

**Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 27, 2023**  
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**January 27, 7:40 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.

**Kremlin insiders reportedly told *Bloomberg* that Russian President Vladimir Putin is preparing a new offensive to regain the initiative that may begin as early as February or March 2023.** Russian officials, Kremlin advisors, and other unspecified knowledgeable figures who spoke on condition of anonymity reportedly told *Bloomberg* that Putin seeks to conduct a new major offensive and that he believes that Russia's tolerance to accept casualties will allow Russia to win the war in the long run despite Russian failures so far.<sup>1</sup> This report is consistent with ISW's current assessment and forecast that the Kremlin is likely preparing to conduct a decisive strategic action—most likely in Luhansk Oblast—in the next six months intended to regain the initiative and end Ukraine's current string of operational successes.<sup>2</sup> ISW previously assessed that the decisive strategic action in Luhansk Oblast could be either a major offensive or a Russian defensive operation to defeat and exploit a Ukrainian counteroffensive.<sup>3</sup>

Recent limited Russian ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast may be intended to disperse Ukrainian forces and set conditions for an offensive in Luhansk.<sup>4</sup> Russia is redeploying elements of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Division from Belarus to Luhansk Oblast.<sup>5</sup> This recent development suggests that the planned Russian offensive referenced in the *Bloomberg* report is most likely aimed at Luhansk Oblast though it could also occur in the Vuhledar area in western Donetsk. This new offensive is extremely unlikely to target northern Ukraine from Belarus. There continues to be no indication that Russian forces are forming strike groups in Belarus; Russian elements in Belarus are largely using Belarusian infrastructure and training capacity for training rotations.<sup>6</sup> Russian milbloggers are also increasingly writing off the notion of a second attack against Kyiv as an information operation and are suggesting that the most likely target for a Russian offensive would be in eastern Ukraine or neighboring Kharkiv Oblast.<sup>7</sup>

**The Kremlin confirmed that Russian President Vladimir Putin is issuing preemptive pardons for convicts who serve in Russian operations in Ukraine.** Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on January 27 that he cannot provide additional information about presidential decrees on pardons because they are protected by "various classifications of secrecy."<sup>8</sup> Peskov's statement confirms that Putin has been issuing preemptive presidential pardons to convicts, the majority of whom are likely recruited into the ranks of the Wagner Group. Russian Human Rights Council member Eva Merkacheva stated in early January that convicts recruited by Wagner are pardoned before their release from penal colonies.<sup>9</sup> ISW previously assessed that these preemptive presidential pardons may be driving further recruitment within penal colonies and likely empower Wagner to operate with greater impunity in the theater.<sup>10</sup>

**A visual investigation by a Russian opposition outlet confirmed that Russian authorities are deporting children from occupied Kherson Oblast to occupied Crimea.** Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* examined photos posted to an "Adoption in Moscow Oblast" website that showed 14 children aged two to five from Kherson Oblast at the Yolochka orphanage in Simferopol,

occupied Crimea.<sup>11</sup> *Verstka* noted that the Yolochnka orphanage is subordinate to the Crimean Ministry of Health and specializes in the care of children with nervous system issues, mental and behavioral disorders, hearing and vision problems, and HIV.<sup>12</sup> The Yolochnka orphanage's official work mandate provides for the education of its children with "patriotism and citizenship" on the grounds that "Crimea is located in the south of Russia" and the generation of "awareness of oneself as a citizen of multinational Russia."<sup>13</sup> Russian outlet *RIA Novosti* reported on Yolochnka in 2020 and stated that children under Yolochnka's care were severely malnourished and neglected by orphanage leadership, prompting the intervention of the former Kremlin-appointed Commissioner on Children's Rights Anna Kuznetsova (the predecessor of current Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova).<sup>14</sup> *Verstka's* investigation confirms that elements of the Russian occupation infrastructure in occupied areas of Ukraine are actively involved in the deportation and handling of Ukrainian children, as ISW has previously assessed.<sup>15</sup> Head of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi reiterated on January 27 that Russia is consistently in violation of "the fundamental principles of child protection" by putting Ukrainian children up for adoption.<sup>16</sup>

