Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov continues to frame Chechen fighters’ involvement in the war in Ukraine on distinctly religious grounds, thereby building out his reputation and the reputation of his power base. Kadyrov responded to the recent list of guidelines for grooming standards in the Russian army and noted that a majority of Chechen fighters wear beards in accordance with the Sunnah, and additionally claimed that his Chechen fighters have been responsible for major gains in Mariupol, Severodonetsk, and Lysychansk. Kadyrov questioned the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)’s justifications for these guidelines and said they would demoralize fighters who are "waging a holy war." Kadyrov additionally amplified a sermon given by Chechen theologian Magomed Khitanaev on January 20 that claimed that the "special military operation" in Ukraine is aimed at eradicating Ukranian "satanism." Kadyrov has repeatedly justified Chechen fighters’ involvement in the war on distinctly religious grounds, thus presenting himself as the protector of Muslim fighters and bridging the gap between Chechen forces and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s framing of the war on religious and moral grounds.

Kadyrov also notably posted footage on January 20 of a group of Chechen theologians completing their training at the Russian Special Forces University in Grozny, Chechnya, and noted that over 300 qadis (magistrates and judges who implement sharia law) and imams are planning to undergo similar training and deploy into Ukraine. The fact that Chechen qadis will supposedly be embedded in Chechen units that deploy to Ukraine is noteworthy—qadis typically serve a judicial role in criminal and civil matters, and their presence in Ukraine may suggest that Kadyrov intends Chechen forces to serve a basic governance function in occupied areas. ISW has previously reported on Kadyrov’s efforts to position himself and his Chechen powerbase as a parallel and complementary structure to the conventional Russian armed forces. Kadyrov may hope to use qadis and imams in Ukraine to set social conditions for the long-term resettlement of Muslim populations from the Caucasus in occupied areas of Ukraine, although there is no independent evidence of any such plans. ISW has previously reported on Kadyrov’s efforts to import Chechen elements to Ukraine to fill administrative and law enforcement roles in occupied territories for similar purposes.

The Wagner Group appears to be struggling to present itself as an effective parallel military structure, thus increasingly proving to be a parasitic paramilitary entity. Russian opposition outlet TV Dozhd reported on January 20 that a woman whose husband reportedly died fighting with Wagner in Ukraine received her husband’s sealed coffin, death certificate, and a medal of honor and buried what she thought was her husband before finding out that he was alive and in Ukrainian custody. TV Dozhd claimed that it has collected many such stories and that Wagner representatives have essentially intimidated family members into not checking coffins to confirm the deaths of their relatives. Moscow Duma deputy Evgeny Stupin relatedly noted appeals he has received from constituents claiming that once their relatives signed contracts with Wagner and deployed to Ukraine, they ceased to hear from their relatives entirely. These reports suggest that Wagner lacks basic administrative organs to maintain records of individual servicemen and communicate properly.
with authorities. Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin ironically has gone to great lengths to criticize the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) establishment, which he has accused of being inept in precisely these ways.

The Wagner Group may additionally be relying on the Russian MoD for the use of military assets on the frontline. A prominent Wagner Group-affiliated Russian milblogger posted an infographic on January 20 reportedly showing the array of military assets that Wagner is using around Bakhmut, including a TOS-1A thermobaric artillery system (typically a military district-level asset), various self-propelled guns and mortar systems, several armored vehicles, and an Su-25 aircraft. The use of these assets, particularly aviation assets such as the Su-25, suggests that Wagner is working with the Russian MoD to access and operate these systems. While Wagner servicemen can feasibly operate these systems independently, they likely continue to rely on the MoD for logistical support and maintenance functions. Taken in tandem with reports of pervasive administrative and communication failures within Wagner’s ranks, the use of MoD equipment suggests that Wagner is functioning more as a parasite attached to the Russian armed forces than as the entirely self-contained, parastatal organization that Prigozhin tries to present it as being.

**US intelligence confirmed the rivalry between the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Wagner Group on January 20.** National Security Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby stated that a rift is forming between Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin and Russian MoD officials as a result of an ongoing competition between conventional Russian forces and Wagner mercenaries in Ukraine. Kirby added that Wagner “is becoming a rival power center to the Russian military and other Russian ministries” with its 50,000-strong group of forces in Ukraine consisting of 40,000 convicts and 10,000 contractors. ISW continues to monitor the progress of the Wagner-Russian MoD conflict in the information space, with the Russian MoD again deliberately avoiding directly acknowledging Wagner troops’ participation in a claimed capture of Klishchiivka, Donetsk Oblast, on January 19.

