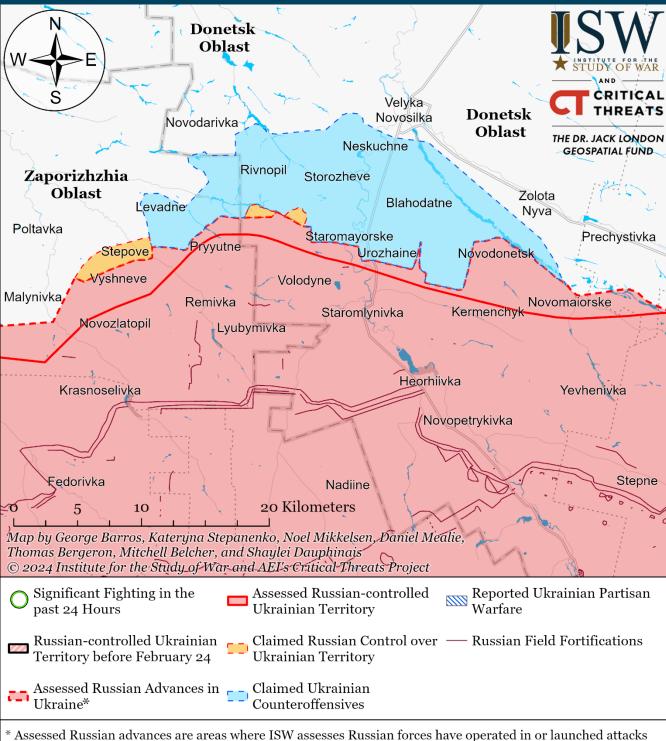
Russian forces recently made confirmed gains during a ground attack southwest of Donetsk City. Geolocated footage posted on January 3 shows the aftermath of a Russian assault southeast of Pobieda (about 10km southwest of Donetsk City) and indicates that Russian forces made a number of marginal advances on the southeastern outskirts of Pobieda.[52] A milblogger also claimed that Russian forces made a marginal gain towards Heorhiivka (just west of Marinka), but ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[53] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued west and southwest of Donetsk City.[54]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 3, 2024, 3:00 PM ET Mazanivka Kharkiv Oblast Barvinkove Siversk Slovyańsk Kramatorsk THE DR. JACK LONDON Geolocated footage posted on December 31 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of Kurdyumivka. Konstyantynivka Geolocated footage posted on Toretsk **Donetsk** A Russian source claimed on December 31 indicates that Russian **Oblast** January 3 that Russian forces forces advanced northeast of Berdychi. advanced east of Vesele. Krasnohorivka Avdiivka Donetsk Oblast Vuhledar Uspenivk Zaporizhzhia **Oblast** 40 Kilometers , 10 20 Rostov **Oblast** Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, (Russia) Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shaylei Dauphinais © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project Significant Fighting in the Assessed Russian-controlled — Major Railroads past 24 Hours **Ukrainian Territory** Claimed Russian Control over Warfare Reported Ukrainian Partisan Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 **Ukrainian Territory** Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine* Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives * Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

Russian and Ukrainian forces continued positional fighting in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on January 3, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported positional fighting southwest of Velyka Novovsilka near Pryyutne and west of Staromayorske.[55] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported on the composition of Russian air defense units covering Zaporizhia Oblast, including: the 38th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade (Eastern Military District [EMD]), the 8th Air Defense Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], EMD), the 71st Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade (35th CAA, EMD), the 67th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade (58th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]), the 140th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade (29th CAA, EMD), the 35th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade (36th CAA, EMD), the 1171st Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division [MRD], 5th CAA, EMD), and anti-aircraft missile batteries of the 19th and 58th MRDs (58th CAA).[56]

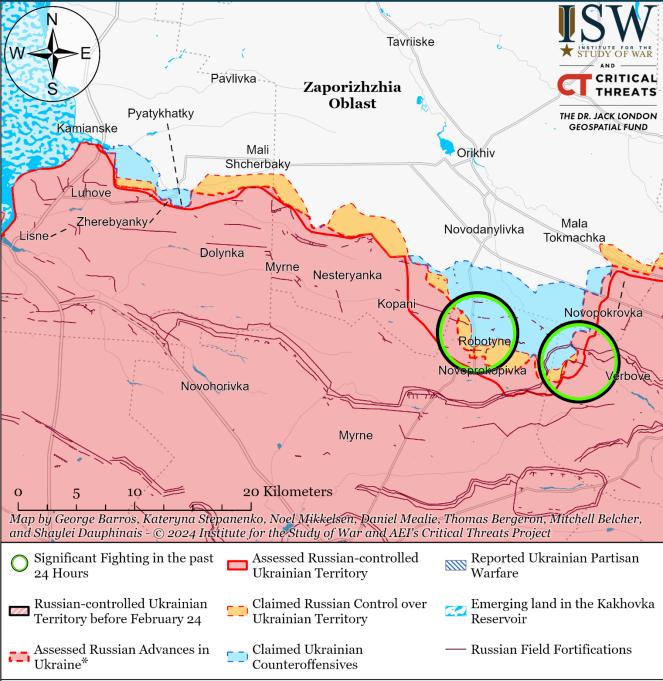
Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of January 3, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

