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and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel**

February 21, 2025, 6:15pm 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.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of Ukraine's offensive in Kursk Oblast.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on February 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian state media and Kremlin officials appear to be leveraging select statements from US officials alongside long-standing Russian narratives to create tension between the United States and Ukraine and undermine faith in America's commitment to Ukraine.

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on February 21 that the Kremlin has ordered Russian state media personalities and other prominent voices in the Russian information space to intensify narratives aimed at creating discord in Ukrainian society and discrediting Ukraine among Western allies.[1] The GUR stated that Russian actors intend to amplify narratives falsely alleging that the West has "betrayed" Ukraine, the United States is not concerned about Europe's and Ukraine's opinions, the Ukrainian government is illegitimate, the Ukrainian military is losing on the frontline, and "corrupt people" are stealing billions of dollars of US aid from Ukraine. The GUR reported that the Kremlin is also preparing to declare "victory" over Ukraine and possibly over NATO on the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion – February 24, 2025.

ISW has recently observed Kremlin officials and prominent voices in the Russian information space amplifying these narratives and other select statements from US officials aimed at sowing discord between Ukraine and its allies.[2] ISW continues to assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin's theory of victory is built on the assumption that Russia can outlast Western support for Ukraine and that Putin is thus attempting to bring about the cessation of Western and particularly US support for Ukraine.[3] Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reported that Russian actors also intend to incite protests

in Ukraine via social media posts on February 24, 2025, and will offer to pay protestors if they attend rallies in Ukraine.[4] The SBU asked Ukrainian citizens to be cautious of Russian efforts to manipulate Ukraine's information space ahead of the third anniversary of the war.

US officials continue to reiterate their support for Ukraine and a lasting and just resolution of the war. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 20 that the United States used the recent bilateral meeting with Russian officials in Saudi Arabia to gauge Russia's interest in good faith peace negotiations and to open a communication channel between the two countries.[5] Rubio emphasized on February 18 that a war can only end when "everyone involved" in the war — which Rubio explicitly defined as including Ukraine, Russia, and US partners in Europe — is "okay with" and accepts the end agreement.[6] Rubio reiterated on February 16 that Trump wants to see the war end in a way that "protects Ukraine's sovereignty," and US Special Presidential Envoy for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg stated on February 15 that Russia must make territorial concessions during negotiations.[7]

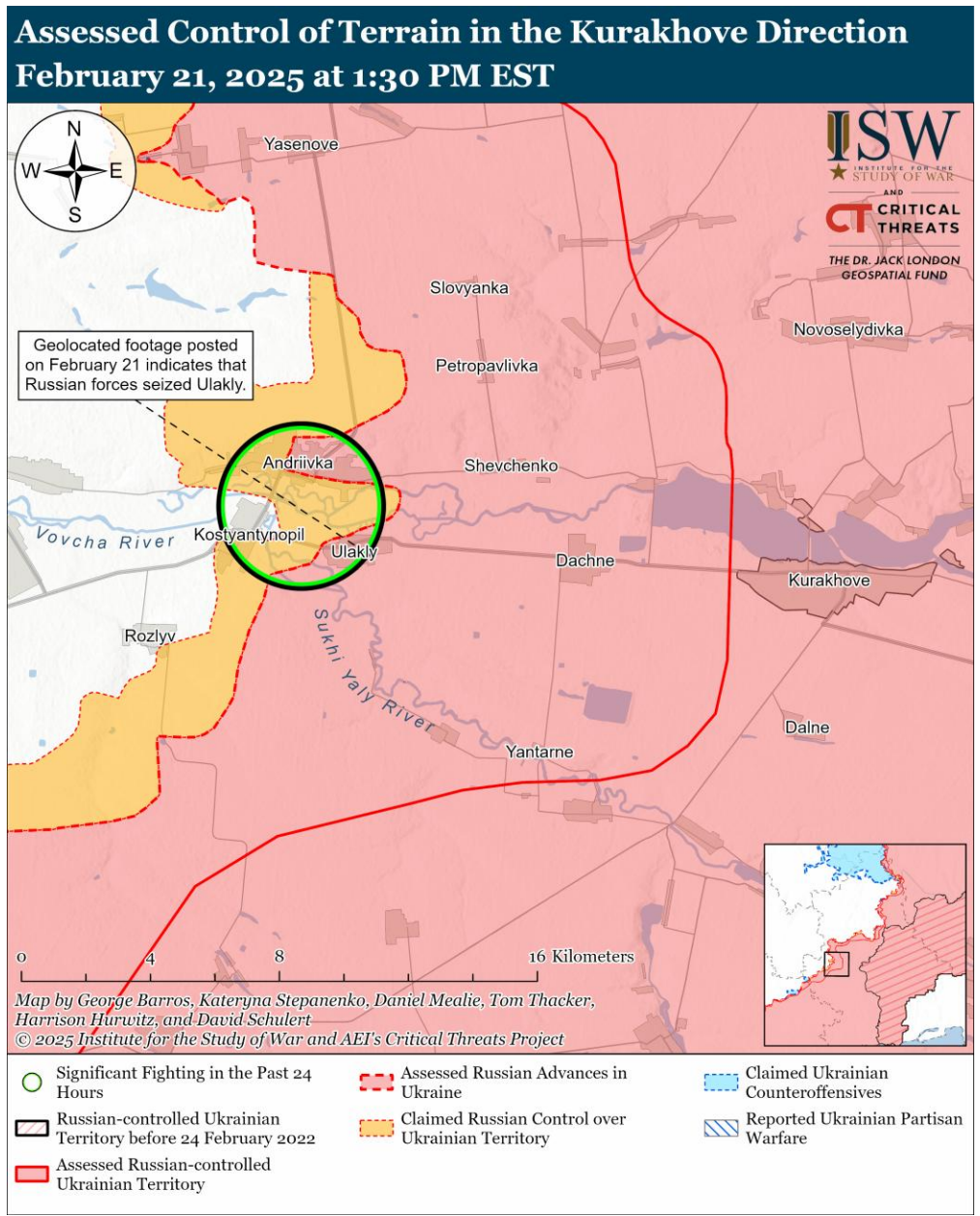
Russian forces recently eliminated the Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove amid continued reports that the Russian military is redeploying elements of the Russian Southern Military District's (SMD) 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk direction. Geolocated footage published on February 21 indicates that Russian forces — reportedly elements of the 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps [AC], Eastern Military District [EMD]) — seized Ulakly (west of Kurakhove) and likely closed the Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove.[8] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced within central Kostyantynopil (west of Kurakhove) from the south.[9] Russian forces continued attacking west of Kurakhove near Andriivka, Ulakly, and Kostyantynopil on February 20 and 21 as part of ongoing efforts to leverage the seizure of Kurakhove and Dachne (west of Kurakhove) to level the frontline west of the settlements.[10] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces' main objective in the Kurakhove direction was to level the frontline and create more defensible positions west of Kurakhove and that Russian forces would not redeploy forces from the Kurakhove direction until Russian forces achieved their objectives in the area.[11] Russian forces appear close to leveling the frontline in western Donetsk Oblast and are reportedly working to redeploy elements of two formations from this area.

ISW recently observed reports that the Russian military command redeployed elements of the 20th and 150th motorized rifle divisions (both of the 8th CAA, SMD) to the Toretsk and eastern Pokrovsk directions, and Russian servicemen in the 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA, 1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] AC, SMD) operating near Toretsk claimed on February 18 that elements of the 103rd Motorized Rifle Regiment and 163rd Tank Regiment (both of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA) recently redeployed to the area.[12]

The Russian military command likely began redeploying elements of the 8th CAA as Russian forces began closing the Kurakhove pocket and aligning the frontline between the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions in Winter 2024-2025 by pushing west from the Yasenove-Andriivka (northwest and west of Kurakhove) line and north from Zelenivka (southwest of Kurakhove). Russian forces have likely freed up some forces of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division from the Kurakhove direction to redeploy to the Toretsk direction by evening out the frontline west of Kurakhove and are likely prioritizing pressuring Kostyantynivka (northwest of Toretsk) - the southernmost point of Ukraine's "fortress belt" in Donetsk

Oblast. ISW has observed elements of the 90th Tank Division (41st CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) attacking toward Andriivka from the west and northwest since at least the beginning of January 2025.[13]

The Russian military will likely continue attacking in the Kurakhove direction from the east with elements of the 41st CAA (CMD) and from the southeast with elements of the EMD thereby allowing 8th CAA (SMD) elements to redeploy to other areas of the frontline.

