

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 24, 2023

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December 24, 2023, 5:35pm 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: ISW and CTP will not publish a campaign assessment (or maps) tomorrow, December 25, in observance of the Christmas holiday. Coverage will resume Tuesday, December 26.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on December 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 26 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

European Union (EU) Foreign Affairs High Representative Josep Borrell stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in a limited territorial victory in Ukraine and will continue the war “until the final victory.”[1] Borrell reported on December 24 that Putin would not be satisfied with capturing a “piece” of Ukraine and allowing the rest of Ukraine to join the EU.[2] Borrell added that Putin will not “give up the war” and called on the West to prepare for a “conflict of high intensity for a long time.”[3] Borrell's statements are consistent with ISW's assessment that Russia is not interested in a ceasefire or good-faith negotiations with Ukraine but retains its maximalist goals of a full Russian victory in Ukraine.[4]

Russian forces are reportedly decreasing aviation activity and their use of glide bombs in Ukraine after Ukrainian forces shot down three Russian Su-34s in southern Ukraine between December 21 and 22. Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat stated on December 24 that Russian forces decreased their use of glide bombs and air strikes in southern Ukraine.[5] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on December 24 that Russian forces are limiting their use of manned aviation near occupied Crimea, particularly in the northwestern Black Sea region.[6] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces may have recently intensified their use of glide bombs against Ukrainian forces on the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River in part because Ukrainian forces reportedly suppressed Russian long-range artillery in the area.[7] Continued decreased Russian glide bomb strikes in Kherson Oblast may present an opportunity for Ukrainian forces to operate more freely in near rear areas in west bank Kherson Oblast and establish a safer position on the east (left) bank from which to conduct future operations if the Ukrainian high command so chose. Russian forces reportedly use glide bomb strikes so that Russian aircraft can remain 50 to 70 kilometers behind the line of combat engagement, and the decreased Russian use of glide bombs suggests that Russian forces are concerned about Ukrainian air defense capabilities following recent losses.[8] Ukrainian Ground Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Volodymyr Fityo stated on December 23 that Russian forces also reduced their use of aviation and increased their use of strike drones in the Kupyansk and Bakhmut directions.[9] Ihnat also stated on December 24 that Ukrainian forces can deploy air defense systems in any direction, not only in those where Russian forces suffered aircraft losses.[10]

Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of December 23 to 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched 16 Shahed-131/-136 drones from Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai and that Ukrainian forces downed 15 drones over Mykolaiv, Kirovohrad, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Khmelnytskyi oblasts.[11] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces launched two missiles of an unknown type against civil infrastructure in Kherson City.[12] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated that Russian forces continue to conduct strikes targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure and that although Ukrainian forces down these projectiles, Ukrainian officials purposefully do not identify Ukrainian infrastructure objects that Russian forces target.[13] Yusov also stated that Russian forces are conducting strikes “more frugally” than in winter 2022 but noted that Russian forces are still capable of conducting powerful missile strikes.[14]

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov further detailed Ukraine's efforts to establish a sustainable wartime force-generation apparatus and an effective defense industrial base (DIB) during an interview published on December 24. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* published an interview on December 24 wherein Umerov stated that Ukrainian military and civilian officials are developing a more transparent recruitment process for military service that

will more clearly communicate to the Ukrainian public how one enters military service, undergoes training, receives leave, and concludes service during the war.[15] Umerov stated that there will be no “demobilization” until after the war is over but that Ukraine must find solutions that provide rest and partial release from military service.[16] Umerov added that Ukrainian officials are trying to improve bureaucratic force-generation systems by unifying draft databases and streamlining notification systems.[17]

Umerov stated that the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) will soon submit a plan to address a Ukrainian military proposal to mobilize another 450,000 to 500,000 Ukrainians, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky acknowledged on December 19.[18] Umerov did not disclose the nature of the plan or the number of Ukrainians whom the Ukrainian MoD will propose to mobilize.[19] Umerov commented that the Ukrainian MoD will propose a 25-to-60 draft-age range only if Ukrainian society accepts the arguments behind the proposal.[20] Ukraine’s current lower-end age limit for conscription is 27, which is high for a state fighting an existential war at the scale of the one that Ukraine is fighting. The current age limit likely aims to allow a generation of Ukrainians to continue receiving an education and provide critical human capital to Ukraine in the long-term. Developing and implementing a stable force-generation approach that addresses Ukrainian military requirements is a complicated political, social, and military issue — one that will continue to produce tensions normal for a society at war.

Umerov also stated that Ukraine has developed a strategy for domestic defense production and has launched programs to reduce the risk of shortages of ammunition, missiles, and other military equipment.[21] Umerov stated that the Ukrainian MoD is currently weighing the financial avenues for its DIB development strategy, including issuing contracts and developing joint ventures between Ukrainian and foreign enterprises.[22] Umerov stated that Ukraine is beginning to work with several hundred drone manufacturers to improve the “huge bureaucracy” involved in producing drones and plans to provide Ukrainian forces with an unspecified number of drones that Ukrainian officials have previously called for to be produced in 2024.[23] Zelensky stated on December 19 that Ukraine intends to produce a million drones in 2024.[24]

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to portray himself as a gracious leader who cares about the well-being of Russian military personnel, while also presenting himself as an effective Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armed forces. Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin published footage on December 24 of a December 19 ceremony at the Russian National Defense Management Center where Putin spoke with Russian military personnel who said that they wanted to see their loved ones but that their commanders had to give them leave. Putin responded, “Let them rest! The commander has already decided. That’s me.”[25] Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov, present at the time, said simply, “It is.”[26] Putin seemingly spontaneously granting Russian personnel leave is indicative of Putin’s continued effort to portray himself as an involved wartime leader who responds to his troops’ requests and rewards those who are loyal to him, while reminding the Russian public that Gerasimov is subordinate to him.[27] The interaction between Putin and the Russian servicemen was likely staged in order to bolster Putin’s reputation and once again cast Gerasimov in the role of inefficient bureaucrat, as Putin began to do during his “Direct Line” session on December 14.[28]

