

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 28, 2023

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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.

**Conventional Russian forces are likely replacing exhausted Wager Group forces to maintain the offensive in Bakhmut after the Wagner Group's offensive in Bakhmut culminated with the capture of Soledar around January 12.** The Wagner Group's assault on Bakhmut has likely culminated with its surge on Soledar. Wagner Group forces in Bakhmut have not made significant gains since capturing Soledar around January 12. Conventional Russian units are now participating in fighting in Bakhmut to reinvigorate the Russian offensive there. Combat footage posted on January 20 indicates Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) are operating around Bakhmut as the footage shows a Russian BMD-4M – niche mechanized equipment exclusively used by the VDV.<sup>1</sup> A Russian source reported that Wagner and VDV elements conducted joint operations in Bakhmut on December 27.<sup>2</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense has been increasingly reporting that Russian VDV are operating in the Bakhmut area since early January 2023, indicating conventional Russian forces are augmenting if not replacing likely culminated Wagner forces in the area.<sup>3</sup> Wagner Group forces - particularly convicts - have taken heavy casualties in Bakhmut since fall 2022. One anonymous US official reportedly stated on January 5 that the Wagner Group's forces have sustained more than 4,100 deaths and 10,000 wounded, including over 1,000 killed between late November and early December near Bakhmut.<sup>4</sup>

Ukrainian officials have maintained that the Russian offensive on Bakhmut has not culminated.<sup>5</sup> ISW has previously assessed that the Russian offensive on Bakhmut was culminating.<sup>6</sup> We continue to assess that the Wagner offensive has culminated, but now assess that the Russians are committing conventional units to continue the fight. The larger Russian effort against Bakhmut has likely thus not culminated.

**Russian forces are attempting to prevent Ukraine from regaining the initiative possibly ahead of a planned decisive Russian offensive in Donbas.** Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov stated on December 22 that Russian forces are focusing most of their efforts on seizing Donetsk Oblast, which likely entails Russian forces capturing key positions in western Luhansk Oblast and northeastern Donetsk Oblast to reach the oblasts' administrative borders.<sup>7</sup> Russian forces have resumed ground attacks in the Vuhledar area (which they unsuccessfully attempted to reach in late October 2022) and are conducting small-scale assaults in Zaporizhia Oblast and around Donetsk City. Russian forces are conducting a large-scale offensive operation on the Bakhmut frontline as their current main effort and a defensive operation, for now, on the Svatove-Kreminna line.<sup>8</sup>

The localized attacks on Vuhledar and settlements in Donetsk and Zaporizhia oblasts are likely intended to disperse Ukrainian troops and set conditions for a decisive Russian offensive in western Luhansk Oblast, as ISW had previously assessed.<sup>9</sup> Russian forces may be attempting to disperse the Ukrainian grouping of forces on the Svatove-Kreminna line to enable a Russian recapture of Lyman, Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces could seek to use Lyman as a launching point for a decisive offensive to secure Donbas by conducting an offensive from Lyman in tandem with a drive on Bakhmut or from Bakhmut toward Slovyansk if the Russians succeed in capturing Bakhmut. The Russians may imagine that they can drive from their current positions directly to the Donetsk Oblast border along several independent lines of advance, although it is unlikely that they would not recognize the extreme improbability of success in such an attempt. The Russians more likely intend to pursue several

phases of offensive operations culminating with securing the borders of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. These phases would likely require anywhere from six to 12 months of Russian campaigning, if they are possible at all, extrapolating from past Russian operational patterns and assuming higher levels of Russian combat power and capability than ISW has observed since the start of the war.

**Russian forces likely lack the combat power necessary to sustain more than one major offensive operation while fixing Ukrainian forces in western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.** There is no open-source evidence to suggest that Russian forces have regenerated sufficient combat power from their losses in the early phases of the war to enable Russian forces to conduct simultaneous large-scale mechanized offensives in the next several months. The Russian military has not demonstrated the capability to conduct simultaneous combined arms offensive operations since early 2022. Russia's most recent gains around Bakhmut relied on months of human wave attacks to secure territorial gains around Bakhmut by brute force at tremendous human costs. Russia's earlier capture of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk in summer 2022 also did not utilize combined arms but instead relied on large-scale rolling artillery barrages to methodically destroy Ukrainian positions. Russian forces are experiencing growing artillery ammunition shortages that would prevent them from repeating these tactics.<sup>10</sup> It is unlikely, moreover, that the conventional Russian military will be willing to take the kinds of horrific losses the human wave tactic has inflicted on Wagner's convicts. The Russians' ability to execute large-scale rapid offensives on multiple axes this winter and spring is thus very questionable.