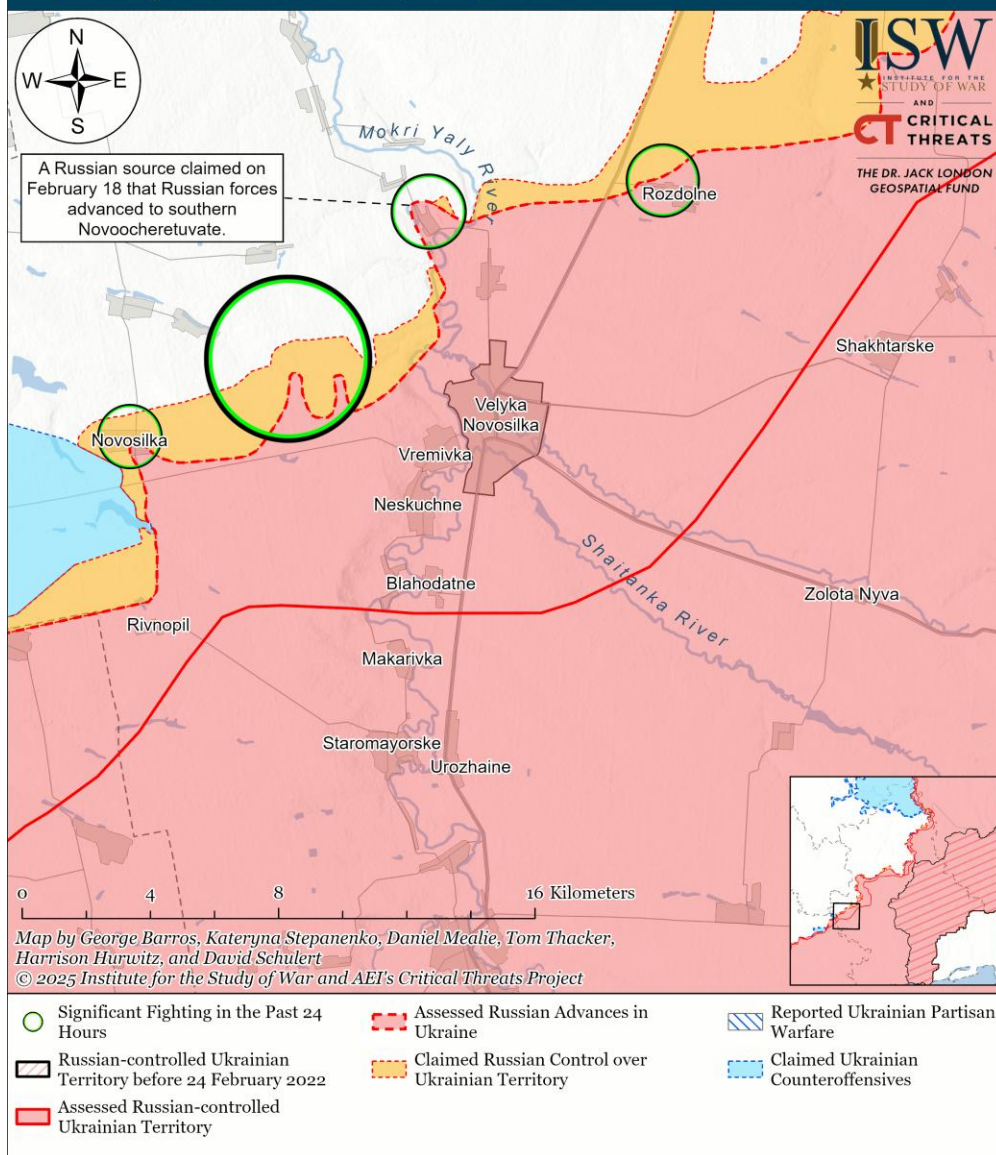


Russian forces are attempting to leverage the seizure of Velyka Novosilka to advance further north of the settlement toward the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border. Russian forces recently reintensified offensive operations northeast, north, and west of Velyka Novosilka after temporarily pausing attacks in these areas for several weeks after

Russian forces seized Velyka Novosilka in late January 2025.[14] Geolocated footage published on February 20 indicates that Russian forces seized Novoocheretuvate (northwest of Velyka Novosilka) after recently crossing the Mokri Yaly River.[15] The Russian Ministry of Defense [MoD] claimed on February 21 that elements of the Russian 5th Tank Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) played a crucial role in crossing the Mokri Yaly River and seizing the settlement.[16] Russian forces may have exploited a dry patch of the Mokri Yaly River near Novoocheretuvate to advance into the settlement, as ISW previously assessed that the Mokri Yaly River could pose a significant challenge for Russian forces.[17] ISW previously assessed that the Russian military command could either redeploy most of the EMD to another sector of the frontline or opt to retain elements of the EMD in the Velyka Novosilka direction and continue advancing toward the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary.[18]

Russian forces have also intensified offensive operations on Velyka Novosilka's northeastern and western flanks. A Russian milblogger published footage on February 21 purportedly showing elements of the Russian 57th Mechanized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, EMD) conducting a reinforced platoon-sized mechanized assault near Novosilka (west of Velyka Novosilka), and Russian forces recently conducted a battalion-sized mechanized assault near Bahatyr (west of Kurakhove and northeast of Velyka Novosilka).[19] Another Russian milblogger claimed on February 20 that elements of the Russian 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, EMD) recently penetrated Ukrainian defenses north of Vremivka (west of Velyka Novosilka) and seized several strongholds in the area.[20] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recently advanced west of Velyka Novosilka and east and south of Novosilka, but ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims.[21] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are using armored vehicles and electronic warfare (EW) systems to support Russian infantry attacking near Novosilka, and another milblogger claimed that Russian forces are leveraging lowlands with distanced shelters and windbreaks to advance between settlements in the area.[22] Another Russian milblogger claimed on February 20 that Russian forces are attacking Skudne (northwest of Novoocheretuvate) and in the direction of Burlatske and Pryvilne (northwest and west of Velyka Novosilka).[23] The milblogger noted that the Russian military command is attempting to penetrate areas of weakness along Ukraine's defensive line and advance near the border of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Velyka Novosilka Direction February 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Ukrainian officials continue to highlight the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) through significant expansion in the domestic production of key military equipment. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced on February 21 that Ukrainian forces have tripled domestic artillery production, increased armored personnel carrier production fivefold, and doubled the output of anti-tank weapons.[24] Shmyhal noted that Ukraine's ammunition production has grown 2.5 times and drone manufacturing has surged tenfold between January 2024 and January 2025. Shmyhal stated that Ukraine currently produces about one-third of its weapons domestically and is actively working to increase this share and that Ukraine is allocating an additional 7.9 billion hryvnia (about \$189 million) to boost drone production in 2025.

Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov also stated on February 21 that 19 Ukrainian companies joined the Ukrainian defense innovation platform Brave1 to support the

production of short and medium-range missiles as well as ballistic missiles.[25] Fedorov added that the Brave1 platform will also create a separate grant program to support the development and production of explosives and gunpowder for Ukrainian forces.[26]

