

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 4

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December 4, 6:15pm 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.

Ukrainian officials have indicated that Ukrainian forces plan to continue offensive operations over the coming winter to capitalize on recent battlefield successes and prevent Russian forces from regaining the battlefield initiative. Spokesperson of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Eastern Group Serhii Cherevatyi stated on December 4 that frozen ground enables heavy wheeled and tracked vehicles to advance and that Ukrainian forces are preparing such vehicles for winter operations.¹ Cherevatyi also stated that low-quality mobilized recruits and Wagner Group personnel recruited from Russian prisoners are unprepared for combat in the winter.² The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on November 20 that those who suggest the winter will pause hostilities “likely never sunbathed in January on the southern coast of Crimea,” suggesting that Ukrainian forces intend to continue counteroffensive operations over the coming winter that contribute toward the goal of retaking Crimea.³ Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Volodymyr Havrylov stated on November 18 that Ukrainian forces will continue to fight in the winter because any type of pause will allow Russian forces to reinforce their units and positions.⁴ Ukrainian officials’ prior statements on ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive actions in Kherson Oblast are further evidence that these official statements on winter counteroffensive actions are indicators of continuing counteroffensive operations.⁵

Senior US government officials are mistakenly identifying the optimal window of opportunity for Ukraine to conduct more counteroffensives as the spring rather than winter, despite Ukrainian officials’ statements to the contrary. US Director for National Intelligence (DNI) Avril Haines assessed on December 3 that the pace of the war in Ukraine will slow over the winter so both sides can refit, resupply, and reconstitute, despite evidence that conditions on the ground favor a renewed offensive and despite the demonstrated tendency of Ukrainian forces to initiate new counteroffensive efforts relatively quickly after the previous effort has culminated.⁶

Ukraine’s ability to maintain the military initiative and continue the momentum of its current operational successes depends on Ukrainian forces continuing to conduct successive operations through the winter of 2022-2023. Russia lost the initiative in summer 2022 after its offensive in Donbas culminated.⁷ Ukrainian forces gained and have retained the initiative since August 2022 and have been conducting a series of successful successive operations since then: Ukraine liberated most of Kharkiv Oblast in September, Kherson City in November, and is currently setting conditions for more Ukrainian pushes elsewhere this winter.⁸ Successive operations are a key part of Ukraine’s campaign design. A series of successive Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts demonstrates the Ukrainian military’s remarkable operational planning skill and knowledge of the strengths of Soviet operational art. Soviet operational art emphasizes that militaries can only obtain their strategic objectives through the cumulative operational success of *successive operations ideally conducted without operational pauses between them*.⁹ Recent official Ukrainian statements make clear that Ukraine’s campaign design is designed to allow a series of

successive operations to deprive Russia of the initiative, defeat the Russian military, and liberate more Ukrainian territory.

Weather conditions in winter 2023 likely will dictate a timeframe in which Ukraine can conduct maneuver warfare and continue its string of operational successes with minimal pauses that would increase the risks of Ukraine losing the initiative. The fall mud season in November hampered maneuver warfare, as ISW previously noted.¹⁰ Both Russia and Ukraine nevertheless continued aggressive offensive and counter-offensive operations throughout this muddy period despite some Western predictions that the mud would suspend operations. As the hard freeze approaches in late December, Ukrainian forces will be again able to exploit the weather conditions. Winter is usually the best season for mechanized warfare in Ukraine whereas spring is the nightmare season for fighting in Ukraine.¹¹ The thaw swells rivers and streams and turns fields into seas of mud.¹² Ukrainian forces likely are preparing to take advantage of frozen terrain to move more easily than they could in the muddy autumn months.¹³

If Ukraine's allies and partners do not support Ukrainian forces to conduct large-scale decisive counteroffensive operations this winter—as the DNI's statements might be construed to suggest – then Ukrainians' ability to conduct maneuver warfare will be constrained until likely at least after the spring mud season in March 2023.¹⁴ Such a course of action will likely prematurely culminate Ukraine's current momentum and grant shattered Russian forces a valuable three-to-four-month reprieve to reconstitute and prepare to fight on a better footing.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, and Will Kiehm
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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.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian officials have indicated that Ukrainian forces will continue counteroffensive operations over the upcoming winter.**
- **Ukraine’s ability to maintain the military initiative depends on Ukrainian forces continuing counteroffensive operations in the winter of 2022-2023.**
- **Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the directions of Kreminna and Svatove.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations around Bakhmut and Avdiivka.**
- **Groups of mobilized Russian soldiers continue to disrupt Russian force generation efforts with refusals to fight, insubordination, and defiance.**
- **Russian forces likely publicly executed residents in occupied Luhansk Oblast on accusations of partisan activity.**

