

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 19, 2023

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December 19, 2023, 8:15pm ET

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

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 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 3:15pm ET on December 19. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is increasingly invoking the Kremlin's pre-invasion pseudo-historical rhetoric to cast himself as a modern Russian tsar and framing the invasion of Ukraine as a historically justified imperial reconquest. Putin addressed the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Collegium on December 19 and largely reiterated boilerplate Kremlin rhetoric on the war in Ukraine by blaming NATO and the collective West for encroaching on Russia's borders and exculpated himself for issues faced by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine by deflecting the blame towards the Russian MoD bureaucracy.[1] Putin additionally lauded Russian battlefield operations and Russia's defense industrial base's net output in 2023, furthering several of his standard talking points. Putin once again invoked the concept of "compatriots abroad" when discussing residents in "southeastern Ukraine" who, he asserted, have historical, cultural, and linguistic attachments to Russia, in order to justify the invasion of Ukraine on ideological grounds. ISW previously assessed that Putin rhetorically contextualized Russia's maximalist objectives in Ukraine within a wider framing of Russian "sovereignty" at Putin's "Direct Line" event on December 14.[2] Putin notably claimed that while Russia is the sole guarantor of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Russia will also not interfere in "territorial disputes" in western Ukraine, where he claimed that many residents want to return to either Poland, Romania, or Hungary, concluding that "history will put everything in its place."

Putin's claim that Russia can be the only true guarantor of Ukraine's sovereignty is not a new narrative. In a 2021 essay entitled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," Putin similarly claimed that "true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible precisely in partnership with Russia." [3] In the same essay, Putin also utilized a pseudo-historical framework of Ukraine's and Russia's relationship that essentially defines the lands of modern, sovereign Ukraine as either part of Malorossiya (Little Russia), Novorossiya (New Russia), or fragments of other historical empires.[4] This essay dismissed Ukraine's historical claim to its own sociocultural development, historical sovereignty, and territorial integrity, which the Russian Federation formally recognized and, indeed, guaranteed, in 1994.[5] During the December 19 Collegium Address, Putin further engaged with this pseudo-historical framing to suggest that western Ukraine is also not truly Ukrainian and claimed that Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin "gave it away" to Ukraine from pieces of Poland, Romania, and Hungary following the Second World War.[6] Putin baselessly claimed that people living in western Ukraine want to return to their "historical homeland," suggesting that western Ukraine could feasibly return to 17th-century conceptions of state borders and become parts of Poland, Romania, or Hungary. **This statement suggests that Putin is selectively weaponizing facets of Eastern and Central European history as they suit his ideological line to further rhetorically strip Ukraine of its internationally recognized sovereignty.**

Putin's MoD Collegium claims are rife with rhetorical contradictions and are dependent on tenuous historical allegories that fall apart when considered in different historical contexts. During a November 28 speech at the World Russian People's Council, Putin defined the concept of the "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) as "all other peoples who have lived and are living in [Russia]," geographically defined as what belonged to Ancient Rus (Kyivan Rus), the Kingdom of Muscovy, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the contemporary Russian Federation, which suggests that Putin was broadly including parts of eastern European states such as Poland and Romania in this conception of the Russian World.[7] During the December 19 Collegium Address, however, Putin appeared to diverge from this maximalist interpretation of the Russian World by differentiating Poland, Romania, and Hungary as having their own historical claims to western Ukraine.[8] These contradictions emphasize the fact that Putin relies on historical narratives that intentionally ignore contemporary contexts when they are suitable to the Kremlin narrative. The contradictions also exhibit another known characteristic of Russian information operations, which is that Russian information operations often are not necessarily internally consistent with each other. Based on Putin's interpretation of eastern European history, the modern

map of Europe could also ridiculously be redrawn with Poland and Sweden controlling the Baltic States and parts of Belarus and Russia, and the Russian borders extending to Alaska and the California coast.[9] One could also make an absurd and nonsensical argument that a revived Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania has rights to most of eastern Europe and parts of western Russia. Putin's selective references to convenient historical "claims" reflect the facile nature of his narrative.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated during the Russian MoD Collegium on December 19 that the Russian MoD will prioritize continuing the war in Ukraine and training newly formed units and formations in 2024, while also reiterating threats against Finland and the wider NATO alliance. Shoigu stated that the Russian military is undergoing work to expand its combat power to 1.32 million personnel from 1.15 million in accordance with Putin's December 1 decree.[10] ISW previously assessed that Russian this decree was likely a formal recognition of the Russian military's current end strength and not an order to immediately increase the number of Russian military personnel, and Shoigu appears to be merely reamplifying Putin's original statement as opposed to outlining major changes in Russian end strength.[11] Shoigu stated that the Russian military formed two fully-equipped armies (likely in reference to the newly formed 18th and 25th Combined Arms Armies), a mixed aviation corps, four divisions, including 50 other units and formations of lower echelons, 18 brigades, and 28 regiments in 2023.[12] Shoigu initially outlined the creation of these new formations on paper at the MoD Collegium in December of 2022, the establishment of several of which ISW has independently confirmed.[13] It is highly unlikely that any of these new formations are "fully equipped" or operating at their doctrinal end strengths at this time, however.[14]