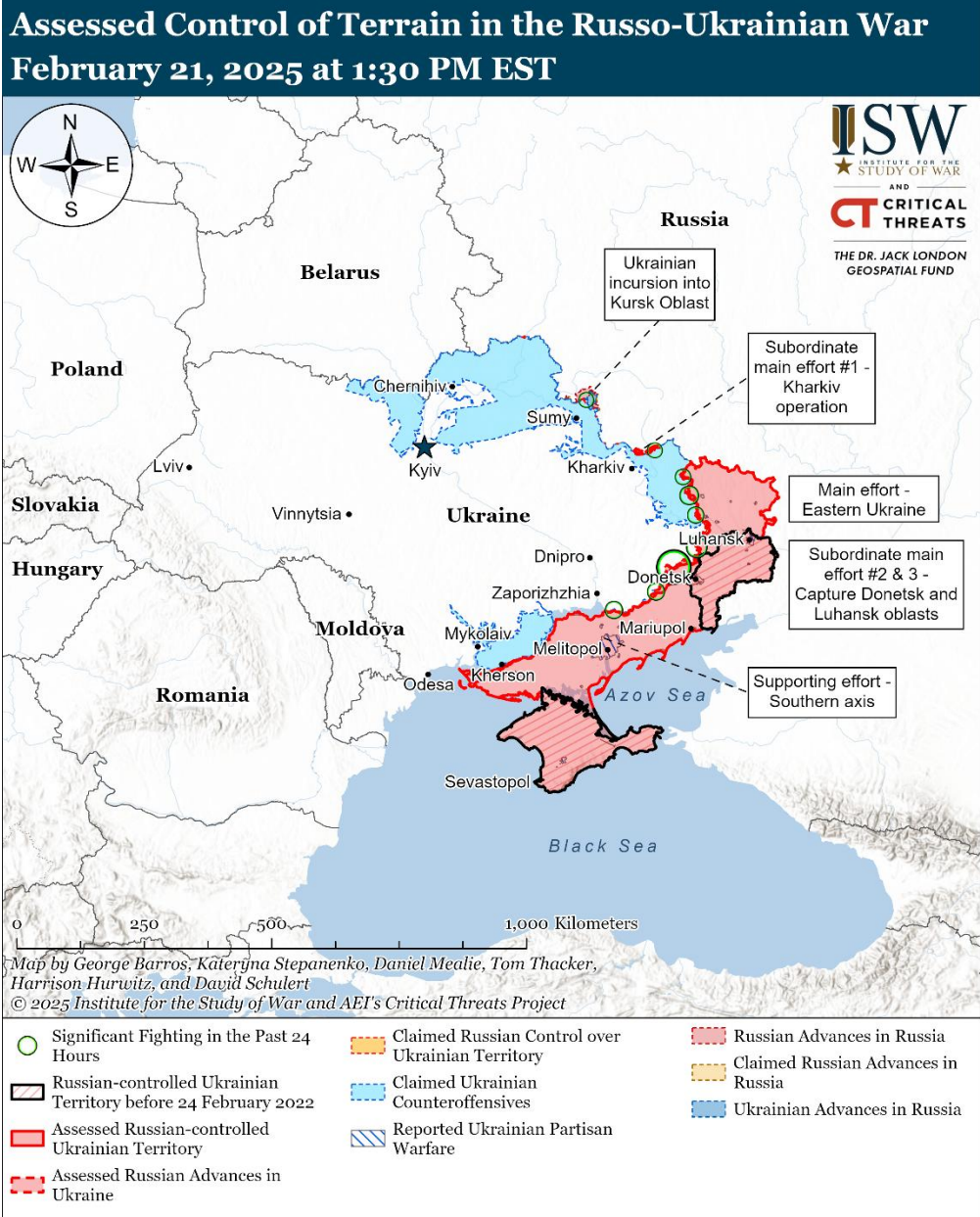
Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced on February 20 the launch of the new State Rear Operator (DOT)-Chain System model of efficiently delivering drones to Ukrainian forces on the frontline.[27] The DOT-Chain System expedites drone delivery through forecasting orders and better informs Ukrainian DIB companies of upcoming drone requirements. ISW assesses that such enhancement of Ukraine's DIB – in part through continued Western support – is part of a continued plan to create a sustainable basis for Ukraine to be able to defend itself over the long term with dramatically reduced foreign military assistance.[28]

Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) Commander Sergei Pinchuk to the rank of Admiral and Eastern Group of Forces Commander Andrei Ivanayev to the rank of Colonel General on February 21.[29] Pinchuk's promotion may be reflective of recent Russian efforts to restructure Russia's peacetime military administrative control over military services. Putin signed a decree on February 5 revoking Russian military districts' "interservice status" and removing naval and Aerospace Forces (VKS) units from subordination to Russian military districts.[30]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian state media and Kremlin officials appear to be leveraging select statements from US officials alongside long-standing Russian narratives to create tension between the United States and Ukraine and undermine faith in America's commitment to Ukraine.**
- **US officials continue to reiterate their support for Ukraine and a lasting and just resolution of the war.**
- **Russian forces recently eliminated the Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove amid continued reports that the Russian military is redeploying elements of the Russian Southern Military District's (SMD) 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk direction.**
- **Russian forces are attempting to leverage the seizure of Velyka Novosilka to advance further north of the settlement toward the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border.**
- **Ukrainian officials continue to highlight the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) through significant expansion in the domestic production of key military equipment.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) Commander Sergei Pinchuk to the rank of Admiral and Eastern Group of Forces Commander Andrei Ivanayev to the rank of Colonel General on February 21.**

- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kurakhove and Velyka Novosilka and in Kursk Oblast.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is reportedly falsely designating former penal recruits as having abandoned their units without authorization (SOCH) to avoid paying them amid continued indicators that Russian authorities are concerned about the war's strain on the Russian economy.**



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these 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 the Ukrainian population and

specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

- Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of three subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Significant Activity in Belarus

Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation

Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast. Russian forces continued attacking northwest of Sudzha near Pogrebki, Lebedevka, Nikolskiy, Nikolayevo-Darino, and Sverdlikovo and south of Sudzha near Guyevo on February 21.[31] A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Sverdlikovo and Guyevo.[32]

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on February 21 indicates that Russian forces advanced in southern Sverdlikovo.[33]

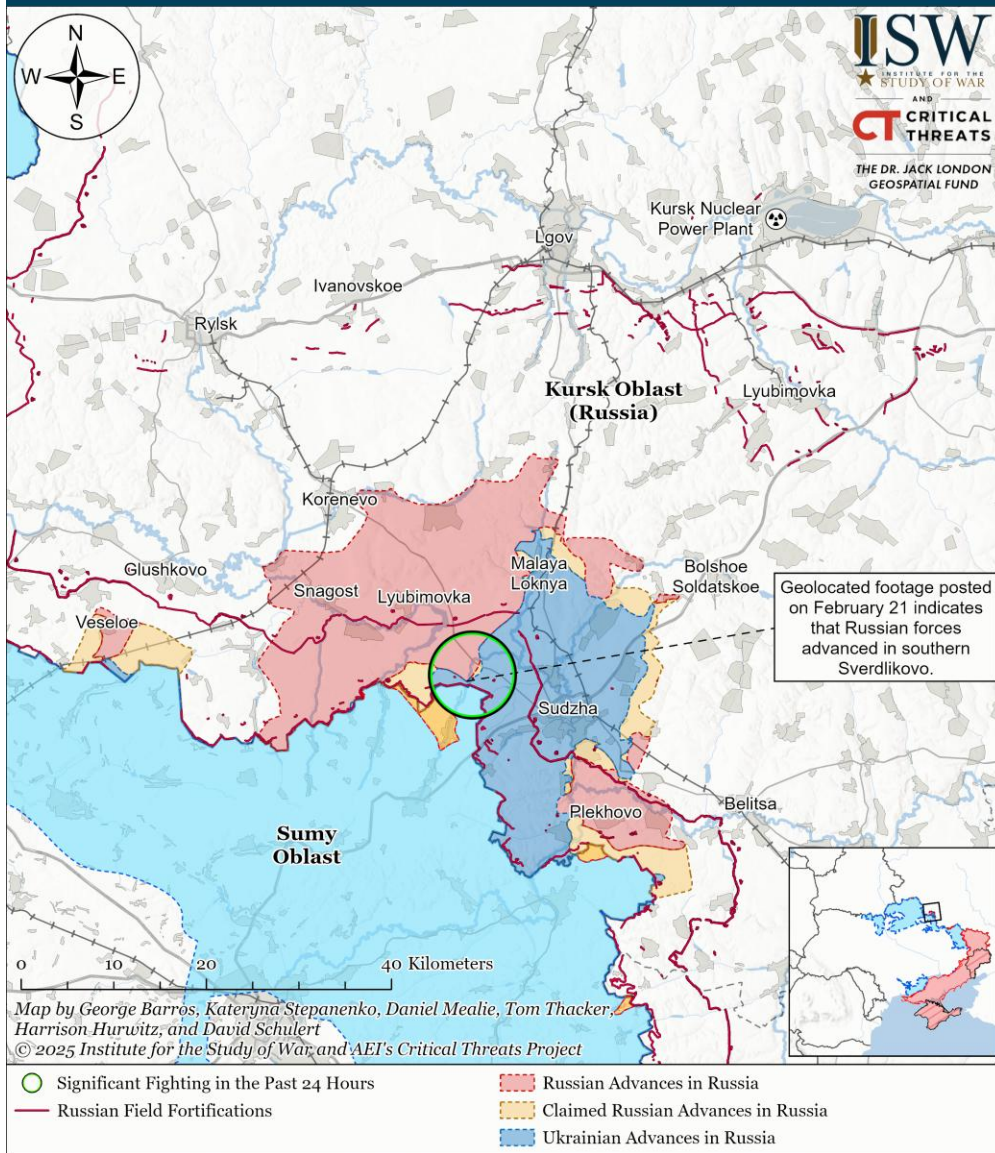
Unconfirmed Russian-claimed advances: The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed on February 21 that Russian forces seized Sverdlikovo.[34] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced southeast of Sudzha near the western outskirts of Cherkasskaya Konopelka and Fanaseyevka.[35] Russian milbloggers continued to claim that Russian forces crossed the Sumy-Kursk Oblast international border and that fighting is ongoing near Novenke and Basivka (northwest of Sudzha) in Sumy Oblast and reached the H07 Yunakivka-Sudzha road.[36]

