

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 30

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Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces targeted Kyiv using Iranian-made drones on the night of December 29 to 30, a continuation of an increased pace of drone attacks in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Air Force Command stated that Russian forces launched 16 Shahed-131 and -136 drones at targets in Ukraine on the night of December 29 to 30 and that Ukrainian air defenses shot down all of them.¹ Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces launched seven of the drones at targets in Kyiv and that Ukrainian air defenses shot down all of them, but one of the drones' munitions hit an administrative building.² The Russian drone attacks follow a massive series of Russian missile and drone strikes against Ukrainian critical infrastructure on December 29 during which Russian forces launched 23 drones, the majority of which were Shaheds.³ The Russian military's use of 39 drones in the past two days, its use of 30 Shahed 131 and -136 drones on the night of December 18 and 19, and its use of 13 Shahed drones on December 14 represent a significant increase in its recent use of these systems in Ukraine.⁴ ISW assessed on December 10 that an increased pace of Russian drone attacks may indicate that Russian forces accumulated more Iranian-made drones after a three-week period (November 17 to December 7) of not using them or that Russia received or expected to receive a new shipment of drones from Iran.⁵ Russian forces have likely further increased their pace of drone attacks in an effort to sustain their campaign against Ukrainian critical infrastructure given their likely depleted stock of precision missiles.⁶ Ukrainian air defenses have recently proven to be highly effective at shooting down Shahed drones and the Russian military's use of these systems in attacks against civilian targets in rear areas is having diminishing impacts.⁷ The Russian military will likely continue to commit an increased number of these systems to attacks on civilian targets in Ukraine in its misguided attempt to break the Ukrainian will to fight.

Russian President Vladimir Putin opened the door for further institutionalized corruption through the manipulation of the Russian domestic legal sphere. Putin approved a decree on December 29 that exempts all Russian officials, including members of the military and law enforcement services, from the requirement to make income declarations public.⁸ The decree extends to military officials, employees of Russian internal affairs organs, those serving in Rosgvardia and law enforcement positions, employees of the Russian penitentiary system and Investigative System, and individuals seconded to positions in Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts.⁹ The decree also notably lifts the ban on military officials receiving "charitable" gifts in connection with their participation in hostilities in Ukraine.¹⁰ Russian independent newspaper *The Insider* noted that this decree could theoretically allow Russian officials involved in the war to seize the private property of Ukrainian residents of occupied areas because such property could be legally classed as "charitable gifts."¹¹ ISW continues to report on Putin's manipulations of domestic law to quash domestic opposition to the war and enable those who support it.¹²

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces targeted Kyiv using Iranian-made drones on the night of December 29 to 30.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin opened the door for further institutionalized corruption in the Russian Federation.**

- **Russian forces continued to conduct counterattacks along the Svatove-Kreminna line.**
- **Ukrainian forces struck Russian concentration areas in Luhansk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Avdiivka area as well as in Bakhmut, where the pace of Russian offensive operations may have slowed compared to previous days.**
- **A Russian source claimed that Russian forces conducted ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian sources continued to discuss whether and when an imminent second wave of mobilization in Russia will occur.**
- **Russian officials continue to pursue the integration of occupied territories into the Russian Federation.**

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 December 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled a Russian attack on Stelmakhivka, 15km west of Svatove.¹³ Russian milbloggers also reported that Russian troops conducted attacks near Stelmakhivka and Dzherelne (10km west of Svatove).¹⁴ A Russian milblogger also claimed that elements of the 76th Airborne Division (VDV) and elements of the 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 41st Combined Arms Army of the Central Military District advanced northwest of Kreminna from Ploshchanka (16km northwest of Kreminna) towards Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna).¹⁵ Geolocated footage posted on December 29 additionally shows Russian soldiers on tactically significant heights near Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna), where fighting is reportedly ongoing.¹⁶

Ukrainian forces struck Russian concentration areas in occupied Luhansk Oblast on December 30. The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) posted images of the aftermath of a reported Ukrainian HIMARS strike on Alchevsk, Kadiivka, and Bryanka, all settlements about 50km west of Luhansk City along the T0504 Luhansk City-Bakhmut highway.¹⁷ A Ukrainian military source confirmed that the strikes hit a Russian barracks in Alchevsk and equipment warehouses in Kadiivka and Bryanka.¹⁸ Ukrainian sources also reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian base in Hirske (about 40km southeast of Kreminna).¹⁹

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)

Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut on December 30, albeit at a slower pace than over the past few days. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks near Soledar (10km northeast of Bakhmut), Ivanivske (5km west of Bakhmut), and Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).²⁰ The Ukrainian General Staff typically names more settlements around Bakhmut as the targets of Russian attacks in its daily report, and this inflection may indicate that the pace of Russian attacks around Bakhmut is slowing, possibly supporting ISW’s forecast that the Russian offensive around Bakhmut may be culminating.²¹ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian troops took control of certain strongholds near Pidhorodne, 5km northeast of Bakhmut.²² Geolocated combat footage posted on December 29 shows Wagner Group positions in the *Opytnenska Zosh* school about 2km south of Bakhmut.²³ Russian milbloggers notably reported that Ukrainian troops launched counterattacks to regain positions south and east of Bakhmut.²⁴ Geolocated footage from December 29 shows Ukrainian forces conducting a counterattack south of Bakhmut and entering the northwestern sector of Kurdyumivka, about 12km southwest of Bakhmut.²⁵

