

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 24

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December 24, 7 pm 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.

Note: ISW and CTP will not publish a campaign assessment (or maps) tomorrow, December 25, in observance of the Christmas holiday. Coverage will resume Monday, December 26.

Russian forces' rate of advance in the Bakhmut area has likely slowed in recent days, although it is too early to assess whether the Russian offensive to capture Bakhmut has culminated. Russian milbloggers acknowledged that Ukrainian forces in the Bakhmut area have managed to slightly slow down the pace of the Russian advance around Bakhmut and its surrounding settlements, with one claiming that Ukrainian forces pushed back elements of the Wagner Group to positions they held days ago.[1] Ukrainian social media sources previously claimed that Ukrainian forces completely pushed Russian forces out of the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut around December 21.[2] ISW has also assessed that Russian forces made slightly fewer overall advances in the Bakhmut area in November and December combined as compared to the month of October.[3]

Russian forces will likely struggle to maintain the pace of their offensive operations in the Bakhmut area and may seek to initiate a tactical or operational pause. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) reported on December 24 that Russian forces currently lack the necessary stockpile of artillery munitions to support large-scale offensive operations and that sustaining defensive operations along the lengthy frontline in Ukraine requires the Russian military to expend a significant number of shells and rockets daily.[4] The Ukrainian Joint Forces Task Force released an interview on December 24 with a Ukrainian servicemember in the Bakhmut area detailing that Russian forces have been conducting an extremely high pace of assaults on Ukrainian positions in the area with little corresponding progress.[5] The Wagner Group's reported heavy losses in the Bakhmut area in recent weeks have also likely strained Russian forces' current operational capabilities in the area.[6]

The Russian military's personnel and munitions constraints will likely prevent it from maintaining the current high pace of offensive operations in the Bakhmut area in the near-term. Russian forces previously allocated significant resources in a meat-grinder effort to seize Severodonesk and Lysychansk in spring–summer 2022. Russian forces culminated after capturing Lysychansk in early July and failed to capture neighboring Siversk to the east or Slovyansk to the northeast. The Russian military's fixation with conducting a highly attritional campaign to achieve the tactical objectives of capturing Severodonetsk and Lysychansk ultimately undermined the Russian military's ability to achieve its larger operational objective to envelop Ukrainian forces in a cauldron along the E40 highway and eventually drive to Donetsk Oblast's western administrative borders. Russia's relentless and costly push on Bakhmut may also degrade Russia's ability to pursue long-term objectives in the Donbas theater.

Russian *siloviki* may be setting information conditions to justify the nationalization of oligarchs' resources to sponsor Russia's war effort. Wagner financier Yevgeniy Prigozhin attended the funeral of a deceased Wagner Group mercenary in St. Petersburg on December 24, where he stated that Russia needs to confiscate luxury possessions and accommodations from elites who ignore or do not support the war effort out of fear of losing their privileged lifestyles.[7] Prigozhin added that these affluent individuals support a vision where "Western curators" dominate Russia in return for the sponsorship of their lifestyles and compared today's Russian oligarchy to Ukraine's or to 1990s Russia. Prigozhin ignited a scandal regarding the burial of the Wagner serviceman in recent weeks to push his political objectives — such as the legalization of Wagner in Russia — and his statements advocating redistribution of wealth at the funeral gained significant traction on the Russian internet.[8] Wagner-affiliated milbloggers widely supported Prigozhin's criticism of Russian officials and praised his support for the war effort.[9] Prigozhin may be using such populist proposals to elevate his authority in Russian society or influence a return of stricter nationalization measures.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also indirectly attacked Russian oligarchs on December 22, however, stating that Russians who drain Russia's money from abroad and do not have a connection with the country "represent a danger" to Russia.[10] Putin claimed that while the vast majority of Russian businessmen are patriots, there are some who do not share the sentiment. Putin concluded that "everyone strives not only to stay, to live and work in Russia but to work for the benefit of our country." Putin previously nationalized big businesses in the early 2000s to consolidate his authoritarian kleptocracy and may be attempting leverage nationalization to coerce elites to support his war in Ukraine or seize their property to fund military expenses.[11]