**Russian officials denied the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) report of explosions at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) on January 26, without accusing Ukrainian forces of being responsible for these explosions.** IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi reported on January 26 that IAEA observers at the ZNPP informed him about explosions and detonations near the facility that indicated nearby military activity.<sup>17</sup> The reference to military activity is notable as the IAEA routinely fails to comment on the Russian military's activities on and near the ZNPP. Russian officials claimed that no explosions occurred near the plant and that the IAEA observers likely heard sounds of an artillery duel a considerable distance from the ZNPP.<sup>18</sup> Zaporizhia Oblast Occupation Deputy Vladimir Rogov claimed that the IAEA was playing a political role to support Ukraine and amplified Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Head Sergey Naryshkin's claim that Ukrainian forces are using nuclear power plants throughout Ukraine to store military equipment.<sup>19</sup> The fact that Russian officials did not frame the event as a Ukrainian provocative shelling of the plant diverges from the routine Russian response to reports of explosions near the ZNPP. Russian officials will likely continue to use interactions with the IAEA to push for it to recognize its ownership of the ZNPP, and *de facto* recognize its illegal annexation of Zaporizhia Oblast.

**The Russian military command is likely attempting to restrict milbloggers' frontline coverage to regain control over the Russian information space ahead of a possible new offensive.** Alexander Kots—a member of the Russian Human Rights Commission under Russian President Vladimir Putin and a prominent milblogger—stated that there are rumors that Russian authorities will require war correspondents to wear bright blue press vests to identify themselves as journalists in the combat zone.<sup>20</sup> Kots and other milbloggers criticized the rumored decision, claiming that high-visibility vests will only help Ukrainian forces deliberately target war correspondents embedded in Russian units.<sup>21</sup> Some milbloggers even admitted that they have been hiding their "PRESS" labels for years and noted that this allowed hundreds of war correspondents to independently work on the frontlines without anyone's formal orders.<sup>22</sup> The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) First Deputy Information Minister Danil Bezsonov also argued that generals who are introducing these regulations should be responsible for each war correspondent's death after making them an easily visible target on the ground.<sup>23</sup> One milblogger accused the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) of deliberately introducing new bureaucratic requirements that will limit the milbloggers' ability to operate on the frontlines.<sup>24</sup>

**These plans for restrictions—if they exist—are likely a part of the Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov’s efforts to professionalize the Russian Armed Forces.** ISW previously reported that Russian milbloggers and nationalist figures had criticized the regulations introduced by the Russian military command requiring servicemen of Russian conventional forces to shave and banning them from using personal vehicles and cell phones on the frontlines.<sup>25</sup> Gerasimov and the Russian MoD are likely attempting to formalize guidance for embedded reporters in Russian units, which is a standard practice in professional militaries aimed at maintaining operational security on the frontlines. The Russian milbloggers’ reaction is likely rooted in their fear that these press vests are little more than a Russian MoD ruse to strip the milbloggers of their independence from Russian government oversight given that they will likely need to undergo complex bureaucratic procedures to receive the Russian MoD’s permission to operate on the front lines to acquire the vests.

**The Russian military command may also be attempting to resurrect its previously unsuccessful censorship efforts targeting the critical milblogger community.** ISW previously reported that the Russian MoD conducted several unsuccessful attempts to promote self-censorship among milbloggers from different nationalist factions—including Wagner-affiliated milbloggers—in summer and fall 2022.<sup>26</sup> Russian military command also previously attempted to promote self-censorship among milbloggers by pushing the narrative that Russian milbloggers have been violating Russian operational security by uploading combat footage or revealing Russian positions online.<sup>27</sup> It is unclear if Russian President Vladimir Putin is supporting these restrictions given that he had been appeasing pro-war milbloggers by meeting with them, allowing them to autonomously operate on the frontlines, and tolerating their criticisms.<sup>28</sup> The Kremlin is also continuing to integrate some select milbloggers by offering to let them host TV shows on Russian state broadcasters.<sup>29</sup> The Russian MoD may be conducting its own line of effort to silence the milbloggers independent of Putin. ISW will continue to monitor to see if Putin overrules the Russian MoD’s efforts to silence milbloggers.

