

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 10, 2023

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January 10, 8:00 pm ET

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

Russian media reported on January 10 that Colonel General Aleksandr Lapin, former commander of the Central Military District (CMD) and Russian forces in eastern Kharkiv and northern Donetsk oblasts, has been appointed Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces. Russian outlet *URA*, citing unidentified Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) sources, reported that Lapin took over from Colonel General Vasily Tonkoshkurov as Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces on January 9.<sup>1</sup> It is unclear why Tonkoshkurov was removed from this position and what his next role will be. While official Kremlin and MoD sources have not confirmed the claim, it was widely circulated and responded to as fact among military commentators in the Russian information space.<sup>2</sup> Lapin's appointment is notably to the position of Chief of Staff of the Russian *Ground Forces* (also known as the Russian Army), not the Russian *Armed Forces* as a whole. Army General Valery Gerasimov likely remains Chief of the General Staff of the Russian *Armed Forces*. The Chief of Staff of the Russian Army is not a frontline command position, and while Lapin's specific duties (in the currently fragmented Russian command structure) are unclear, he is unlikely to directly command troops in Ukraine.

Lapin's previous role as commander of the "Central" group of Russian forces in Ukraine and commander of the Russian Central Military District (CMD) was checkered with controversy following the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive that retook large swaths of territory in eastern Kharkiv and northern Donetsk oblasts in September 2022. The Russian MoD confirmed Lapin's appointment as commander of the "Central" grouping on June 24, 2022, and noted he was responsible for operations in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area and likely the broader Luhansk-Donetsk Oblast border area.<sup>3</sup> Lapin went on to receive a "Hero of Russia" medal on July 4 for his role in the Russian capture of Lysychansk.<sup>4</sup> Lapin was also the commander responsible for Lyman, Donetsk Oblast, and received strong criticism from prominent voices in the Russian information space for his claimed responsibility for massive Russian losses following successful Ukrainian counteroffensives in mid-September of 2022 that pushed Russian forces to the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border.<sup>5</sup> Following the disastrous Russian loss of most of Kharkiv Oblast and the critical settlement of Lyman, the Kremlin reportedly removed Lapin from both command of the "Central" grouping and CMD.<sup>6</sup> The pro-war information space's response to Lapin's perceived command failures served as a catalyst for a fracture between a faction led by Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin—the *siloviki*—and the Russian MoD establishment that milbloggers widely claimed Lapin represented.<sup>7</sup> Kadyrov's staunch and pointed criticism of Lapin at the time demonstrated that the *siloviki* faction saw itself as fundamentally at odds with the conventional Russian MoD and associated elements.<sup>8</sup>

Lapin's appointment as army Chief of Staff may be intended to serve as a counterbalance to the growing prominence of the *siloviki*. Prigozhin and Kadyrov both have largely private armed forces at their disposal (Kadyrov's Chechen fighters and Prigozhin's Wagner Group) and are

capitalizing on the gains made by these forces to promote themselves politically, as ISW has frequently reported.<sup>9</sup> As the anti-Russian MoD voices gain more relevance and support throughout the Russian pro-war information space, which perceives this faction as generally more competent, motivated, and effective than the Russian MoD, Russian military leadership may seek to rehabilitate and bolster Lapin's reputation to establish the Russian MoD as a competent and structured wartime apparatus and balance out the growing influence of the Kadyrov-Prigozhin faction. Additionally, considering that the Chief of Staff of the Russian Army is more of a logistical and organizational oversight role than a command position, the Russian MoD may be using Lapin's appointment to posture a commitment to the sound structuring of Russian ground forces in response to continued criticisms of the efficacy of the Russian army. While the Kremlin has at times distanced itself and even blamed the Russian MoD for military failures in Ukraine, the Kremlin likely maintains a vested interest in bolstering public perceptions of the MoD's efficacy. The Russian military apparatus writ large likely benefits from the public perception that it is an appropriately managed wartime instrument. ISW has previously reported on the Kremlin's attempts to rehabilitate the reputation of the Russian MoD and affiliated elements, including prior efforts to rehabilitate Lapin's reputation.<sup>10</sup>

**Lapin's appointment may alternatively suggest that the Russian MoD increasingly must fill important leadership positions with previously disgraced—or at minimum heavily publicly criticized—general officers.** Former Russian Eastern Military District (EMD) commander Colonel-General Alexander Chaiko, who led failed Russian efforts to take Kyiv in the early stages of the war, went on to serve as commander of Russian Armed Forces in Syria after he was replaced following the Kharkiv counteroffensive.<sup>11</sup> Colonel General Andrei Serdyukov, former commander of the Russian airborne forces (VDV) who was reportedly dismissed due to the poor performance of Russian paratroopers, now appears to have replaced Chaiko as commander of the Russian grouping in Syria.<sup>12</sup> The Russian MoD appears to be using previously disgraced and unpopular general officers to fill other, non-frontline command roles, suggesting that there is a systemic lack of general officers more suited to these positions.

