

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 5, 2023

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December 5, 2023, 6:45pm ET

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

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:10pm ET on December 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against Russian military targets in occupied Crimea on the night of December 4 to 5. Ukrainian media reported on December 5, citing sources in the Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), that GUR and SBU elements struck a Russian military oil terminal in Feodosia, a Nebo-M radar system near Baherove (13km west of Kerch), and a helicopter landing pad, P-18 Terek radar system, and a Baikal-1M anti-aircraft missile control system in unspecified areas of Crimea.[1] Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), claimed that Russian air defenses, electronic warfare (EW) systems, and small-arms fire downed up to 35 Ukrainian drones near Baherove, Feodosia, Cape Chauda, and over the Sea of Azov but did not say that any Ukrainian drones struck their intended targets.[2] Another group of Russian sources, including Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo, claimed that Russian air defenses downed up to 41 Ukrainian drones over northern Crimea and the Sea of Azov and claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to strike Russian air defense systems and fuel storage facilities.[3] Ukrainian forces have been conducting an interdiction campaign against Russian military infrastructure in occupied Crimea, primarily Black Sea Fleet assets, since June 2023 to degrade the Russian military's ability to use Crimea as a staging and rear area for Russian operations in southern Ukraine.[4]

Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine on the night of December 4 and 5. Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces launched 17 Shahed-136/-131 drones from Kursk Oblast and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai, and six S-300 missiles at targets in Ukraine and that Ukrainian air defenses shot down 10 of the drones.[5] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that the Russian missiles targeted civilian objects in Donetsk and Kherson oblasts.[6] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones struck civilian residences and infrastructure in Lviv Oblast and Izyum and Chuhuiv raions, Kharkiv Oblast.[7]

The Russian State Duma will reportedly consider a proposed bill that would recognize the Sea of Azov as an internal Russian body of water, likely setting conditions to coerce recognition of Russia's illegal annexation of occupied Crimea and Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Donetsk oblasts. Russian State Duma Deputy representing occupied Crimea Mikhail Sheremet stated on December 5 that the Duma will try to adopt a proposed bill that would formally designate the Sea of Azov as an internal water of Russia by the end of 2023.[8] Russia and Ukraine signed and ratified a treaty in 2003 and 2004 that included stipulations that the Sea of Azov is a historically internal water of both Russia and Ukraine and that vessels flying Ukrainian or Russian flags in the Sea of Azov enjoy freedom of navigation.[9] The Ukrainian Rada denounced the treaty in February 2023, stating that Russia had violated the stipulation that all issues concerning the Sea of Azov should be resolved by peaceful, bilateral means and that the treaty's authorization of Russian warships to freely navigate the sea posed a threat to Ukrainian national security.[10] Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law in June 2023 that also denounced the treaty, claiming that Ukraine lost its status as a littoral state of the Sea of Azov when Russia (illegally) annexed Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts in 2022.[11] The proposed bill likely portends a series of corresponding Russian administrative measures that would require maritime traffic *en route* to or from ports on the Sea of Azov to formally recognize the sea as a Russian internal body of water and, therefore, to de facto recognize Russia's illegal annexation of occupied Ukrainian territories.

Russian opposition party Yabloko founder Grigory Yavlinsky advocated for a ceasefire in Ukraine as part of his presidential bid on December 5 likely in an attempt to distinguish himself from Russian President Vladimir Putin and give voice to Russians who support a ceasefire. Yavlinsky stated in an interview with Russian state outlet *RBK* published on December 5 that he believes that it is in Russia's interest to sign a ceasefire agreement with Ukraine as quickly as possible.[12] Yavlinsky expressed doubt that recent Russian surveys claiming to show that Russians support the war in Ukraine are true given the scale of Russian propaganda, which he believes has created a widespread sense

of fear in Russia in the past year and a half.[13] Yavlinsky stated that he is currently collecting the signatures needed to run in the 2024 presidential election and explained that his sequential presidential platform includes signing a ceasefire and exchanging prisoners of war (POWs) with Ukraine first, releasing political prisoners in Russia second, and beginning to reform the Russian judicial system third.[14] Yavlinsky advocated against Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and the full-scale invasion in 2022 and called for Russia to withdraw from the war in Syria during his 2018 presidential campaign.[15] Yavlinsky likely believes that these anti-war positions and the call for a ceasefire are the most direct way to oppose Putin and to garner support from the public. Recent Russian opinion polls indicate that more Russians support a withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine than do not and that a majority of Russians believe that Russia should begin peace negotiations with Ukraine.[16]

The Kremlin may be strategically allowing Yavlinsky to criticize the Russian government in order to preserve its veneer of electoral legitimacy and to delegitimize possible support for a ceasefire among factions in the Kremlin. A Russian insider source claimed on December 4 that Yavlinsky made an agreement with the Russian Presidential Administration that if he were allowed to participate in the 2024 presidential elections, he would criticize the Ukrainian government, especially Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.[17] The insider source claimed that the Presidential Administration is not against “moderate” criticisms of Russia's war in Ukraine as this can demonstrate that there is a “pluralism of opinions” in Russian presidential elections.[18] The insider source claimed that the Kremlin would allow Yavlinsky to garner no more than one to 1.5 percent of the vote in the election, which is consistent with Yavlinsky's results in the 2018 presidential elections.[19] Yavlinsky stated in the *RBK* interview that Russian authorities have sentenced or are investigating other members of the Yabloko party but that this occurs only at the regional level and that he is unsure why the federal government has not shut down Yabloko.[20] The Kremlin is likely refraining from punishing Yavlinsky and Yabloko at the federal level so as to maintain its carefully crafted façade of opposition, democracy, and electoral legitimacy.[21] The Kremlin is also likely allowing Yavlinsky to widely promote the idea of a ceasefire in a state media outlet so as to associate the idea with the “opposition,” thereby likely deterring factions within the Kremlin that may want to freeze the frontline in Ukraine from publicly or privately voicing their opinions.

Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized the benefits that migrants provide to the Russian economy, while promoting ongoing efforts to Russify migrants in Russia and citizens of post-Soviet countries at the Russian Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights meeting on December 4. Putin stated that Russian economic demands, including a labor shortage, largely shape policy regarding migrants and noted that Russia must maintain an “ethnocultural balance.”[22] Putin criticized migrants for creating “ethnic enclaves” in Russian cities and failing to register with the Russian military after they acquire Russian citizenship.[23] Putin also stressed that migrants must be linguistically and culturally prepared to work in Russia and must abide by Russian traditions and laws.[24] Putin claimed that 20 to 50 percent of children of migrants have a low level of Russian language proficiency or do not speak Russian at all and noted the Russian government is creating special programs and classes for these children to study the Russian language and integrate into the Russian educational system.[25] Putin also noted that Russia is working with Central Asian and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries to establish Russian schools and teach the Russian language in these countries.[26] The Russian government has continually promoted opening Russian and Russian-speaking schools and universities in post-Soviet countries and has criticized countries for promoting the use of their indigenous languages in educational institutions.[27] Russia likely uses these educational programs and institutions in Russia and abroad to promote Russian narratives and foster a Russian identity among youth.

