

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 5, 2023

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January 5, 8pm 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.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement that Russian forces will conduct a 36-hour ceasefire between January 6 and January 7 in observance of Russian Orthodox Christmas is likely an information operation intended to damage Ukraine's reputation. Putin instructed Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to initiate a ceasefire from 1200 January 6 to 2400 January 7 along the "entire line of contact between parties in Ukraine" and called on Ukraine to accept the ceasefire to allow "a large number of citizens of citizens professing Orthodoxy" to attend services on the day of Russian Orthodox Christmas.[1] Putin's announcement was ostensibly in response to an appeal by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow (head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church) for a temporary ceasefire in observance of Christmas Eve and the Day of the Nativity of Christ.[2] Ukrainian and Western officials, including US President Joe Biden, immediately highlighted the hypocrisy of the ceasefire announcement and emphasized that Russian forces continued striking Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure on December 25—when many Orthodox Ukrainians celebrate Christmas—and New Year's.[3]

Putin could have been seeking to secure a 36-hour pause for Russian troops to afford them the ability to rest, recoup, and reorient to relaunch offensive operations in critical sectors of the front. **Such a pause would disproportionately benefit Russian troops and begin to deprive Ukraine of the initiative.** Putin cannot reasonably expect Ukraine to meet the terms of this suddenly declared ceasefire and may have called for the ceasefire to frame Ukraine as unaccommodating and unwilling to take the necessary steps towards negotiations. This is an intentional information tactic that Russia has previously employed, as ISW has reported.[4] Ceasefires also take time to organize and implement. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov notably said on December 14 that Russia has no plans for a ceasefire for Russian Orthodox Christmas, so Putin's sudden January 5 announcement was surprising.[5] The date of Russian Orthodox Christmas in 2023, after all, has been known for centuries. Had Putin been serious about a religiously motivated ceasefire he had ample time to prepare for it. The announcement of a ceasefire within 24 hours of when it is meant to enter into force suggests that it was announced with the intention of framing Ukrainian forces who continue to fight throughout the timeframe of the ceasefire as unwilling to work towards peace and wanting to fight at all costs.

Putin's framing of the ceasefire on religious grounds additionally reinforces another two-fold Russian information operation that frames Ukraine as suppressing religious groups and positions Putin as the true protector of the Christian faith. As ISW has previously observed, the Kremlin has weaponized discussions of Eastern Orthodox Christianity to accuse Kyiv of oppressing religious liberties in Ukraine.[6] Russian sources have recently picked up on raids carried out by the Ukrainian State Security Service (SBU) against Russian Orthodox churches and clergy members and Ukrainian sanctions against Kremlin-linked elements of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP).[7] These measures are not efforts to suppress religious liberties in Ukraine but rather are aimed at explicitly pro-Kremlin elements of the Russian Orthodox Church that have materially, politically, and spiritually supported Russian aggression against Ukraine.[8] The invocation of a ceasefire on distinctly religious grounds in line with Russian Orthodox Christian tradition is a subcomponent of this information operation. Suddenly announcing a ceasefire with Ukraine that should have been negotiated well in advance in observance of Russian Orthodox Christmas will allow Russia to frame Ukraine as infringing on the right of believers to celebrate the holiday as hostilities will likely continue into January 6 and 7. This information operation can support the baseless Kremlin narrative that Ukraine was persecuting Orthodox Christians and Russian speakers, a narrative that Putin has repeatedly advanced as justification for his illegal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The ceasefire announcement positions Putin as the guarantor of Christian values and beliefs. Putin and other Russian officials have frequently framed the war in Ukraine as a religious war against "Satanic" and "fanatical" elements of Ukrainian society that seek to undermine traditional religious values and morality.[9] Putin's proposed ceasefire supports false Russian information operations that Russia is fighting a holy war against an immoral Ukrainian society and its secular Western overseers. In actuality, Russian forces have suppressed religious freedom in occupied Ukrainian territory since 2014.[10]

The pro-war Russian milblogger information space responded to the ceasefire announcement with vitriolic discontent. Several prominent milbloggers emphasized that Russian soldiers do not want a ceasefire at all and remarked that it is a useless, defeatist ploy that is unlikely to succeed in the first place.[11] One milblogger who was previously embedded with Russian units in Bakhmut and attended the annexation ceremony at the Kremlin in September employed overtly genocidal, dehumanizing rhetoric in response to the ceasefire and stated that Russian soldiers do not want

compromise: They “want to kill every person dressed in the uniform of the enemy army, regardless of gender and the circumstances that forced the subhuman [sic] to wear this uniform.”[12] This level of vitriol originating from milbloggers who are typically fairly aligned with Putin’s line on the war is noteworthy and undermines Putin’s ability to present Russia as the party that is willing to negotiate. Putin’s continued association with this milblogger community, especially those who frequently openly call for genocide, continues to demonstrate the fact that Putin has not decided to compromise his aims in Ukraine.