**The news of Lapin's appointment generated further schisms in the already-fragmented pro-war Russian information space.** Former militant commander and prominent milblogger Igor Girkin stated that Lapin's new role must be a "misunderstanding" because Russian forces under Lapin's command suffered major losses in Kharkiv Oblast.<sup>13</sup> Girkin concluded that Lapin represents a "boorish" attempt by the MoD to demonstrate their invulnerability.<sup>14</sup> A Wagner Group-affiliated Telegram group claimed that Lapin was also responsible for the disastrous May 5, 2022, Bilohorivka river crossing and additionally blamed Lapin for the loss of Lyman.<sup>15</sup> Other milbloggers responded more neutrally or even positively, with one suggesting that it was not Lapin but Lieutenant General Roman Berdnikov who was responsible for the loss of Lyman.<sup>16</sup> A pro-Kremlin milblogger credited Lapin with stabilizing the front after the collapse of Russian operations in Kharkiv Oblast.<sup>17</sup> The lack of consensus on who commanded the Lyman front among the Russian milblogger community further indicates the convoluted state of the Russian chain of command. Lapin's new role will likely further the divide between the *siloviki* and affiliated milbloggers and milbloggers who have historically been more favorable to the Kremlin and the Russian MoD. This decision will likely open to Russian MoD to more criticism of its intentions and capabilities instead of addressing these concerns.

**Russian forces have not captured the entirety of Soledar despite several false Russian claims that the city has fallen and that Bakhmut risks imminent encirclement.** Several

Russian sources claimed that Wagner Group forces advanced into the west of Soledar on January 10.<sup>18</sup> Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin refuted these claims, remarking that Wagner Group forces are still fighting against concerted Ukrainian resistance.<sup>19</sup> ISW has only observed visual confirmation of Wagner Group forces in central Soledar as of January 10.<sup>20</sup> The reality of block-by-block control of terrain in Soledar is obfuscated by the dynamic nature of urban combat, however, and Russian forces have largely struggled to make significant tactical gains in the Soledar area for months. Even taking the most generous Russian claims at face value, the capture of Soledar would not portend an immediate encirclement of Bakhmut. Control of Soledar will not necessarily allow Russian forces to exert control over critical Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) into Bakhmut, as ISW has previously assessed.<sup>21</sup>