Shoigu reiterated that the Russian military is forming the Leningrad Military District (LMD) and Moscow Military District (MMD) in connection with Finland's accession to NATO and the upcoming accession of Sweden.[15] Shoigu also announced that Russia will prioritize implementing operational and combat training measures to combat the "threats of further NATO expansion east" in 2024.[16] Shoigu's attempt to present the creation of the LMD and MMD as a response to alleged "NATO expansion" echoes an ongoing Russian information operation aimed at shifting responsibility for the war in Ukraine away from Russia to the West by framing Russia's actions as reactive. Finland and Sweden only applied to join NATO shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, likely fearing further Russian aggression on their borders.[17] Russia's decision to reform the Western Military District (WMD) into the LMD and MMD is part of a long-term restructuring and expansion effort that aims to prepare Russia for a potential future large-scale conventional war against NATO while balancing the Russian operational requirements in Ukraine.[18]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky gave an end-of-the-year press conference on December 19 during which he commented on Russia's continued unwillingness to negotiate, his confidence in future Western aid provisions, Ukrainian domestic weapons production, and possible future mobilization in Ukraine. Zelensky stated that the Kremlin did not achieve its military objectives in Ukraine in 2023, likely referring to Russia's inability to occupy the entirety of its illegally annexed territory, particularly by failing to reach the administrative borders of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.[19] Zelensky stated that Ukraine is working on a peace formula at international summits to possibly present to Russia in the future but that the issue of negotiations with Russia is currently "irrelevant" as Putin's recent statements about Russia's unchanged goals in Ukraine indicate that Putin does not want peace. (ISW has long assessed that Russia is unwilling to negotiate with Ukraine in good faith.)[20] Zelensky expressed confidence that the US and EU will provide aid to Ukraine in the near future.[21] Zelensky noted that Ukraine will domestically produce one million drones and increase production of artillery in 2024, and that Ukraine is working to produce unspecified projectiles and create the infrastructure needed to deliver domestically produced weapons to the front. Zelensky stated that financing issues have prevented him from making a decision on the Ukrainian General Staff's proposal to mobilize an additional 450,000 – 500,000 military personnel. Zelensky also emphasized that he would not sign a possible future bill on the mobilization of women but that he may lower the mobilization age to 25.[22] Zelensky answered a question about the possible dismissal of Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, stating that he and Zaluzhnyi have a "working relationship." [23] Russian sources have increasingly been promoting reports about internal Ukrainian political-military tension in an effort to discredit Ukrainian leadership, sow domestic distrust between Ukrainian citizens and the government, and weaken Western support for Ukraine.[24]

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin discussed Russian and Chinese economic cooperation and bilateral relations with Chinese Premier Li Quang in Beijing on December 19.[25] Mishustin claimed that Russia and China have "completely gotten rid of third-country currencies in mutual transactions" in 2023 and that both countries are strengthening their business contacts and increasing the share of national currencies in mutual transactions. Mishustin added that one of Russia's most important strategic objectives is to bring the trade and investment between Russia and China to a higher level.[26] Mishustin arrived in Beijing to attend the 28th regular meeting of heads of the Russian and Chinese governments and will also meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping over the next two days.[27]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin is increasingly invoking the Kremlin's pre-invasion pseudo-historical rhetoric to cast himself as a modern Russian tsar and framing the invasion of Ukraine as a historically justified imperial reconquest.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated during the Russian MoD Collegium on December 19 that the Russian MoD will prioritize continuing the war in Ukraine and training newly formed units and formations in 2024, while also reiterating threats against Finland and the wider NATO alliance.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky gave an end of the year press conference on December 19 during which he commented on Russia's continued unwillingness to negotiate, his confidence in future Western aid provisions, Ukrainian domestic weapons production, and possible future mobilization in Ukraine.**
- **Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin discussed Russian and Chinese economic cooperation and bilateral relations with Chinese Premier Li Quang in Beijing on December 19.**
- **Russian forces made confirmed advances northeast of Kupyansk, north of Bakhmut, and southwest of Avdiivka, and continued positional meeting engagements along the entire line of contact.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that the Russian military intends to recruit up to 745,000 contract personnel by the end of 2024 at the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Collegium on December 19.**
- **Russian authorities continued attempts to use military conscription in occupied Ukraine to augment force generation efforts and legitimize Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 19, 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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* 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
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives

NOTE: ISW has restructured the operational kinetic axis sections of the daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment to more accurately reflect the positional nature of fighting on the battlefield. Operational kinetic axis paragraphs will be shorter and more synthetic to convey the same assessment in fewer words and not to overwhelm the reader with long lists of settlement names. The level of detail included in the report has not decreased. The report’s endnotes still contain the same level of sourcing, and ISW encourages readers interested in tactical granular details to read them. ISW will explicitly flag major operational inflections in axis text as usual, so the lack of named settlements should not be taken as an indication of gains or losses of territory or changes in the frontline. ISW will lead operational axes with confirmed map changes to accord with the daily map products produced by the Geospatial Intelligence Team, supplemented by Ukrainian and Russian claims, and will also list order of battle (ORBAT) details in each axis section when available.

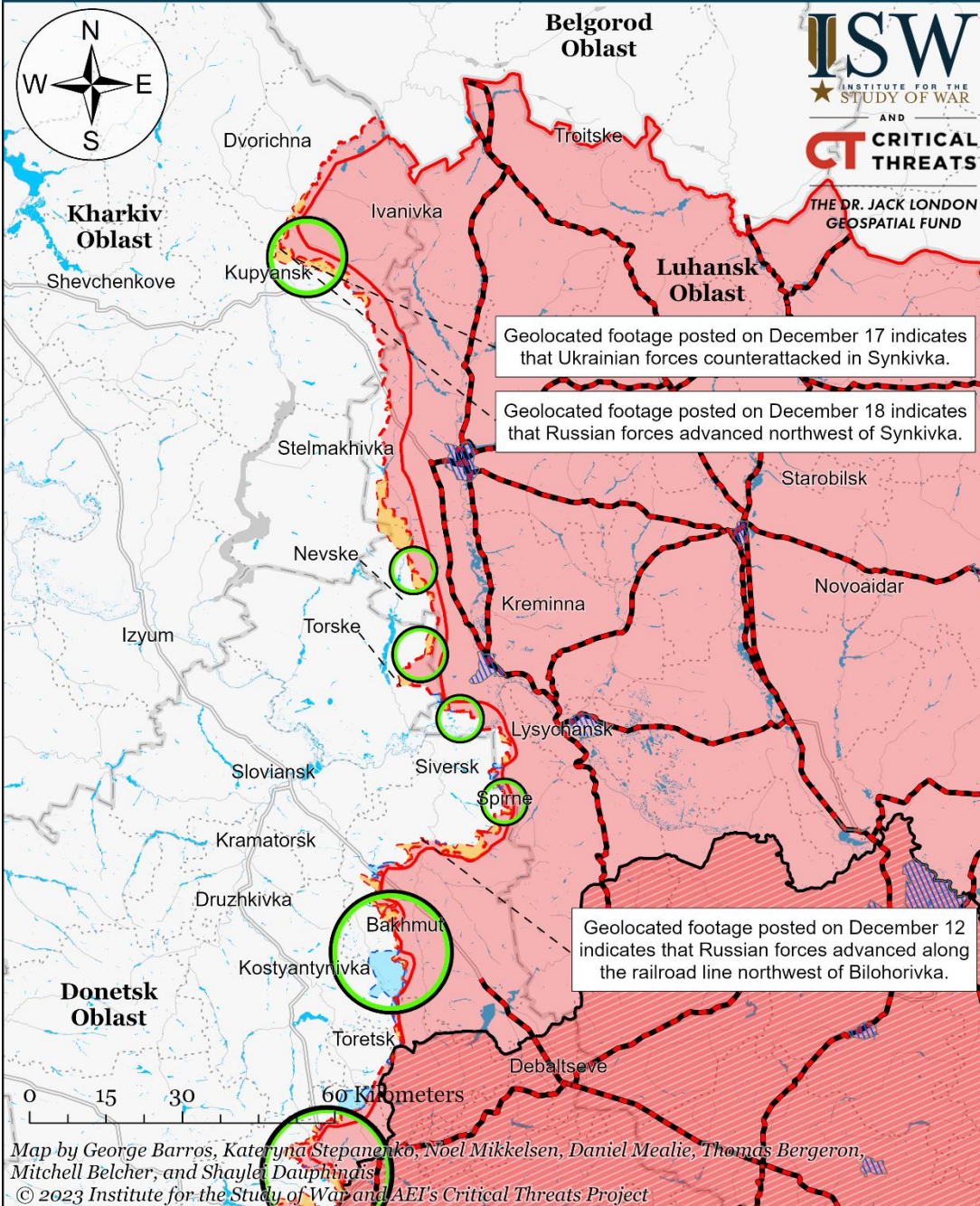
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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 marginal confirmed advance northeast of Kupyansk. Geolocated footage published on December 18 indicates that Russian forces marginally advanced north of Synkivka (northeast of Kupyansk).[28] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that fighting continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka and Petropavlivka.[29]