Putin reiterated his maximalist objectives in a telephone conversation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on January 5. Putin emphasized that Moscow remains open to negotiations with Kyiv as long as such negotiations “take into account new territorial realities.”[13] Accounting for “territorial realities” in the context of negotiations means hammering Ukraine into making concessions that directly undermine its territorial sovereignty.[14] NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg also noted on January 5 that there are no indicators that the Kremlin’s ambitions have changed.[15]

The use of a ceasefire as an information operation, coupled with Putin’s continued propagation of maximalist goals in Ukraine, continues to indicate that Putin has no desire to actually negotiate with Ukraine. Additionally, Putin’s continued alignment with and decision to platform milbloggers who routinely use openly genocidal language and call for unrestrained hostilities offer clear indicators of his intentions along these lines. If and when Putin becomes serious about seeking compromises that Ukraine and the West could seriously contemplate accepting, he will have set conditions with the vocal and prominent nationalist community he is currently empowering and courting. He could threaten, marginalize, de-platform, co-opt, or cajole the pro-war milbloggers into accepting more limited objectives, but such activities would be apparent in the information space. As long as Putin continues to give air and prominence to such extremists, however, it will remain clear that he does not intend to abandon his maximalist aims.

Wagner Financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that prisoners who volunteered with the Wagner Group in Ukraine received pardons, likely in a bid to inflate his influence and political power. Russian state media outlet *RIA Novosti* reported that Prigozhin told reporters that two dozen former prisoners completed six-month contracts with the Wagner Group fighting in Ukraine and received pardons.[16] Russian sources published footage of Prigozhin holding a ceremony for the Wagner Group personnel at a rehabilitation center in Anapa, Krasnodar Krai, in which he awarded the former prisoners state medals and pardon papers.[17] ISW has not observed any official Russian government source comment on whether the Wagner personnel did indeed receive these pardons. Under the Russian Criminal Code and Article 89 of the Russian Constitution, only the Russian President may issue a pardon to an individual, although regionally based pardon commissions and individuals may petition the Russian President to pardon specific individuals.[18] It is possible that Prigozhin submitted petitions to pardon the former prisoners on their behalf. It is also possible that Prigozhin is claiming that the former prisoners received pardons when in actuality a Russian court may have issued them a “Release from Punishment” (a commuting of a prison sentence and/or other criminal punishment) or the State Duma of the Russian Federation granted the former prisoners amnesty.[19] ISW has not observed any official Russian sources report that a Russian court or the State Duma has taken either of these legal actions on behalf of these former prisoners, although it is perfectly possible that they did. Previous reporting suggested that the Wagner Group promised prisoners “full exemption from their criminal punishment” and not necessarily that prisoners would receive pardons.[20]

Prigozhin is likely using the ambiguity of the legal status of these former prisoners to create the impression that he is influential enough to be able to secure pardons for Wagner Group personnel. Prigozhin likely publicized the granting of the pardon papers to reflect this supposed influence in support of ongoing efforts to cast himself as the central figure in the ultra-nationalist pro-war community.[21] By appearing to take public credit for pardoning these criminals Prigozhin risks seeming to arrogate to himself powers that only Putin actually wields.

Prigozhin also likely publicized the pardons to strengthen the Wagner Group’s ongoing recruitment of prisoners and to assuage current Wagner Group personnel’s possible concerns about promised legal rewards. US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby reported on December 22, 2022, that the Wagner Group currently has 50,000 personnel deployed to Ukraine, including 40,000 convicts recruited from Russian prisons.[22] Kirby reported that over 1,000 Wagner Group personnel died in Ukraine in a month, and Russian opposition outlet *The Insider* reported on November 5 that 500 former prisoners volunteering with the Wagner Group died in Ukraine in two months.[23] The Wagner Group likely needs to replenish its forces after heavy losses, predominantly of former prisoners, and Prigozhin likely publicized the supposed pardons to augment the Wagner Group’s recruitment campaign in Russian prisons. Prigozhin also likely publicized the pardons to reassure the reportedly 80 percent of deployed Wagner Group personnel in Ukraine who have been promised some type of legal reward for their participation in hostilities. Prigozhin has increasingly pinned his standing in the Russian ultra-nationalist pro-war community on the Wagner Group’s ability to capture territory and, particularly, on its offensive on Bakhmut.[24] Prigozhin likely intends to further motivate Wagner