**The Russian MoD’s effort to restrict embedded milbloggers in conventional units will not silence all milblogger criticism online, however.** A Russian milblogger observed that restrictive measures such as government-distributed press vests will further solidify Wagner Group as the dominant source of independent frontline information since Wagner will not abide by such restrictions. The Russian MoD’s tactic to suppress information from the frontlines would create a vacuum in the information space for Wagner-affiliated milbloggers, who have a significantly stronger distaste for the Russian MoD, to fill. Russia’s use of unconventional military formations will also undermine the effectiveness of such regulations.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Kremlin insiders reportedly told *Bloomberg* that Russian President Vladimir Putin is preparing a new offensive to regain the initiative that may begin as early as February or March 2023.**
- **The Kremlin confirmed that Russian President Vladimir Putin is issuing preemptive pardons for convicts who serve in Russian operations in Ukraine.**
- **A visual investigation by a Russian opposition outlet confirmed that Russian authorities are deporting children from occupied Kherson Oblast to occupied Crimea.**
- **Russian officials denied reported explosions near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) on January 26.**

- **The Russian military command is likely attempting to restrict mibloggers' frontline coverage to regain control over the Russian information space ahead of the new offensive. These restrictions—if planned—are likely a part of the Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov's efforts to professionalize the Russian Armed Forces.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations near Kreminna on January 26 and January 27.**
- **Russian forces continued ground attacks around Bakhmut, on the western outskirts of Donetsk City, and in western Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian sources did not report that Russian forces continued localized offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast on January 27.**
- **Russian officials claimed that the conscription age will not change in the upcoming 2023 spring conscription cycle.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are continuing to intensify efforts to integrate occupied territories into the Russian legal and administrative structures.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 27, 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

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

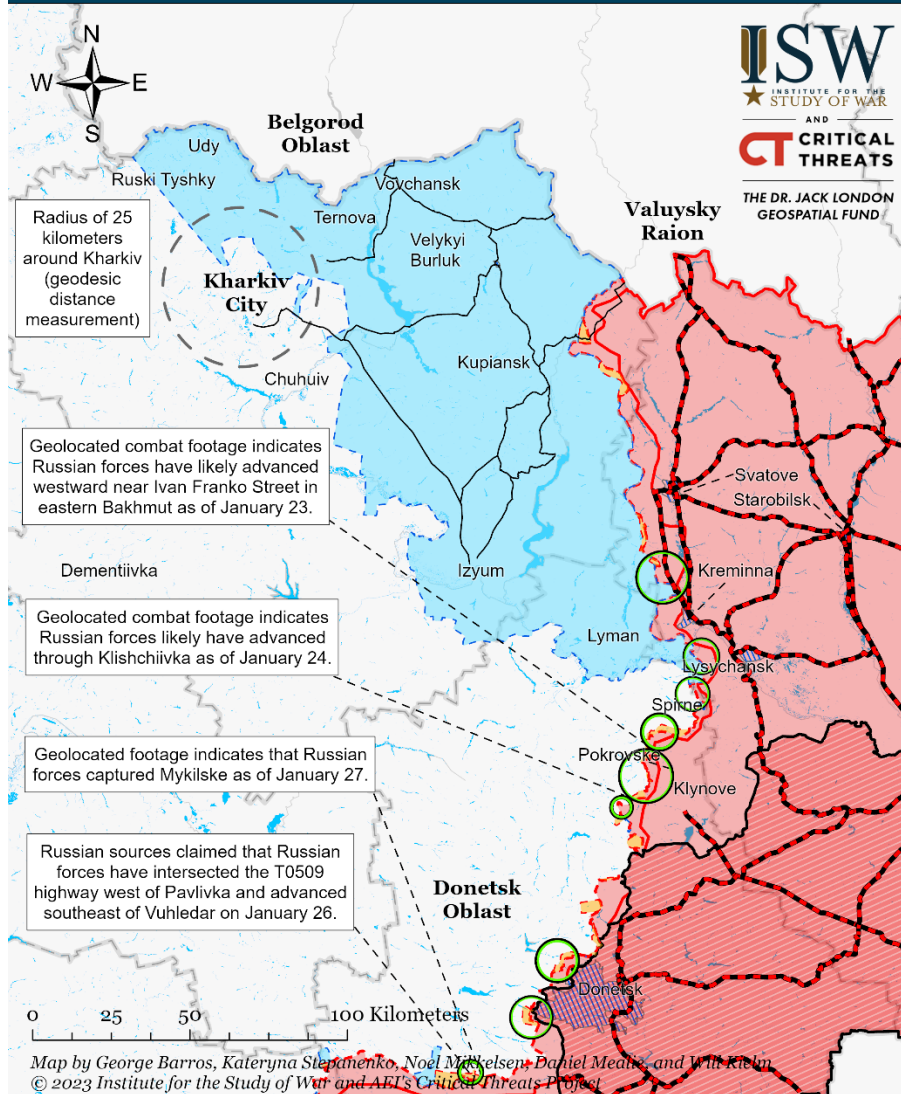
#### **Eastern Ukraine: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)**

