Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 6, 2023

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, George Barros, Layne Philipson, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan February 6, 9:00 pm ET

Click <u>here</u> to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian officials assess that Russian forces are preparing to launch a large-scale decisive offensive in eastern Ukraine in mid-to-late February. Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov stated on February 5 that the Ukrainian military is expecting Russia to start its decisive offensive around February 24 to symbolically tie the attack to the first anniversary of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.¹ Reznikov also clarified that the Ukrainian military has not observed the formation of Russian offensive groups in the Kharkiv and Chernihiv directions or Belarus; Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Nataliya Humenyuk noted that Russian forces are likely concentrating on launching offensive operations in the east rather than in southern Ukraine.² An unnamed advisor to the Ukrainian military told *Financial Times* that Russia intends to launch an offensive in the next 10 days (by February 15), a timeline that would allow Russian forces to strike Ukrainian positions before the arrival of Western tanks and infantry fighting vehicles.³ Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai stated that Russian forces are continuing to deploy reserves to Luhansk Oblast to strike after February 15.4

Select Russian nationalist voices continued to express skepticism towards Russia's ability to launch a successful offensive past late February. A Wagner-affiliated milblogger noted that Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov (who currently commands Russian forces in Ukraine) has a limited time window to launch a large-scale offensive operation in Ukraine before it is entirely impossible to execute.⁵ Another ultra-nationalist voice, former Russian officer Igor Girkin, forecasted that the Russian decisive offensive will not be successful until Russia mobilizes more manpower, industry, and economy.⁶ Girkin claimed that an attack without such mobilization would shortly culminate. Both observations highlight that the Russian military command appears to be in a rush to launch the decisive offensive, likely ahead of the arrival of Western military aid and the muddy spring season in Ukraine around April that hindered Russian mechanized maneuvers in spring 2022.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz undermined Russian President Vladimir Putin's false narrative that the provision of German tanks to Ukraine threatens Russian security. Putin stated on February 2 that German tanks are again threatening Russia, drawing a false parallel with World War II.7 Scholz stated that Putin's remarks are "a part of a series of abstruse historical comparisons that he uses to justify his attack on Ukraine." Scholz added that the West and Ukraine have a "consensus" that Ukrainian forces will only use Western-provided weapons to liberate its territories from Russian occupation. Germany's provision of Leopard tanks does not differ from Western military provisions of Soviet tanks and kit to Ukraine throughout the war, and Putin's February 2 reaction is likely a continuation of Russian information operation to discourage Western military aid to Ukraine ahead of Russia's decisive offensive. Kremlin information agents are amplifying similar rhetoric that Ukrainian forces will use Ground Launched Small Diameter Bombs (GLSDM) - which increase the range of HIMARS to 151km from roughly 80km – to target Russian territory alongside

occupied Ukrainian territories. Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov confirmed on February 5 that Ukraine agreed to not use Western long-range weapons to strike Russian territories, however. 10

Kremlin-appointed Russian and occupation officials continue to implement social benefit schemes that target children and teenagers in occupied areas of Ukraine to consolidate social control and integration of these territories into Russia. Russian Commissioner on Children's Rights, Maria Lyova-Belova (appointed by Russian President Vladimir Putin) met with a slate of Russian occupation officials on February 6 to discuss various issues relating to children and youth in occupied regions of Ukraine. In a meeting with occupation head of Crimea Sergey Aksyonov, Lvova-Belova noted that the Crimean occupation government has been instrumental in "accepting" children from Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts. 11 Lvova-Belova also reported that the "Day After Tomorrow" organization will begin conducting "rehabilitation" tours in Crimea to work with children who need special psychological assistance. 12 ISW has previously reported on numerous instances of Russian occupation officials using the guise of psychiatric and medical rehabilitation to remove Ukrainian children further into Russian-controlled territory within Ukraine or deport them to Russia. 13 Sevastopol occupation head Mikhail Razvozhaev similarly announced that he met with Lvova Belova on February 6 to discuss "new formats of social work" on behalf of Putin and remarked that most of the children who require social support are not orphans.¹⁴ Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik stated that Lvova-Belova proposed that children whose personal data is in the regional data bank will be "able to find a family in other regions of the Russian Federation."15 Pasechnik also reported that LNR authorities are working with Novosibirsk Oblast and Khanty-Mansi Okrug to secure "methodological assistance" in resolving issues regarding children in occupied Luhansk Oblast.¹⁶ Lvova-Belova additionally met with Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin to develop programs "for the socialization of adolescents" and with Zaporizhia occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky to discuss social institutions for children in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.17

