

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 27, 2024

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January 27, 2024, 5:55pm 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 12:30pm ET on January 27. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Russian President Vladimir Putin, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, and Kremlin officials claimed that Russia is in an existential geopolitical conflict with an alleged modern Nazi movement that extends beyond Ukraine while marking the 80th anniversary of the breaking of the siege of Leningrad.** Putin attended the opening of a memorial to the Soviet victims of Nazi genocide in Leningrad Oblast on January 27 and focused heavily on long-standing claims that Russia is fighting “Nazis” in Ukraine.[1] Putin also asserted that select countries have adopted Nazi ideology and methods and tied this assertion to a number of European states promoting “Russophobia as a state policy.”[2] Putin declared that Russia will “do everything to suppress and finally exterminate Nazism” and cast Russia as pursuing the “aspirations of millions of people...all over the planet for true freedom, justice, peace, and security.”[3] Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko also attended the ceremony and stated that Belarus and Russia “are again faced with the question of the right to life of our civilization and the preservation of ancestral...[and] cultural values.”[4] Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin stated that Russia will not stop halfway in its fight against current Nazi followers, and Russian State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin explicitly stated that “fascist ideology is becoming the norm...for leaders of NATO states” and specifically accused US President Joe Biden, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, United Kingdom (UK) Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz of sponsoring genocide in Ukraine.[5] Volodin framed this alleged growing fascist movement as a “dangerous path that could lead to a new world war.”[6]

Nazi Germany besieged Leningrad for over two years during the Second World War, causing the deaths of roughly 1.5 million Soviet citizens. Putin was born in Leningrad in 1952, and his grandfather was seriously wounded while defending the city. Putin likely sought to leverage his known if unstated personal connection with the siege and the emotional appeal of one of the most dramatic moments in

the Great Patriotic War (Second World War) to expand his overall ideological framing of the conflict with the West to which he has committed Russia.

**Putin has long tried to construct an ideology for Russia that he can use to support a geopolitical confrontation with the West reminiscent of the Cold War, and the Kremlin may increasingly use existing rhetoric about fighting Nazism to support this effort.** The Kremlin has called for “denazification” in Ukraine as a thinly veiled demand for regime change and has used information operations about Ukrainian “Nazis” to wrap its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in the mythos of the Great Patriotic War.[7] Russian officials have previously applied the label of “Nazism” to Western states and actors outside Ukraine, although Putin’s, Lukashenko’s, Naryshkin’s, and Volodin’s likely coordinated rhetoric on January 27 suggest that the Kremlin may increasingly label any perceived adversary and possibly the entire West as “Nazi.”[8] The Kremlin may have decided that the simple narrative that Russia and other states are fighting a geopolitical Nazi force is a more effective immediate narrative line than Putin’s attempt to appeal to Russian citizens and Russian speakers in the territory of the former Soviet Union and Russian Empire with the ideology of the “Russian World” (*Russkiy Mir*), which is based on purposefully amorphous ethnic identities that are not agreed upon and that are at odds with Russia’s multi-ethnic composition.[9]

Lukashenko’s participation in this rhetorical posturing suggests that the Kremlin and Lukashenko may believe that this narrative is also easier to coordinate than the Kremlin’s appeals to ethnic Russians and the *Russkiy Mir*. The Kremlin has increasingly sought to cast Russia as a main actor within the “world majority,” which it has defined as “a civilizational and cultural community that objectively opposes” the West (using the word “objectively” in an echo of the Soviet Union’s Communist ideology).[10] The Kremlin’s overtures to non-Western states have yet to acknowledge that these states have cultural, ideological, and political differences and that many of these states are likely unwilling to involve themselves in Russian appeals to the *Russkiy Mir*. The Kremlin may hope that “fighting fascism” will be an easier rhetorical line to coordinate with desired partners within this fictitious “world majority.”

**Putin specifically accused the Baltic states of adopting “Nazism,” likely as part of continued Kremlin efforts to set information conditions for future Russian aggression against NATO members.**[11] Putin alleged that the Baltic states have declared thousands of people living there “subhuman,” are “depriving” them of their “most basic rights,” and are subjecting them to “persecution.”[12] Although Putin did not specifically claim that the Baltic states are “persecuting” Russians or Russian speakers, Kremlin officials have routinely accused Baltic governments of having “neo-Nazi” policies and of oppressing Russians and Russian speakers.[13] The Kremlin has historically used its concept of “compatriots abroad,” which vaguely includes ethnic Russians and Russian speakers of other ethnicities, to justify Russian aggression in neighboring states.[14] ISW continues to assess that Kremlin officials and mouthpieces may be attempting to set information conditions for possible future Russian aggression in the Baltic states – and other NATO members, such as Finland – under the guise of protecting Russia’s “compatriots abroad.”[15] The Kremlin may also use the pretext of protecting people from alleged “Nazi” policies in the future.

**Myanmar banks reportedly connected to the Russian System for the Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) banking system, a Russian analogue for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) banking system.** Russian Minister of Economic Development Maxim Reshetnikov stated on January 27 that Myanmar banks

recently connected to SPFS, which will allow Russian and Myanmar businesses to freely buy and sell products.[16] Russia began developing its SPFS banking system in 2014, following US threats to disconnect Russia from SWIFT in response to Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, and roughly 20 countries have joined SPFS in the past 10 years.[17] The *Washington Post* reported that internal Russian Security Council documents show that Kremlin officials are working to undermine the dollar's role as a world reserve currency and hope to work with China to create a new financial system to bypass Western dominance of global financial transactions.[18] Unnamed European security officials told the *Washington Post* that it is unclear if China has any real interest in this effort.[19]

**Russian forces conducted a limited series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on January 26 and 27.** Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces struck civilian infrastructure in Myrnohrad and Novohrodivka in Donetsk Oblast and Antonivka, Kherson Oblast with nine S-300 missiles and in Slovyansk, Donetsk Oblast with an Iskander-M missile on January 26 and 27.[20] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down all four Shahed-136/131 drones that Russian forces launched at Ukraine on January 27.[21] Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated on January 26 that Ukrainian forces are improving and strengthening their ability to counter Russian drone adaptations, including adaptations for Shahed drones.[22]

**Russian authorities are likely blocking communications in the Sakha Republic for the fourth consecutive day following January 24 protests in support of a Russian citizen allegedly murdered by a naturalized Russian citizen from Tajikistan.** Local Sakha Republic outlets reported on January 27 that disruptions to WhatsApp and Telegram services continue following reported outages on the night of January 24.[23] The local news outlets also noted that Sakha Republic Digital Development Deputy Minister Andrei Suslov stated on January 24 that Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor's "preventative work" created communication disruptions, but that no officials have since commented on continued disruptions as of January 27.[24] Former Yakutsk Mayor Sardana Avksenteva and Sakha Party of Business Head Vitaly Obedin stated that all internet connection and communication has slowed, creating difficulties for online commerce and digital document organization.[25] Russian authorities are likely attempting to preemptively stifle a potential resurgence in protests and "strengthen public safety and crime prevention measures" in accordance with Sakha Republic Head Aisen Nikolayev's orders following the protests.[26] Russian sources notably did not report similar widespread communication outages during or following several days of protest in Bashkortostan.

