

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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January 22, 2024 6:45pm 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 1:40pm ET on January 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Russia continues to weaponize its position on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to propagate several long-standing Russian information operations.** Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke at a UNSC meeting, which Russia convened, on January 22 and blamed the West for the lack of negotiations, claiming that Russia has always been “ready for negotiations.”<sup>[1]</sup> Lavrov clarified, however, that Russia is only interested in negotiations that result in the removal of the current Ukrainian government from power, confirming that Russia still officially seeks regime change in Ukraine.<sup>[2]</sup> Lavrov continued to deny Ukraine’s independence and sovereignty, falsely claiming that the Ukrainian people have no interests in the war against Russia and that the West has pushed Ukraine to continue the war.<sup>[3]</sup> Lavrov advised the West to understand that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s “peace formula” is a “path to nowhere,” claiming that the “sooner [the West] realizes this, the better it will be for both Ukraine and the West.”<sup>[4]</sup> Lavrov also claimed that “if Ukraine stops fighting, hundreds of thousands” of Ukrainian lives would be saved.<sup>[5]</sup> Lavrov previously made similar comments, suggesting that the Kremlin believes that Russia will be able to occupy more territory as the war continues and that this course of the war will increasingly weaken Ukraine’s negotiating position.<sup>[6]</sup>

Lavrov denied Russia’s responsibility for fears that Russia may attack NATO in the future, ignoring the recent Kremlin official statements that have prompted those fears. Lavrov falsely claimed that the West promotes the idea that Russia will attack the Baltic states, Poland, and Finland in the future as a way to “extort money” from Western states for aid to Ukraine.<sup>[7]</sup> Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, however, have sustained consistent threatening rhetoric directed against NATO member states, and Kremlin-affiliated actors appear to be attempting to sow instability and set information conditions for possible future aggressive Russian actions against NATO members and other post-Soviet states.<sup>[8]</sup> Lavrov also blamed Ukrainian forces for conducting strikes on Russian-occupied territory in Ukraine, which the Kremlin used to support Russian justifications for its war of conquest in Ukraine.<sup>[9]</sup> Lavrov recently claimed that Ukrainian forces are using Western-supplied weapons to strike civilian targets, including in alleged strikes against occupied Donetsk City on January

21, for example.[10] Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), made similar claims on January 21.[11] The *New York Times* reported on January 21 that it could not independently confirm the actors behind the strike on Donetsk City, and the press service of the Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces stated on January 21 that forces under the control of the Tavriisk Group of Forces did not conduct the strikes.[12] Lavrov also attempted to downplay the various war crimes and crimes against humanity that Russian occupation forces and occupation administrators are conducting in Ukraine, claiming that Ukrainians and Russians “live in peace and harmony” in occupied Crimea and other Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories.[13] Lavrov claimed that “Russians and Ukrainians will live exactly like brothers and good neighbors” after Russia achieves its goals in the war in Ukraine — which ISW continues to assess are tantamount to full Ukrainian and Western surrender.[14] ISW has routinely documented how Russian forces and occupation administrations have been engaging in large-scale and deliberate ethnic cleansing campaigns; forcibly and illegally deport Ukrainians, including children, to Russia; and are systematically working to eliminate the Ukrainian language, culture, history, and ethnicity in areas that Russian forces occupy.[15]

ISW previously assessed that Russia aims to reinforce the primacy of the UN and to link as many international efforts to the UN as possible in order to capitalize on Russia’s permanent UNSC seat and veto power.[16] Russia’s request for the January 22 UNSC meeting to discuss arms supplies to Ukraine and Lavrov’s use of this meeting to promote various Kremlin information operations is likely an attempt to legitimize these Kremlin narratives, promote them on a global stage, and convince Ukraine’s international partners to stop sending weapons to Ukraine.

**Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk visited Kyiv on January 22 and announced a new Polish defense package for Ukraine.**[17] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky thanked Tusk for the new Polish defense package and noted that he and Tusk discussed possibilities for the future production of weapons.[18] Zelensky stated that the package includes a Polish loan for large-scale Ukrainian weapons purchases, but Tusk and Zelensky did not specify additional details about security assistance package provisions or the overall value of the package.[19] Tusk later stated that Poland joined the Group of Seven (G7) declaration of support for Ukraine and noted that Poland will appoint a commissioner to oversee Polish involvement in Ukrainian reconstruction efforts.[20]

**Footage purportedly showing an altercation between a Russian soldier and Chechen “Akhmat-Vostok” forces in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast, reignited criticism of Chechen forces for their lack of contributions to Russian military operations in Ukraine.** Footage widely circulated on January 22 purportedly shows Chechen “Akhmat-Vostok” Battalion commander Vakha Khambulatov and other “Akhmat-Vostok” Battalion personnel threatening to kill a Russian soldier at a checkpoint in occupied Melitopol after the Russian soldier stated that Khambulatov had invalid identification documents.[21] Russian milbloggers criticized the Chechen personnel for having “too clean uniforms and too clean cars” and complained that these personnel receive the same state salary and social benefits as frontline Russian Airborne (VDV) forces despite contributing less to Russian military operations.[22] A Russian milblogger claimed that this is the fifth altercation between Russian and Chechen military personnel in rear areas.[23] Russian sources have previously criticized Chechen forces for conducting performative actions in Belgorod Oblast after all-Russian pro-Ukrainian forces raided the area, for posturing themselves as a response force during the Wagner Group rebellion

in June 2023, and for exaggerating their supposed frontline combat contributions around Bakhmut in July 2023.[24] Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov has routinely attempted to curry favor with the Kremlin and promote his domestic power through emphasizing Chechnya's contributions to the war in Ukraine, and continued criticism against Chechen forces in Ukraine may degrade the influence Kadyrov has gained through this effort.

**An investigation by a Russian opposition outlet suggests that Russian elites may have accepted and internalized the domestic consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine.** Russian opposition outlet *Verstka*, citing unnamed interlocutors amongst Russian elites, reported that Russian elites are increasingly complaining that vacations in Russia and abroad in "friendly countries" are becoming more expensive.[25] *Verstka's* interlocutor noted that many Russian elites who work in military and government affairs want a quick end to the war on the condition that Ukraine recognizes Russia's illegal annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts, and that elites desire Russia to "finish off" Ukraine so that Russia can go about planning for a new future isolated from Europe. *Verstka* cited Russian political scientist Ilya Grashchenkov noting that the upcoming March 2024 Russian presidential election is not galvanizing Russian political elites as the Presidential Administration had hoped because most Russian elites view the outcome of the elections as pre-determined, and do not anticipate much change to their status as a result of Russian President Vladimir Putin's re-election. Grashchenkov noted that "new" elites who came into power as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have realized that they will be unable to gain more influence and "old" elites understand they have limited political control. *Verstka* summarized the sentiments of Russian elites as "apathetic," which suggests that many Russian elites have internalized and accepted the social ramifications of the war. ISW has previously reported on Russian public opinion polls that similarly show a substantial degree of domestic internalization of the war's consequences and support for the war.[26]