Ukrainian intelligence continues to suggest that the Russian military is not following proper command structures or procedures. Chief of the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Kyrylo Budanov stated that Prigozhin formed an alliance with the Commander of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine, Army General Sergey Surovikin.[12] Budanov noted that both Prigozhin and Surovikin are rivals of Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, and that Prigozhin used the alliance to his advantage to receive heavy weapons from Russian Armed Forces for Wagner forces. The allocation of military resources should in principle rest with the Minister of Defense rather than the theater commander, although Surovikin could have the authority to make transfers once equipment enters the theater. The Prigozhin–Surovikin alliance is plausible given that Prigozhin had previously praised Surovikin for his efforts to save the collapsing Soviet Union.[13]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces will likely struggle to maintain the pace of their offensive operations in the Bakhmut area and may seek to initiate a tactical or operational pause.**
- **Russian *siloviki* may be setting information conditions to justify the nationalization of oligarchs' resources to sponsor Russia's war effort.**
- **Ukrainian intelligence continues to suggest that the Russian military is not following proper command structures or procedures.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct limited counterattacks to regain lost positions along the Kreminna-Svatove line.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations around Bakhmut and Avdiivka.**
- **Russian SPETSNAZ are likely reconnoitering the Dnipro River delta to study Ukrainian defenses in right bank Kherson Oblast.**
- **Russian forces struck a residential area of Kherson City with a Grad multiple launch rocket system, killing at least 10 and injuring 55.**
- **The Russian Orthodox Church — a Kremlin-affiliated institution — asked the Kremlin for a mobilization exemption for its clergy, despite avidly supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.**
- **Russian officials are planning to take children from Horlivka, Donetsk to Belarus, possibly as a scheme to deport Ukrainian children.**
- **ISW introduced a new section in the update to track daily observed indicators and counter-indicators consistent with the current assessed most dangerous course of action – a Russian invasion of Ukraine from Belarus.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 24, 2022, 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 those 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 population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and one supporting effort)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas
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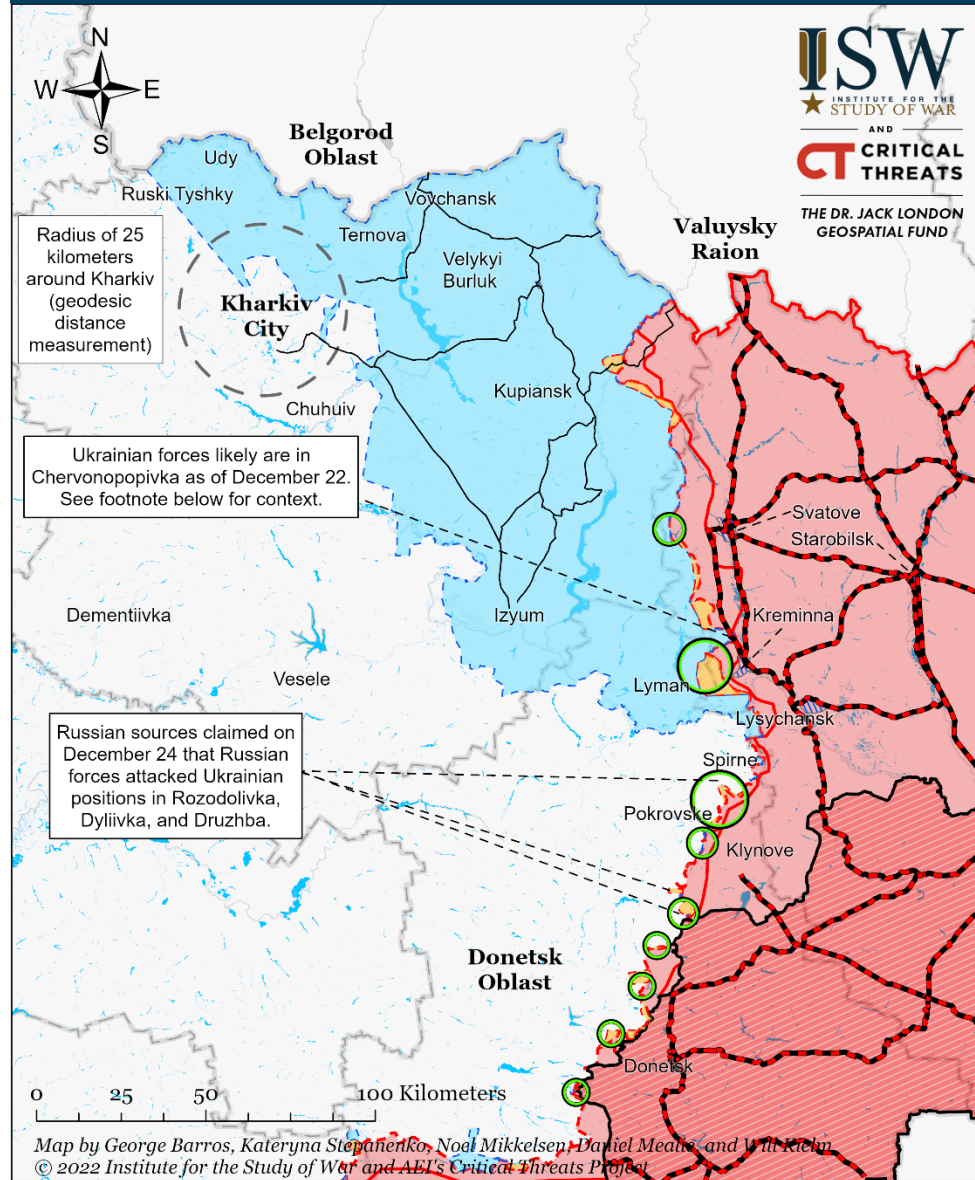
Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