Russia appears to be continuing its efforts to build out a military occupation force in Ukraine separate from its frontline units through the use of its newly formed Rosgvardia units. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported on December 24 that the Russian command completed the deployment of the three newly formed regiments of Rosgvardia’s 116th Special Purpose Brigade — the 900th, 901st, and 902nd Special Purpose Regiments — to occupied Donetsk Oblast.[29] Mashovets stated that the Russian command based the 116th Special Purpose Brigade in Chystiakove (70km east of Donetsk City); the 900th Special Purpose Regiment in Melekyne (22km southwest of Mariupol); the 901st Special Purpose Regiment in Snizhne (80km east of Donetsk City); and the 902nd Special Purpose Regiment seven kilometers north of Chystiakove. Mashovets assessed that the 116th Special Purpose Brigade will perform “stabilization functions” in occupied Ukraine on a “permanent basis.” Russian local media reported that Rosgvardia began forming the 116th Special Purpose Brigade specifically for service in occupied Donetsk Oblast in early September 2023.[30] ISW later observed in late October that the 116th Special Purpose Brigade received a Russian T-80BV tank that Wagner Group fighters used in the June 2023 armed rebellion.[31]

The short timeframe and the deployment locations of the new Rosgvardia regiments indicate that the Kremlin is actively attempting to use these forces to solidify Russia’s control over occupied rear areas. Mashovets observed that Rosgvardia likely moved up to 6,000 troops from Russia to occupied Ukraine as part of the deployment of the 116th Special Purpose Brigade, increasing the number of Rosgvardia personnel in occupied Ukraine to 34,300 troops. While ISW cannot independently verify Mashovets’ number of deployed Rosgvardia personnel in occupied Ukraine, Russia’s recent efforts to legalize Rosgvardia’s access to recruiting volunteers, the Kremlin’s approval to provide Rosgvardia heavy military equipment, and the 116th Special Purpose Brigade’s basing in occupied Donetsk Oblast are indicators that Russia is attempting to expand Rosgvardia forces to establish a separate military occupation force.[32] Moscow is likely trying to recruit and deploy military occupation forces to further impede Ukraine’s counteroffensive efforts, establish permanent control over occupied areas, and suppress partisan activity without fixing frontline troops in occupation duty indefinitely.

The Russian Black Sea Fleet’s 810th Naval Infantry Brigade edited its acknowledgement that its personnel are deliberately using chemical weapons in Ukraine in a likely effort to hide what could be evidence of an apparent violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Russia is party. The 810th Naval Infantry Brigade stated on its Telegram channel on December 22 that the brigade is using a “radical change in tactics” against Ukrainian forces in Krynky (on the eastern bank of Kherson Oblast) by dropping K-51 grenades from drones onto Ukrainian positions.[33] K-51 aerosol grenades are filled with irritant CS gas (2-Chlorobenzalmalonitrile), a type of tear gas used for riot control (also known as a Riot Control Agent [RCA]), which the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) prohibits as a method of warfare.[34] Between the time of ISW’s data collection on December 23 and this December 24 update the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade’s Telegram edited the post to delete the specific reference to the K-51 grenade.[35] The original phrasing of the post, however, can be still observed on Russian social media accounts that posted screenshots of it, directly reposted the original acknowledgement (since edits to Telegram posts do not affect reposts of an unedited post), or archived the original post – all confirming that the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade did publish the use of K-51 grenades and then edited its post.[36] ISW has not determined when the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade made the edit. A Russian milblogger indirectly criticized the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade on December 22 for exposing a new tactic, which suggests that Russian forces may intend to deliberately use K-51s or other RCAs elsewhere along the front.[37] The Russian milblogger’s complaints or wider reporting about the acknowledgement may have prompted the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade, or some Russian official to tell the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade, to edit the post.

Russia’s labor shortage, which is partially a result of the war in Ukraine, reportedly amounted to about 4.8 million people in 2023 and will likely continue to exacerbate struggling Kremlin efforts aimed at increasing Russian economic capacity. Kremlin-affiliated outlet *Izvestiya* reported on December 24 that according to the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) data indicates that the number of workers needed to fill vacant positions in mid-2023 was 6.8% of the total number of employed people, amounting to about 4.8 million people across Russia.[38] Russian President Vladimir Putin noted the connection between labor shortages and the development of Russia’s migrant policy on December 4.[39] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is struggling to reconcile inconsistent and contradictory policies that attempt to appease the Russian ultranationalist community by disincentivizing migrant workers from working in Russia while simultaneously trying to increase Russian industrial capacity and force generation.[40]

Key Takeaways:

- **European Union (EU) Foreign Affairs High Representative Josep Borrell stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in a limited territorial victory in Ukraine and will continue the war “until the final victory.”**
- **Russian forces are reportedly decreasing aviation activity and their use of glide bombs in Ukraine after Ukrainian forces shot down three Russian Su-34s in southern Ukraine between December 21 and 22.**
- **Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of December 23 to 24.**
- **Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov further detailed Ukraine’s efforts to establish a sustainable wartime force-generation apparatus and an effective defense industrial base (DIB) during an interview published on December 24.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to portray himself as a gracious leader who cares about the wellbeing of Russian military personnel, while also presenting himself as an effective Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armed forces.**
- **Russia appears to be continuing its efforts to build out a military occupation force in Ukraine separate from its frontline units through the use of its newly formed Rosgvardia units.**
- **The Russian Black Sea Fleet’s 810th Naval Infantry Brigade edited its acknowledgement that its personnel are deliberately using chemical weapons in Ukraine in a likely effort to hide what could be evidence of an apparent violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Russia is party.**
- **Russia’s labor shortage, which is partially a result of the war in Ukraine, reportedly amounted to about 4.8 million people in 2023 and will likely continue to exacerbate struggling Kremlin efforts aimed at increasing Russian economic capacity.**
- **Russian forces made confirmed advanced near Kreminna and near Avdiivka as positional engagements continues along the entire line of contact.**
- **The newly formed 337th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (104th VDV Division) operating in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast near Krynky is continuing to suffer losses.**