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, and Kremlin officials claimed that Russia is in an existential geopolitical conflict with an alleged modern Nazi movement that extends beyond Ukraine while marking the 80th anniversary of the breaking of the siege of Leningrad.**
- **Putin has long tried to construct an ideology for Russia that he can use to support a geopolitical confrontation with the West reminiscent of the Cold War, and the Kremlin may increasingly use existing rhetoric about fighting Nazism to support this effort.**

- **Putin specifically accused the Baltic states of adopting “Nazism,” likely as part of continued Kremlin efforts to set information conditions for future Russian aggression against NATO members.**
- **Myanmar banks reportedly connected to the Russian System for the Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) banking system, a Russian analogue for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) banking system.**
- **Russian forces conducted a limited series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on January 26 and 27.**
- **Russian authorities are likely blocking communications in the Sakha Republic for the fourth consecutive day following January 24 protests in support of a Russian citizen allegedly murdered by a naturalized Russian citizen from Tajikistan.**
- **Russian forces made recent confirmed advances near Kupyansk, Kreminna, and Avdiivka amid continued positional engagements along the entire line of contact on January 27.**
- **UK outlet the *Telegraph* reported on January 26, citing an unnamed Western official, that Russia is spending roughly 40 percent of its GDP on the war in Ukraine, more than Russian national spending on health and education.**
- **Russian federal subjects continue to establish patronage networks with occupied areas of Ukraine.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 27, 2024, 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 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
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Activities in Russian-Occupied Areas
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

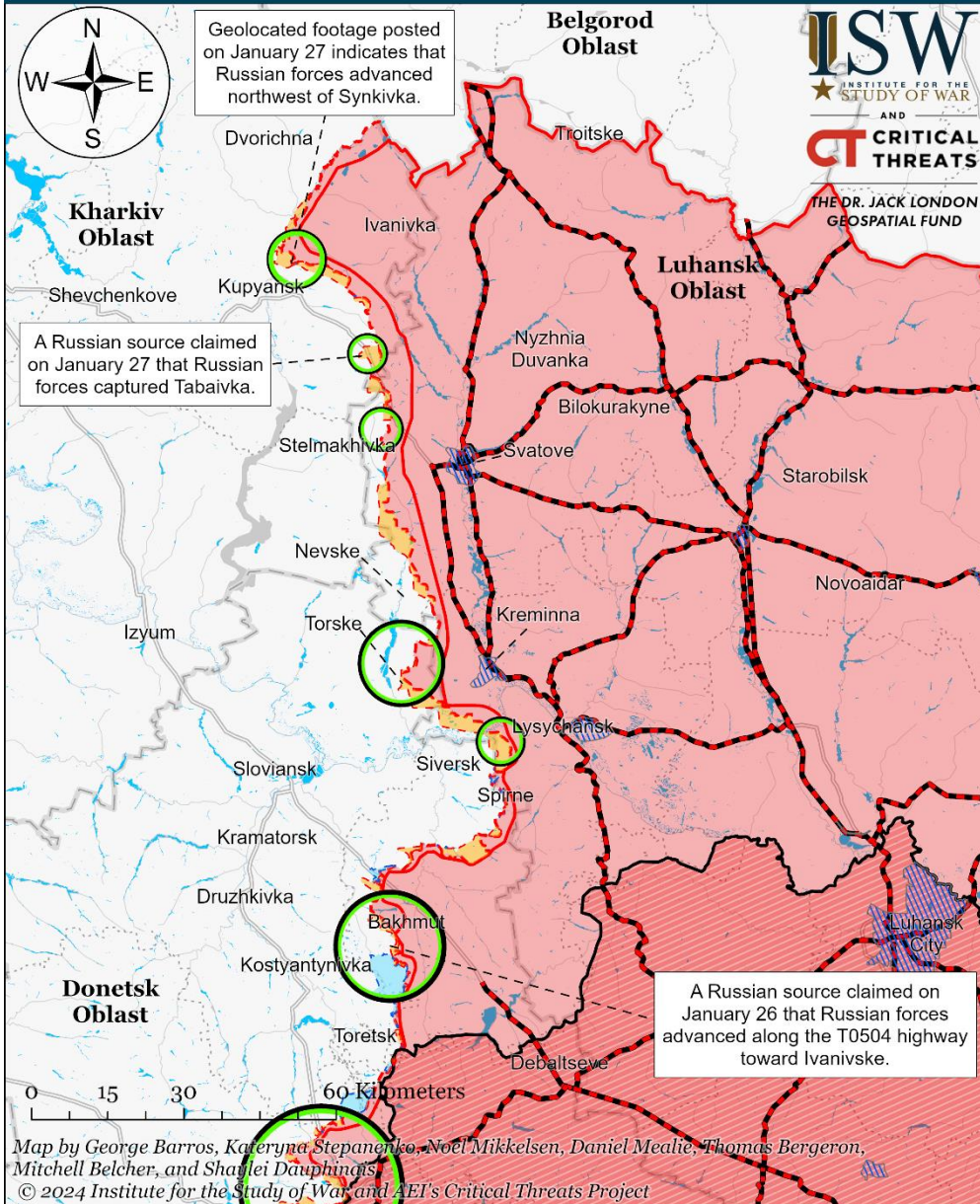
#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces recently made a confirmed advance northeast of Kupyansk. Geolocated footage published on January 27 shows that Russian forces recently advanced west of Synkivka (northeast of Kupyansk).[27] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian elements of the 47th Tank Division (1st Guards Tank Army, Western Military District [WMD]) captured Tabaiivka (southeast of Kupyansk), although ISW has not observed evidence confirming this claim.[28] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional engagements continued near Synkivka and southeast of Kupyansk near Stelmakhivka, Tabaiivka, and Berestove.[29] Kharkiv Oblast Military Administration Head Oleh Synehubov stated that the most intense engagements in the Kupyansk direction are occurring in the Synkivka and Tabaiivka areas.[30] Ukrainian Ground Forces Command Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Volodymyr Fityo reported that a large number of Russian artillery strikes in the Khortytsia direction (the Kupyansk, Lyman, and Bakhmut directions) indicates that Russian forces are trying to advance in these directions.[31] Elements of the Russian “Veter 177” unit of the 16th Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff Main Directorate or GRU) reportedly continue operating in the Kupyansk direction.[32]

Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Kreminna in the Lyman direction. Geolocated footage published on January 27 shows that Russian forces recently advanced east of Makiivka (northwest of Kreminna) and west of Dibrova (southwest of Kreminna).[33] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional engagements continued west of Kreminna near Yampolivka, Torske, and Terny; southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova, and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.[34] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Russian forces have increased efforts to advance in the direction of the Terny-Makiivka line.[35] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 164th Motorized Rifle Brigade (25th Combined Arms Army [CAA]) are operating in the direction of Yampolivka and that elements of the Russian 752nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (3rd Motorized Rifle Division, 20th CAA, WMD) are operating in the direction of Makiivka.[36] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 169th Motorized Rifle Brigade (25th CAA) are operating west and northwest of Dibrova with elements of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th CAA, WMD).[37] Elements of the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz “Aida” detachment reportedly continue to operate near Kreminna and Bilohorivka.[38]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of January 27, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

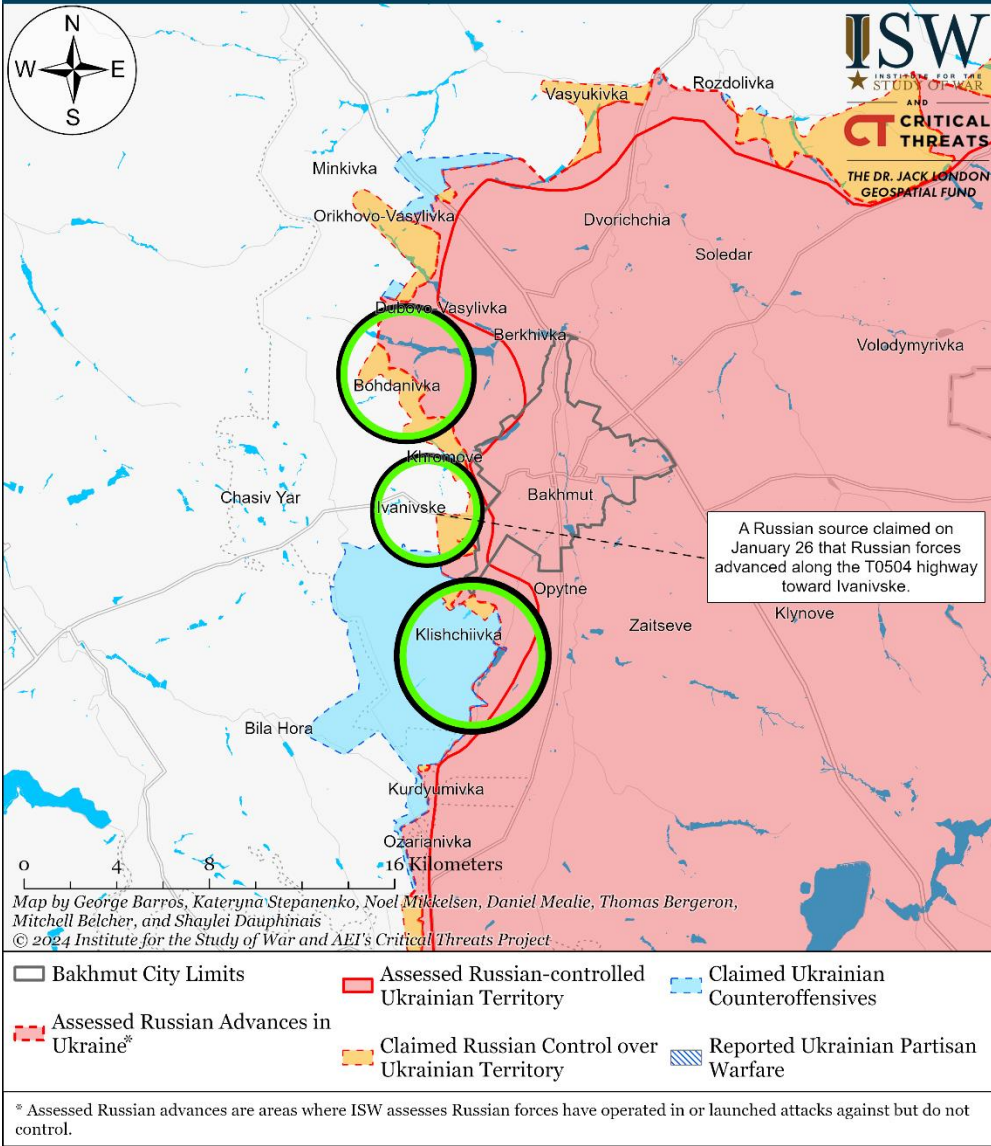
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

## **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 reportedly recently advanced west of Bakhmut and continued positional engagements with Ukrainian forces in the Bakhmut area on January 27. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed on January 26 that Russian forces advanced to the outskirts of Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut) and gained a foothold on the intersection of Sadova and Shoseina Streets along the T0504 (Bakhmut-Chasiv Yar) highway, although ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[39] A Russian "Storm-Z" instructor claimed that Russian forces control 40 percent of Bohdanivka (northwest of Bakhmut) but acknowledged that the settlement is not tactically significant for Russian efforts to advance towards Chasiv Yar (west of Bakhmut) since Bohdanivka is located in a lowland and is vulnerable to Ukrainian artillery fire.[40] Positional fighting continued northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka, Andriivka, and Shumy.[41] Elements of the 137th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (106th VDV Division) are reportedly operating on Bakhmut's northern flank, elements of the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Northern Fleet) are reportedly operating near the Berkhivka reservoir northwest of Bakhmut, and elements of the 58th Spetsnaz Battalion (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps) are reportedly operating in the Bakhmut area.[42]