Eastern Ukraine: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)

Russian forces continued to conduct limited counterattacks to regain lost positions along the Kreminna-Svatove line on December 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault near Andriivka, Luhansk Oblast (15km west of Svatove).[14] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted assaults in the direction of Stelmakhivka (16km northwest of Svatove) and in the direction of Nadiia (16km west of Svatove).[15] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have transitioned from offensive operations to positional battles near Dvorichna (55km northwest of Svatove).[16] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces conducted assaults in the direction of Makiivka (23km northwest of Kreminna) and in the area of Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna) and that there are positional battles between Russian and Ukrainian forces in the vicinity of Ploshchanka (17km northwest of Kreminna).[17] One Russian milblogger claimed on December 23 that Russian forces are now at a distance close enough to Makiivka to effectively use small-arms fire against Ukrainian forces.[18] Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces also conducted assaults in the direction of Yampolivka, Donetsk Oblast (17km west of Kreminna) and near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).[19] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted an assault in the vicinity of Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna).[20]

Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian rear areas on December 24. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces struck Polovynkyne, Luhansk Oblast (56km southeast of Svatove) with HIMARS rockets.[21] Social media sources posted footage indicating that Ukrainian forces reportedly struck an unspecified warehouse in Polovynkyne.[22]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of December 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
Key Ukrainian Roads	Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Russian Ground Lines of Communication	Assessed Russian-controlled 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.

The Ukrainian Main Defense Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine published a claimed audio intercept on December 22 in which a Russian soldier purportedly operating in the vicinity of Chervonopivka supported reports that Ukrainian forces captured part of the R-66 Kreminna-Svatove road in the vicinity of Zhytliivka (just south of Chervonopivka). The Ukrainian General Staff has repeatedly reported since November 30 that Russian forces shelled Chervonopivka, indicating Russian forces no longer hold control of terrain over Chervonopivka. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to establish a position in Chervonopivka on November 27, indicating Ukrainian maneuvers near Chervonopivka. The R-66 runs through Chervonopivka and its capture would be consistent with the evidence presented in the intercepted phone call plus the Ukrainian General Staff's reports.

Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

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

Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations around Bakhmut on December 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut, within 19km northeast of Bakhmut near Rozdolivka and Bakhmutske; and within 31km south of Bakhmut near Pivichne and Niu York.[23] A Russian milblogger claimed that there is also fierce fighting northeast of Bakhmut near Pidhordone, where Russian forces reportedly captured stronghold positions on the southern outskirts of the settlement.[24] The Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also captured new positions in unspecified areas northeast of Bakhmut along the Rozdolivka-Yampolivka line.[25] A Russian milblogger claimed that there is fierce fighting between Ukrainian forces and elements of the Wagner Group in the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut, where battles have been ongoing for days.[26] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also conducted an assault south of Bakhmut in the vicinity of Andriivka and that there is fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces within 17km south of Bakhmut near Opytne, Klishchiivka, and Dyliivka.[27]

Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations in the Avdiivka–Donetsk City area on December 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults within 27km southwest of Avdiivka near Krasnohorivka, Vodyane, and Marinka.[28] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are advancing farther into Marinka, but that Ukrainian forces are still entrenched in some positions in the center of the settlement.[29] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces have been accumulating their forces on the western outskirts of Marinka due to a rapid deterioration of the tactical situation in the settlement and extensive losses.[30] The Russian milblogger also claimed that the 11th Regiment of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) People’s Militia conducted a reconnaissance-in-force operation in the direction of Pervomaiske (13km southwest of Avdiivka) and established a foothold in the outskirts of the settlement.[31] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued indirect fire along the long of contact in Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.[32]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of December 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- 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.

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

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks on the southern axis on December 24 but may be deploying equipment from Donetsk to the southern axis. Ukrainian advisor to the mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushchenko reported on December 24 that Russian forces are transporting an unusually high number of armored personnel carriers and truck convoys through Mariupol towards Berdyansk in Zaporizhia Oblast to fortify the Melitopol front.[33]

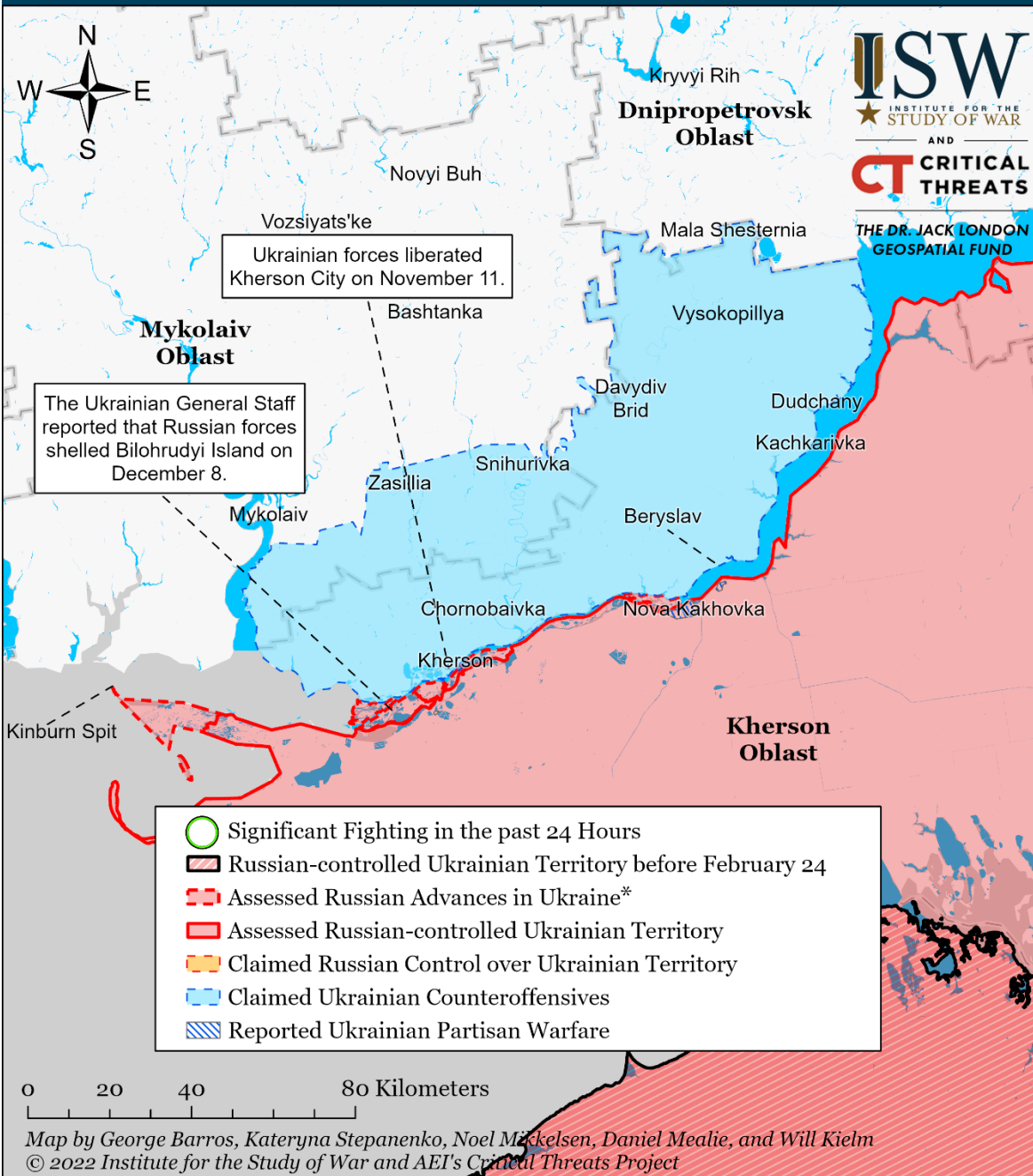
Russian forces struck a residential area of Kherson City with a Grad multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) on December 24, killing at least 10 and injuring 55.[34] Most if not all the victims were civilians. Several Russian sources falsely claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted the strike as part of a false flag to blame Russian forces for reasons that remain unclear.[35] One Russian source falsely claimed that this attack was a repeated Ukrainian false flag attack modeled after the Russian Tochka U strike that killed 60 Ukrainian civilians at the train station in Kramatorsk, Donetsk Oblast, on April 8 — a Russian strike that the Russian government falsely accused Ukraine of conducting.[36] A few Russian milbloggers mocked the lie that Ukrainian forces conducted the MLRS attack against Kherson City.[37] Independent monitors have thoroughly documented Russia's deliberate and regular strikes against civilian targets in Ukraine.