- Russian officials claimed that Russia's handling of the situation at the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) is sufficient, despite recent unsafe incidents during Russian occupation of the plant.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 24, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

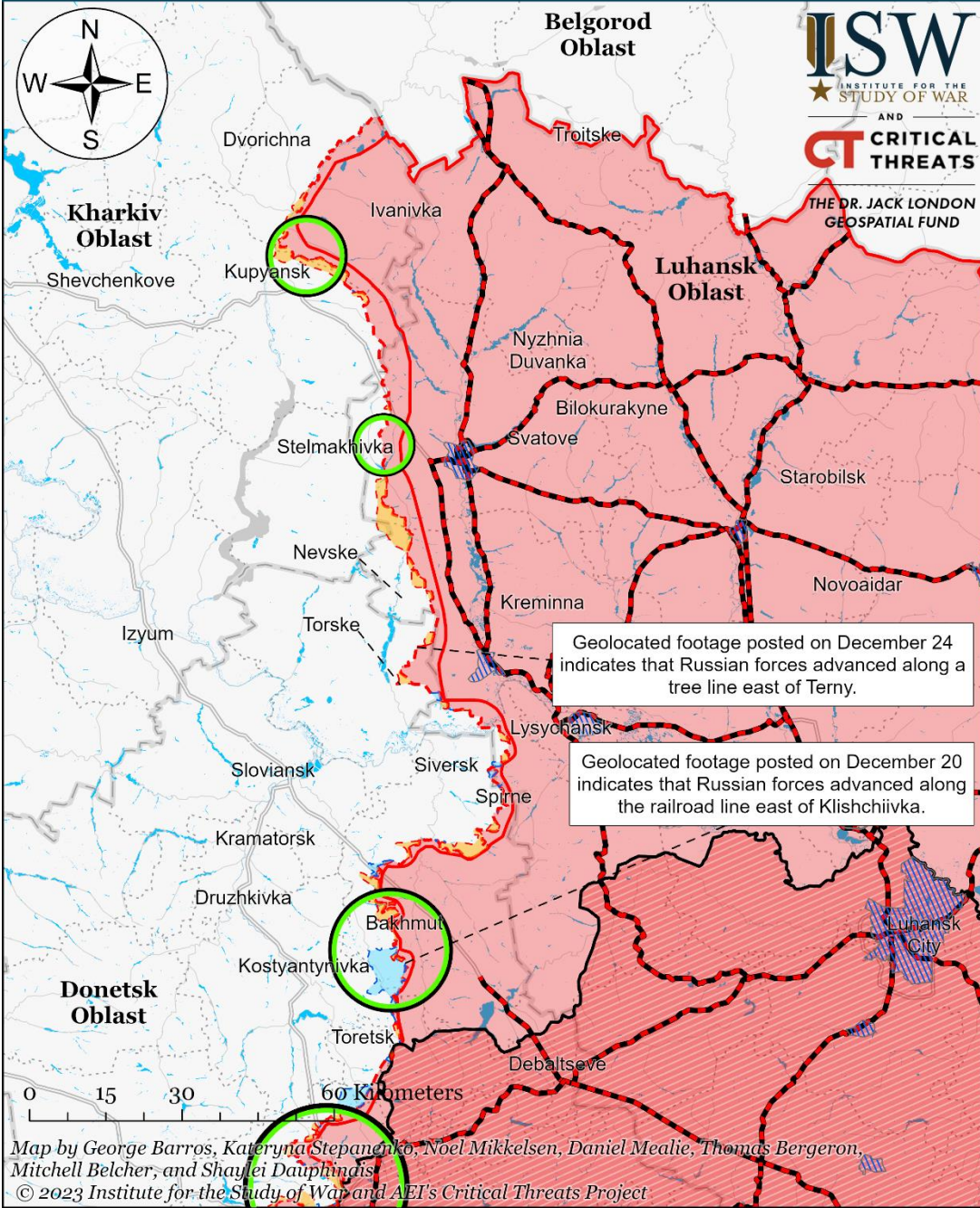
NOTE: ISW has restructured the operational kinetic axis sections of the daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment to more accurately reflect the positional nature of fighting on the battlefield. Operational kinetic axis paragraphs will be shorter and more synthetic to convey the same assessment in 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 confirmed advance near Kreminna. Geolocated footage published on December 24 shows that Russian forces recently advanced east of Terny (west of Kreminna).[41] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are less than four kilometers away from Terny, although the geolocated footage indicates that Russian forces are slightly over four kilometers away from the outskirts of Terny.[42] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces marginally advanced in the Kupyansk direction near Synkivka (northeast of Kupyansk), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[43] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that positional engagements continued in the Kupyansk direction near Synkivka and Stelmakhivka (northwest of Svatove) and in the Lyman direction east of Yampolivka (northwest of Kreminna); south of Kuzmyne (southwest of Kreminna); and near Terny (west of Kreminna), Torske (west of Kreminna), Dibrova, and the Serebryanske forest area (both southwest of Kreminna).[44] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces have increased the amount of artillery strikes in the Khortytsya direction (Kupyansk, Lyman, and Bakhmut directions) to over 1,000 strikes per day.[45] Elements of the Russian 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic Army Corps) reportedly continue to operate near Bilohorivka, Luhansk Oblast.[46]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of December 24, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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Geolocated footage posted on December 24 indicates that Russian forces advanced along a tree line east of Terny.

Geolocated footage posted on December 20 indicates that Russian forces advanced along the railroad line east of Klishchiivka.

