

# **Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 28, 2023**

## **Karolina Hird, Riley Bailey, George Barros, Nicole Wolkov, Angela Howard, and Frederick W. Kagan**

### **February 28, 6:30pm 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.

**Russian authorities appear to be escalating their promotion of false flag information operations to distract from their lack of tangible battlefield gains and slow down the provision of Western tanks and other aid in advance of expected Ukrainian counter-offensives.** The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) accused the “US and its accomplices” on February 28 of planning to carry out a provocation in Ukraine using toxic chemicals.<sup>1</sup> The Russian MoD relatedly claimed on February 19 that Ukrainian officials are planning false-flag attacks at hazardous radiation facilities in Ukraine to accuse Russian forces of indiscriminately striking such sites.<sup>2</sup> The apparent uptick in fallacious biochemical and nuclear false flag warnings accompanies a concerted Russian false flag information operation accusing Ukraine of preparing for an invasion of Russian-occupied Transnistria, Moldova.<sup>3</sup> Russian President Vladimir Putin also notably re-introduced nuclear rhetoric into the Russian information space during his address to the Russian Federal Assembly on February 21 when he announced Russia’s intent to suspend participation in START.<sup>4</sup> The recent resurgence of several standard Russian information operations in the form of false flag warnings and tired nuclear threats suggests that Russian officials are increasingly trying to mitigate the informational impacts of a continued lack of Russian battlefield successes as well as to slow down the provision of Western tanks and other equipment in advance of expected Ukrainian counter-offensives. ISW has previously reported on the correlation between Russian information operations and battlefield realities, particularly when Russian forces are failing to take significant ground in offensive operations in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> The Russian MoD and top Russian officials will likely escalate their engagement with such information operations as the ongoing Russian offensive in Luhansk Oblast nears culmination and the opportunities for Ukrainian counter-offensives grow.

**A top US defense official supported ISW’s continued assessment that Russia is extraordinarily unlikely to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.** Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl stated that the US does not assess that Russia will use nuclear weapons during a House Armed Service Committee hearing on American military support for Ukraine on February 28.<sup>6</sup> ISW has assessed that Russian invocations of nuclear threats and nuclear doctrine are part of an information operation meant to discourage Ukraine and the West but do not represent any material Russian intent to employ nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup>

**Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the Federal Security Service (FSB) board on February 28 and emphasized the role of the FSB in supporting the war in Ukraine in a law enforcement and counterterrorism capacity.** Putin lauded the FSB for its direct participation in the war in “non-standard field tasks” such as protection of the Russian border and cracking down on terrorist activities, organized crime, corruption, and extremism.<sup>8</sup> Putin also emphasized that the FSB’s primary purpose is to support the Russian Armed Forces and Rosgvardia in their efforts to accomplish the objectives of the “special military operation” and noted the FSB’s role in preventing incursions of Ukrainian sabotage groups onto Russian territory.<sup>9</sup> Putin has frequently invoked mentions of domestic security, law enforcement, and counterterrorism efforts when speaking about the war in Ukraine in order to portray the war as a threat to Russian internal security and to bring the war closer to his domestic constituency as ISW has previously reported.<sup>10</sup> Putin’s address to the FSB similarly aligns the FSB and its traditional domestic law enforcement and counterterrorism role with

Russian military efforts in Ukraine in order to frame Russian victory in the war as necessary for Russia's domestic security.

**The Kremlin is likely attempting to reintroduce a Russian information operation aimed at falsely portraying Russia as being open to negotiations while the collective West refuses to negotiate.**

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on February 28 that Russian officials are open to negotiations to end the war in Ukraine but that Ukraine and the West must recognize new “territorial realities” associated with Russia’s illegal annexation of occupied territories in Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> Peskov added that Ukraine also needs to consider Russia’s specific goals in the war in Ukraine to reach a negotiated settlement.<sup>12</sup> These goals include regime change of the Ukrainian government under the rubric of “denazification” and the elimination of Ukraine’s ability to defend itself against future Russian attacks under the rubric of “demilitarization.”<sup>13</sup> Peskov also stated that Russia made serious preparations for security talks before launching the invasion of Ukraine but accused the West of being unresponsive to such talks.<sup>14</sup> Russia’s suggested pre-invasion security talks called for the West to acknowledge a list of “security guarantees” demanding a moratorium on NATO expansion, a ban on the deployment of Western strike weapons near Russia, and the de facto withdrawal of NATO forces to their 1997 posture.<sup>15</sup>

