

**Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 31, 2023**  
**Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Angela Howard,**  
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**January 31, 8:15 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.

**The introduction of Russian conventional forces to the Bakhmut frontline has offset the culmination of the Wagner Group's offensive and retained the initiative for Russian operations around the city.** The ISW December 27 forecast that the Russian offensive against Bakhmut was culminating was inaccurate.<sup>1</sup> The Wagner Group offensive culminated, as ISW assessed on January 28, but the Russian command has committed sufficient conventional Russian forces to the effort to reinvigorate it, thus forestalling the overall culmination of the offensive on Bakhmut, which continues.<sup>2</sup> The commander of a Ukrainian unit operating in Bakhmut, Denys Yaroslavskyi, confirmed that "super qualified" Russian conventional military troops are now reinforcing Wagner Group private military company (PMC) assault units in an ongoing effort to encircle Bakhmut.<sup>3</sup> Another Ukrainian Bakhmut frontline commander, Volodymyr Nazarenko, also confirmed ISW's observations that the Russian military command committed Russian airborne troops to the Bakhmut offensive.<sup>4</sup> Russian forces are continuing to conduct offensive operations northeast and southwest of Bakhmut and have secured limited territorial gains since capturing Soledar on January 12.<sup>5</sup>

**ISW does not forecast the imminent fall of Bakhmut to Russian forces, although the Ukrainian command may choose to withdraw rather than risk unacceptable losses.** It is extraordinarily unlikely that Russian forces will be able to conduct a surprise encirclement of Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut. Yaroslavskyi noted that the Ukrainian military command would conduct a controlled withdrawal of forces from Bakhmut to save Ukrainian soldiers' lives, likely if the Ukrainian command assesses that the risk of an encirclement of the city is imminent.<sup>6</sup> Ukrainian Eastern Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Serhiy Cherevaty stated on January 31 that Ukrainian forces are still able to effectively supply units in Bakhmut and noted that the Ukrainian military command has developed several contingency plans to respond to Russian operations around Bakhmut.<sup>7</sup> Cherevaty added that Russian forces are continuing to suffer heavy casualties and noted that Ukraine's previous defense and subsequent withdrawal from Severodonetsk and Lysychansk over the summer of 2022 exhausted Russian forces and disrupted their plans for an immediate attack on Bakhmut.

**Russian officials are again overestimating Russian military capabilities to advance in Donetsk Oblast and in the theater in a short period of time.** Head of the Donetsk People's Republic Denis Pushilin stated on January 31 that the Russian capture of Bakhmut will allow Russia to advance to Kramatorsk and Slovyansk, both approximately 40km northwest of Bakhmut.<sup>8</sup> Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin previously claimed that the average pace of Russian advance around Bakhmut was about 100 meters per day, and it took Russian forces eight months to advance from occupied Popasna in Luhansk Oblast and Svitlodarsk to their current positions in the vicinity of Bakhmut (distances of 25km and 22km respectively).<sup>9</sup> Pushilin also claimed that the hypothetical Russian capture of Vuhledar would allow Russian forces to launch offensive operations on Kurakhove, Marinka, and Pokrovsk—despite the inability of Russian forces to capture Marinka since March 17, 2022, when the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) falsely claimed to have seized the settlement.<sup>10</sup> Pushilin had also claimed that Russian forces will seize Avdiivka, but has not provided any explanation of how Russian forces will break through almost nine years' worth of Ukrainian fortifications around the settlement.<sup>11</sup> Pushilin's expectations for Russia's hypothetical seizure of Bakhmut further

demonstrate that Russians are continuing to face challenges in accurately assessing the time and space relationship with the account for Russian military capabilities.

**Russian conventional forces may be replacing expended Wagner PMC forces by relocating them from Bakhmut to the frontlines in southern Ukraine.**<sup>12</sup> The Head of the Ukrainian Press Center of the Defense Forces of the Tavris Direction, Colonel Yevhen Yerin, stated that Russian forces are conducting unspecified force rotations out of Kherson Oblast and that Ukrainian authorities are clarifying reports about Wagner Group forces arriving in the Zaporizhia operational direction.<sup>13</sup> Ukrainian officials first reported on Wagner forces arriving in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on January 15, coinciding with the culmination of the Wagner offensive in Donbas with the capture of Soledar on January 12.<sup>14</sup> Russian forces may be rotating out the culminated and battle-weary Wagner forces in favor of Russian conventional units that have likely been resting and refitting since the Russian withdrawal to the east (left) bank Kherson Oblast in November.<sup>15</sup>

**The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) may be attempting to fully supplant Wagner forces near Bakhmut and frame the traditional Russian military command structure as the sole victor around Bakhmut, assuming Russian forces eventually take the city.** The Russian MoD and Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin have made competing claims over recent Russian gains around Soledar and Bakhmut following the capture of Soledar.<sup>16</sup> The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces captured Blahodatne just west of Soledar on January 31 after Prigozhin claimed that Wagner forces seized the settlement on January 28.<sup>17</sup> Prigozhin is likely overcompensating for Wagner forces' reduced combat capabilities and reliance on conventional forces by claiming territorial gains before the MoD can feasibly claim them for Russian conventional forces.<sup>18</sup> The Russian MoD likely aims to undermine the Wagner Group's influence in Ukraine despite the MoD's reliance on Wagner forces to sustain the Russian effort around Bakhmut since July and to take horrendous losses for minimal territorial gains.<sup>19</sup>