Russian SPETSNAZ are likely reconnoitering the Dnipro River delta to study Ukrainian defenses in right-bank Kherson Oblast. A Russian source reported on December 23 unspecified Russian SPETSNAZ elements landed on Velykyi Potomkin Island southwest of Kherson City at an unspecified recent time.[38] This report is consistent with Ukrainian officials' statements. The head of the Ukrainian Joint Press Center of the Tavris Direction Defense Forces, Yevhen Yerin, stated on December 23 that Russian forces have not changed their tactics in southern Ukraine and are continuing to use sabotage and reconnaissance groups to reconnoiter the islands on the Dnipro River delta in Kherson Oblast to test the Ukrainian ability to repel Russian attacks.[39]

A Russian source claimed that Russian forces defeated Ukrainian attempts to land on the Kinburn Spit. The source reported that Ukrainian forces regularly shell the spit with long-range artillery and destroyed an unspecified port building on the spit.[40] The source reported that Russian forces defeated unspecified Ukrainian attempts to land on the spit, that Ukrainian forces are constantly trying to gain a foothold on the spit, and that that Russian forces fully control the spit despite several attempted Ukrainian attacks there.[41] Kherson Oblast Occupation Administration Head Vladimir Saldo similarly claimed on December 22 that Russian forces are repelling Ukrainian attempts to land on the spit.[42] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command spokesperson Natalia Humenyuk stated on November 22 that Ukrainian forces are conducting operations on the Kinburn Spit under operational silence.[43]

Ukrainian forces likely conducted a drone attack against targets in Crimea on December 24. Video posted in the early morning of December 24 reportedly shows an explosion from a Ukrainian drone attacking an oil refinery in Nyzhnioghirskiy Raion in Crimea.[44] A prominent Kremlin-linked milblogger reported that Ukrainian forces launched seven Chinese-made Mugin-5 drones from the Odesa International Airport to hit targets in Crimea in the early morning of December 24.[45] This account claims that Russian air defenses shot down all seven drones: five drones over the Karkinit Bay and two over Crimea as the drones approached targets near the oil refinery in Nyzhnioghirskiy Raion and the Tavricheska Thermal Power Plant near Simferopol. It is unclear if Russian forces shot down the drone near the oil refinery as the milblogger reported given the ambiguous video of an explosion.[46]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of December 24, 2022, 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.

