

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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February 8, 8:30pm ET

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

Russian forces have regained the initiative in Ukraine and have begun their next major offensive in Luhansk Oblast. The pace of Russian operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line in western Luhansk Oblast has increased markedly over the past week, and Russian sources are widely reporting that conventional Russian troops are attacking Ukrainian defensive lines and making marginal advances along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border, particularly northwest of Svatove near Kupyansk and west of Kreminna.¹ Geolocated combat footage has confirmed Russian gains in the Dvorichne area northwest of Svatove.² Russian military command additionally appears to have fully committed elements of several conventional divisions to decisive offensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line, as ISW previously reported.³ Elements of several regiments of the 144th and 3rd Motor Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) and a regiment of the 90th Tank Division (Central Military District), supported by elements of the 76th Airborne Division and unspecified Southern Military District elements, are conducting offensive operations along the entire Svatove-Kreminna line and are reportedly advancing against Ukrainian defenses.⁴

The commitment of significant elements of at least three major Russian divisions to offensive operations in this sector indicates the Russian offensive has begun, even if Ukrainian forces are so far preventing Russian forces from securing significant gains. The Russian offensive likely has not yet reached its full tempo; Russian command has not yet committed elements of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Division (1st Guards Tank Army, Western Military District), which deployed to Luhansk Oblast in January after deploying to Belarus.⁵ Russian forces are gradually beginning an offensive, but its success is not inherent or predetermined. While Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast now have the initiative (in that Russian forces are setting the terms of battle, ending the period of Ukrainian initiative from August 2022), the full commitment of these forces could lead to their eventual culmination along the Svatove-Kreminna line without achieving their objectives of capturing all of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. That culmination would likely provide a window of opportunity for Ukrainian forces to exploit with their own counteroffensive.⁶

Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) People's Militia command reportedly assumed control over a Russian artillery battalion, likely in support of an effort to strengthen degraded DNR forces ahead of an imminent Russian offensive. A Russian source published a video appeal from mobilized personnel of the 640th howitzer battalion from Saratov Oblast on February 8 in which they stated that Russian military officials sent them to join DNR units and that DNR commanders are now trying to transfer them to infantry assault units.⁷ ISW has not previously observed Russian personnel subordinated to a DNR formation and this claim, if true, would suggest that Russian forces may be reinforcing degraded DNR formations with mobilized personnel from Russia itself because DNR formations are unable to replenish losses themselves. The reported subordination of Russian military personnel to DNR formations may portend a Russian effort to prepare DNR formations for an expanded role in their zone of responsibility along the western outskirts of Donetsk City, and the transfer of remaining

conventional Russian forces from this area to the Bakhmut area and Luhansk Oblast, where Russian forces are conducting an increased pace of offensive operations.

The reported subordination of Russian mobilized personnel to DNR formations could also suggest that Russian military command may be continuing efforts to integrate ad hoc DNR and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) formations into the Russian Armed Forces, but will likely face significant difficulties. The Russian Southern Military District formally controls the armed forces of the DNR and LNR through the 1st and 2nd Army Corps, respectively. However, many DNR and LNR formations remain ad hoc units and are not fully integrated into Russian MoD structures. ISW previously assessed that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) appears to be rushing to integrate irregular conventional forces into a more traditional structure and may be creating new formations from DNR/LNR units in support of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu’s proposals to create new maneuver divisions.⁸ Russian forces would likely need to temporarily remove these irregular forces from frontline positions to integrate them into new Russian formations, a prospect that would not be operationally sound ahead of increased Russian offensive operations in Ukraine. Russian officials therefore may be attempting to gradually integrate these irregular formations through subordinating mobilized personnel under them without disrupting the command structures and existing personnel operating at front line positions. The mobilized personnel of the 640th howitzer battalion claimed that DNR command is retraining assault units for artillery purposes yet still committing their artillery battalion to infantry roles, indicating a breakdown in command and the proper utilization of personnel among DNR formations.⁹ The Russian MoD will likely struggle to correct the poor effectiveness of DNR/LNR forces through the rapid integration of Russian personnel.