Ukrainian forces reportedly made marginal advances in western Zaporizhia Oblast amid continued positional fighting in the area on January 3, though ISW has not observed any confirmed changes. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced east of Robotyne near Verbove. [57] Positional fighting continued near Robotyne and to the east and south of Robotyne near Verbove, Novoprokopivka, and Novofedorivka. [58]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of January 3, 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 1 that Russian forces have captured 38 square kilometers of the 327 square kilometers that Ukrainian forces recaptured during the summer counteroffensive. A Russian source claimed on December 31 that Russian forces advanced 1.8 kilometers along a seven-kilometers-wide front west of Verbove.

Positional engagements continued on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on January 3, but there were no confirmed territorial advances in the area. Russian and Ukrainian forces continued meeting engagements near Krynky.[59] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces in the area have a numerical advantage in personnel but that Ukrainian forces are compensating with electronic warfare (EW) and drone strikes.[60] Mashovets stated that the Russian command is reorganizing tactical elements of the "Dnepr" Grouping of Forces to correct combat command and control problems among the various tactical units operating near Krynky and concluded that these units will likely be subordinated to a unified tactical command, possibly collocated with the headquarters for the Russian 104th Airborne Division near Krynky.[61] Mashovets reported that elements of the Russian 26th Motorized Rifle Regiment (70th MRD, 18th CAA, SMD) are operating southwest of Krynky; assault groups of the 337th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (104th VDV Division) retreated to the west of Krynky; elements of the 144th Motorized Rifle Brigade (40th Army Corps, 18th CAA, SMD) are moving from the Krynky area southwest to the Pishchanivka-Pidstepne area; and elements of the 328th and 337th VDV regiments (104th VDV Division) are operating within Krynky.[62]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of **January 3, 2024, 3:00 PM ET** Kryvyi Rih Dnipropetrovsk **Oblast** Novyi Buh THREATS Vozsivats'ke HE DR. JACK LONDON Mala Shesternia GEOSPATIAL FUND Bashtanka Vysokopillya Mykolaiv **Oblast** Davydiv Dudchany Brid Kachkariyka Snihurivka Zasillia Mykolaiv Beryslav Kherson Chornobaiyka ova-Kakhovka **Oblast** Kinbúrn Spit) Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine* Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir 80 Kilometers 20 40 Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shaylei Dauphinais © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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.

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

Russian sources accused Ukrainian forces of conducting a Storm Shadow strike against occupied Crimea on January 2, but claimed that Russian forces intercepted all the missiles. Sevastopol occupation head Mikhail Razvozhaev claimed that Russian forces intercepted a missile over Cape Fiolent (southern Sevastopol), and footage shows columns of smoke over the bay.[63] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian 31st Air Force and Air Defense Division identified up to six targets, including missiles that fell near or that were approaching Sevastopol without hitting the intended Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) targets.[64] Mashovets stated that Russia has begun constant sorties of A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft due to the threat of Ukrainian strikes against Russian military infrastructure in Crimea, including BSF assets.[65]

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

The Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) "Vostok" Battalion stated on January 3 that the unit will continue to operate subordinated to Rosgvardia and that the unit's service will not be impacted by the Russian military's reported dissolution of the "Kaskad" operational combat tactical formation of the DNR's Internal Affairs Ministry (MVD).[66] The "Vostok" Battalion stated that some of its elements hold several positions on the front, including frontline positions in the Avdiivka industrial zone southeast of Avdiivka, while other elements are participating in law enforcement tasks in an unspecified location, likely in the Russian-occupied rear.[67] The "Vostok" Battalion stated that Rosgvardia is preparing the unit to go on an offensive in order to perform its "assigned role" and noted that the unit is taking steps to preserve its combat potential.[68] "Vostok" Battalion Commander Alexander Khodakovsky announced the unit's future intention to operate under Rosgvardia in March 2023.[69] A Russian milblogger later claimed on December 30, 2023, that Khodakovsky "hijacked" Kaskad's entire 5th Battalion and subordinated it to an unspecified Rosgvardia formation that does not participate in active combat.[70] Another Russian milblogger claimed that some Kaskad fighters framed Kaskad's reported dissolution as a transfer to other units in BARS (Russian Combat Army Reserve) or Rosgvardia.[71] ISW previously assessed that the Russian military's dissolution of "Kaskad" is likely in support of its efforts to formalize control over Russian irregular forces.[72]