Lvova-Belova is likely working directly on Putin's orders to institute several social institutions and programs in occupied areas of Ukraine to collect personal data on children, carry out various social programming functions aimed at integrating occupied areas using pseudo-humanitarian organizations, and set conditions to legitimize and institutionalize the deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children into Russian **families.** Putin signed a list of instructions on January 3 that directed Lyova-Belova and directed the occupation heads of Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts to "take additional measures to identify minors...left without parental care" in occupied areas to provide them with "state social assistance" and "social support." 18 Lyova-Belova's February 6 meetings with occupation heads are likely the manifestation of Putin's list of instructions and represent an escalation in efforts by Kremlinappointed officials to consolidate social integration of occupied territories by targeting children.¹⁹ The implementation of "rehabilitation centers" and the tabulation of children's personal data through these social programs will likely enable Russian occupation officials to facilitate the forced deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children to Russian families. Occupation officials continue to execute social control measures in occupied areas according to directives provided by Putin's list of instructions. ISW continues to observe that efforts to deport and forcibly adopt Ukrainian children may constitute a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. 20

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to open the door for further institutionalized corruption in Russia through legislative manipulations. Putin signed a

decree on February 6 allowing Russian deputies and senators to not publish their incomes in the public domain.²¹ The law will allow deputies and senators to publish their incomes in an anonymized form that does not contain their personal data. The law will also apply to regional and municipal deputies.²² Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that the new law will not affect anti-corruption measures and stated that "the conditions of the [special military operation] bring their own specifics."²³ Putin previously approved a decree on December 29, 2022, that exempted all Russian officials, including members of the military and law enforcement, from making public income declarations.²⁴ These two decrees are likely efforts by the Kremlin to appease the political actors who comprise Putin's domestic support base and will likely continue to contribute to the institutionalization of corruption in Russia.

The Kremlin continues to deny Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin legitimacy and authority in Russia. A Moscow court refused to recognize Prigozhin as the owner and founder of Wagner private military company (PMC) after revisiting Prigozhin's lawsuit against Russian journalist Alexei Venediktov on February 6.25 Prigozhin sued Venediktov in June 2021 for accusing him of being the "owner of Wagner," and the Moscow court concluded that information about Prigozhin's ownership of Wagner was "unreliable." Prigozhin attempted to reverse the court's decision on January 19, claiming that Venediktov did not lie about Prigozhin's ownership of Wagner—likely in an ongoing effort to overcompensate for his declining influence following the replacement of war-torn Wagner forces around Bakhmut with Russian conventional units. ISW previously assessed that the Russian military's decreasing reliance on Wagner forces around Bakhmut is likely reducing Prigozhin's influence within the Kremlin inner circle.

