

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 27, 2023

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December 27, 2023, 6:30pm 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.

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 1pm ET on December 27. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian drone footage published on December 27 showed another Russian execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) near Robotyne in western Zaporizhia Oblast.

[1] The geolocated video shows Russian servicemen shooting three Ukrainian soldiers whom Russian forces captured in a tree line west of Verbove (east of Robotyne). The video later depicts one Russian soldier shooting an already dead Ukrainian serviceman again at close range.[2] The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office announced that it opened an investigation into Russian forces violating the laws and customs of war in addition to premeditated murder.[3] The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office stated this incident occurred on an unspecified date in December 2023.[4] ISW previously reported observing drone footage of Russian servicemen using Ukrainian POWs as human shields near Robotyne on December 13.[5] The killing of POWs violates Article III of the Geneva Convention on the laws of armed conflict.[6]

Russian forces recently advanced in western Zaporizhia Oblast and retook positions that Ukrainian forces had captured during the summer 2023 counteroffensive, likely after Ukrainian forces withdrew to more defensible positions near Robotyne for the winter. Geolocated footage published on December 14 and 27 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced west of Verbove (9km east of Robotyne).[7] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy stated in an interview with *BBC* published on December 27 that Russia's leadership wants to retake Avdiivka at a minimum but has a more ambitious goal of capturing all of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and recapturing the territory Russian forces lost in Zaporizhia Oblast during the Ukrainian counteroffensive.[8] ISW assessed that the Ukrainian capture of nearby positions in August 2023 was tactically significant because it could have allowed Ukrainian forces to begin operating past the densest Russian minefields and subsequent Russian defensive layers but does not assess that the recapture of these positions by Russian forces is particularly significant at this time.[9] Recent Russian advances in western Zaporizhia Oblast nevertheless support ISW's assessment that the current positional war in Ukraine is not a stable

stalemate because the current balance can be tipped in either direction by decisions made in the West or in Russia, and limited Russian gains could become significant especially if the West cuts off military aid to Ukraine.[10]

The destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP) dam on June 6, 2023, reportedly postponed a Ukrainian crossing of the Dnipro River that was likely intended to support Ukrainian counteroffensive operations. *The Associated*

Press published an interview with Ukrainian Special Operations Forces personnel on December 26 wherein Ukrainian personnel stated that they were prepared to conduct a crossing of the Dnipro River to the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast in late May 2023 but that the destruction of the KHPP dam and subsequent flooding postponed these plans.[11] The Ukrainian personnel reportedly conducted limited crossing attempts in July, August, and September 2023, but Ukrainian forces did not launch a larger crossing aimed at establishing a bridgehead on the east bank until mid-October 2023.[12]

Ukrainian operations in the east bank of Kherson Oblast in October 2023 drew Russian forces from other sectors of the front and would have likely had a similar or even more pronounced effect in June 2023 at the start of the Ukrainian counteroffensive.[13] Russian forces also transferred elements of the 7th Airborne (VDV) Division from Kherson Oblast following the destruction of the KHPP dam and proceeded to rely on them as critical elements of the Russian defense in western Zaporizhia Oblast and the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.[14] It is unlikely that the Russian command would have transferred these elements away from Kherson in the event of a Ukrainian crossing in June 2023. Significant Ukrainian ground operations in the left bank of Kherson Oblast coordinated with Ukrainian counteroffensive operations throughout southern Ukraine and near Bakhmut would have placed greater pressure on Russian forces and would likely have limited the Russian military's ability to balance manpower and materiel requirements for defensive operations in four directions. The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam thus likely played a role in the outcome of the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy described continued Ukrainian battlefield challenges and requirements for future territorial advances during an interview with *BBC* published on December

27. Tarnavskiy stated that well-prepared Russian defenses, including superior Russian minefields, were one of the main factors that impacted the results of the Ukrainian counteroffensive, but noted that he does not believe that the front is at an impasse.[15] Tarnavskiy reiterated that Ukrainian forces are facing ammunition shortages, particularly shortages of 122mm and 152mm shells and that Ukrainian forces need additional supplies of air defense missiles and electronic warfare (EW) systems to defend against Russian drones.[16] Tarnavskiy also reiterated the need for Ukrainian air superiority.[17] Tarnavskiy noted that both Russian and Ukrainian forces are adjusting their tactics to increasingly include radio-electronic operations, drone operations, and surveillance.[18]

Ukrainian officials highlighted the Ukrainian defense industrial base's (DIB) increased production in 2023 and offered projections of Ukraine's domestic drone production capabilities on December 27.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukraine produced three times as much equipment and weapons in 2023 as in 2022.[19] Zelensky added that Ukraine is systematically expanding its production of ordnance for drones and has significantly increased its production of projectiles and missiles.[20] Ukrainian Minister of Strategic Industries Oleksandr Kamyshin stated that Ukraine also increased the production of mortar rounds by a factor

of 42, the production of artillery shells by a factor of 2.8, and the production of armored personnel carriers by a factor of five in 2023.[21] Kamyshin stated that Ukraine is capable of producing over one million first-person viewer (FPV) systems, over 10,000 medium range strike drones, and over 1,000 drones with a range of 1,000 kilometers within an unspecified timeframe, presumably within the next year.[22] Kamyshin added that Ukraine is also developing hybrid air defense systems and that so-called FrankenSAM systems that merge advanced Western air defense missiles with modified Soviet launchers or other missile launchers are already operating on the battlefield.[23]

Russian forces launched another series of Shahed-136/131 drone strikes against Ukraine overnight on December 27. Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces launched 46 Shaheds in several waves from the directions of Balaklava (occupied Crimea) and Primorsko-Akhtarsk (Krasnodar Krai, Russia).[24] Ukrainian forces reportedly shot down 32 Shaheds, and Ukrainian air defense systems activated over Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, Vinnytsia, Zaporizhia, Khmelnytskyi, and Kirovohrad oblasts. Ukrainian military officials reported that most of the drones that Ukrainian forces could not shoot down hit frontline areas, especially in Kherson Oblast.[25] Several Shaheds also fell without any consequences. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk reported that Russian forces have changed their tactics and are now attempting to direct Shaheds through residential areas, where Ukrainian forces reportedly cannot maintain stationary air defense systems.[26]