**Russian officials and information space actors are attempting to further rhetorically justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine by misrepresenting a decree that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed on January 22 concerning discrimination against ethnic Ukrainians in Russia.** Zelensky signed a decree titled "On the Territories of the Russian Federation Historically Inhabited by Ukrainians," which accurately stated that Russia has systematically oppressed and continues to oppress Ukrainians living in Russia and eroding their national identity, including on lands historically inhabited by ethnic Ukrainians in modern day Russia's Krasnodar Krai and Belgorod, Bryansk, Voronezh, Kursk, and Rostov oblasts.[27] The decree instructs the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers to develop an action plan for preserving Ukrainian national identity in Russia, documenting the history of Russia's oppression of its Ukrainian communities, countering disinformation about the history of Ukrainians in Russia, and disseminating materials about Ukrainian national state formations in different historical periods. **Zelensky's decree does not establish any territorial demands upon Russia, as select Russian ultranationalists falsely claimed.**[28]

Russian officials purposefully misrepresented the decree to further justify Russia's full-scale invasion and made further genocidal appeals to the destruction of Ukrainian statehood and ethnic identity. Kursk Oblast Governor Roman Starovoyt called the decree a blatant distortion of history and argued that it shows that Russian President Vladimir Putin was correct to invade Ukraine.[29] Starovoyt's

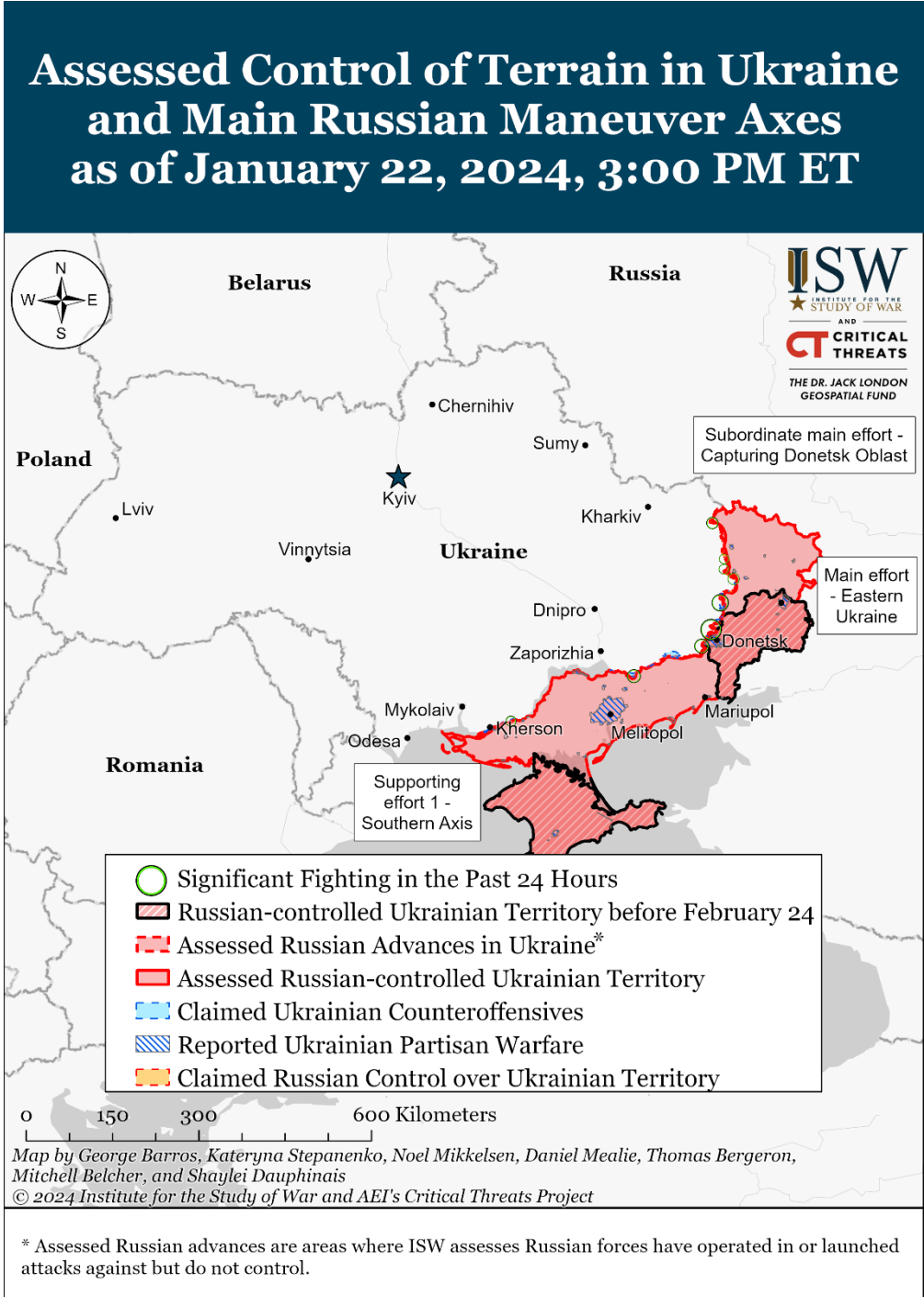
response suggests that Russian officials and actors may continue to misrepresent the decree as an *ex post facto casus belli* to falsely assert that Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was defensive in nature. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev responded to the decree and reiterated longstanding Kremlin rhetoric that aims to erase Ukrainian ethnic identity by asserting that ethnic Ukrainians are ethnically Russian.[30] Medvedev also stated that “Malorossiia” (Little Russia) is part of Russia — a pseudo-historical Kremlin talking point that Russian officials routinely invoke to deny Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty.[31] The Kremlin has repeatedly used the concept of “compatriots abroad,” which includes ethnic Russian and Russian speakers of other ethnicities, to justify the war in Ukraine and aggression in other neighboring states, and Russian officials and ultranationalists may be primed to view legitimate appeals to protecting compatriots abroad as similar pretexts for aggressive actions.[32]

Russia has historically had a policy to Russify ethnic minorities living within Russian territory, and Zelensky’s decree coincides with wider Russian animus towards non-ethnic Russians within Russia that extends far beyond ethnic Ukrainian communities.[33] The Russian ultranationalist community continues to seize on incidents involving migrants and non-ethnic Russians to express growing hostility towards diaspora communities and non-ethnic Russian minorities within Russia.[34] Russian officials and ultranationalists may attempt to frame states’ legitimate concerns about growing Russian domestic animus towards their diaspora communities and Russia’s history of discriminatory policies as anti-Russian and inherently escalatory.

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Russia continues to weaponize its position on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to propagate several long-standing Russian information operations.**
- **Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk visited Kyiv on January 22 and announced a new Polish defense package for Ukraine.**
- **Footage purportedly showing an altercation between a Russian soldier and Chechen “Akhmat-Vostok” forces in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast, reignited criticism of Chechen forces for their lack of contributions to Russian military operations in Ukraine.**
- **An investigation by a Russian opposition outlet suggests that Russian elites may have accepted and internalized the domestic consequences of Russia’s war in Ukraine.**
- **Russian officials and information space actors are attempting to further rhetorically justify Russia’s invasion of Ukraine by misrepresenting a decree that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed on January 22 concerning discrimination against ethnic Ukrainians in Russia. Zelensky’s decree does not establish any territorial demands upon Russia, as select Russian ultranationalists falsely claimed.**
- **Russian forces made confirmed advances south of Avdiivka and west of Donetsk City amid continued positional engagements along the entire frontline.**

- Kyrgyzstan issued a statement against Russia’s continued practice of targeting naturalized migrants as part of ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts.
- Russian federal subjects continue to establish ties with areas of occupied Ukraine.