Prigozhin’s quest for legal recognition of Wagner Group may also trigger some factionalization within the Russian government—whether he intentionally sets out to do so or not. Chairman of the Russian socialist Just Russia—For the Truth party Sergey Mironov published a picture of himself with a Wagner sledgehammer that he said was a gift from Prigozhin. Prigozhin had engraved the settlement names of Bakhmut and Soledar, Donetsk Oblast, likely to support his ongoing effort to advertise his forces as victors of the Battle for Soledar. Mironov also responded to a comment from a social media user asking if he intended to use this sledgehammer in combat, sarcastically implying that he is already on the front lines and in the trenches at his current position. Mironov’s actions could suggest that he is a member of the pro-war faction that Prigozhin had previously referenced in his rants and may be advocating for the legalization of Wagner in Russia. Mironov had an exchange with a different commenter who had asked him to define Wagner and how the Kremlin regulates the group, to which he responded that the commenter was too late to the conversation. That social media user, in turn, interpreted Mironov’s response as disregarding the Russian Criminal Code provisions against illegal military structures such as private military companies. ISW previously reported that Prigozhin used Mironov’s likeness in his advertisements for the Wagner Center in St. Petersburg and is likely attempting to expand his group of backers within the Kremlin to support his commercial interests.
The Kremlin is likely intensifying its efforts to present Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as an existential war to set informational conditions for a protracted war in Ukraine. Russian and social media sources circulated images on January 19 and 20 showing Russian officials installing air defense systems on the roof of the Russian Ministry of Defense building in Moscow and elsewhere near the city. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov refused to comment on the images, and State Duma DeputY Yevgeny Lebedev called them fake. Some Russian milbloggers responded to these images with satisfaction that Moscow residents would finally be aware that Russia is involved in a “difficult war” in Ukraine. The Kremlin likely deployed the air defense systems in Moscow to generate inflammatory images that portray the war as more threatening to the Russian public. It is unlikely, however, that the Kremlin believes that Ukraine would target Moscow and it likely engaged in this ostentatious play to support intensifying information operations to prepare the Russian domestic information space for a protracted war in Ukraine and further sacrifices. This demonstration is also likely a part of the emerging information operation to contextualize the war in Ukraine in the Russian mythos of the Great Patriotic War, which is likely meant to increase Russian support for the war effort and further mobilization by absurdly portraying Ukraine as threatening Moscow and the rest of the Russian heartland in a way to the way Nazi Germany did during its invasion of the Soviet Union.

Prominent Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin replaced Russian Commander of the Airborne Forces, Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky, with First Deputy Head of the Russian General Staff Academy, Lieutenant General Oleg Makarevich, on January 20. A prominent Russian news source initially claimed on January 13 that Teplinsky was only on a temporary leave and denied milblogger reports about Teplinsky’s dismissal. Some milbloggers complained that Makarevich is the least suitable candidate to command the Russian Airborne Forces and called for Putin to instead appoint Colonel Vadim Pankov, current commander of the 45th Separate Guards Spetsnaz Brigade. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has not yet confirmed Teplinsky’s dismissal nor confirmed Makarevich’s appointment. Teplinsky replaced former Commander of the Russian Airborne Forces, Colonel-General Andrey Serdyukov, in mid-June 2022, as ISW previously reported. Teplinsky visited rear areas in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast in late December.

The Kremlin continues to promote information operations threatening escalation over Western military assistance to Ukraine. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on January 20 that if Western defense ministers decided to provide Ukraine with heavy tanks at their meeting at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany, then this would only "add problems for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people." The Kremlin seeks to undermine Western willingness to offer aid to Ukraine by stoking fears of an escalation, whether between Russia and the West or of the war in Ukraine itself, that Russia cannot execute. The Kremlin will likely continue to respond to Western conversations about further military assistance to Ukraine with vague threats of escalation that have no corresponding action.