Satellite imagery from the successful December 26 Ukrainian strike on a Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) vessel in occupied Feodosia, Crimea indicates that the strike damaged the surrounding port infrastructure. Satellite imagery published on December 27 taken on December 26 indicates that the Ukrainian strike on the BSF's *Novocherkassk* Ropucha-class landing ship also damaged a pier at the Feodosia port and a nearby warehouse.[27] The satellite imagery shows that most of the ship is heavily burned and mostly submerged.[28] Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmitry Pletenchuk stated on December 27 that the strike may have killed up to 80 Russian personnel.[29] Russian opposition news outlet *Astra* reported that there were 77 Russian military personnel aboard the *Novocherkassk* at the time of the strike of whom 33 are missing and 19 are wounded.[30] A Russian sailor who reportedly served on the *Novocherkassk* told *Astra* that conscripts and contract servicemen (*kontraktniki*) were on the ship at the time of the strike.[31] Russian military officials have repeatedly stated that Russian conscripts would not deploy to Ukraine.[32] Russian conscripts were also aboard the BSF's flagship *Moskva* missile cruiser when Ukrainian forces destroyed it in April 2022.[33]

Russia maintains its maximalist objectives in Ukraine and is uninterested in good faith negotiations despite reports that Western officials are becoming more amenable to eventual Ukrainian negotiations with Russia to end the war. An unspecified Biden administration official and a European diplomat told *Politico* in an article published on December 27 that the Biden administration and European officials are shifting their focus from supporting Ukraine's total victory over Russia to improving Ukraine's position in presumed eventual negotiations with Russia to end the war.[34] *Politico* noted that such negotiations would likely force Ukraine to cede territory to Russia.[35] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on December 27 that the West intends to freeze the war in Ukraine then frame it as a victory and rhetorically asked what victories the United States achieved in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq after having attempted the same thing.[36] Lavrov's references to US involvement in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq suggest that

Lavrov views the Western discussion about freezing the war and preparing for eventual Ukrainian negotiations with Russia as a Western willingness to accept Ukraine's defeat. Lavrov's statement is also consistent with recent Russian officials' statements that Russia is not interested in freezing the war or engaging in honest negotiations and will continue to pursue its expansionist territorial goals and efforts to "demilitarize" Ukraine.[37] ISW previously assessed that a temporary ceasefire would likely provide the Russian military time to prepare for renewed aggression against Ukraine and that Russia would still ultimately maintain the same maximalist objectives for that renewed aggression.[38]

The Russian state-owned Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) found that Russians are increasingly less trusting of Russian state TV and are turning to social media and the internet for news.[39] VCIOM conducted a study in December, which found that Russian public trust in state TV channels had declined from 46 percent to 26 percent in a span of seven years. VCIOM concluded that the TV audience in Russia has also shrunk from 42 percent to 40 percent since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. VCIOM observed that the Russian audience that reportedly trusts the internet as its primary source of information constituted 44 percent of respondents and exceeded the number of Russians who relied on state TV for the first time. VCIOM specified that of Russians who prefer the internet as their primary source 19 percent rely on news sites, 14 percent get their news from social media networks, and 11 percent prefer instant messaging platforms including Telegram. The study found that over the past two years Russians' use of instant messaging platforms as their primary source of information increased almost threefold – likely reflecting the growing popularity of Russian milbloggers on Telegram over the nearly two years of Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. VCIOM also observed an increase in the number of Russians who do not trust any media or social networks from three percent prior to the full-scale invasion to eight percent in December 2023. These Russians reported preferring "kitchen conversations" for their information, which the Russian outlet *The Moscow Times* compared to information learning practices in the Soviet Union.

The decrease in Russian trust and reliance on state TV is likely partially reflected in changing technology and generational shifts, as well as public disillusionment with Russian TV propaganda since the start of the full-scale invasion. ISW previously reported on statistics that showed that the number of Russian bloggers on Telegram increased by 58 percent and that Telegram saw the highest percent increase of daily published content in the first eight months of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[40] ISW assessed on November 20, 2022, that this increase of Telegram use for information purposes likely highlighted growing Russian distrust of Kremlin media.[41] The Kremlin, however, continues to support the expansion of the Russian ultranationalist online community and is attempting to lure key voices in the Russian information space to amplify state narratives to the growing internet-based audience.[42]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on December 27 in a likely effort to maintain Russia's critical trade relationship with India.[43] Putin told Jaishankar that Russia knows Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's position on Russian-Indian relations and attitude towards complex processes and the "situation in Ukraine." [44] Jaishankar stated that Modi intends to visit Russia in 2024. Lavrov stated that he and Jaishankar discussed Russian-Indian military-technical cooperation and the launch of the North-South International Transport Corridor.[45] Lavrov also stated that Russia is ready to help India produce military equipment in the

framework of the Make India program.[46] Indian banks and officials have routinely insisted on settling payments for Russian oil and military goods in rupees, but Russia and India suspended a months-long effort to address the issue in May 2023.[47] The Kremlin likely seeks to reassure India about this dispute in their bilateral trade relationship due to India's increasing importance as a customer for Russian oil exports and its potential as a partner in defense production. Russian oil exports to India rapidly grew in 2023 with India becoming the second largest buyer of Russian crude oil.[48] *Bloomberg* reported on December 20 that roughly five million barrels of Russian crude oil that were scheduled to reach Indian refiners in the past four weeks had not done so for unspecified reasons, however.[49] Oil revenues have buoyed Russian budgets in recent months, and the Kremlin continues to search for new ways to expand defense industrial cooperation with other countries in an effort to relieve pressures on Russia's heavily sanctioned defense industrial base (DIB).[50]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian drone footage published on December 27 showed another Russian execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) near Robotyne in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in western Zaporizhia Oblast and retook positions that Ukrainian forces had captured during the summer 2023 counteroffensive, likely after Ukrainian forces withdrew to more defensible positions near Robotyne for the winter.**
- **The destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP) dam on June 6, 2023, reportedly postponed a Ukrainian crossing of the Dnipro River that was likely intended to support Ukrainian counteroffensive operations.**
- **Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy described continued Ukrainian battlefield challenges and requirements for future territorial advances during an interview with BBC published on December 27.**
- **Ukrainian officials highlighted the Ukrainian defense industrial base's (DIB) increased production in 2023 and offered projections of Ukraine's domestic drone production capabilities on December 27.**
- **Russian forces launched another series of Shahed-136/131 drone strikes against Ukraine overnight on December 27.**
- **Satellite imagery from the successful December 26 Ukrainian strike on a Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) vessel in occupied Feodosia, Crimea indicates that the strike damaged the surrounding port infrastructure.**
- **Russia maintains its maximalist objectives in Ukraine and is uninterested in good faith negotiations despite reports that Western officials are becoming more amenable to eventual Ukrainian negotiations with Russia to end the war.**
- **The Russian state-owned Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) found that Russians are increasingly less trusting of Russian state TV and are turning to social media and the internet for news.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on December 27 in a likely effort to maintain Russia's critical trade relationship with India.**

- **Russian forces made confirmed advances near Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Donetsk City, and Verbove as positional engagements continued along the entire line of contact.**
- **A Russian insider source claimed that Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin has created his own private military company (PMC).**
- **The Ukrainian “Cyber Resistance” movement obtained information about a Russian deputy commander of the 171st Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (51st Air Defense Division) committing sexual crimes against minors in occupied Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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.