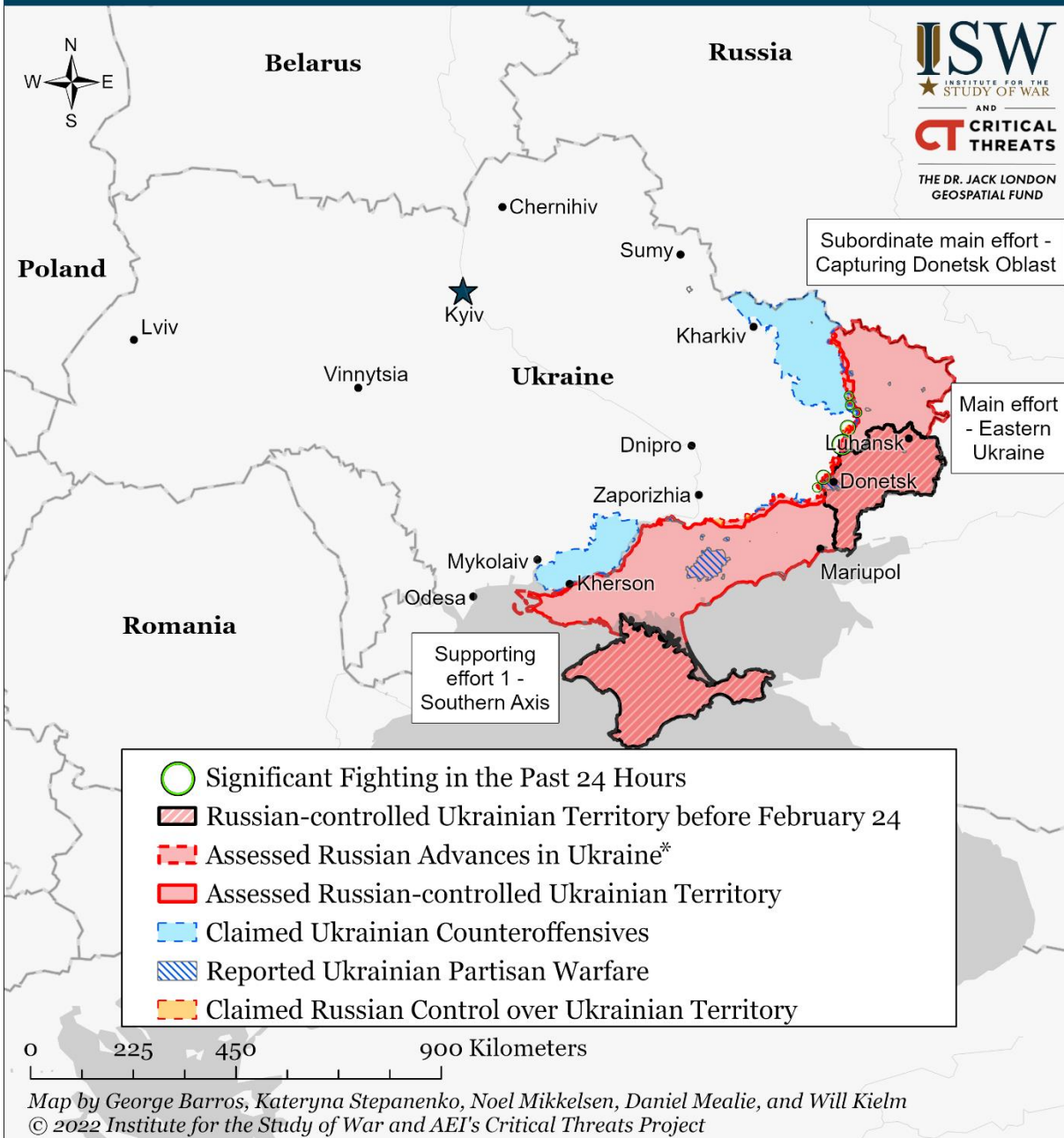
**Igor Girkin, former commander of Russian militants in Donbas and a prominent milblogger, heavily implied that he would support the removal of Russian President Vladimir Putin from office, his most direct criticism of Putin to date.** Girkin criticized Putin for appointing and refusing to remove Russian military leaders who oversee frequent and disastrous military failures, in reference to Lapin's appointment.<sup>22</sup> Russian milbloggers have historically criticized Russian military leaders and MoD officials while upholding Putin as an effective wartime leader, as ISW has previously reported.<sup>23</sup> Girkin extended his criticisms to non-military Putin appointees and advisors whose decisions negatively impacted Russia's war performance and effort, noting that the common factor between these leaders is Putin's decision to appoint them.<sup>24</sup> Girkin caveated his criticisms with an implied loyalty to the Russian state, softening his call for Putin to leave office by stating he is against a change of presidential leadership during the war, as it would lead to military and civil "catastrophe."<sup>25</sup> Girkin's criticisms, which he said he hopes will spark change even if they have "suicidal" consequences, indicate that growing frustration with the state of the war may be reaching a boiling point after nearly a year of hostilities among some milbloggers, prompting some milbloggers to reduce their self-censorship.

## Key Takeaways

- **Russian media reported on January 10 that Colonel General Aleksandr Lapin, former commander of the Central Military District and Russian forces in Kharkiv and northern Donetsk oblasts during Russia's significant losses in September 2022, has been appointed Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces.**
- **The news of Lapin's appointment is generating further schisms in the already-fragmented pro-war Russian information space.**
- **Igor Girkin heavily implied that he would support the removal of Russian President Vladimir Putin from office, suggesting that a willingness to reduce self-censorship and directly criticize Putin may be growing among some milbloggers.**
- **The Ukrainian General Staff deviated from its normal reporting pattern about Russian forces in Belarus and near Ukraine's northern border on January 10, an indicator of possible Russian preparations for an offensive in northern Ukraine, though ISW assesses this course of action remains unlikely at this time.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to make gains along the Svatove-Kreminna line.**
- **Russian forces conducted ground attacks across the Donetsk Oblast frontline and made gains around Soledar but have not captured the settlement, despite false claims.**

- **The Kremlin continues to deny that Russian authorities are preparing for another wave of partial mobilization.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are struggling to contain an effective partisan movement in occupied territories.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 10, 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.