***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

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**Russian                      Main                      Effort                      –                      Eastern                      Ukraine**

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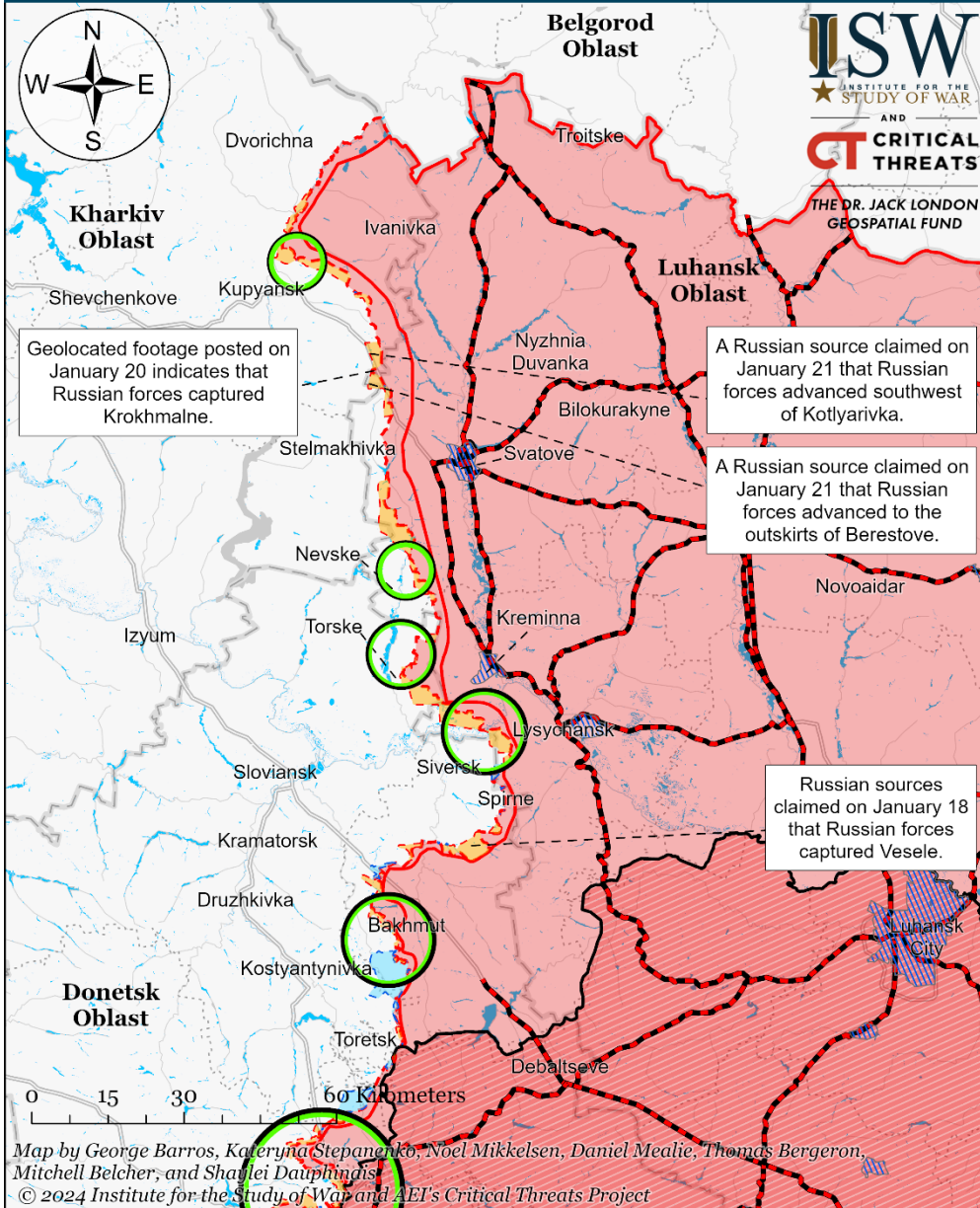
**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces continued intensified offensive operations southeast of Kupyansk on January 22 and reportedly advanced. Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces continued efforts to advance southwest of Krokmalne near Berestove (25km southeast of Kupyansk).[35] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced four kilometers deep along a 1.5-kilometer-wide front towards the Kotlyarivka-Kyslivka line (20km southeast of Kupyansk and just north of the Krokmalne area), although ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Russian gains towards Kotlyarivka.[36] Milbloggers claimed that Russian advances in this area will allow Russian forces to access the P07 Kupyansk-Svatove road and open a new front against Kupyansk.[37] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that positional engagements continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka and Petropavlivka.[38] Elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army (Western Military District) reportedly continue to operate in the Kupyansk direction.[39]

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Svatove-Kreminna line on January 22 and reportedly advanced in some areas. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 400 meters along a 1.5 kilometer-wide-front from near Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna), and other milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced near the mill facility area southeast of Bilohorivka.[40] ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of these Russian gains near Bilohorivka, however. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that positional engagements continued northwest of

Kreminna near Makiivka and Novoyehorivka; west of Kreminna near Terny, Torske, and Yampolivka; and south of Kreminna in the Serebryanske forest area and near Bilohorivka.<sup>[41]</sup> Geolocated footage posted on January 21 shows at least 20 new Russian vehicles losses following a recent unsuccessful assault on Terny.<sup>[42]</sup> Elements of the 2nd Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Army Corps continue to operate near Bilohorivka.<sup>[43]</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of January 22, 2024, 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.