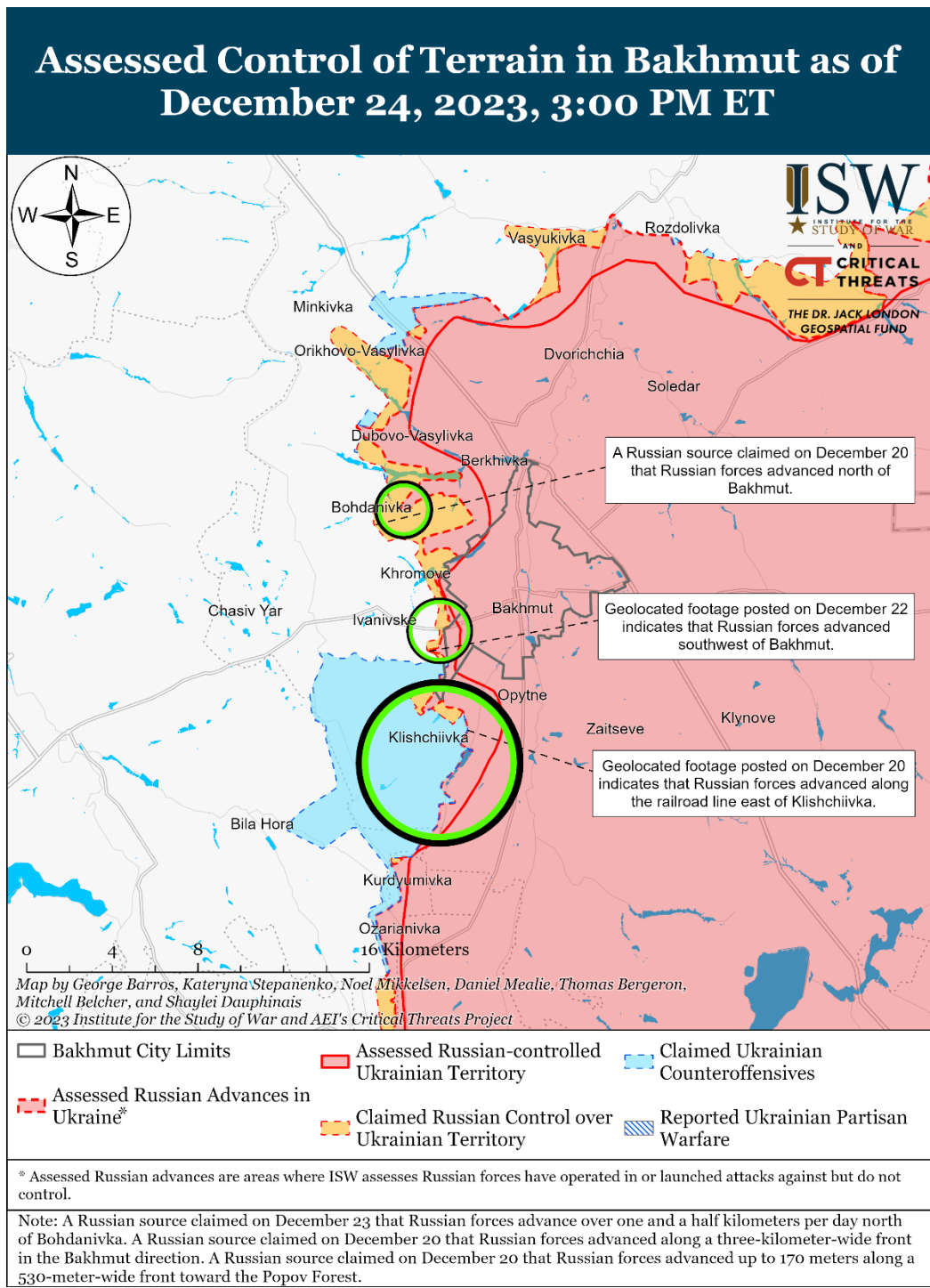
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shaylei Dauphinais
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- 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

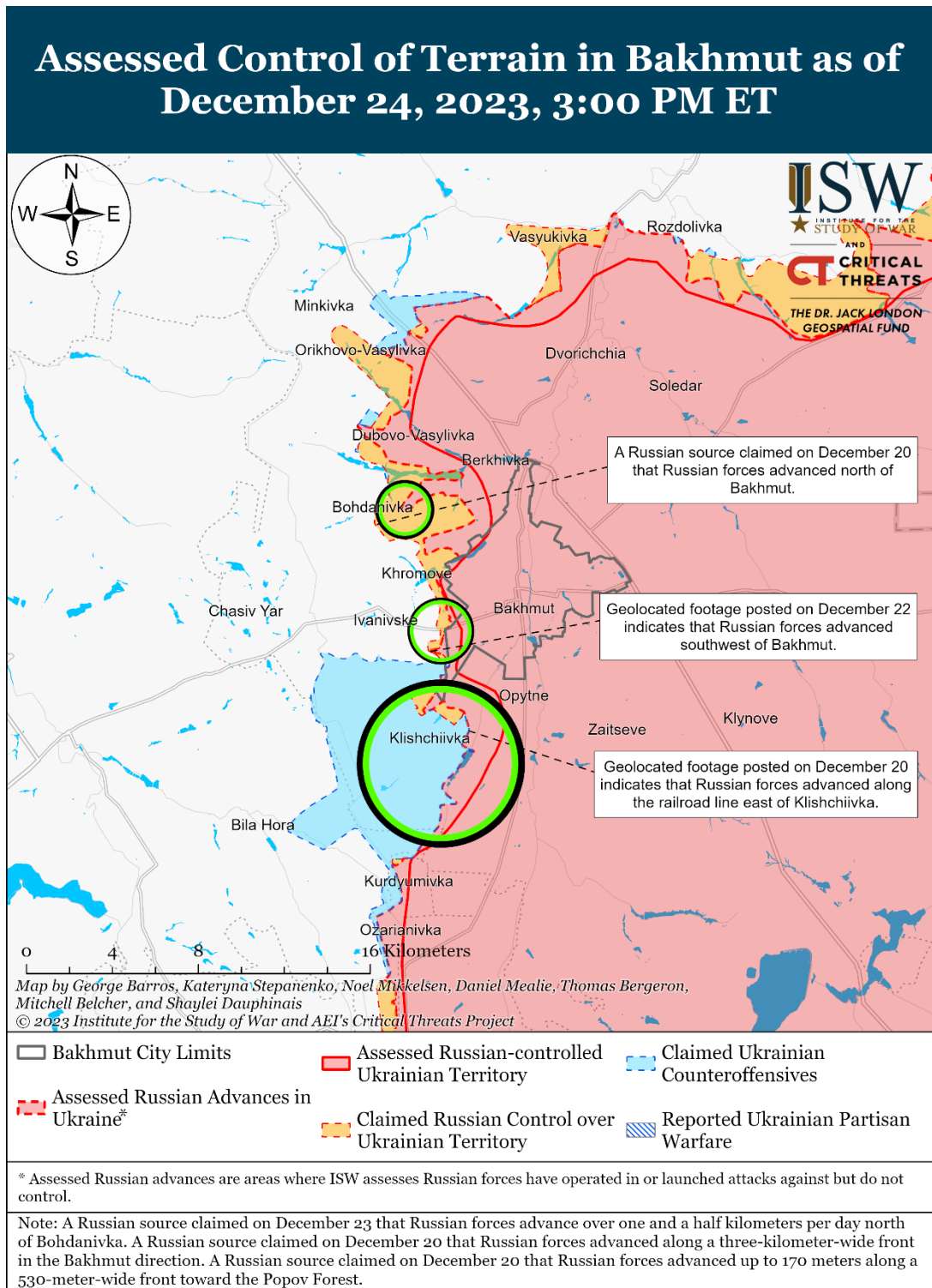
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