Russian milblogger and Russian Human Rights Council member Alexander Kots criticized the Russian government for failing to help ethnic Russian citizens of Central Asian countries receive Russian citizenship while granting Russian citizenship to ethnically Central Asian citizens of Central Asian countries.[28] Kots praised the Russian government for granting citizenship to foreigners who served in the Russian military, however.[29] Kots further commended Russian State Duma Deputy Alexander Khinshtein for successfully requesting that the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) grant Uzbek citizen Alexander Babkov temporary asylum in Russia with the future prospect of obtaining Russian citizenship.[30] Babkov, an ethnic Russian from Uzbekistan who allegedly fought in the Wagner Group near Bakhmut and Soledar, reportedly faced deportation to Uzbekistan in January 2024 and feared subsequent imprisonment.[31] An Uzbek court sentenced an Uzbek citizen to prison for fighting in the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) military from 2014–2015, and a Kazakh court sentenced a Kazakh citizen who reportedly served in Wagner to prison on charges of mercenarism.[32] Khinshtein's intervention on Babkov's behalf may be a response to increasing calls for the Russian government to protect ethnic Russians abroad, particularly those who served in the Russian military.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will travel to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia on December 6 and will host Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi in Russia on December 7 — a bout of diplomatic outreach likely focused on strengthening Russia's position with Gulf States while continuing to solidify the deepening Russian–Iranian security partnership. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov stated on December 5 that Putin will exchange views on bilateral relations, international agendas, and regional agendas during his meetings with UAE

President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.[33] Peskov responded to a question about Russian, Saudi, and Emirati oil cooperation and stated that discussions will occur within the OPEC+ framework.[34] OPEC+ members recently agreed on November 30 to cut oil output in early 2024 to stabilize oil prices.[35] Russian Presidential Assistant Yuri Ushakov stated that Putin intends to discuss the Palestinian–Israeli conflict; the war in Ukraine; and conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Sudan during his meetings in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.[36] The Kremlin likely aims to use cooperation on oil output and diplomatic engagement on the Israel– Hamas war and other regional conflicts to strengthen engagement with Gulf States while balancing potential Saudi and Emirati concerns about Russia’s increasing reliance on its security partnership with Iran. Peskov and Ushakov stated that Putin will meet with Raisi on December 7, and the Iranian state-owned *Islamic Republic News Agency* stated that Putin and Raisi will also discuss the situation in Palestine.[37] Ushakov announced that Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) intend to sign a cooperation agreement by the end of 2023, likely to facilitate and expand Iran’s role in Russian sanctions evasion schemes and in the supply of weapons and critical components to Russia.[38]

Armenia appears to be effectively abstaining from participation in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The Spokesperson for the Armenian Parliament Chairman, Tsovinar Khachatryan, confirmed on December 5 that Armenia will not send a representative to the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Moscow on December 19.[39] The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly meeting represents the fourth consecutive high profile CSTO event or exercise that Armenia has abstained from amid the backdrop of deteriorating Russian–Armenian relations.[40] Armenia did not participate in the CSTO Collective Security Council session in Minsk, Belarus on November 23; the CSTO’s summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on October 13; or the CSTO “Indestructible Brotherhood-2023” exercises in Belarus in early October.[41] Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Mnatsakan Safaryan reiterated on November 23 that Armenia is not considering leaving the CSTO or discussing the withdrawal of Russia’s 102nd Military Base in Gyumri, Armenia.[42] CSTO Secretary General Imangali Tasmagambetov stated on November 20 that Armenia asked the CSTO to remove provisions on assistance to Armenia from the agenda of the CSTO summit in Minsk.[43] Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated in October that Armenia is currently in the process of diversifying its security partnerships, and Armenia signed a military cooperation agreement with France on October 23.[44]

The Kremlin continues to intensify censorship efforts, targeting prominent Russian messaging and social media app Telegram. A Moscow court fined Russian communications company Telegram Messenger Inc. four million rubles (\$44,300) on December 5 for refusing to remove prohibited information at the request of Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor.[45] Moscow’s Tagansky Court previously fined Telegram four million rubles for failing to remove false information about the Russian Armed Forces and information aimed at destabilizing Russia on November 21, 2023.[46] These fines are likely a mild punishment for Telegram rather than a concerted effort by Russian authorities to shut down the app.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against Russian military targets in occupied Crimea on the night of December 4 to 5.**
- **Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine on the night of December 4 and 5.**
- **The Russian State Duma will reportedly consider a proposed bill that would recognize the Sea of Azov as an internal Russian body of water, likely setting conditions to coerce recognition of Russia’s illegal annexation of occupied Crimea and Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Donetsk oblasts.**
- **Russian opposition party Yabloko founder Grigory Yavlinsky advocated for a ceasefire in Ukraine as part of his presidential bid likely in an attempt to distinguish himself from Russian President Vladimir Putin and give voice to Russians who support a ceasefire.**
- **The Kremlin may be strategically allowing Yavlinsky to criticize the Russian government in order to preserve its veneer of electoral legitimacy and to delegitimize possible support for a ceasefire among factions in the Kremlin.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized the benefits that migrants provide to the Russian economy, while promoting ongoing efforts to Russify migrants in Russia and citizens of post-Soviet countries.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin will travel to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia on December 6 and will host Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi in Russia on December 7— a bout of diplomatic outreach likely focused on strengthening Russia’s position with Gulf States while continuing to solidify the deepening Russian-Iranian security partnership.**
- **Armenia appears to be effectively abstaining from participation in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).**

- The Kremlin continues to intensify censorship efforts, targeting prominent Russian messaging and social media app Telegram.
- Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminka line, near Bakhmut, near Avdiivka, west and southwest of Donetsk City, in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast but did not make any confirmed advances.
- Russian forces are reportedly quickly sending poorly trained convict recruits to reinforce assaults elements in Ukraine.
- Russian occupation authorities are reportedly intensifying their seizure of Ukrainian property in occupied Berdyansk, Donetsk Oblast.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 5, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