Russian President Valdimir Putin fired Russian Security Council Assistant Secretary Alexei Pavlov on January 20, likely in response to Pavlov’s antisemitic comments in Fall 2022. Pavlov had served as a subordinate to Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev since 2009. The Kremlin’s newswire TASS reported that Pavlov’s dismissal was in connection with his receiving a new unspecified position but did not provide the timeline for his next appointment. Pavlov’s dismissal, however, likely relates to his highly publicized comments regarding the need to "desatanize" Ukraine in a Moscow government-owned outlet Argumenty I Fakty in October 2022. Pavlov stated that there is a need for "desatanization" because there are many religious cults in Ukraine
following Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity in 2014, such as the Hassidic Jews. Pavlov’s antisemitic statement ignited criticism from Russian Hassidic Rabbi Berel Luzar and forced Patrushev to issue an apology promising that he would take appropriate measures to discipline the author of the piece.\textsuperscript{34} It is unclear why Patrushev or Putin would have waited this long to take action.

Key Takeaways

- Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov continues to frame Chechen fighters’ involvement in the war in Ukraine on distinctly religious grounds, thereby building out his reputation and the reputation of his power base.
- The Wagner Group appears to be struggling to present itself as an effective parallel military structure, thus increasingly proving to be a parasitic paramilitary entity.
- US intelligence confirmed the rivalry between the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Wagner Group on which ISW has long reported.
- Prigozhin’s quest for legal recognition of the Wagner Group may also trigger further factionalization within the Russian government.
- The Kremlin continues to engage in demonstrative public actions aimed at setting informational conditions for a protracted war in Ukraine.
- Russian Telegram sources claimed that Putin dismissed Russian Commander of the Airborne Forces Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky, but these reports remain unconfirmed.
- The Kremlin continues to promote information operations threatening escalation over Western military assistance to Ukraine in order to weaken Western support.
- Russian and Ukrainian forces reportedly continued offensive operations near Svatove and Kreminna.
- Russian forces continued offensive operations across the Donetsk Oblast front line. Russian sources continued to falsely claim that Russian forces are close to encircling Bakhmut.
- Russian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast are still likely preparing for a defensive operation in the long term despite recent claims of territorial gains.
- Russian officials and sources continue to indicate that mobilization measures are ongoing despite numerous claims that mobilization has officially concluded.
- Russian officials and occupation authorities continue deporting Ukrainian children from occupied Ukraine to Russia.
Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, and Will Kielm © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI’s Critical Threats Project

* 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)

Russian and Ukrainian forces reportedly continued offensive operations near Svatove on January 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault near Novoselivkse (15km northwest of Svatove). A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations near neighboring Kuzemivka (15km northwest of Svatove) and that Russian forces are in a dangerous position as they have no other settlements to fall back to in the immediate area. Former Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Minister Vitaly Kiselev published footage on January 20 of Russian forces using thermobaric artillery systems against a Ukrainian position near Novoselivske. The use of a military district-level asset indicates that Russian forces may be prioritizing the frontline north of Svatove. A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 6th Tank Regiment of the 90th Tank Division of the Central Military District have been operating in the Svatove area since late October 2022.

Russian and Ukrainian forces also reportedly continued offensive operations near Kreminna on January 20. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces tried to advance from near Zhytlivka (2km north of Kreminna) toward Terny, Donetsk Oblast (17km west of Kreminna). Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces continued attempts to reach Kreminna from the south and that fighting is intensifying around the settlement. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also repelled a Russian assault near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna). The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that unspecified Central Military District (CMD) elements are operating in the Kreminna area.
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of January 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Skiba, Irina, Noel Mikkelson-Daniel, Matthew and Beth Miller. © 2023 Institute for the Study of War & The Critical Threats Project 2023

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 Ukraine forces captured part of the R-66 Kremenna-Svatove road and in the vicinity of Zhirivka (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)

Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut on January 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut itself, within 32km north of Bakhmut near Verkhnokamiankse, Krasnopolivka, Soledar, and Krasna Hora; and within 16km southwest of Bakhmut near Ivanivskoe and Dyliivka. Geolocated footage published on January 19 indicates that Russian forces have likely captured the eastern part of Sil (15km north of Bakhmut). A Russian milblogger claimed that Wagner Group fighters conducted an assault near Blahodatne (12km north of Bakhmut) and continued attempts to advance in the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut. German outlet Der Spiegel reported that the German Intelligence Service has intelligence that indicates that Ukrainian forces are losing a three-digit number of soldiers every day in the Bakhmut area. Fighting in the Bakhmut area continues to be highly attritional for Russian forces as well. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Territorial Defense claimed that Russian forces captured Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) on January 20, following Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin’s claim that Wagner Group fighters captured the settlement on January 19. The Russian MoD referred to Wagner Group fighters once again as “volunteers of assault detachments” likely to downplay the Wagner Group’s role in tactical advances while also shielding itself from previous criticism that it does not acknowledge the Wagner Group’s involvement in such claimed advances.