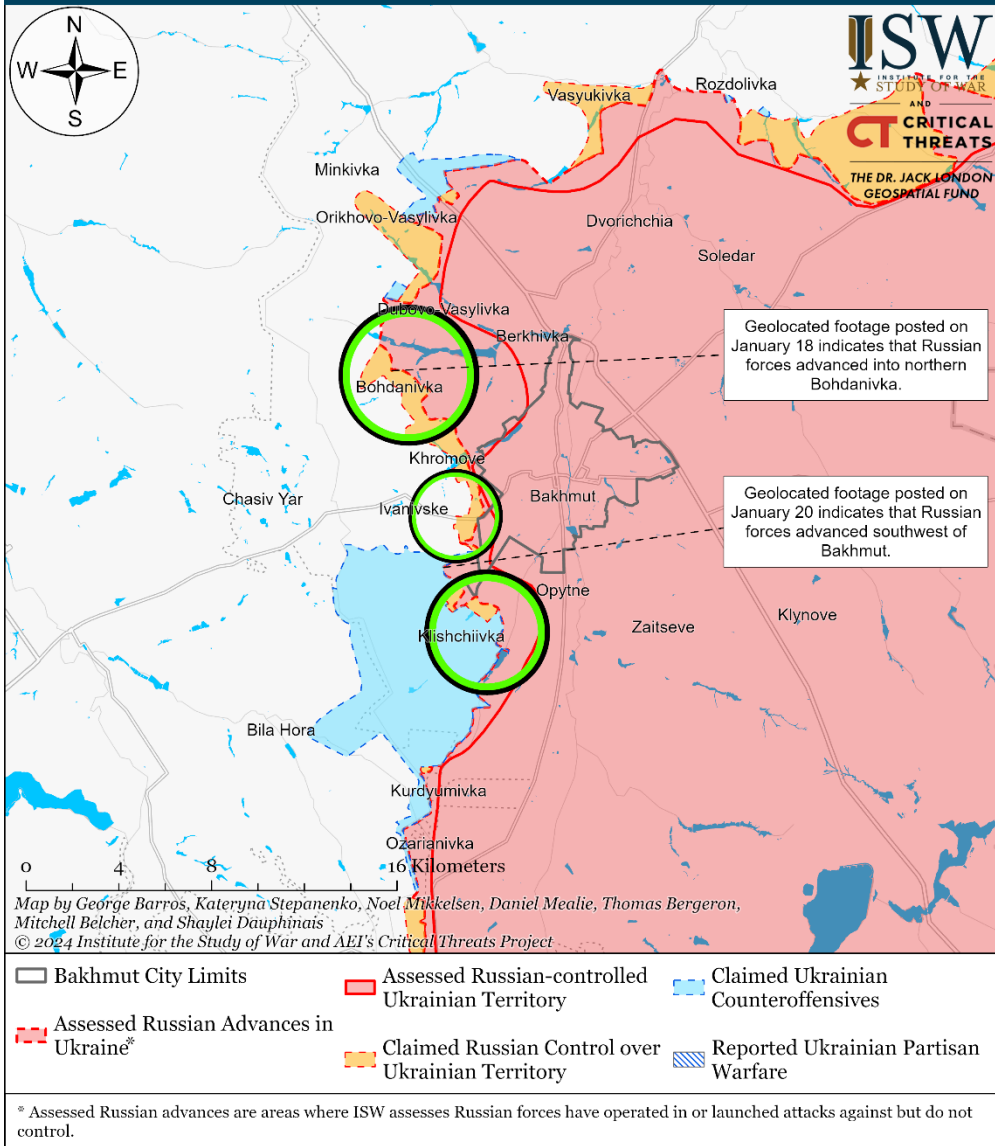
Note: A Russian source claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced up to 400 meters along a 1.5-kilometers-wide front near Bilohorivka. A Russian source claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced four kilometers along a 1.5-kilometers-wide front along the Kotlyarivka-Kyslivka line. A Russian source claimed on January 19 that Russian forces advanced half a kilometer west of the railway line east of Tabaiivka. North Ossetian volunteer battalions "Storm Ossetia" and "Alania" claimed on January 18 that Russian forces are within seven kilometers of Kupyansk.



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

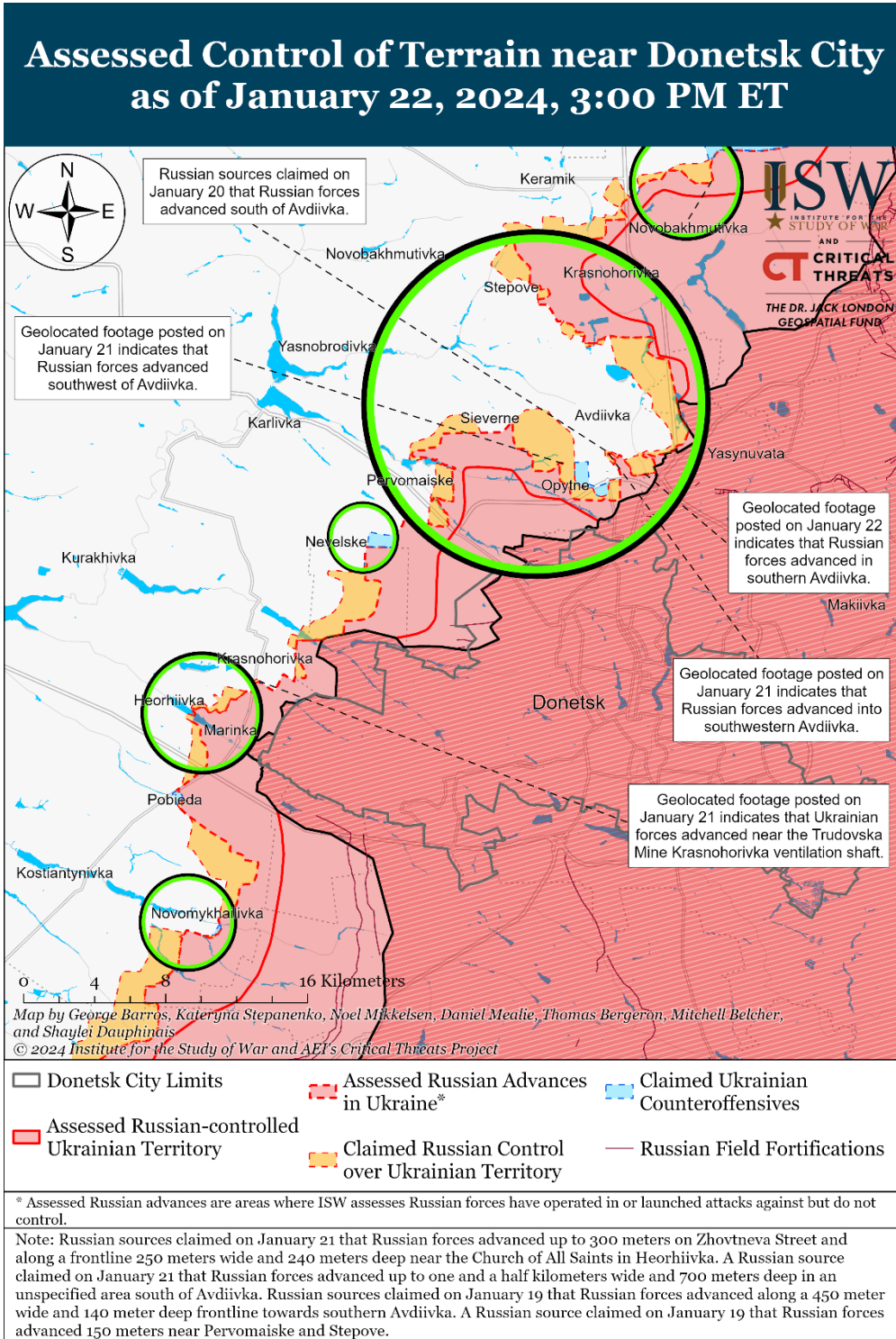
Russian forces reportedly advanced northwest of Bakhmut amid continued positional fighting in the area on January 22. Russian milbloggers claimed on January 21 and 22 that Russian forces advanced within central Bohdanivka (northwest of Bakhmut) and that Ukrainian forces control roughly a third of the settlement.[44] ISW has only observed confirmation of Russian forces holding positions in the northern outskirts of Bohdanivka. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting occurred northwest of Bakhmut near Hryhorivka and Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka, Andriivka, and Pivnichne.[45] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) published footage on January 22 of elements of the Russian 106th Airborne (VDV) Division participating in the alleged capture of Vesele (northeast of Bakhmut) on January 18.[46] Elements of the Russian 98th VDV are reportedly operating northwest of Bakhmut, elements of the “Sever-V” Volunteer Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps) are reportedly operating near Bohdanivka, and elements of the 11th VDV Brigade are reportedly operating in the Bakhmut area.[47]