Russian officials continue to propose measures to prepare Russia’s military industry for a protracted war in Ukraine while also likely setting further conditions for sanctions evasion. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin stated on February 8 that the Russian government will subsidize investment projects for the modernization of enterprises operating in the interests of the Russian military and will allocate significant funds for manufacturing new military equipment.¹⁰ Mishustin also stated that the Russian government would extend benefits to Russian entrepreneurs who support the Russian military, including extended payment periods on rented federal property.¹¹ The Kremlin likely intends these measures to augment its overarching effort to gradually prepare Russia’s military industry for a protracted war in Ukraine while avoiding a wider economic mobilization that would create further domestic economic disruptions and corresponding discontent.¹²

Russian officials also likely proposed these measures in coordination with a recent decree excluding Russian officials from requirements to list income declarations and proposals to repeal federal procurement procedures. The Kremlin may be creating a system of subsidies and benefits designed to have little oversight or accounting. This lack of oversight and accounting would likely allow Russian firms to better evade international sanctions regimes targeting Russia’s military industry.¹³ The United Kingdom announced a new list of sanctioned entities on February 8 focused on Russia’s military industry.¹⁴ ISW previously reported that 82% of Iranian-made drones downed in Ukraine had chips, semiconductors, and other components from the United States, suggesting that Russia and Iran are likely exploiting loopholes to transfer Western-produced arms components to Russia via proxy actors.¹⁵ The Kremlin’s effort to prepare the Russian military industry for a protracted war in Ukraine in part relies on the ability of Russian military industry to have consistent access to multiple secure supply chains of key foreign components that it otherwise cannot produce.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces have regained the initiative in Ukraine and have begun their next major offensive in Luhansk Oblast.**
- **The commitment of significant elements of at least three major Russian divisions to offensive operations in this sector indicates the Russian offensive has begun, even if Ukrainian forces are so far preventing Russian forces from securing significant gains.**
- **Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) People's Militia command reportedly assumed control over a Russian artillery battalion, likely in support of an effort to strengthen degraded DNR forces ahead of an imminent Russian offensive.**
- **The reported subordination of Russian mobilized personnel to DNR formations could also suggest that Russian military command may be continuing efforts to integrate ad hoc DNR and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) formations into the Russian Armed Forces, but will likely face significant difficulties.**
- **Russian officials continue to propose measures to prepare Russia's military industry for a protracted war in Ukraine while also likely setting further conditions for sanctions evasion.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive actions northwest of Svatove and intensified offensive operations near Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area and western Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces reportedly continue small-scale skirmishes and reconnaissance activity in the Dnipro River delta and on the Kinburn Spit.**
- **The Wagner Group is reportedly resorting to more coercive tactics in its prison recruitment campaign, possibly in response to the campaign's declining effectiveness.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



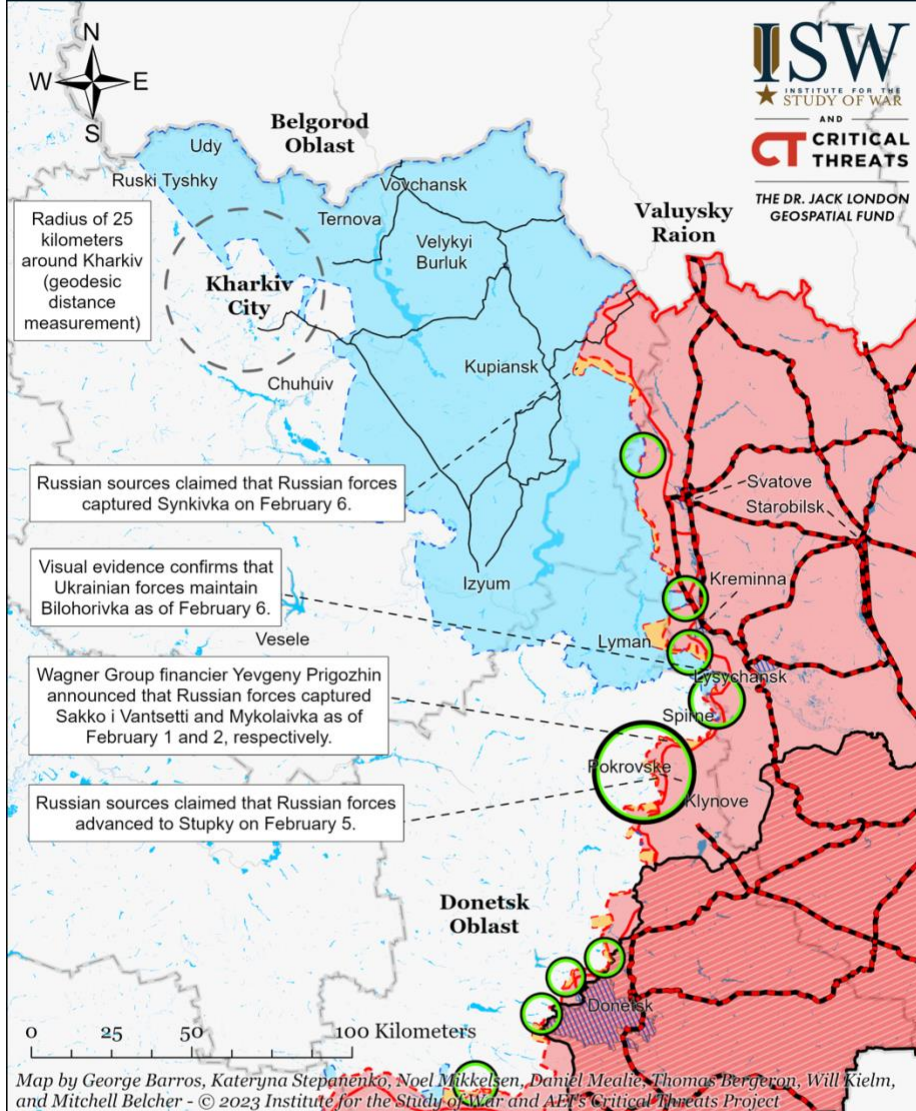
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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 two subordinate main efforts);
- Russia Subordinate Main Effort #1—Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of February 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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Radius of 25 kilometers around Kharkiv (geodesic distance measurement)