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)

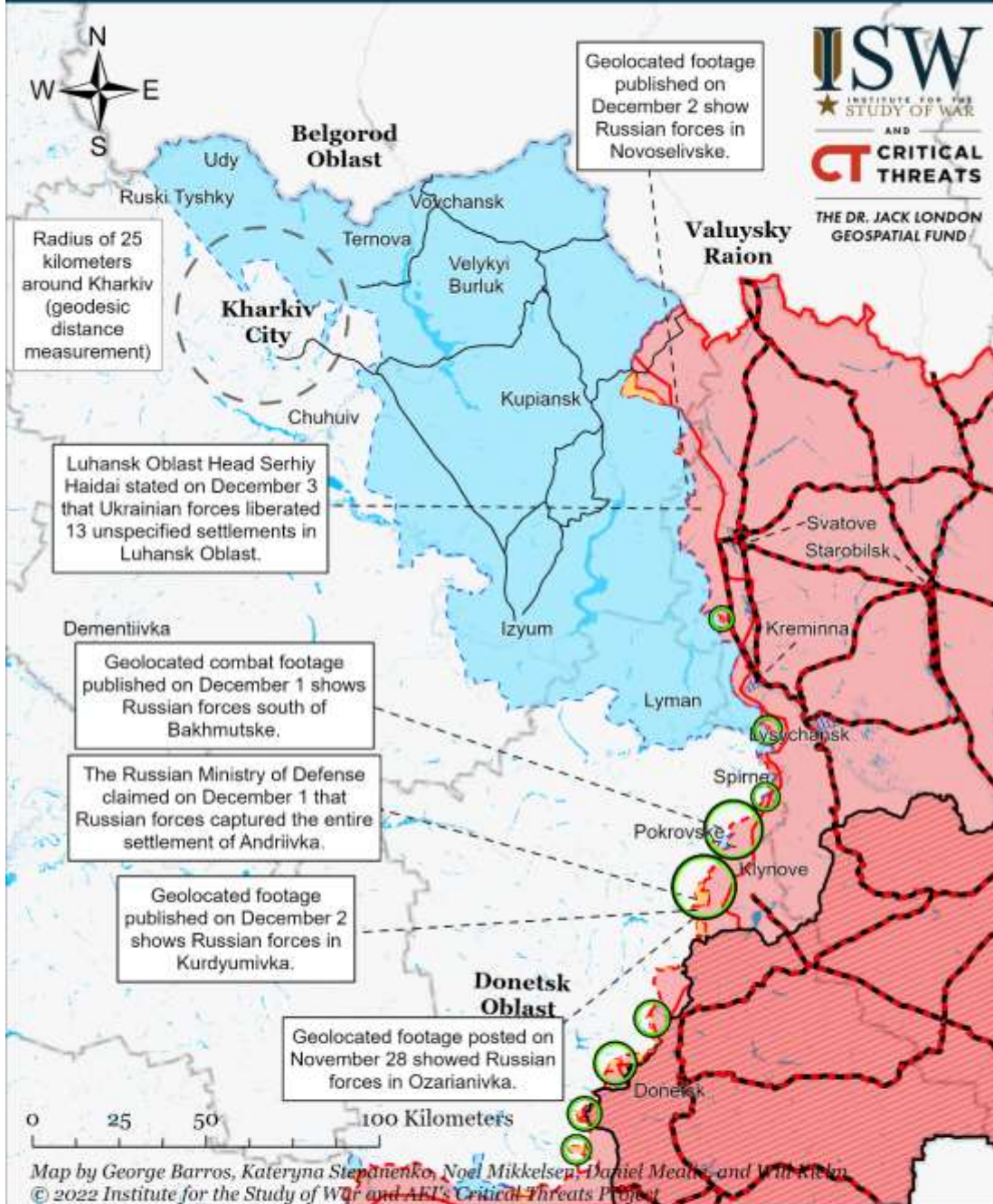
Eastern Ukraine: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)

Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the direction of Svatove on December 4. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces thwarted Ukrainian assaults within 28km northwest of Svatove near Kuzemivka in Luhansk Oblast and Yahidne in Kharkiv Oblast.¹⁵ Geolocated footage posted on December 4 shows Ukrainian forces conducting strikes on Russian positions northwest of Svatove near Stelmakhivka and Kryvoshyvka in Luhansk Oblast.¹⁶ A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces will likely increase their assaults on Kuzemivka as well as on the R-66 highway between Svatove and Kreminna.¹⁷ ISW makes no assessments about specific, future Ukrainian operations.

Ukrainian forces reportedly continued counteroffensive operations in the direction of Kreminna amidst limited Russian counterattacks on December 4. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces thwarted Ukrainian assaults near Kreminna and destroyed Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups within 5km southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova.¹⁸ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian assault in the area of the Zhuravka Balka River (16km northwest of Kreminna).¹⁹ Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also repelled Ukrainian attacks near Chervonopopivka (7km north of Kreminna) and claimed that neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces control the settlement.²⁰ Former Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) ambassador to the Russian Federation Rodion Miroshnik claimed that Russian officials have detected the formation of Ukrainian strike groups in the vicinity of Kreminna.²¹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults within 17km northwest of Kreminna near Ploshchanka and within 12km south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.²² The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces continued routine indirect fire along the line of contact in eastern Kharkiv and western Luhansk oblasts.²³

Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces continued to strike rear areas in Luhansk Oblast on December 4. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces struck Novochevone and Alchevsk in Luhansk Oblast with HIMARS rockets.²⁴

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of December 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



	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.

Spokesman for the Ukrainian Eastern Forces, Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated on November 20 that Ukrainian forces have already liberated 12 settlements in Luhansk Oblast since the start of the eastern counteroffensive. ISW will update our maps when independent sources disclose the area of Ukrainian advances.

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)