Ukrainian Northern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vadym Mysnyk reported on February 21 that small Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups continue operating on the international border near Kursk Oblast but that Ukrainian forces repel these groups.[37]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on February 21 that Russian civilians have sent 29 percent more requests in January 2025 presumably than in December 2024 to find relatives operating in Kursk Oblast to the Ukrainian "I Want to Find" initiative, which identifies killed or captured Russian soldiers.[38] The GUR reported that most requests are about the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), 155th and 40th naval infantry brigades (both Pacific Fleet); 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment (144th Motorized Rifle Division, 20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]); 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]); 9th Motorized Rifle Regiment (18th Motorized Rifle Division, 11th AC, LMD); 51st Airborne (VDV) Regiment (106th VDV Division); 234th VDV Regiment (76th VDV Division); and 11th and 83rd VDV brigades.[39]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th AC, LMD), and elements of the 22nd Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff Main Directorate [GRU]) reportedly continue to operate in Kursk Oblast.[40]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Kursk Direction February 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



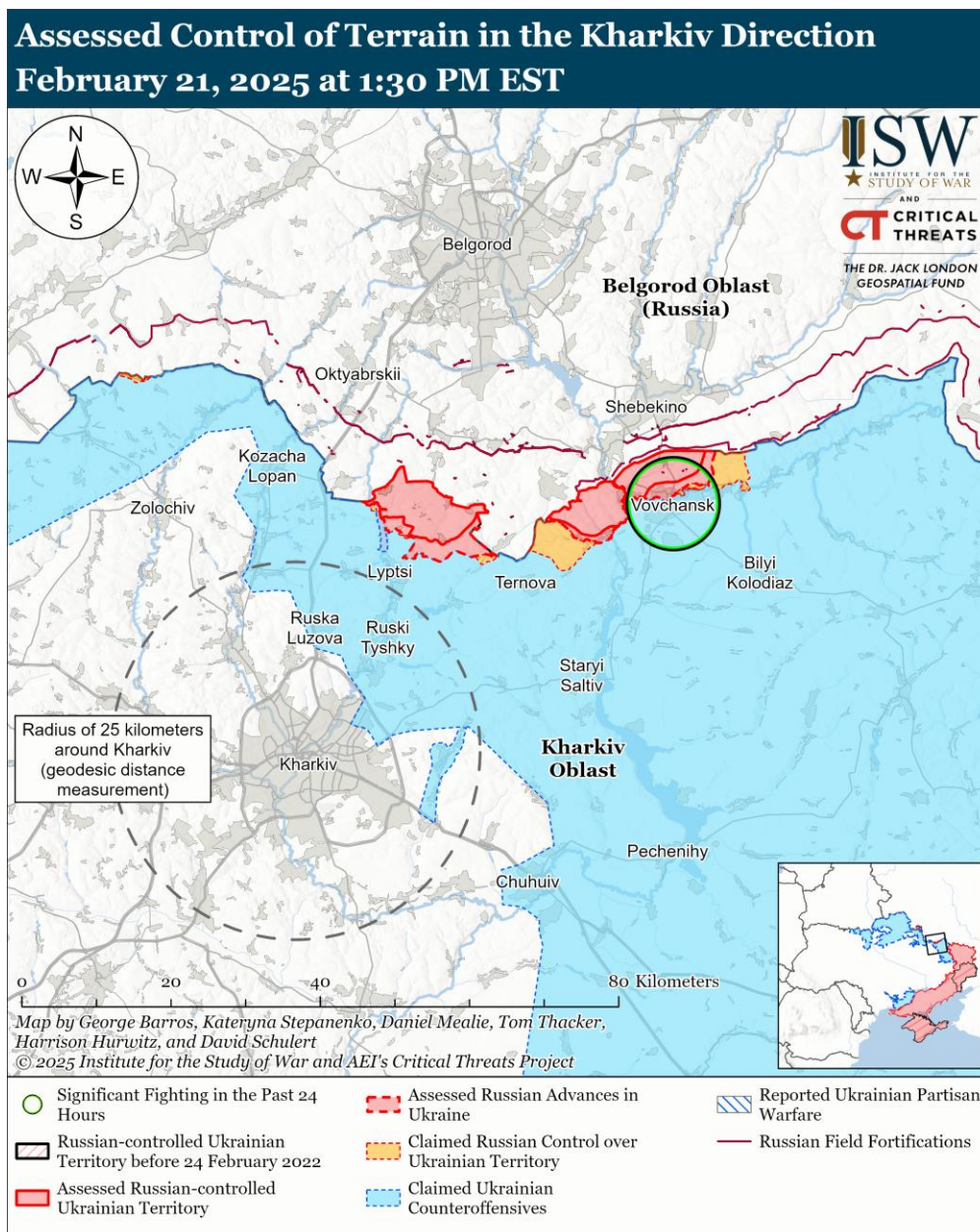
Ukrainian forces reportedly struck an electrical substation and oil pumping station near Novovelichkovskaya, Krasnodar Krai overnight on February 20 to 21. The Krasnodar Krai Operational Headquarters claimed on February 20 that falling drone debris damaged an electrical substation in Dinsky Raion.[41] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian drones hit the Novovelichkovskaya oil pumping station and electrical substation and that some drones also targeted the Sloviansk-on-Kuban oil refinery but did not strike it.[42] Russian and Ukrainian sources claimed that Russian forces downed 19 Ukrainian drones targeting fuel and energy infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai overnight.[43]

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Kharkiv Oblast (Russian objective: Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City)

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Kharkiv direction on February 21 but did not advance. Russian forces conducted offensive operations north of Kharkiv City near Lyptsi and northeast of Kharkiv City near Vovchansk on February 20 and 21.[44] A Russian milblogger claimed on February 21 that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Vovchansk.[45]

Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Yevhen Romanov stated on February 21 that snowy and freezing weather conditions are impairing Russian drone operations.[46]



Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Kupyansk direction on February 21 but did not make confirmed advances. Russian forces continued attacking north of Kupyansk near Zapadne and east of Kupyansk near Petropavlivka.[47]