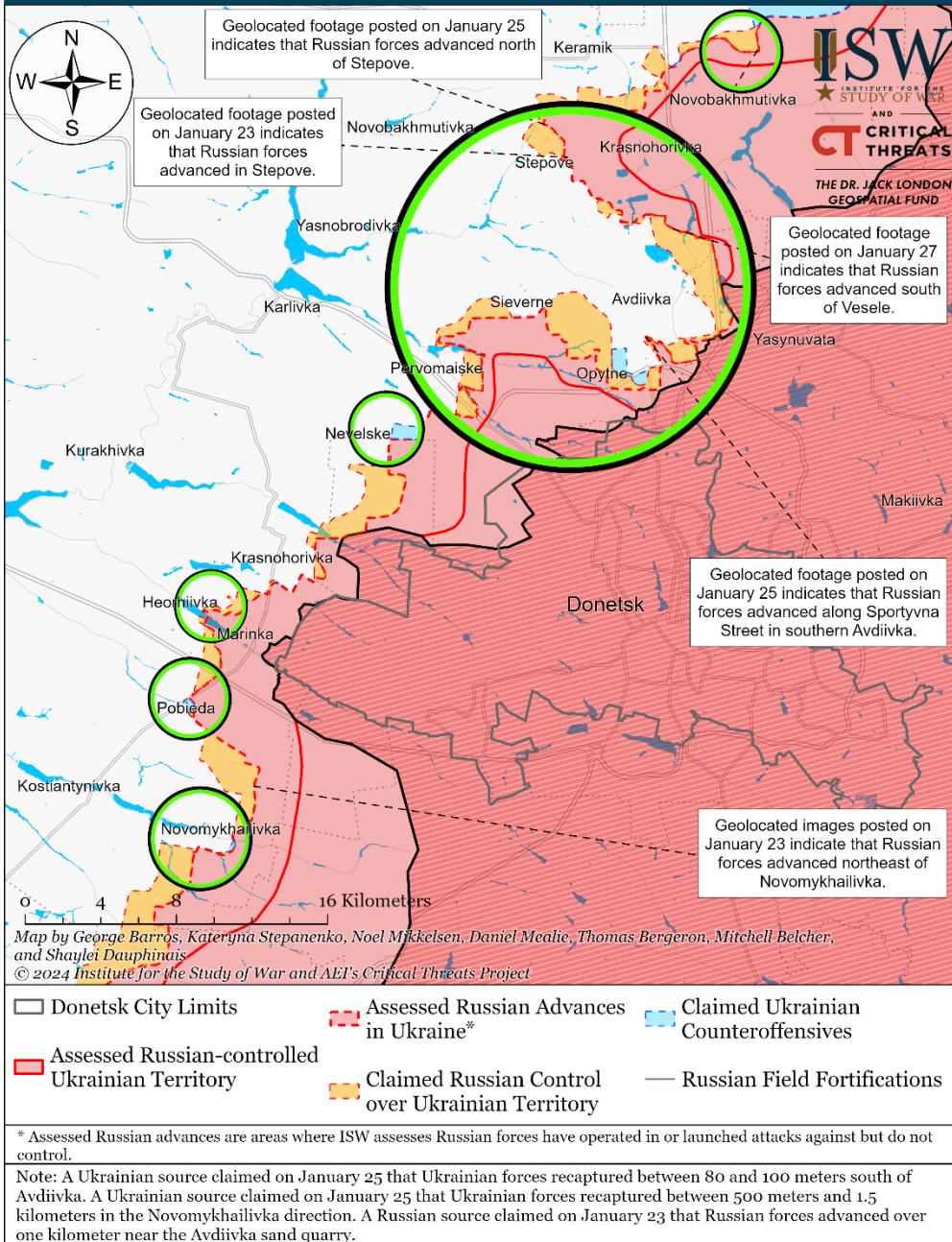
# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of January 27, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently advanced near Avdiivka amid continued positional fighting in the area on January 27. Geolocated footage published on January 27 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced further south of Vesele (northeast of Avdiivka).[43] Russian sources claimed on January 26 and 27 that Russian forces continue to focus offensive operations on the southern outskirts of Avdiivka and in the southernmost residential area of the settlement.[44] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that recent Russian gains in the “Tsarska Okhota” restaurant area on Avdiivka’s southern outskirts and along Soborna Street in southern Avdiivka threaten the tactical encirclement of Ukrainian forces operating in the immediate area.[45] Positional fighting continued northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka and Stepove; near Avdiivka itself; west of Avdiivka near Tonenke; south of Avdiivka near Opytne; and southwest of Avdiivka near Vodyane, Pervomaiske, and