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Synkivka on February 6.

Visual evidence confirms that Ukrainian forces maintain Bilohorivka as of February 6.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced that Russian forces captured Sakko i Vantsetti and Mykolaivka as of February 1 and 2, respectively.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced to Stupky on February 5.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AET's Critical Threats Project

- 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
- Key Ukrainian Roads
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication

* 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 Subordinate Main Effort #1- Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

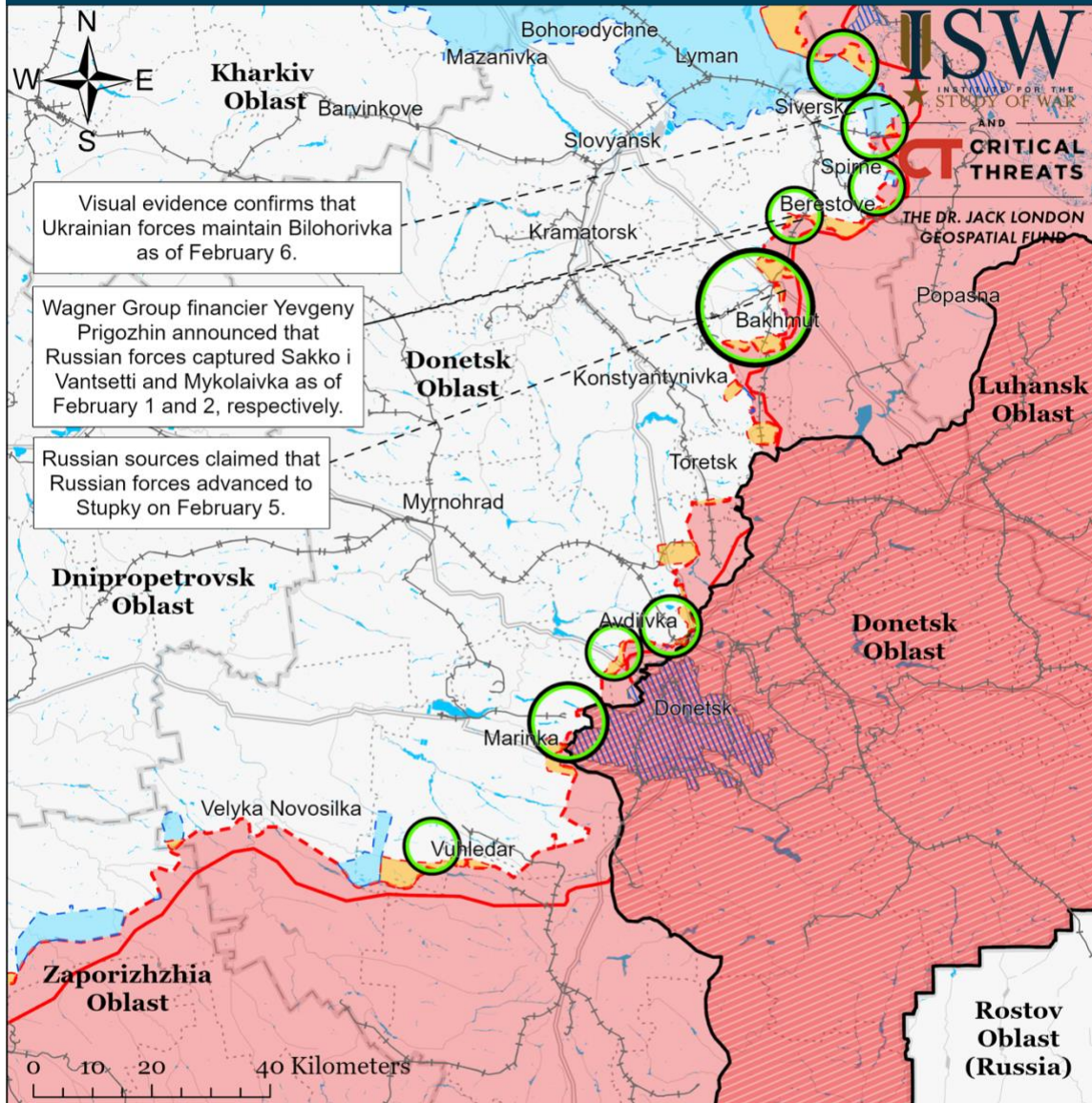
ISW continues to assess the current Russian most likely course of action (MLCOA) is an imminent offensive effort in Luhansk Oblast and is therefore adjusting the structure of the daily campaign assessments. We will no longer include the Eastern Kharkiv and Western Luhansk Oblast area as part of Ukrainian counteroffensives and will assess this area as a subordinate part of the Russian main effort in Eastern Ukraine. The assessment of Luhansk Oblast as part of the Russian main effort does not preclude the possibility of continued Ukrainian counteroffensive actions here or anywhere else in theater in the future. ISW will report out on Ukrainian counteroffensive efforts as they occur.