Russian and Ukrainian forces did not advance along the Svatove-Kreminna line and conducted positional engagements on December 19. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that fighting occurred northwest and west of Kreminna near Makiivka, Terny, and the Serebryanske forest area.[30] Elements of the 24th Spetsnaz Brigade and the 20th Combined Arms Army (Western Military District) are reportedly operating in this area.[31]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of December 19, 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

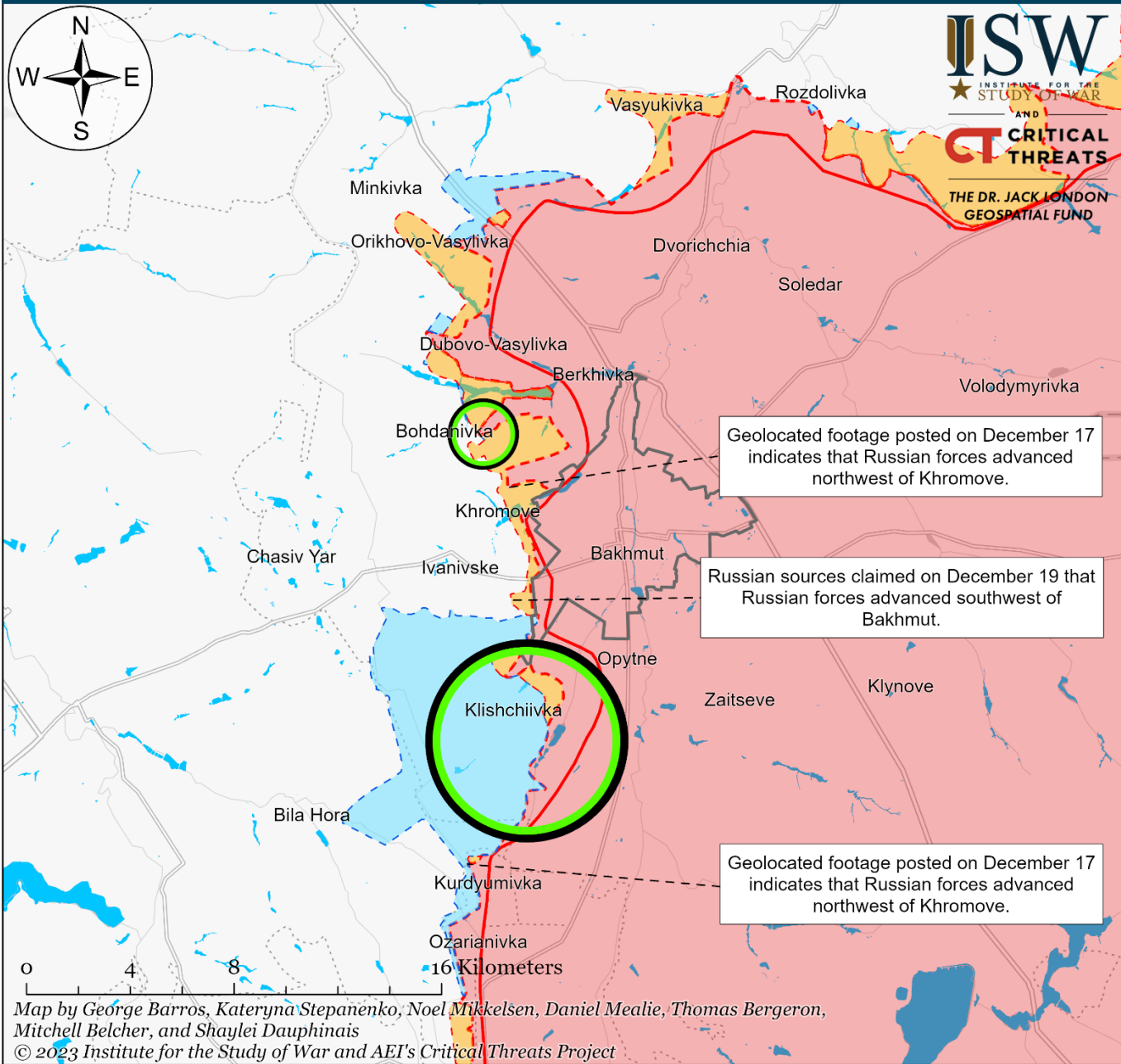
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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 a confirmed advance north of Bakhmut. Geolocated footage published on December 12 indicates that Russian forces advanced northwest of Bilohorivka, Donetsk Oblast, 15km northeast of Bakhmut.[32] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Pazeno, 15km north of Bakhmut.[33]