personnel and generate new paramilitary forces in a misguided and implausible effort to reverse the culmination of the Bakhmut offensive.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin’s announcement that Russian forces will conduct a 36-hour ceasefire in observance of Russian Orthodox Christmas is likely an information operation intended to damage Ukraine’s reputation.**
- **Putin’s framing of the ceasefire on religious ground reinforces another Russian information operation that falsely frames Ukraine as suppressing religious groups and positions Putin as the true protector of the Christian faith.**
- **Putin has not changed his fundamental maximalist objectives in Ukraine.**
- **Wagner Financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that prisoners who volunteered with the Wagner Group in Ukraine received pardons, likely in a bid to inflate his influence and political power, strengthen Wagner Group’s prisoner recruitment, and reassure Wagner Group criminals in uniform.**
- **Russian forces continued limited counterattacks to regain lost positions along the Svatove-Kreminna line, and Russian forces claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the area.**
- **Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a successful counterattack as Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut and west of Donetsk City.**
- **Russian forces continued to operate sabotage and reconnaissance groups on the Dnipro River and reinforce positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast.**
- **Russian milbloggers claimed recent Russian successes in Zaporizhia Oblast, likely to distract from the slow Russian offensive around Bakhmut that may be culminating.**
- **Mobilized Russian servicemembers likely continue to represent an outsized portion of Russian military casualties in Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 5, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, and Will Kielm
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* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those 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 population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and one supporting effort)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

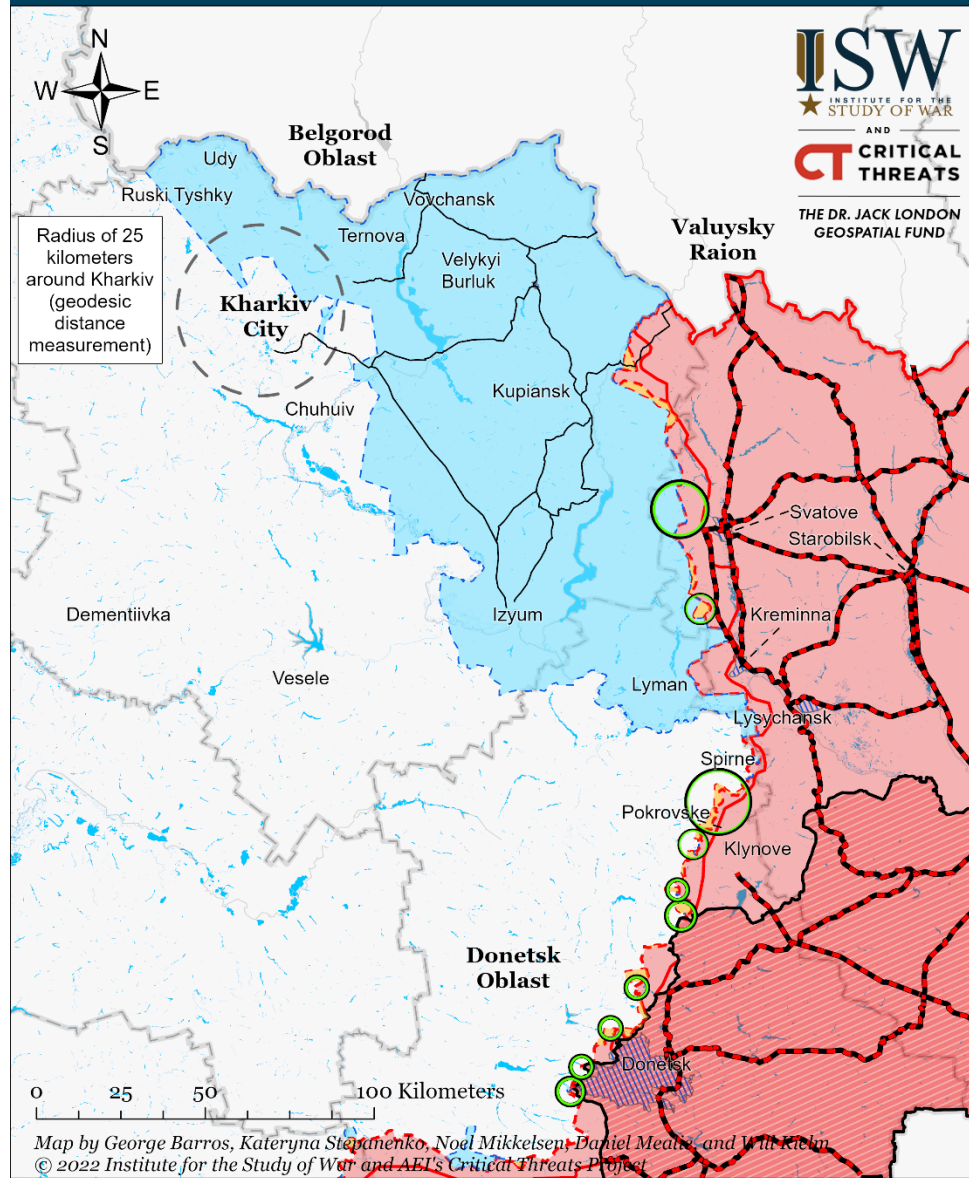
Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