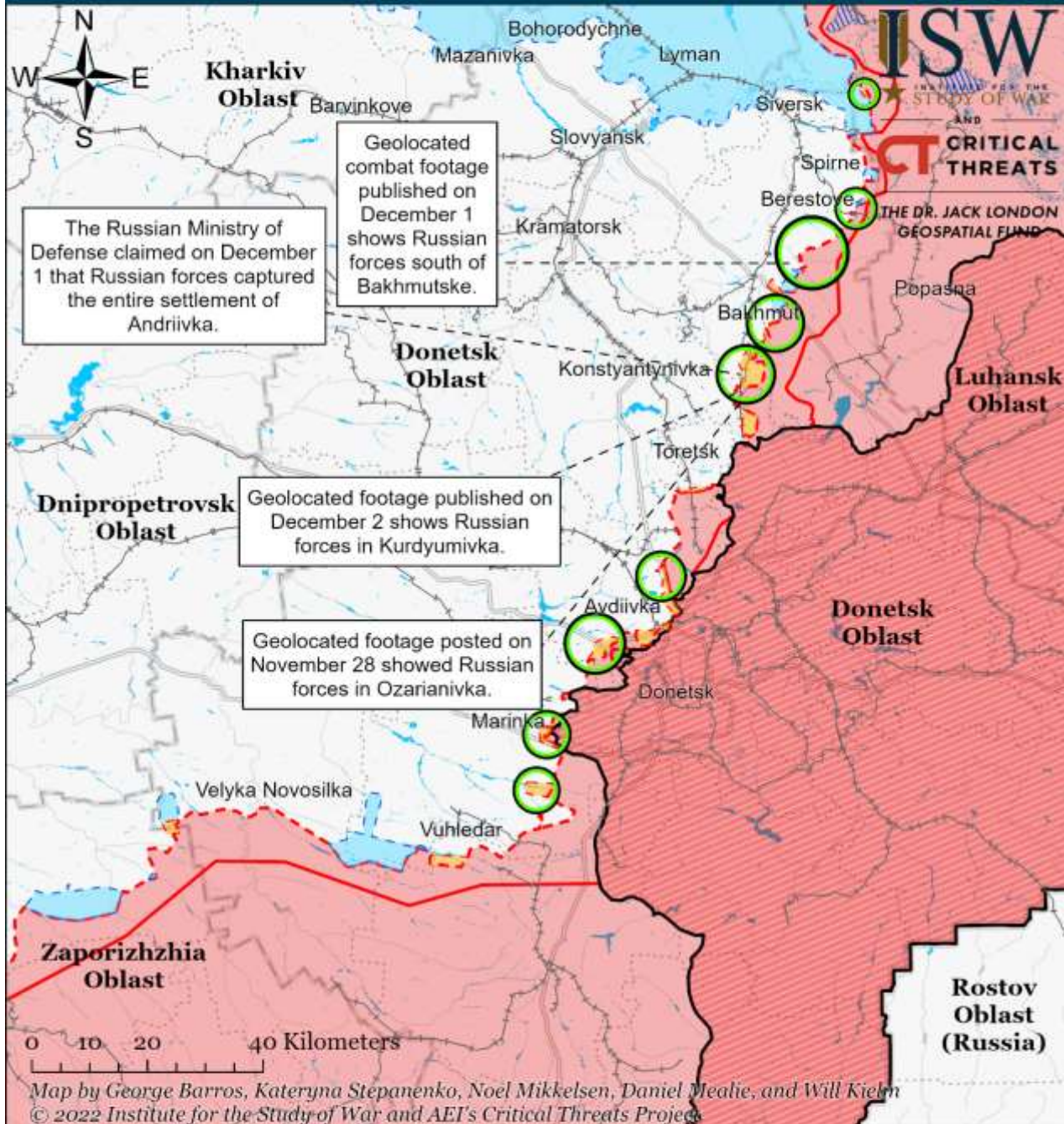
Russian forces continued ground attacks around Bakhmut on December 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks northeast of Bakhmut near Berestove, Bilohorivka, Yakovlivka, Soledar, and Bakhmutske and south of Bakhmut near Opytne, Klishchiivka, Andriivka, and Kurdiumivka.²⁵ Ukrainian and Georgian sources confirmed that Russian troops encircled a Ukrainian detachment with Georgian volunteers near Bakhmut in recent days, wounding the Georgian commander and killing six Georgian volunteers.²⁶ Social media footage posted by Ukrainian troops shows heavy fighting south of Bakhmut in Opytne, and Russian milbloggers claimed that the capture of Opytne is crucial to further Russian advances toward Bakhmut.²⁷ Russian sources additionally claimed that Ukrainian troops conducted an unsuccessful counterattack in Kurdiumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut) and that fighting is ongoing in several settlements south of Bakhmut.²⁸

Russian forces are likely continuing to suffer high casualties in operations around Bakhmut. Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Serhii Cherevatyi stated that Russian troops are suffering losses on the order of 50 wounded and 50 killed in action per day around Bakhmut.²⁹ Cherevatyi also noted that Russian troops received an order not to bring artillery shells within 100km of the frontline in the Donetsk area because of recent successful Ukrainian strikes on Russian ammunition depots.³⁰ The Ukrainian Border Guard additionally reported that Ukrainian troops shot down a Russian Sukhoi-34 fighter-bomber on the outskirts of Bakhmut on December 3.³¹ Russian operations around Bakhmut are continuing to expend manpower, ammunition, and other military assets while making limited tactical gains that have limited operational utility, as ISW has previously assessed.³²

Russian troops continued ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on December 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful assaults near Vodiane, Pervomaiske, Vesele, Marinka, and Novomykhailivka, all along the western outskirts of Donetsk City.³³ Russian media outlet *RT* posted footage on December 4 reportedly of Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) ”Somalia” Battalion and 11th Regiment fighters repelling a Ukrainian attack on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Pisky.³⁴ Russian milbloggers claimed that DNR 11th Regiment troops are clearing Ukrainian fortifications near Pervomaiske.³⁵ Russian sources also claimed that Russian forces have advanced within Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City) and have pushed Ukrainian troops to the outskirts of the settlement.³⁶

Russian forces continued defensive operations in western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts on December 4. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian troops repelled a series of limited Ukrainian counterattacks to regain lost positions southwest of Donetsk City in the Vuhledar area.³⁷ Russian troops continued routine shelling along the line of contact in this area.³⁸