Russian forces continued offensive actions northwest of Svatove on February 8. Kharkiv Oblast Head Oleh Synhubov reported on February 8 that Russian forces are increasing their presence northwest of Svatove in the Kupyansk and Dvorichna areas.¹⁶ A former Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) deputy claimed that fierce fighting is ongoing 7km from the Kupyansk area, likely referring to areas near Synkivka, which Russian sources claimed Russian forces captured on February 6.¹⁷ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack near Novoselivske, about 15km northwest of Svatove.¹⁸ Former Russian militant commander and nationalist milblogger Igor Girkin denied that Russian forces have made any significant territorial gains in Kharkiv Oblast, particularly in the Kupyansk direction, as of February 8.¹⁹

Russian forces also reportedly intensified offensive operations in the Kreminna area. Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on February 8 that there has been a "maximum escalation" in the Kreminna direction and that Russian forces are attempting to break through Ukrainian defenses in this area.²⁰ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces attacked near Chervonopopivka (5km north of Kreminna).²¹ Several Russian milbloggers circulated unconfirmed footage of unspecified Central and Western Military District elements which crossed the Zherebets River running north to south in western Luhansk Oblast, roughly parallel to the Svatove-Kreminna line) and captured Ukrainian positions in an unspecified location around February 6.²² Russian sources also reported that elements of the 3rd Motor Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) are approaching the Zherebets River and are threatening Ukrainian positions in the area.²³ A prominent Russian milblogger posted footage of the 59th Tank Regiment of the 144th Motor Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) attacking towards Torske (13km west of Kreminna) and claimed the unit pushed Ukrainian forces back to secondary lines of defense.²⁴

Russian forces continued offensive operations south of Kreminna on February 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian troops attacked near Shepilove (7km south of Kreminna) and Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna).²⁵ Chechen Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that elements of the Chechen "Akhmat" special forces and 2nd Brigade of the Luhansk People's Republic 2nd Army Corps captured Ukrainian positions near Berestove, 30km south of Kreminna.²⁶ Russian forces appear to be pushing northeast of the Bakhmut area towards Siversk (17km southwest of Kreminna) to provide a supporting line of advance to the likely main Russian push directly westward toward Kreminna.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Visual evidence confirms that Ukrainian forces maintain Bilohorivka as of February 6.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced that Russian forces captured Sakko i Vantsetti and Mykolaivka as of February 1 and 2, respectively.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced to Stupky on February 5.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- 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.