Eastern Ukraine: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)

Russian forces continued limited counterattacks to regain lost positions along the Svatove-Kreminna line on January 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault near Stelmakhivka (16km northwest of Svatove).[25] A Russian milblogger claimed that battles in the past week between Ukrainian and Russian forces northwest of Svatove have been positional in nature and that control of terrain has not changed.[26] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault near Ploshchanka (17km northwest of Kreminna).[27] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division of the 20th Guards Combined Arms Army of the Western Military District have been conducting an offensive or a very active defense along the Ploshchanka-Makiivka line (22km northwest of Kreminna) for the past few weeks.[28] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are trying to push Ukrainian forces back from positions near the R-66 (Svatove-Kreminna) highway and that fighting is the fiercest near Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna).[29] The Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian artillery units can currently interdict all Russian movements on the highway and that Russian forces intend to resume movements along the highway after pushing Ukrainian forces further back.[30] Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on January 5 that Russian forces transferred mobilized servicemembers and Wagner Group personnel to the Kreminna area out of fear that the tactical situation in the area was worsening.[31] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also conducted an assault towards Bilohorivka, Luhansk Oblast (12km south of Kreminna).[32]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the directions of Svatove and Kreminna on January 5. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 5 that Ukrainian forces regularly conduct night raids on Russian positions near Kuzemivka (15km northwest of Svatove) intending to exhaust Russian combat power in the area.[33] A BARS-13 (Russian Combat Reserve) affiliated source claimed on January 5 that Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups routinely attempt to penetrate Russian positions in the direction of Svatove.[34] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are attempting to cut a section of the R-66 highway that leads into Kreminna near Chervonopopivka, where both Russian and Ukrainian forces have been conducting assaults and counterattacks in the past week.[35] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to advance towards Russian positions in the Kreminna area on January 5.[36]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of January 5, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Meade, and Will Klein
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Key Ukrainian Roads
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

The Ukrainian Main Defense Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine published an audio intercept on December 22 in which a Russian soldier operating in the vicinity of Chervonopopivka supported reports that Ukrainian forces captured part of the R-66 Kreminna-Svatove road in the vicinity of Zhytlivka (just south of Chervonopopivka). The Ukrainian General Staff has repeatedly reported since November 30 that Russian forces shelled Chervonopopivka, indicating Russian forces no longer control Chervonopopivka. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to establish a position in Chervonopopivka on November 27, indicating Ukrainian maneuvers near Chervonopopivka. The R-66 runs through Chervonopopivka and the road's capture by Ukrainian forces would be consistent with the evidence presented in the intercepted phone call plus the Ukrainian General Staff's reports.