**Ukrainian officials continue to support ISW's assessment that an imminent Russian offensive in the coming months is the most likely course of action (MLCOA) and further suggested that Ukrainian forces plan to launch a larger counteroffensive.** Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov stated in a January 31 interview with *Sky News* that Russian forces are preparing for a "maximum escalation" in Ukraine within the next two to three months and may do so as soon as the next two to three weeks to coincide with the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>20</sup> Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Kyrylo Budanov stated in a January 31 interview with the *Washington Post* that Russian forces will focus on occupying a larger area of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, supporting ISW's assessment that Russian forces appear to be preparing for an imminent offensive in eastern Ukraine, particularly in Luhansk Oblast.<sup>21</sup> Budanov stated that there are currently 326,000 Russian forces fighting in Ukraine, excluding the roughly 150,000 mobilized personnel still in training grounds that Russian forces have reportedly not yet committed to hostilities.<sup>22</sup> The Russian military will likely continue to accumulate conventional forces in Luhansk Oblast and increase the deployment of remaining mobilized personnel to eastern Ukraine in support of an imminent decisive strategic effort in western Luhansk Oblast.<sup>23</sup> Danilov suggested that Ukrainian forces have their own plans for operations in the coming months, and Budanov stated that Ukrainian forces must return Crimea to Ukrainian control by the summer of 2023.<sup>24</sup> Budanov has recently stated that Ukrainian forces intend to launch a major counteroffensive throughout Ukraine in the spring of 2023 "from Crimea to Donbas."<sup>25</sup>

**Prominent Russian milbloggers continue to expose Russian military failures in Ukraine through increasingly public and elevated platforms.** A prominent Russian milblogger claimed on live Russian state TV that Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) lost 40-50% of their personnel between the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and September of 2022, although ISW cannot independently confirm the accuracy of the milblogger's assessment.<sup>26</sup> The public reporting of this significant figure, regardless of its accuracy, notably undermines efforts from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to minimize Russian casualties reported in the Russian information space. The Kremlin has recently attempted to integrate some select milbloggers, including this one, into its narrative control by offering them platforms on Russian state broadcasters while also attempting to resurrect censorship efforts targeting the wider community of milbloggers that are critical of the Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).<sup>27</sup> The Kremlin's effort to coopt a select group of milbloggers by giving them more public and elevated platforms may backfire as milbloggers may seize the opportunity to appeal to the Russian ultranationalist community that has been increasingly critical of the Kremlin's conduct of the war.<sup>28</sup>

**Russia continues to weaponize counterterrorism laws to justify domestic repressions.** Russian sources reported on January 31 that the Central Military District Court found Vladislav Borisenko guilty of a terrorist act and sentenced him to 12 years in prison for his role in a May 2022 Molotov cocktail attack on the Nizhnevartovsk military registration office in Khanty-Mansi Okrug.<sup>29</sup> This is notably the first instance of the perpetrator of an attack on a military registration office being officially charged with committing a terrorist act.<sup>30</sup> The apparent elevation of charges for such incidents from destruction of property and hooliganism indicate that the Russian judicial system is increasingly seeking to impose harsher punishments on acts of domestic dissent as the war in Ukraine continues, as ISW has previously assessed.<sup>31</sup> Russian President Vladimir Putin additionally signed a decree on January 31 that simplifies the process of implementing terror threat alerts in Russia.<sup>32</sup> The decree allows Russian regions to introduce an elevated "terrorist level" for an indefinite period, thus negating the previous 15-day limit.<sup>33</sup> The January 31 decree is an expansion of Putin's October 19 martial law decree, which introduced varying levels of "martial law readiness" in occupied regions of Ukraine and Russian border regions.<sup>34</sup> The new decree will allow Russian regions operating on a "yellow level" of terrorist threat (as in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk Oblasts) to stop and search vehicles on administrative borders to weapons and explosives, activities that were previously allowed only in "red level" regions.<sup>35</sup> The continued legislative manipulations of terrorism as a legal concept are allowing Russian authorities greater scope to crack down on domestic dissent and on any activities that are deemed contrary to Russian interests.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **The introduction of Russian conventional forces to the Bakhmut frontline has offset the culmination of the Wagner Group's offensive and retained the initiative for Russian operations around the city. ISW's December 27 forecast that the Russian offensive against Bakhmut was culminating was inaccurate.**
- **ISW does not forecast the imminent fall of Bakhmut, and it is extraordinarily unlikely that Russian forces will be able to conduct a surprise encirclement of Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut.**
- **Russian military command is overestimating Russian military capabilities to advance rapidly in Donetsk Oblast and in the theater.**
- **Russian conventional forces may be replacing expended Wagner PMC forces by relocating them from Bakhmut to the Zaporizhia Oblast front line.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) may be attempting to fully supplant Wagner forces near Bakhmut to frame the traditional Russian military command**

structure as the sole victor around Bakhmut, assuming Russian forces take the city.