***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.***

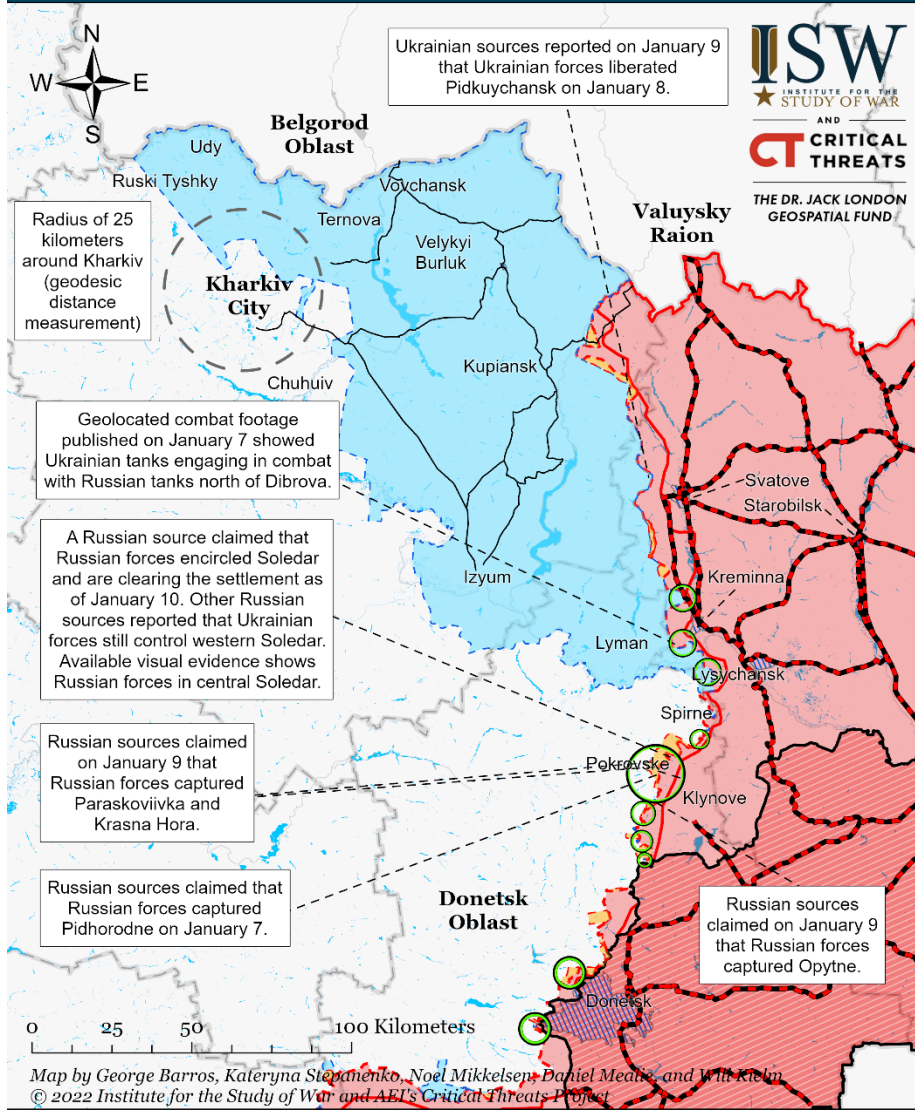
- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and one supporting effort);
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation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

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

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

Ukrainian forces continued to make gains along the Svatove-Kreminna line on January 10. The Ukrainian Center for Defense Strategies confirmed that Ukrainian troops captured Pidkuichansk, 8km northwest of Svatove, on January 8.<sup>26</sup> Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated that Russian forces are conducting limited counterattacks near Svatove to regain lost positions in the area.<sup>27</sup> A Russian milblogger reported that Russian troops attacked near Stelmakhivka, 13km northwest of Svatove.<sup>28</sup> Geolocated footage shows a Russian tank from the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division of the 20th Combined Arms Army of the Western Military District firing on Ukrainian positions west of Ploshchanka and approximately 17km northwest of Kreminna, indicating that Ukrainian troops have advanced closer to R66 Svatove-Kreminna highway.<sup>29</sup> A Russian milblogger also remarked that Russian troops attacked Ukrainian positions in the Ploshchanka area, further confirming that Russian troops have lost ground near Kreminna.<sup>30</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks near Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna) and Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna).<sup>31</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of January 10, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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THREATS  
THE DR. JACK LONDON  
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Key Ukrainian Roads
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