Russian forces reportedly conducted a reconnaissance-in-force operation in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast on January 27. A milblogger claimed that Russian forces broke through Ukrainian defenses near Ternova (38km northeast of Kharkiv City) penetrating 500 meters deep.<sup>30</sup>

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations near Kreminna on January 26 and January 27. Secretary of the General Council of United Russia Andrey Turchak claimed that Kreminna is the most challenging segment of the frontline due to Ukrainian attempts to break through Russian defensive lines following his reported visit to the area on January 26.<sup>31</sup> Turchak also claimed that Russian airborne forces are maintaining defenses in the Kreminna direction. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 26 that the 254th Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (144th Motorized Rifle Division, 20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) repelled Ukrainian assaults and exchanged fire at a distance of 50-100 meters from Ukrainian forces near Kreminna.<sup>32</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff stated on January 27 that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Ploshchanka (16km northwest of Kreminna), Nevske (18km northwest of Kreminna), and Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna).<sup>33</sup>



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of January 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

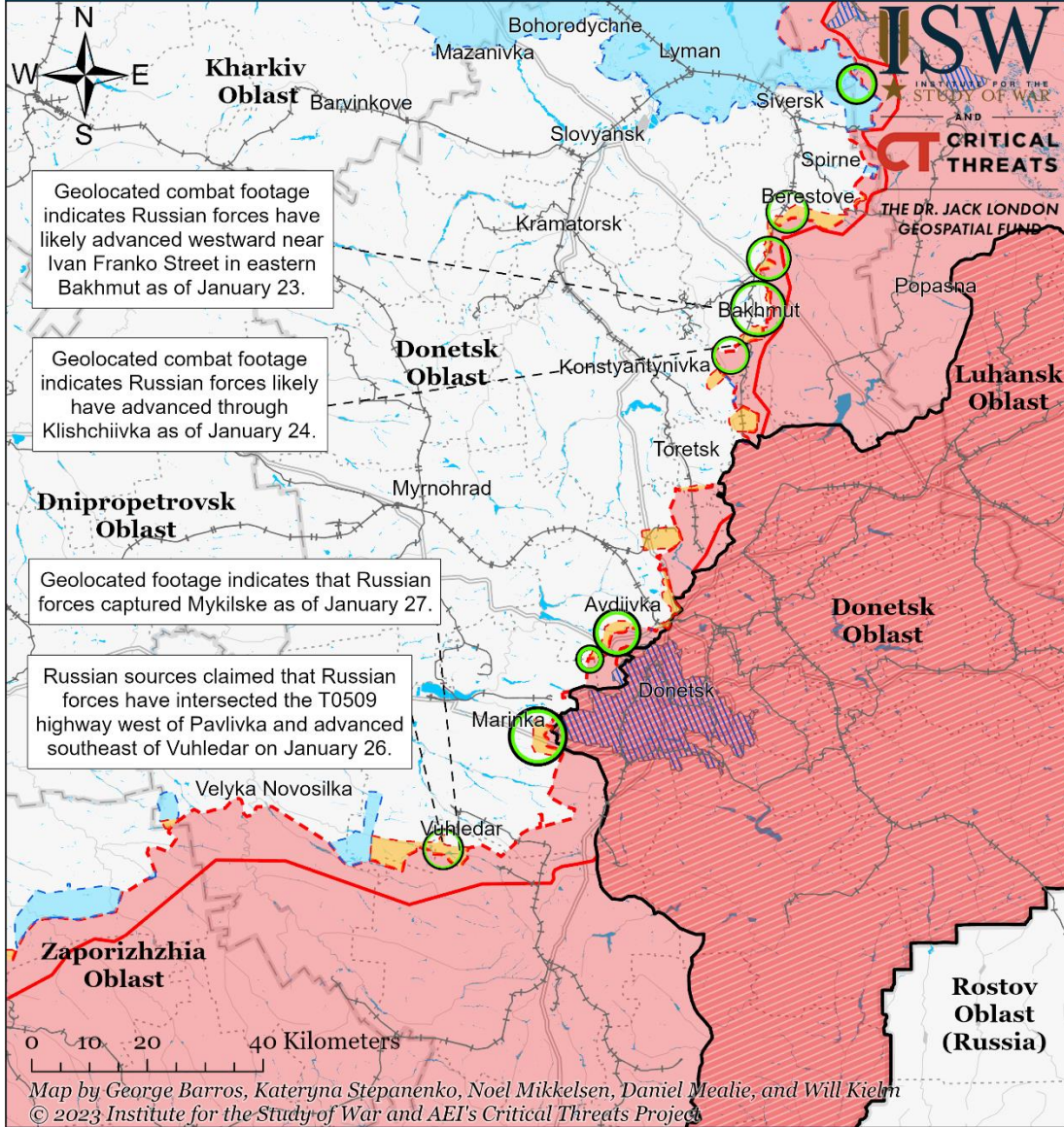
Russian forces continued ground attacks around Bakhmut on January 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northeast of Bakhmut near Verkhokamyanske (30km northeast) and Paraskoviivka (6km north); and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka (6km southwest).<sup>34</sup> Geolocated footage shows Ukrainian artillery striking a Russian crossing on the Bakhmutivka River just northwest of Sil, indicating that Russian forces have advanced northwest of Soledar up to about this point.<sup>35</sup> Ukrainian sources also confirmed that Russian troops captured Krasnopolivka (just northwest of Soledar) and Dvorichchia (just southwest of Soledar).<sup>36</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Wagner Group fighters in the Soledar area are trying to push through Ukrainian defenses near Blahodatne (directly west of Soledar).