- **Ukrainian officials continue to support ISW's assessment that an imminent Russian offensive in the coming months is the most likely course of action (MLCOA) and further suggested that Ukrainian forces plan to launch a larger counteroffensive.**
- **Prominent Russian milbloggers continue to expose Russian military failures in Ukraine through increasingly public and elevated platforms.**
- **Russia continues to weaponize counterterrorism laws to justify domestic repressions.**
- **Russian forces continued limited ground attacks to regain lost positions along the Svatove-Kreminna line on January 31.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Donetsk Oblast front line.**
- **Russian forces are unlikely to benefit significantly elsewhere in eastern Ukraine from their localized offensive around Vuhledar.**
- **Russian forces are likely prioritizing sabotage and reconnaissance activities over territorial gains in southern Ukraine.**
- **Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov acknowledged Russian mobilization failures in an attempt to frame implementation failures and policy violations as resolved.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue to use youth engagement and education programs to consolidate social control of occupied territories.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 31, 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

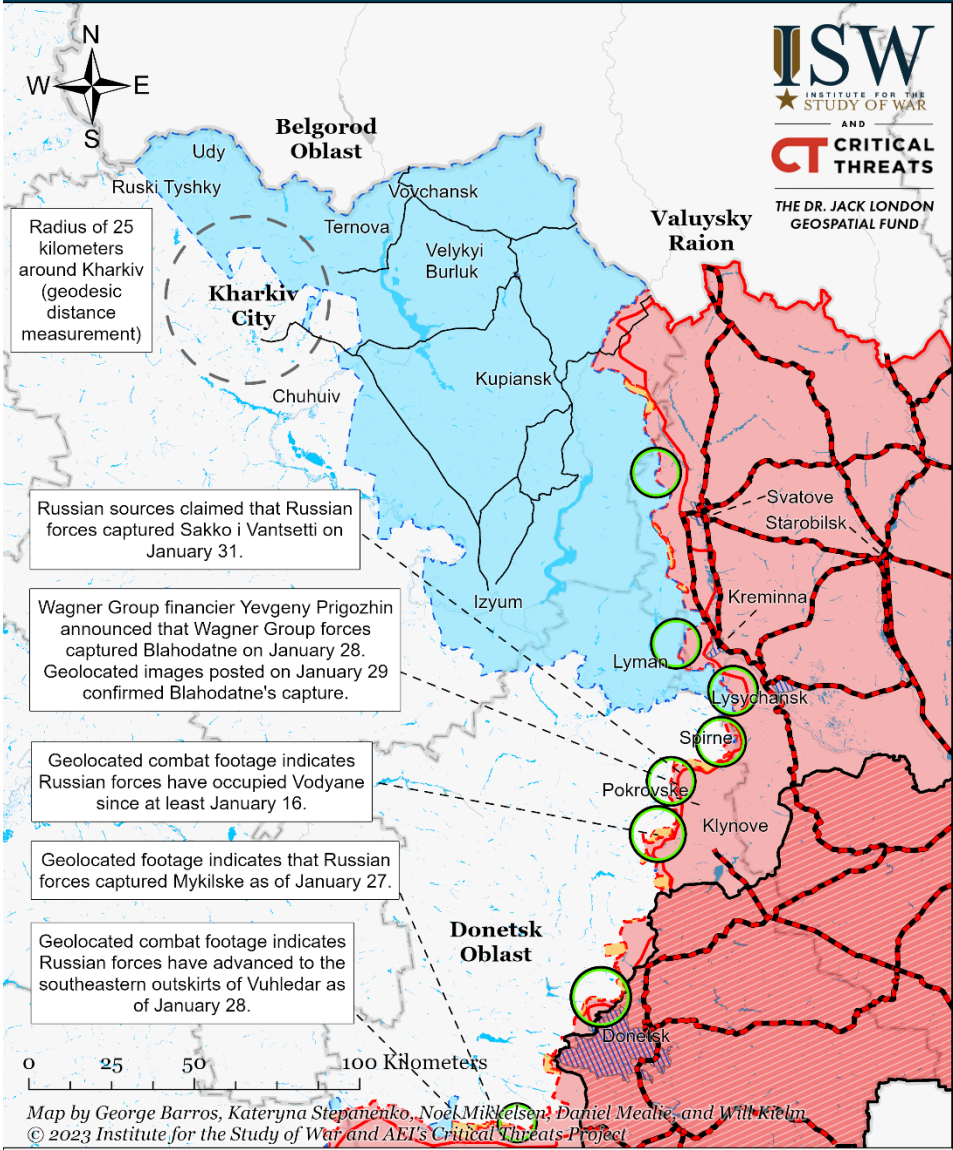
### **Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)**

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

Russian forces continued limited ground attacks to regain lost positions along the Svatove-Kreminna line on January 31. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Novoselivske (16km northwest of Svatove) and Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna) in Luhansk Oblast and Yampolivka (16km west of Kreminna) in Donetsk Oblast.<sup>36</sup> Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated on January 31 that Ukrainian advances on the Svatove-Kreminna line have slowed.<sup>37</sup> Geolocated combat footage posted on January 30 shows Russian artillery striking a Ukrainian position about 8km west of Kreminna, indicating that Ukrainian forces have advanced to within 8km of the settlement.<sup>38</sup>

Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian concentration areas in occupied Luhansk Oblast. Geolocated photos posted on January 31 confirm claims made by the Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) that Ukrainian troops struck Kadiivka (48km west of Luhansk City on the T0504 Lysychansk-Luhansk City highway) with HIMARS.<sup>39</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of January 31, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

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)**

Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut on January 31. Ukrainian Eastern Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Serhiy Cherevaty reported that there have been 42 engagements between Ukrainian and Russian forces in the Bakhmut area in the past 24 hours.<sup>40</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut itself; within 29km northeast of Bakhmut near Spirne, Krasna Hora, and Paraskoviivka; and within 7km southwest of Bakhmut near Ivanivske and Klishchiivka.<sup>41</sup> A Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) 105th Rifle Regiment-affiliated source claimed that Russian forces captured Sacco and Vanzetti (17km north of Bakhmut), although ISW has not observed any visual evidence that verifies this claim.<sup>42</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that "volunteers of assault detachments" with support from conventional Russian units captured Blahodatne (11km north of Bakhmut), following Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin’s January 28 claims that Wagner Group fighters captured the settlement.<sup>43</sup> ISW previously reported that geolocated footage published on January 29 indicates that Russian forces likely captured the settlement.<sup>44</sup> The Russian MoD continues to refer to the Wagner Group as "volunteers of assault detachments" to minimize the Wagner Group’s responsibility for tactical advances in the Bakhmut area while still acknowledging its role.<sup>45</sup> The DNR 105th Rifle Regiment-affiliated source claimed that Russian forces began a massive assault on Bakhmut itself on January 30 and advanced in the eastern outskirts of the city.<sup>46</sup> The source also claimed that Russian forces advanced to positions within 1km of the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Bakhmut highway near Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut), although ISW has also not observed visual evidence that supports this claim.<sup>47</sup>