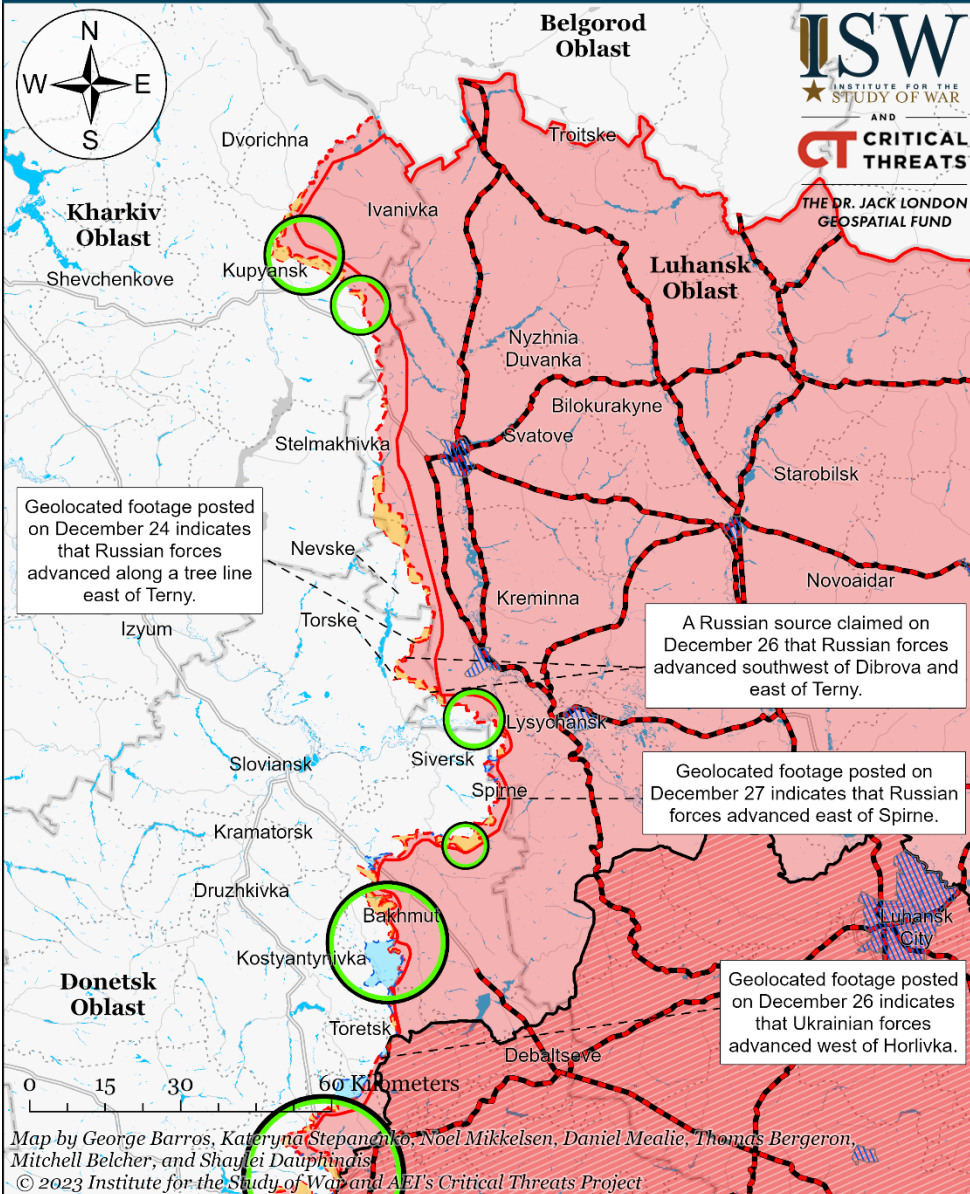
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces reportedly advanced near Kreminna amid continued positional fighting along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on December 27. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced southeast of Yampolivka (west of Kreminna) and up to three kilometers in unspecified parts of the Serebryanske forest area (southwest of Kreminna), although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[51] Ukrainian and Russian sources claimed that positional fighting occurred northeast and southeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka, Petropavlivka, and Ivanivka and west and southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova and the Serebryanske forest area.[52]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of December 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- - - Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- 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 are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