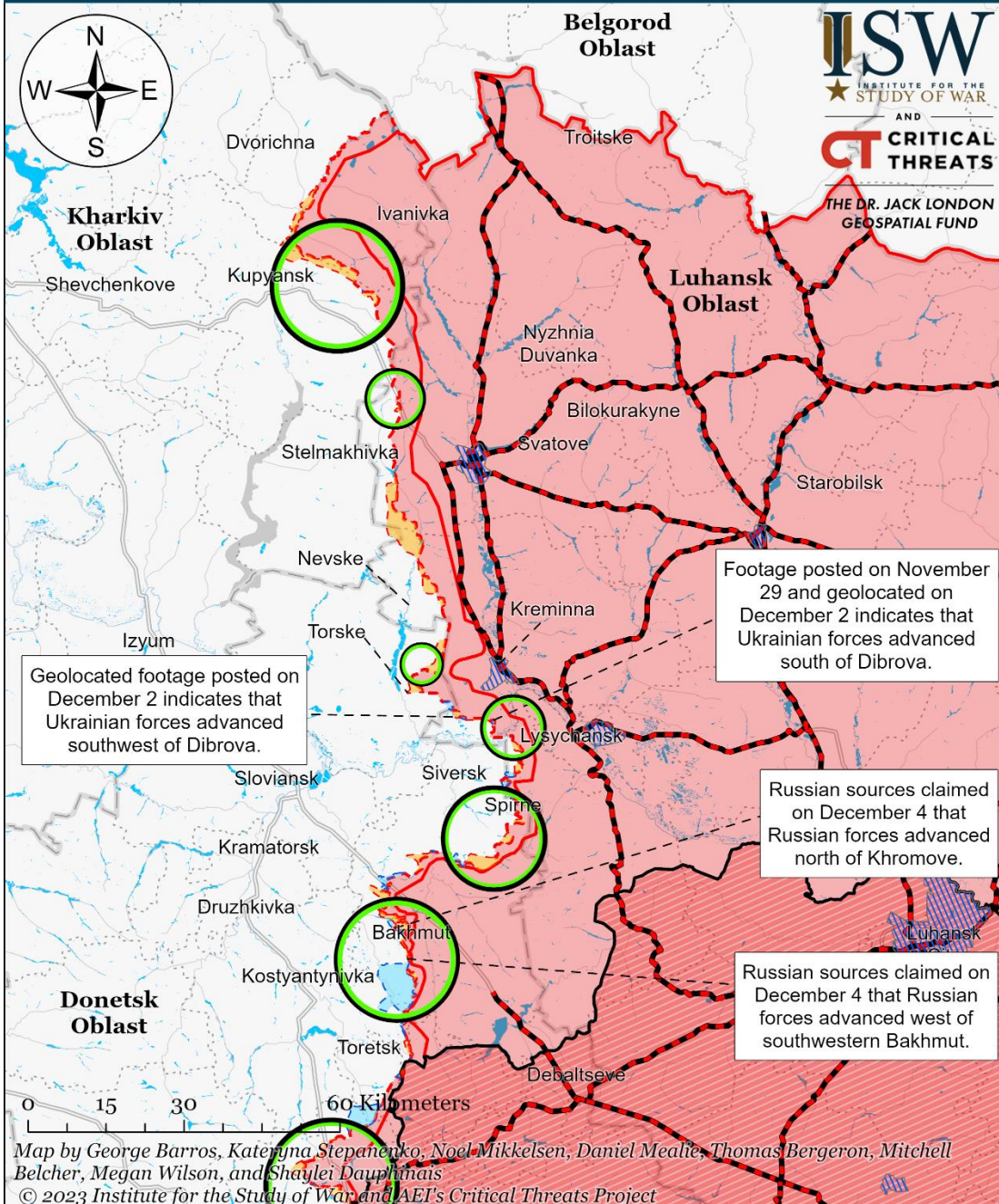
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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 continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on December 5 but did not make confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Synkivka (9km northeast of Kupyansk), Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk), Novoselivske (14km northwest of Svatove), Terny (17km west of Kreminna), the Serebryanske forest area (10km south of Kreminna), Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna), Spirne (25km south of Kreminna), and Vesele (31km south of Kreminna).[47] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces captured the northern outskirts of Synkivka, advanced up to 1 kilometer near Torske (15km west of Kreminna), and made unspecified gains near Yampolivka (17km west of Kreminna).[48] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces attacked south and southwest of Lyman Pershyi (12km northeast of Kupyansk) and that fighting is ongoing near Serebryanka (12km southwest of Kreminna) and Hryhorivka (11km south of Kreminna).[49] Nadiya Zamryha, a spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Kupyansk direction, stated on December 5 that Russian forces in the Kupyansk direction have decreased the density of artillery fire in comparison to late summer 2023 and are using tanks more frequently than in October 2023.[50]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Synkivka and Ivanivka (20km southwest of Kupyansk).[51]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of December 5, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Megan Wilson, 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

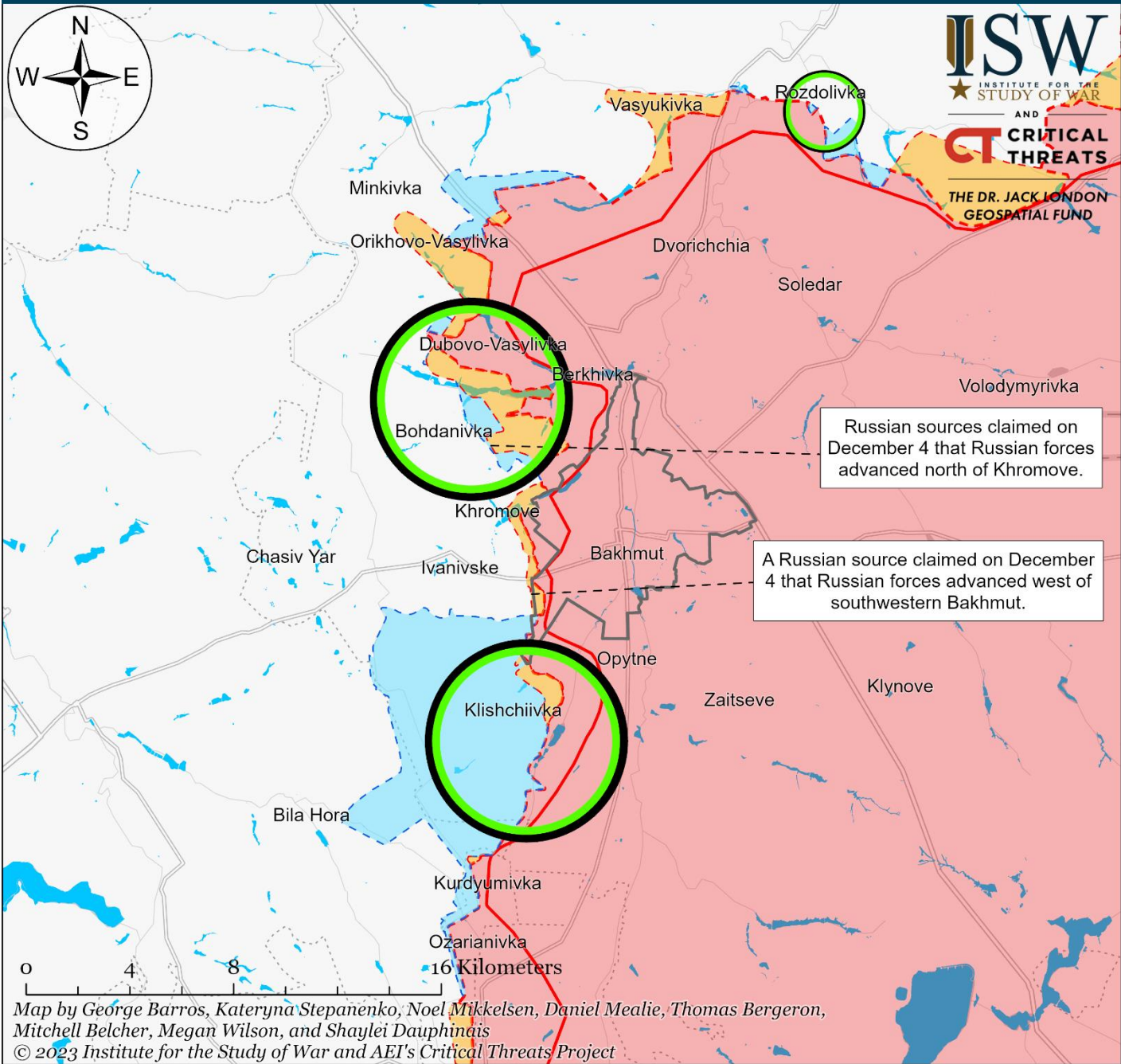
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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 continued ground attacks near Bakhmut on December 5 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued assault actions south of Bakhmut.[52] A Ukrainian military observer stated that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut) and captured two positions previously held by elements of the Russian 331st Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th Guards VDV Division).[53] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that unspecified elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled four Ukrainian assaults near Bohdanivka, Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), and Toretsk (21km south of Bakhmut and 12km northwest of Horlivka).[54]