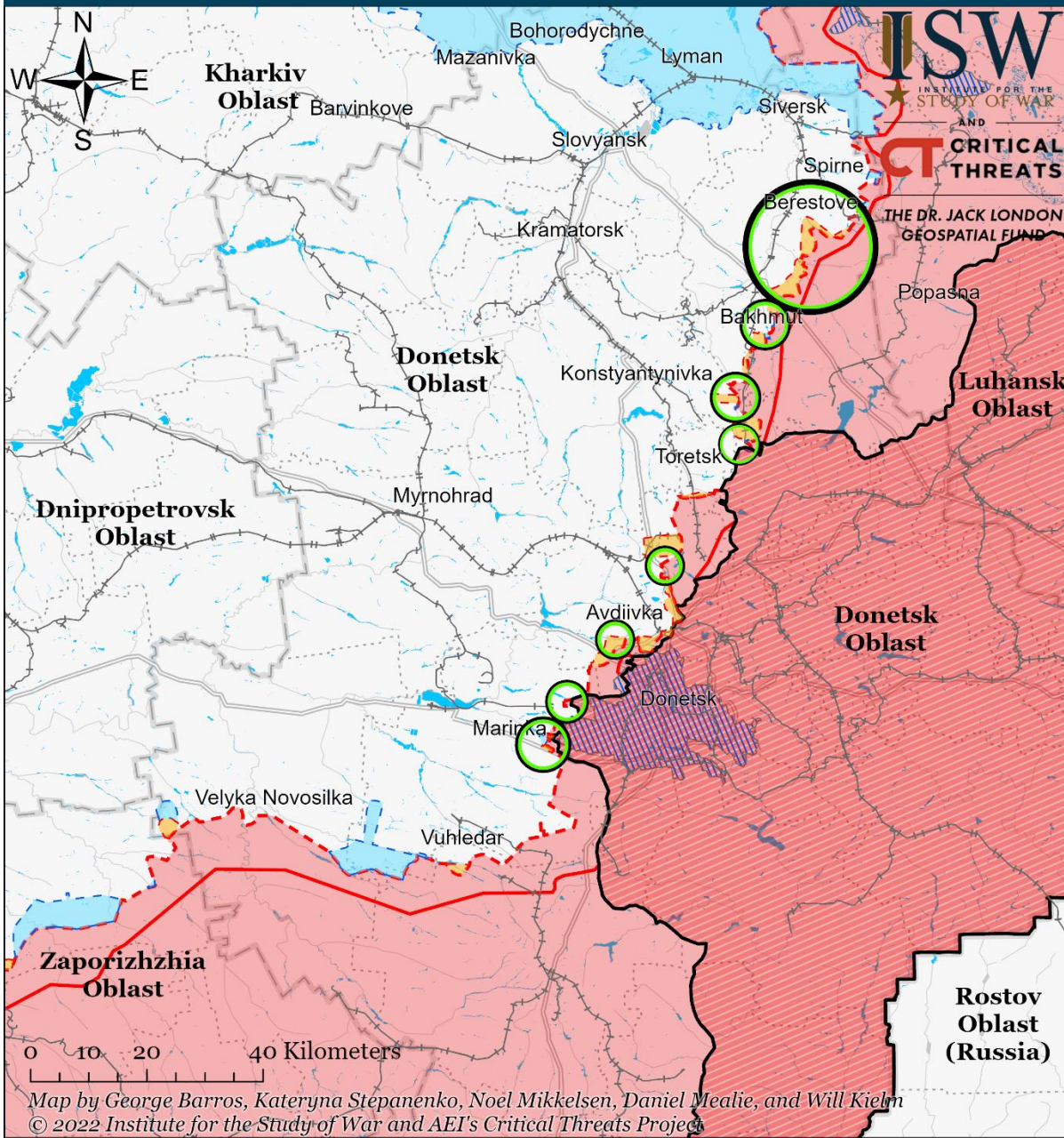
Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

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

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a successful counterattack as Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut on January 4 and 5. The Ukrainian State Border Guards Service reported on January 4 that Ukrainian soldiers conducted a tactical counterattack in Bakhmut and advanced 300 meters in an unspecified area, forcing Russian troops to withdraw from certain unspecified positions.[37] Russian sources refuted this report and claimed that Russian troops have advanced northeast and south of Bakhmut and made gains within Bakhmut itself.[38] The Ukrainian General Staff stated on January 5 that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northeast of Bakhmut near Bilohorivka (22km northeast), Soledar (10km northeast), Krasna Hora (5km north), Vyimka (25km northeast), and Pidhorodne (5km northeast); and south of Bakhmut near Kurdyumivka (12km southwest), Mayorsk (20km south), and Pivnichne (20km southwest).[39] Geolocated footage posted between January 4 and 5 indicates that Russian troops have made marginal advances south of Bakhmut near Opytne (3km south of Bakhmut) and Kurdiiumivka.[40] Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group forces expanded their control over certain urban areas on the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut.[41] Former commander of militants in Donbas in 2014 and prominent milblogger Igor Girkin noted that this sector of the front is a “mutual meatgrinder of attrition” for Ukrainian and Russian troops.[42]

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on January 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attacked near Vodiane, Krasnohorivka, Vesele Marinka, and Pobieda, all ranging along the northern to southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City.[43] Russian milbloggers continued to remark on urban fighting within Marinka.[44] Geolocated footage posted on January 5 shows the aftermath of a Ukrainian strike on a base used by Chechen fighters in Marinka, indicating that Russian troops hold limited positions along the N15 Donetsk City–Zaporizhzhia City highway on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City.[45] Russian forces did not conduct any ground attacks in western Donetsk or eastern Zaporizhzhia oblasts and continued routine shelling in these areas.[46]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 5, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory | Major Railroads |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare |
| 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.