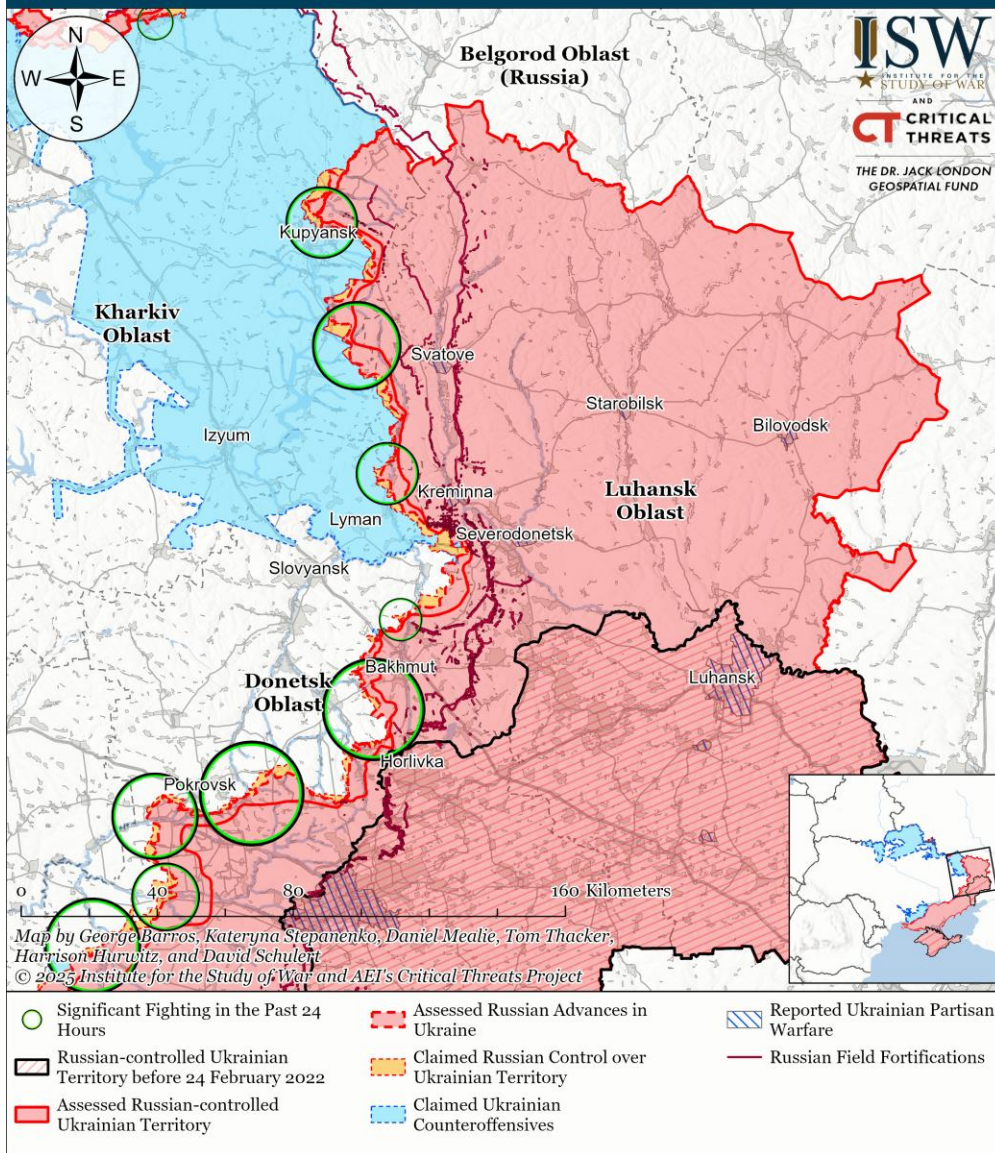
Unconfirmed Russian-claimed advances: A Russian milblogger claimed on February 21 that Russian forces have seized most of Topoli (north of Kupyansk near the international border) and advanced southwest of Orlyanske (southeast of Kupyansk) and west of Zapadne.[48]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Borova direction on February 21 but did not advance. Russian forces continued attacking northeast of Borova near Zahryzove and east of Borova near Kopanky on February 20 and 21.[49] Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces published footage on February 21 of Ukrainian forces repelling at least a reinforced platoon-sized Russian mechanized assault towards Lozova (northeast of Borova) and stated that Ukrainian forces destroyed four infantry fighting vehicles.[50]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 27th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Guards Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) are reportedly operating near Lozova, and elements of the 12th Tank Regiment (4th Tank Division, 1st GTA, MMD) are reportedly operating near Zelenyi Hai (east of Borova).[51]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Lyman direction on February 21 but did not make confirmed advances. Russian forces continued attacking northeast of Lyman near Terny, Yampolivka, Novolyubivka, and Kolodyazi on February 20 and 21.[52]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Luhansk Oblast February 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



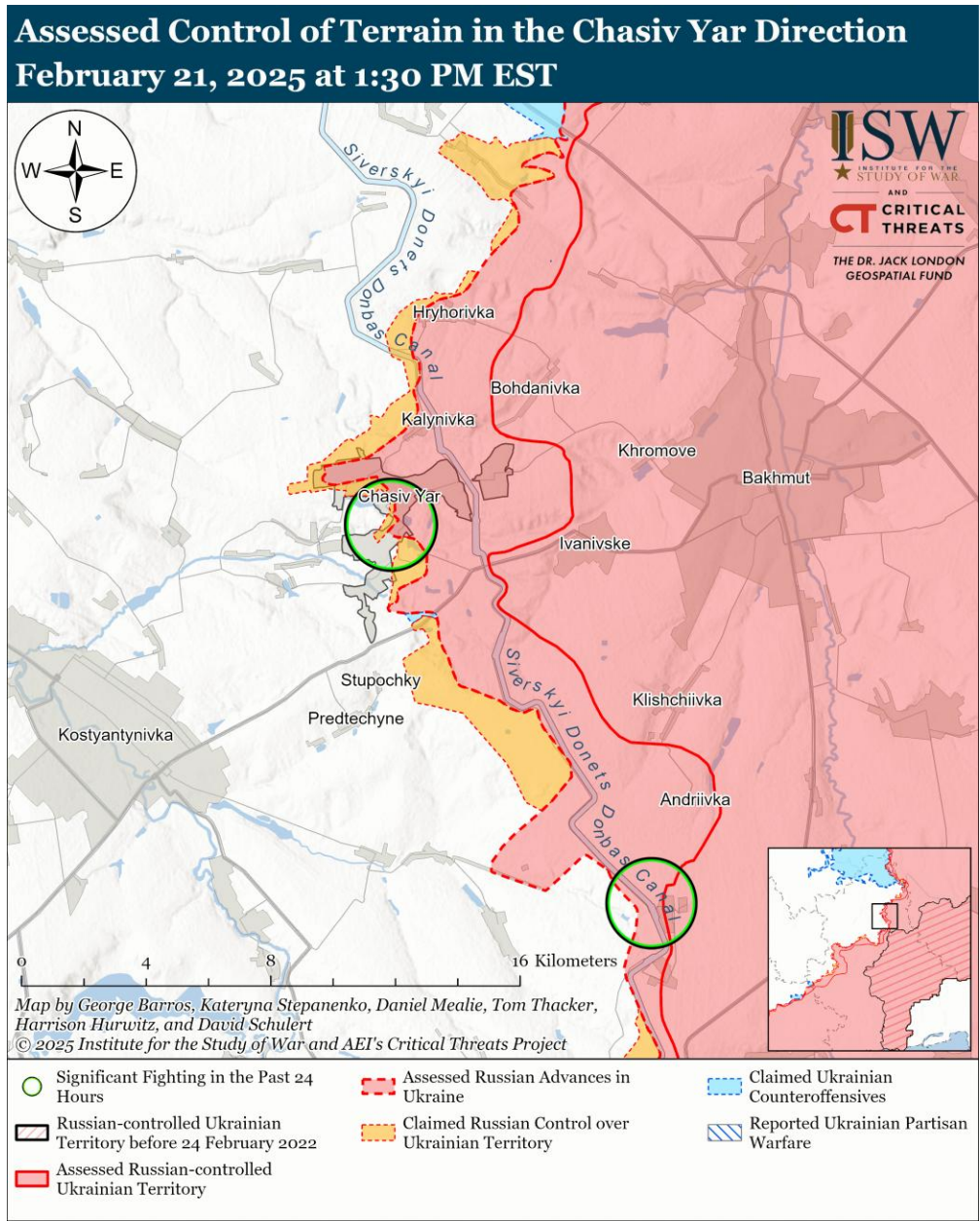
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Siversk direction on February 21 but did not advance. Russian forces continued attacking northeast of Siversk near Bilohorivka on February 20 and 21.[53]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Chasiv Yar direction on February 21 but did not advance. Russian forces continued attacking near and within Chasiv Yar, north of Chasiv Yar near Hryhorivka, and northeast of Chasiv Yar near Vasyukivka on February 20 and 21.[54]