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of January 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently made confirmed gains south of Avdiivka and reportedly continued to advance in southern Avdiivka on January 22. Geolocated footage published on January 22 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced beyond a section of railway line south of Avdiivka.[48] Russian milbloggers claimed on January 21 and 22 that Russian forces further consolidated positions in the “Tsarska Okhota” restaurant area just south of Avdiivka and continued to advance along Sportyvna, Soborna, and Cherenyshevskoho streets on the southern outskirts of Avdiivka.[49] A Russian milblogger claimed on January 22 that Ukrainian forces still control the area between the “Tsarska Okhota” restaurant and the Avdiivka quarry and Vynohradnyky garden areas in southeastern Avdiivka.[50] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported positional fighting northwest of Avdiivka near Ocheretyne, Novokalynove, Novobakhmutivka, and Stepove; near Avdiivka itself; west of Avdiivka near Sieverne; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske and Nevelske.[51] Elements of the Donetsk Peoples Republic (DNR) “Pyatnashka” international volunteer brigade are reportedly operating near Avdiivka, and elements of

the DNR 1487th Motorized Rifle Regiment (1st DNR Army Corps) reportedly participated in the alleged capture of the “Tsarska Okhota” restaurant area.[52]

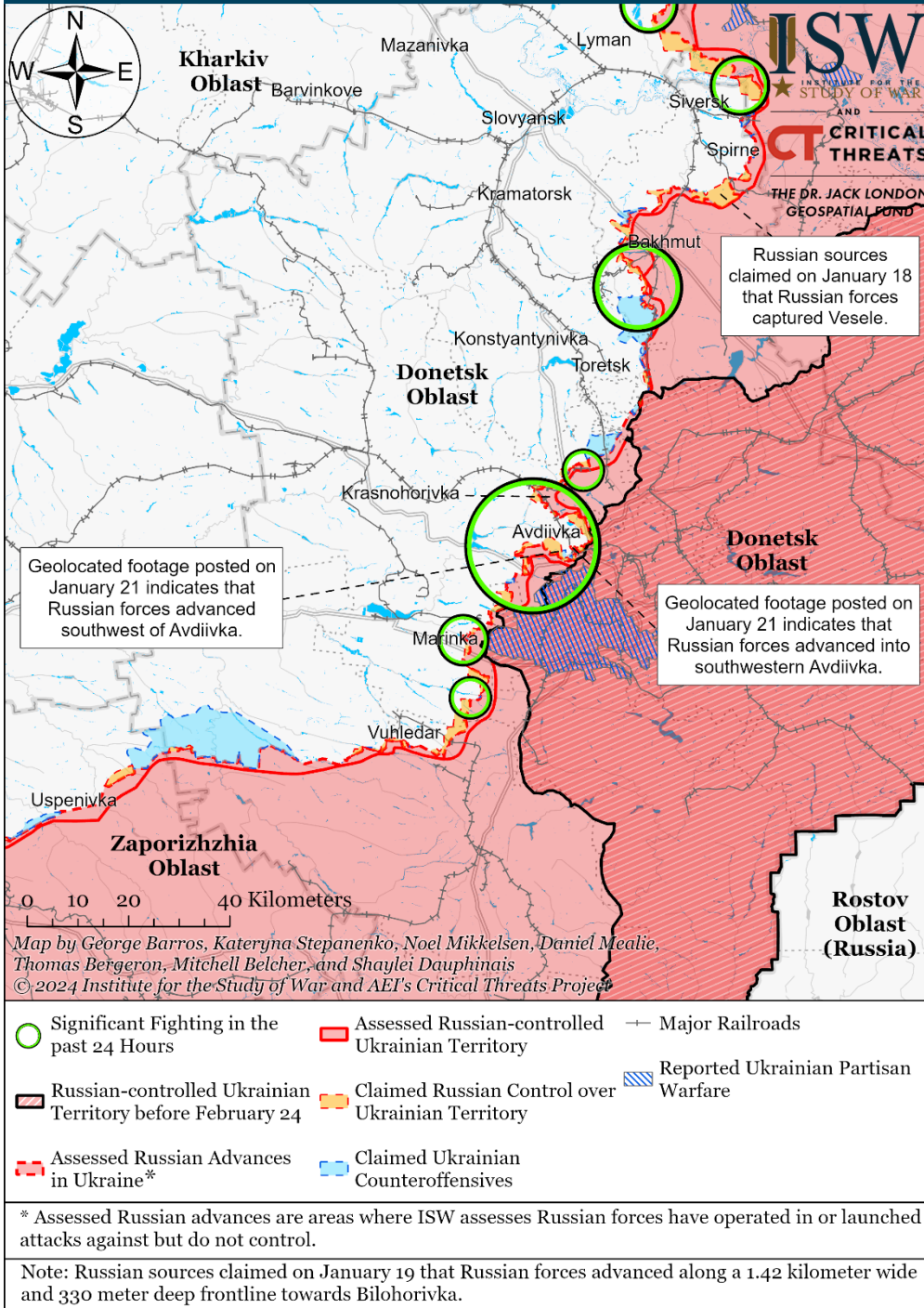


Ukrainian forces recently made marginal advances west of Donetsk City. Geolocated footage published on January 21 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced at the Trudovska mine south of Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City).[53] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 300 meters deep along Zhovetna Street and 240 meters deep near the All-Saints Church in Heorhiivka (west of Donetsk City).[54] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claimed Russian

advances in Heorhiivka. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting continued near Heorhiivka and Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[55] Elements of the Russian 68th Army Corps (Eastern Military District) are reportedly operating near Novomykhailivka, and elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District), the DNR 5th Motorized Rifle Regiment (DNR 1st Army Corps), and the 8th CAA's 238th Artillery Brigade are operating near Heorhiivka.[56]

Russian forces recently made a confirmed advance in the Vuhledar area southwest of Donetsk City. Geolocated footage published on January 22 indicates that Russian forces recently marginally advanced north of Mykilske (southeast of Vuhledar).[57]