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

## **Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine**

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

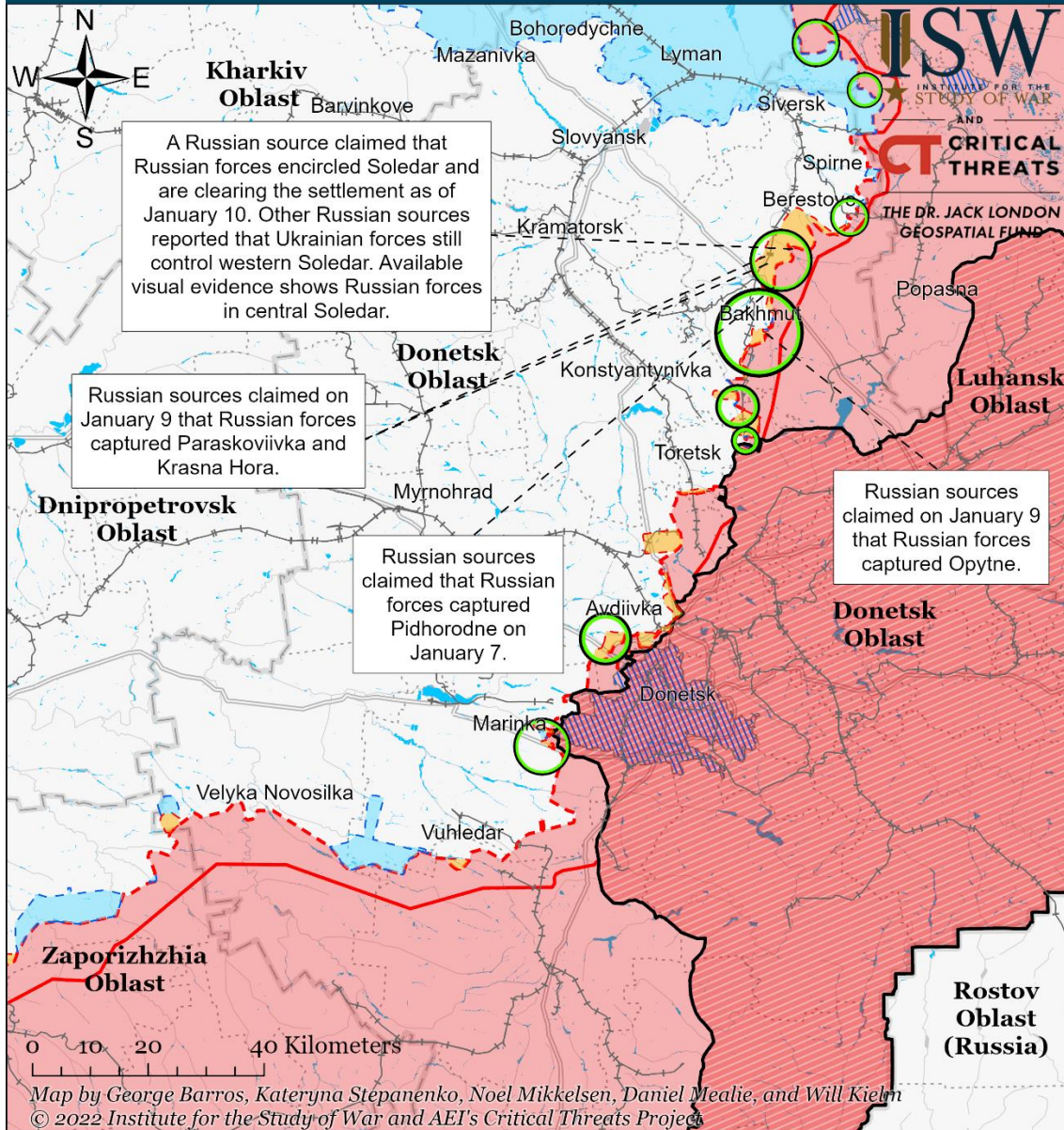
Wagner Group forces made further gains in Soledar on January 10. Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Serhiy Cherevaty reported that the Wagner Group has concentrated its most capable (likely special operations) forces in Soledar as of January 10.<sup>32</sup> The Wagner Group likely hopes to build on recent marginal tactical gains by committing more elite assets to the area. Geolocated footage posted on January 9 shows Wagner Group forces fighting in central Soledar.<sup>33</sup> A Wagner Group-affiliated Telegram group posted additional footage on January 10 of Wagner Group forces near the city administration building in central Soledar and claimed that the Wagner Group is working to consolidate positions in the area.<sup>34</sup> Certain Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group forces have moved into the western parts of Soledar and that Ukrainian troops have begun withdrawing from the settlement *en masse*.<sup>35</sup> Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin denied these claims and stated that Ukrainian troops are still fighting fiercely for Soledar.<sup>36</sup> Russian milbloggers also claimed that the Wagner Group is clearing Pidhorodne (just southwest of Soledar) and are moving on Krasna Hora and Paraskoviivka.<sup>37</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported continued fighting in other settlements near Soledar, including Bilohorivka and Pidhorodne.<sup>38</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks in and around Bakhmut on January 10. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled attacks on Bakhmut itself and south of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka (7km southwest), Kurdiuvivka (12km southwest), and Mayorsk (20km south).<sup>39</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian troops are fighting for control of Klishchiivka in order to push north and cut the T0504 Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway.<sup>40</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian troops have advanced to the northern borders of Opytne (3km south of Bakhmut) and are now on the southern outskirts of Bakhmut.<sup>41</sup> Russian sources additionally continued to discuss fierce fighting in the industrial zone on the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut.<sup>42</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on January 10. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Vodiane (on the northwestern outskirts) and Marinka and Pobieda (on the southwestern outskirts).<sup>43</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian troops attacked from near Novomykhailivka (just south of Donetsk City) toward Pobieda, about 4km directly south of Marinka.<sup>44</sup> The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) People’s Militia posted footage of the 5th DNR Brigade reportedly striking Ukrainian positions in Marinka.<sup>45</sup> Russian forces did not conduct any claimed or confirmed ground attacks in western Donetsk or eastern Zaporizhia oblasts and continued routine fire along the entire Avdiivka-Donetsk City and western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia oblast frontline.<sup>46</sup>