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of December 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Major Railroads

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

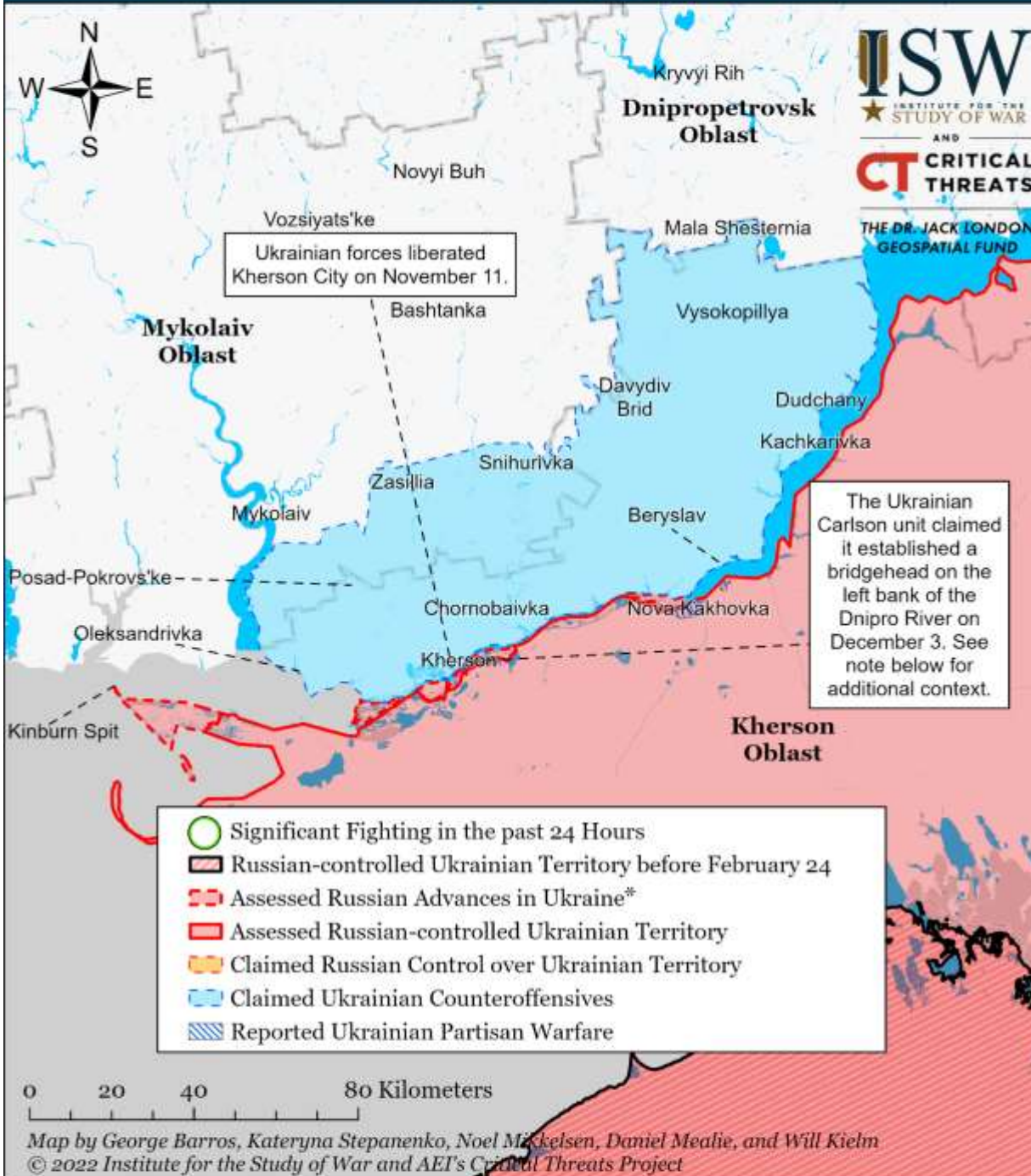
Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Note: ISW will report on activities in Kherson Oblast as part of the Southern Axis in this and subsequent updates. Ukraine’s counteroffensive in right-bank Kherson Oblast has accomplished its stated objectives, so ISW will not present a Southern Ukraine counteroffensive section until Ukrainian forces resume counteroffensives in southern Ukraine.