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Donetsk City-Avdiivka area on January 31. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Avdiivka, Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka), and Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka).<sup>48</sup> A BARS-13 (Russian Combat Reserve of the Country) affiliated source claimed that BARS-14 elements destroyed a Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group near Makiivka (27km southwest of Avdiivka).<sup>49</sup>

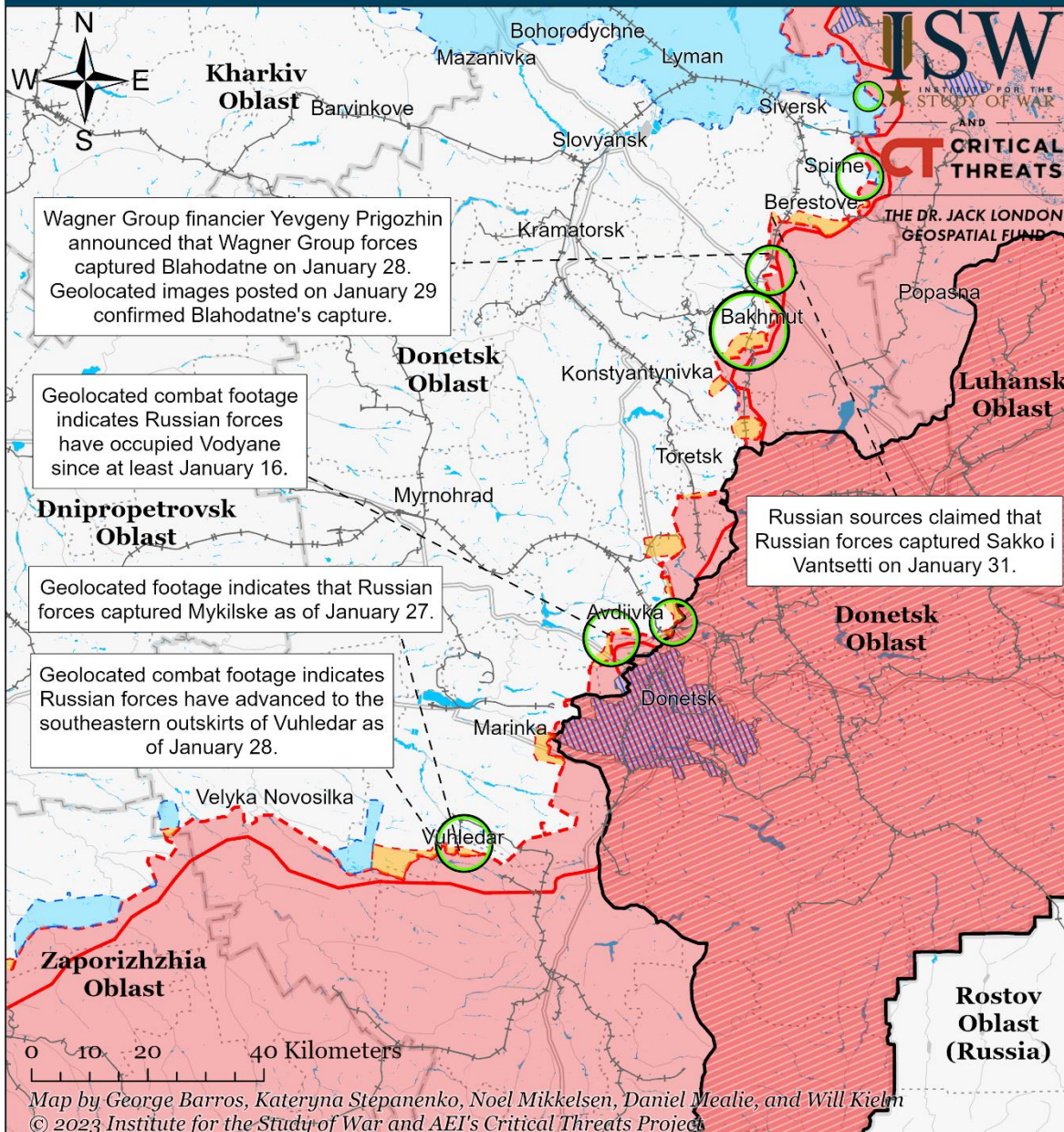
Russian forces continued localized offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast on January 31. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City).<sup>50</sup> A Russian milblogger published footage on January 29 reportedly of Russian tank units of the 36th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 29th Combined Arms Army of the Eastern Military District engaging Ukrainian tank units in the vicinity of Vuhledar.<sup>51</sup> A Ukrainian military officer reported that Russian forces failed to establish control over positions near Vuhledar and that high casualties and poor weather are constraining Russian combat effectiveness in the area.<sup>52</sup> The Ukrainian military officer reported that Ukrainian forces eliminated the most experienced Russian formations during the first days of renewed Russian assaults near Vuhledar and that the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Pacific Fleet has suffered heavy losses.<sup>53</sup> The Ukrainian military officer reported that Russian forces have accumulated a large number of forces in the area and will likely continue the localized offensive to capture Vuhledar.<sup>54</sup> Russian sources amplified footage on January 30 purporting to show elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade entering Vuhledar, with one Russian source claiming that fighting was ongoing in the settlement itself as of January 30.<sup>55</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on January 31 that Ukrainian forces have deployed a large number of personnel to the Vuhledar area.<sup>56</sup>