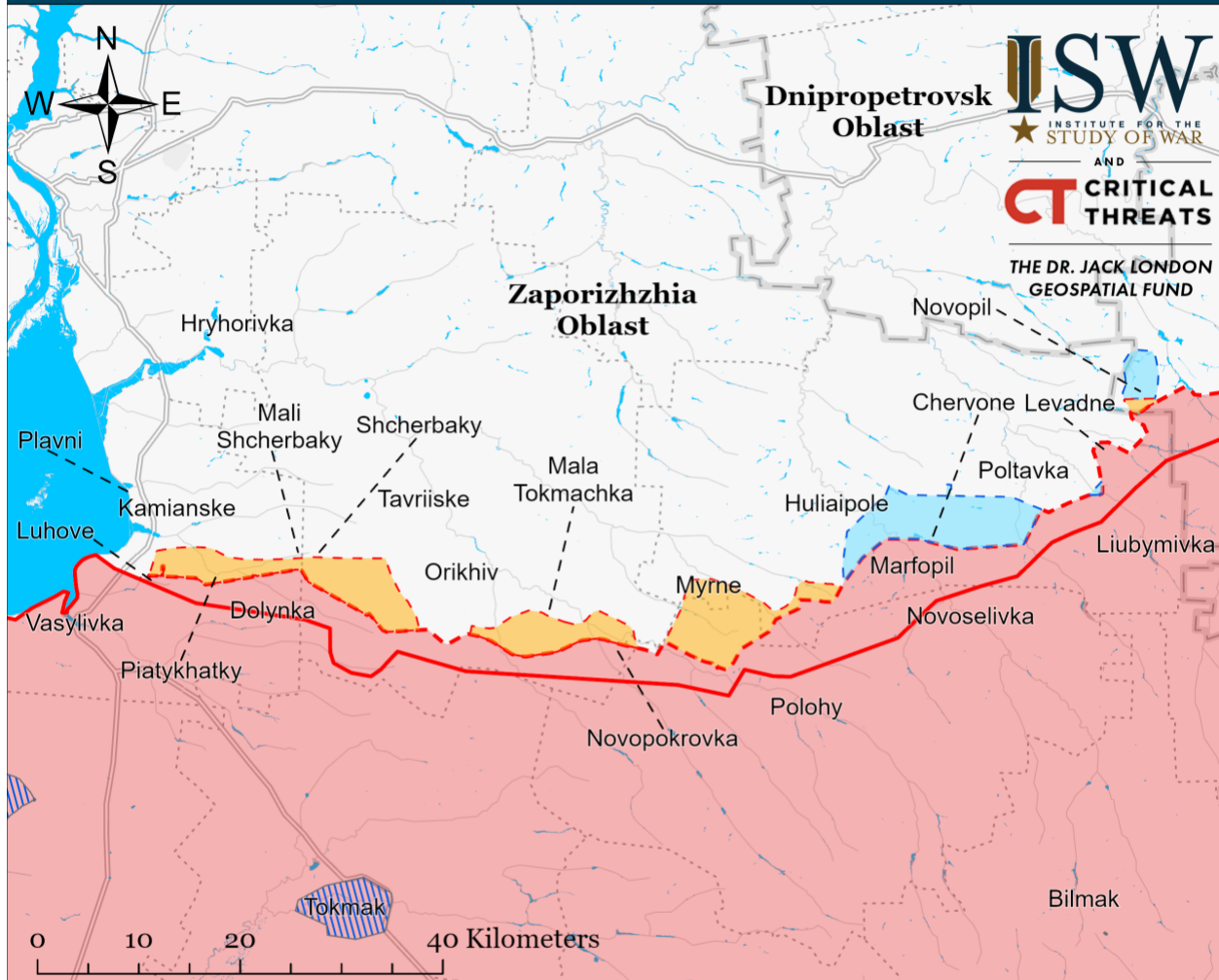
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces conducted ground attacks around Bakhmut and continued making tactical advances on February 8. Geolocated footage posted between February 4 and 8 confirms that Russian forces have made marginal advances north of Bakhmut near Krasna Hora and Zaliznyanske (10km north of Bakhmut), in the Stupky area of northern Bakhmut, and southwest of Bakhmut near Ivanivske.²⁷ Russian forces are visually confirmed to be within 2.5 km of the E40 Bakhmut-Slovyansk highway.²⁸ The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northeast of Bakhmut near Verkhokamyanske (30km northeast), Fedorivka (15km northeast), Spirne (27km northeast), and Vymika (20km northeast); north of Bakhmut near Paraskoviivka (5km north) and Krasna Hora (4km north); northwest of Bakhmut near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (12km northwest) and Dubovo-Vasylivka (7km northwest); and west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west) and Chasiv Yar (10km west).²⁹ The Ukrainian General Staff’s report that Russian forces are attacking towards Orikhovo-Vasylivka and Dubovo-Vasylivka is consistent with geolocated combat footage and indicates that Russian forces seek to encircle Bakhmut by cutting off Ukrainian forces’ access to the E40. Similarly, the report of a Russian attack on Chasiv Yar indicates that Russian forces have likely advanced closer to the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway southwest of Bakhmut. Russian sources claimed that Wagner Group fighters took control of Krasna Hora and are fighting northeast of Bakhmut.³⁰ Russian milbloggers also claimed that Wagner Group forces established fire control over a section of the T0504 highway between Stupochky and Ivanivske.³¹