Russian forces reportedly advanced northwest and southwest of Bakhmut. Russian milbloggers claimed that claim Russian forces captured the Chronobilets gardening community southwest of Bakhmut, although ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of this claim. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces also advanced northwest of Bakhmut near Khromove and Bohdanivka, although ISW has not observed visual evidence of these claims.[34] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked on the western outskirts of Bakhmut and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka.[35] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that fighting occurred northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[36] Ukrainian military officials stated that the Russian military command is using its most combat-capable airborne (VDV) and naval infantry units, and “Storm-Z” and “Storm-V” units comprised mostly of prisoner recruits, in the Bakhmut direction and that Russian forces’ goal is to attack Chasiv Yar (10km west of Bakhmut).[37] The Russian MoD stated that elements of the Russian 98th VDV Division are operating north of Bakhmut and that elements of the Russian 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Northern Fleet) are operating in the general Bakhmut direction.[38] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] Army Corps) are operating southwest of Bakhmut.[39]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of December 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



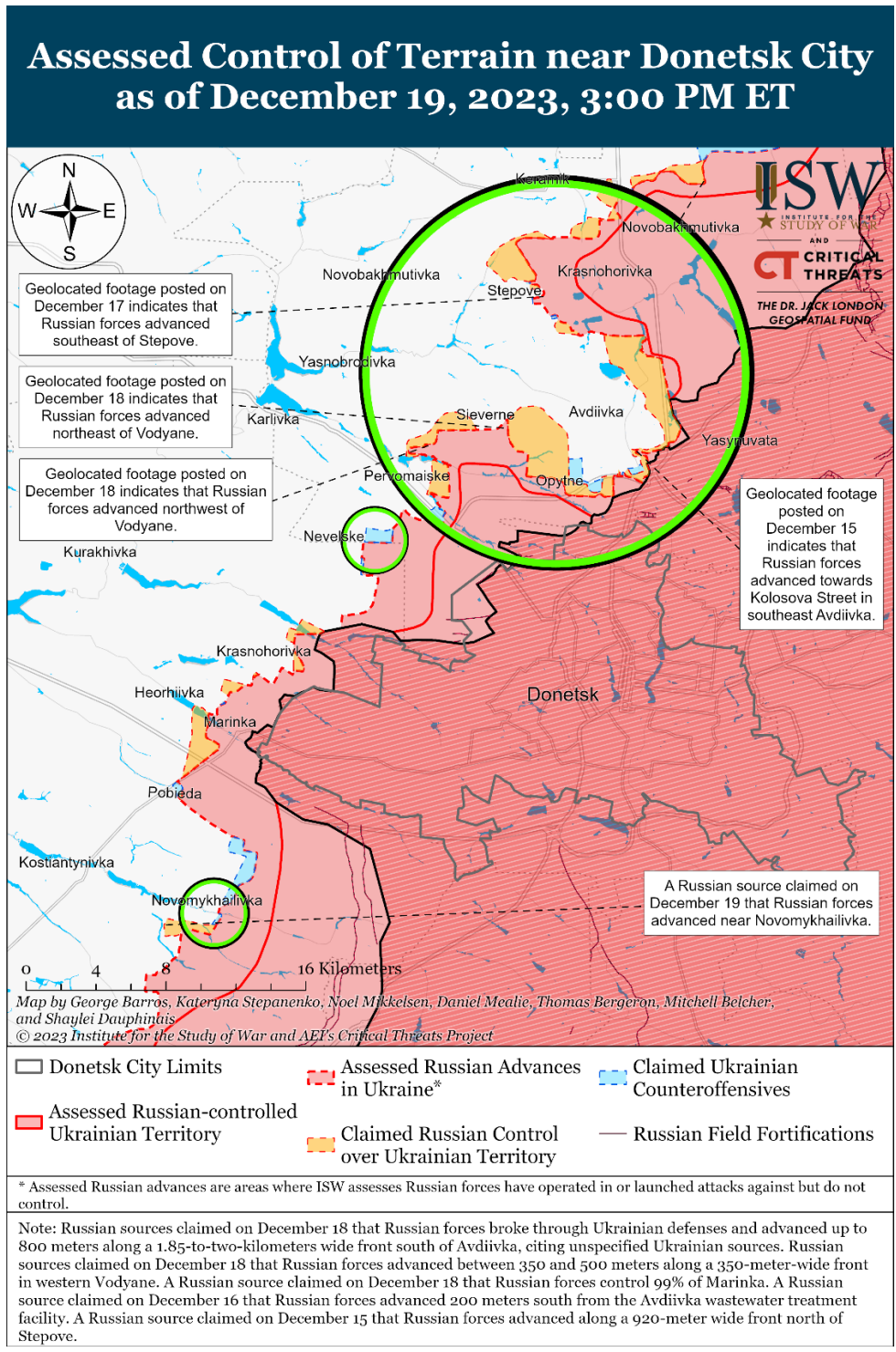
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shaylei Dauphinais
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Bakhmut City Limits	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Assessed Russian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