Russian forces continued localized offensive operations near Bakhmut on December 5 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 11 assaults near Bohdanivka, Klishchiivka, and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut).[55] A Ukrainian military observer claimed that elements of the Russian 331st VDV Regiment dislodged Ukrainian forces from a position east of Bohdanivka and that elements of the Russian 11th VDV Brigade dislodged Ukrainian forces from three positions east of Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut).[56] Russian milbloggers claimed on December 4 and 5 that Russian forces advanced on the western outskirts of Bakhmut and north of Klishchiivka.[57] Another Russian milblogger claimed on December 5 that Ukrainian forces withdrew from limited positions near Klishchiivka and in the direction of Ivanivske, providing Russian forces space to launch assaults.[58] A Ukrainian commander operating in the Bakhmut area stated that Ukrainian artillery units and drone operators near Bakhmut destroy roughly 80 percent of Russian equipment during Russian assaults.[59] The Ukrainian commander stated that Russian forces are focused on recapturing previously lost positions near Bakhmut and are using "Storm-Z" assault detachments for highly attritional frontal assaults while using more professional units, primarily VDV and Chechen elements, for searching for gaps in Ukrainian defenses.[60]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of December 5, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Megan Wilson, and Shaylei Dauphinais
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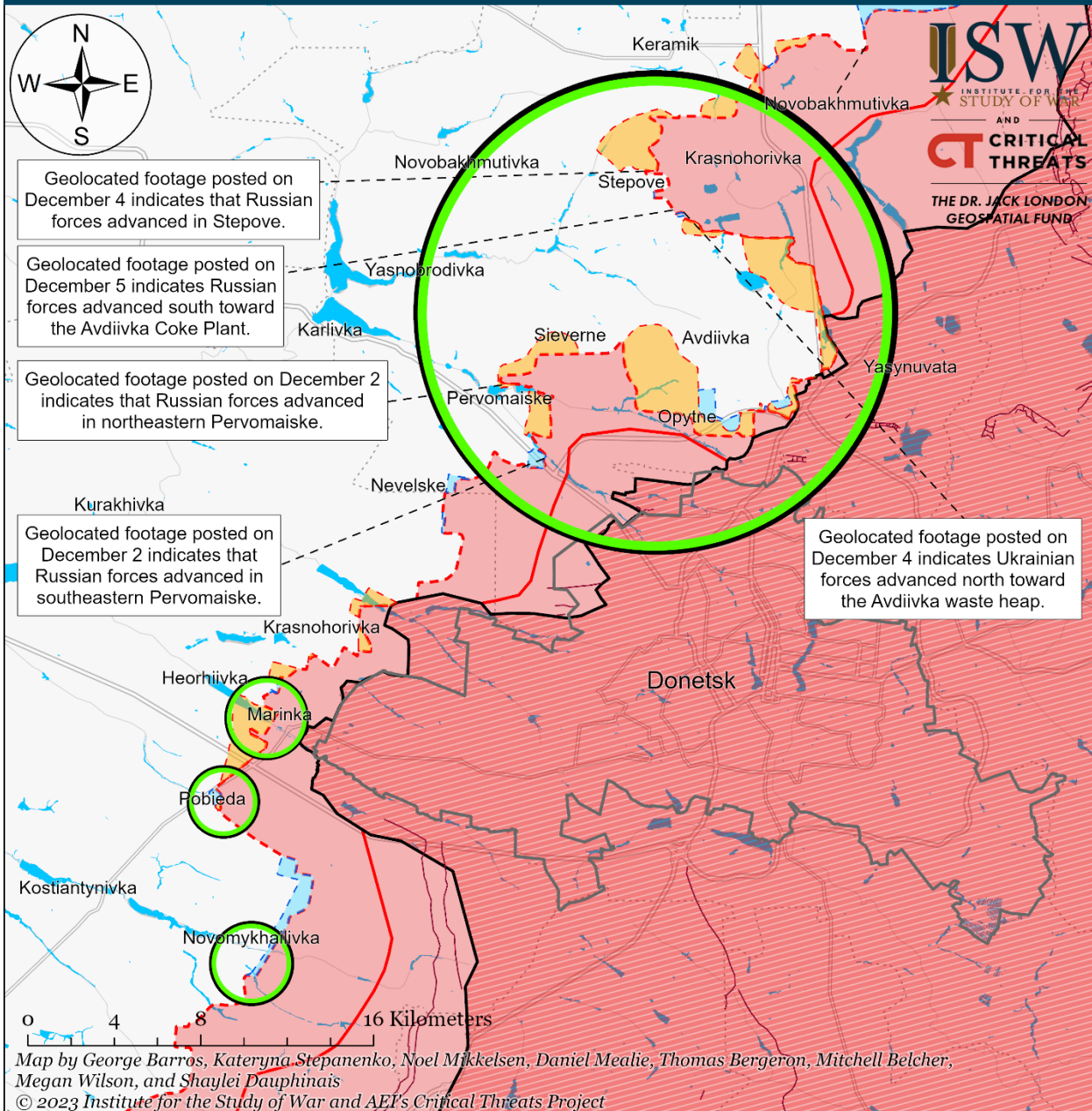
- Bakhmut City Limits
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Avdiivka on December 5 and made confirmed gains. Geolocated footage published on December 5 indicates that Russian forces advanced along a section of the railway line north of the Avdiivka Coke Plant in northwestern Avdiivka.[61] Additional geolocated footage published on December 4 indicates that Russian forces also advanced south of the Avdiivka waste heap.[62] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 23 Russian assaults east of Novobakhmutivka (7km northwest of Avdiivka); northeast of Berdychi (4km north of Avdiivka); and near Stepove (3km north of Avdiivka), Avdiivka, Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka), and Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka).[63] Russian milbloggers claimed on December 4 and 5 that Russian forces advanced near Novokalynove (8km north of Avdiivka), Stepove, the Avdiivka Coke Plant, the Avdiivka waste heap, the industrial zone southeast of Avdiivka, Sieverne, and Pervomaiske.[64] Russian milbloggers claimed on December 4 and 5 that positional fighting is ongoing near Krasnohorivka (4km northeast of Avdiivka) and that Russian forces resumed assaults near Nevelske (14km southwest of Avdiivka).[65] The Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Press Service reported on December 5 that Russian forces resumed conducting air strikes with Su-25 attack aircraft and Ka-52 helicopters in the Avdiivka area after a period of less intense Russian aviation activity.[66]

Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Avdiivka on December 5 and recently made a confirmed advance. Geolocated footage published on December 4 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced east of a section of the railway line north of the Avdiivka Coke Plant.[67] A Ukrainian military observer claimed on December 5 that Ukrainian forces counterattacked north of the Avdiivka Coke Plant and forced Russian forces to withdraw from two forward positions.[68] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are counterattacking near Stepove and are pressuring Russian defenses from the direction of Novokalynove.[69]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of December 5, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

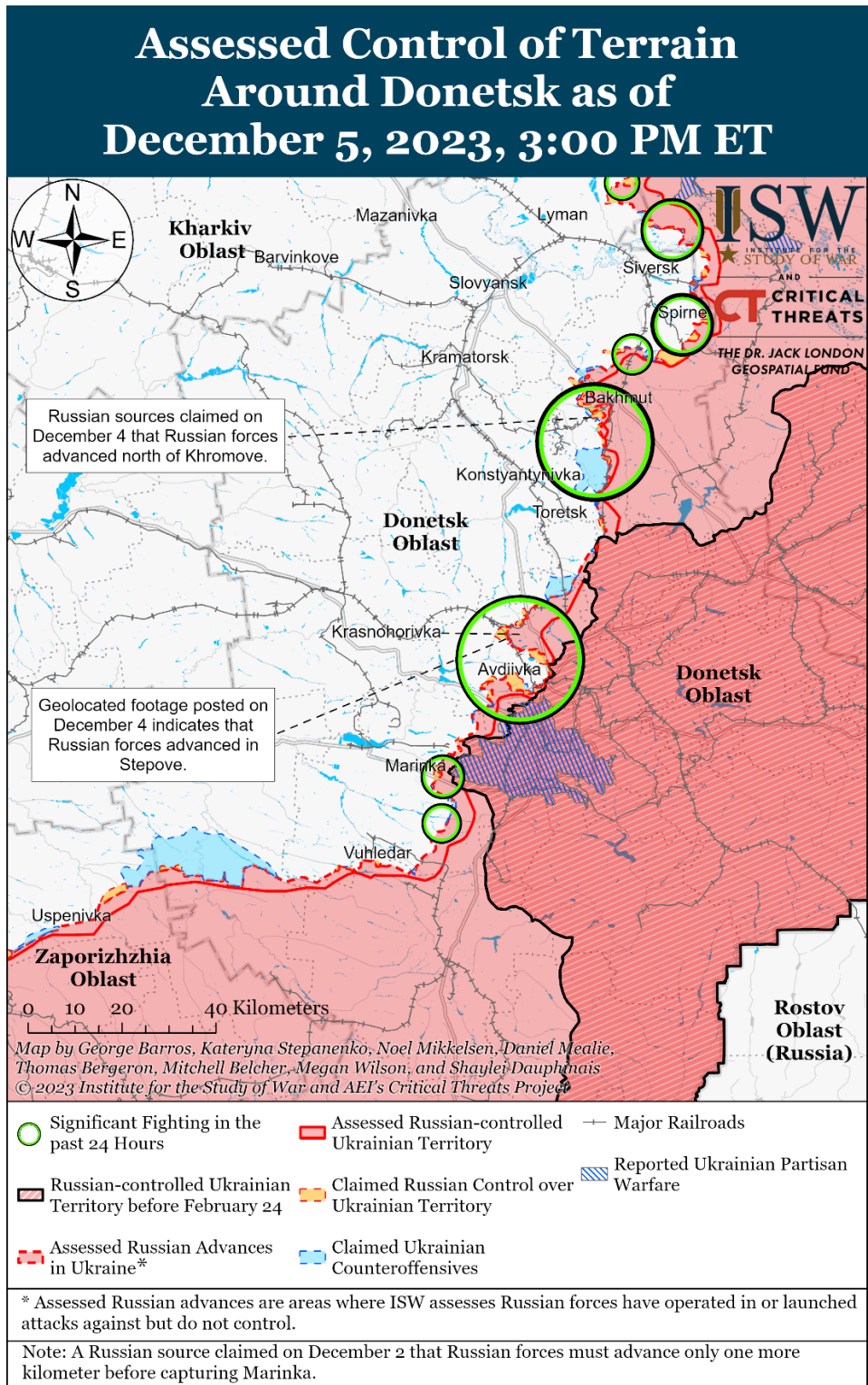


- Donetsk City Limits
- ▬ Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- ▬ Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- ▬ Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- ▬ Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- ▬ Russian Field Fortifications

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

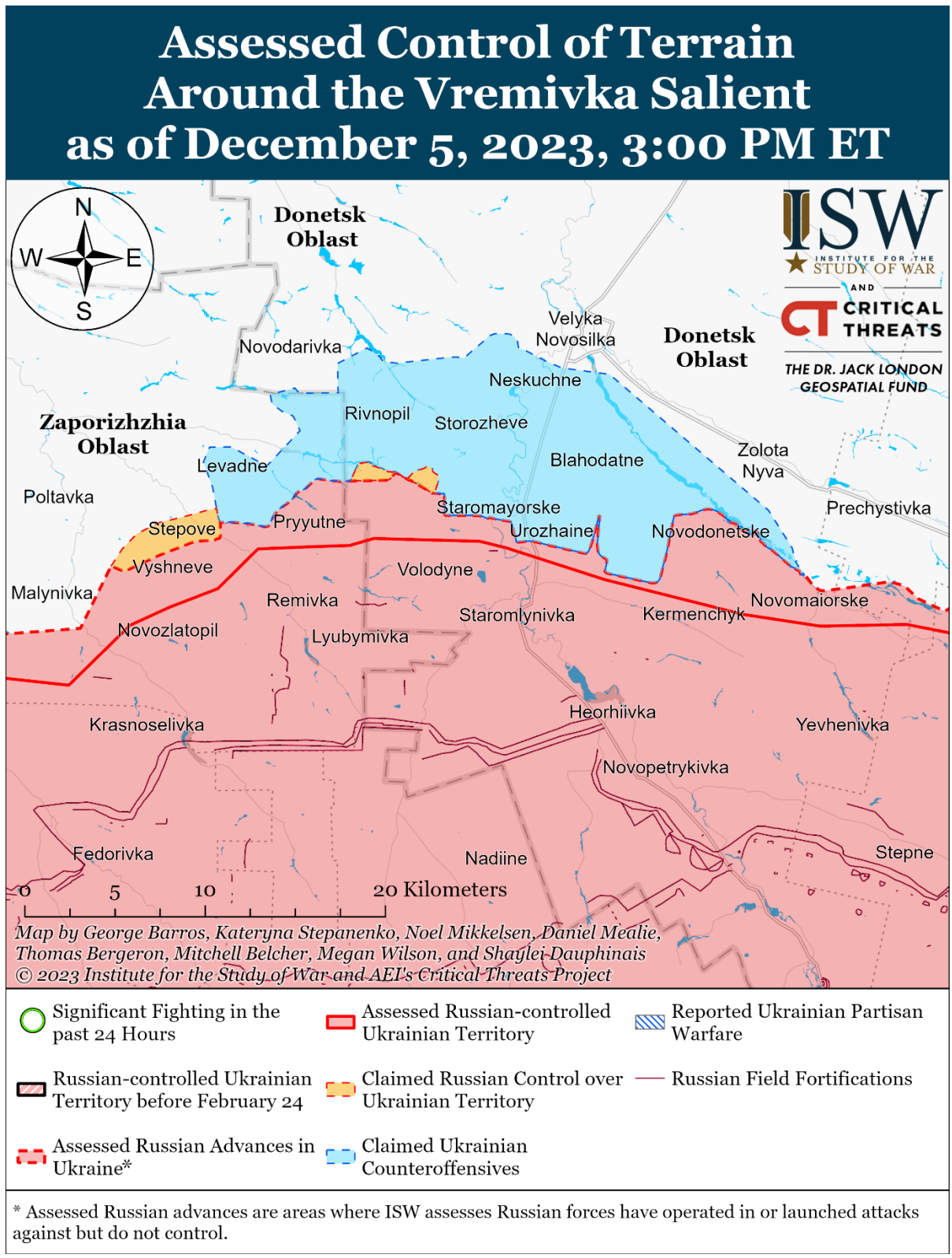
Note: A Russian source claimed on December 4 that Russian forces advanced up to 600 meters along the forest belt southeast of Stepove. A Russian source claimed on December 2 that Russian forces must advance only one more kilometer before capturing Marinka. Russian sources made contradictory claims about Marinka on December 1, claiming anywhere from 90 to 100 percent control over the settlement. Available geolocated evidence as of December 1 indicates Russian forces occupy no less than 74 percent of Marinka.