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 10, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads
- 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.

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

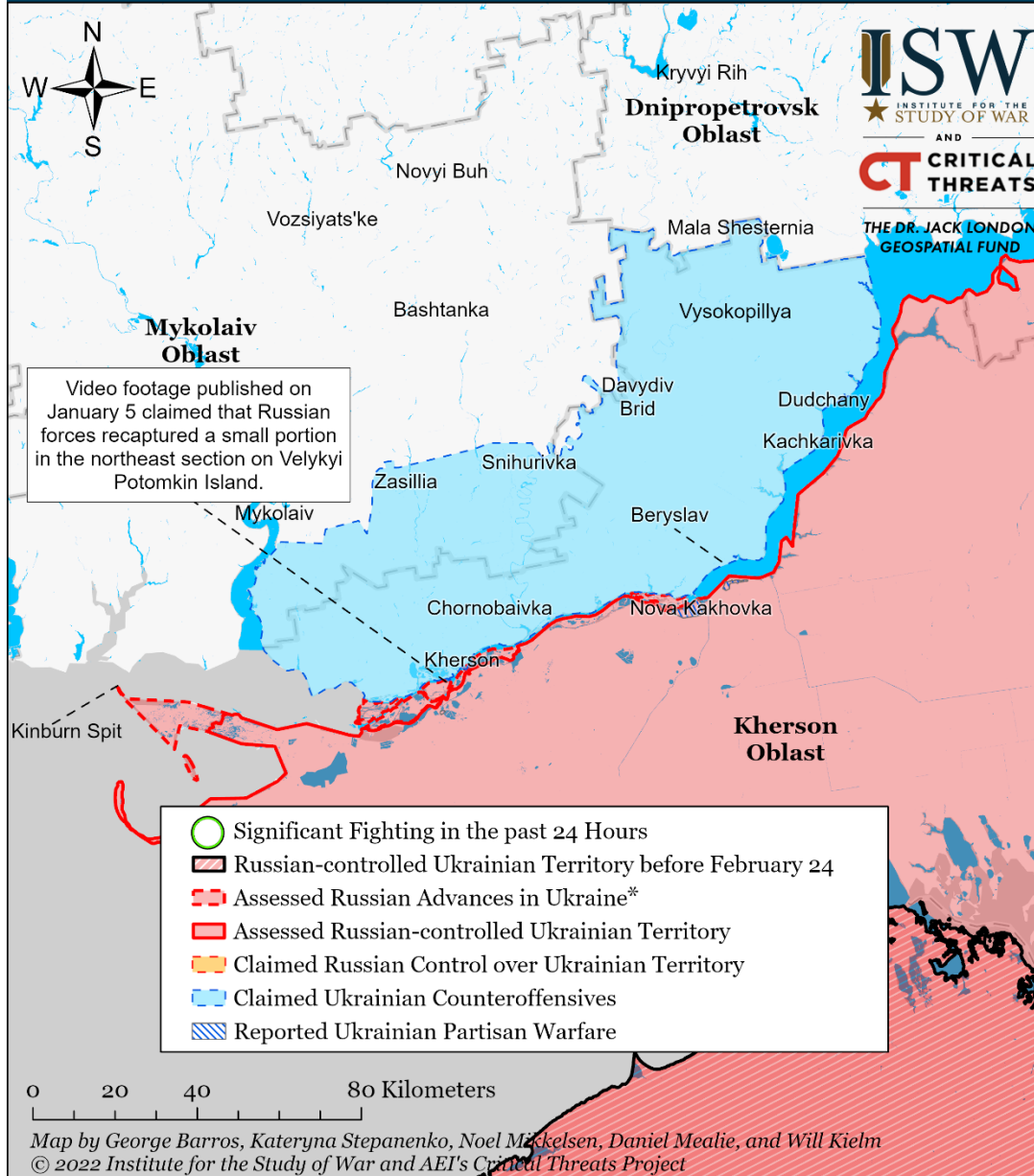
Russian and Ukrainian forces continued routine strikes across the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast on January 10. A Ukrainian source claimed that Ukrainian forces shot down a Russian Ka-52 attack helicopter near Kherson City.<sup>47</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces struck a 200-person concentration of Ukrainian security personnel in Kherson City and inflicted high casualties.<sup>48</sup> ISW has not observed visual observation of this claim. ISW previously reported on January 8 that Russian military leadership is attempting to present similar claimed strikes on Ukrainian concentrations areas as "retaliation" for the December 31 Ukrainian strike on Russian positions in Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast, which reportedly killed up to 400 mobilized servicemen.<sup>49</sup> Russian forces shelled various areas of west (right) bank Kherson Oblast, including the Kherson City area and areas 33km west of Kherson City near Stanislav and Shyroka Balka.<sup>50</sup> Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian forces struck Tavriisk, Nova Kakhovka, and Skadovsk Raion, Kherson Oblast.<sup>51</sup>