The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russia's ruling United Russia party is intensifying recruitment efforts for the "Hispaniola" private military company (PMC).[73] The GUR reported that the Hispaniola PMC, formerly the 1st "Hispaniola" Fan Volunteer Reconnaissance and Assault Brigade, receives funding from United Russia and is composed of "football hooligan" sports fans and extremists.[74] The "Hispaniola" Brigade announced new recruitment efforts in Moscow and a new training base in Tambov Oblast on November 28, 2023.[75] *BBC*'s Russia service reported on November 20, 2023, that the "Hispaniola" Brigade is subordinate to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)-controlled Redut PMC.[76]

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

Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec stated on January 3 that its subsidiary, High Precision Systems, is completing tests on a new version of the Pantsir-SM-SV missile system that will be installed on a new tracked chassis and will be maneuverable through snowy and off-road conditions.[77] Rostec claimed that the modification will increase Russian air defense capabilities at low altitudes and in near-rear areas.

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 authorities continue efforts to integrate occupied Ukraine into Russia using infrastructure projects and social outreach programs. The Kherson Oblast occupation administration amplified a post stating that the Russian Adygea Republic built a multifunctional center in occupied Kherson Oblast.[78] Zaporizhia Oblast occupation governor Yevgeny Balitsky claimed that 12,340 businesses registered with the occupation administration in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast in 2023, revenues from the budget of occupied Zaporizhia Oblast injected about nine billion rubles into the Russian federal budget, and investors from occupied Zaporizhia Oblast signed agreements worth more than 100 billion rubles at various Russian and international exhibits and forums.[79] The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) People's Militia posted footage of members of the LNR branch of the Russian Young Army Cadets National Movement (Yunarmiya) giving New Year's gifts to local children in occupied Popasna, Luhansk Oblast, on behalf of Gazprom Inform, a subsidiary of Russian-state owned energy company Gazprom.[80]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

See topline text.

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)

Belarusian state news outlet *Belta* reported on January 3 that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko relieved Major General Viktor Lisovsky from the post of deputy chief of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Staff.[81]

Russian Ambassador to Belarus Boris Gryzlov stated on December 31, 2023, that Russia and Belarus would approve a new package of Union State integration roadmap measures for 2024-2026 at an unspecified time "in the near future." [82]

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.

- [1] https://t.me/V Zelenskiy official/9073
- [2] https://t.me/dmytro_lubinetzs/4626; https://t.me/dmytro_lubinetzs/4630
- [3] https://t.me/V Zelenskiy official/9073; https://t.me/dmytro_lubinetzs/4626
- [4] https://t.me/mod russia/34284
- [5]. https://t.me/grey_zone/21799; https://t.me/grey_zone/21799; https://t.me/grey_zone/21799;
- $[6] \, \underline{https://t.me/vrogov/13662} \; ; \; \underline{https://t.me/grey} \; \; \underline{zone/21799} \; ; \; \underline{https://t...}$

- [7] https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/inside-the-pow-camp-where-ukraine-re-... https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Nov%2018%20Russian%...
- [8] https://isw.pub/UkrWar122823; https://isw.pub/UkrWar121423; https://isw.pub/UkrWar122723
- [9] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign... https://isw.pub/UkrWar122023
- [10] https://t.me/Denys Smyhal/6745
- [11] https://t.me/Denys Smyhal/6745; https://t.me/Denys Smyhal/6745; https://www.understandingwar.org/back...
- [12] https://t.me/Denys Smyhal/6745
- [13] https://armyinform.c... ua/2024/01/03/denys-shmygal-klyuchove-zavdannya-spryamuvaty-zamorozheni-na-zahodi-aktyvy-rf-na-ukrayinske-vidnovlennya/; https://isw.pub/UkrWar121623
- [14] https://isw.pub/UkrWar122923; https://isw.pub/UkrWar122923; https://
- [15] https://isw.pub/UkrWar122923; https://isw.pub/UkrWar12292; https://isw.pub/UkrWar12292; https://isw.pub/UkrWar12292; <
- [16] https://twitter.com/DmytroKuleba/status/1742574359632351728
- [17] https://twitter.com/DmytroKuleba/status/1742574359632351728
- [18] https://isw.pub/UkrWar112923
- [19] https://www.regjeringen dot no/en/aktuelt/-na-starter-treningen-av-ukrainske-piloter-ved-hjelp-av-norske-f-16-kampfly-i-danmark/id3020558/
- [20] https://www.regjeringen dot no/en/aktuelt/-na-starter-treningen-av-ukrainske-piloter-ved-hjelp-av-norske-f-16-kampfly-i-danmark/id3020558/
- [21] https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news 221626.htm?selectedLocale=en
- [22] https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_221626.htm?selectedLocale=en
- [23] https://isw.pub/UkrWar010224
- [24] https://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2023/12/22/denmark-promises-incr...
- [25] https://isw.pub/UkrWar112923;