Russian forces continued offensive operations west and southwest of Donetsk City on December 5 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled at least 13 Russian assaults near Marinka (immediately southwest of Donetsk City) and Novomykhailivka (11km southwest of Donetsk City).[70] The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) stated that Russian forces likely control most of Marinka with Ukrainian forces retaining control of positions on the western edge of the settlement.[71] A Russian milblogger acknowledged on December 4 that Russian forces have not yet captured all of Marinka.[72] A Ukrainian military observer claimed on December 5 that elements of the 33rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) and 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps, Eastern Military District) are operating near Marinka and Novomykhailivka.[73]



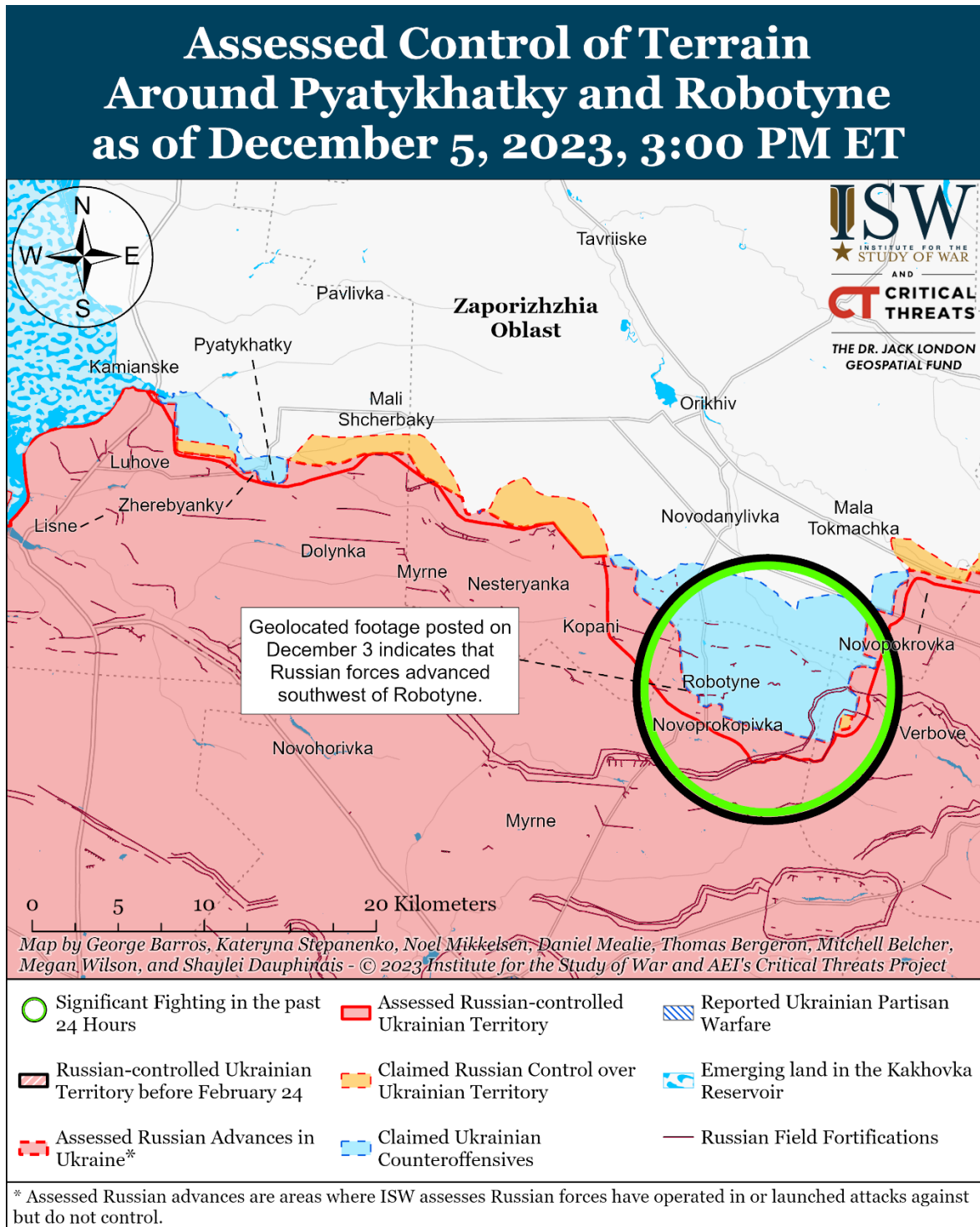
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances on December 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked south of Zolota Nyva (11km southeast of Velyka Novosilka).[74] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked southwest of Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[75]

