Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 19, 2023

Karolina Hird and Frederick W. Kagan February 19, 7:30pm 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.

ISW is publishing an abbreviated campaign update today, February 19. This report forecasts the unlikelihood of significantly increased Russian offensive operations this winter based on an assessment of Russian forces already committed to active operations compared with Russia's overall ground forces order of battle.

The major phase of Russian offensive operations in Luhansk Oblast is underway, and Russia likely lacks sufficient uncommitted reserves to dramatically increase the scale or intensity of the offensive this winter. Russian conventional ground forces are generally deploying and fighting in normal doctrinal formations and units rather than in battalion tactical groups or other ad hoc structures. The observed absence of several critical tank units suggests that the Russian military continues to struggle to replace equipment, especially tanks, lost during previous failed offensive operations. Russian forces almost certainly still have some reconstituted mechanized units in reserve, but the commitment of these limited reserves to the Luhansk Oblast frontline is unlikely to change the course of the ongoing offensive dramatically. The Russian offensive will very likely continue for some time and may temporarily gain momentum as the final reserves are committed—if they are—but will very likely culminate well short of its objectives and likely short of achieving operationally significant gains.

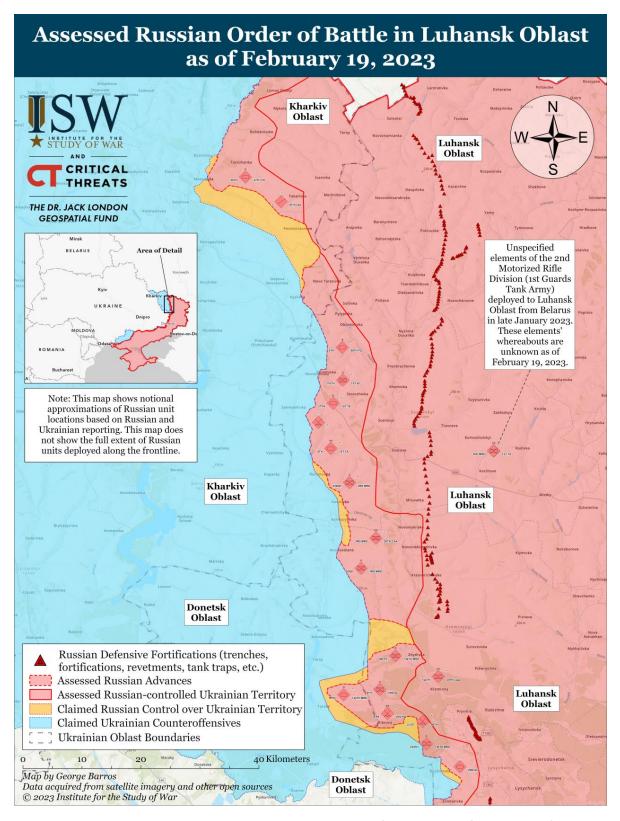
The current pattern of commitment in Luhansk Oblast indicates that Russian forces in this area are deploying in doctrinal units and formations from the military-district level down to the brigade/regiment level at least, and likely down to the battalion level as well. Russian forces operating in and near the Luhansk Oblast frontline are drawn almost entirely from the Western Military District (WMD) with a few reinforcements from other force groupings. This disposition suggests that the Russian military command has returned to the traditional military district command-and-control structure wherein all units in a discrete geographical area fall under the area of responsibility of a single military district. Two full WMD divisions (the 144th Motorized Rifle Division and the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division) have each deployed their maneuver regiments in line allowing the division commanders to operate as divisions are designed to do. These regiments have been reconstituted with mobilized personnel, indicating that the Russian command is using mobilized soldiers as replacements in doctrinal structures instead of creating ad hoc formations.[1]

Russian forces have deployed throughout this war in various non-standard and non-doctrinal structures, starting with the battalion tactical group but encompassing also volunteer regiments, BARS (National Combat Reserve) units, and militia units belonging to the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR respectively), to say nothing of the Wagner Private Military Company (PMC) formations of convicts. The return to doctrinal structures represents an inflection in Russian force structure and campaign design. As ISW has previously assessed, the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is currently engaging in a number of reforms meant to formalize and professionalize the Russian Armed Forces and prepare to fight a protracted war in Ukraine as a conventional army.[2] The current array of forces along the Luhansk Oblast frontline likely reflects the ongoing shift in Russian military procedure towards the Russian MoD establishment.