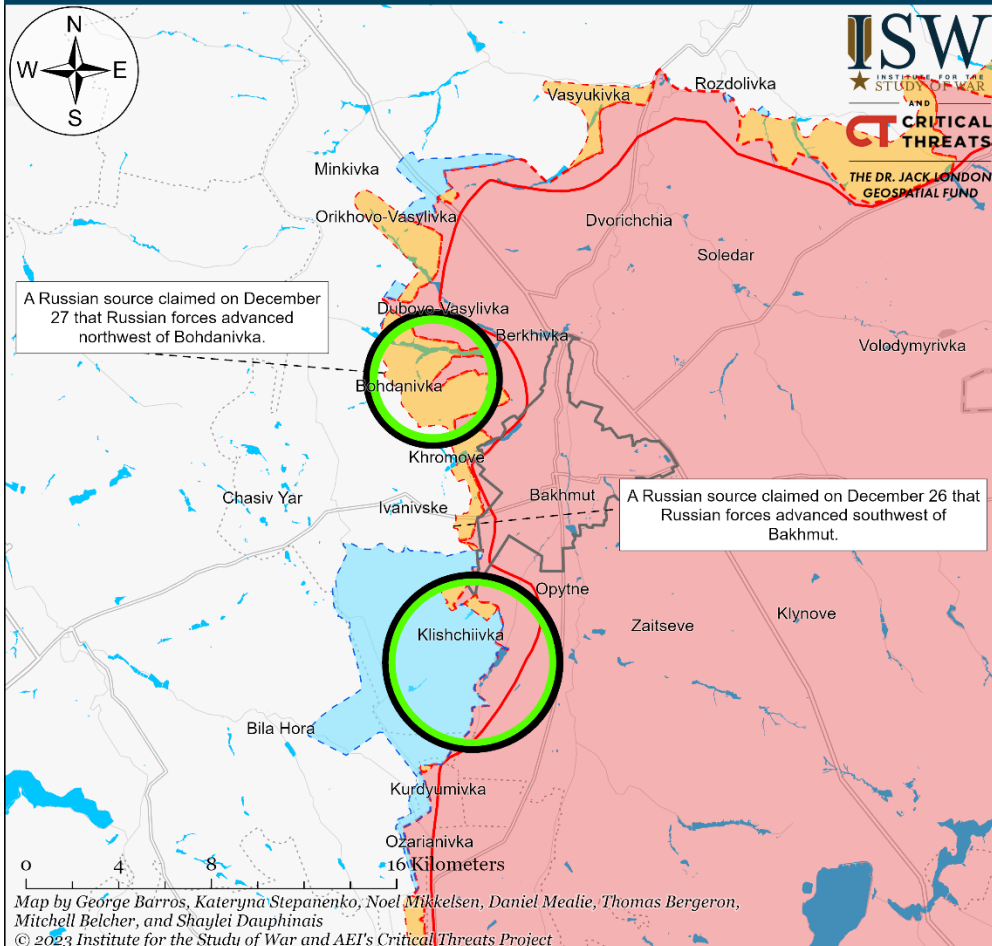
Note: A Russian source claimed on December 27 that Russian forces advanced up to three kilometers in the Serebryanske Forest. A Russian source claimed on December 26 that Russian forces advanced approximately one kilometer along a two-kilometers-wide front in the Terny and Yampolivka directions.

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 recently made advances northeast of Bakhmut and continued positional fighting with Ukrainian forces in the area on December 27. Geolocated footage published on December 27 indicates that Russian forces advanced closer to the eastern outskirts of Spirne (northeast of Bakhmut).[53] Russian milbloggers claimed that positional fighting occurred northeast of Bakhmut along the railway line in the direction of Siversk and near Vesele.[54] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Russian forces are trying to develop an offensive operation in the direction of Spirne and Bilohorivka (21km northeast of Bakhmut) and are training assault units from unspecified Russian Airborne (VDV) formations to conduct offensive operations in the area.[55]

Russian forces reportedly advanced near Bakhmut on December 27 and continued positional engagements with Ukrainian forces. A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 500 meters in depth and width in a forest area north of Bohdanivka (northwest of Bakhmut), although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[56] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional battles occurred northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka, west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske and in the direction of Chasiv Yar, and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[57] Syrskyi stated that the Russian command recently transferred unspecified elements of the Russian Volunteer Corps from the southern direction to the Bakhmut area and that unspecified personnel of the Caspian Flotilla are participating in offensive operations in the area.[58] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on December 24 that the Russian command is deploying elements of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla) near Kurdyumivka (southwest of Bakhmut) after withdrawing these elements from fighting near Krynky and Pidstepne in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast for reconstitution and replenishment over an unspecified period of time.[59]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of December 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shaylei Dauphinais
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- Bakhmut City Limits
- ▭ Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- ▭ Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- ▭ Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- ▭ Claimed Russian Control over 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.

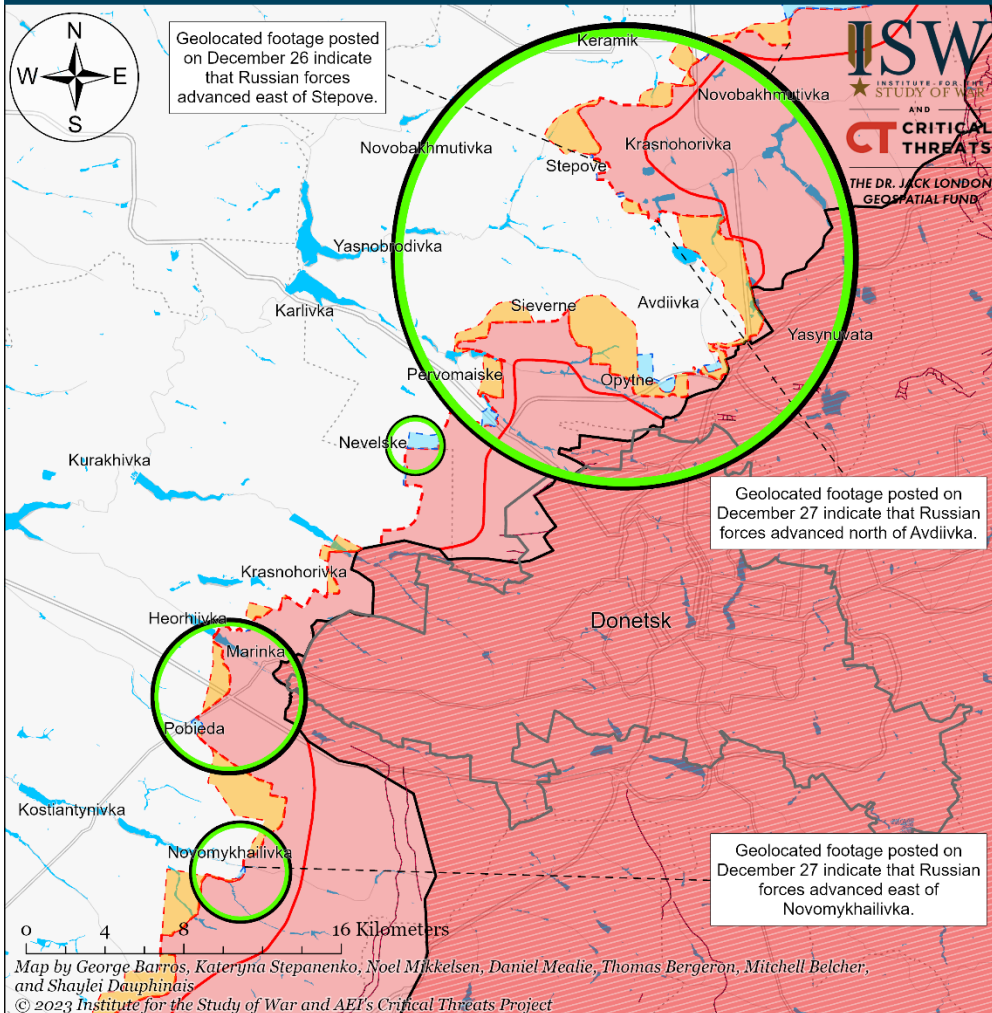
Note: A Russian source claimed on December 26 that Russian forces advanced up to 580 meters along a 660-meters-wide front near the cemetery northwest of Khromove. A Russian source claimed on December 26 that Russian forces advanced up to 200 meters along a 290-meters-wide front in the Bakhmut direction, citing unspecified Ukrainian sources. Russian sources claimed on December 24 that Russian forces advanced up to one-half kilometer toward Bohdanivka and in the adjacent forest belts. A Russian source claimed on December 23 that Russian forces advance over one and a half kilometers per day north of Bohdanivka.