Prigozhin's appeal in the Russian nationalist information space may also be declining as he continues to overcompensate for the culmination of Wagner's attack around Bakhmut. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger commented on a video showing Prigozhin piloting an Su-24M bomber aircraft supposedly over Bakhmut on February 6.29 The milblogger stated that Prigozhin became the main player in Russian information space rather than the traditional Russian military command which "lacked creativity." 30 Prigozhin also "declared" the US, UK, and Canadian governments to be illegitimate states that sponsor terrorism according to the "Wagner Charter."31 The milblogger stated that Prigozhin's manipulation of the information space - specifically his skill in trolling - had allowed him to gain more political influence than a Russian Defense Minister.32 ISW assessed on October 25 that Prigozhin weaponized the Russian information space and Russian President Vladimir Putin's reliance on his forces to gain political leverage in Russia.³³ The milblogger's acknowledgment of Prigozhin's flashy tactics may indicate that the non-Wagner-affiliated nationalist information space may be awakening to Prigozhin's efforts to use the war in Ukraine for personal benefit. Wagner-affiliated milbloggers, in turn, continued to celebrate Prigozhin and previous theater commander Army General Sergey Surovikin as the only two leaders who have "confirmed their high qualifications and enjoy the trust of the political leadership of the country and the people."34

Failures of Western sanctions efforts against the provision of arms components to Iran have likely contributed to Russia's ability to bypass Western sanctions to acquire components for combat drones through military cooperation with Iran. US officials stated on February 5 that Russia and Iran are moving ahead with plans to build an Iranian drone factory on Russian soil, the second such international Iranian drone factory.³⁵ Iran opened a drone production factory in Tajikistan - a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member state and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) candidate - in May 2022.³⁶ Russia may leverage its significant economic ties

to Tajikistan through the CSTO and EAEU to launder drone components or procure manufactured drones for use in Ukraine to bypass international sanctions.³⁷

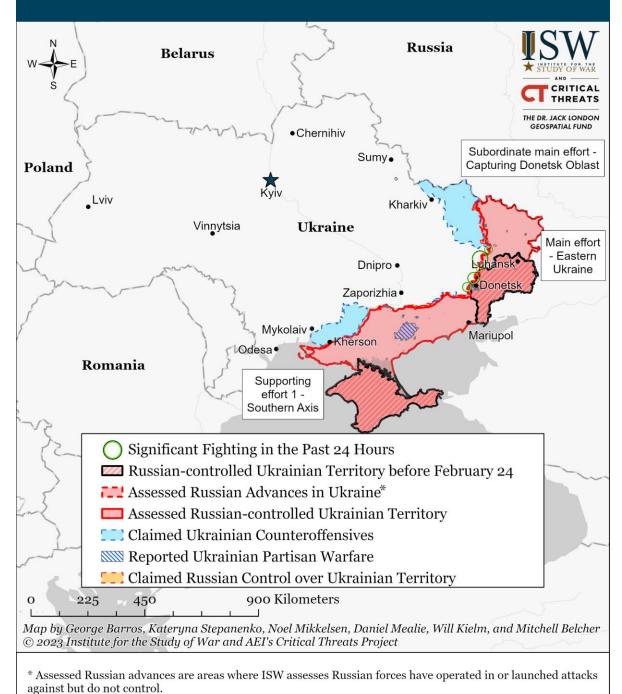
UK investigative group Conflict Armament Research (CAR) reported in November 2022 that 82% of Iranian Shahed-131, Shahed 136, and Mohajer-6 drones downed in Ukraine had chips, semiconductors, and other components that came from the US despite high import and export control restrictions on such components to Iran.³⁸ CAR also noted that the downed drones contained higher-end technological capabilities and have a "significant jump in capabilities" compared to other systems previously observed in the Middle East.³⁹ Most Western-manufactured components in the downed Iranian drones were produced between 2020 and 2021, following the expiration of United Nations Security Council heavy arms sanctions against Iran in 2020.⁴⁰ Most Western companies whose components were found in downed Iranian drones in Ukraine denied directly selling components to Russia, Iran, or Belarus since the start of the war.⁴¹ However, the representative of a Swiss manufacturing company noted that it is impossible to be completely sure that distributors of arms components do not sell components to sanctioned entities, implying that Russia, Iran, or other sanctioned states can exploit loopholes allowing them to acquire Western-produced arms components via proxy actors.⁴²