The conventional Russian military still must undergo significant reconstitution before regaining the ability to conduct effective maneuver warfare. The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) plans to significantly increase the size of Russia's military with 12 new maneuver divisions will take at least until 2026, if this effort succeeds at all.<sup>11</sup> Western intelligence and defense officials have not issued any indications that Russia's effective mechanized warfare combat power has recently increased, and ISW has not observed any indicators along those lines.

**The Russian military leadership may once again be planning an offensive operation based on erroneous assumptions about the Russian military's capabilities, however.** Russia's military failures in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Kherson oblasts have demonstrated time and again that Russian military leadership overestimates the Russian military's own capabilities. The degraded Eastern Military District naval infantry elements that are currently attacking Vuhledar will likely culminate even if they succeed in capturing the settlement.<sup>12</sup> The Ukrainian loss of Vuhledar, if it occurs, would not likely portend an immediate Russian breakthrough on multiple lines of advance in Donetsk or in the theater in general, therefore. Ukraine's spring rain season (which normally occurs around April) will degrade the terrain's suitability for maneuver warfare. If Russian forces attempt simultaneous mechanized offensives in the next two months they would likely disrupt Ukrainian efforts to conduct a counteroffensive in the short term, but such a Russian offensive would likely prematurely culminate during the spring rain season (if not before) before achieving operationally significant effects. Russian forces' culmination would then generate favorable conditions for Ukrainian forces to exploit in their own late spring or summer 2023 counteroffensive. Ukraine would additionally be seeing growing benefits from the incorporation of Western tank deliveries that have only just been pledged.

The Russians are thus very unlikely to achieve operationally decisive successes in their current and likely upcoming offensive operations, although they are likely to make tactically and possibly even operationally significant gains. Ukraine will very likely find itself in a good position from which to conduct successful counteroffensive operations following the culmination of Russian offensives before or during the spring rainy season—always assuming that the Ukrainians do not preempt or disrupt the Russian offensives with a counter-offensive of their own.

**The Russian military's decreasing reliance on Wagner forces around Bakhmut is likely reducing Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's influence.** ISW assessed on January 22 that the Kremlin likely turned to Prigozhin's irregular forces to get through a rough period following the culmination of Russian conventional forces' offensive in Luhansk Oblast over summer 2022, which misled Prigozhin into overestimating

his importance in the Russian military and political spheres.<sup>13</sup> The Kremlin, however, will not need to appease Prigozhin if Russian conventional forces continue to take responsibility for the Bakhmut frontline. ISW has reported that the Kremlin likely has already been slowly terminating his privileges.<sup>14</sup> Gerasimov and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) have also embarked upon new efforts to professionalize the army, an effort that, if successful, would marginalize parallel military formations such as the Wagner Group.

**Prigozhin is likely sensing and is overcompensating for his declining influence and has therefore begun to attack the nationalist veteran faction.** The veteran faction has been demanding that the Russian military command fix flaws within its conventional campaign instead of focusing on ineffective and unconventional solutions since at least May 2022.<sup>15</sup> Prigozhin continued on January 28 to berate Igor Girkin – a prominent Russian nationalist voice and a former Russian officer who has connections with the Russian veteran community – with vulgar insults and accusations that he is responsible for Russian forces’ loss of Slovyansk in 2014.<sup>16</sup> Prigozhin accused Girkin, Russian State Duma Parliamentarian and Committee on Defense member Lieutenant General (Ret.) Viktor Sobolev, and Leader of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party Leonid Slutsky of living in a past in which Russia relied on conventional forces.<sup>17</sup> Sobolev previously supported the Russian MoD effort to professionalize the military by enforcing grooming standards, and Slutsky avidly advocated for the Kremlin to declare mobilization to rectify the dire situation on the frontlines in early fall 2022.<sup>18</sup> Prigozhin went after these three individuals likely in an effort to undermine their credibility and advocacy for reforms and improvements within the military that further marginalize his undisciplined and brutal parallel military forces.