**The Kremlin appears to be using Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko as a conduit to reengage with this information operation, likely in pursuit of negotiations on favorable terms to Russia and further delays in the West’s provision of critical weapons systems to Ukraine.**

Lukashenko stated during his official trip to China that Russia is ready to take steps towards a peaceful settlement and that there is a unique opportunity to end the war in Ukraine before Russia puts its economy on a stronger war footing.<sup>16</sup> Lukashenko also blamed the West and the US for coercing Ukrainian officials into rejecting negotiations with Russia.<sup>17</sup> The Kremlin and Lukashenko are likely seizing on China’s release of a 12-point peace plan to reintroduce an existing Russian information operation that the Kremlin used in December 2022. That information campaign centering on Russia’s openness to negotiations aimed to prompt Western officials to offer preemptive concessions and coerce Ukraine to negotiate on Russian terms and likely contributed to the delay in the provision of Western tanks and other equipment essential for the continuation of Ukrainian mechanized counteroffensives.<sup>18</sup> The Kremlin may be reintroducing the negotiations information operation to reduce the effectiveness of future Ukrainian counteroffensives by delaying the provision of essential Western aid and to seek to gain concessions before potential further setbacks in Ukraine.

**Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko may facilitate sanctions evasion schemes between Russia and China during his official trip to Beijing, China from February 28 – March 2.**

*Deutsche Welle* reported that Lukashenko will sign a large package of agreements on developing joint projects, trade, economic, investment, humanitarian cooperation, and political cooperation with China during his three-day visit.<sup>19</sup> Lukashenko previously stated that the Belarusian defense industry can produce weapons since Belarus has access to microelectronics, optics, and other component imports from other states.<sup>20</sup> Ukrainian intelligence officials stated that Belarus supplied Russia with artillery ammunition from Belarusian warehouses to support operations in Ukraine.<sup>21</sup> US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns stated on February 25 that the CIA is confident that Chinese leadership is considering the provision of lethal equipment to Russia.<sup>22</sup> China may clandestinely transfer equipment to Russia via Belarus.