Russian sources continue to falsely assert that Russian forces are close to encircling Bakhmut. DNR Head Denis Pushilin stated on January 20 that Wagner Group fighters are close to starting the operational encirclement of Bakhmut following Russian tactical advances in Soledar and supposedly in Klishchiivka. Russian forces have still not cut any major Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs) into Bakhmut from Siversk, Slovyansk, and Kostyantynivka. Russian forces would need to cut the majority of these GLOCs and advance further around Bakhmut to even begin an operational encirclement of the city. Russian forces are unlikely to achieve an operational encirclement in the near term as recent offensives to capture small settlements of little tactical significance have likely further degraded Russian manpower and equipment in the area. ISW continues to assess that the Russian offensive to capture Bakhmut is likely culminating due to the Russian military’s increasingly degraded operational capabilities in the area.

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Donetsk City-Avdiiivka area on January 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults within 32km southwest of Avdiivka near Vodyane, Marinka, and Pobieda. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces are continuing positional battles within Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka). Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted an assault near Paraskovivka (36km southwest of Avdiivka).

Russian forces conducted a limited ground assault in western Donetsk Oblast on January 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault near Novosilka (65km southwest of Donetsk City) in western Donetsk Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff also
reported that Russian forces continued routine indirect fire along the line of contact in Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia Oblasts.55
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

Geolocated combat footage published on January 17 shows Russian advances south of Rozdolivka.

Geolocated footage indicates Russian forces occupy eastern Sil as of January 20.

Russian forces captured mine #7 in Soledar on January 15.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that Wagner Group forces captured Klishchivka on January 19.

Zaporizhzhia Oblast Occupation Deputy Vladimir Rogov claimed on January 20 that Russian forces captured Mali Shcherbaky, Shcherbaky, Novoandriivka, Novodanylivka, Mala Tokmachka, and Bilohirye in Zaporizhzhia Oblast.

Map by George Barros, Katerina Stepanenka, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Meadie, and Will Kinney © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI’s Critical Threats Project

Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours

Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory

Major Railroads

Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24

Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory

Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine

Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

* 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 forces in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast are still likely preparing for a defensive operation in the long term despite recent claims of territorial gains. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces made territorial gains in Zaporizhia Oblast on January 20. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and several Russian milbloggers claimed that unspecified elements of the Russian Eastern Military District (EMD) seized Lobokove, 25km southwest of Orikhiv. Russian milbloggers claimed that unspecified elements of the 5th Combined Arms Army of the EMD and the 58th Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District (SMD) also seized Maly Shcherbaky, Shcherbaky, and Novoandriivka southwest of Orikhiv, and Novodanylivka, Mala Tokmachka, and Bilohirya to the southeast of Orikhiv to enable direct ground attacks against the settlement from multiple sides. Prominent Russian nationalist media outlet Tsargrad reported that the claims are unverified. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks near Stepove (20km southwest of Orikhiv) and Mala Tokmachka (7km southeast of Orikhiv), contrary to the Russian claims. A milblogger reposted January 19 battle footage from the Ukrainian General Staff showing a platoon-sized (30 people) group of Russian forces from the 58th Combined Arms Army conducting a ground attack in Zaporizhia Oblast. The milblogger criticized Russian military command for allowing Russian forces to attempt a ground attack without heavy weapons or armored vehicle support, suggesting that Russian forces currently lack or are unwilling to dedicate the equipment necessary to sustain a prolonged offensive in Zaporizhia Oblast. Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces may have conducted the localized attack to locate Ukrainian defensive positions for an upcoming offensive but conceded that Russian forces are only able to conduct limited operations with their current amounts of ammunition and manpower.