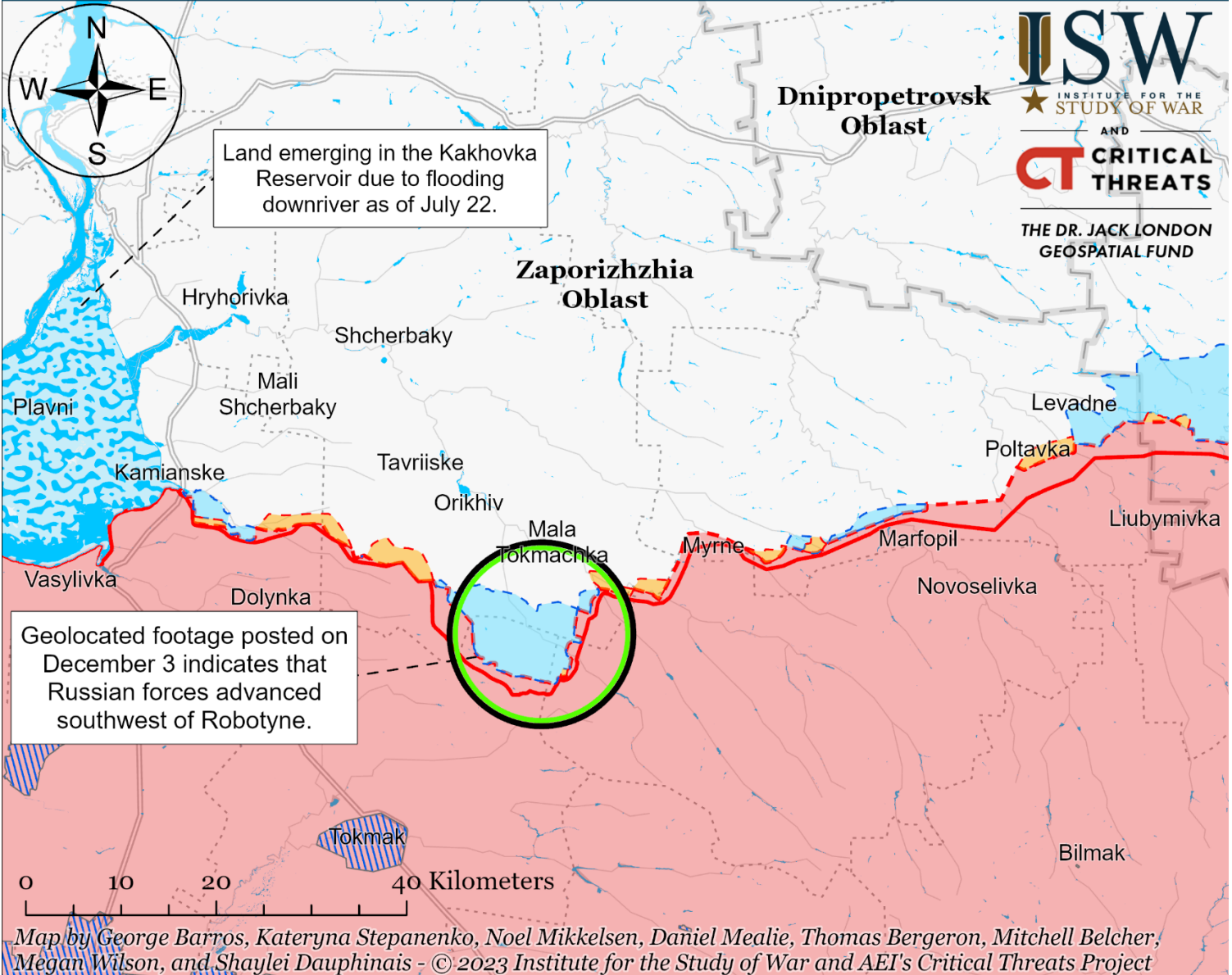


Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances on December 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction.[76] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked in the Balka Uspenivka area (5km northeast of Robotyne).[77] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked west of Robotyne, near Novoprokopivka (2km south of Robotyne), and northwest of Verbove (9km east of Robotyne).[78]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast but did not make any confirmed advances on December 5. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces captured several Ukrainian positions near Robotyne, although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[79] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked south and west of Robotyne.[80]



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of December 5, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

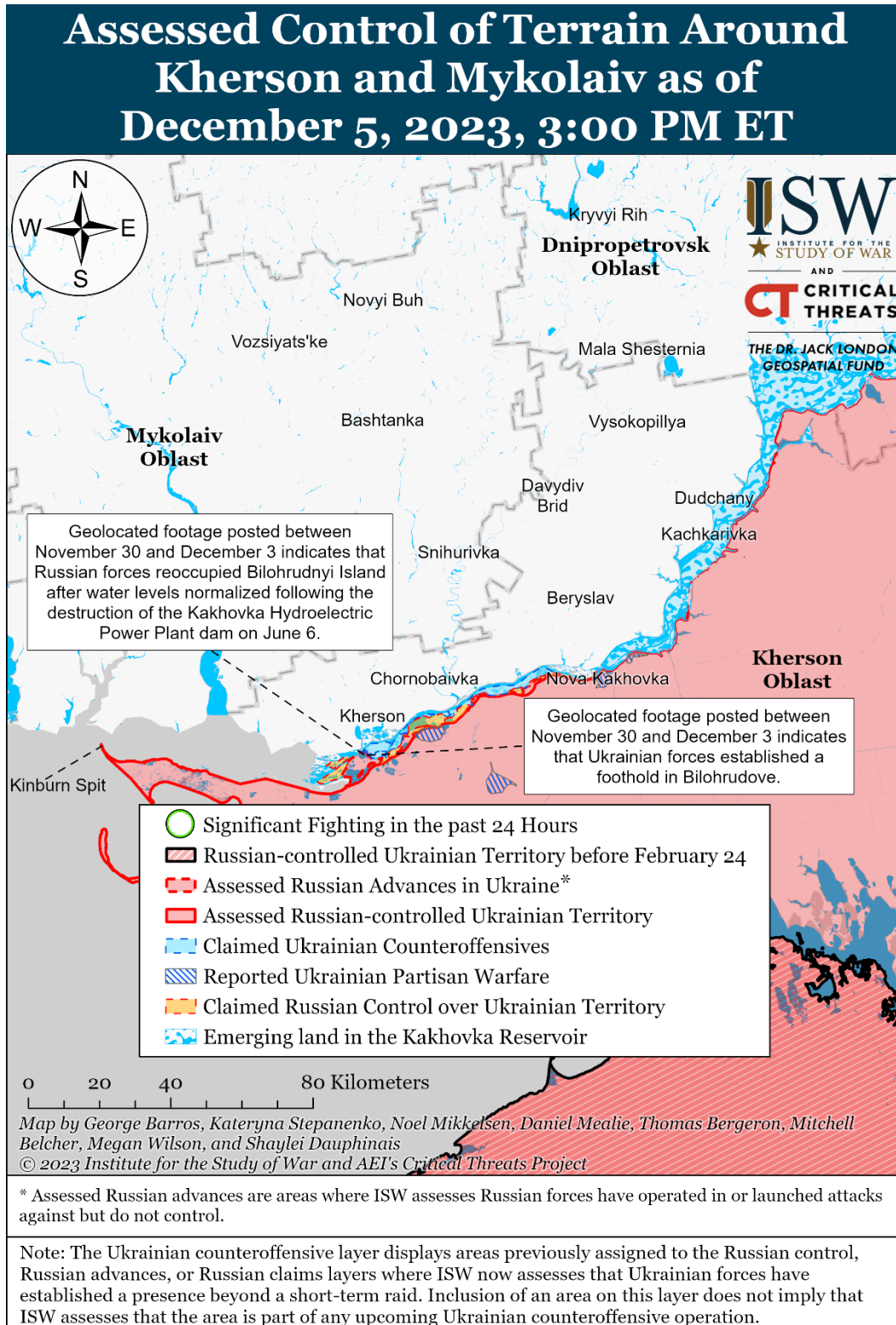


Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Megan Wilson, and Shaylei Dauphinais - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

-  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

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

Ukrainian forces continued ground operations on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on December 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continue to maintain positions on the east bank of the Dnipro River.[81] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked in the forest area near Krynyky (30km northeast of Kherson Oblast and 2km from the Dnipro River), with one of the milbloggers stating that the channel would no longer assess that the Kherson direction does not pose a threat to Russian forces.[82] A Russian source claimed that elements of the Russian 104th Airborne (VDV) Division gained a foothold on the outskirts of Krynyky, although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[83] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces conducted three airstrikes with 26 glide bombs in the direction of Krynyky in the past day.[84]



The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian air defenses near Snake Island downed a Russian Su-24 bomber attempting to strike Odesa Oblast.[85]

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

Russian forces are reportedly quickly sending poorly trained convict recruits to reinforce assault elements in Ukraine. The spokesperson for a Ukrainian unit operating the Kupyansk direction stated on December 5 that Russian convict recruits, who signed contracts with Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) in October 2023, are already fighting and dying in the Kupyansk direction.[86] The spokesperson stated that convict recruits who were still in prison until October 20th began arriving on the front lines in this direction in November. Russian forces use assault detachments comprised of convict recruits throughout the front and there is no reason why the hasty commitment of convict recruits would be a phenomenon isolated to the Kupyansk direction.