Key Takeaways

- Ukrainian officials assess that Russian forces are preparing to launch a large-scale decisive offensive in eastern Ukraine in mid to late February. Ukrainian officials assess that Russian forces are preparing to launch a large-scale decisive offensive in eastern Ukraine in mid-to-late February.
- Select Russian nationalist voices continued to express skepticism toward Russia's ability to launch a successful offensive past late February.
- German Chancellor Olaf Scholz undermined Russian President Vladimir Putin's false narrative that the provision of German tanks to Ukraine threatens Russian security.
- Kremlin-appointed Russian and occupation officials continue to implement social benefit schemes that target children and teenagers in occupied areas of Ukraine to consolidate social control and integration of these territories into Russia.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to open the door for further institutionalized corruption in Russia through legislative manipulations.
- The Kremlin continues to deny Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin legitimacy and authority in Russia.
- Prigozhin's appeal in the Russian nationalist information space may also be declining as he continues to overcompensate for the culmination of Wagner's attack around Bakhmut.
- Failures of Western sanctions efforts against the provision of arms components to Iran have likely contributed to Russia's ability to bypass Western sanctions to acquire combat drones through military cooperation with Iran.
- Russian forces likely made tactical gains northeast of Kupyansk between February 4 and February 6, and Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced west of previous positions on the Svatove-Kreminna line on February 5 and February 6.

- Ukrainian forces maintain positions in Bilohorivka in Luhansk Oblast as of February 6 despite Russian claims that Russian forces captured Bilohorivka on February 3.
- Russian forces continued ground attacks northeast and south of Bakhmut but still have not encircled the settlement as of February 6.
- Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area.
- Ukrainian forces continued limited attempts to cross the Dnipro River.
- Russian conventional and irregular forces may be increasingly struggling to recruit from Russian penal colonies due to high casualties among prior penal colony recruits.
- Russian forces continue to struggle with ethnic tensions and tensions between irregular forces.
- Russian officials and occupation authorities may be intensifying operational security to conceal new Russian force deployments in Donbas.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 6, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

<u>Ukrainian Counteroffensives</u> (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

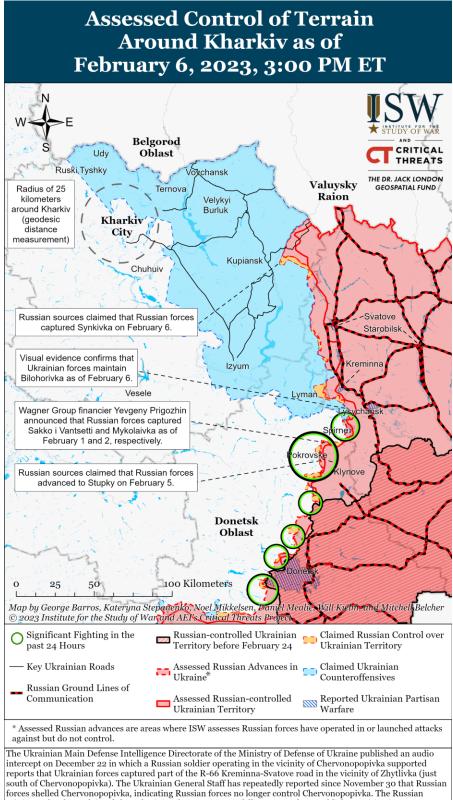
Eastern Ukraine: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)