<sup>37</sup> Geolocated combat footage shows Ukrainian troops engaging Wagner Group fighters in the Miasokombinat suburb of northeastern Bakhmut, indicating that Wagner continues to incrementally advance within Bakhmut itself.<sup>38</sup> A Russian milblogger also claimed that fighting is ongoing on the southern outskirts of Paraskoviivka.<sup>39</sup> Russian sources additionally claimed that Wagner forces southwest of Bakhmut in the Klishchiivka area are trying to push northwest toward Ivanivske to cut the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway.<sup>40</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on January 27. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Vodyane and Nevelske and on the southwestern outskirts near Marinka.<sup>41</sup> Geolocated footage from January 14 shows that Russian forces have advanced within Vodyane.<sup>42</sup> Russian sources claimed that Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) forces captured Vodyane on January 26.<sup>43</sup> Geolocated footage of Russian infantry positions shows that Russian troops have also marginally advanced in Pisky, also on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City.<sup>44</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian troops fighting in western Marinka seized the initiative.<sup>45</sup>

Russian forces conducted a ground attack in western Donetsk Oblast on January 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled a Russian attack on Vuhledar, 30km southwest of Donetsk City.<sup>46</sup> Geolocated combat footage suggests that Russian troops captured Mykilske, on the southeastern outskirts of Vuhledar.<sup>47</sup> Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Advisor Yan Gagyn claimed that fierce battles are ongoing on the outskirts of Vuhledar and that Russian troops have entrenched themselves on the southeastern and eastern outskirts of the settlement.<sup>48</sup> Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), reported that the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade and other Eastern Military District and DNR elements are operating in the area.<sup>49</sup> Social media footage shows Russian troops firing on Vuhledar with a TOS-1A Thermobaric artillery system.<sup>50</sup> The use of a military district-level artillery asset suggests that the Russian command may be prioritizing advances in the Vuhledar area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are redeploying from Bakhmut to defend Vuhledar.<sup>51</sup>