Russian forces continued routine shelling in Kherson Oblast on December 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces frequently shell civilian areas in Kherson Oblast, particularly Kherson City.³⁹ Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces shelled Antonivka on the northeastern outskirts of Kherson City.⁴⁰ A Ukrainian source reported that Ukrainian forces struck Chaplynka (40km south of Nova Kakhovka on the T2202 Nova Kakhovka-Armiansk highway) where Ukrainian officials frequently report strikes against Russian force concentrations.⁴¹

Russian forces continued routine shelling west of Hulyaipole and in Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv oblasts on December 4. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces shelled Nikopol and Marhanets on the north bank of the Kakhovka Reservoir.⁴² Ukrainian Mykolaiv Oblast Head Vitaly Kim reported that Russian forces shelled the port area of Ochakiv, slightly north of the Kinburn Spit.⁴³ Odesa Military Administration Spokesman Serhiy Bratchuk reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian force concentration near Pershotravneve, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁴⁴ Satellite imagery dated November 30 shows that Russian forces are building fortifications, including dragon’s teeth anti-tank structures, in Zaporizhia Oblast north of Melitopol.⁴⁵

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of December 4, 2022, 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.

Light reconnaissance elements of the Ukrainian Carlson special volunteer unit placed a Ukrainian flag on a tower on wetlands on the left Bank side of the Dnipro River approximately 600 meters south of Kherson City and claimed the area will become a Ukrainian bridgehead that will support future operations to further liberate southern Kherson on December 3. ISW does not assess that Ukrainian forces have established a bridgehead or lodgment in this location as Carlson claimed as of December 4. The Carlson element's ability to operate in the area uncontested and the lack of observed Russian fortifications or defensive forces in the area indicates that Russian forces do not exercise full control over the area. Russian control lines are likely south of the Konka River.

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

The Russian military continues to struggle with mobilized soldiers refusing to fight. An independent Russian news outlet interviewed a mobilized soldier whom Russian forces held in a basement alongside other Russian soldiers who refused to fight in Zavtine Bazhannia, Donetsk Oblast.⁴⁶ The news outlet reported that at least 12 Russian soldiers remain in the basement.⁴⁷ The Russian soldier demanded that Russian authorities free the other soldiers and prosecute the commanders holding them.⁴⁸ ISW has previously reported on similar informal detention centers on the front lines containing hundreds of other unwilling Russian soldiers.⁴⁹

Russian mobilized soldiers reportedly continue to challenge the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD's) control over its forces via insubordination and defiance. A Russian Telegram channel claimed on December 2 that mobilized soldiers stationed in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan "rebelled" when their commanders prevented them from taking leave or from visiting their relatives.⁵⁰ Video posted to Telegram shows a large group of mobilized soldiers pushing through a gate and exiting the perimeter of the unit before confronting other soldiers who attempted to stop them.⁵¹ A local Russian news agency called the video a fake on December 3.⁵² The source claimed the mobilized soldiers were in such a hurry to see their relatives that they forgot to check out at the exit. The soldiers allegedly returned once officials reminded them to check out.⁵³ The original poster of the video of "rebellious" mobilized soldiers reportedly took down the video following the local agency's denunciation.⁵⁴ ISW reported on three other instances of mobilized soldiers in Kazan rioting, disobeying orders, and demonstrating disruptive behavior in the month of November alone.⁵⁵ An independent Russian news outlet reported that Russian authorities arrested a Kazan journalist for participation in rallies against mobilization on December 2.⁵⁶

Relatives of Russian mobilized soldiers continue to form support groups across Russia to engage with authorities concerning mobilization and to gather aid for Russian soldiers. The relatives' groups reportedly have had limited success scheduling meetings with local governments.⁵⁷ However, the groups likely must carefully restrain their efforts to avoid the appearance of criticizing state efforts. The Kremlin appears wary of allowing these groups to repeat scenarios seen when mothers' groups challenged Soviet state decisions during the Soviet-Afghan War. The Kremlin has made efforts to host staged meetings with mothers of mobilized soldiers while quieting genuine complaints.⁵⁸ A Russian news source reported on December 2 that Russian authorities have ignored appeals from the Council of Mothers and Wives, an organization created immediately following the start of mobilization.⁵⁹ The source stated that Council of Mothers and Wives activist Olga Tsukanova announced that unspecified authorities surveil her and have opened a criminal case against her.⁶⁰ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources continue to depict Russian soldiers as content, well-cared for, and well-equipped, despite evidence of continuing poor conditions and equipment shortages.⁶¹