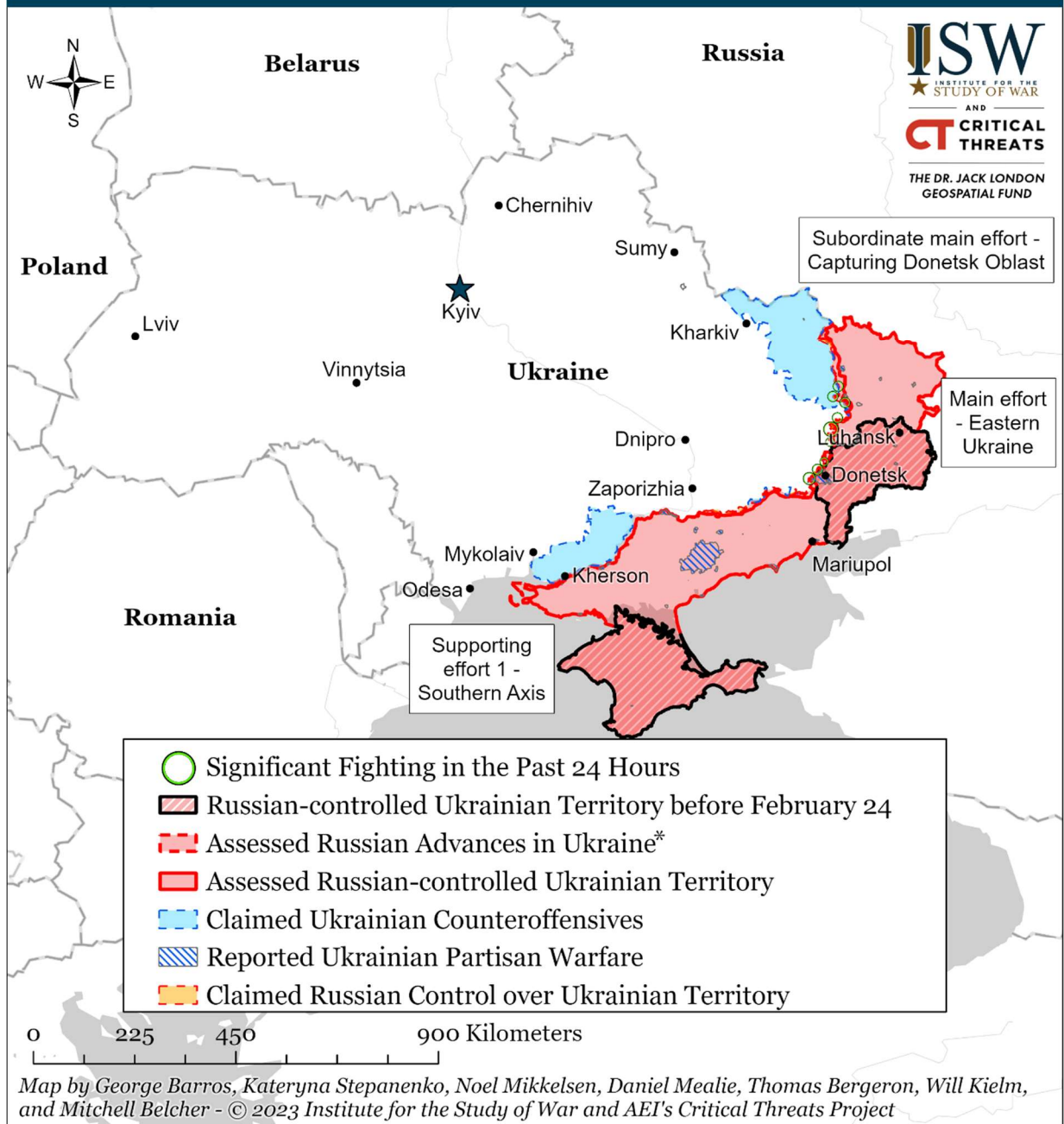
**Key Takeaways**

- **Russian authorities appear to be escalating their promotion of false flag information operations in an effort to distract from their lack of tangible battlefield gains and slow**

**down the provision of Western tanks and other aid in advance of expected Ukrainian counter-offensives.**

- **US Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl stated that the US has no indication that Russian forces will use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized the role of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) in supporting the war in Ukraine during an address to the FSB board.**
- **The Kremlin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko are likely attempting to intensify efforts to falsely portray Russia as open to negotiations to end its war in Ukraine.**
- **Lukashenko may facilitate Sino-Russian sanctions evasion schemes during his official trip to Beijing, China from February 28 to March 2.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks near Svatove and Kreminna and likely made limited advances north of Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces made tactical gains in northern Bakhmut and continued ground attacks around Bakhmut and in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area.**
- **Ukrainian officials continue to report potential Russian preparations for renewed offensive operations in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts, though ISW has not observed indicators that Russian forces plan to renew offensive operations in these directions.**
- **Armenian authorities detained a Russian citizen in Yerevan for an act of protest against the war in Ukraine committed in Moscow in July 2022.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky enacted a Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council decision to sanction 109 Russian citizens involved in the forced deportation of Ukrainian children.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 28, 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 those activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.***

- 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
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