Ukrainian forces recently advanced west of Horlivka and continued positional engagements with Russian forces on December 27. Geolocated footage published on December 26 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced further into a waste heap west of Horlivka.[60] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on December 27 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian assault near Niu-York (west of Horlivka).[61]

Russian forces recently advanced north of Avdiivka and continued positional engagements with Ukrainian forces on December 27. Geolocated footage published on December 26 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in eastern Stepove (north of Avdiivka).[62] Additional geolocated footage published on December 27 indicates that Russian forces advanced south of the Avdiivka waste heap (northeast of Avdiivka).[63] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting continued northwest of Avdiivka near Ocheretyne, Novokalynove, and Novobakhmutivka; north of Avdiivka near Stepove; near the Avdiivka Coke Plant in northwestern Avdiivka; near the industrial zone southeast of Avdiivka; and southwest of Avdiivka near Vodyane, Sieverne, Pervomaiske, and Nevelske.[64] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy stated that Russian forces are conducting assaults with armored vehicle support near Avdiivka and that in the past day, Ukrainian forces destroyed 60 percent of the Russian armored vehicles that participated in assaults.[65] Elements of the irregular Russian “Pyatnashka” Brigade are reportedly participating in Russian offensive operations near Avdiivka.[66]

Tarnavskiy, the Ukrainian commander responsible for the Avdiivka direction, stated on December 27 that the Russian effort to capture Avdiivka continues to be the Russian military’s main offensive effort in Ukraine. Tarnavskiy stated that the Avdiivka direction is the main direction of the current Russian offensive effort, that the Marinka direction is a subordinated Russian offensive effort, and that Russian offensive operations in the Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City) and Novopavlivka (western Donetsk Oblast) directions are diversionary efforts.[67] Tarnavskiy stated that Russian forces do not want to repeat attritional frontal urban assaults reminiscent of the gradual likely Russian capture of Marinka and instead plan to bypass and encircle Avdiivka.[68] Tarnavskiy stated that Russian forces are constantly transferring forces, primarily Storm-Z and Storm-V units, to the Avdiivka direction to support attempts to break through Ukrainian defenses.[69]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of December 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Donetsk City Limits	Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	Russian Field Fortifications

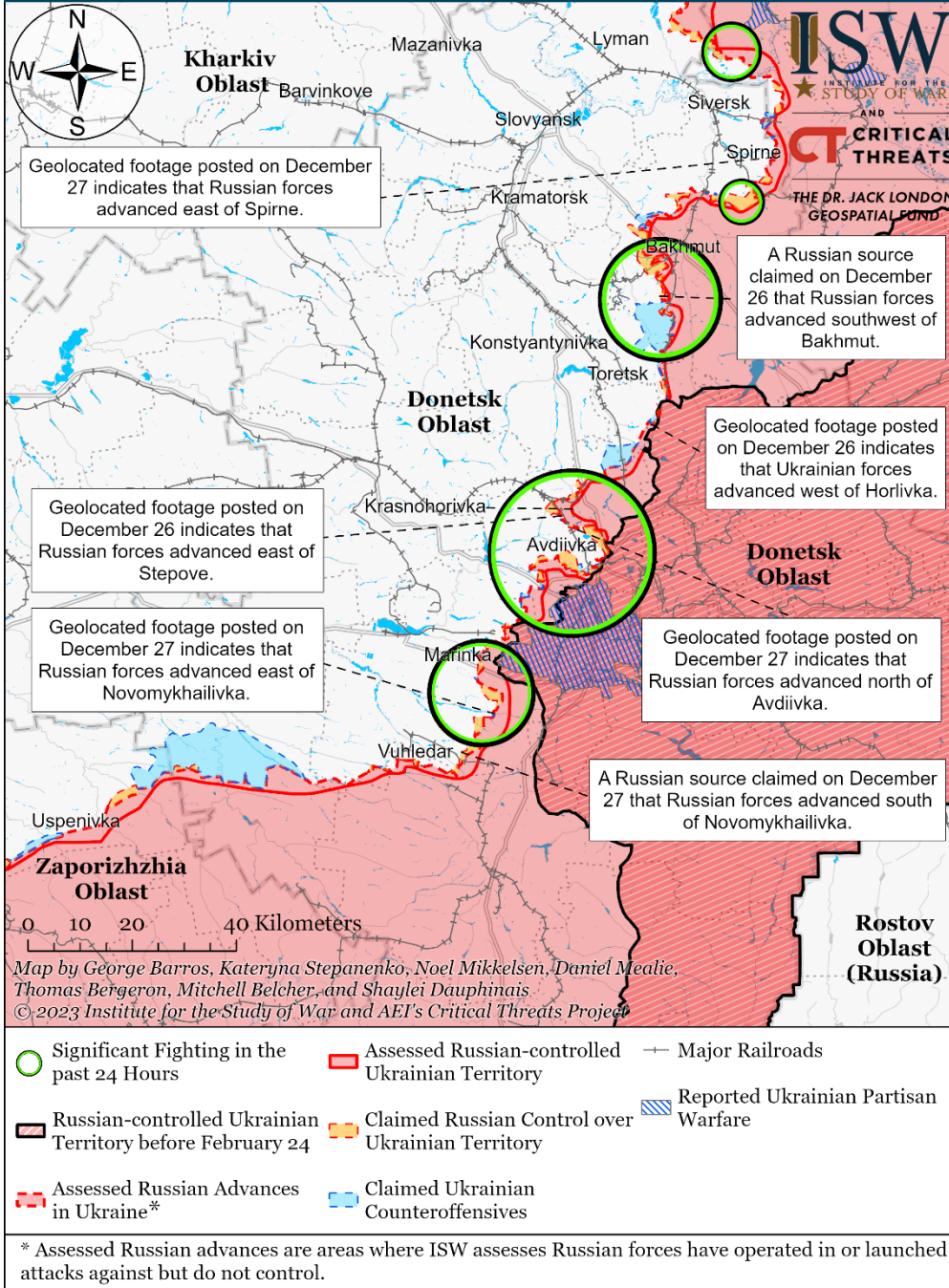
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: Russian sources claimed on December 26 that Russian forces advanced 300 meters along the railway line toward Ocheretyne. Russian sources claimed on December 25 that Russian forces captured Marinka. A Russian source claimed on December 25 that Russian forces advanced up to 100 meters in eastern Stepove. A Russian source claimed on December 25 that Russian forces advanced 200 meters in the Nevelske direction. A Russian source claimed on December 24 that Russian forces advanced several hundred meters near Novokalynove. A Russian source claimed on December 23 that Russian forces advanced 200 meters in the direction of Novokalynove and 100 meters toward southern Avdiivka.