Russian forces likely made tactical gains northeast of Kupyansk between February 4 and 6. Multiple Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Synkivka (10 km northeast of Kupyansk) on February 6, though one milblogger reported that this capture is unconfirmed.⁴³ A prominent Russian milblogger reported that Russian forces broke through Ukrainian defenses in Dvorichne (about 9 km north of Synkivka) and established positions on the settlement's western outskirts on February 4.⁴⁴ Geolocated combat footage posted on February 5 shows Ukrainian artillery striking Russian forces in western Dvorichne, supporting the milblogger's report.⁴⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff did not report that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks in these areas between February 5 and 6.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced west of previous positions on the Svatove-Kreminna line on February 5 - 6. A Russian milblogger reported that unspecified Russian airborne elements (likely of the 76th Airborne Division) advanced through the Serebryanka forests south of Dibrova and that elements of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division are clearing mines in an unspecified area near Yampolivka as of February 5.46 This milblogger also reported that elements of the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division pushed Ukrainian forces from unspecified high ground along the Makiivka-Ploshchanka-Nevske line.47 A different Russian milblogger reported that Russian forces attacked in the direction of Nevske on February 5.48 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Kreminna and Shypylivka on February 5 but did not mention repelling attacks further west near Yampolivka or Nevske on February 5 or 6.49

Ukrainian forces maintain positions in Bilohorivka in Luhansk Oblast as of February 6 despite Russian claims that Russian forces captured Bilohorivka on February 3. Geolocated video recorded on February 6 shows Ukrainian forces in Bilohorivka, confirming Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai's February 5 statement that Russian forces did not recapture Bilohorivka.⁵⁰ The previous Russian claims may have been part of a larger Russian information operation. Deputy Head of the Kharkiv Oblast Administration Roman Semenukha stated on February 6 that there is no threat of an offensive on Kharkiv City and

noted that all social media rumors about an attack on Kharkiv City are Russian information operations.⁵¹ Russian milbloggers have increasingly been claiming that Russian forces gained the initiative in the Luhansk area and are pushing Ukrainian forces south and west back toward the Siverskyi Donets River. The Kremlin may be conducting information operations to demoralize Ukrainian forces ahead of a major Russian offensive in Luhansk Oblast.



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

<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

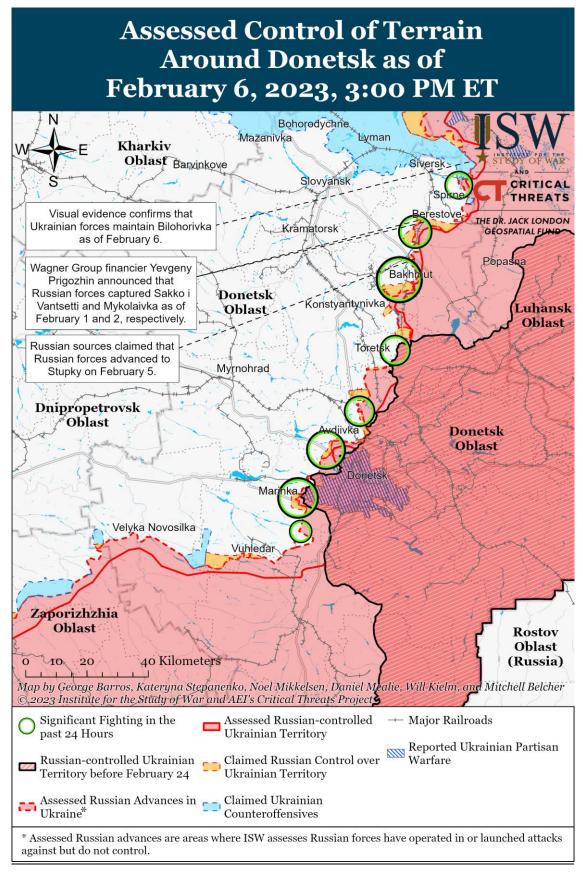
Russian forces have not yet succeeded in encircling Bakhmut as of February 6. A Ukrainian soldier who is fighting in Bakhmut stated on February 5 that while Russian forces are continuing efforts to interdict the To504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut road west of Bakhmut and the E40 Bakhmut-Slovyansk highway north of Bakhmut, supply to the city continues.⁵² The soldier noted that Ukrainian troops are maintaining supply to their grouping in Bakhmut despite constant Russian shelling of critical roads.⁵³ Several Russian sources additionally reiterated on February 5 that Ukrainian troops are not yet withdrawing from Bakhmut.⁵⁴ Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin noted that fierce battles are occurring in Bakhmut and emphasized that Ukrainian troops are not withdrawing from any part of the city, indicating that the Ukrainian command has not yet deemed the threat of encirclement imminent or exigent.⁵⁵