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

Russian forces continued to operate sabotage and reconnaissance groups on the Dnipro River and reinforce positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on January 5. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Military Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on January 4 that Russian forces are training mobilized personnel in the Henichesk area and transferring more manpower to the area.[47] The Head of the Ukrainian Joint Press Center of the Tavris Direction Defense Forces, Yevhen Yerin, stated on January 5 that Russian forces are primarily conducting defensive actions in Kherson Oblast, and only use small sabotage and reconnaissance groups in the Dnipro River and delta islands to probe Ukrainian defenses.[48] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces maintain positions on Velyki Potemkin Island southwest of Kherson City in the Dnipro River delta and that Ukrainian forces previously only briefly landed on the island on January 2.[49] One milblogger claimed that the islands remain contested and that it does not make sense for Russian forces to maintain positions on the islands as they cannot launch an effective amphibious operation without controlling a bridgehead to Kherson City.[50]

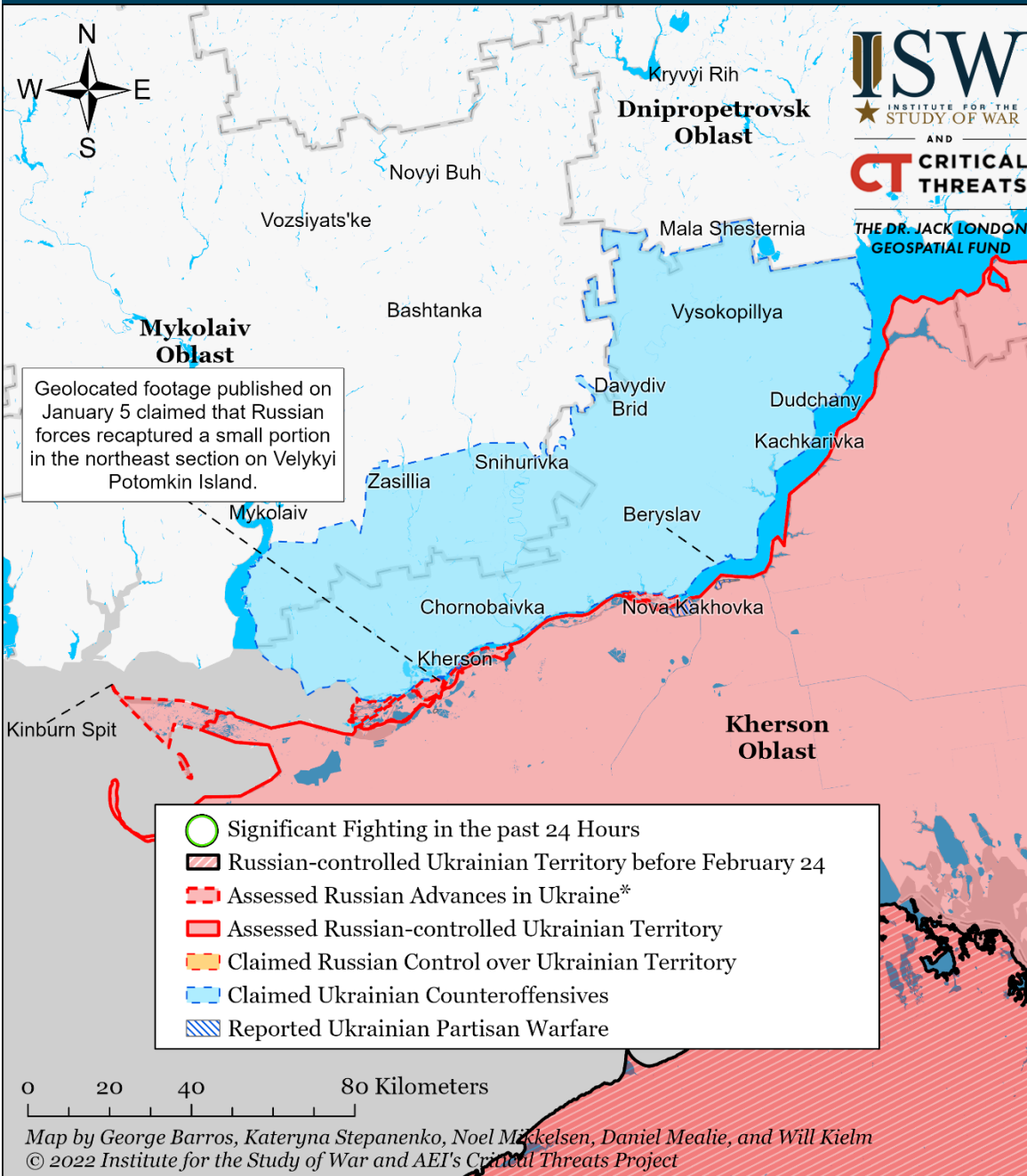
Russian milbloggers claimed recent Russian successes in Zaporizhia Oblast on January 5, likely to distract from the slow Russian offensive around Bakhmut that may be culminating and to secure limited positions along the Zaporizhia Oblast frontline. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces continued to expand their zone of control near Dorozhnyanka (6km south of Hulyaipole), which Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured on December 31.[51] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces continue to probe Ukrainian defenses in the area and exposed Ukrainian positions in the forest belt east of the T0401 highway between Hulyaipole and Dorozhnyanka.[52] A different milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces do not conduct any offensive operations along the Zaporizhia Oblast frontline and lost their chance to launch an offensive near Vasylivka, Zaporizhia Oblast.[53] Russian milbloggers claimed for months that Ukrainian forces were preparing for an imminent counteroffensive in Zaporizhia Oblast.[54]