The Russians are receiving less benefit from this return to normal in military operations than they might have hoped because of the badly degraded condition of their forces. They did not leave enough time to train their mobilized reservists to standards sufficient to support large-scale offensive mechanized maneuver warfare, as ISW has repeatedly observed; and they clearly lack the equipment necessary to kit out their reconstituted units. The coherent 3rd and 144th Motorized Rifle Divisions attacking on the Luhansk Oblast axis have thus made relatively few gains since the offensive began.

The Russian military has committed a large majority of the conventional elements belonging to the Western Military District (WMD) to its decisive offensive effort in Luhansk Oblast, leaving relatively few elements either in reserve or unobserved. ISW has observed elements of Russia's WMD, along with some supplemental Central Military District (CMD), Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic (DNR and LNR) and airborne (VDV) elements, arrayed along the Luhansk Oblast frontline, with a specific concentration of units along the Svatove-Kreminna line. The WMD has fully committed both rifle divisions of the 20th Combined Arms Army (CAA)—the 144th Motor Rifle Division (144th MRD) and 3rd Motor Rifle Division (3rd MRD)—to the Svatove-Kreminna line in Luhansk Oblast.[3] ISW has observed both of the 144th MRD's rifle regiments (the 254th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment and the 488th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment) and its tank regiment (the 59th Guards Tank Regiment) committed along the Svatove-Kreminna line but has only observed the 752nd and 252nd Motorized Rifle Regiments of the 3rd MRD by name.[4] ISW has also observed reports that elements of the 4thTank Division of the 1st Guards Tank Army, of the 26th Tank Regiment of the 47thTank

Division of the 1st Guards Tank Army, and of the 27th Separate Tank Brigade of 1stGuards Tank Army are deployed along the line from Svatove north toward Kupyansk.[5] The CMD has additionally committed elements of the 6th Tank Regiment of the 9oth Tank Division to the Svatove area, and unspecified elements in the Lyman direction west of Kreminna.[6] DNR units and ad hoc formations are apparently supporting WMD operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line in limited numbers, and LNR units (particularly the 4th Motorized Rifle Regiment) are engaged in the Bilohorivka area south of Kreminna.[7] Limited VDV elements, particularly of the 76th Guards Air Assault Division and of the 98th Airborne Division, appear to be supporting WMD operations in the Kreminna area as well.[8]



ISW has not observed the commitment of the 2nd Motor Rifle Division (2nd MRD) of the 1st Guards Tank Army to combat even though the unit was reported to have deployed to Luhansk Oblast. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) noted on January 25 that the 2nd MRD partially redeployed to Luhansk Oblast from training areas in Belarus.[9] ISW has not yet observed indications that the 2nd MRD or its constituent elements—the 15th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment, 1st Tank Regiment, or 1st Guards Motor Rifle Regiment—appear near the frontline. 2nd MRD elements are therefore likely being held in reserve in the rear of Luhansk Oblast and likely could deploy to the frontline in the future. It is possible that elements of the 2nd MRD have already been committed to the line in some capacity, but that ISW has simply not observed evidence of their commitment. That scenario is unlikely because of the fanfare this unit generally receives when it operates and because of the detail with which Russian and Ukrainian sources have been reporting on the Russian units fighting in Luhansk Oblast. The absence of the 2nd MRD from active engagement suggests that Russian forces are holding most of a division in reserve. With two motorized rifle divisions already likely fully committed along with other reinforcements, however, the addition of the two or possibly three regiments of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Division to the fight is unlikely to generate a nonlinear change in Russian offensive capacity.