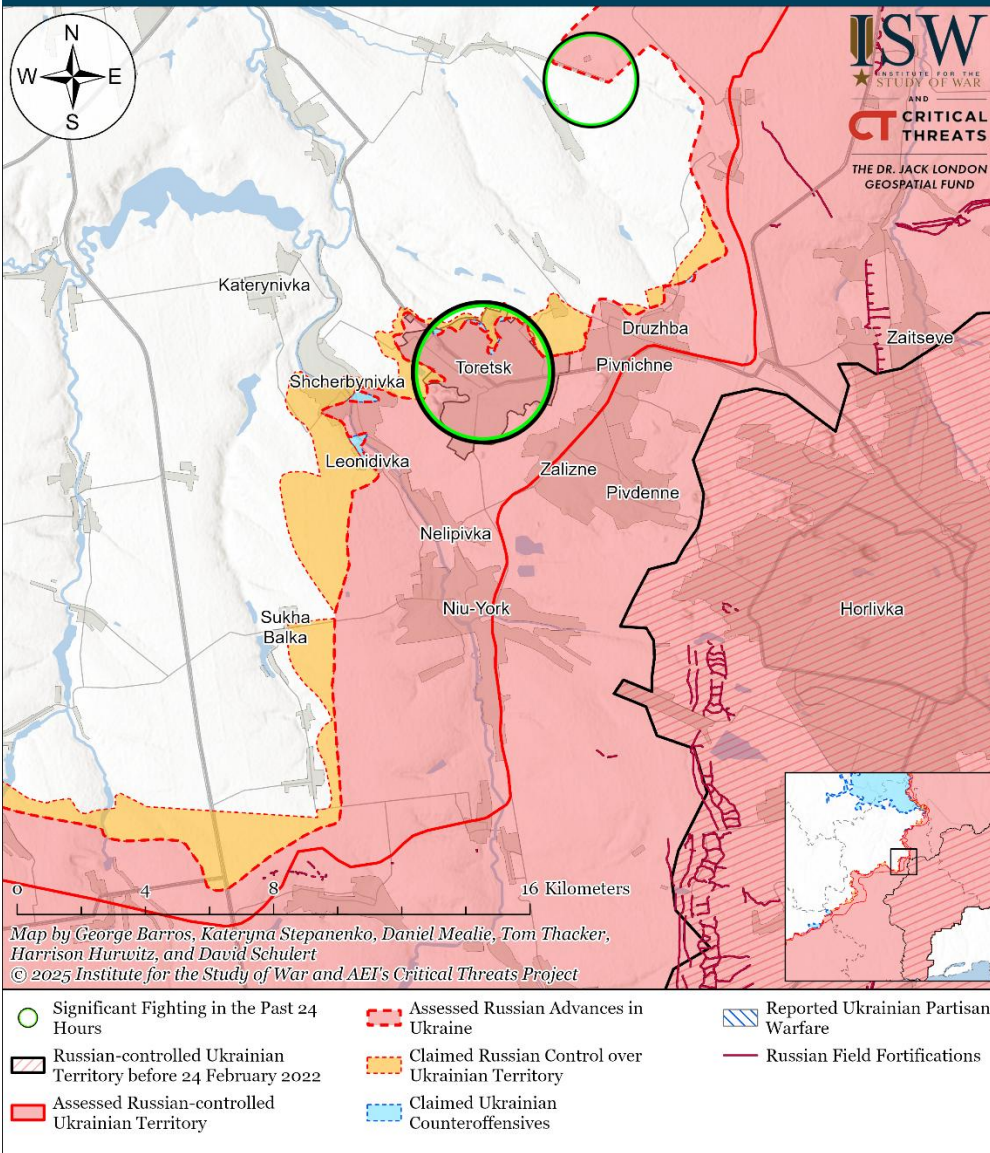
Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 27th Artillery Regiment (6th Motorized Rifle Division, 3rd Army Corps [AC]) are reportedly operating in the Kostyantynivka direction.[55] Elements of the

Russian "Nevsky" Volunteer Reconnaissance-Assault Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps) are reportedly operating near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (northeast of Chasiv Yar).[56]



Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Toretsk direction on February 21 but did not advance. Russian forces continued attacking near Toretsk and north of Toretsk near Dyllivka on February 20 and 21.[57]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Toretsk Direction February 21, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



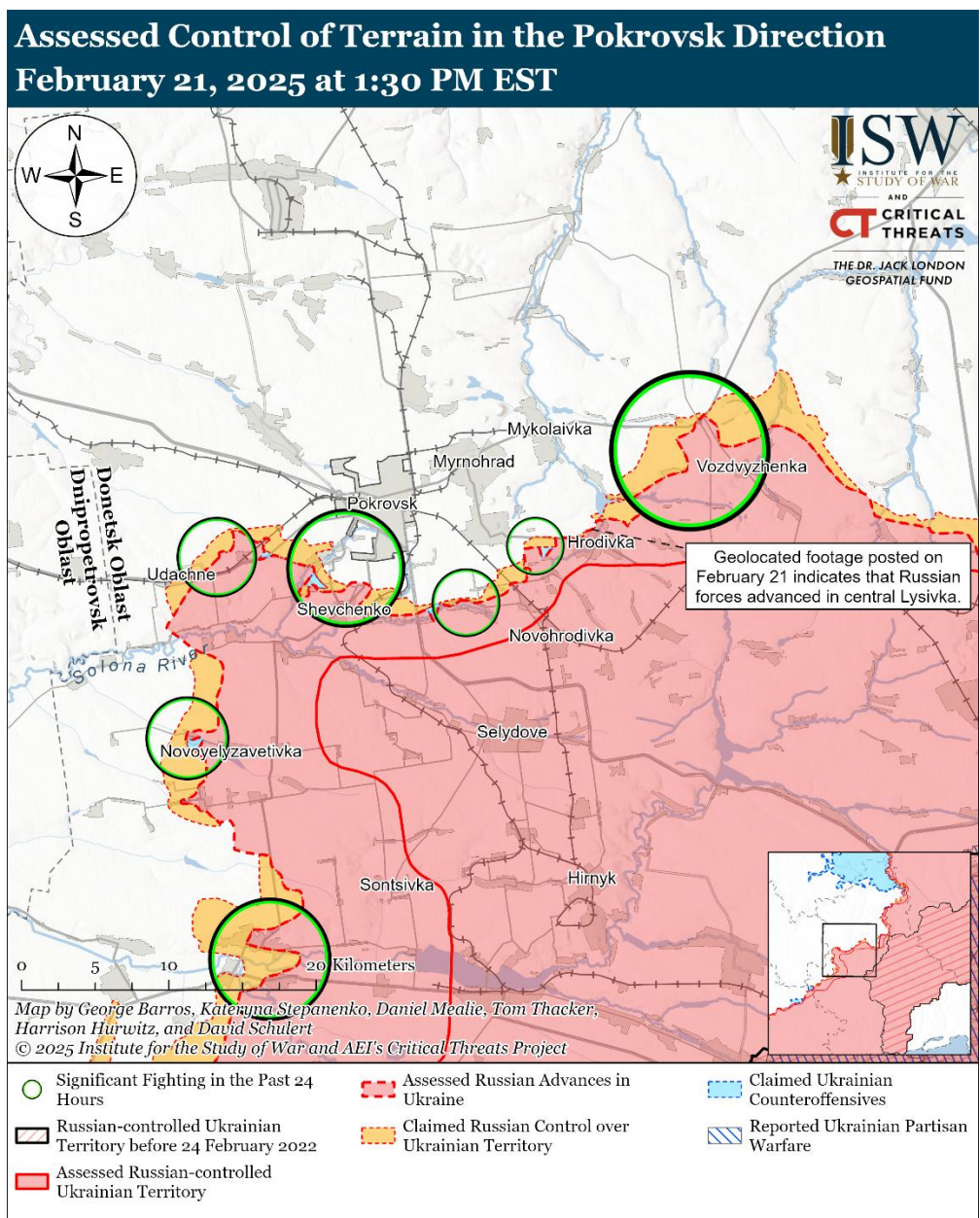
Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk. Russian forces continued attacks near Pokrovsk itself; east of Pokrovsk near Vodyane Druhe, Yelyzavetivka, Svyrydonivka, and Promin; southeast of Pokrovsk near Lysivka; south of Pokrovsk near Pishchane; and southwest of Pokrovsk near Udache, Serhiivka, Nadiivka, Preobrazhenka, Bohdanivka, and Sribne on February 20 and 21.[58] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Zaporizhzhia and Preobrazhenka (both southwest of Pokrovsk).[59]

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on February 21 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in central Lysivka (southeast of Pokrovsk).[60]