Russian forces are unlikely to benefit elsewhere in eastern Ukraine from the localized offensive around Vuhledar. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) reported that Russian forces likely



developed probing attacks near Pavlivka (36km southwest of Donetsk City) and Vuhledar into a more concerted offensive assault with the aim of developing a new axis of advance within Donetsk Oblast.<sup>57</sup> The development of a new axis of Russian advance is unlikely to reinforce other Russian offensives in eastern Ukraine due to the seeming lack of overall operational coordination between these separate offensives and the distances between them, however. ISW has previously assessed that a localized Russian offensive in the Vuhledar area is part of a wider effort to disperse Ukrainian forces along the frontline in Ukraine and set conditions for a decisive Russian offensive in western Luhansk Oblast.<sup>58</sup> Russian forces would likely have to activate a large-scale offensive from the vicinity of Donetsk City to generate operational coherence between offensives around Vuhledar and operations around Bakhmut. ISW has observed no evidence of Russian preparations to launch such an offensive.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 31, 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)**

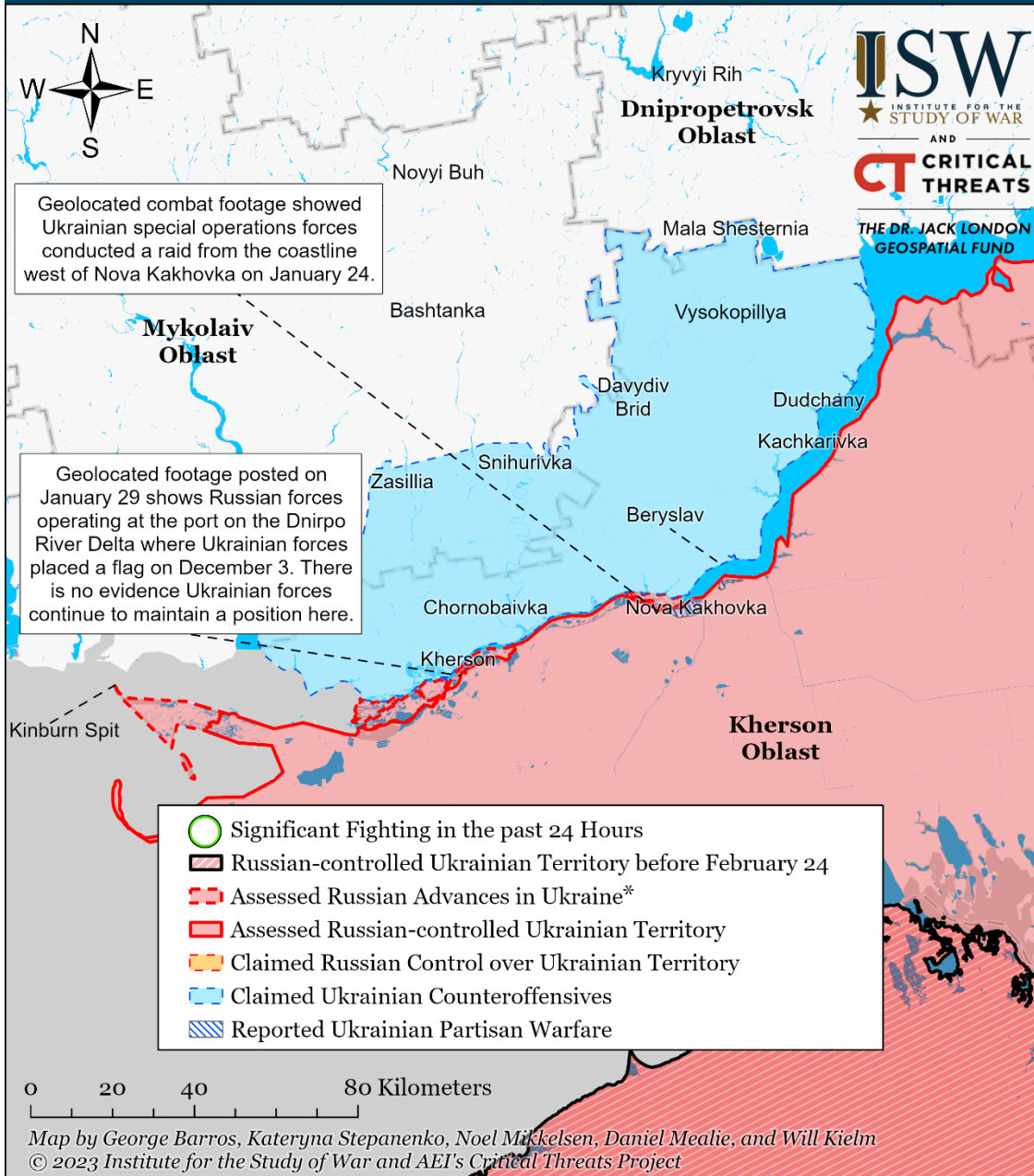
Russian forces are likely prioritizing sabotage and reconnaissance activities over territorial gains in southern Ukraine. Head of the Ukrainian Press Center of the Defense Forces of the Tavris Direction Colonel Yevhen Yerin stated that Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups intensified their activity in the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast and along the Zaporizhia Oblast front line and are not attempting to make territorial gains.<sup>59</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 31 that Ukrainian forces destroyed at least five Russian sabotage and reconnaissance boats in the Dnipro River on the last day.<sup>60</sup> Russian and Ukrainian sources did not report that Russian forces conducted any ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast for the fifth consecutive day on January 31.<sup>61</sup> These reports (or lack thereof) support ISW's prior assessment that Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov's claims of an ongoing Russian offensive in Zaporizhia Oblast were most likely exaggerated as part of a Russian information operation.<sup>62</sup>

Ukrainian forces conducted a raid against the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River on January 31. Geolocated imagery from January 31 shows two boats on the Dnipro River near the delta islands southwest of Kherson City.<sup>63</sup> Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces briefly landed near and established positions in a residential area on the riverbank before Russian artillery fire forced Ukrainian forces to leave the east bank.<sup>64</sup> One Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces were reconnoitering Russian positions and may be attempting to fix Russian forces in Kherson Oblast but do not intend to establish a bridgehead on the east bank of the Dnipro River.<sup>65</sup> Intermittent Ukrainian raids against east bank Kherson Oblast continue to demonstrate that Russian forces likely lack full control over the eastern shoreline of the Dnipro River, as ISW has previously reported.<sup>66</sup>

Russian occupation authorities continued efforts to restore the Russian logistics line between Krasnodar Krai and Crimea. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin announced that authorities restored the fourth and final road bridge span for the Kerch Strait Bridge on January 31.<sup>67</sup> Occupation authorities installed the third road bridge span on January 26.<sup>68</sup> Khusnullin reiterated that Russia plans to reopen the Kerch Strait Bridge to road traffic in March 2023.<sup>69</sup>

Russian forces continued to conduct routine artillery strikes against areas in Zaporizhia, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on January 31.<sup>70</sup>