Russian forces continued ground attacks around Bakhmut on February 5 and February 6. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 5 and February 6 that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northeast of Bakhmut near Verkhnokamyanske (32km northeast), Blahodatne (7km north), Krasna Hora (3km north), Paraskoviivka (5km north), and Vasyukivka (12km north); and southwest of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west) and Klishchiivka (7km southwest).56 Various geolocated footage posted on February 5 confirms marginal Russian advances northeast of Bakhmut in Krasna Hora and in the Rozdolivka-Mykolaivka area (15km northeast), in urban areas in northeastern Bakhmut, and southwest of Bakhmut near Opytne (3km south), Ozarianivka (15km southwest) and Klishchiivka.⁵⁷ Several Russian sources claimed on February 5 that Wagner Group forces advanced towards the Stupky area of northern Bakhmut.⁵⁸ Russian milbloggers emphasized that heavy fighting continued northeast and north of Bakhmut, particularly in the Krasna Hora and Paraskoviivka areas, as well as within urban sectors of northern and eastern Bakhmut on both February 5 and 6.59 Russian sources additionally claimed that Wagner troops advanced to within a kilometer of the To504 highway on February 6 and are attacking toward Stupochky (15km southwest) and Ivanivske in order to cut the To504.60 The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that "volunteer" detachments captured Mykolaivka (15km northeast of Bakhmut), thus continuing to undermine Wagner Group's credit for gains around Bakhmut by not mentioning Wagner by name.⁶¹ Prigozhin previously claimed Wagner took control of Mykolaivka on February 2.62

Russian forces continued ground attacks around Avdiivka and on the western outskirts of Donetsk City on February 6. The Ukrainian General Staff did not confirm any ground attacks in this area on February 5, and a Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces attacked from Opytne towards Pervomaiske (on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City). Geolocated footage posted on February 5 shows marginal Russian advances within western Marinka. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 6 that Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks near Avdiivka around Kamianka (5km northeast of Avdiivka) and Severne (7km west of Avdiivka) as well along the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Pervomaiske, Vesele, Krasnohorivka, and Nevelske and southwestern outskirts of

Donetsk City near Marinka, Pobieda, and Novomykhailivka.⁶⁵ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are attacking toward Severne to push east on Avdiivka.⁶⁶

Russian forces did not conduct any claimed or confirmed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on February 5th or 6th. Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian troops are transferring reserves to the Vuhledar areas (about 30km southwest of Donetsk City) in preparation for a counteroffensive attempt.⁶⁷ A Ukrainian reserve officer reported on February 6 that the situation around Vuhledar is mostly stable and that Russian forces are conducting small frontal assaults with fire support but are overall hesitant to launch a large-scale attack.⁶⁸ The reserve officer noted that Russian units fighting in the area—the 155th and 40th Naval Infantry Brigade—are largely destroyed.⁶⁹