Russian authorities reportedly continue to fail to deliver promised payments to Russian soldiers.⁶² A Russian news source reported that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has prepared a draft procedure for routing social payments to the mobilized through unit commanders.⁶³ Contract soldiers reportedly lose the right to receive payments under this framework.⁶⁴ Authorizing the delegation of payments through unit commanders also creates systemic opportunities for payment embezzlement.

Russian authorities continue to mobilize men without medical examinations or a completed period of training and with conditions that should qualify them for exemption from mobilization.⁶⁵ Many of these mobilizations contradict Russian law and Russian President Vladimir Putin's informal declaration of the end of partial mobilization.

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

Russian occupation authorities continued measures to restrict the movement of residents in occupied Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts on December 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian officials in occupied Kherson Oblast set up roadblocks on the Chaika River that prevent the passage of private boats under the guise of counter-subversion measures.⁶⁶ Ukrainian Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov reported that Russian occupation authorities are preventing military-eligible men from leaving occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.⁶⁷ Fedorov also reported that Russian occupation authorities sometimes prevent Ukrainian citizens with temporary travel permits from traveling to Ukrainian-held Zaporizhia Oblast.⁶⁸

Russian occupation authorities continued efforts to enforce the use of rubles and establish further economic control in occupied territories on December 4. Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on December 4 that Russian occupation officials are planning to withdraw the Ukrainian hryvnia from circulation starting on January 1, 2023.⁶⁹ Haidai also stated that Russian occupation officials introduced tariffs for utilities in Severodonetsk, Lysychansk, and Kreminna Raions in Luhansk Oblast.⁷⁰ Haidai added that Russian occupation authorities introduced the tariffs retroactively from July and reported that there has been no trash removal since the summer and that only some residents of occupied Luhansk Oblast have received water in September and October.⁷¹

Russian occupation authorities continued efforts to forcibly integrate children in Russian-occupied territories into the Russian education system on December 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian occupation authorities continued to threaten to strip parental rights from Ukrainian parents who refuse to send their children to study under Russian programs in occupied Kherson Oblast.⁷²

Russian forces likely publicly executed residents in occupied Luhansk Oblast under accusations of partisan activity. Ukrainian journalist Sergii Sternenko posted images on December 4 showing five residents in Luhansk Oblast who Sternenko reported that Russian forces had publicly hanged them on accusations of partisan activity.⁷³ Russian forces may have executed the residents in this manner in an attempt to prevent further partisan activity in Russian-occupied territories in Ukraine. ISW has previously assessed that effective Ukrainian partisan activity is forcing Russian forces to divert resources away from frontline operations to help secure rear areas.⁷⁴

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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- ¹ <https://armyinform.com dot ua/2022/12/04/mobilizovani-ta-vagnerivczi-ne-mayut-navychok-voyuvaty-vzymku-sergij-cherevatyj/>
- ² <https://armyinform.com dot ua/2022/12/04/mobilizovani-ta-vagnerivczi-ne-mayut-navychok-voyuvaty-vzymku-sergij-cherevatyj/>
- ³ <https://twitter.com/DefenceU/status/1594372791360491520>
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- ⁵ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-16;>
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- ⁶ [https://www.cnbc.com/2022/12/04/us-intel-chief-on-russia-using-up-ammunition-in-ukraine.html;](https://www.cnbc.com/2022/12/04/us-intel-chief-on-russia-using-up-ammunition-in-ukraine.html)
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- ⁷ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-30;>
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- ¹¹ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-30>
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²⁴ <https://t.me/millnr/9835> ; <https://t.me/luhansktoday/10687> ; <https://t.me/rybar/41685> ;
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KKiai8nsjx8soAqHgl](https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02S3t6SyuYDWjUfCq51GCBqgiWFzNTqMuysULgrnHZUBUoCUK KKiai8nsjx8soAqHgl)

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<https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1599372707199533056>

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⁶⁷ https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/987

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