The absence of several elite and prominent WMD elements from the Luhansk Oblast line and elsewhere in theater suggests that the Russian military continues to face challenges in reconstituting combat units and specifically tank units. The WMD commands three army-level maneuver formations—the 6th and 20th Combined Arms Armies (CAA) and the 1st Guards Tank Army (GTA). The 20th CAA is heavily committed along the Svatove-Kreminna line, as noted above. ISW has only observed limited mentions of the 6th CAA and partial mentions of 1st GTA formations in Luhansk Oblast, however, and has not observed these elements anywhere else in theater, suggesting that some of these units and formations have likely not been reconstituted yet.[10] A delay in the reconstitution of tank units in particular could result from the fact that several critical (and previously elite) Russian tank units and mechanized formations have suffered devastating defeats over the course of the first year of the war. The 1st GTA, for example, suffered massive losses during its assault in Chernihiv Oblast early in the war and then once again in autumn of 2022 during Ukraine's counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast.[11] The 1st GTA's 4th Tank Division, specifically its 12th and 13th Guards Tank Regiments, famously lost nearly 100 tanks (a full regiment's worth) in a few days in September of 2022.[12]

Russian tank losses have been enormous in this war, amounting to the equivalent of around 16 tank regiments worth, which is likely hindering Russia's ability to reconstitute its tank units rapidly. Recent intelligence estimates presented by Dutch open-source investigative organization Oryx and the British research institute International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) depict these losses clearly. Oryx verified over 1,000 distinct Russian tank losses and 500 captured tanks on February 9, which likely means that Russia has lost half of its pre-war tank fleet in the first year of the war.[13] IISS similarly noted on February 15 that Russia has lost about 50 percent of its pre-war number of T-72B and T-72B3M main battle tanks.[14] A single tank regiment requires just short of 100 tanks, so rebuilding two tank regiments from scratch (as the 12th and 13thTank Regiments likely required) would demand 200 tanks, which the Russian armed forces do not appear to have in usable stocks and do not appear able to produce quickly.[15] Widespread tank losses also impact the capacities of motorized rifle formations to function effectively, but motorized rifle units require fewer tanks in each and can make better use of the large amount of relatively untrained manpower the rushed Russian reserve mobilization has generated. The absence of reconstituted tank regiments and brigades, however, deprives the Russian ground forces of the kind of punch required to make and exploit operationally significant breakthroughs—which may explain why the WMD has so far failed to make any.

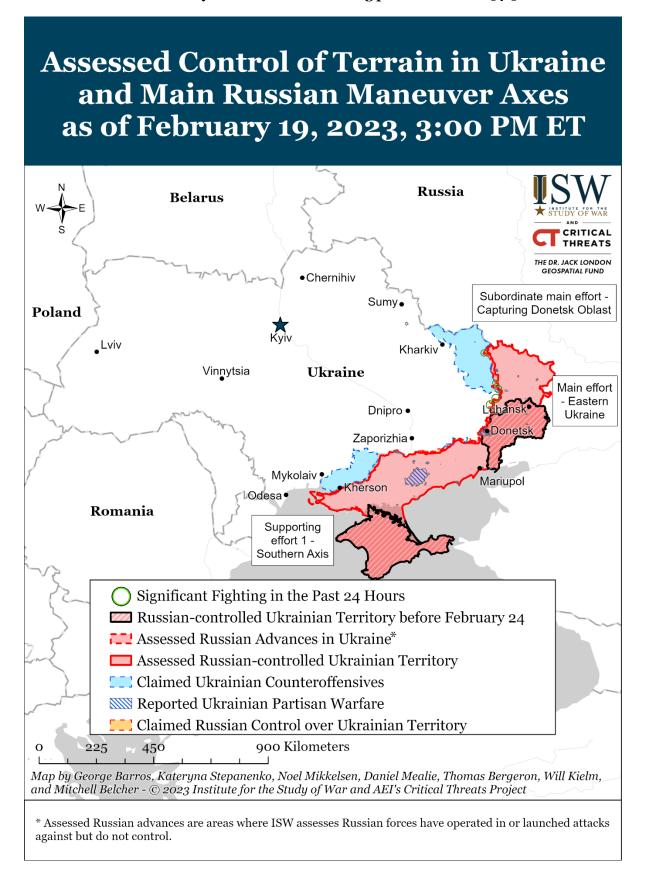
The pattern of Russian deployments in other parts of the theater strongly suggests that most of the available maneuver elements of the other military districts and the Airborne Forces are already committed and thus do not constitute a large reserve that Moscow could suddenly hurl into the fray in Luhansk Oblast or elsewhere. ISW has previously assessed that various elements of the Southern Military District (SMD) are currently engaging in unsuccessful offensive efforts throughout Donetsk Oblast and holding defensive positions on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast.[16] Elements of the Eastern Military District (EMD) and the 40thand 155th Naval Infantry Brigades have been predominantly fighting near Vuhledar in western Donetsk Oblast and have suffered catastrophic losses over the past weeks. [17] DNR troops are heavily committed along the outskirts of Donetsk City and elsewhere throughout Donetsk Oblast. [18] The Central Military District (CMD), which suffered devastating losses during Ukrainian counteroffensive operations near Lyman in fall 2022, appears to mainly be reinforcing WMD elements in the Kreminna area.[19] VDV elements are scattered throughout the theater, gradually supplementing and increasingly supplanting the Wagner Group in its assaults around Bakhmut and maintaining a presence in southern Ukraine as well as a limited presence in Luhansk Oblast. [20] The commitment of Russian forces throughout Ukraine suggests that the 2nd MRD is the only obvious candidate for a theater reserve unless the missing tank regiments/brigades begin to appear. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) has previously confirmed this assessment with the suggestion that an absolute majority of the Russian military is already committed in Ukraine.[21]