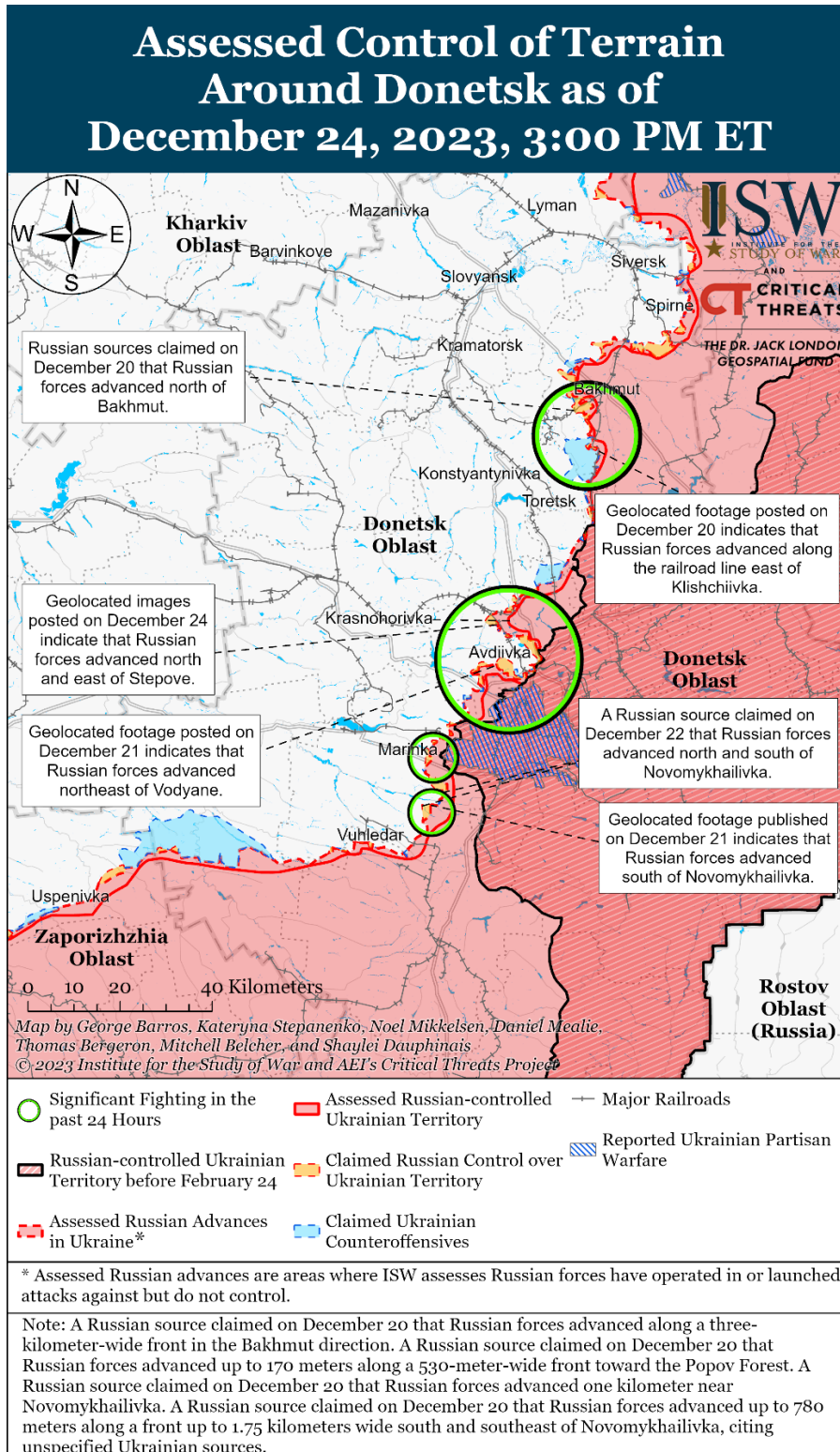
Ukrainian forces reportedly made recent gains near Bakhmut, although there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in the area. A Russian milblogger claimed on December 24 that Ukrainian forces advanced southwest of Verkhnokamianske (30km northeast of Bakhmut) and in the vicinity of Bakhmut near Khromove and Klishchiivka.[47] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting occurred northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka and Vasyukivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka, Andriivka, and Pivdenne.[48] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that the Russian command is deploying elements of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla) near Kurdyumivka (southwest of Bakhmut) after withdrawing these elements from fighting near Krynky and Pidstepne in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast for reconstitution and replenishment over an unspecified period of time.[49]