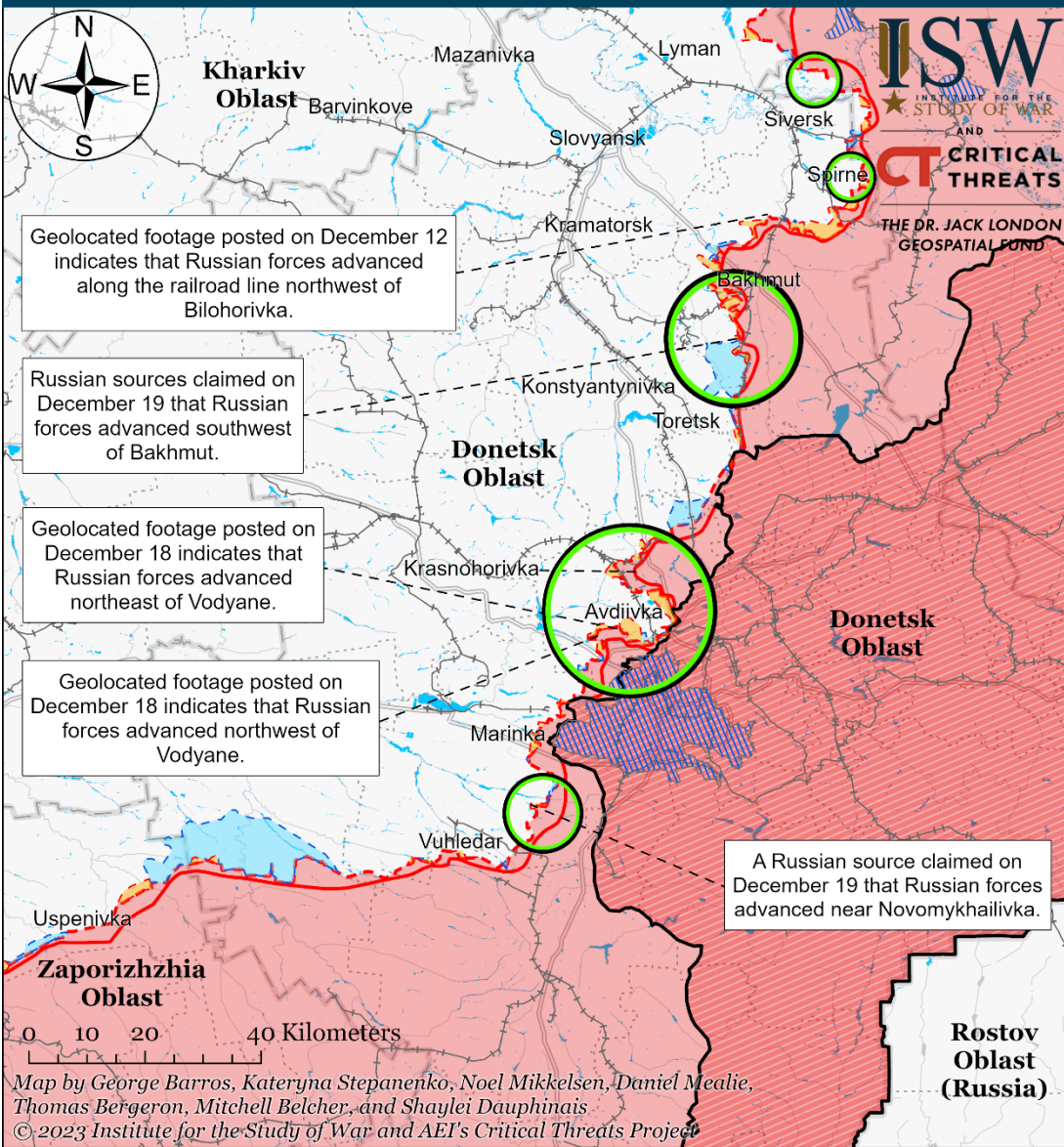
Note: A Russian source claimed on December 19 that Russian forces advanced up to 530 meters along a front up to one kilometer wide southwest of Bakhmut, citing unspecified Ukrainian sources.

Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka. Geolocated footage posted on December 18 shows that Russian forces made a marginal gain just north of Pervomaiske (about 10km southwest of Avdiivka) around December 15.[40] Additional geolocated footage posted on December 19 shows that Russian forces have also marginally advanced in the quarry area southwest of Avdiivka.[41] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces achieved tactical successes southwest of Avdiivka.[42] Several Russian sources additionally claimed that Russian forces are trying to push Ukrainian forces out of positions in the Avdiivka Coke Plant (on the northwestern outskirts of Avdiivka), and that Russian forces are advancing on the northern flank of Avdiivka near Stepove.[43] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Avdiivka itself, as well as northwest, southwest, and directly west of Avdiivka.[44] A Russian source claimed that elements of the 41st Combined Arms Army (Central Military District) are operating in the Avdiivka area.[45]



Russian forces recently made marginal advances southwest of Donetsk City. Geolocated footage posted on December 19 shows that Russian forces have made a small gain along Tsentralna Street on the eastern outskirts of Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).[46] Russian forces reportedly captured an agricultural complex on the southwestern outskirts of Novomykhailivka, although ISW has not yet observed visual evidence to corroborate this claim.[47] Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Advisor Yan Gagyn claimed that Ukrainian forces abandoned several positions along the defensive line near Novomykhailivka, which ISW also cannot verify.[48] Russian and Ukrainian forces continued positional engagements near Novomykhailivka and in Marinka and Krasnohorivka (directly on the western outskirts of Donetsk City).[49] A reconnaissance company of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) is reportedly fighting in the Marinka area.[50]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of December 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



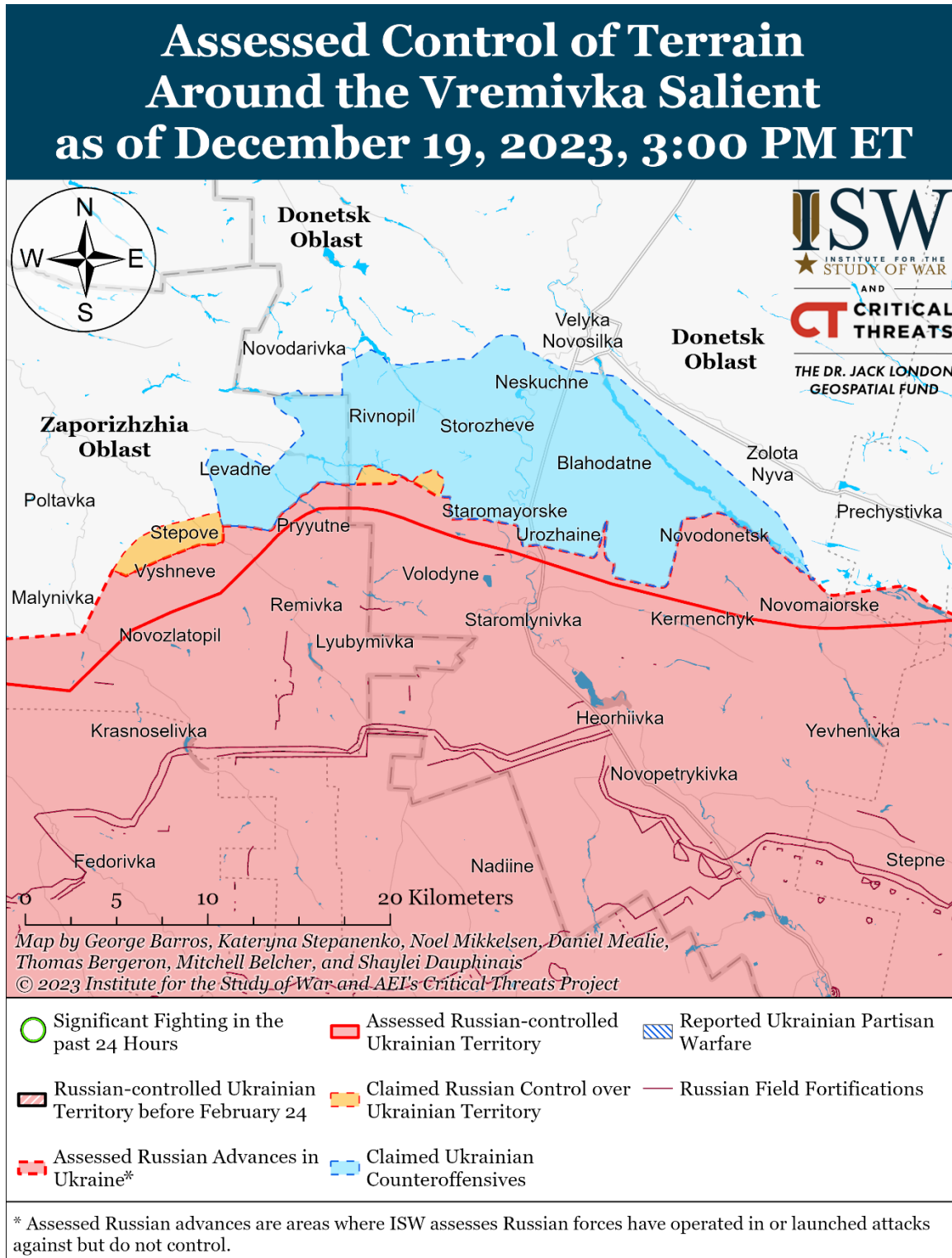
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- + Major Railroads
- 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.