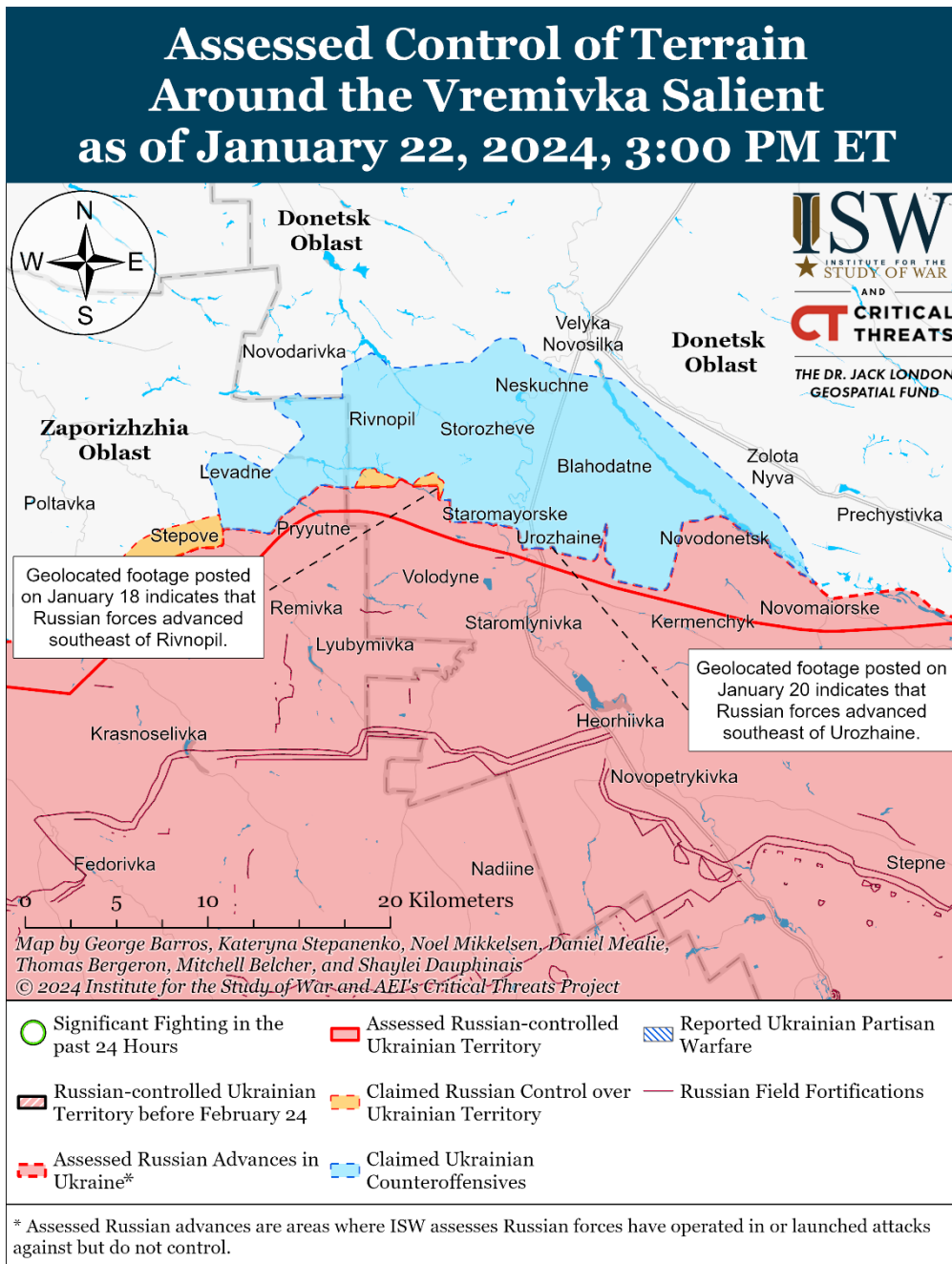
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

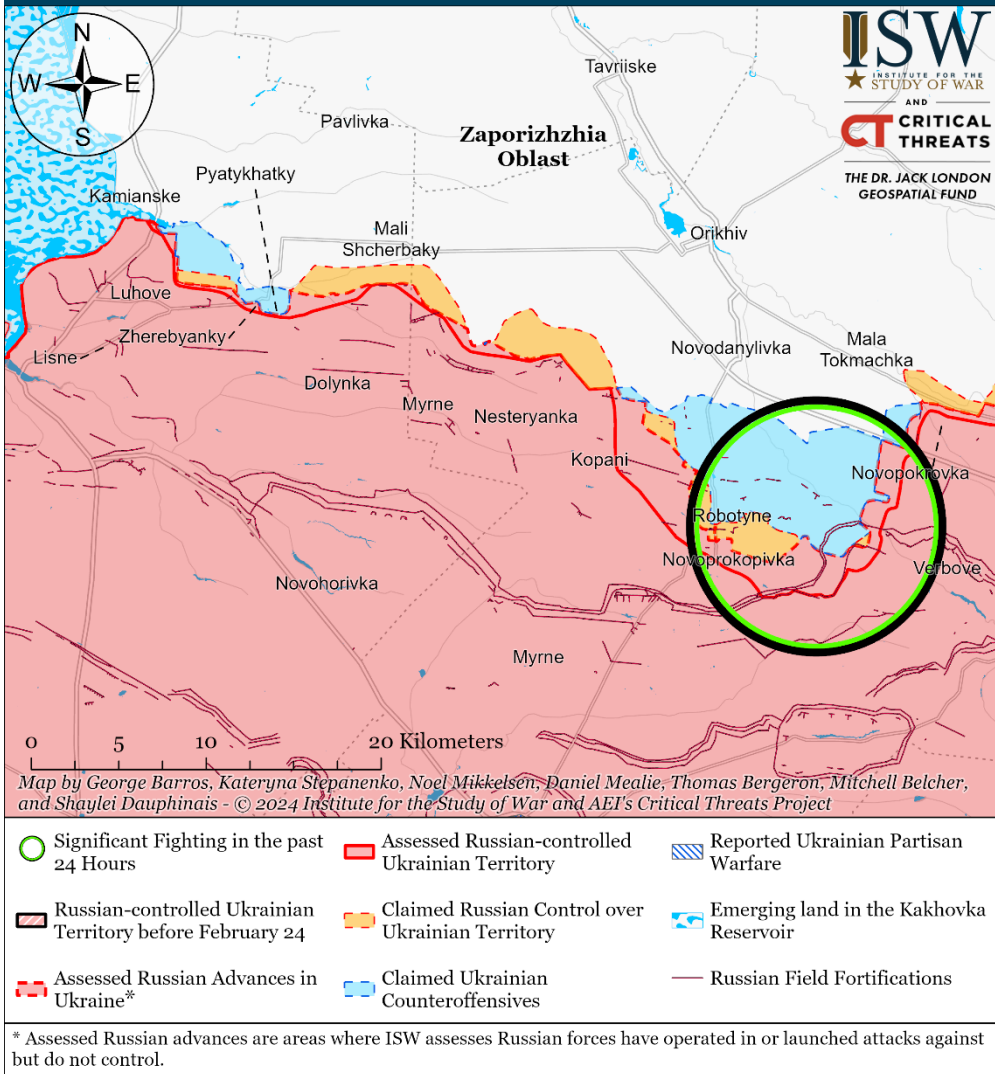
Positional engagements continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on January 22, but there were no confirmed changes to this area of the frontline. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated

that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced south of Urozhaine (south of Velyka Novosilka), although ISW has not observed visual evidence confirming this purported advance.[58] Russian sources claimed that positional engagements continued near Novodonetske (southeast of Velyka Novosilka), Staromayorske, and Zavitne Bazhannya (both south of Velyka Novosilka).[59]