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

Russian forces did not make any confirmed territorial gains on the southern axis on February 5 or February 6. Head of the Ukrainian Joint Coordination Press Center of the Southern Forces Nataliya Humenyuk stated on February 6 that Russian forces continue aerial reconnaissance and use civilian boats for reconnaissance operations on islands in the Dnipro River delta but are not making preparations for an attack from the south and have not changed positions in the southern direction.⁷⁰ Kherson Oblast advisor Serhiy Khlan, however, stated that Russian forces may go on the offensive in the southern direction, indicating that certain Ukrainian officials are keeping the possibility of a Russian offensive in the south within their forecast cone.⁷¹ Humenyuk also stated that Ukrainian troops destroyed two Russian concentration areas and two sabotage and reconnaissance groups on the Kinburn Spit, suggesting that Ukrainian troops are continuing to strike rear concentration areas.⁷² Video footage posted on February 5 reportedly shows Russian forces dropping incendiary munitions on Ukrainian positions on the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River.⁷³ The Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration stated on February 5 that Russian forces focus on maintaining occupied lines and shelling civilian infrastructure along the frontline in Zaporizhia Oblast.⁷⁴ Russian forces continued routine shelling in Kherson, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Mykolaiv Oblasts on February 5 and February 6.75 Geolocated satellite footage shows that Russian forces built a fortified base on the Arabat Spit in northeastern Crimea between October 18, 2022, and January 21, 2023.76

Ukrainian forces continued limited attempts to cross the Dnipro River. Geolocated combat footage published on February 5 showed Russian artillery striking a Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group near Kruhle Lake on the Dnipro River delta.⁷⁷ The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces defeated Ukrainian reconnaissance elements near Kruhle Lake on February 1.⁷⁸

Russian occupation officials continue efforts to consolidate control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on February 6 that Russian occupation officials in Enerhodar abducted Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) employees who refused to sign contracts with Russian state nuclear power company Rosatom.⁷⁹ The report states that Russian officials are not telling relatives of kidnapped workers where they are being held.⁸⁰ Ukrainian nuclear operator Energoatom reported that ZNPP workers refused to train imported Russian from the Kalinin NPP, suggesting that Russian officials at the plant are continuing efforts to import Russian employees to take control of the ZNPP.⁸¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 6, 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.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of February 6, 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.

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

Russian conventional and irregular forces may be increasingly struggling to recruit from Russian penal colonies due to high casualties among prior penal colony recruits. Russian opposition outlet *Mediazona* reported on February 6 that the Wagner Group conducted a second prisoner recruitment drive in late 2022, and the drive at Correctional Colony 16 in Samara, Samara Oblast, only yielded 340 recruits whereas the first drive yielded over 1,000 recruits in the summer and fall of 2022. Rediazona noted that other Russian penal colonies see similar declines in recruitment. Mediazona amplified one report that only 20 percent of prisoners recruited in 2022 are still alive as of February 6. A Russian source claimed that Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) personnel forcibly transported 56 prisoners from the Correctional Colony 41 in Yurga, Kemerovo Oblast, on February 5, suggesting that Russian authorities are increasing coercive measures to exploit prisoners amid low voluntary recruitment. Requirements

Russian occupation authorities continue to set conditions for long-term force-generation efforts in occupied Ukraine. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on February 6 that Russian forces are introducing cadet classes for 10th and 11th grades in schools in occupied Kherson Oblast where students will study military affairs. ⁸⁴ The Center reported that Russian occupation officials will offer graduates of this class noncommissioned officer ranks if they are later drafted. ⁸⁵ These efforts continue to indicate that the Kremlin is preparing for a prolonged war effort in Ukraine, as ISW has previously reported. ⁸⁶

Russian forces continue to struggle with ethnic tensions and tensions between irregular forces. Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin claimed on February 5 that it is an "injustice" that Central Asian and Caucasian people can move to Russia but are not required to serve in the Russian military and called for Russia to consider prioritizing directing "naturalized citizens," particularly those from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Transcaucasia, to participate in the war in Ukraine. People from territories with high proportions of ethnic minorities have disproportionately borne the burden of the Russian war in Ukraine, as ISW has previously reported. Tuvan mobilized personnel published a video on February 5 claiming that Russian military police and Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) forces routinely beat them and that Russian forces have not properly trained Tuvan mobilized personnel. Republic authorities only provided transportation for Chuvash mobilized personnel to return home on leave after substantial public outcry. Republic of Bashkortostan Head Radiy Khabirov announced that the Republic has redirected funds from the construction of the Ar-Rahim Mosque, which began construction in 2007, to the Russian war effort.