Ukrainian forces continued to target Russian military assets in rear areas of southern Ukraine. Odesa Military Administration Spokesperson Serhiy Bratchuk amplified reports of an explosion of an S-300 missile warehouse in Radensk, Kherson Oblast, which is within range of Ukrainian tube artillery.[55] Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov claimed that Russian air defenses activated over Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast on January 4.[56] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed on January 4 a Ukrainian strike in Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast, but denied allegations that Russian forces used a hospital in Tokmak as a military facility.[57] The Russian MoD claimed the hospital strike killed a Russian military medic but otherwise did not comment on casualty counts.

Russian forces continued routine fire against areas in Zaporizhia, Mykolaiv, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on January 5.[58]

The head of Ukrainian nuclear energy agency Energoatom, Petro Kotin, stated in an interview published on January 4 that Energoatom does not believe that the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) efforts to establish a safety and security zone around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) are realistic.[59] Kotin stated that Ukrainian forces will return the ZNPP to Ukrainian control and that Russian forces would have to withdraw from the ZNPP if Ukrainian forces broke through Russian lines and captured Melitopol.[60]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 5, 2023, 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.

ISW recoded the northeast section of Velykyi Potomkin Island in Kherson Oblast from reported Ukrainian counteroffensives to Russian claims based on Russian milblogger reports and video footage published on January 5 that claimed Russian forces recaptured that part of the island where Ukrainian forces placed a flag on January 2. ISW cannot confirm if Russian forces recaptured the same positions as Ukrainian forces as of January 5. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 3 that the island is in a gray zone because Russian forces are still operating in the northern part of the island. Geolocated footage published on January 2 does show Ukrainian forces striking Russian positions on an adjacent island east of Velykyi Potomkin Island, which indicates that Russian forces are still operating within the Dnipro River delta areas.

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

Official Ukrainian sources continue to report that Russian officials are preparing for another imminent wave of mobilization in Russia and occupied territories in Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 5 that the Russian military-political leadership is taking measures to prevent Russian men from leaving the country during a new mobilization wave in January and that Russian officials are considering a complete foreign travel ban for Russian men of military age.[61] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on January 5 that Russian forces and occupation officials are preparing for another wave of mobilization in Russian-occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.[62] The Resistance Center reported that Russian occupation officials have introduced new restrictions on movement that require residents in Berdyansk and Melitopol to obtain permission from local military commandant's offices in order to leave the cities.[63] Russian occupation officials likely introduced the measures to prevent military-age men from fleeing the upcoming wave of mobilization. ISW reported on December 31, 2022, that Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov stated that he knew "for a fact" that the Kremlin plans to close all Russian borders for military-age men, declare martial law, and begin another wave of mobilization in January.[64]

Mobilized Russian servicemembers likely continue to comprise an outsized portion of Russian military casualties in Ukraine. *BBC Russian Service* reported on January 2 that it has confirmed open-source data for the identities of 538 mobilized Russian servicemembers killed in Ukraine.[65] *BBC Russian Service* noted that real casualties among mobilized Russians servicemembers could be much higher, as many reports on Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine since October 2022 do not indicate the status of the servicemembers.[66] ISW reported on December 9, 2022, that the *BBC Russian Service's* ongoing open-source investigation into the identities of confirmed Russian casualties with independent Russian outlet *Mediazona* had identified over 400 mobilized Russian personnel killed in Ukraine.[67] *BBC Russian Service* noted that the more than 100 confirmed Russian mobilized personnel killed in Ukraine since early December 2022 does not account for the large number of mobilized personnel that were killed in a Ukrainian strike on a Russian base in Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast on December 31, 2022.[68] The breakdown of the confirmed mobilized personnel killed in Ukraine shows that certain Russian oblasts are overrepresented, matching the pattern the *BBC Russian Service* has reported for all confirmed Russian servicemembers killed in Ukraine.[69] ISW assesses that the overrepresentation of certain Russian oblasts in casualty figures is partially a result of Russian force-generation efforts that have focused on specific Russian regions.[70] Shortages of professional soldiers in combat operations, poor training, and Russian commanders' lack of regard for the lives of mobilized Russian personnel may also account for the recent predominance of mobilized personnel in confirmed Russian casualty figures in Ukraine.