Russian milbloggers circulated pictures on January 20 of a destroyed Russian S-400 air defense system in Ilyne, Zaporizhia Oblast from fall 2022, the first confirmed combat loss of a Russian S-400 system in Ukraine. ISW has previously observed Russian S-400 air defense systems in northern Crimea, but not in Zaporizhia Oblast or other occupied Ukrainian territories. One milblogger falsely claimed that Ilyne was out of Ukrainian HIMARS or HARM missile range. Ilyne is 55km from the current front line, and Ukrainian HIMARS have a range of up to 80km (50 miles).

Russian forces continued routine fire against areas in west (right) bank Kherson Oblast and Mykolaiv Oblast on January 20. Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces did not shell areas in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast for the fifth time in six months.
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
-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

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanska, Noel Myklesken, Daniel Meddie, and Will Kiihn
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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.

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 3 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)**

Russian officials and sources continue to indicate that mobilization measures are ongoing, despite numerous claims that Russian mobilization has officially concluded. Pskov Oblast deputy Artur Gayduk submitted a request for Russian President Vladimir Putin to issue an order officially ending mobilization, to which the Russian Presidential Administration stated that Putin’s initial partial mobilization decree continues to be in force. Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov stated that the initial mobilization order continues to be in force due to a “legal feature” and urged Russians to focus on Putin’s statements on mobilization and not on the legal technicalities of the continued force of the mobilization order. A local Telegram channel additionally reported on continued covert mobilization practices in Perm Krai and stated that military enlistment offices are quietly sending five to seven people to training centers every week in order to replenish mobilized detachments without sowing panic in the local population by conducting mass mobilizations. Another Russian source reported that Ural Federal University appointed university officials in late December to be responsible for the distribution of mobilization summonses to students and employees in the mobilization reserve, indicating that the university’s infrastructure is continuing covert mobilization measures.

Russian mobilization authorities continue to face bureaucratic challenges to force generation efforts. A Russian military correspondent posted interview footage on January 20 of volunteers of the Chebarkul-based 6th Tank Regiment of the 90th Tank Division of the Central Military District operating in the Svatove area of Luhansk Oblast. The volunteers reportedly arrived in the combat zone in October and received a 9,000-ruble payment (approximately $131) in October and a 19,000-ruble (approximately $287) in November but have not received their promised salaries beyond the two payments. The volunteers apparently have not received their payments because their documents claim they are still at training grounds in Chebarkul, which also means they cannot be registered as injured or dead in action because their deployment is not officially recognized. A Russian media outlet reported on the case of 31 mobilized recruits from Krasnodar Krai who have been classified as unfit for service but are still receiving 180,000-ruble per month salaries because the Russian military bureaucracy does not know how to cancel their mobilization orders or handle the situation.

The Kremlin is continuing its efforts to reinvigorate its defense industrial base (DIB) under unrealistic timelines, while also attempting to bypass Western-imposed sanctions. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on January 18 called on Russian officials to send all missing material and technical means that Russian Armed Forces needed in 2022 to the frontlines by no later than February 2023. Mishustin added that government officials need to promptly take all relevant management decisions to supply Russian troops, mirroring Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recent orders to improve the Russian DIB within a month to supply Russian forces in both the near and the long term. The Kremlin also continues to find loopholes to avoid sanctions to sustain Russia’s DIB by using Russian state nuclear power company, Rosatom, to procure raw materials for sanctioned enterprises. Ukrainian intelligence shared a letter reportedly from Rosatom dated October 2022 with *The Washington Post* indicating that the company—which presents itself as a “civilian entity”—had been working to supply Russia’s military industry with components, technology, and raw materials for missile fuel. *The Washington Post* reported that Rosatom managed to avoid sanctions given its widespread involvement in nuclear power plants globally and control over supplies.
The Kremlin is trying to expand the authority of the Rosgvardia (Russian National Guard) likely in an effort to strengthen its control over segments of Russian enterprises and private military companies (PMCs) amidst the preparations for protracted war. Parliamentarians of the United Russia and the New People parties introduced a bill on January 20 that would allow Rosgvardia to send its elements to government agencies and companies. Other Russian security structures already have such permissions, and Rosgvardia will be tasked with protecting important state facilities and special cargo, overseeing state control over the circulation of weapons and PMCs, and participating in a fight "against terrorism, extremism, and many others." The Kremlin may use Rosgvardia to establish control over lower-level government officials—such as military recruitment officers—or to monitor the workflow of DIB companies. The Kremlin may also be establishing future provisions to regulate PMCs such as the Wagner Group.