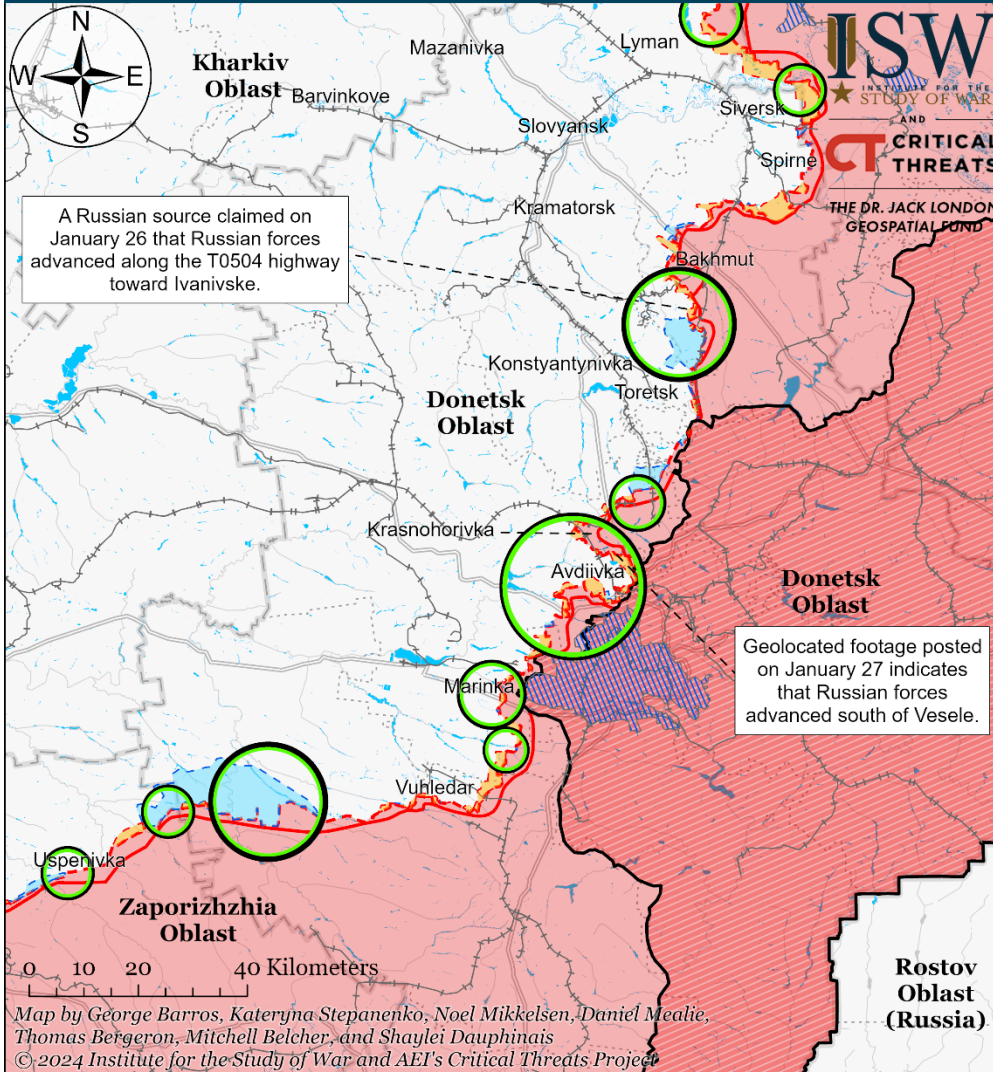
Nevelske.[46] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy stated that Russian forces have intensified assaults in an area of the front that includes the Avdiivka direction.[47] Elements of the 80th and 239th Tank regiments (both of the 90th Tank Division, 41st Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) are reportedly operating in the Avdiivka area, elements of the 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) are reportedly operating near Spartak, and elements of the 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Pervomaiske.[48]

# Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of January 27, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Positional fighting continued west and southwest of Donetsk City on January 27. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting occurred west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda and Novomykhailivka.[49] Elements of the Russian 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Chervone (south of Donetsk City).[50]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 27, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



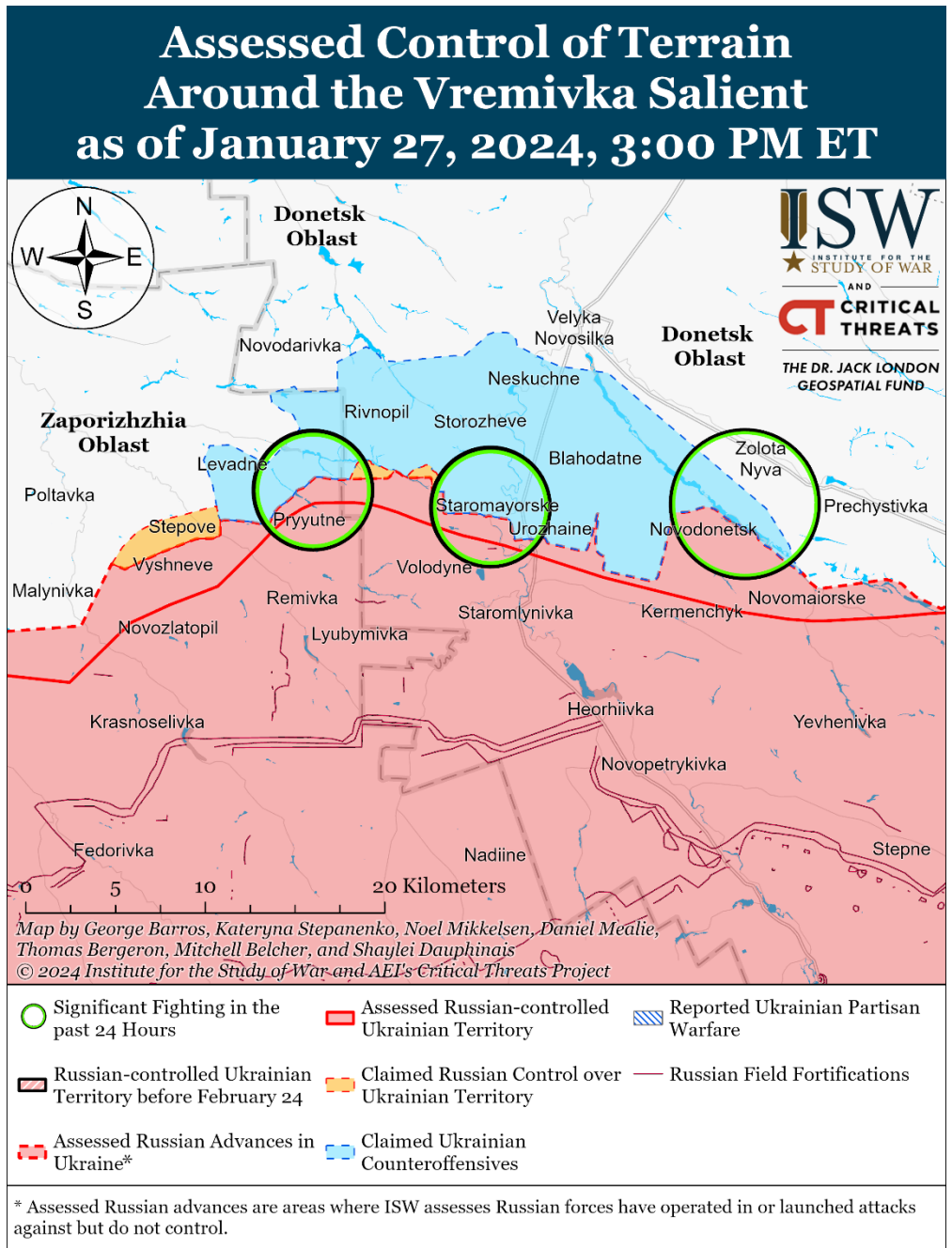
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads
- 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 Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