Russian forces likely continued to consolidate control over Marinka (west of Donetsk City) on December 27 and recently made gains southwest of Donetsk City. Geolocated footage published on December 27 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced east of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[70] Footage of a Russian milblogger freely walking in Marinka published on December 27 further indicates that Russian forces control much if not all of Marinka.[71] A Russian milblogger

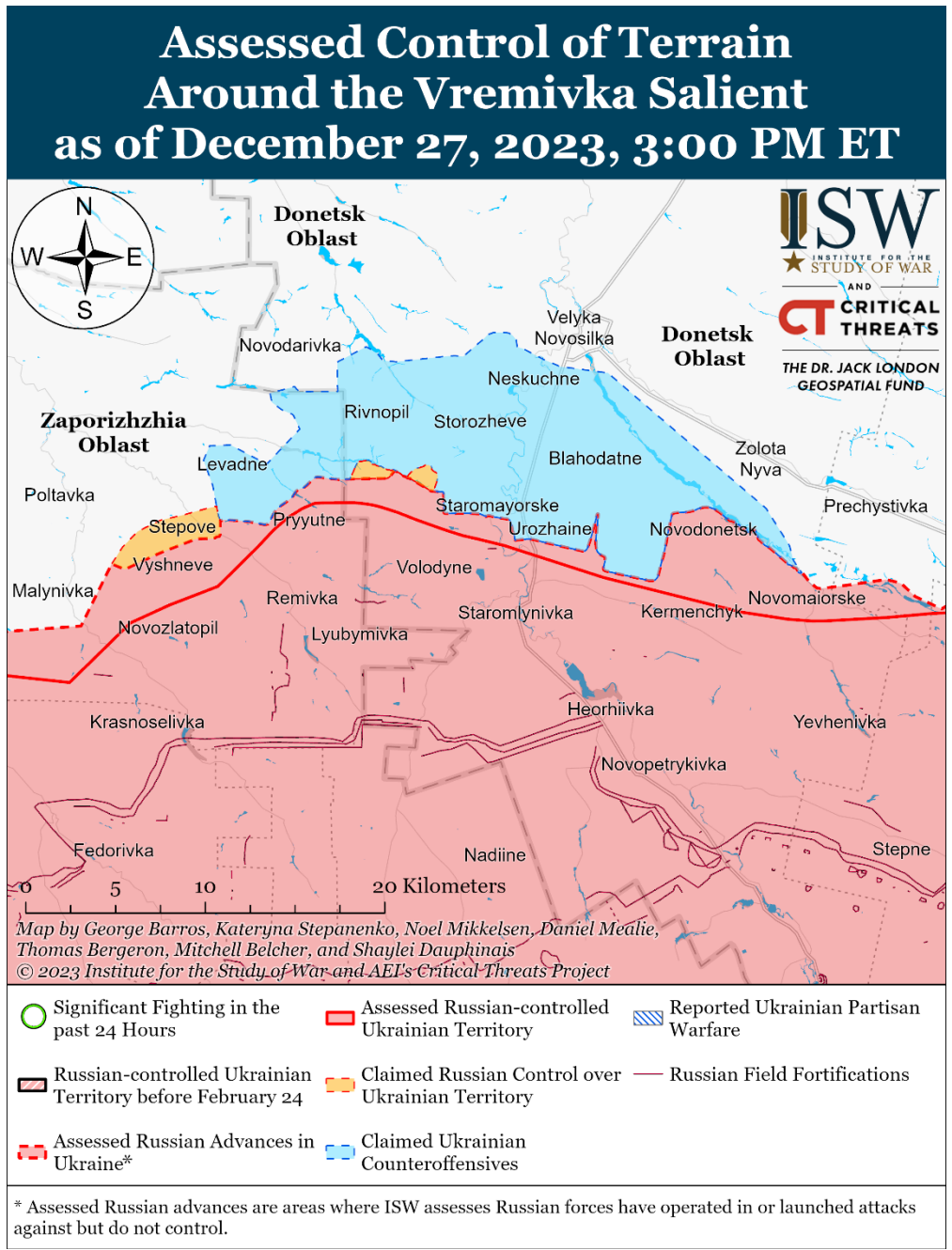
claimed that Russian forces advanced southeast of Pobieda (southwest of Donetsk City), although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[72] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional battles occurred near Marinka, Novomykahlivka, and Pobieda.[73] Elements of the Russian 103rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) are reportedly operating near Marinka, and elements of the Russian 33rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Regiment, 8th Combined Arms Army) are reportedly operating near Novomykahlivka.[74]

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



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

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on December 27.[75]