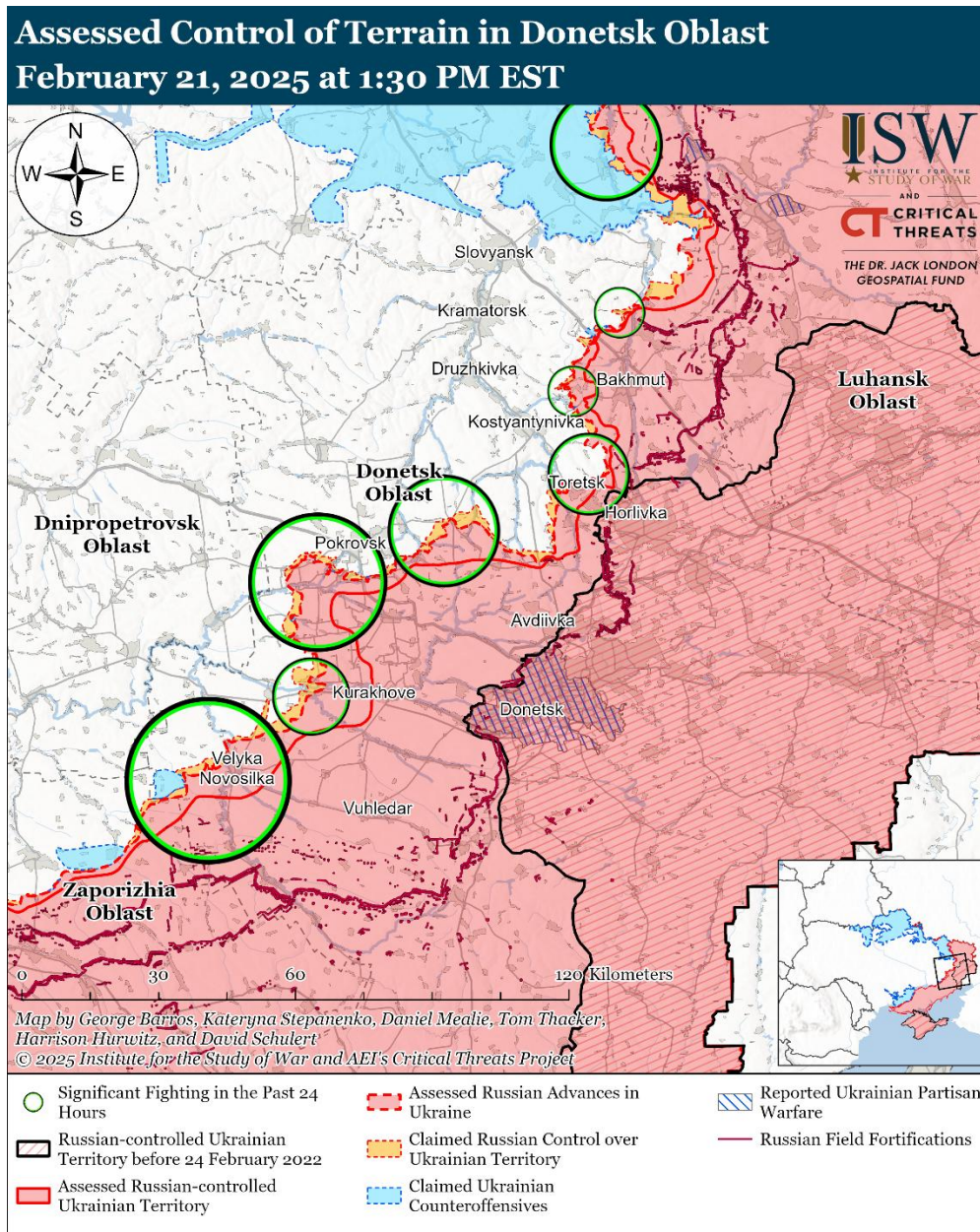
Unconfirmed Russian-claimed advances: The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on February 21 that Russian forces seized Nadiivka, and a Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian

6th and 239th tank regiments (both of the 90th Tank Division, 41st Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) are advancing near Nadiivka.[61] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced east of Kotlyne, south of Udachne, south of Yasenove, within central Preobrazhenka, and north of Zaporizhzhia (all southwest of Pokrovsk).[62]

Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov stated on February 21 that Russian forces are struggling to advance near Pokrovsk and will likely have to transfer additional units to this area and reconstitute units already in the area to make further gains in this direction.[63] The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions stated that Russian forces are using tanks and infantry fighting vehicles in the area and are often attacking in single columns with little space between vehicles.[64] The spokesperson noted that this method of attack makes the Russian tanks and armored vehicles more vulnerable to Ukrainian drone strikes.



See topline text for updates in the Kurakhove and Velyka Novosilka directions.

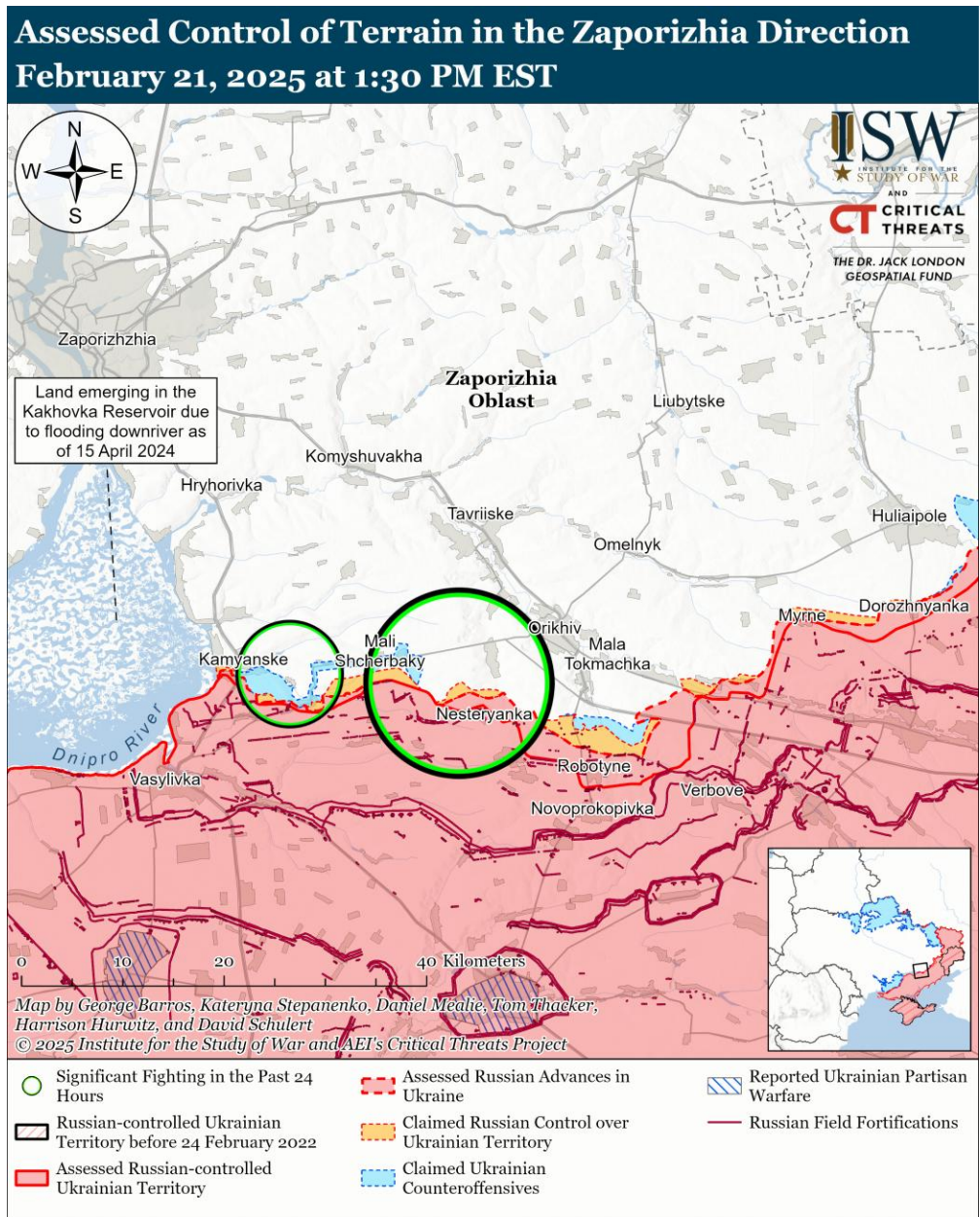


Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on February 21 but did not make any confirmed advances. Russian forces conducted offensive operations northwest of Robotyne near Shcherbaky, Stepove, Novoandriivka, and Pyatykhatky on February 20 and 21.[65] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Pyatykhatky and Kamyanske (northwest of Robotyne).[66]

Unconfirmed Russian-claimed advances: A Russian milblogger reiterated claims that Russian forces seized half of Pyatykhatky.[67]