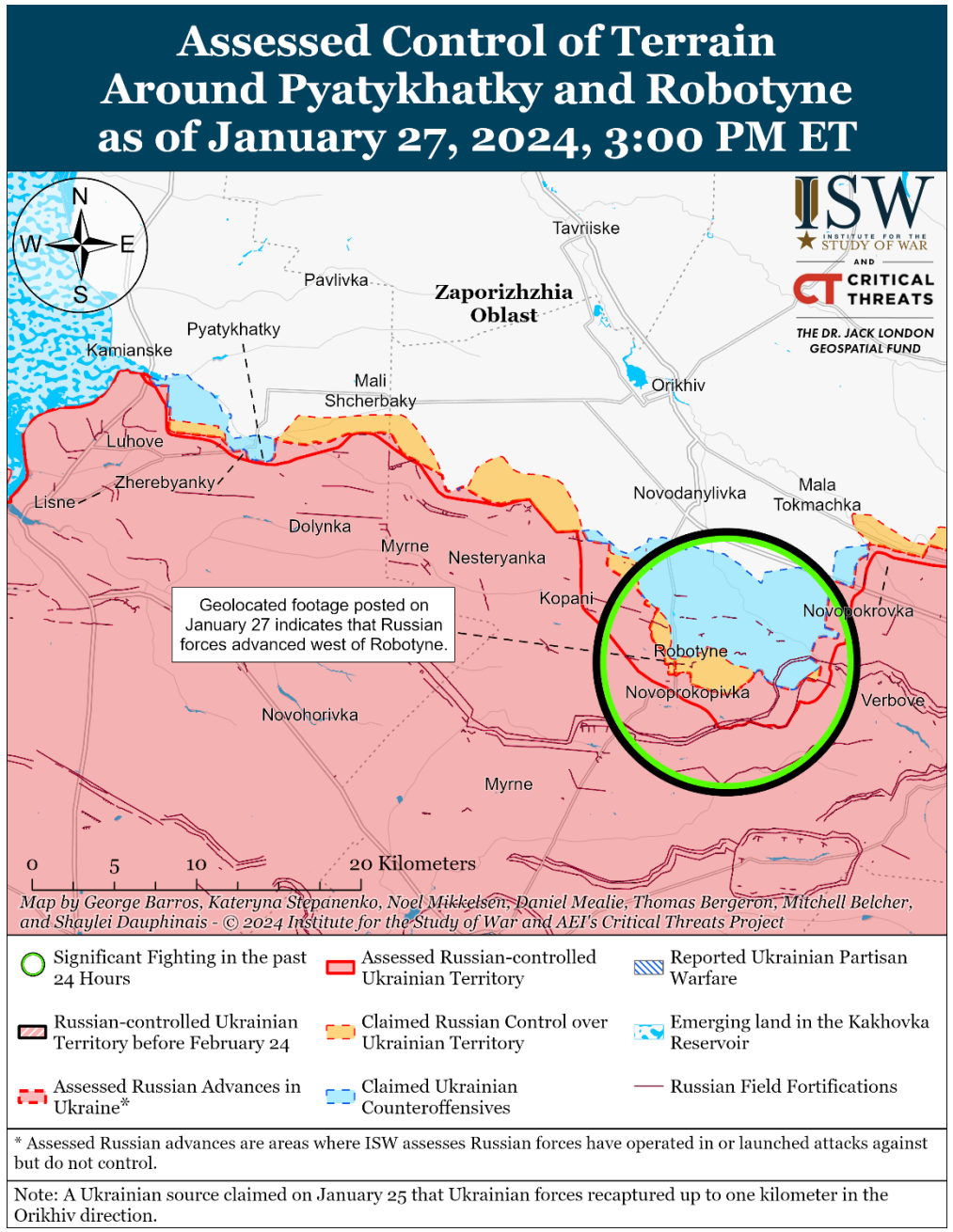


Positional fighting continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on January 27, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that there were positional engagements southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Zolota Nyva, south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske, and southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Rivnopil and Pryyutne.[51] Elements of the Russian 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District) and the Russian 34th Motorized Rifle Brigade (49th CAA, Southern Military District) are reportedly operating near Pryyutne.[52]



Russian forces recently made a marginal advance in western Zaporizhia Oblast amid continued positional fighting in the area on January 27. Geolocated footage published on January 27 indicates