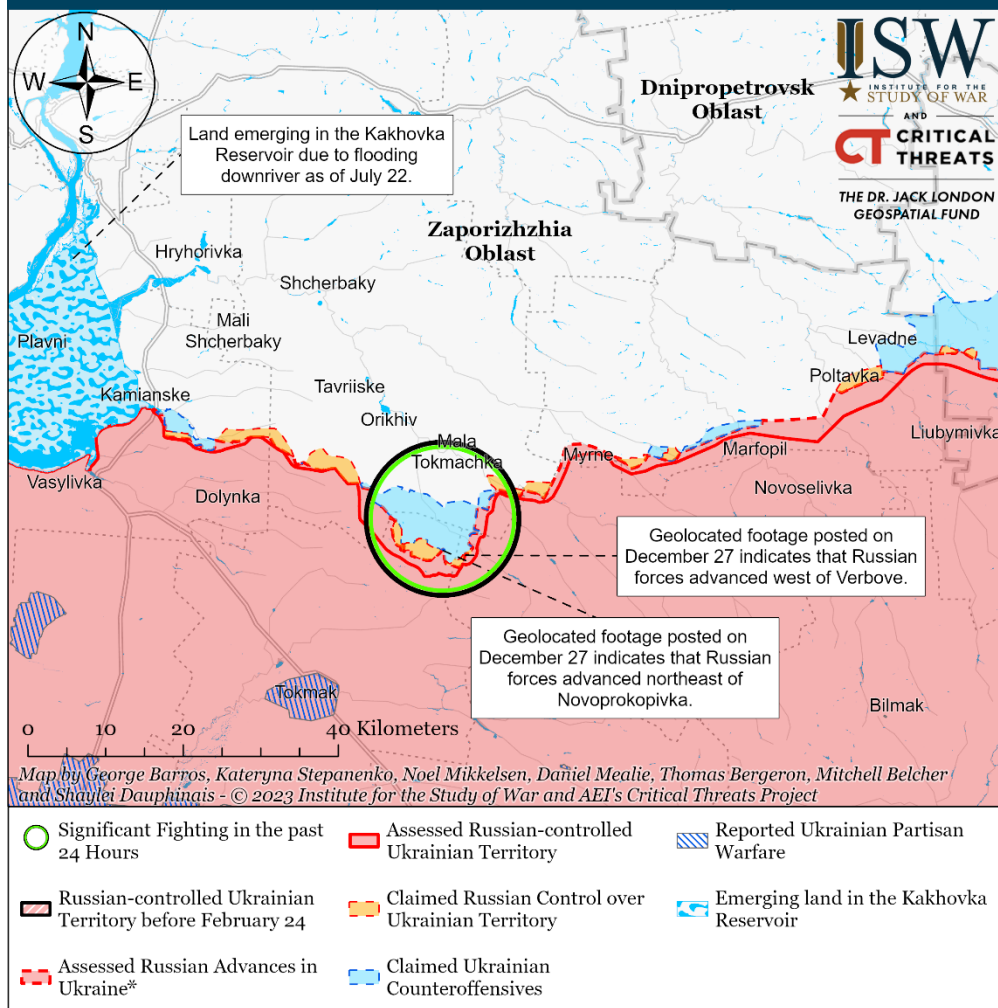


Ukrainian forces recently lost ground around Robotyne, likely after withdrawing to more defensible lines near Robotyne for the winter. Geolocated footage published on December 14 and December 27 shows that Russian forces regained previously lost positions west of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[76] Russian forces reportedly attacked near Robotyne, northeast of Robotyne near Novopokrovka, and west of Verbove.[77] Russian sources claimed that rain and snow are decreasing the intensity of fighting around Robotyne due to dense mud impeding ground

maneuver.[78] Elements of the Russian 108th Guards Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th Guards VDV Division) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhia direction.[79]



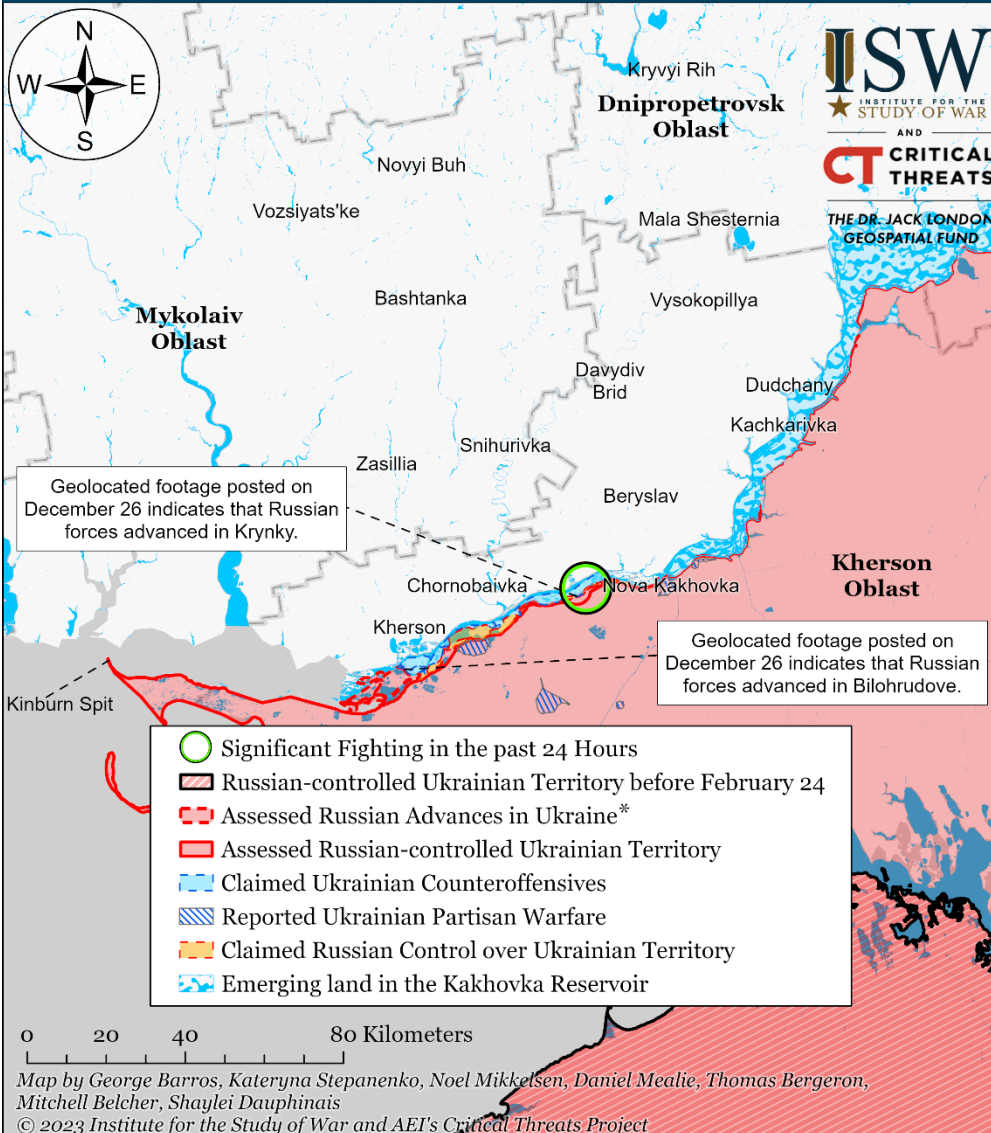
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of December 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Russian forces recently made marginal territorial gains on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River in occupied Kherson Oblast. Geolocated footage published on December 26 shows that Russian forces advanced in the western part of Krynky on the east bank and north of Bilohrudove (9.5km southwest of Kherson City).[80] Ukrainian forces continue to hold positions near Krynky and participate in meeting engagements.[81] Russian and Ukrainian sources both complained about effective drone usage by the other side on the east bank.[82] A Ukrainian marine stated that conditions at Ukrainian positions on the east bank are “hell” due to Russian artillery fire targeting trenches and supply boats, and due to rising water levels along the coast in certain areas.[83] Elements of the Russian 810th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) reportedly continue to operate near Krynky and elements of the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Northern Fleet) are shelling Ukrainian forces in the Stanislav (35km west of Kherson City) direction, likely from positions near the Kinburn Spit on the east bank.[84]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of December 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: The Ukrainian counteroffensive layer displays areas previously assigned to the Russian control, Russian advances, or Russian claims layers where ISW now assesses that Ukrainian forces have established a presence beyond a short-term raid. Inclusion of an area on this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the area is part of any upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive operation.