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces continued to focus on holding occupied lines in the Zaporizhia direction on January 10.<sup>52</sup> Ukrainian Zaporizhia Oblast Head Oleksandr Starukh stated on January 9 that severe winter weather increases the likelihood of intense Russian combat reconnaissance along the Zaporizhia Oblast front line.<sup>53</sup> Russian forces continued routine fire in Zaporizhia, Mykolaiv, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on January 10.<sup>54</sup> Ukrainian Mykolaiv Oblast Head Vitaly Kim stated on January 10 that Russian forces struck Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast six times within 24 hours, and Spokesperson for Ukraine's Southern Operational Command, Natalya Humenyuk, stated that Russian forces targeted Ochakiv in retaliation for Ukrainian military successes.<sup>55</sup>

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces continue to militarize the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). Ukrainian Atomic Energy Regulatory Commission Head Oleh Korkiv stated on January 10 that the Russian military established a military equipment and repair base at the ZNPP amid ongoing negotiations on the demilitarization of the ZNPP.<sup>56</sup> Korkiv also stated that Russian authorities have tried and failed multiple times to connect the ZNPP to the Russian power grid, and stated he is confident that further attempts will be unsuccessful.<sup>57</sup> The Head of the Ukrainian Joint Press Center of the Tavris Direction Defense Forces, Yevhen Yerin, stated on January 8 that Russian forces continue to store military personnel and equipment at the ZNPP.<sup>58</sup>

Russian occupation authorities continued efforts to restore the Kerch Strait Bridge. Russian occupation authorities announced on January 10 that Russian authorities laid the first new span of the west (left) road bridge.<sup>59</sup> Occupation authorities claim that they plan to complete repairs to the road bridge by March 2023.<sup>60</sup> Russian forces have likely struggled to compensate for their diminished logistics capacity following the Kerch Strait Bridge attack, as ISW has previously reported.<sup>61</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 10, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

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

The Kremlin continues to deny that Russian authorities are preparing for another wave of "partial mobilization." Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied reports of a new wave of partial mobilization on January 9 and called on Russian citizens to ignore Telegram channels that speculate about new mobilization efforts.<sup>62</sup> As ISW continues to assess, discussion of a second wave of mobilization is erroneous to some extent because mobilization has never truly ceased and the Kremlin has conducted a greater, ongoing effort to recruit reservists and others into service since before February 2022.<sup>63</sup>

Russian occupation authorities continue mobilizing Ukrainian citizens in occupied Ukraine. The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) People's Militia posted a video on January 10 of LNR recruiters working with Luhansk Oblast residents who "volunteered" to fight in the Russian military.<sup>64</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian authorities mobilized 30 people - including four people with disabilities - during a raid in Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast, on January 6, and sent these people to service with a military unit after only two days of training.<sup>65</sup>

## **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 authorities are struggling to contain an effective partisan movement in occupied territories that is likely improving the targeting intelligence of Ukrainian forces. The Ukrainian Resistance Center claimed on January 10 that Ukrainian partisans were responsible for a January 8 explosion at a Russian ammunition depot near the Hidromash factory in Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast.<sup>66</sup> Partisans may have sabotaged the depot or provided intelligence on the location of the ammunition depot to enable Ukrainian strikes.