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian forces and occupation authorities are continuing to intensify filtration measures in occupied territories. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on January 5 that Russian forces are prohibiting movement within occupied Zaporizhia Oblast and are only permitting those with permits to leave occupied territories.[71] Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on January 5 that Russian forces are prohibiting civilians in occupied Kherson Oblast from leaving occupied territories until January 15.[72]

Russian occupation authorities are continuing passportization efforts in occupied territories. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 5 that Russian occupation authorities have shortened the process to receive Russian passports in Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast, from 30 to 10 days.[73] The Ukrainian General Staff also stated on January 5 that Russian occupation authorities are continuing to forcibly passportize citizens in occupied territories and that banking institutions in Luhansk Oblast require Russian passports to issue bank cards.[74]

Russian authorities are continuing to take measures to consolidate legal and administrative control of occupied territories. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed and implemented a decree (N984) to simplify procedures to allow Ukrainian collaborators to join the occupation civil service by abolishing psychological screening and personal recommendations from other civil servants.[75] The decree also provides that newly-hired collaborators may undergo medical examinations in absentia.[76] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 5 that Russian occupation authorities in Donetsk Oblast are issuing citizens Russian license plates and driver's licenses.[77]

Russian forces and occupation authorities continued to seize and repurpose civilian infrastructure to support Russian military activities in occupied territories on January 5. Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on January 5 that Russian forces coerced farmers in Bilovodsk, Luhansk Oblast to abandon their hangers in order to accommodate Russian servicemen

and personnel.[78] Haidai also stated that Russian occupation authorities are continuing to seize and repurpose civilian hospitals to treat Russian and Wagner Group servicemen throughout Luhansk Oblast.[79]

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to take measures to incentivize Ukrainian citizens to move to occupied territories. Russian officials passed a resolution on January 3 on the provision of a two percent rate on mortgage loans for residents in occupied territories.[80] Kherson Occupation Administration Head Vladimir Saldo stated on January 5 that the new planned city on the Arabat Spit will need new residents and that preferential mortgages will make housing there much more affordable.[81] Russian occupation authorities likely seek to increase the population in the deep rear in occupied territories to strengthen production capabilities and support logistics related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russian occupation authorities continued making efforts to consolidate economic control of occupied territories on January 5. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan reported on January 5 that Russian occupation officials are allowing Ukrainian civilians to exchange the Ukrainian hryvnia for Russian rubles at select banks in occupied Kherson Oblast in accordance with proposed rates.[82]

Russian forces and occupation authorities are continuing to take measures to identify possible partisans in occupied territories. Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated on January 5 that Russian forces conceal themselves in civilian clothing before entering supermarkets and other public places in Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast, in an effort to identify possible partisans.[83]

ISW will continue to report daily observed indicators consistent with the current assessed most dangerous course of action (MDCOA): a renewed invasion of northern Ukraine possibly aimed at Kyiv.

ISW's December 15 MDCOA warning forecast about a potential Russian offensive against northern Ukraine in winter 2023 remains a worst-case scenario within the forecast cone. ISW currently assesses the risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine from Belarus as low, but possible, and the risk of Belarusian direct involvement as very low. This new section in the daily update is not in itself a forecast or assessment. It lays out the daily observed indicators we are using to refine our assessments and forecasts, which we expect to update regularly. Our assessment that the MDCOA remains unlikely has not changed. We will update this header if the assessment changes.

Observed indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- Nothing significant to report.

Observed ambiguous indicators for MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated on January 5 that Russia will continue deploying Russian forces to Belarus and will conduct combat exercises with Belarusian forces within the context of the combined Russian–Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV).[84]
- Belarus' State Border Committee accused Ukrainian forces of engaging in “provocations” on the Ukraine–Belarusian border by aiming weapons at Belarusian border guards at the Poddobryanka checkpoint (between Chernihiv and Gomel oblasts) on January 5.[85]

Observed counter-indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- Reuters National Security Correspondent covering the Pentagon Idrees Ali reported on January 5 that the Pentagon assesses there are no indications that Russia intends to use Belarus as a new front in the war in Ukraine.[86]
- The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of January 5.[87]

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] <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/70330>; <https://ria dot ru/20230105/putin-1843179065.html>

[2] <http://www.patriarchia dot ru/db/text/5992770.html>

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