Note: Russian sources claimed on December 18 that Russian forces broke through Ukrainian defenses and advanced up to 800 meters along a 1.85-to-two-kilometers wide front south of Avdiivka, citing unspecified Ukrainian sources. Russian sources claimed on December 18 that Russian forces advanced between 350 and 500 meters along a 350-meter-wide front in western Vodyane. A Russian source claimed on December 18 that Russian forces control 99% of Marinka.

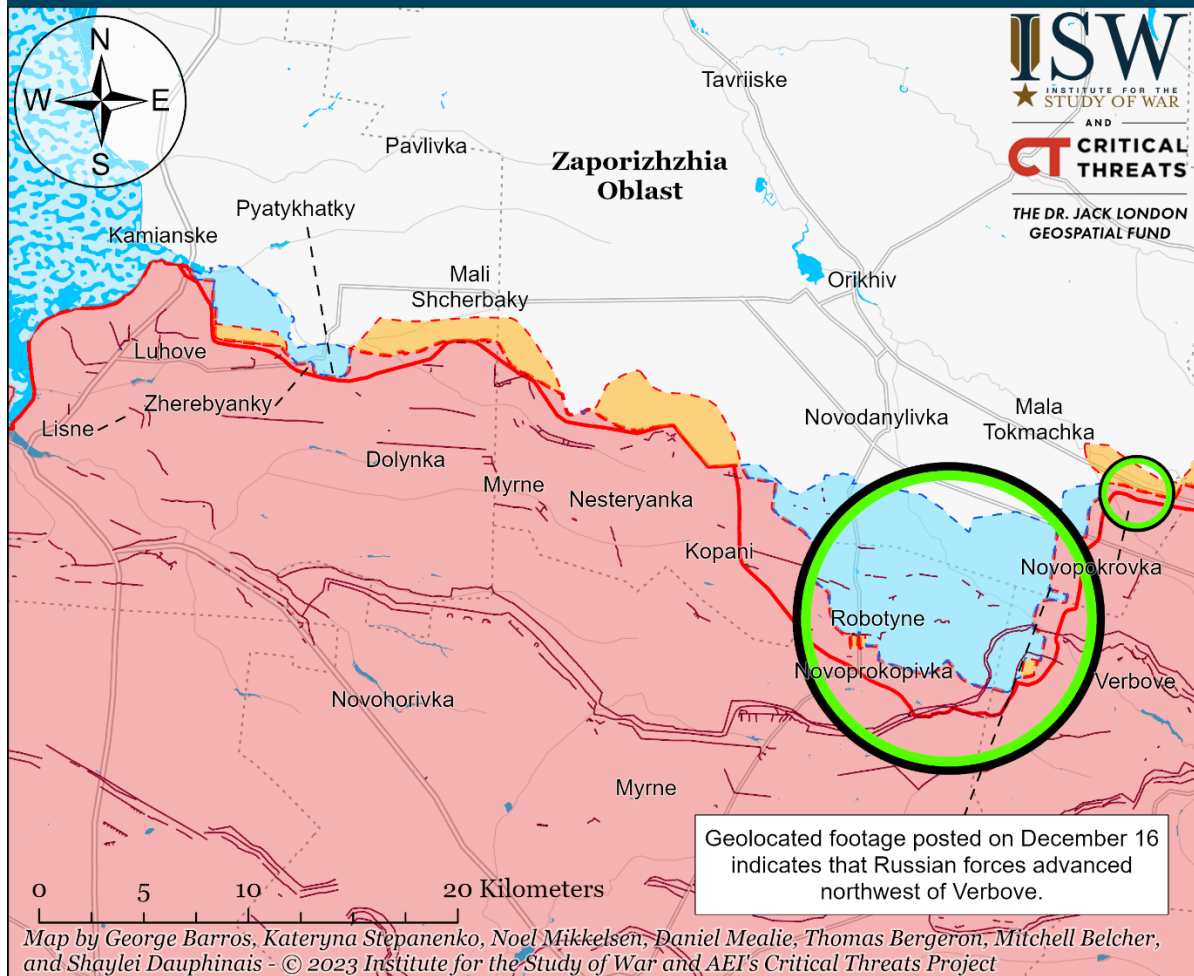
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian and Ukrainian forces did not advance in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on December 19.[51] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that elements of the 60th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) are operating in the Velyka Novosilka direction; elements of the 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA) are operating south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske; and elements of the 37th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th CAA, EMD) southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Novodonetske.[52]



Geolocated footage published on December 18 indicates that the Russian frontline of troops is further east of Novopokropivka (directly south of Robotyne) than previously assessed, though this advance is likely not the result of a Russian counterattack and is unlikely to have taken place over the past 24 hours.[53] Ukrainian forces may have withdrawn to more defensible positions closer to Robotyne. Russian forces reportedly advanced 700 meters between Robotyne and Verbove (9km east of Robotyne) and continued counterattacking west of Robotyne, from Verbove, and northeast of Robotyne in the direction of Novofedorivka.[54] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Robotyne and west of Novopokrovka to the northeast of Robotyne.[55] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces tried to attack west of Robotyne.[56]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of December 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