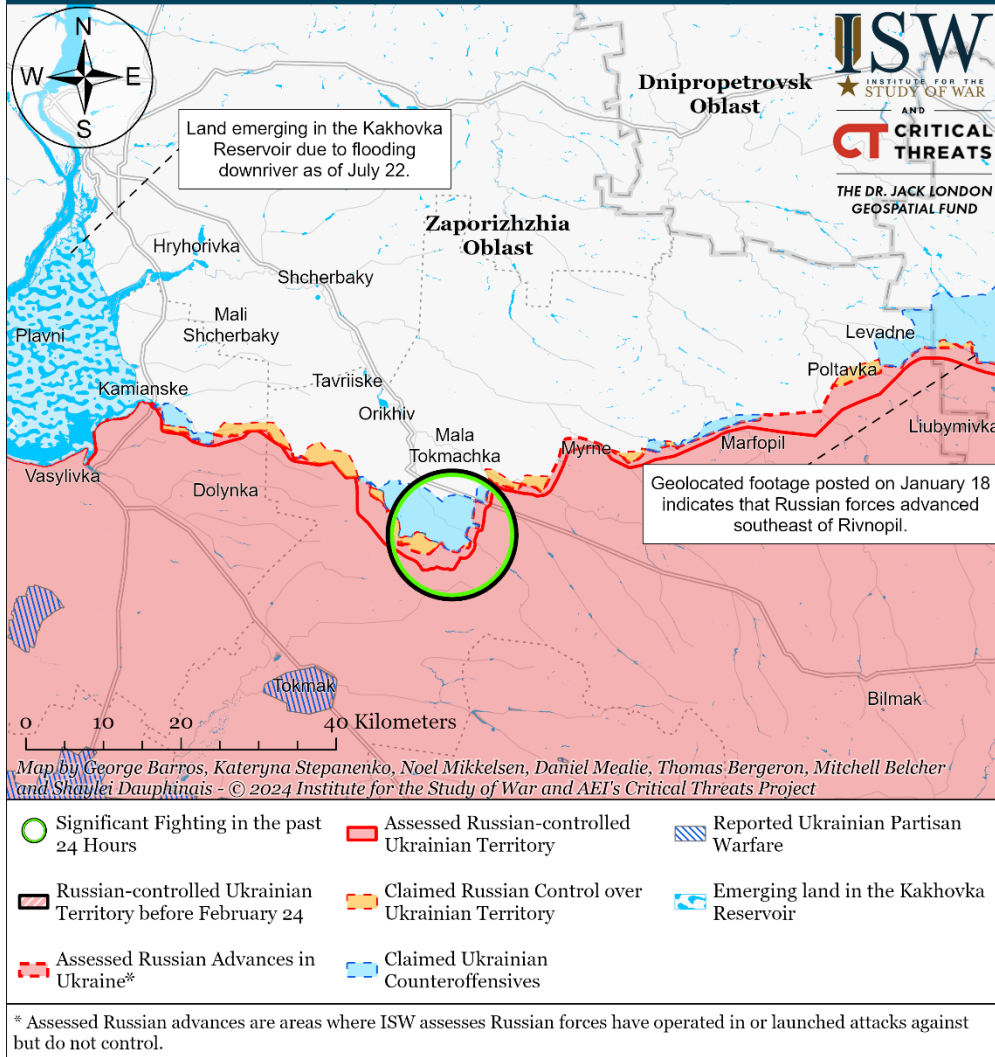


Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on January 22, but there were no confirmed changes to this area of the frontline. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces captured several unspecified positions near Verbove (east of Robotyne), although ISW has not observed visual evidence confirming this claim.[60] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional engagements continued near Robotyne, Verbove, Novoprokopivka (south of Robotyne), Pyatykhatky (27km northwest of Robotyne), and Kamyanske (35km northwest of Robotyne).[61] Russian milbloggers claimed that frequent Ukrainian first-person view (FPV) drone strikes increase the difficulty of Russian operations in the Zaporizhzhia direction.[62]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of January 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



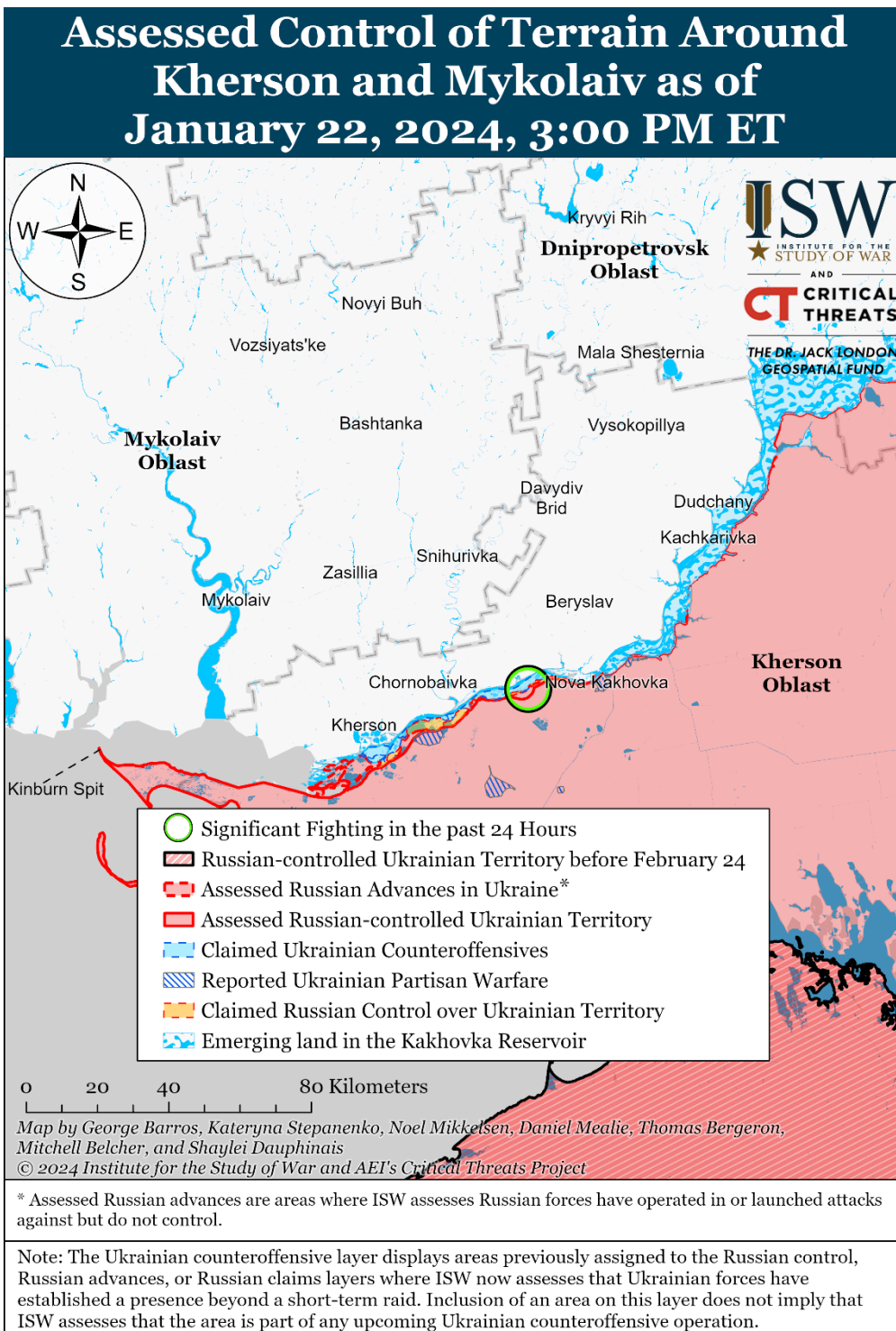
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of January 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Ukrainian forces maintain positions on east (left) bank Kherson Oblast as of January 22, but there were no changes to the frontline in this area. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional engagements continued near Krynky.[63] Russian forces reportedly continue conducting TOS-1A thermobaric artillery strikes on Ukrainian positions in Krynky.[64] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces have reduced tactical aviation activity over southern Ukraine but have started to intensify the use of various modified drones to drop explosives on Ukrainian positions and populated areas.[65] Humenyuk also reported that Russian forces are attempting to adjust their combat tactics on the east bank to push Ukrainian forces from the east bank, so the number of Russian assaults per day has fluctuated between one and 10 over the past week.[66] Humenyuk stated that Russian personnel are increasingly refusing to conduct assaults in the Kherson direction because the Russian command prohibits Russian forces from using armored vehicle support during the attacks.[67]