Russian forces continued ground attacks north of Avdiivka and along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on December 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Avdiivka, Kamyanka (5km north of Avdiivka), and Vesele, Vodiane, Krasnohorivka, and Marinka (all ranging from the northwestern to southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).²⁶ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian troops continued attacks along the western outskirts of Donetsk City, including on Vodiane, Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Opytne, and that Ukrainian troops unsuccessfully tried to counterattack in Marinka.²⁷ Russian forces continued routine fire along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line of contact and in western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.²⁸

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian concentration area in Donetsk City on December 30. Russian and Ukrainian sources posted pictures of the aftermath of a reported Ukrainian strike on the Viktoriya Hotel in Donetsk City, which was reportedly frequented by prominent Russian figures and military personnel.²⁹ Russian media reported that the Head of the Control and Investigation Department of the Military Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Joint Grouping of Troops, Yevgeny Ryabkov, died in the strike.³⁰

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

A Russian source claimed that Russian forces conducted limited ground assaults in Zaporizhia Oblast on December 30. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are conducting local offensives on certain sectors of the front in Zaporizhia Oblast.³¹ The Russian milblogger claimed that Russian assault detachments broke through the first line of Ukrainian defenses west of Dorozhnianka, Zaporizhia Oblast (8km south of Hulyaipole).³² The Zaporizhia Oblast Administration reported that Russian forces remain focused on defending their positions in Zaporizhia Oblast, however.³³ ISW has not observed any indicators that Russian forces are preparing for or conducting offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast.³⁴ Russian forces may be conducting limited operations to improve their tactical positions in Zaporizhia Oblast, but such tactical actions do not suggest that Russian forces are preparing for future offensives on the operational level in this section of the frontline.

Russian forces continued routine artillery and missile strikes west of Hulyaipole, on the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River in Dnipropetrovsk and Kherson oblasts, and in Mykolaiv Oblast.³⁵ Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces struck Kherson City, Nikopol, and Ochakiv.³⁶ Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Head Valentyn Reznichenko reported that Russian forces conducted five drone attacks in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and that Ukrainian air defenses shot all the drones down.³⁷

Russian air defenses in Russian-occupied Crimea were activated on December 30. Russian-occupied Sevastopol Governor Mikhail Razvozhaev stated that Russian air defenses activated over Sevastopol, and Russian and Ukrainian sources posted footage showing those air defenses operating.³⁸ A Russian milblogger claimed that there were explosions in Dzhankoi, Crimea, but ISW cannot independently verify whether any explosions occurred.³⁹

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

Russian and Ukrainian sources continued to discuss a likely and imminent second wave of mobilization. Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov inadvertently confirmed an upcoming second wave of mobilization during a December 29 press conference about mobilization in which he stated that Chechnya overfulfilled its mobilization requirements by 254% and therefore Chechen residents will not be mobilized in the second wave of mobilization.⁴⁰ Chief of the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Kyrylo Budanov stated in an interview with *BBC* that Russian authorities have made the decision to start another wave of mobilization on January 5, or potentially January 9, because they lack manpower.⁴¹ Senior Kremlin officials have denied claims of a second wave of mobilization as recently as December 21, as ISW has previously reported.⁴² ISW assesses that a second wave of mobilization would not fix the shortcomings of the Russian military as the Kremlin's force generation efforts are contingent on its ability to invest time and supplies in its personnel, requirements that are fundamentally at odds with the Kremlin's failures of long-term strategic planning.⁴³

Russian authorities continued efforts to crack down on military personnel who refuse to fight. *BBC's* Russian service reported on December 29 that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) developed and published a draft presidential decree that would legalize extreme punishment of Russian personnel who have committed offenses against the Russian military by creating "field guardhouses."⁴⁴ The report stated that the Russian military would place the misbehaving personnel into isolated field guardhouses designed to be worse than other military holding cells.⁴⁵ The decree reportedly forbids the creation of guardhouses in dungeons, basements that do not have windows or adequate ventilation, various containers, and pits "with the exception of cases due to the preservation of the lives of military personnel."⁴⁶ This decree does yet appear to have been signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. ISW has been unable to locate the originally published draft of this presidential decree.