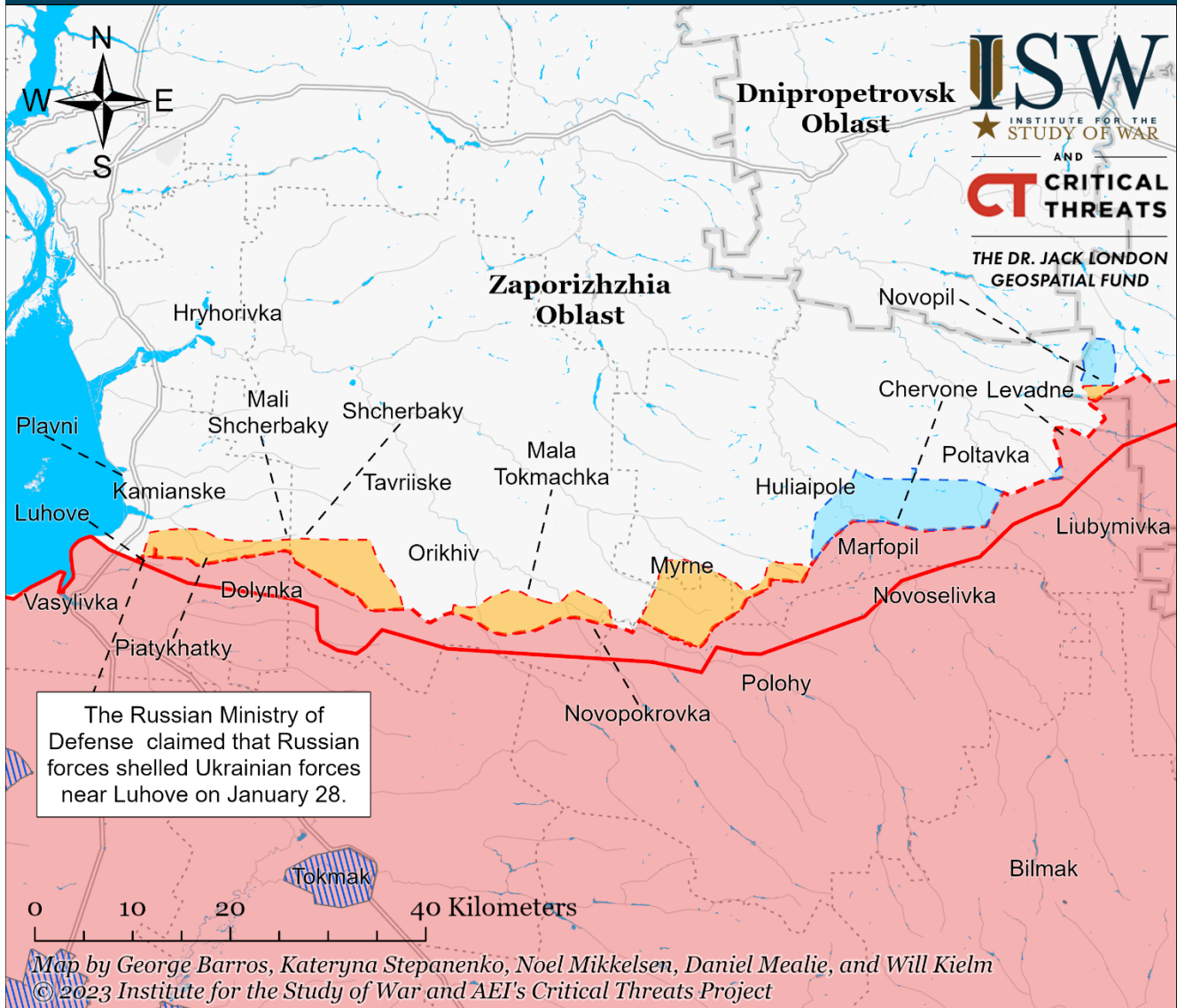
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 31, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of January 31, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- 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.

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

Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov acknowledged Russian mobilization failures in an attempt to claim that issues with mobilization and policy violations have been resolved.<sup>71</sup> Krasnov reported to Russian President Vladimir Putin on January 31 that Russian authorities have returned over 9,000 illegally-mobilized Russians to their homes.<sup>72</sup> Krasnov acknowledged "an array of significant problems" with mobilization but claimed that Russian authorities have solved the majority of issues with body armor and uniforms and disbursed all payments owed to Russian military personnel.<sup>73</sup> ISW has observed increased Russian efforts to professionalize the Russian military over recent weeks, but Krasnov very likely exaggerates the extent to which Russian officials have addressed mobilization issues.<sup>74</sup> The Rostov Oblast Legislative Assembly stated on January 30 that Assembly Chairman Aleksandr Ishchenko proposed that Russian regions standardize payments for mobilized soldiers and establish a minimum payment account.<sup>75</sup> This proposal reflects the continued inconsistency of Russian policy surrounding mobilization as well as a demand to stabilize this policy.

Russian sources continue to spread confusion regarding the official provisioning of, role of, benefits for, and conditions of discharge that apply to different types of Russian soldiers. A Russian milblogger presented on January 31 a series of hypothetical situations left unclear by Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's announcement on January 30 that the Russian MoD will take over the provisioning of Russian volunteer units with weapons, equipment, clothing, medical care, and food.<sup>76</sup> Another milblogger questioned why Russian authorities created "these unnecessary battalions" and "incomprehensible military formations" at all instead of replenishing existing units.<sup>77</sup> A Russian nationalist Telegram channel posted on January 30 that Russian authorities expanded the list of veterans' injuries and illnesses eligible for state compensation without providing specific details or referencing a specific source of information.<sup>78</sup> A prominent Russian milblogger stated on January 30 that he asked the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) why some Russian soldiers cannot quit after their contracts ended.<sup>79</sup> The milblogger stated that the MoD responded that all dismissals were suspended following the declaration of partial mobilization except in certain cases regarding age, health, or legal proceedings.<sup>80</sup>