Russian news outlet *RIA Novosti* reported on January 22 that a source close to Crimean occupation authorities claimed that the Russian military will dismantle Ukrainian ships abandoned in Sevastopol after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 instead of transferring them to the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF).[68] The source claimed that the Russian military has suspended dismantling the Ukrainian ships in order to prioritize protecting BSF vessels.[69]



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

Kyrgyzstan issued a statement against Russia’s continued practice of targeting naturalized migrants as part of ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts. Russian outlet *It’s My City* reported on January 19 that Russian security forces from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), and Rosgvardia conducted a raid at a construction site in Yekaterinburg on January 17.[70] *It’s My City* reported that the Russian security officials inspected the documents of about 150 foreign workers, deported eight workers, and issued military summonses to four foreign workers who recently obtained Russian passports but had not registered with Russian military registration and enlistment offices.[71] Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on January 22 that there were about 40 Kyrgyz citizens at the construction site on January 17 and that Kyrgyzstan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Consulate General is taking measures to investigate the legality of Russian law enforcement’s methods that “degrade the dignity of [Kyrgyz] citizens engaged in labor activities.”[72] Kyrgyzstan previously sentenced Kyrgyz citizens to prison on charges of participating in a military conflict in a foreign country after the Kyrgyz citizens fought in Ukraine as part of the Wagner Group and a Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) unit.[73]

Russian officials continue attempts to censor family members of mobilized Russian military personnel who demand the return of their family members back to Russia. Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* stated on January 22 that Russian authorities accused relatives of mobilized Russian military personnel of violating anti-COVID-19 measures, demanded an inspection of the group’s documents, and photographed the group’s signs after the group laid flowers at the Field of Mars in St. Petersburg on January 20.[74]

Russian authorities are reportedly struggling to develop a unified electronic military register for digitizing recruitment processes. *Forbes Russia* stated on January 21 that Russia will have to create its electronic military summonses system from scratch, which may delay the project’s implementation.[75] *Forbes Russia* stated that the Russian government decided on December 22, 2023, to not develop a military registration system based on its platform for public services, Gostekh, as this system is not designed to process classified information. Russian President Vladimir Putin approved the creation of a digital register to send electronic summonses to citizens eligible for conscription in April 2023, and Russian Deputy Minister of Digital Development Oleg Kachanov stated in September 2023 that Russia will launch the digital register in 2025.[76]

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

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on January 22 that it delivered an unspecified quantity of modernized T-72B3M tanks to the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces operating in the southern Donetsk direction in Ukraine.[77] The T-72B3M is a modernized version of the T-72 with an improved fire control system with a digital ballistic computer, a sight with a laser rangefinder, an anti-tank missile control system, a modernized digital communications system, a rearview camera, and more reliable tracks.[78] TASS stated that the T-72B3M is reinforced with side screens, mounted lattice screens, and new protection systems.[79]

**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.

Ukraine's partners continue to prepare military assistance packages and bolster defense production for Ukraine. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on January 21 that the European Union (EU) is developing a new plan to provide Ukraine with "tens of billions of dollars" of military assistance and that 22 billion euros (\$23.9 billion) of this assistance will feed back into EU member states.[80] The WSJ also reported that NATO plans to announce a new investment in artillery ammunition production on January 23.[81] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on January 22 that Belgium will provide military assistance valued at 611 million euros (\$665.1 million) to Ukraine in 2024 and that Belgium has made a long-term commitment to help modernize the Ukrainian military.[82]

**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 ties with areas of occupied Ukraine. Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko stated on January 22 that Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov visited occupied Mariupol to hold administrative meetings with Russian occupation officials.[83] Kherson Oblast occupation administration head Vladimir Saldo claimed on January 22 that the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic continues to establish patronage networks with occupied Kherson Oblast, including through the construction of a medical facility and school in occupied Mykhailivka and Kalanchak and the provision of school supplies to schools in occupied Skadovsk and Hola Prystan raions.[84]

**Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

Senior Russian officials continue efforts to falsely portray Ukraine as a pawn of the West that lacks agency. Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin falsely claimed on January 22 that the US is trying to make Ukraine into a "vassal state" and that the US is blackmailing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky into making cabinet-level personnel changes that allegedly favor the West.[85] Senior Russian officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, routinely attempt to frame Ukraine as an agent of the West to mask Russia's expansionist and maximalist war goals of establishing full Russian control over Ukraine and eliminating Ukrainian sovereignty.[86]

Russian officials and Kremlin mouthpieces further intensified efforts to misrepresent French support for Ukraine as escalatory to constrain ongoing and future French assistance to Ukraine. Russian State Duma International Affairs Committee Head Leonid Slutsky announced that the Duma has submitted a draft appeal to the French National Assembly to begin an investigation into Russian allegations of “French mercenaries” fighting for Ukraine.[87] Slutsky stated that the State Duma will consider the appeal on January 24.[88] Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed on Russian state television channel *Rossiya-24* that France is violating its own laws by failing to admit that “French mercenaries” are fighting in Ukraine.[89] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) previously summoned French Ambassador to Russia Pierre Levy over these accusations on January 19.[90] Russian MFA Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne on January 22 of being “indifferent” and “unprofessional” in response to the French MFA’s January 18 denial of “French mercenaries” operating in Ukraine.[91] The French MFA characterized the Russian accusations as “another clumsy Russian manipulation.”[92]

A pro-Kremlin actor is amplifying information attacks on Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan likely to punish Armenia for recently distancing itself from Russian influence. A prominent, Kremlin-affiliated milblogger amplified a claim on January 22 portraying Pashinyan as purposefully destroying the Armenian military and that Pashinyan aims to destroy the Armenian state.[93] The milblogger also claimed that Azerbaijan demanded a list of minefields along the Azerbaijan-Armenia border and that this demand sets a precedent for further Azerbaijani demands on the Armenian military.[94] The milblogger’s seemingly contradictory characterizations of Pashinyan as both abusing power and as weak in posturing against Azerbaijan likely aim to portray Pashinyan as an incapable head of state and punish Pashinyan for his increasingly anti-Russia policies.

### **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)**

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated on January 22 that he will hold one-on-one negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss the meeting agenda of the upcoming Union State Supreme Council meeting, which will likely occur in early 2024.[95] Neither Russia nor Belarus has announced a date for the Putin-Lukashenko discussions nor for the Union State Supreme Council meeting, however. Union State Secretary of State Dmitry Mezentsev announced on January 22 that Belarus has prepared a draft resolution to create a unified media holding for the Union State for the Supreme Council to consider at the meeting.[96] Mezentsev stated that this media company will coordinate and ensure the release of print publications, television channels, and internet resources related to the Union State formation, components, history, plans, and reactions to pressure. Russian and Belarusian officials have described the Union State’s united media holding as a single media company that will unify Belarus’ and Russia’s media resources under one consolidated “powerful editorial office” to “promote the Union State agenda” domestically.[97]

**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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