There may well be more Russian elements online in Luhansk Oblast than ISW has observed at this time. Other research organizations have suggested that additional units of the 6th CAA are operating along the Luhansk Oblast line.[22] ISW cannot verify the sources of these other assessments but has no reason to question them. If elements of the 6th CAA or other formations have indeed been committed, then Russian theater reserves available for commitment to subsequent offensive or defensive operations are even smaller. The offensive will likely continue and may briefly increase in intensity if reserve elements such as the 2nd MRD are committed, but these increases in intensity will likely be brief and unable to make operationally significant gains.

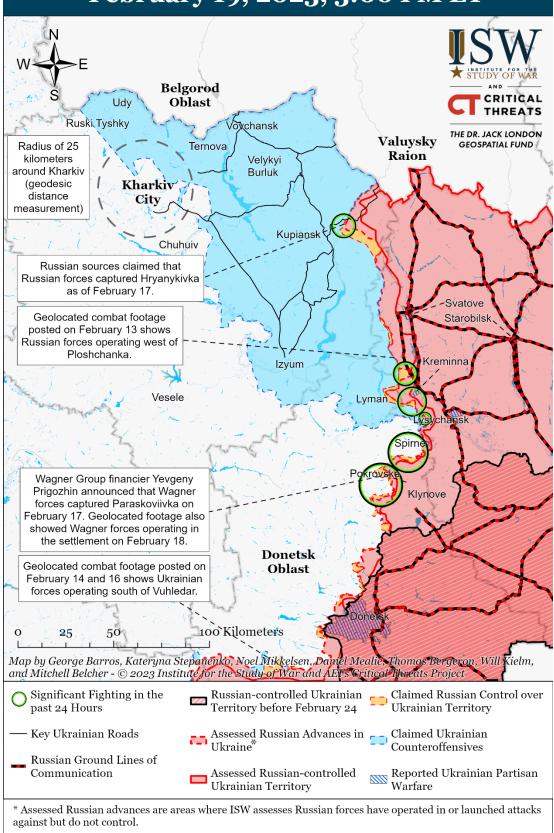
Key inflections in ongoing military operations on February 19:

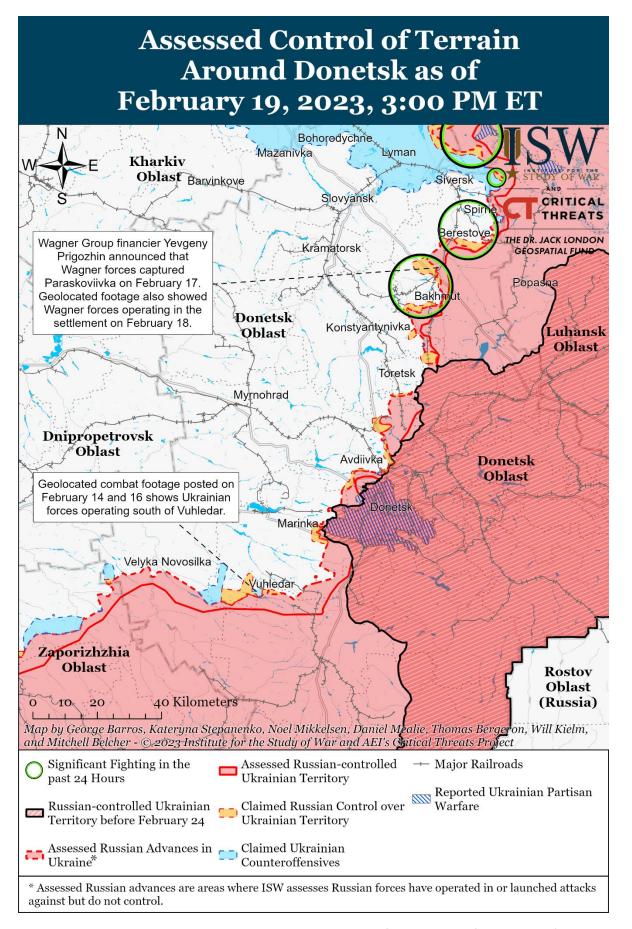
- Member of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on National Security, Defense, and Intelligence Fedir Venislavskyi stated that Russian forces have already deployed all their combat-ready units to the frontlines in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts as well as parts of Zaporizhia Oblast.[23]
- Ukrainian forces will reportedly be able to deploy only 50 Western-provided tanks to frontline areas by April, out of a promised total of 320 tanks.[24]
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed that the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) 1st Army Corps and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) 2nd Army Corps are official formations in the Russian Armed Forces while denying accusations that it dismissed DNR Military Command spokesperson Eduard Basurin or any other LNR/DNR commander.[25] Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin seized on the controversy over Basurin's reported dismissal by publicizing a meeting he had with Basurin in which Prigozhin continued several informational lines of attack against the Russian MoD.[26]
- Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov publicly applauded Prigozhin after likely refusing to join Prigozhin's renewed campaign against the Russian MoD.[27] Kadyrov also indicated that he may be interested in forming a paramilitary company of his own after completing his government service.[28]
- The Russian MoD falsely claimed that Ukrainian officials are preparing a radiological false flag attack in order to accuse Russia of violating the Convention on Nuclear Safety ahead of the 11th emergency special session of the United Nations General Assembly.[29]
- Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin claimed that the completed investigation into the October 10, 2022 explosion on the Kerch Strait Bridge in Crimea proves that Ukrainian Special Services planned and conducted a terrorist attack.[30] The attack would have been a legitimate military operation, not a terrorist attack, had Ukraine conducted it.
- A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces crossed the Russian border into Kharkiv Oblast and occupied unspecified border settlements.[31]
- Russian forces continued offensive operations northwest of Svatove and near Kreminna.[32] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces are strengthening frontline positions west and northwest of Kreminna.[33]
- Russian forces likely secured marginal gains in the northern suburbs of Bakhmut and in the eastern outskirts of the city.[34] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that degraded Wagner Group formations are narrowing the scope of their offensives in the Bakhmut area due to a lack of forces.[35]
- Russian forces reportedly continued offensive operations along the western outskirts of Donetsk city and around Vuhledar.[36]
- Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces conducted a localized ground attack near Novodanylivka, Zaporizhia Oblast and amplified footage showing Wagner Group fighters arriving in Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast.[37]
- Crimean occupation parliament head Vladimir Konstantinov stated that Crimean occupation officials nationalized tens of billions of rubles (at least 10 million USD) worth of Ukrainian property and plan to use funds from the sale of the property to support Russian forces fighting in Ukraine.[38]
- A Russian milblogger claimed that the Commander of Russian 45th Separate Special Purpose Brigade of the Russian Airborne Forces Vadim Pankov was promoted to Major-General.[39]
- A Russian Lancet drone manufacturer and Kalashnikov Concern subsidiary is reportedly producing drones in a public sauna following disputes over access to its facilities, prompting another Russian drone manufacturers to call for the mass assembly of drones despite the lack availability of proper facilities.[40]

• Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces are unable to repair modernized S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems near the frontlines due to logistics problems and have to transfer these systems to manufacturing plants in Russia.[41]