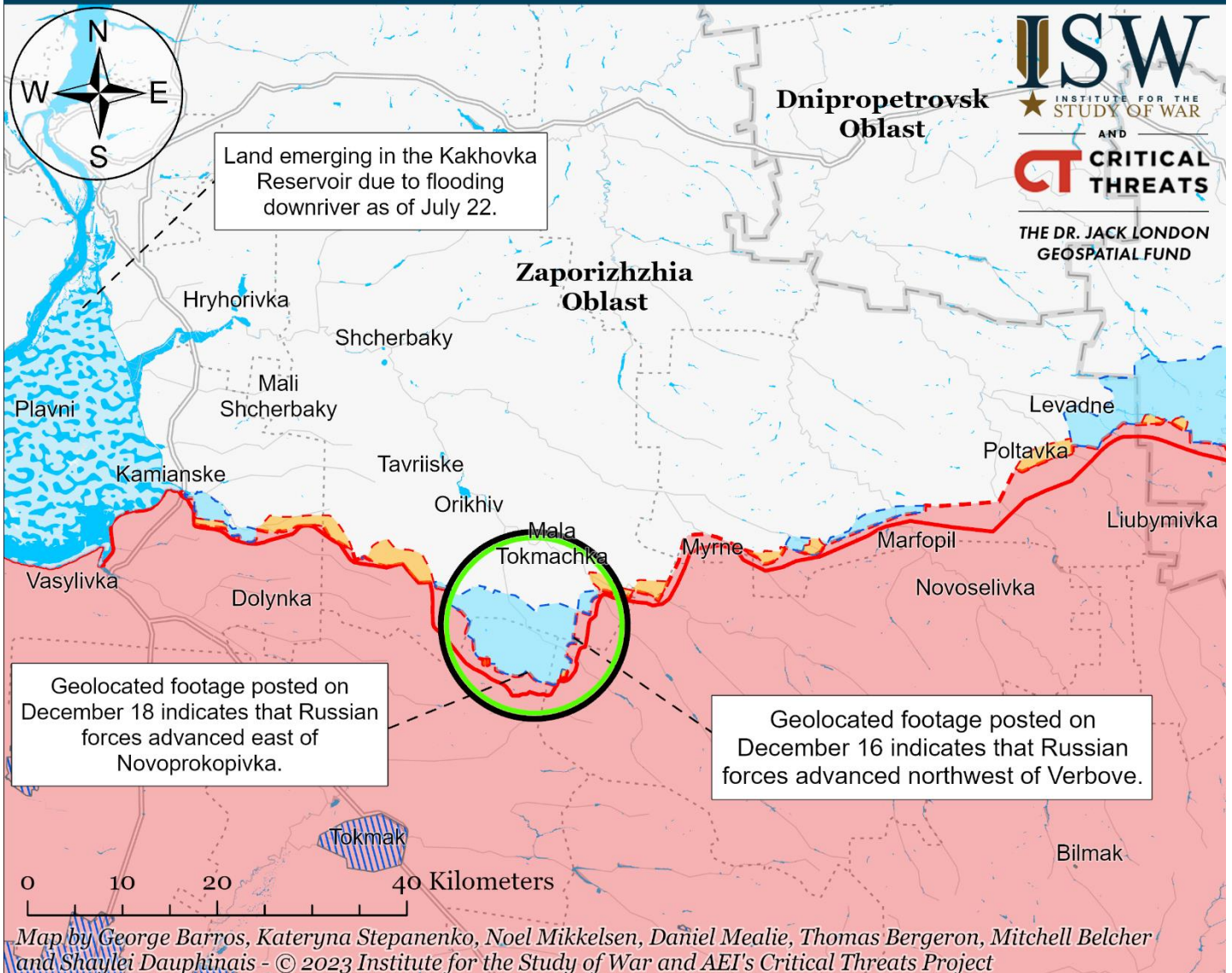


- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory | Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir |
| Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine* | Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives | 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: A Russian source claimed on December 19 that Russian forces advanced 700 meters between Robotyne and Verbove.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of December 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

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

Note: A Russian source claimed on December 19 that Russian forces advanced 700 meters between Robotyne and Verbove.

Russian and Ukrainian forces engaged in positional engagements on the east (left) bank of Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast. Ukrainian forces reportedly retained their positions in Krynky on the east bank despite Russian counterattacks in the area.[57] Russian and Ukrainian sources indicated that both sides are effectively using drones in the Kherson direction, and Russian forces reportedly continue facing equipment shortages necessary for evacuation of wounded on the east bank.[58]



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

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that the Russian military intends to recruit up to 745,000 contract personnel by the end of 2024 at the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Collegium on December 19.[59] Shoigu's figure likely includes the number of contract soldiers (*kontraktniki*) and volunteers (*dobrovoltsy*) in irregular formations, as well as personnel recruited through conscription since the Russian military began requiring all volunteers to sign volunteer service contracts with the Russian MoD in July 2023.[60] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev claimed on December 1 that the Russian military recruited over 452,000 contract, volunteer, and conscripted military personnel since January 1, 2023.[61] The contract soldiers that the Russian military intends to recruit are likely less skilled and experienced than the Russian military's pre-war professional long-service contract soldiers who suffered heavy losses at the beginning of the war, due to limited Russian training capacity and degraded training quality.[62] Russian officials have routinely inflated and altered the stated number of Russian military personnel by purposefully including and excluding different categories of Russian military personnel in reported figures.[63]

Shoigu stated that the Russian MoD simplified the procedure for obtaining combat veteran status, amid Russian President Vladimir Putin's thinly veiled criticism of Russian military bureaucracy.[64] Putin called on the Russian MoD at the Russian MoD Collegium on December 19 to promptly resolve problems to provide combat veteran status and the accompanying benefits to all war participants.[65] Shoigu stated that the Russian MoD has issued 458,000 combat veteran certificates, including 50,000 in December 2023 alone, and that all Russian participants in the war in Ukraine will their certificates "soon." [66] Shoigu stated that the Russian MoD will begin issuing electronic identification cards for veterans in 2024 and is likely trying to posture the MoD's efficacy against Putin's continued tactic criticism.[67]