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on February 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Avdiivka, north of Avdiivka near Kamianka, and along the western outskirts of Donetsk City near Vodyane, Pervomaiske, and Krasnohorivka.³² Former Russian officer and prominent milblogger Igor Girkin claimed that Russian forces did not advance near Avdiivka and took heavy losses.³³ Another milblogger claimed that fighting is ongoing in western Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City) and that unspecified elements of the Southern Military District (SMD) advanced through urban areas of Marinka on February 8.³⁴ The milblogger also stated that Russian forces were able to gain a foothold in positions near a tire repair plant in Marinka.³⁵ Videos posted by milbloggers on February 8 reportedly show SMD tank units attacking a Ukrainian position in Marinka and Russian tanks operating in western Marinka.³⁶ Former Deputy LNR Interior Minister Vitaly Kiselev posted a video on February 8 purportedly showing Russian elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army, SMD) attacking Marinka and claimed that Russian forces had cleared all Ukrainian fortifications there.³⁷ The deployment of valuable Russian conventional military units (as opposed to DNR proxy forces) in the area is notable, if confirmed. Girkin, however, claimed that the situation in Marinka has not changed and continues at a sluggish pace.³⁸

Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack in western Donetsk Oblast on February 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bohoyavlenka (25km southwest of Donetsk City).³⁹ Russian sources made conflicting claims about the status of operations in this area. One milblogger claimed that fierce fighting is ongoing near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City), while other milbloggers stated that there is no active fighting in the area.⁴⁰ Girkin claimed that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Vuhledar and inflicted heavy losses.⁴¹ Odesa Military Administration Spokesman Serhiy Bratchuk shared a video on February 8 of Ukrainian forces attacking and halting a disorganized Russian mechanized column near Vuhledar.⁴²

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of February 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