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

Russian officials and occupation authorities continue deporting Ukrainian children from occupied Ukraine to Russia. Russian Children’s Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova stated on January 20 that teenagers from Mariupol traveled to Moscow as part of the "Teenagers for Russia"—an organization that reportedly encourages personal development and self-determination in Russia's teenage population. A Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Telegram channel reported on January 20 that Russian occupation authorities have deported 138 Ukrainian children to occupied Crimea, amplifying unspecified Crimean officials’ claims that the children will not return to their homes in Kherson Oblast. The Telegram channel noted that Russian occupation authorities claimed they returned 18 previously deported Ukrainian children to Kherson but that this claim is not verified.

Russian forces and occupation authorities are continuing to seize and repurpose civilian infrastructure for military purposes in occupied territories. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 20 that Russian forces continue to use the network of civilian healthcare facilities in occupied territories to treat wounded servicemen. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces established a field hospital on the territory of a maternity ward in Novopskov, Luhansk Oblast, to treat over 300 wounded Wagner servicemen. Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated on January 20 that Russian forces are overfilling civilian hospitals with wounded Russian servicemen as they continue to face significant losses along the frontline in Zaporizhia Oblast. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Military Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on January 20 that Russian forces are looting private homes and training in residential buildings in Kherson Oblast.

Russian occupation authorities continue to face logistical issues in maintaining a sufficient pro-Russia workforce at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). Ukrainian nuclear operating enterprise Energoatom reported on January 20 that Russian occupation authorities are struggling to recruit the highly-trained engineers necessary to operate the ZNPP as Ukrainian employees continue to refuse to sign work contracts with Rosatom. Energoatom also stated on January 20 that Russian occupation forces are building fortifications around power units and the dry storage of spent nuclear fuel at the ZNPP, continuing to disregard civilian and nuclear safety in occupied territories.

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to restrict civilian movement in occupied territories. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian occupation authorities will require Melitopol residents
to obtain passes from a military commandant’s office to pass checkpoints in Melitopol starting March 1.\textsuperscript{91} This may be part of a Russian effort to crack down on partisan activities in Melitopol.\textsuperscript{92} Luhansk Oblast authorities stated on January 20 that Russian forces continue to block the entrances to and exits from settlements in occupied Luhansk Oblast, emphasizing that Russian occupation authorities require certificates of work to enter Lysychansk and Rubizhne.\textsuperscript{93}

Russian occupation authorities continue to intensify evacuation and passportization measures for Ukrainian "evacuees." The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on January 20 that Russian officials have deported more than two million Ukrainian citizens to the Russian Federation since February 24, 2022.\textsuperscript{94} Kherson Occupation Administration Head Vladimir Saldo thanked officials in occupied Crimea for accepting 30,000 evacuated residents of Kherson Oblast as of January 20.\textsuperscript{95}

\textbf{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.}

\textit{ISW’s MDCOA warning forecast about a potential Russian offensive against northern Ukraine in fall 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.}

\textbf{Observed indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:}

- Nothing significant to report.

\textbf{Observed ambiguous indicators for MDCOA in the past 24 hours:}

- The Belarusian Ministry of Defense reported that Russian and Belarusian pilots continued conducting joint tactical flight exercises as part of the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV) on January 20.\textsuperscript{96} The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced that these exercises are occurring at the Ruzhany and Machulishchi airfields.\textsuperscript{97}
- Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced that unspecified elements of the Belarusian 6th Separate Guards Mechanized Brigade and 11th Separate Mechanized Brigade conducted unspecified tasks in an unspecified location as part of a joint combat coordination with the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV) on January 20.\textsuperscript{98} The Belarusian Ministry of Defense also reported that elements of the Belarusian 103rd Airborne Brigade conducted tactical live-fire exercises at the Losvido Training Ground.\textsuperscript{99}

\textbf{Observed counter-indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:}

- The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of January 20.\textsuperscript{100} The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian units
continue training in Belarus and that Russia is increasing its aviation forces in Belarus under the guise of joint exercises.\textsuperscript{101}

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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