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

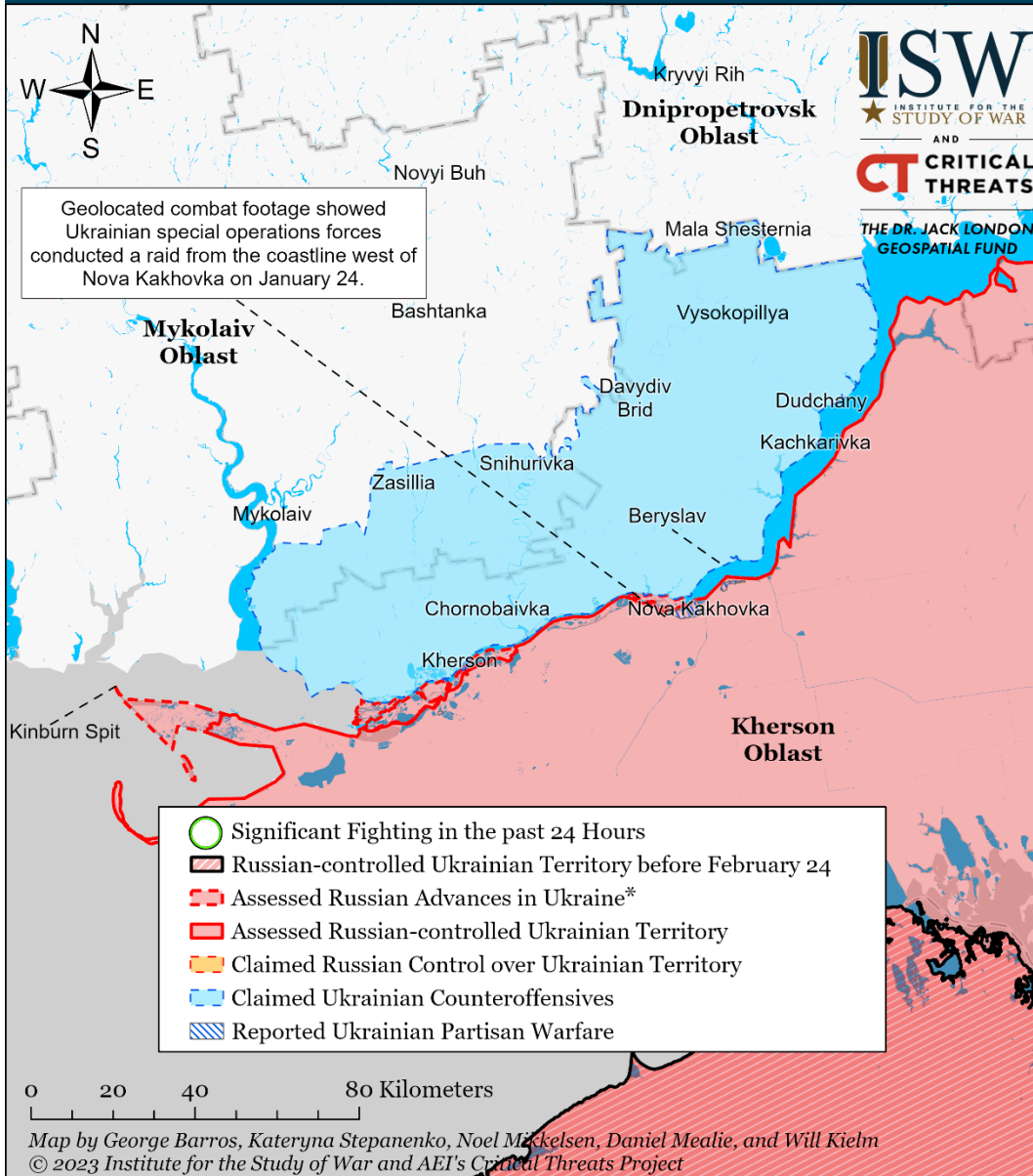
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

Russian sources did not report that Russian forces continued localized offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast on January 27. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces launched localized offensives along the line of contact in Zaporizhia Oblast in previous days and captured several settlements.<sup>52</sup> ISW has not seen any visual confirmation that Russian forces have captured any settlements in the area and continues to assess that Russian sources likely made these claims to distract from the lack of progress in the Russian offensive to capture Bakhmut.<sup>53</sup> The lack of reporting on localized Russian offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast suggests that these operations were likely limited in scope.

Russian forces continued routine artillery and MLRS strikes west of Hulyaipole and in Kherson and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on January 27.<sup>54</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued to strike Kherson City.<sup>55</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 27, 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 Dniro River delta areas.