Russian forces recently made advances near Avdiivka and continued positional engagements with Ukrainian forces on December 24. Geolocated footage published on December 24 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced east of Stepove (north of Avdiivka).[50] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces captured the entirety of the vineyard area southeast of Avdiivka but that Ukrainian forces still control an unspecified part of the nearby industrial zone southeast of Avdiivka.[51] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced 200 meters from Vodyane towards Pervomaiske southwest of Avdiivka and 200 meters towards the southwestern outskirts of Avdiivka itself.[52] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional engagements occurred northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka and in the direction of Ocheretyne; north of Avdiivka near Stepove; and southwest of Avdiivka near Sieverne, Pervomaiske, and Nevelske.[53] Ukrainian Avdiivka City Military Administration Head Vitaliy Barabash stated that Russian forces have intensified shelling of Avdiivka in the past day.[54]

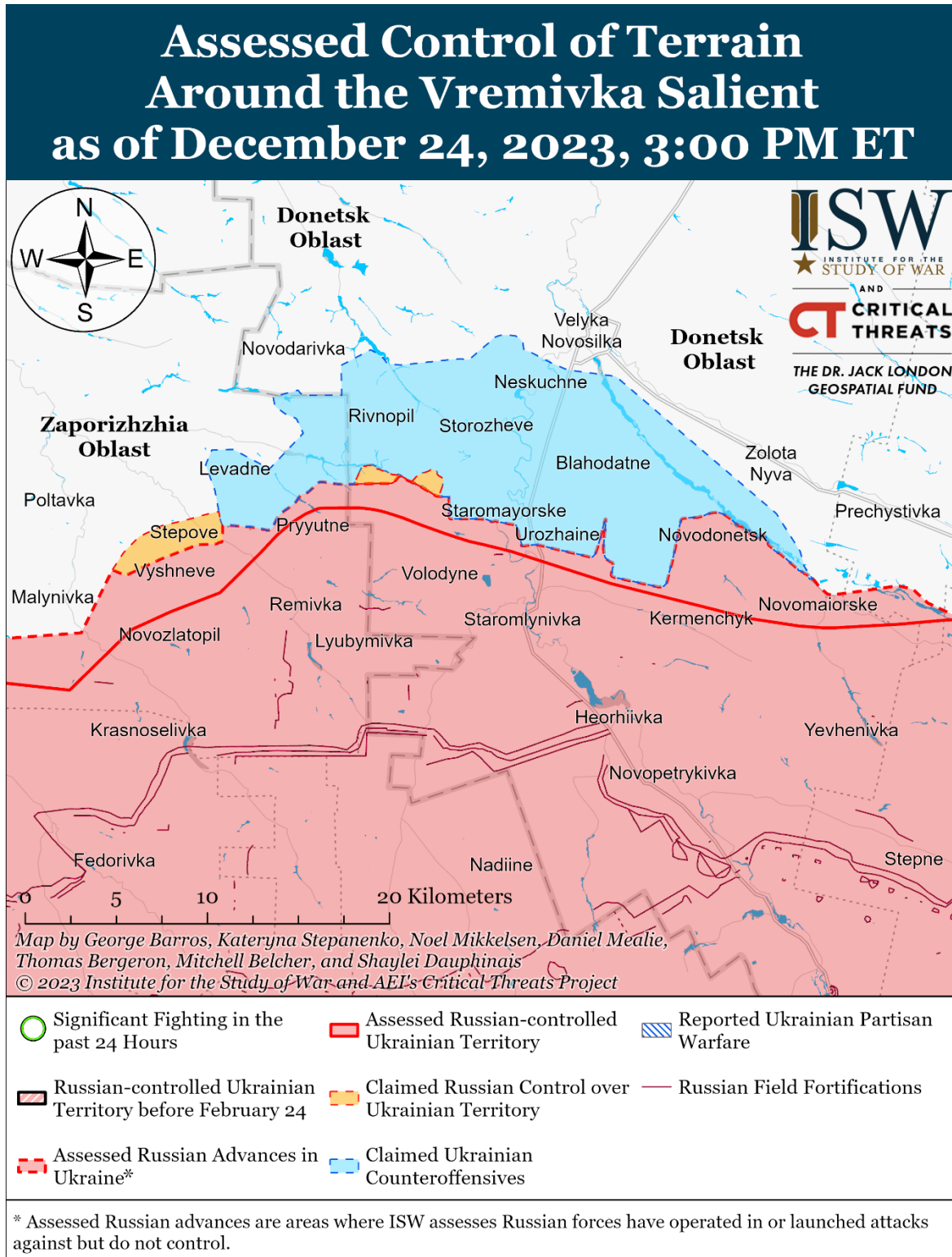


Russian and Ukrainian forces continued positional engagements west and southwest on Donetsk City on December 24. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional engagements continued west of Donetsk City near Marinka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka and Pobieda.[55] Mashovets stated on December 24 that elements of the Russian 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps, Eastern Military District) and the 225th and 33rd Motorized Rifle Regiments (both of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) are operating near Novomykhailivka.[56] Mashovets claimed that elements of 139th Separate Motorized Rifle Battalion (29th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) and the 40th and 155th Naval Infantry Brigades (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District) are also operating in the Novomykhailivka area.[57]