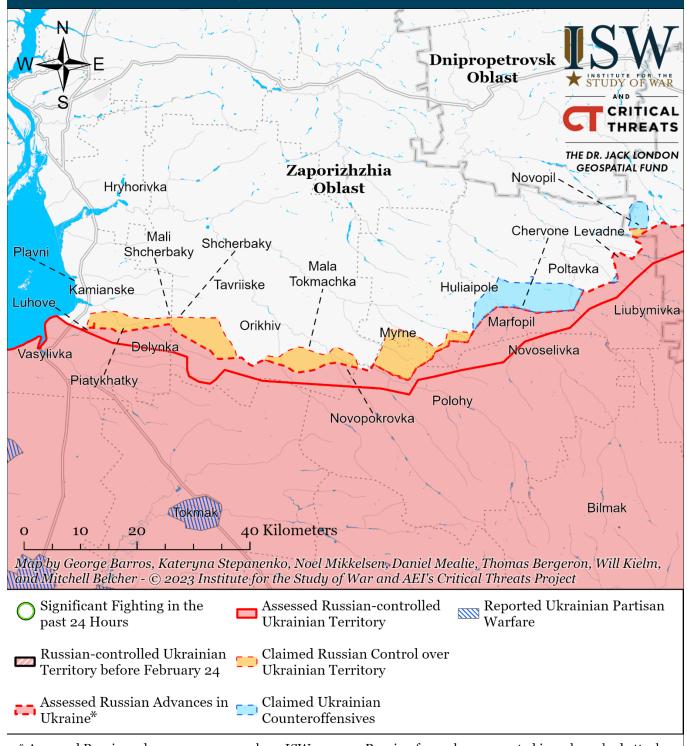


Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of February 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET





Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of February 19, 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.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 19, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

- [1] https://telegra.ph/My-rasstrelyaem-vas-i-skinem-v-odnu-yamu-a-rodstvennikam-soobshchim-chto-vy-bez-vesti-propali-11-09; https://t.me/harry_homolsky/3185
- [2] https://isw.pub/UkrWar021723; https://isw.pub/UkrWar012223; https://isw.pub/UkrWar011723; https://isw.pub/UkrWar011223
- [3] https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10684; https://t.me/wargonzo/10658; https://t.me/wargonzo/10667; https://t.me/kom munist/15515; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10641; https://t.me/rybar/43228; https://t.me/anna_news/46036; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10526; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10668; https://t.me/notes_veterans/7312; https://telegra.ph/Myrasstrelyaem-vas-i-skinem-v-odnu-yamu-a-rodstvennikam-soobshchim-chto-vy-bez-vesti-propali-11-09; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10428; https://t.me/notes_veterans/7785; https://t.me/dva_majors/8915; https://twitter.com/UAControlMap/status/1612563056592146434; https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1612747143034425351?s=20&t=jhwp_AO3ElS9PJj6znAaUQ; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10426; htt
- https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1612747143034425351?s=20&t=jhwp_AO3ElS9PJj6znAaUQ; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10465; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10473; https://t.me/kommunist/14832; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10706; https://t.me/rybar/43387; https://t.me/notes_veterans/7845; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10744; https://t.me/dva_majors/9089; https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1625127878957449222
- [4] https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10684; https://t.me/wargonzo/10658 ; https://t.me/wargonzo/10667; https://t.me/kommunist/15515; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10638; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10641; https://t.me/rybar/43228; https://t.me/anna_news/46036; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10526; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10668; https://t.me/notes_vete rans/7312
- $\label{lem:chto-vy-bez-vesti-propali-11-} In the propali-11- In the$
- 09; https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoxBAALczVonQJCWpMw38y9UwRudx1vj9tCbk1pxPVRBXnn7ifuY67KKbwToRfhAxFl
- [6] https://t.me/harry_homolsky/3185; https://t.me/mod_russia/23501; https://t.me/mod_russia/23542; https://t.me/mod_russia/23673; https://t.me/mod_russia/23690
- [7] https://t.me/boris_rozhin/76993; https://t.me/sashakots/38257; https://twitter.com/Danspiun/status/1618639206666088449?s=20&t=ii9y1cEobMP2J460opawUw; https://t.me/Z4LP R/440; https://t.me/sons_fatherland/10116; https://twitter.com/fdov21/status/1624739335462436864; https://t.me/sw odki/226330; https://twitter.com/auditor_ya/status/1624769438380658690
- [8] https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1613421834564673543; https://t.me/mod/russia/23542
- [9] https://gur dot gov.ua/content/na-terytorii-bilorusi-perebuvaiut-maizhe-6000-rosiiskykh-viiskovykh.html
- [10] https://t.me/kommunist/15449; https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1607500894995709955 https://t.me/rian_ru/189738; https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoxBAALczVonQJCWpMw38y9UwRudx1vjqtCbk1pxPVRBXnn7ifuY67KKbwToRfhAxFl
- $[11] \ https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2023/01/28/beaten-twice-in-ukraine-russias-elite-1st-guards-tank-army-is-poised-to-attack-yet-again/?sh=f8d8ab310551; https://www.businessinsider.com/russian-tank-force-repeatedly-beaten-appears-ready-for-another-try-2023-2$
- $[12] \ https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2022/09/13/a-hundred-wrecked-tanks-in-a-hundred-deadly-hours-heavy-losses-gut-russias-best-tank-army/?sh=7924f05127a3$
- [13] https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-equipment.html; https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/09/europe/1000-russian-tanks-destroyed-ukraine-war-intl-hnk-ml/index.html
- [14] https://t.me/bbcrussian/41920
- [15] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-9-2023; https://www.businessinsider.com/captured-documents-say-elite-russian-unit-lost-tanks-kharkiv-ukraine-2022-5; https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/getting-know-russian-battalion-tactical-group

```
[16] https://t.me/tankist4/801; https://twitter.com/auditor_ya/status/1624047832150712320?s=20&t=Z6LiEBg5LwTeT50ljMD85g;
```