The Russian government has not prepared itself for the consequences of its soldiers returning to Russian society. Independent Russian news outlet *The Moscow Times* reported in early December that Russian soldiers who are trickling back to Russia after time on the Ukrainian front are struggling to reintegrate into Russian society.⁴⁷ *The Moscow Times* reported that many Russian veterans have not received proper mental health support, despite the government's claims of providing up to thirty days of medical and psychological rehabilitation after demobilization.⁴⁸ A Russian grass-roots support group called War Veterans told *The Washington Post* "there are no rehabilitation programs" for veterans in Russia.⁴⁹ The Russian Federation government has reportedly abandoned and forgotten its veterans of other recent wars and it appears that veterans of the current war are unlikely to be better off.⁵⁰ ISW previously reported on the failures of the Russian government to pay its troops, provide land plots to veterans of the conflict in Ukraine, and meet the basic needs of Russian troops.⁵¹ *The Washington Post* noted that reports of violent altercations in Russia involving returned soldiers have already increased.⁵² A Russian milblogger reported on December 29 that a Russian veteran in Petrozavodsk shot his wife upon his return to Russia from Ukraine and called the police on himself.⁵³ Although issues with the reintegration of combat veterans are by no means unique to the Russian case, it is likely that the lack of material support and attention by Russian officials to this issue will serve as yet another point of domestic friction as the war continues.

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 officials and Russian-appointed occupation authorities continued to take measures to integrate occupied territories into the Russian Federation on December 30. Russian-appointed officials of the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) stated that the LNR People's Council unanimously adopted the Constitution of the Luhansk People's Republic of the Russian Federation on December 30, codifying the formal recognition of occupied Luhansk Oblast as part of the Russian Federation.⁵⁴ Russian-appointed Head of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Denis Pushilin stated that the DNR People's Council adopted the Constitution of the Donetsk People's Republic of the Russian Federation on December 30, also codifying the formal recognition of occupied Donetsk Oblast as part of Russia.⁵⁵ Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on December 30 that integrating occupied territories into the Russian legal, economic, social, and security space is in full swing.⁵⁶

Russian occupation authorities are continuing efforts to consolidate social control in occupied territories. Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration Head Oleksander Starukh stated on December 30 that Russian occupation officials are ordering Ukrainian teachers to work in schools and doctors to work in hospitals in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.⁵⁷ Starukh also stated that Russian occupation authorities are intimidating Ukrainian parents who are refusing to send their children to Russian schools in Russian-occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.⁵⁸

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:

- Belarusian Security Council Head Alexander Volfovich stated on DEC 30 that Russian and Belarusian forces can now create a combined grouping of troops of any composition or size per amendments to the 1997 interstate agreement that Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin approved during their December 3 meeting in Minsk.⁵⁹ ISW previously assessed that Russia pursued efforts to integrate the Belarusian military into Russian-led structures in joint military exercises and permanent joint combined combat training centers before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.⁶⁰ The formation of combined military groupings would therefore not be novel, but the removal of restrictions on their size and composition could mark a notable increase in the Belarusian and Russian ability to form more or larger combined military formations. This change does not necessarily indicate that Belarusian and Russian officials intend to do so, however. The Russian military is currently

leveraging its participation in the combined Regional Grouping of Forces to augment the training of recently mobilized Russian military personnel, and any potentially new or larger formations of combined groupings of forces may serve similar purposes.⁶¹

- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) posted a video on December 30 showing unspecified tank units of the Western Military District (WMD) that are a part of the combined Regional Grouping of Forces at an unspecified training ground in Belarus.⁶²

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

- The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of December 30.⁶³

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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² https://t.me/VA_Kyiv/591; <https://suspilne.net/media/349134-rosiani-obstrilali-vnoci-kiiv-sahedami-e-vlucanna-kmva/>; <https://t.me/OleksiyKuleba/3186>; https://t.me/vitaliy_klitschko/1723

³ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122922>

⁴ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar121922>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar121422>

⁵ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar121022>

⁶ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-29>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar12222>

⁷ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar121922>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar121422>

⁸ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202212290095?index=0&rangeSize=1>; <https://theins.ru/news/258252>

⁹ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202212290095?index=0&rangeSize=1>; <https://theins.ru/news/258252>

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¹² <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122922>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122922>

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¹⁴ <https://t.me/wargonzo/10107>

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https://t.me/miroshnik_r/10057; <https://t.me/readovkanews/49895>; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/73995

¹⁸ https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/25783

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²¹ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122822>

²² <https://t.me/rybar/42378>

²³ <https://t.me/yaremshooter/678>; <https://twitter.com/Cosmonaut19/status/1608841369665310720>

²⁴ <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonoV/20904>; <https://t.me/sashakots/37887>; https://t.me/rusich_army/7040;
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²⁵ https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1608581238440488960?s=20&t=LEm_bEZT8zWEvMZe8iZYeg

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²⁷ <https://t.me/wargonzo/10107>

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³¹ <https://t.me/rybar/42380>

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³⁶ <https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/2869>; <https://t.me/vilkul/2478>; https://t.me/Yevtushenko_E/1990;

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³⁷ <https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/2868>

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³⁹ <https://t.me/wargonzo/10107>

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