Some Russians continue limited resistance to Russian mobilization and Russia's war in Ukraine. A regional Russian news source reported on January 30 that authorities in Vladimir Oblast sentenced a mobilized soldier to one year of prison for desertion "in order to temporarily evade military service duties."<sup>81</sup> Advisor to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine Anton Gerashchenko on January 30 amplified footage of a Russian woman who accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of taking Russian women's husbands and children and "[pretending] that nothing is happening" and appealed to Putin to provide Russians with information about the status of their mobilized family members.<sup>82</sup> Russian news outlet *Baza* stated on January 31 that Russian authorities drew up an administrative report against a resident of Ryazan Oblast for "discrediting the Russian Armed Forces" by leaving anti-war graffiti in a shopping center bathroom.<sup>83</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 continue to use youth engagement and education programs to consolidate social control of occupied territories. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky

stated on January 31 that the Russian youth movement "Movement of the First" (Dvizheniye Pervykh) has opened 14 branches throughout occupied Zaporizhia Oblast and is working with youth in Melitopol.<sup>84</sup> Balitsky claimed that this movement was formed on the order of Russian President Vladimir Putin with the mission of uniting and creating equal self-development opportunities among young people and instilling the "right guidelines" in children.<sup>85</sup> Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyenov similarly met with the head of the Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and Navy of the Russian Federation of the Republic of Crimea (DOSAAF) Andrey Popov on January 27 to discuss the "military-patriotic" education of youth in Crimea.<sup>86</sup> DOSAAF is notably a Soviet-era relic.<sup>87</sup> Occupation authorities are likely using youth engagement and educational programs to Russify occupied areas by instilling pro-Russian ideologies and erasing Ukrainian civil society on the local level.

Russian occupation officials continue to use social benefit schemes to strengthen the administrative integration of occupied territories into the Russian system. Zaporizhia occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky announced on January 31 that his administration has clarified the process for issuing birth certificates on occupied territory and that for parents to stamp Russian citizenship to a Ukrainian birth certificate, a Ministry of Internal Affairs migration service employee must provide parents with a certified translation of the Ukrainian certificate in Russian.<sup>88</sup> While the Zaporizhia occupation administration is ostensibly allowing parents to keep Ukrainian birth certificates, they are still compelling Ukrainian citizens to interact with Russian administrative bodies to obtain the required translation. The translation component is a notable form of crypto-Russification, as birth certificates will be registered with the Russian orthography for names and locations as opposed to the Ukrainian. Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik relatedly announced that the LNR has been issuing maternity capital certificates since January 1.<sup>89</sup> Maternity capital programs incentivize families to have more than one child, and while this is not a new concept in Russia or the broader post-Soviet space, occupation authorities may be pushing enrollment in these programs in order to encourage population growth in occupied areas and to encourage families to register with Russian-controlled administrative organs.<sup>90</sup>

Russian occupation officials continue to pursue infrastructure projects in occupied areas, partially enabled through patronages with Russian federal subjects. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin amplified a statement made by occupation head of Khartyszk (a settlement just east of Donetsk City that has been occupied since 2014) Viktoria Zhukova, who describes how the Russian Nizhny Novgorod administration has aided Khartyszk in implementing various infrastructure projects.<sup>91</sup> ISW has previously reported on efforts by occupation authorities to secure patronages with Russian regions, which provide material and financial support that strengthens administrative control over occupied areas by fostering dependence on such infrastructure projects.<sup>92</sup> Zhukova additionally reported that Nizhny Novgorod officials have facilitated the removal of 380 children from Khartyszk to "rehabilitation camps" in Nizhny Novgorod.<sup>93</sup> Russian federal subjects are likely helping occupation officials deport Ukrainian children to Russia under various medical and social guises, as ISW has previously observed.<sup>94</sup>

Russian authorities are likely using imported labor to construct defensive fortifications in occupied areas of Ukraine. A Russian Telegram channel reported that Russian authorities are widely luring workers, predominantly migrants from Central Asian and African nations, to participate in construction projects in occupied territories and failing to provide them with the promised position or payment upon arrival in occupied areas.<sup>95</sup> The post notes that workers are promised that they will work on infrastructure projects and then find themselves digging trenches and defensive fortifications for less than half the promised compensation.<sup>96</sup> Russian authorities may seek to exploit disenfranchised

ethnic minorities to sustain construction projects in occupied areas in the absence of willing Russian workers or collaborators in occupied areas.

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

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on January 31 to sign an agreement to establish joint training centers for joint Russian-Belarusian training.<sup>97</sup> Putin is likely seeking to use these Belarusian facilities to train more of his forces to reinforce active frontlines in eastern Ukraine.

Russian and Belarusian forces are continuing joint military exercises in Belarus. Belarusian Security Council Secretary Lieutenant General Alexander Volfovich, Commander of the Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense Forces Colonel Andrey Lukyanovich, and Russian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Sergey Dronov reportedly cooperated in drawing up practical aviation exercises as part of joint tactical flight exercises.<sup>98</sup> The Belarusian MoD also reported that joint tactical flight exercises continued at the Ruzhansky training ground on January 31.<sup>99</sup> Russian and Belarusian forces also conducted a joint staff training session and will conduct joint decision-making training over the next week in preparation for Union Shield exercises in September 2023.<sup>100</sup>

Independent Belarusian monitoring group The Hajun Project also did not record any large convoys with Russian military equipment in Belarus and noted that large convoys with Belarusian military equipment appeared in Polatsk Raion, near Khodna and Slonim in western Belarus.<sup>101</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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