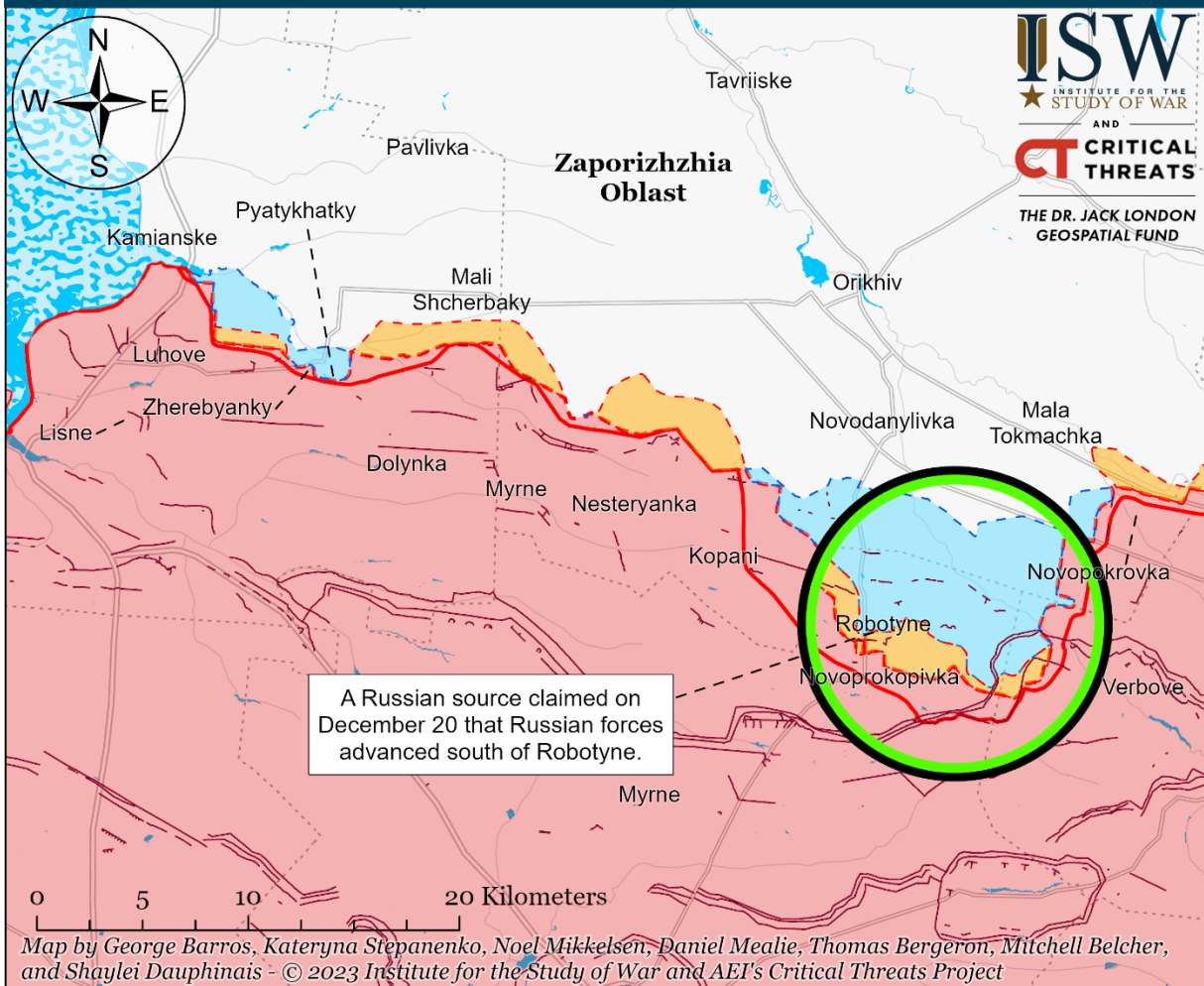
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian and Ukrainian forces reportedly did not conduct offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on December 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in the area.[58] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian and Russian forces mostly engaged in mutual shelling and that Russian forces conducted several unsuccessful attacks near Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka) in the past week.[59]



Ukrainian and Russian forces continued positional engagements in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on December 24, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements occurred near Robotyne and Verbove and south of Hulyaipole (36km east of Orikhiv).[60] Russian milbloggers continued to comment that poor weather conditions are affecting Russian and Ukrainian forces' ability to conduct ground maneuver.[61] A Russian milblogger claimed that a poorly trained "special contingent" deployed to the Robotyne area and reinforced an unspecified Russian airborne (VDV) unit – in line with Russian VDV Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky's December 23 statement that new graduates of the Ryazan Higher Airborne Command School deployed to combat zones before their intended deployment date.[62] Elements of the Russian 247th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division) are reportedly operating near Verbove.[63]