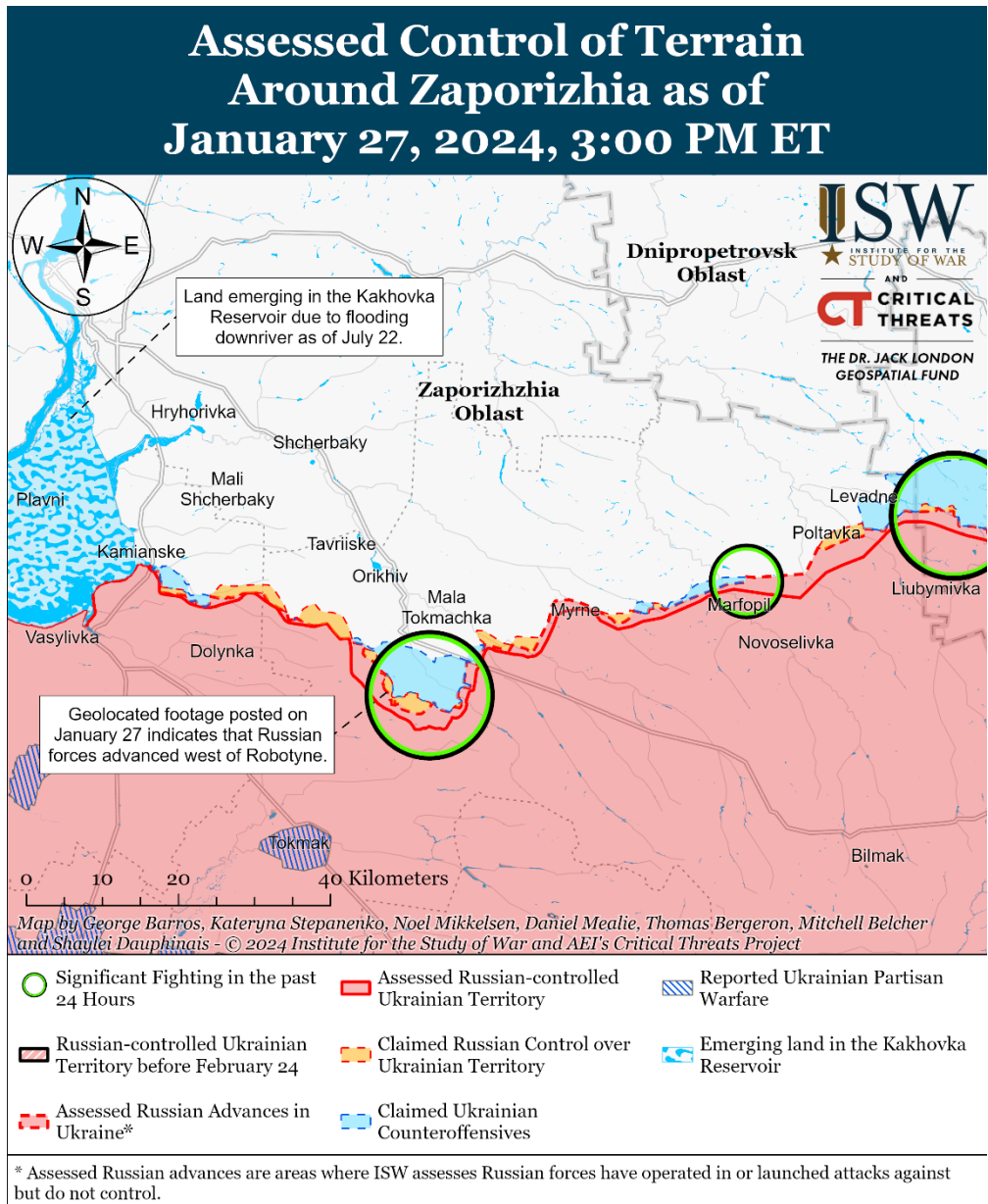
that Russian forces recently marginally advanced west of Robotyne.[53] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional fighting continued south of Chervone (northeast of Robotyne), west of Verbove (east of Robotyne), and in the direction of Novoprokopivka (just south of Robotyne).[54] Elements of the Russian 247th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) are reportedly operating near Verbove.[55]



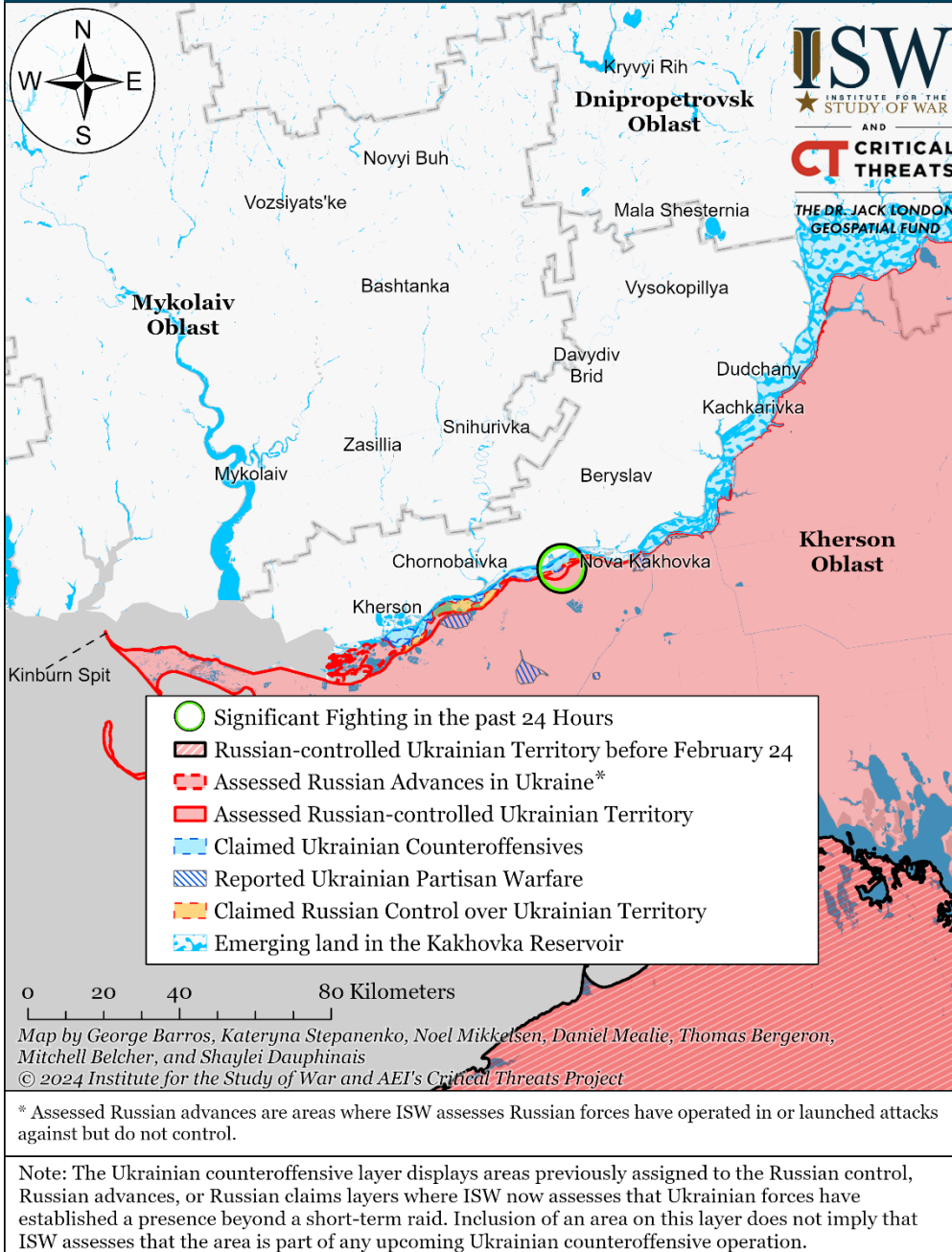
Positional engagements continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on January 27, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional fighting continued near Krynyky.[56] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Russian forces have been regrouping and replenishing units operating between Oleshky and