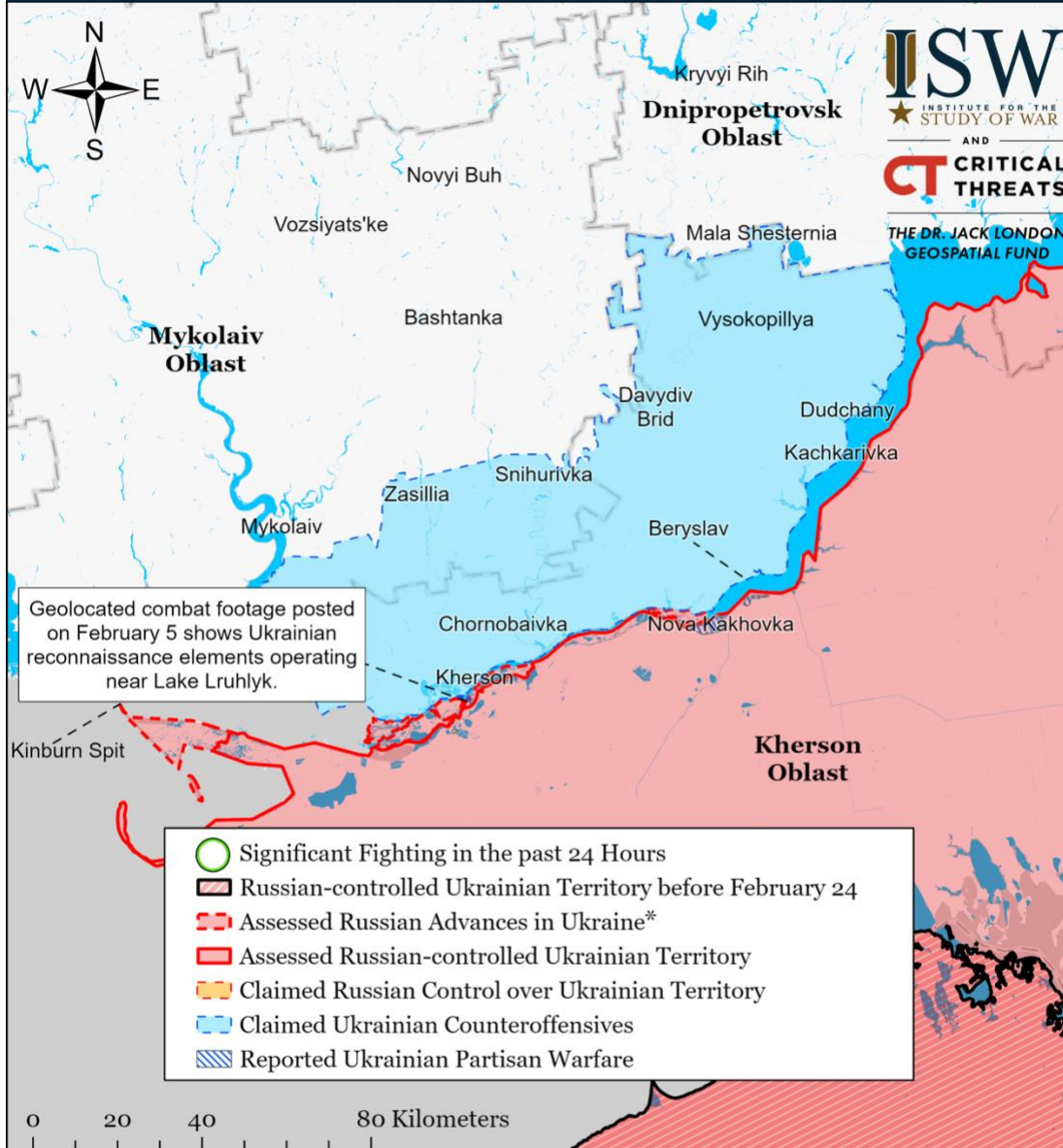


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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed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

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 8, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiehl, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 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.

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 Dniester River delta areas.

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

Russian and Ukrainian forces reportedly continued small scale skirmishes and reconnaissance activity in the Dnipro River delta and on the Kinburn Spit on February 8. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) reported that Russian forces are using small boats to try to maintain a presence on islands in the Dnipro River delta south of Kherson City and that Ukrainian forces have deployed long-range artillery to strike several Russian outposts on the islands.⁴³ The UK MoD reported that Russian and Ukrainian forces have likely deployed small groups on the Kinburn Spit in Mykolaiv Oblast, aiming to control the Dnipro Gulf.⁴⁴ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Natalia Humenyuk previously stated that Russian forces are increasing the number of reconnaissance and sabotage attempts in the area of the Dnipro River delta as part of an information operation to create a perceived threat against Kherson City.⁴⁵

Russian forces continue to construct defensive fortifications in Zaporizhia Oblast. Satellite imagery collected between January 26 and February 7 shows Russian forces expanding trench and field fortifications near Tarasivka, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁴⁶ Russian forces likely constructed these fortifications to further strengthen Russian positions along the T0401 highway between Polohy and Tokmak. Russian forces are likely establishing long defensive lines along critical grounds lines of communication (GLOCs) in Zaporizhia Oblast in preparation to defend against possible future Ukrainian counteroffensive operations along the Zaporizhia frontline. However, ISW has not observed Russian forces constructing defenses intended to halt a cross-country Ukrainian attack on a large front, and defensive positions remain limited to main roads.

Russian forces continued routine fire west of Hulyaipole and in Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Mykolaiv Oblasts on February 8.⁴⁷ Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces struck Kherson City and in the vicinity of Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast.⁴⁸

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

Russian officials continued attempts to extend social benefits held by regular Russian servicemembers to volunteer formations serving in Ukraine. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin stated on February 8 that the Russian government has prepared new measures to support volunteers, including increasing pensions and social assistance payments related to injuries and disabilities.⁴⁹ The Russian State Duma is reportedly drafting a bill to include provisions against discrediting volunteer detachments assisting the Russian military in Ukraine, as Wagner Group Financier Yevgeny Prigozhin previously demanded.⁵⁰ The Kremlin is likely pursuing efforts to more formally recognize volunteer formations in order to mitigate continued criticism of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) over the unclear status of volunteer formations.⁵¹

The Wagner Group is reportedly resorting to more coercive tactics in its campaign to recruit prisoners, possibly in response to declining numbers of recruits since autumn 2022. Independent Russian outlet *Agentstvo* reported on February 8 that Russian lawyers and human rights activists stated that Wagner Group representatives and Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs and Federal Security Service (FSB) officials are threatening prisoners in Samara and Rostov oblasts, Krasnodar Krai, and the North Caucasus with new criminal cases if they refuse to volunteer with the Wagner Group in Ukraine.⁵² One of the lawyers reportedly stated that fewer convicts have agreed to volunteer with the Wagner Group in an unspecified recent period because of information about its high casualties, supporting ISW's previous assessment that Russian

convicts' resistance may have caused a decline in the Wagner Group's prison recruitment campaign.⁵³ The Wagner Group will likely continue these more coercive practices as it seeks to replenish its forces in Ukraine with more convict recruits following months of highly attritional human wave attacks in eastern Ukraine.