Light reconnaissance elements of the Ukrainian Carlson special volunteer unit placed a Ukrainian flag on a tower in the wetlands on the left bank of the Dniro River, approximately 600 meters south of Kherson City and claimed the area will become a Ukrainian bridgehead that will support future operations to further liberate southern Kherson on December 3. ISW does not assess that Ukrainian forces have established a bridgehead or lodgment in this location as Carlson claimed as of December 3. The Carlson element's ability to operate in the area uncontested and the lack of observed Russian fortifications or defensive forces in the area indicate that Russian forces do not exercise full control over the area. Russian control lines are likely south of the Konka River.

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

The Russian Orthodox Church — a Kremlin-controlled institution — asked the Kremlin for a mobilization exemption for its clergy, despite avidly supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war in Ukraine. Head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill stated that he heard numerous concerns from clergy about the church being subject to mobilization during the diocesan meeting in Moscow on December 22.[47] Kirill noted that currently Russian law does not exempt clergy from military service, which contradicts the holy canons against the church participating in combat. Kirill added that the church received an exemption during the period of partial mobilization but called on the Kremlin to formally secure this provision in law for clergy. Kirill, however, publicly stated that he shares Putin’s opinions on very “important issues” and called on Russians to “spiritually mobilize” so that Russia and Ukraine can reunite into the one sphere of the Russian Orthodox Church.[48] Russian priests have also repeatedly blessed Russian military personnel and equipment before combat and while dressed in military uniforms prior to Putin’s mobilization order.[49] Kirill’s request further highlights that mobilization is not popular among even Kremlin-affiliated institutions despite ongoing support for the war effort.

The Kremlin authorized the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Information to request up-to-date information about citizens via a centralized registry on December 23, likely to facilitate military registration and mobilization processes in Russia.[50] The Russian MoD may access passport data, permanent residence registration documentations, and information on the number of children to create conscription or mobilization lists. In November, Putin ordered the Kremlin to create a centralized database for military registration by April 2024 and called on the Russian MoD to start digitizing print documents currently stored in local military recruitment centers throughout Russia.[51] Ukrainian intelligence previously reported that the Kremlin seeks to create an electronic database by February 2023, possibly in preparation to support a second wave of mobilization.[52]

Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian casualties are continuing to overload the medical system in occupied Ukraine. Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported that many Russian personnel die waiting for medical assistance due to lack of specialists, necessary medical equipment, and medicine.[53] Malyar added that Russian forces are also installing metal bars on the windows of hospitals to prevent Russian servicemen with light wounds from deserting from the Russian Armed Forces.[54] The Russian MoD had previously claimed that 92% of deaths among Russian forces occur as a result of lack of first aid medical attention; however, ISW cannot independently verify this assessment.[55]

Russian milbloggers continued to disagree with select parts of the Russian MoD’s proposed plan on December 22 to form new military formations. A prominent milblogger and a member of Putin’s mobilization working group stated that the Russian MoD should not form five naval infantry divisions and two new airborne assault divisions as Shoigu suggested but should instead create line heavy infantry and motorized rifle divisions.[56] The milblogger argued that Russian naval infantry and airborne troops do not have the necessary artillery power to be effective in the war in Ukraine.