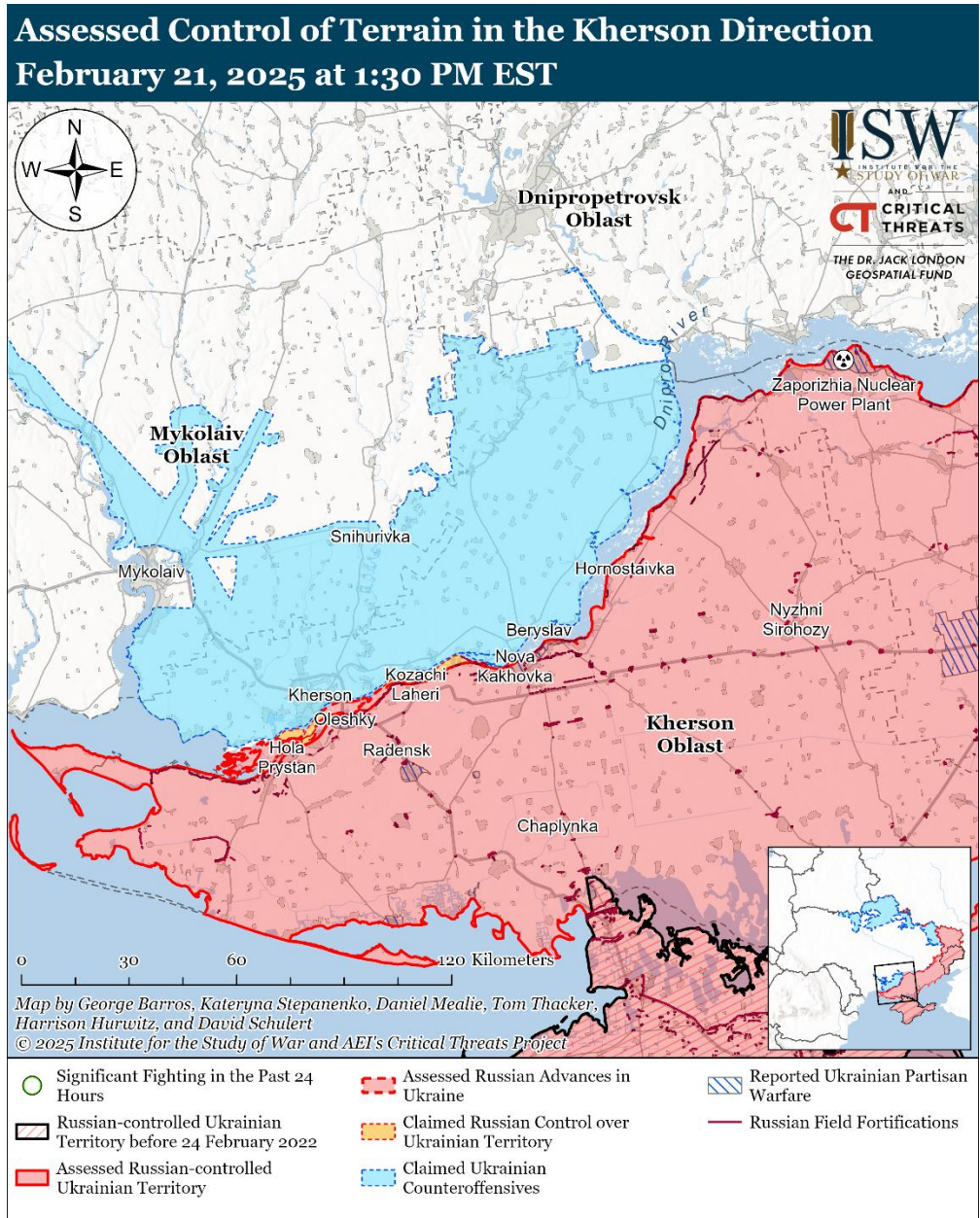
Order of Battle: Artillery elements of the Russian 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly striking targets in the Orikhiv direction; drone operators of the Russian 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD) are reportedly striking targets near Robotyne; drone operators of the Russian 1455th Motorized Rifle Regiment's (reportedly of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD) "Shaman" detachment are reportedly striking targets near Novoandriivka; and elements of the Russian 19th Motorized Rifle Division (58th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating near Pyatykhatky.[68]



Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command reported on February 21 that Ukrainian forces recently destroyed a Russian Buk-M3 air defense system in southern Ukraine.[69]

Neither Ukrainian nor Russian sources reported ground activity in the Kherson direction on February 21.

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian 3rd Company “Night Witches” (BARS-Sarmat Detachment, Russian Combat Army Reserve) are reportedly striking targets on the right bank of the Dnipro River.[70]



Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign (Russian Objective: Target Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure in the rear and on the frontline)

Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of February 20 to 21. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched two Iskander-M/Kn-23 ballistic missiles from occupied Crimea towards Odesa Oblast and launched 160 Shahed and decoy

drones from the directions of Oryol, Bryansk, and Kursk cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; and Shatalovo, Smolensk Oblast.[71] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 87 drones over Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts; that 70 decoy drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference; and that Russian strikes damaged Odesa, Kyiv, Poltava, and Kharkiv oblasts. Ukrainian sources reported that Russian drones and glide bombs damaged civilian infrastructure and an industrial facility in Kyiv, Poltava, and Kharkiv oblasts.[72]

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

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is reportedly falsely designating former penal recruits as having abandoned their units without authorization (SOCH) to avoid paying them amid continued indicators that Russian authorities are concerned about the war's strain on the Russian economy.[73] Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on February 20 that Russia designated at least 32 penal recruits of military unit 95378, the 1437th Motorized Rifle Regiment (15th Motorized Rifle Brigade, 2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) as SOCH since October 2024, including personnel pulled from the frontline, beaten in punishment "pits," transported to unknown locations, and killed in action.[74] (ISW has observed reports that elements of the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade have been fighting in the Pokrovsk direction since intensified offensive operations in Fall 2024).[75]

Verstka reported that the families of the missing soldiers wrote an appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin for assistance in removing the false SOCH designations. *Verstka* reported that some relatives have filed complaints against the 1437th Motorized Rifle Regiment's Acting Chief of Staff Captain Sergei Betonov, who reportedly admitted to relatives that former prisoners were assigned the SOCH status due to an "internal directive" from the MoD. Betonov reportedly told the relatives that his unit designates all penal recruits as SOCH when they perform combat missions and does not remove the designation until the soldiers return from combat. *Verstka* noted that the relatives believe the Russian MoD does not want to pay them, as relatives can petition Russian courts to redesignate "missing" or "lost" soldiers as "dead" to receive social benefits afforded to relatives of dead soldiers.

ISW has frequently observed reports indicating that Russian penal units sustain especially high casualties in attritional, infantry assaults, and the Russian military likely aims to reduce the high monetary costs associated with these high casualty rates.[76] A Russian milblogger claimed on February 20 that a Russian penal recruit currently in detention in occupied Donetsk Oblast claimed that only 30 personnel of his 240-person unit remained after a month of combat operations due to high casualties.[77] The milblogger claimed that "Storm" penal recruit units regularly are completely restaffed within one or two months.

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to highlight Russian military units fighting in Kursk Oblast to obscure the role of North Korean forces, as well as to highlight units accused of committing war crimes. Putin awarded the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade with the honorific name "Kursk" on February 21.[78] Putin previously lauded the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade in November 2024 as part of continued efforts to gloss over North Korean forces' participation in combat operations in Kursk Oblast.[79] The 155th Naval Infantry Brigade is implicated in at least two instances of beheadings and summary executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Kursk Oblast in October 2024.[80]

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Russia service *Radio Svoboda* reported on February 21 that it gained access to data from the Russian MoD's Main Military Medical Directorate and determined that Russian forces have suffered at least 166,000 wounded who were treated in military hospitals from January 2022 to mid-June 2024.

Radio Svoboda reported that the Russian military units that have suffered the most wounded personnel between February 2022 and June 2024 include the 252nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (3rd Motorized Rifle Division, 20th CAA, Moscow Military District [MMD]), 70th and 71st motorized rifle regiments (both 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]), 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd CAA, CMD), and 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA, CMD). *Radio Svoboda* reported that the 76th Airborne (VDV) Division had the most wounded of the VDV, as its 104th, 234th, and 237th VDV regiments suffered a combined 2,400 wounded from February 2022 to June 2024, while the 98th VDV Division sustained the second most wounded with over 1,300, including 800 just from its 331st VDV Regiment including 60 officers. *Radio Svoboda* reported that the Russian General Staff Main Directorate (GRU) units that suffered the most losses in this period were the 10th and 22nd Spetsnaz brigades.

Radio Svoboda noted that this data only includes Russian soldiers transported to rear military hospitals, also includes those treated in hospitals for injuries and illnesses unrelated to the war and does not include instances when a Russian soldier was treated several times. *Radio Svoboda* noted that Russian officers sustained higher casualty rates until roughly July 2022 as the Russian military had formed effective communications and moved command posts farther from the frontline following Ukraine's introduction of HIMARS to the battlefield in June 2022.

Russian Technological Adaptations (Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)

Russia's ruling United Russia party announced on February 21 that Russia's Center for Unmanned Systems Technologies has developed its first drone detection system based on artificial intelligence (AI), the Titan, and will test it in late February 2025.[81] United Russia claimed that the Titan has a laser with a three-kilometer range and a 24-barrel and 12-gauge turret. The Titan reportedly will first attempt to disable drones with electronic warfare (EW) before downing drones kinetically.

Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

ISW is not publishing coverage of activities in Russian-occupied areas today.

Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks)

Nothing significant to report.

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western

reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

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