https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1627058548252487682; https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1627037183436636162; https://t.me/wargonzo/10773; https://t.me/kommunist/15635

[17] https://t.me/mod_russia/24229; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/78280; https://t.me/mod_russia/24181; https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-battle-vuhledar/32276547.html

[18] https://t.me/nm_dnr/9871; https://t.me/nm_dnr/9901

[19] https://t.me/mod_russia/24229; https://t.me/russkiy_opolchenec/35847

[20] https://isw.pub/UkrWar013123; https://isw.pub/UkrWar012823; https://twitter.com/Danspiun/status/162337393 0953158657?s=20&t=nz7WjQAFSZywYCLqEb6sug; https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1627440354914975747

[21] https://isw.pub/UkrWar021523; https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1625746370291290112

[22] https://defence.org.ua/dailybrief/2023-02-16/

[23] https://www.ukrinform.dot.ua/rubric-ato/3672113-fedir-venislavskij-predstavnik-prezidenta-u-parlamenti-clen-komitetu-vr-iz-pitan-nacbezpeki-i-oboroni.html

[24] https://meduza dot io/news/2023/02/19/the-times-ukraina-k-nachalu-vesennego-nastupleniya-rossii-poluchit-menshe-chetverti-obeschannyh-zapadnyh-tankov; https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/less-than-quarter-leopard-2-challenger-2-abrams-tanks-arrive-ukraine-spring-offensive-2023-6sfzb5h3r

[25] https://t.me/mod_russia/24272

[26] https://t.me/concordgroup_official/470; https://t.me/concordgroup_official/471

[27] https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/3364;

[28] https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/3364;

[29] https://t.me/mod_russia/24273;

[30] https://tass dot com/russia/1578535

[31] https://t.me/strelkovii/4002

[32] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoZLEybucTHcctz2wASbCHdDzamYt8B39GacpfiiCFjCUfrkjYzcZpDKDpAEq2DjQNl

[33] https://t.me/rybar/43762; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10805;

[34] https://t.me/ssternenko/13461; https://twitter.com/SerDer_Daniels/status/1627238097946611715; https://twitter.com/auditor_ya/status/1627326803881742336; https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1627028313838346242; https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/If/

[35] https://t.me/strelkovii/4002

[36] https://t.me/strelkovii/4002; https://t.me/wargonzo/10949; https://t.me/rybar/43752

[37] https://t.me/wargonzo/10949; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/78527; https://t.me/milinfolive/97148; https://twitter.com/hochu_dodomu/status/1626881454658420736?s=20; https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1627040373515190272?s=20; https://twitter.com/kargolow/status/1626895231760171008?s=20;

[38] https://ria dot ru/20230219/natsionalizatsiya-1852940782.html

- [39] https://t.me/grey_zone/17294
- [40] https://t.me/oreshkins/11409; https://t.me/lobaev_vlad/5468
- $\label{lem:composition} \begin{tabular}{l} [41] $https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoZLEybucTHcctz2wASbCHdDzamYt8B39GacpfiiCFjCUfrkjYzcZpDKDpAEq2DjQNl \end{tabular}$