**Prigozhin is also facing bribery accusations, which may further diminish his reputation regardless of their validity.** Prigozhin responded to a media inquiry on January 27 regarding speculations that he receives bribes from convicts who do not then serve on the front lines but still receive a pardon for their “service.”<sup>19</sup> The allegations claimed that Prigozhin had recruited and soon released convicted Lipetsk Oblast Parliamentarian Andrey Yaitskiy (who some commentators speculated was physically unfit for military service), which granted him a pardon in exchange for a bribe.<sup>20</sup> Prigozhin attempted to deflect the accusations by claiming that Wagner discharged Yaitskiy with honors following his heavy injuries sustained on the frontlines and included purported testimony from Yaitskiy’s alleged commanders who portrayed him as a hero.<sup>21</sup> ISW cannot independently verify these bribery accusations against Prigozhin, however, their emergence is notable given that corruption and bribery is endemic in Russia and a hated cultural vice among Russians.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Conventional Russian forces are likely replacing exhausted Wagner Group forces to maintain the offensive in Bakhmut after the Wagner Group’s offensive in Bakhmut culminated with the capture of Soledar around January 12.**
- **Russian forces are attempting to prevent Ukraine from regaining the initiative possibly ahead of a planned decisive Russian offensive in Donbas.**
- **Russian forces likely lack the combat power necessary to sustain more than one major offensive operation while fixing Ukrainian forces in western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.**
- **The Russian military leadership may once again be planning an offensive operation based on erroneous assumptions about the Russian military’s capabilities**
- **The Russian military’s decreasing reliance on Wagner forces around Bakhmut is likely reducing Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin’s influence.**
- **Russian forces reportedly continued limited counterattacks to regain lost positions along the Svatove-Kreminna line.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian rear areas in Luhansk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut and Avdiivka-Donetsk City areas. Russian forces continued a localized offensive near Vuhledar in western Donetsk Oblast.**

- **Russian sources did not report any Russian ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast for the second consecutive day on January 28.**
- **Some Russian citizens continue limited efforts to sabotage Russian force generation efforts.**
- **Russian occupation officials continue to set conditions for the long-term forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.**

*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 reportedly continued limited counterattacks to regain lost positions along the Svatove-Kreminna line on January 28. Geolocated footage published on January 28 indicates that Russian forces have made marginal advances near Hryanykivka, Kharkiv Oblast (53km northwest of Svatove) and likely hold positions near Novovodyane, Luhansk Oblast (24km northwest of Kreminna).<sup>22</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted assaults near Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna) in the direction of Nevske (18km northwest of Kreminna) and Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna).<sup>23</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on January 28 that Ukrainian forces conducted reconnaissance-in-force operations along the Nevske-Terny line on January 26 and 27.<sup>24</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).<sup>25</sup>

Russian milbloggers continue to provide forecasts of possible Ukrainian actions. One milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces expect Russian forces to conduct an offensive along the Synkivka-Vilshana line in eastern Kharkiv Oblast (10-15km northeast of Kupyansk) and are simultaneously withdrawing some forces in Kupyansk to unspecified areas along the front line.<sup>26</sup> The milblogger also claimed that Ukrainian forces are planning their own counteroffensive near Kuzymivka, Luhansk Oblast (18km northwest of Svatove), and used sabotage and reconnaissance groups to assess Russian forces' capabilities in the area. Another milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces reduced the intensity of ground attacks but increased artillery fire along the Svatove-Kreminna line.<sup>27</sup> These forecasts suggest that these Russian milbloggers may be increasingly worried about a renewed Ukrainian effort somewhere on the front line to which Ukrainians may dedicate resources currently operating in the Kupyansk, Svatove, or Lyman areas.

Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian rear areas in Luhansk Oblast on January 28. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces struck a hospital in Novoaidar (km east of Kreminna) with HIMARS rockets, killing 14 unspecified patients.<sup>28</sup> Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai implied that Ukrainian forces may have struck the hospital, killing several dozen Russian military personnel.<sup>29</sup> Ukrainian forces are likely increasing strikes on Russian positions in deep rear areas of Luhansk Oblast to disrupt Russian logistics

and ground lines of communication (GLOCs), an effort that Ukrainian forces could use to set conditions for future counteroffensive operations. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian force concentration on December 2 in the vicinity of Starobilsk - also a rear area in Luhansk Oblast - killing 14 Russian personnel and wounding 30.<sup>30</sup>

### **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 January 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut itself, within 18km north of east of Bakhmut near Rozdolivka and Krasna Hora, 6km west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske, and within 20km south of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Druzhba.<sup>31</sup> Geolocated footage published on January 26 indicates that Russian forces have likely advanced to the northwestern outskirts of Sil (14km north of Bakhmut).<sup>32</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group fighters pushed Ukrainian forces back from positions north of Sil and that Russian forces conducted assaults in the direction of Paraskoviivka (9km north of Bakhmut) and Verkhokamianske (32km northeast of Bakhmut).<sup>33</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces captured a stronghold west of the Bakhmutka River near Paraskoviivka and Krasna Hora (7km north of Bakhmut).<sup>34</sup> Geolocated footage published on January 28 indicates that Russian forces made marginal advances in the northeastern outskirts of Bakhmut.<sup>35</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group fighters continued assaults in the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut.<sup>36</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian assault squads pushed Ukrainian forces from positions near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) back to Ivanivske and advanced to Bila Hora (15km southwest of Bakhmut) from the Siversky Donets-Donbas canal.<sup>37</sup> The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) People’s Militia claimed that the 132<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Corps continued successful offensive operations in the direction of Toretsk (23km southwest of Bakhmut) and recaptured lost positions from Ukrainian forces.<sup>38</sup>

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Donetsk City-Avdiivka area on January 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka), Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka), and Pobieda (32km southwest of Avdiivka).<sup>39</sup> Geolocated footage posted on January 27 indicates that Russian forces have likely advanced near Vodyane.<sup>40</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Sieverne (7km west of Avdiivka) and are attempting to advance towards elevated positions near Sieverne and Tonenke (7km west of Avdiivka).<sup>41</sup> The Russian milblogger claimed that these positions would allow Russian forces to advance further towards Orlivka (9km northwest of Avdiivka) and Lastochkyne (6km northwest of Avdiivka) and cut off the Ukrainian ground line of communication (GLOC) between Avdiivka and Orlivka.<sup>42</sup>

Russian forces continued a localized offensive in western Donetsk Oblast on January 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Prechystivka (43km southwest of Donetsk City) and Vuhledar (32km southwest of Donetsk City).<sup>43</sup> Geolocated footage published on January 28 indicates that Russian forces have likely made marginal advances west of Mykilske (27km southwest of Avdiivka) and south of Vuhledar.<sup>44</sup> A Ukrainian military official reported that the situation in the Vuhledar area is stable and that Russian forces conducted failed attempts to outflank Ukrainian forces in the area and take control over the surrounding roads.<sup>45</sup> DNR Head Advisor Yan Gagin claimed that the DNR “Kaskad” Battalion and other Russian formations still hold positions on the eastern and southeastern outskirts of Vuhledar.<sup>46</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are focusing their main effort on the southeastern outskirts of the settlement and that Ukrainian forces have constructed a serious line of defense in the Vuhledar area.<sup>47</sup> Russian sources amplified footage published on January 28 purporting to show the 40th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Pacific Fleet conducting a ground assault near Vuhledar and supposedly capturing a group of Ukrainian servicemembers.<sup>48</sup>

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

Russian sources did not report any Russian ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast for the second consecutive day on January 28. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov, who began the Russian information operation of a Russian offensive in Zaporizhia Oblast, has not commented on Russian ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast since January 26.<sup>49</sup> Russian sources reported only on routine artillery fire without mentioning any ground assaults on January 28.<sup>50</sup> One Russian milblogger claimed on January 27 that poor weather during the day prevents Russian forces from firing artillery and that Russian forces are unable to advance at night due to a complicated network of fortifications on the front lines.<sup>51</sup> The current lack of reporting and evidence of Russian advances continues to support ISW's assessment that Russian forces only conducted limited offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast.<sup>52</sup>

Russian forces continued to strike routine areas in Zaporizhia, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts on January 28.<sup>53</sup> Russian sources claimed that Russian forces struck the Zaporizhstal plant in Zaporizhzhia City with an Iskander missile overnight on January 27-28.<sup>54</sup>