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

Russian officials claimed that the conscription age will not change in the upcoming 2023 spring conscription cycle. The St. Petersburg Oblast administration published a draft resolution on January 26 about the conscription of its citizens from April to July of 2023 that states that the age of conscription remains between 18 and 27 years of age.<sup>56</sup> Russian Duma Defense Committee Chairman Andrei Kartapolov stated on January 26 that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has no reason to adopt a new conscription age increase for the upcoming spring conscription cycle.<sup>57</sup> Kartapolov had stated on January 11 that Russian officials could raise the upper threshold for the conscription age to 30 years of age in the 2023 spring conscription cycle.<sup>58</sup> Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu initially proposed increasing the conscription age bracket to 21 to 30 years of age at the annual Russian MoD Board meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on December 21, 2022.<sup>59</sup>

High-ranking Russian figures continue to criticize Russian citizens who fled the country to avoid mobilization. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow (head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church) gave a speech to the Russian State Duma on January 26 and stated that Russian citizens who fled the country out of fears about mobilization likely did so because of "false values imported from outside" of Russia and that they need spiritual help.<sup>60</sup> Patriarch Kirill pointed to the flight of Russian citizens in response to mobilization as evidence that the Russian government needs to adopt education standards that emphasize "patriotism."<sup>61</sup> Patriarch Kirill recently called on the Russian government to exclude Orthodox priests from mobilization efforts and military service, revealing that even Kremlin-affiliated institutions find the prospects of further mobilization unpopular.<sup>62</sup>

Russian officials proposed a bill that would allow Russian authorities to allocate confiscated property for defense purposes. The Russian government proposed a bill on January 27 that would allow Russian officials to send light industry goods confiscated in cases of administrative offenses to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Ministry of Emergency Situations.<sup>63</sup> The Russian Federal Property Management Agency reportedly destroys these confiscated goods according to the existing administrative code.<sup>64</sup> Russian outlet *RBK* reported on January 17 that the Russian government's commission on legislative activities approved the bill after the Russian Ministry of Finance initially proposed it.<sup>65</sup> This change to the administrative code will likely not produce enough new materials to notably offset the Russian MoD's systemic problems in provisioning Russian forces in Ukraine.

Ukrainian intelligence reported that Russian forces are experiencing significant shortages of junior commanders in frontline units in Ukraine. Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) representative Andriy Chernyak reported on January 27 that Russian forces have approximately 40 percent of junior commander positions in units on the frontline unfilled.<sup>66</sup> Chernyak stated that these vacancies in platoon and company commanders contribute to Russian units conducting assaults without command and proper interaction between formations.<sup>67</sup> A Russian milblogger argued on January 27 that many Russian military commanders continue to face bureaucratic challenges that stymie the Russian military's ability to address problems and train new personnel.<sup>68</sup> Russian force generation efforts since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have likely failed to produce enough adequately trained personnel who could fill these vacancies, many of which are likely the result of high casualties. ISW has previously reported that an independent open-source investigation found that Russian officers represent a sizeable portion of confirmed Russian military deaths in Ukraine.<sup>69</sup>



Ukrainian sources reported that the Wagner Group is attempting to recruit deported Ukrainian prisoners from occupied territories. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on January 27 that Russian occupation officials deported 3,500 prisoners from Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts to Russian-occupied Crimea, where the Wagner Group is currently trying to recruit them.<sup>70</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 continuing to intensify efforts to integrate occupied territories into Russian legal and administrative structures. Kherson Occupation Head Vladimir Saldo signed a decree on January 24 that replaces the Civil-Military Administration of Kherson Oblast with the legal name of Kherson Oblast Administration, claiming that the measure will begin normalization efforts during "peacetime."<sup>71</sup> Saldo claimed that the decree brings occupied Kherson Oblast authorities and other government bodies in line with Russian legislation in accordance with the Russian Federal Law "On the General Principles of Organization of Public Power in the Subject of the Russian Federation." The decree recognizes occupied Kherson Oblast as a federal subject (region) of Russia with a structure of executive authority that includes the Kherson Oblast Governor (Saldo), ministries, departments, services, and other departments.<sup>72</sup> Saldo published a list of employment opportunities in the Kherson Oblast Administration on January 27, suggesting that Russian occupation authorities continue to struggle with recruiting and maintaining a sufficient pro-Russian workforce in occupied territories.<sup>73</sup> Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik claimed on January 27 that LNR officials submitted a draft law to the Russian Ministry of Trade to transfer occupied Luhansk Oblast to the Moscow time zone, which is one hour ahead of Ukraine time and does not participate in daylight savings time.<sup>74</sup>