Russian officials continue to promote incremental efforts to fix longstanding personnel issues associated with mobilization. Russian Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council (and head of the mobilization working group) Andrey Turchak claimed that the mobilization working group has received appeals from 22,000 Russian servicemembers and their family members since holding its first meeting on December 29, 2022, addressing issues like the incorrect accrual of payments and the wrongful mobilization of fathers with many children who should be exempt.⁵⁴ Turchak stated that the working group has heavily focused on solving poor recordkeeping issues through efforts to digitize military registration information from military recruitment offices.⁵⁵ Turchak claimed that the working group sent a report to Russian President Vladimir Putin with recommendations to establish comprehensive rehabilitation centers, a minimum set of measures to support family members, a reduced term for recognizing a Russian soldier as missing, and a guarantee for receiving pensions.⁵⁶ These proposals and efforts are likely meant primarily to placate ultranationalist figures that criticized the numerous issues associated with mobilization and hedge against further domestic discontent ahead of a likely second wave of mobilization.

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 efforts to increase connectivity between Russia and southern Ukraine. Kherson Occupation Head Vladimir Saldo claimed on February 8 that Russian occupation authorities have approved design and research works on a new highway that will run from Crimea, north of the Sea of Azov, to Rostov-on-Don, Russia.⁵⁷ Saldo also claimed that the construction of a new town in the Arabat Spit in northeast Crimea has begun.⁵⁸ ISW has previously assessed that Russian occupation authorities likely seek to increase the population in the deep rear of occupied territories to strengthen production capabilities and support logistics related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁹

Russian occupation authorities continue to lean on patronage-like partnerships with Russian federal subjects to restore infrastructure in occupied territories. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed on February 8 that he held a meeting with Sakhalin Oblast Governor Valery Limarenko in which they discussed Sakhalin Oblast's plans to help repair kindergartens, stadiums, schools, and playgrounds in occupied Shakhtarsk, Donetsk Oblast.⁶⁰ Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik held a meeting with Voronezh Oblast Governor Aleksandr Gusev on February 8 during which Gusev claimed that Voronezh Oblast hopes to develop occupied Luhansk Oblast to not only extract raw materials, but also to develop a processing industry.⁶¹ Gusev claimed that Voronezh Oblast will double the amount of aid it previously provided occupied Luhansk Oblast in 2022 to bring living standards in occupied Luhansk Oblast to those of Russia's "national" level.⁶²

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.)

Belarusian airborne forces may be conducting tactical force-on-force exercises with Russian airborne elements in Belarus. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced on February 8 that unspecified airborne infantry companies — likely of the Belarusian 38th Air Assault Brigade — conducted a force-on-force company tactical exercise at the Brest Training Ground, emphasizing using unmanned aerial vehicles, urban warfare, small unit tactics, and tactical medicine.⁶³ It is unclear if Russian airborne forces participated in this exercise. The Belarusian 38th Air Assault Brigade has historically conducted joint exercises with elements of the Russian 76th Air Assault Division, 106th Airborne Division, and the 31st Air Assault Brigade - all units that have taken casualties in Ukraine and require regeneration.⁶⁴

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. Unspecified elements of the Belarusian 19th Separate Guards Mechanized Brigade conducted tactical readiness exercises at the Lepelsky Training Ground in Vitebsk Oblast, Belarus, on February 8.⁶⁵

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.

¹ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020623>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020423>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020223>

² <https://t.me/DeepStateUA/15451>

³ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>

⁴ <https://t.me/rybar/43387>; https://t.me/notes_veterans/7845; https://t.me/russkiy_opolchenec/35783; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/37711>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/10782>; <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10725>; <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10704>; <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10706>; <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10703>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/10726>; <https://t.me/kommunist/15515>; <https://t.me/rybar/43256>; <https://t.me/rybar/43257>; https://t.me/dva_majors/8678; <https://t.me/rybar/43256>; <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10684>; <https://t.me/rybar/43220>; <https://t.me/rybar/43218>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/10658>; <https://t.me/rybar/43197>; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/76787; <https://t.me/Z4LPR/445>; <https://t.me/mOscOwcalling/18752>; https://t.me/komdiv_76/311; https://t.me/harry_homolsky/3185

⁵ <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Operations%20Assessments%20January%202023.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>

⁷ https://t.me/ostorozhno_novosti/14167

⁸ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020323>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020423>

⁹ https://t.me/ostorozhno_novosti/14167

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- ²⁰ <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/8438>
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- ²³ <https://t.me/rybar/43387>; https://t.me/notes_veterans/7845
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⁶¹https://t.me/glava_lnr_info/745; https://t.me/glava_lnr_info/748

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