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian officials are planning to take children from Horlivka, Donetsk to Belarus, potentially as a scheme to deport Ukrainian children. Zaporizhia Occupation Deputy Vladimir Rogov announced on December 24 that Belarusian citizens organized a trip for children from Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast to go to Belarus.[57] He stated that the children are already on their way.[58] ISW is unable to verify if these children are expected to return to occupied Donetsk Oblast after this event. The deportation of children may amount to a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and constitute a wider ethnic-cleansing effort, as ISW has previously reported.[59]

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to intensify law enforcement crackdowns in occupied territories. A Russian media source claimed that the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs detained eight people in Kherson Oblast on December 24 under suspicion of aiding Ukrainian forces.[60] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian occupation officials in Hornostaivka, Kherson Oblast have imposed a 24-hour curfew for residents from December 25 to January 3, likely in an effort to keep Ukrainian residents from leaving occupied territories during the holidays.[61]

Russian occupation officials continue efforts to nationalize Ukrainian property in occupied territories. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on December 24 that Russian occupation officials continue to threaten Ukrainians in occupied territories with nationalization of their property.[62] The report stated that occupation officials are forcing residents to re-register their property claims under Russian law and threatening to take the property should residents fail to do so.[63] The Ukrainian Resistance Center noted that Russian occupiers have already created a platform for selling nationalized property and the belongings of those who fled their homes in occupied territories.[64] The Luhansk Military Administration also

reported that Russian occupation authorities in Luhansk Oblast publicized the names of homes and apartments they have designated for “flexible housing stock” — nationalization and occupation by Russian forces — and are requiring residents to appear within 10 calendar days of the publicization to consent to or refuse the designation of “flexible house” on their property.[65] The report stated that, should the resident not appear, the Russian occupation officials will automatically house people there for three years.[66]

Russian occupiers continue to make life difficult for Ukrainians in occupied territories. The Luhansk Military Administration reported that Ukrainians in Luhansk Oblast have increased their complaints about ever-rising prices for essential items.[67] The Luhansk Military Administration also reported that Russian occupation authorities have begun signaling that no one will rebuild destroyed housing in Luhansk Oblast, despite previous promises to the contrary.[68]

ISW will continue to report daily observed indicators consistent with the current assessed most dangerous course of action (MDCOA): a renewed invasion of northern Ukraine possibly aimed at Kyiv.

ISW’s December 15 MDCOA warning forecast about a potential Russian offensive against northern Ukraine in winter 2023 remains a worst-case scenario within the forecast cone. ISW currently assesses the risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine from Belarus as low, but possible, and the risk of Belarusian direct involvement as very low. This new section in the daily update is not in itself a forecast or assessment. It lays out the daily observed indicators we are using to refine our assessments and forecasts, which we expect to update regularly. Our assessment that the MDCOA remains unlikely has not changed. We will update this header if and when the assessment changes.

Observed indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- Geolocated footage posted on December 23 shows Russian forces shipping about 40 tanks (including T-62, T-80, and T-90M models) in Rostov Oblast, possibly towards Belarus.[69]

Observed ambiguous indicators for MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- Ukrainian Joint Forces Commander Serhiy Nayeв stated on December 24 that Russian forces in Belarus deployed one motorized rifle battalion and two tank battalions to unspecified areas along the Ukrainian-Belarusian border.[70]
- Independent imagery analysis of Russian forces in Belarus found that Russian forces maintain about 10,000 personnel in Belarus, about 5,000 of whom are stationed at the 230th Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus as of December 23.[71]

Observed counter-indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of December 24.[72]
- Chief of the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Kyrylo Budanov told the *New York Times* on December 23 that Russia is trying to divert Ukrainian forces from the southeast by setting up a feint in Belarus, noting that military activity in Belarus is an element of a disinformation campaign.[73] Budanov stated that the Russian force arrayment in Belarus does not indicate preparations for an offensive and that Russian forces in Belarus do not have enough armored equipment for a mechanized assault.

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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[2] Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 21 | Institute for the Study of War ([understandingwar.org](https://www.understandingwar.org))

[3] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-20>

[4] <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1606543192488554498>

- [5] <https://www.facebook.com/easternforces/posts/pfbidoxAvmxPw2c83qt7sdHM2c5d59iuf02PeUG1hBaEtLogd64LZLD2WPpCVMj7qPRHmrl>
- [6] <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-says-russias-wagner-group-bought-north-korean-weapons-ukraine-war-2022-12-22/>
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[31] <https://t.me/milchronicles/1426>

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