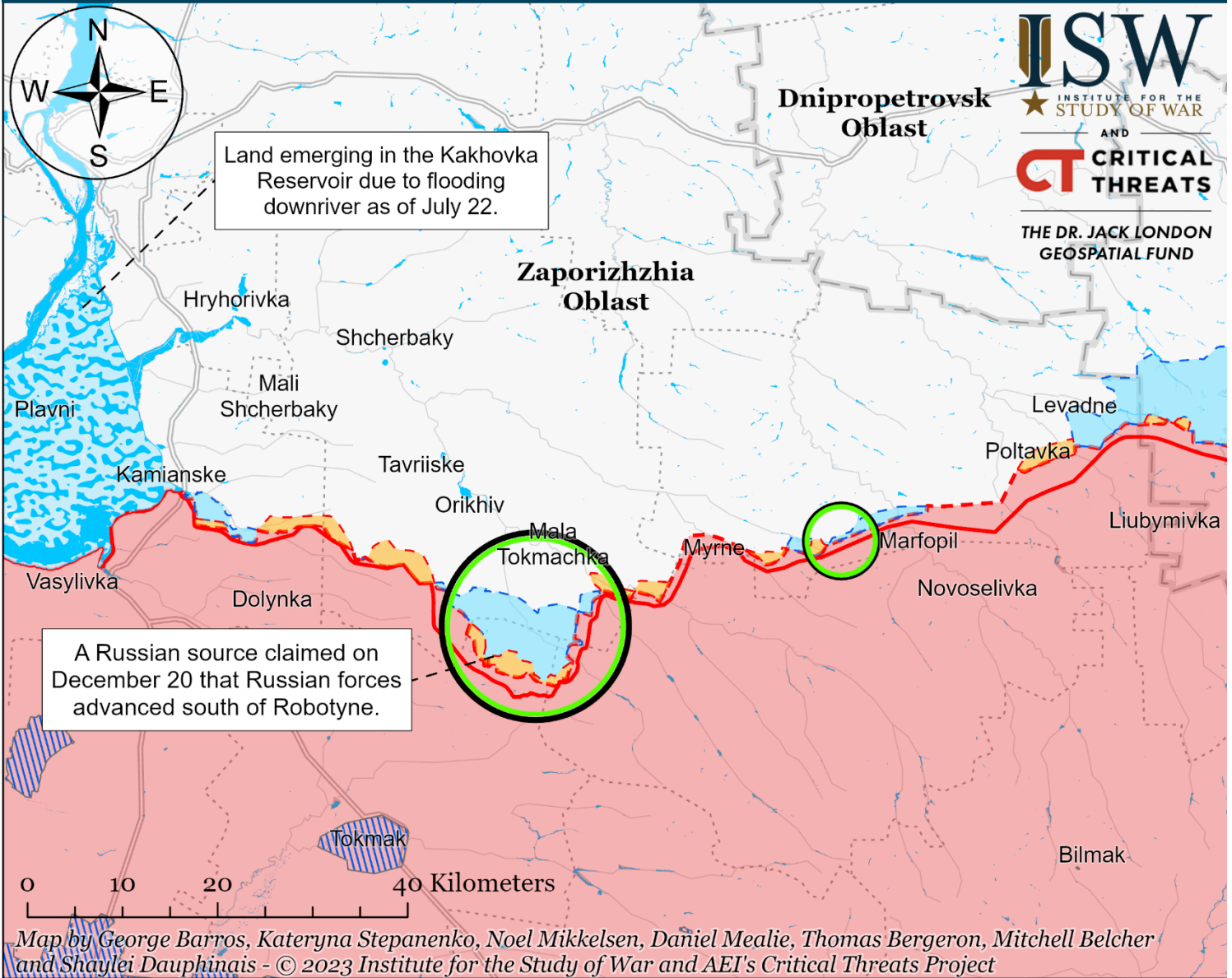
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of December 24, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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|---|--|---|
| 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.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of December 24, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

Ukrainian forces maintain positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast as of December 24, but neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces made confirmed advances in the area. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional engagements continued on the east bank, including near Krynky.[64] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have been unable to push Ukrainian forces out of the bridgehead in Krynky in the past week due to effective Ukrainian drones and electronic warfare (EW) complexes.[65] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that the 2nd VDV Battalion of the Russian 337th VDV Regiment (104th VDV Division) moved to the Krynky area to join the “Enerhodar” combat group of forces.[66] Mashovets stated that detachments of the 345th VDV Regiment (104th VDV Division) from reserves of the Russian “Dnepr” Grouping of Forces replaced the 2nd VDV Battalion within the “Enerhodar” group. Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 328th and 337th VDV Regiments (104th VDV Division); 26th Motorized Rifle Regiment (70th Motorized Rifle Division, 18th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District); and 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) have been operating near Krynky for the past three weeks.



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

The newly formed 337th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (104th VDV Division) operating near Krynky in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast is continuing to suffer losses. The mother of a Russian mobilized serviceman in the 337th VDV Regiment recorded a video appeal in which she stated that the entire 1st Company of the regiment was recently buried after fighting in the Krynky area.[67] The mother added that servicemen operating in this direction do not have effective guidance from mid-level commanders, lack artillery support, and spend 20 days in a row in trenches without water and other supplies. The mother concluded her appeal by asking Russian commanders to not use elements of the regiment as “cannon fodder.” Russian VDV Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky published a video on December 23, in which he likely tried to address Russians’ concerns over Russia’s inability to push Ukrainian forces to the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast and mentioned some VDV manpower losses.[68] It is possible that Teplinsky, at least in part, was attempting to address concerned relatives of servicemen of the 104th VDV Division – which, he observed, was less combat effective than other Russian VDV elements.

Teplinsky and the Russian VDV command also appear to be facing issues with insubordination within the ranks of the 104th VDV Division. Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* amplified a video on December 24, which shows a Russian commander punishing several men of the newly-formed 345th VDV Regiment (104th VDV Division) for failing to follow his orders by making them jump into a hole completely naked at night.[69] Elements of the 345th VDV Regiment are reportedly operating under Teplinsky’s command within the Russian “Dnepr” Group of Forces in southern Ukraine, and this footage indicates that Teplinsky may be facing insubordination challenges as a result of VDV losses on the east bank of the Dnipro River and/or the inexperience and insufficient preparation of VDV soldiers and their junior officers in this area.[70]

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

Nothing significant to report.

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 officials claimed that Russia’s handling of the situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) is sufficient, despite recent unsafe incidents during Russian occupation of the plant. Kremlin newswire *TASS* stated on December 24 that the Permanent Mission of Russia to international organizations in Vienna told the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that there is a sufficient number of personnel at the ZNPP to ensure its safe operation in cold and hot shutdown modes and conduct scheduled maintenance and that radiation at the facility does not exceed permissible levels.[71] Ukrainian nuclear energy operator Energoatom reported on November 16 that Russian authorities’ actions at the ZNPP led to a leak of a boric acid solution into steam generators, and the Ukrainian Energy Ministry and IAEA recently reported on December 2 that the ZNPP lost connection with both of its external power lines for five and a half hours.[72]

Russian occupation authorities continued to build out electoral infrastructure in occupied Ukraine as part of efforts to legitimize Russian occupation and elections. Occupation officials stated that signature collection points to support Russian President Vladimir Putin’s presidential campaign began operating in occupied Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson oblasts and that citizens must have Russian passports to participate.[73]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Nothing significant to report.

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.



- [1] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/24/eu-foreign-policy-chief-fears-rightwing-surge-in-june-elections>
- [2] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/24/eu-foreign-policy-chief-fears-rightwing-surge-in-june-elections>
- [3] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/24/eu-foreign-policy-chief-fears-rightwing-surge-in-june-elections>
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