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

Some Russians continue limited efforts to sabotage Russian force generation efforts. Independent Russian media outlets *OVD-Info* and *Mediazona* reported on January 27 that the Bryansk district court sent Dmitry Prokhorenko, a resident of Surazh, Bryansk Oblast, to a pre-trial detention center for two months.<sup>55</sup> The man's case file states that he set fire to a Russian railroad relay box in order to “undermine the economic security and defense capability” of Russia.<sup>56</sup> Another Russian news source claimed that Russian authorities further suspect that Prokhorenko attacked an oil depot in Surazh using drones in December 2022.<sup>57</sup> Russian opposition news source *Ostorozhno Novosti* reported on January 7 that Russian authorities also sent four Russian teenagers from Krasnoyarsk to a pre-trial detention center for setting fire to a railway transformer box in Ovinny, Krasnoyarsk Krai.<sup>58</sup> Sabotage acts targeting Russian infrastructure committed by Russian residents are particularly notable as Russian authorities normally depict sabotage acts as the work of foreign agents and terrorists, as ISW has previously reported.<sup>59</sup>

Russian soldiers and their relatives continue to express frustration over poor conditions, commander callousness, and information blocks. An open-source intelligence aggregator on January 28 posted a screenshot of a conversation in which a Russian soldier fighting in the Svatove direction accused his commanders of devaluing his life and sending his company on a mission that caused the death of 70 percent of the company.<sup>60</sup> The soldier credited Wagner Group mercenaries with providing the unit with equipment and helping to evacuate the wounded.<sup>61</sup> A Russian news source released an expose on January 27 including interviews with family members of a unit of mobilized soldiers from Volgograd in which the family members accused Russian authorities of withholding information about their relatives.<sup>62</sup> The source implied that dozens of the mobilized soldiers died on October 24 due to Russian commanders' mistakes and neglect.<sup>63</sup>

Russian officers continue to pressure mobilized soldiers into signing contracts as volunteer soldiers. Independent Russian media outlet ASTRA on January 27 amplified reports from the relatives of Russia's 346th Regiment that Russian commanders used exposure to the elements, intimidation, threats of violence, and rounds fired at soldiers' feet to coerce the mobilized soldiers into agreeing to “volunteer” for combat service.<sup>64</sup>

Abysmal Russian discipline and observance of basic rules continue to diminish Russian forces' effectiveness and create challenges for Russian authorities. Russian Telegram channel “Mozhem Obyasnit” posted a recorded complaint from a Russian mobilized soldier on January 27 in which he claimed that his unit faces rampant drunkenness leading to fighting and even an unreported murder.<sup>65</sup> The soldier claimed his commander is

constantly drunk, has beaten soldiers more than once, and threatens to shoot soldiers, so the soldier surrounds himself with guards because he is afraid of his fellow servicemen.<sup>66</sup> Russian opposition news outlet *Verstka* reported on January 27 that Russian authorities have tried at least 42 Russian soldiers for illegal appropriation, possession, transportation, and carrying of weapons, ammunition, and explosive devices.<sup>67</sup> The majority of these cases appear to occur among soldiers returning from the front lines.<sup>68</sup>

Russian authorities reportedly have not paid workers digging trenches in Belgorod Oblast to defend against the nonexistent threat of a Ukrainian ground attack against Russia.<sup>69</sup> A Russian opposition news source on January 27 amplified a comment on Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov's VK page that accused officials of allocating money for trench construction from the budget but not using that money to pay workers.<sup>70</sup> A Belgorod resident reportedly spoke to Gladkov about the issue via phone on a prior date, and Gladkov referred the resident to the prosecutor's office.<sup>71</sup> The construction of such fortifications continues to waste Russia's limited resources as well as mobilized soldiers and civilian labor on a nonexistent threat.