https://isw.pub/UkrWar122623

; https://isw.pub/UkrWar121923;

https://isw.pub/UkrWar121723

- ; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign...
- [26] https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-ass...
- [27] https://t.me/dva_majors/32259; https://www.understandingwar.org/backg...
- [28] https://isw.pub/UkrWar121923; https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20CTP%20Report%...
- [29] https://www.rbc dot ru/politics/03/01/2024/6594d7de9a79477e50be0be1; https://egemen dot kz/article/355466-qasym-zhomart-toqaev-biz-ozyq-oyly-ult-retinde-tek-qana-algha-qarauymyz-kerek

- [30] https://tass.dot.com/world/1728539
- [31] https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-ass...
- [32] https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/kazakhstan-says-it-wont-recog...

az/en/politics/kazakhstan-is-not-going-to-recognize-quasi-state-dnr-and-

lnr; https://astanatimes.dot com/2022/09/kazakhstan-announces-its-position-on-referendums-in-dnr-and-lnr/

- [33] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign...
- [34] https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Offensive...
- [35] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido32uUR36dzPJSDS9tm7V...
- [36] https://t.me/wargonzo/17400
- [37] https://t.me/osirskiy/517
- [38] https://suspilne.dot media/652744-rf-zrujnuvala-skolu-v-odnomu-z-rajoniv-harkova-vveceri-2-sicna/?utm_source=copylink&utm_medium=ps
- [39] https://t.me/boris_rozhin/108362
- [40] https://t.me/boris rozhin/108362
- [41] https://t.me/creamy_caprice/3882; https://t.me/vdd98/2084
- [42] https://t.me/boris rozhin/108393; https://t.me/RVvoenkor/59569
- [43] https://t.me/osirskiy/517
- [44] https://t.me/wargonzo/17390; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/108389
- [45] https://t.me/wargonzo/17390; https://t.me/RVvoenkor/59569; https://t.m...
- [46] https://t.me/mod_russia/34276; https://t.me/RVvoenkor/59569; https://t.me/vdd98/2084
- [47] https://t.me/escadrone/955; https://t.me/kiber_boroshno/6084; https://t.me/WarArchive_ua/9230
- [48] https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/6046; https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/6069
- [49] https://t.me/wargonzo/17390
- [50] https://t.me/wargonzo/17390; https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/6046; http...
- [51] https://t.me/RVvoenkor/59585
- $\label{eq:commod} \textbf{[52]} \ \underline{\text{https://t.me/GeneralStaffZSU/12083: https://x.com/moklasen/status/174...}}$
- [53] https://t.me/wargonzo/1739
- $[54] \, \underline{https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2rgMT2QfzQtMR8mGrUC...}$
- [55] https://t.me/wargonzo/17390; https://t.me/mod_russia/34274 https://t.me/mod_russia/34280

- [56] https://t.me/zvizdecmanhustu/1540
- [57] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido32uUR36dzPJSDS9tm7V... https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2n8HPQMiwcZ4zThEA5V...
- [58] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido32uUR36dzPJSDS9tm7V... https://t.me/wargonzo/17390
- [59] https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/6045; https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido32uUR36dzPJSDS9tm7V... https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2n8HPQMiwcZ4zThEA5V...
- [60] https://t.me/wargonzo/17390
- [61] https://t.me/zvizdecmanhustu/1539
- [62] https://t.me/zvizdecmanhustu/1539
- [63] https://t.me/razvozhaev/5066; https://t.me/bbcrussian/58760; https://t.me/Crimeanwind/51296; https://t.me/Crimeanwind/51296;
- [64] https://t.me/rybar/55597; https://t.me/dva_majors/32280
- [65] https://t.me/zvizdecmanhustu/1539
- [66] https://t.me/batalyon_vostok/291
- [67] https://t.me/batalyon_vostok/291
- [68] https://t.me/batalyon_vostok/291
- [69] https://t.me/aleksandr skif/2635
- [70] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign...
- [71] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign...
- [72] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign...
- [73] https://t.me/DIUkraine/3274
- [74] https://t.me/DIUkraine/3274
- [75] https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-ass...
- [76] https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-67454788
- [77] https://t.me/rostecru/6924
- [78] https://t.me/VGA Kherson/17012
- [79] https://uk.tgstat.com/channel/@BalitskyEV/2334
- [80] https://t.me/sons_fatherland/11960
- [81] https://www.belta dot by/president/view/lukashenko-osvobodil-lisovskogo-ot-dolzhnosti-zamnachalnika-objedinennogo-shtaba-odkb-608155-2024/

[82] https://www.interfax-russia.ru/rossiya-i-mir/v-blizhayshee-vremya-budet-...