Russian companies are reportedly acquiring microchips and other communications technology through a network of Chinese, Moroccan, and Turkish intermediaries. *The New York Times* (NYT) reported on December 19 that Russian companies are evading Western sanctions by buying microchips for advanced computing and weapons systems, telecommunication equipment, surveillance gear, and drones through intermediary companies based in China, Morocco, and Turkey.[68] NYT reported that China and Hong Kong have supplied 85 percent of all imported semiconductors to Russia from March 2022 to September 2023, a reported 27 percent increase in imports since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[69]

Republic of Bashkortostan Head Radiy Khabirov announced on December 19 that Bashkortostan's 2024 budget is allocating 4.6 billion rubles (about \$50.8 million) to supporting the war in Ukraine. Khabirov stated that the Bashkortostan is allocating 2.8 billion rubles of the total 4.6 billion to support volunteers and mobilized personnel and to purchase anti-drone guns, vehicles, medicine, and other goods needed at the frontline. The other 1.8 billion rubles will reportedly fund local measures, support for veterans and their families and payments to the families of dead and wounded soldiers.[70] Bashkortostan has formed at least seven volunteer battalions to fight in Ukraine of which at least four have already deployed to Ukraine.[71] ISW has frequently assessed that Russian regions appear to be bearing the financial brunt of the federal government's war effort.[72]

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

The Ukrainian Crimean-based "Atesh" partisan group claimed to have obtained secret information which indicates that Pelcom Dubna Machine Building Plant in Moscow Oblast is unable to fulfil its annual state defense order for Kh-32 cruise missiles.[73] Atesh stated that the plant only produced 61 of 80 missiles planned to be made by November 10. The plant reportedly needs to produce 19 more missiles by the extended deadline at the end of December. Atesh added that the plant supplies these missiles to the Russian 52nd Guards Heavy Bomber Aviation Regiment (22nd Guards Heavy Bomber Aviation Division) and military unit 35020-V of the Belaya Air Base.

Russian Strategic Missile Forces Commander Colonel General Sergei Karakayev announced on December 19 that the next regiment equipped with the Avangard missile systems with guided warhead was activated in Orenburg Oblast.[74]

Russian forces are continuing their efforts to develop naval drones to use in operations against Ukrainian forces. Russian state outlet TASS, citing an unnamed Russian defense industrial base (DIB) source, claimed that Russian specialists are developing a surface assault drone equipped with a payload of up to 10 kilograms, which can be increased to 100 kilograms. TASS claimed that the surface drone will have an operating range of up to 20 kilometers and that Russian officials plan to test these drones in February 2024.[75]

Russian state outlet *Ria Novosti* claimed that Russian forces are using modernized Pantsir-SM anti-aircraft missile and gun systems in Ukraine.[76] *Ria Novosti* claimed that Pantsir-SM systems have demonstrated a significantly increased combat effectiveness in relation to the Pantsir-S and have longer detection ranges.[77]

UK-based investigative organization Conflict Armament Research (CAR) stated that Russia is modernizing its universal planning and correction modules (UMPCs) used on aerial bombs and is attempting to hide the origin of some of its foreign commercial components, likely in order to prevent future sanctions.[78] CAR analyzed two Russian UMPCs recovered near Bakhmut in January 2023 and near Orikhiv in October 2023, and stated that the UMPC recovered in October 2023 contained a more elaborate electronic system, including the Russian Kometa satellite navigation module used in various Russian reconnaissance drones and the Russian-produced version of the Shahed-136 drones. The US Department of Treasury sanctioned the Russian producer of the Kometa system in November 2023.[79] CAR stated that both recovered UMPCs had their markings removed, likely to prevent the tracing of their components. Russian forces have increased their usage of glide bombs with UMPCs in southern Ukraine, and more recently, in eastern Ukraine.[80] Russian state *RIA Novosti* claimed on December 1 that the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) will reportedly begin training Su-34 pilots *en masse* to operate glide bombs with UMPCs for use in Ukraine.[81]

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 authorities continued attempts to use military conscription in occupied Ukraine to augment force generation efforts and legitimize Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. Ukrainian Presidential Representative in Crimea Tamila Tasheva stated on December 19 that Russian authorities have conscripted 44,500 Crimeans into the Russian military and have opened 497 criminal cases for conscription evasion.[82] Tasheva stated that Russia has conducted 18 conscription campaigns in occupied Crimea since 2014.[83]

Russian authorities continued attempts to quiet dissent and eradicate cultural identities in occupied Crimea. Tasheva stated that Russian authorities are holding 191 political prisoners in Crimea, including 123 Crimean Tatars, likely as part of efforts to quiet dissent in occupied Crimea.[84] Russian occupation authorities have persistently persecuted Crimean Tatars, many of whom have openly opposed Russian occupation since 2014, as part of ethnic cleansing campaigns in occupied territories.[85]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu introduced a new false state narrative that Ukraine will not be able to repay the West for military aid during his speech the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Collegium on December 19.[86] Shoigu claimed that Ukraine is a bankrupt country since it needs to repay many loans to the West. Shoigu's comment likely intends to discourage further Western military and financial aid to Ukraine and negatively influence Ukrainian citizens' perception of Ukraine's future.

Russian state media and milbloggers deliberately used Ukrainian officials' statements to launch a false narrative that Ukraine is planning to mobilize women in an ongoing effort to destabilize Ukrainian society.[87] Russian state outlet *TASS* misrepresented a Ukrainian deputy's statements to claim that "the situation in Ukraine may deteriorate so much that the mobilization of women will be required." The Ukrainian deputy originally discussed conditions under which the government may consider mobilizing women if it is necessary for defensive operations as a hypothetical scenario – rather than signaling that Ukraine is imminently preparing to mobilize women at large.[88]

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova attempted to further an information operation weaponizing deepening US-Finnish defense ties. Zakharova claimed that the US-Finnish Defense Cooperation Agreement threatens Russian security.[89] The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) announced that it summoned Finnish Ambassador to Russia Antti Helanterya for questioning regarding the alleged "build-up of NATO military potential" on Russia's border.[90] The Russian MFA's claims are consistent with Russian attempts to frame Finland's accession to NATO as a threat to Russia, despite Finland joining NATO out of fear of further Russian aggression on its borders after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[91]

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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