### **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 occupation officials continue to set conditions for the long-term forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Russian occupation Sevastopol Governor Mikhail Razvozhaev claimed on January 28 that the Russian government allocated a 70-million-ruble (\$989,800) subsidy for Sevastopol to create three non-profit facilities for children's health and recreation in the Gorny children's camp. Razvozhaev claimed that these new buildings will allow the camp to house over 400 children at once and will complete construction by May 25. Russian occupation officials have forcibly deported Ukrainian children to Crimea, including temporary housing for civilians forcibly evacuated from Kherson Oblast, as ISW has previously reported.<sup>72</sup> Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (parliament) Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lubinets stated on January 26 that Ukrainian officials have confirmed information that Russian occupation authorities have forcibly deported over 14,000 children to Russia and may have forcibly deported over 150,000 Ukrainian children in total.<sup>73</sup>

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian occupation authorities continued to integrate occupied Ukraine into Russian administrative and economic structures. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities began forced passportization measures among employees of state and communal enterprises in occupied Donetsk Oblast and that the enterprises will fire employees who do not have Russian passports by March 1.<sup>74</sup> The Resistance Center stated that the workers must also renounce their Ukrainian citizenship even though Russian law allows for dual citizenship and assessed that Russian authorities intend to change the demographic composition of occupied Ukraine to support propaganda efforts.<sup>75</sup> Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated that Russian occupation authorities have raised the retirement age for women from 55 to 60, delayed payment of pensions and salaries, created blanket pension amounts regardless of length of service or previous salary, and established a living wage of 11,000 rubles, one half the living wage in Moscow and one third the living wage in the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug in the Russian Far East.<sup>76</sup>

### **Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses it very unlikely that Russian or Belarusian forces will attack northern Ukraine in early 2023 and has thus restructured this section of the update to orient away from the previous most dangerous course of action warning forecast about a Russian offensive against northern Ukraine to report on significant activity in Belarus. ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus.)**

There is still no indication that Russian forces are forming a strike group in Belarus as of January 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of January 27.<sup>77</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that elements of the Russian 6th Motorized Rifle Division of the 3rd Army Corps (a force of about 10,000 - 15,000 poorly trained mobilized personnel that

Ukrainian forces defeated in the fall 2022 Kharkiv counteroffensive) are training in Belarus.<sup>78</sup> This is one of the first prominent mentions of the 3rd Army Corps since its defeat in Kharkiv Oblast in 2022. It is unclear if the 3rd Army Corps still exists as a coherent formation or if the Ukrainian General Staff simply observed elements formally of the 3rd Army Corps regrouping in Belarus.

The Russian military continues expanding its air force presence in Belarus under the rubric of joint tactical flight exercises. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on January 28 that unspecified flight crews (likely Russian and Belarusian) performed a combat exercise at the Ruzhansky Training Ground as part of ongoing joint Russian-Belarus tactical flight exercises.<sup>79</sup> Independent Belarusian monitoring organization The Hajun Project reported that a Russian Aerospace Forces An-26 transport arrived at the Machulishchy Airfield in Minsk, Belarus on January 27.<sup>80</sup> The Hajun Project also reported that unspecified Belarusian aircraft conducted flights near the Machulishchy, Baranavichy, and Luninets airfields and that a Russian Su-34 flew to Russia from the Baranavichy Airfield on January 27.<sup>81</sup>

Belarusian mechanized elements continue to deploy across Belarus for exercises. The Hajun Project reported that a column of at least 30 unspecified vehicles of the Belarusian 11th Mechanized Brigade deployed through Slonim in Grodno Oblast on January 27.<sup>82</sup>

**Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.**



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- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1555425774968642>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-28>
- <sup>3</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/23347](https://t.me/mod_russia/23347); <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/880782>;  
<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-13-2023>;  
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-19-2023>;  
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-20-2023>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/06/putin-ally-fighting-to-control-salt-and-gypsum-mines-near-ukraine-city-of-bakhmut-says-us>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/possible-russian-victory-vuhledar-ukraine-could-provide-key-strategic-advantages-1776919>; <https://www.newsweek.com/ukraine-war-live-updates-1776225>; <https://www.president.gov.ua/ru/news/nam-potribna-micna-derzhava-i-ukrayina-bude-same-takoyu-zver-80597>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122822>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-22>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Operations%20Assessments%20January%2018%202023.pdf>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-31>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-17-2023>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://t.me/milinfo/96150>; <https://t.me/voenkorkotenok/44798>; <https://t.me/epoddubny/14700>;  
[https://t.me/grey\\_zone/16864](https://t.me/grey_zone/16864)
- <sup>13</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-22-2023>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-22-2023>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-23>;  
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-2>;  
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-4>;  
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- <sup>16</sup> [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/362](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/362); [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/361](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/361);  
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