Russian occupation authorities continue to search for pro-Ukrainian civilians and partisans in occupied parts of Zaporizhia Oblast. Ukrainian Mayor of Melitopol, Ivan Fedorov, reported on January 10 that occupation authorities are conflating pro-Ukraine sentiments with partisan activity and are advertising social media forums for residents to report Ukrainian partisans or anyone with a pro-Ukrainian viewpoint to occupation authorities.<sup>67</sup> Fedorov reported that occupation officials are encouraging residents to anonymously report their neighbors in exchange for money and are intimidating Ukrainian civilians through "preventative talks" and torture. Fedorov reported that occupation officials who capture pro-Ukraine civilians deport them "outside of the occupied territories," likely to Russia. A senior official within the Zaporizhia Occupation Administration, Vladimir Rogov, announced on January 10 that Russian forces will search garages in Tokmak on January 13 for unspecified "dangerous contents."<sup>68</sup> Occupation authorities may intend such preemptive announcements to draw out Ukrainian partisans for arrest if Russian intelligence did identify a partisan storage site, but may instead be setting conditions for simple theft via seizures of allegedly suspicious vehicles. Russian occupation authorities have repeatedly stolen cars, appliances, and other valuables belonging to Ukrainian civilians in occupied areas to export and resell them within Russia for personal gain.<sup>69</sup>

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

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

**Observed indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:**

- The Ukrainian General Staff deviated from its normal reporting pattern about Russian forces in Belarus and near Ukraine's northern border on January 10 by excluding its usual statement that Ukraine has not observed Russian forces forming strike groups in Belarus or northern Ukraine.<sup>70</sup> This is the first time the Ukrainian General Staff has excluded this statement since it reintroduced discussing Russian forces in Belarus on November 20.<sup>71</sup> This could indicate that the Ukrainian military has observed Russian forces forming strike groups in northern Ukraine. Alternatively, the situation may not have changed, and the Ukrainian General Staff may have left it out of the daily report in an isolated incident. ISW will continue to monitor and assess the language of Ukrainian General Staff reports.

**Observed ambiguous indicators for MDCOA in the past 24 hours:**

- *Reuters* reported that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Russia is "gathering forces for another escalation" but did not specify where, when, or how the unspecified escalation could occur.<sup>72</sup>
- Russian forces continue to deploy Russian elements to Belarus. Social media footage posted on January 10 reportedly shows likely Russian military equipment, including tube artillery with winter camouflage, on a train in Belarus moving west.<sup>73</sup> As ISW previously noted, applying winter camouflage to equipment is not wholly necessary for training activity and could indicate preparation for actual winter combat operations.<sup>74</sup>

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

- Nothing significant to report.

**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.**

- <sup>1</sup> <https://ura-news.turbopages.org/ura.news/s/news/1052616949>; <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/10/01/2023/63bd09389a794708391c3120>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://ura-news.turbopages.org/ura.news/s/news/1052616949>; <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/10/01/2023/63bd09389a794708391c3120>
- <sup>3</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/17139](https://t.me/mod_russia/17139); <https://www.interfax.ru/amp/847820>; <https://www.kommersant.ru/amp/5433629>; <https://www.moscowtimes.ru/2022/06/25/minoboroni-podtverdilo-izmeneniya-v-komandovaniyami-rossiiskimi-voiskami-v-ukraine-a21659>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignJuly4>; [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/17385](https://t.me/mod_russia/17385); [https://t.me/riz\\_the\\_kraken/51078](https://t.me/riz_the_kraken/51078); <https://tass.ru/politika/15116687>; <https://ria.ru/20220704/geroi-1800093356.html>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignOct1>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-1>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-29>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-1>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-28>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-1>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-28>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-8-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-26>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-19>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Offensive%20Campaign%20Assessment%2C%20January%20%20OPDF.pdf>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-8-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-25>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-1>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-23>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-1>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-17>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-28>
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- <sup>15</sup> [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/16577](https://t.me/grey_zone/16577); [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/16566](https://t.me/grey_zone/16566)
- <sup>16</sup> <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/18544>; <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/18541>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/18544>; <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/18541>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/44316>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/50400>; [https://t.me/riz\\_the\\_kraken/55760](https://t.me/riz_the_kraken/55760); <https://t.me/rybar/42585>; <https://t.me/sashakots/37974>; <https://t.me/epoddubny/14465>; <https://t.me/sashakots/37968>; [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/16563](https://t.me/grey_zone/16563); <https://twitter.com/fdov21/status/1612849187841888256?s=20&t=PASgsQ9-qG38LUdD5RV2Jg>; <https://t.me/brussinf/5512https://twitter.com/fdov21/status/1612849190710673409?s=20&t=PASgsQ9-qG38LUdD5RV2Jg>; [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/16588](https://t.me/grey_zone/16588); <https://t.me/brussinf/5521>; <https://t.me/sashakots/37978>
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<sup>47</sup> <https://t.me/hueviyherson/32655>

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