Korsunka on the east bank and estimated that up to seven Russian battalions comprised of elements of the Russian 26th and 28th Motorized Rifle Regiments (both of the 70th Motorized Rifle Division, 18th CAA), 17th Tank Regiment (70th Motorized Rifle Division, 18th CAA), 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People’s Republic [DNR] Army Corps), 328th and 337th VDV Regiments (both elements of the 104th VDV Division), and the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) are operating in the area.[57] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike on Nova Kakhovka.[58]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 27, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

UK outlet the *Telegraph* reported on January 26, citing an unnamed Western official, that Russia is spending roughly 40 percent of its GDP on the war in Ukraine, more than Russian national spending

on health and education.[59] ISW previously reported that Russian authorities plan to spend up to 14 trillion rubles (\$157.5 billion) on defense and law enforcement in 2024, amounting to 39 percent of the overall federal budget.[60] The *Telegraph* reported that Russia's official national budget for military spending likely does not include Russia's spending on reconstruction in occupied Ukraine or its support of private Russian defense industrial base (DIB) initiatives.[61] The *Telegraph* noted that, despite widespread Western concern about Russia's efforts to increase its military equipment and weapons production capacities, Russia's DIB continues to struggle with labor shortages and quality control issues.[62] Ukrainian intelligence previously reported that Russian efforts to expand Russia's DIB have yet to fulfill Russia's operational requirements in Ukraine and that munitions shortages will continue to prompt Russia to source supplies from abroad.[63]

Russian news outlet *Interfax* reported on January 26 that the Russian government simplified the medical examination procedure for prospective Russian servicemen.[64] Prospective contract servicemen will now undergo a one-stage medical examination at a military registration and enlistment office and will receive the results of their medical examinations within five days.[65] Russian recruits previously underwent two medical examinations, and this new procedure will reportedly speed up the recruitment process for contract service.[66] Russian opposition outlet *Radio Svoboda* reported that Russian medical boards routinely give passing scores to recruits and active servicemen with prior illnesses and injuries.[67]

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

Nothing significant to report.

### **Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)**

***Click here to read ISW's new analysis on Ukrainian long-term efforts to develop a self-sufficient DIB with US and European support.***

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on January 27 that the Netherlands joined the IT Coalition for Ukraine and has already contributed 10 million euros (about \$10.8 million) to fund the Ukrainian MoD's and Ukrainian forces' cyber security projects.[68]

Ukraine's Army of Drones project stated on January 27 that American company Titan Dynamics developed the "Titan Falcon," a first-person view (FPV) drone with interchangeable wings and tails, for Ukrainian forces and that German company Donaustahl GmbH is manufacturing the drone.[69]

### **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)**

Russian federal subjects continue to establish patronage networks with occupied areas of Ukraine. Luhansk City occupation acting head Yana Pashchenko stated on January 27 that Moscow City is renovating and equipping a hospital in Luhansk City with new medical technology as part of a patronage program between Moscow City and Luhansk City.[70]

## **Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

The Russian information space continued to promote narratives that attempt to manipulate domestic US political events to sow domestic instability in the US and interfere with US policy debates about further US military assistance to Ukraine. Russian state media and a large number of Russian milbloggers continued to fill the Russian information space with claims about conflict between Texan and US federal authorities.[71] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger attempted to undermine the legitimacy of upcoming US elections.[72] ISW continues to assess that these claims are very likely part of a deliberate Russian information campaign.[73]

The Kremlin continues efforts to misrepresent NATO’s defensive “Steadfast Defender 2024” exercises as provocative, as ISW previously forecasted. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on January 26 that the exercises are “openly provocative” and are “deliberately aimed at exacerbating the situation, increase the risk of military incidents, and ultimately could lead to tragic consequences for Europe.”[74] The Russian information operation aimed at painting defensive NATO actions in response to real Russian aggression on NATO’s eastern flank as provocative seeks to deflect from recent aggressive Russian rhetoric and behavior towards NATO, which ISW has extensively reported.[75]

## **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)**

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitri Peskov stated on January 27 that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko will hold a bilateral meeting on January 28 during Lukashenko’s ongoing visit to Russia.[76]

The Kremlin announced on January 27 that Putin and Lukashenko will participate in the Union State Supreme State Council meeting on January 29.[77]

**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] <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/73334>

[2] <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/73334>

[3] [https://t.me/tass\\_agency/228453](https://t.me/tass_agency/228453) ; [https://t.me/tass\\_agency/228449](https://t.me/tass_agency/228449) ; <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/73334>

[4] [https://t.me/pul\\_1/11176](https://t.me/pul_1/11176) ; <https://t.me/modmilby/35635> ;  
[https://t.me/belta\\_telegramm/233647](https://t.me/belta_telegramm/233647)

[5] [https://t.me/vv\\_volodin/749](https://t.me/vv_volodin/749)

[6] [https://t.me/vv\\_volodin/749](https://t.me/vv_volodin/749)

[7] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011624> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122823> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-21-2023> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar121423> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar012023> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011823> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011024>

[8] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-11-2024> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011624> ; [https://mid dot ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/1925456/](https://mid dot ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1925456/) ; <https://tass dot ru/politika/19796819> ; <https://tass dot ru/politika/19716145> ; <https://ria dot ru/20230118/putin-1845728977.html> ; [https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/humanitarian\\_cooperation/1918450/#\\_Toc150529461](https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/humanitarian_cooperation/1918450/#_Toc150529461) ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar081823> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020223>

[9] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar123123> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar123023> ;  
<https://isw.pub/UkrWar112823>

[10] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar123023>

[11] <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/73334>

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[13] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-11-2024> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011624> ; [https://mid dot ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/1925456/](https://mid dot ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1925456/) ; <https://tass dot ru/politika/19796819> ; <https://tass dot ru/politika/19716145> ; <https://ria dot ru/20230118/putin-1845728977.html> ; [https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/humanitarian\\_cooperation/1918450/#\\_Toc150529461](https://mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/humanitarian_cooperation/1918450/#_Toc150529461)

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