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

A Russian insider source claimed that Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin has created his own private military company (PMC). The insider source claimed on December 2 that Sobyenin began efforts to create his own PMC on the base of the Moscow Metropolitan Security Service shortly after the Wagner Group's rebellion in June 2023.[85] The insider source claimed that the Russian State Duma passed amendments that would allow Sobyenin to create a departmental security organization after local Moscow security forces refused to defend Moscow against Wagner forces that threatened to enter the city during Wagner's armed mutiny.[86] Sobyenin allegedly registered an autonomous non-profit organization called the "Departmental Security of the Moscow Government" on November 16, 2023.[87] The insider source likened the "Departmental Security of the Moscow Government" to private security structures that Russian state corporations Rostec and Rosatom use.[88] Sobyenin is reportedly personally managing the organization, which reportedly employs instructors from Wagner, Russian special services, and law enforcement organizations.[89] The insider source claimed that the "Departmental Security of the Moscow Government" had almost 5,000 personnel as of December 2 and planned to recruit 15,000 total personnel.[90] Rosgvardia reportedly provides military equipment to the "Departmental Security of the Moscow Government." [91] The insider source claimed on December 27 that the "Departmental Security of the Moscow Government" failed to recruit enough qualified personnel, which forced it to lower its personnel standards.[92] If these reports are confirmed, Sobyenin would be following in the footsteps of Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov who reportedly formed Convoy PMC in occupied Crimea in March 2023.[93] ISW cannot independently verify any of the insider source's claims, however.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade and Industry Denis Manturov announced on December 27 that the Russian Komsomolsk-on-Amur Aviation Plant (part of Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec) delivered the final batch of fifth-generation Su-57 fighter aircraft to the Russian MoD under the 2023 production program.[94] Rostec General Director Sergei Chemezov claimed the number of Su-57 fighter aircraft that Rostec delivers to the Russian MoD almost doubles each year and noted that Rostec plans to deliver combat vehicles to the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) in 2024.[95]

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

Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec General Director Sergei Chemezov stated on December 26 that Russia will begin producing the new dual-caliber "Vozrozhdeniye" multiple rocket launch system (MLRS) in the first half of 2024.[96] Chemezov stated that the "Vozrozhdeniye" system can function as a remote mining system and an MLRS if the system is equipped with a unified transport and launch container.[97]

Chemezov also reported that the Russian military plans to test a new remote-controlled infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) in combat conditions. Chemezov stated that Rostec plans to install remote-control kits on BMP-3 IFVs and test their use on 2S25M self-propelled anti-tank guns.[98] Chemezov noted that remote-controlled IFVs could reduce the risk of personnel losses in dangerous areas of the frontline." [99]

Russian forces have reportedly started using small all-terrain Chinese-made vehicles to transport supplies over muddy terrain in Zaporizhia Oblast. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger published footage on December 27 of himself and his team testing these all-terrain vehicles near an unspecified sector of the frontline in Zaporizhia Oblast.[100] The milblogger claimed that the all-

terrain vehicle weighs less than a civilian passenger car, which allows it to traverse muddy terrain more easily.[101]

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)

The Ukrainian “Cyber Resistance” movement obtained information about the Russian deputy commander of the 171st Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (51st Air Defense Division) committing sexual crimes against minors in occupied Ukraine.[102] Ukrainian hackers of the “Cyber Resistance” movement identified the deputy commander as Major Mikhail Shyshkin. ISW has no independent confirmation of these allegations.

The Luhansk Oblast occupation Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) is requiring all foreigners, including Ukrainian citizens, to undergo mandatory fingerprint and photo registration – likely in an effort to identify residents who refuse to receive Russian passports.[103] Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Military Administration Head Artem Lysohor stated that Luhansk Oblast occupation authorities are fingerprinting Ukrainian citizens in search of partisans and to account for individuals who did not receive Russian passports.[104]

Ukraine sentenced in absentia Head of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Denis Pushilin to 15 years in prison on December 27 for treason and collaboration charges.[105]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian officials appear to be reverting to a Cold War worldview, framing the world as divided into two distinct groups, albeit not along a clearly defined ideological line. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Higher School of Economics, Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, and State Duma published a report on December 27 detailing Russia’s policy towards the “world majority.”[106] The report defined the “world majority” as “a civilizational and cultural community that objectively opposes” the West and alleged that the world is divided into two camps: countries that support the United States and Ukraine and countries that are neutral or support Russia.[107] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on December 20 that the “crisis in Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East” show the emerging divisions between how the “Western minority” and the “World majority” approach crises.[108] The report added Russia will prioritize relations with countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America over the next 10-15 years to bring about a “transformational” change in the global order.[109]

Kremlin officials continued to push narratives intended to discourage Western aid to Ukraine on December 27. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that corrupt Ukrainian officials are stealing a significant portion of Western monetary aid and claimed that additional Western aid will not change the outcome of the war.[110] Ukrainian and US officials have recently highlighted Ukraine’s ongoing anti-corruption efforts, however.[111]

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

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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