Russian occupation authorities are continuing efforts to close Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Christian communities and establish the Kremlin-affiliated Moscow Patriarch Orthodox Church as the dominant religion in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky claimed on January 27 that he visited Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill in Moscow following Kirill's invitation.<sup>75</sup> Balitsky claimed that he and Patriarch Kirill discussed issues of church-state relations, the functioning of churches in the region, and the changes in spiritual lives in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.<sup>76</sup> ISW reported on January 26 that Russian occupation officials in Zaporizhia Oblast are attempting to establish the Kremlin-affiliated Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Church as the dominant faith in the region.<sup>77</sup>

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

There is still no indication that Russian forces are forming a strike group in Belarus as of January 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of January 27.<sup>78</sup>

The Russian military is expanding its air force presence in Belarus. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported on January 27 that Russian and Belarusian air elements continue deploying to Belarusian airfields under the rubric of continued joint tactical flight exercises.<sup>79</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian units continue training in Belarus and that Russia is increasing its aviation forces in Belarus under the guise of joint exercises.<sup>80</sup>

Some Belarusian elements are practicing river crossing exercises. The Belarusian MoD reported on January 27 that unspecified Belarusian sapper elements conducted a pontoon bridge river crossing exercise on the Neman River in Grodno, Belarus.<sup>81</sup> The Belarusian MoD reported on January 26 that elements of the Belarusian 38th Separate Guards Airborne Assault Brigade conducted a river crossing exercise in BTR-82A in an unspecified location.<sup>82</sup>

Belarusian mechanized forces continue conducting exercises across Belarus. The Belarusian MoD reported on January 27 that unspecified elements of the Belarusian 339th Separate Mechanized Battalion conducted unspecified combat training tasks at the Uruchcha Training Ground near Minsk, Belarus.<sup>83</sup> The Belarusian MoD also reported that an unspecified mechanized battalion of the Belarusian 11th Separate Mechanized Brigade deployed to an unspecified area for a combat readiness test. Unspecified elements of the Belarusian 6th Separate Guards Mechanized Brigade conducted BMP-2 and small arms live fire exercises at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on January 26.<sup>84</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-27/russian-president-putin-plans-new-offensive-in-ukraine-as-he-girds-for-long-war>

<sup>2</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>;  
<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>

<sup>3</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>

<sup>4</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>;

<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>

<sup>5</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>;

<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>

<sup>6</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>

<sup>7</sup> <https://t.me/atomiccherry/537>

<sup>8</sup> <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/16900187>

<sup>9</sup> <https://ria dot ru/20230109/zaklyuchennye-1843702450.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011123>

<sup>11</sup> <https://verstka dot media/rossijskie-vlasti-vyvezli-ne-menee-14-sirot-iz-hersona/>; <https://meduza dot io/feature/2023/01/27/verstka-nashla-14-detey-sirot-vyvezennyh-iz-hersona-v-krymskom-dome-rebenka-elochka>

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- <sup>12</sup> [https://verstka](https://verstka.io/feature/2023/01/27/verstka-nashla-14-detey-sirot-vyvezennyh-iz-hersona-v-krymskom-dome-rebenka-elochka) dot media/rossijskie-vlasti-vyvezli-ne-menee-14-sirot-iz-hersona/; [https://meduza](https://meduza.io/feature/2023/01/27/verstka-nashla-14-detey-sirot-vyvezennyh-iz-hersona-v-krymskom-dome-rebenka-elochka) dot io/feature/2023/01/27/verstka-nashla-14-detey-sirot-vyvezennyh-iz-hersona-v-krymskom-dome-rebenka-elochka
- <sup>13</sup> [http://elochka-dom](http://elochka-dom.ru/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BC%D0%B0.pdf) dot ru/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BC%D0%B0.pdf
- <sup>14</sup> [https://ria](https://ria.ru/20200904/sirotty-1576702715.html) dot ru/20200904/sirotty-1576702715.html
- <sup>15</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-26>;  
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<https://isw.pub/RusCampaignAugust23>
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