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

Russian forces are intensifying efforts to import medical personnel from Russia to staff civilian hospitals in Donbas, supporting ISW's assessment that Russian forces are preparing for a renewed offensive in western Luhansk Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 5 that Russian forces stationed Russian medical personnel and surgeons at a field hospital in occupied Pokrovsk, Luhansk Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff stated on February 5 that hospitals in occupied Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast, are full of Russian servicemen as Russian forces continue to treat their

wounded in local hospitals at the expense of local civilians. 93 The Ukrainian General Staff also reported on February 5 that imported medical personnel from Yakutia, Russia, arrived in Svitlodarsk, Donetsk Oblast, to staff a civilian hospital holding approximately 70 wounded Russian servicemen. 94 *Business Gazeta*, a media outlet based in Tatarstan, Russia, claimed on February 2 that the Kazan State Medical University in Kazan, Russia, developed an 18-hour first-aid course that teaches volunteers how to identify and treat minor injuries and communicate with people with severe mental trauma, following which the volunteers will be sent to Donbas. 95 Business Gazeta also claimed 30 newly trained volunteers have already been sent to Donbas and that a new batch of trained volunteers will depart for Donbas on February 6.96

Russian officials and occupation authorities may be intensifying operational security to conceal new Russian force deployments in Donbas. Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko stated on February 6 that Mariupol internet providers will be shut down indefinitely on February 11, likely in an effort to prevent residents from posting Russian military movements through Mariupol on social media.⁹⁷

Russian federal subjects and occupation authorities are continuing to engage in patronage-like activity to support infrastructure projects in occupied territories. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed on February 5 that he met with a delegation of Tomsk Oblast officials in Donetsk Oblast, after which he thanked the Tomsk Oblast delegation for providing humanitarian assistance and construction material to Donbas, sending Tomsk Oblast doctors to staff hospitals in occupied territories, and supporting those Donbas residents forced to leave their homes. Pushilin stated that he and the Tomsk Oblast delegation discussed the potential for the Tomsk-based "IIma" company and the Donetsk-based Yasinovatsky Machine-Building and Kuzbass Plants to jointly implement an import-substitution plan. Popular delegation discussed the potential for the Tomsk-based "IIma" company and the Donetsk-based Yasinovatsky Machine-Building and Kuzbass Plants to jointly implement an import-substitution plan.

Russian-appointed Governor of Sevastopol Mikhail Razvozhaev claimed on February 6 that the "World Russian People's Council" established a branch in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea. DNR Head Denis Pushilin announced on February 5 that Russian and Donetsk Oblast occupation officials created a constituent assembly of the "World Russian People's Council," an organization that is run by the Russian Orthodox Church with a self-proclaimed mission of uniting all Russian people regardless of their place of residence or political views. Dushilin claimed that "spiritual unity is the essence of the Russian people" and a component of the Russian Orthodox Church worldview that corresponds to the "impulse of all of Russia" to capture Donbas.

<u>Significant activity in Belarus</u> (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.)

Russia continues to expand its military influence in Belarus. Belarusian Air Force Commander Andrei Lukyanovich stated on February 5 that Belarus will receive a squadron of Russian Mi-35 attack helicopters before April 2023 and that Belarus plans to buy an unspecified number of Su-30SM multirole fighters at an unspecified future time in 2023. 102

The Kremlin media apparatus continues to promote the information operation about a Russian invasion of northern Ukraine from Belarus. Prominent Kremlin state TV propagandists Vladimir Solovyov visited joint Russian-Belarusian exercises in Belarus in early February and released a special report on the development of the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces on the Rossiya 1 TV channel on February 5. 103

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced a snap military readiness check of the Military Academy of Belarus on February 6.104

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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