Russian intermediaries are reportedly recruiting and trafficking Nepali citizens into service in the Russian army. The Nepali Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced on December 4 that six Nepali citizens were killed fighting alongside the Russian military in Ukraine.[87] The Nepali MFA stated that the Nepali government requested the Russian government not recruit Nepali citizens as soldiers, to immediately deport any Nepali citizens that the Russian MoD previously recruited, and to return the bodies of the deceased Nepali citizens. Nepali outlet *Kathmandu Post* reported on December 5 that the Nepali government does not allow its citizens to serve in foreign militaries other than in India and the United Kingdom.[88] Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal told *Kathmandu Post* that there are additional Nepali citizens serving in the Russian army and reports of Nepali citizens serving in the Ukrainian army. Nepali ambassador to Russia Milan Taj Tuladhar told *Kathmandu Post* that an estimated 150–200 Nepali citizens are serving in the Russian army as mercenaries. Tuladhar stated that Russian “agents” lure Nepali citizens to Russia with promises of large sums of money and illegally transport them to Russia after charging a fee of up to one million rupees (approximately \$12,000). *Kathmandu Post* reported that many Nepali citizens traveled to Russia on student and tourist visas before joining the Russian army.[89] Tuladhar stated that Nepali officials are working to return all their citizens to Nepal and to discourage citizens from joining foreign armies.

Relatives of mobilized Russian servicemen continue to petition the Russian government for demobilization and complain about the mistreatment of frontline troops.[90] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on December 5 that more than 100 relatives of mobilized Russian military personnel from military unit 95411 (Western Military District) wrote a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, requesting that Putin address the “deliberate extermination” of mobilized personnel in the Avdiivka direction.[91] The letter reportedly stated that mobilized Russian personnel have been living in trenches on the front line within 700 meters of Ukrainian positions near Avdiivka for more than 10 months and are constantly under Ukrainian artillery fire. Relatives told *Vazhnye Istorii* that the Russian military command issued several orders for any personnel from military unit 95411 with light to moderate injuries to join assault units and to be treated in the trenches and not at military hospitals. One relative stated that the servicemen of military unit 95411 are “walking over corpses” in the Avdiivka direction. Relatives told *Vazhnye Istorii* that the Russian military command are “in a hurry” to achieve any result ahead of the 2024 Russian presidential election and the New Year holiday.

Russian opposition outlet the *Moscow Times* reported that cases of desertion among Russian servicemen increased by 89 percent between summer and fall 2023. The *Moscow Times* reported on December 4 that “Go Through the Forest,” a Russian organization that helps Russian citizens avoid mobilization, observed an 89 percent increase in requests from Russian servicemen to help with desertion between fall 2023 and summer 2023.[92] Go Through the Forest received 305 requests for assistance with desertion from June-August 2023 and 577 such requests in September-November 2023. Go Through the Forest’s lawyers attributed the increase in requests to desperation among mobilized Russian servicemen, and Go Through the Forest Head Grigory Svedlin told the *Moscow Times* that most Russian servicemen decide to desert after spending time in Russian hospitals with severe wounds. The *Moscow Times* reported that Russian human rights group “Citizen.Army.Pravo.” also received more appeals to help with desertion cases in fall 2023.[93]

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin stated during a speech at a meeting of the Russian Armed Forces Coordination Council on December 5 that Russia’s defense industrial base (DIB) significantly increased its production of military equipment and weapons in 2023.[94] Mishustin stated that Russian DIB doubled its production of aviation equipment and drones and increased its production of communications technology, weapons, electronic warfare (EW), and reconnaissance systems by a factor of five in 2023.

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

Sevastopol State University Vice Rector for Innovation Sergei Dudnikov told Kremlin newswire TASS on December 4 that Russian authorities will begin construction on a drone research and production center in Sevastopol in 2026.[95] Sevastopol State University scientists will finalize the designs and development procedures for the drones, including a drone modified to operate in coastal areas, in 2024 and 2025.

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 occupation authorities are reportedly intensifying their seizure of Ukrainian property in occupied Berdyansk, Donetsk Oblast. Ukrainian Berdyansk City Head Viktoriya Halitsyna stated on December 4 that representatives from the Russian Ministry of Property and Land Legal Relations created commissions to determine “ownerless property” through an arbitration court in Russia after which Russian occupation authorities can take control over, auction, or privately sell the property.[96] Halitsyna also reported that Russian occupation officials continue to demand that Berdyansk residents reregister their property with Russian occupation authorities.[97]

Russian occupation authorities continue forcibly deporting children in occupied Ukraine to Russia under the guise of educational programs. Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Artem Lysohor reported on December 5 that Russian occupation authorities sent a group of children from occupied Luhansk Oblast to Moscow City to view an exhibition on the Russian economy.[98]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian President Vladimir Putin falsely claimed that Western countries and institutions are purposefully ignoring alleged Ukrainian human rights violations against civilians in Donbas for the past eight years.[99] Putin also reiterated claims at the Russian Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights meeting on December 4 that Russia is willing to work with foreign countries and international human rights organizations to ensure human rights “for all.”[100] Russia has occupied Donbas and Crimea since 2014, and the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has documented continued Russian war crimes and human rights violations against the civilian population in occupied Ukraine including torture, rape, and the forced deportation of Ukrainian children.[101]

Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened “retaliatory” measures against Latvia on December 4, in response to the Latvian government requiring Russian citizens with Latvian residence permits to take a Latvian language proficiency exam.[102] Russian Duma Deputy Pyotr Tolstoy proposed on November 14 restricting migrants from jobs in several sectors of the Russian service industry if they are not citizens from a country that designates Russian as a state language.[103] The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) proposed a bill on November 28 that would require all foreigners entering Russia to sign a “loyalty agreement” banning them from discrediting Russian domestic and foreign policy, denying Russian family values, or “disrespecting the diversity of regional and ethnocultural ways of life” in Russia among other restrictions.[104]

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed on December 5 that 120 Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip boarded a plane to Moscow.[105] Kadyrov also claimed that a special board of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations will assist the Gazan refugees in temporarily or permanently staying in Russia.[106] Advisor to the Russian Minister of Emergency Situations, Daniil Martynov, reportedly told Kadyrov that Russian authorities evacuated the refugees through the Rafah checkpoint.[107] ISW cannot independently verify Kadyrov's claims.

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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