### **Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine**

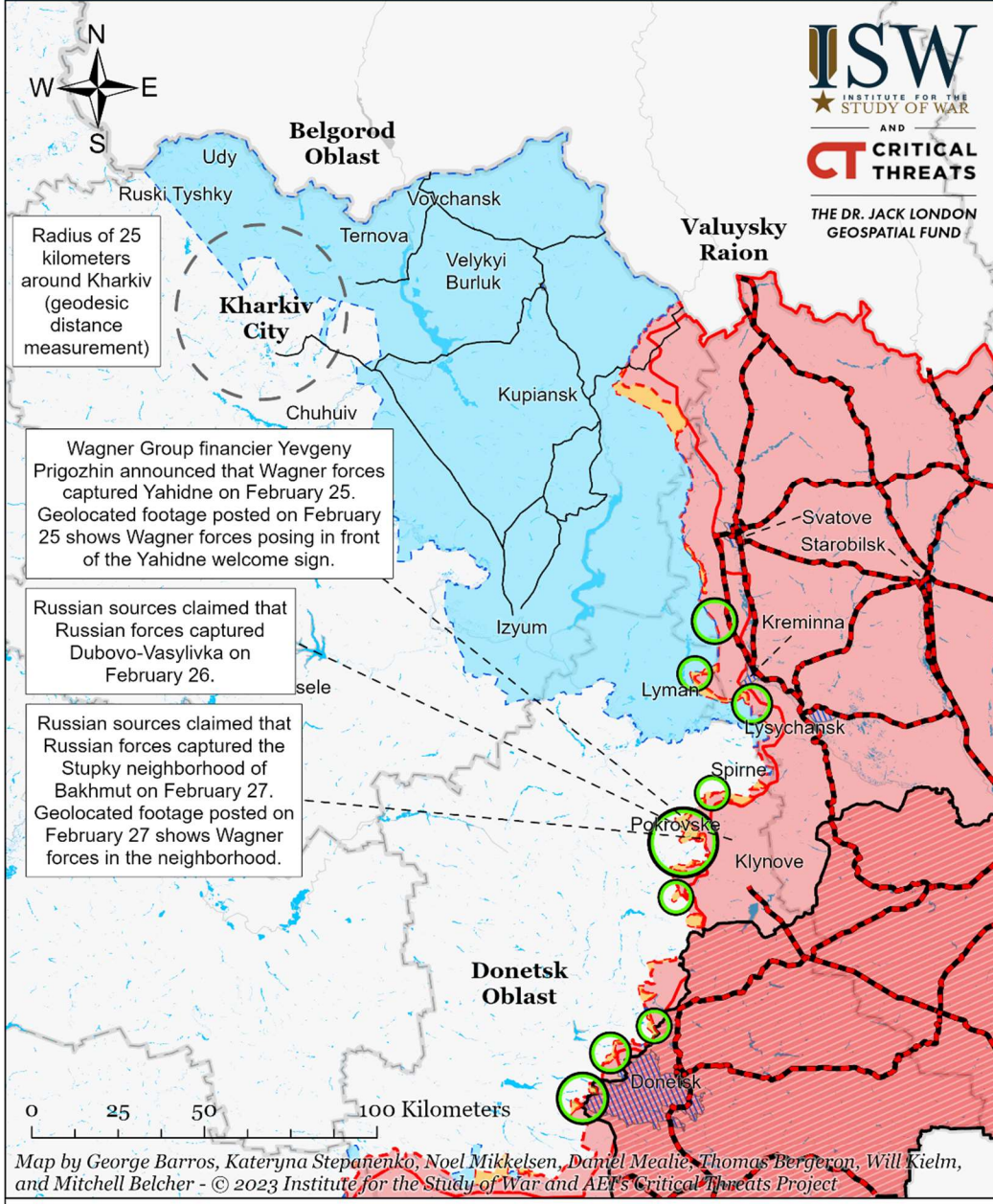
#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1— Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks near Svatove on February 28. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are engaged in fierce fighting near Novoselivske (14km northwest of Svatove).<sup>23</sup> Another milblogger claimed that assault detachment elements of the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division (20th Guards Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) pushed Ukrainian forces out of unspecified high-ground positions on the Svatove-Kreminna line.<sup>24</sup>

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks near Kreminna on February 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive actions near Kreminna itself, Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna), Nevske (18km northwest of Kreminna), Ploshchanka (17km northwest of Kreminna), Dibrova (6km southwest of Kreminna), and Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna).<sup>25</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that while Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast still have the initiative, Russian offensive operations in Luhansk Oblast are unsuccessful, supporting ISW's previous assessment that the Russian forces' offensive in Luhansk Oblast lacks sufficient reserves to increase the scale or intensity of the offensive.<sup>26</sup> Geolocated footage published on February 27 showed two Russian tanks firing at Ukrainian positions west of Chervonopopivka (5km north of Kreminna) indicating limited Russian advances.<sup>27</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the 254th Motorized Rifle Regiment (144th Motorized Rifle Division, 20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) fought near Kreminna.<sup>28</sup>

Ukrainian forces continue to target Russian concentration areas in the rear of Luhansk Oblast. Geolocated footage published on February 28 allegedly shows the aftermath of a Ukrainian HIMARS strike on a Russian ammunition warehouse in Kadiivka.<sup>29</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of February 28, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



**ISW**  
INSTITUTE FOR THE  
STUDY OF WAR  
AND  
**CRITICAL  
THREATS**  
THE DR. JACK LONDON  
GEOSPATIAL FUND

Radius of 25 kilometers around Kharkiv (geodesic distance measurement)

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced that Wagner forces captured Yahidne on February 25. Geolocated footage posted on February 25 shows Wagner forces posing in front of the Yahidne welcome sign.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Dubovo-Vasylivka on February 26.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured the Stupky neighborhood of Bakhmut on February 27. Geolocated footage posted on February 27 shows Wagner forces in the neighborhood.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AET's Critical Threats Project

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

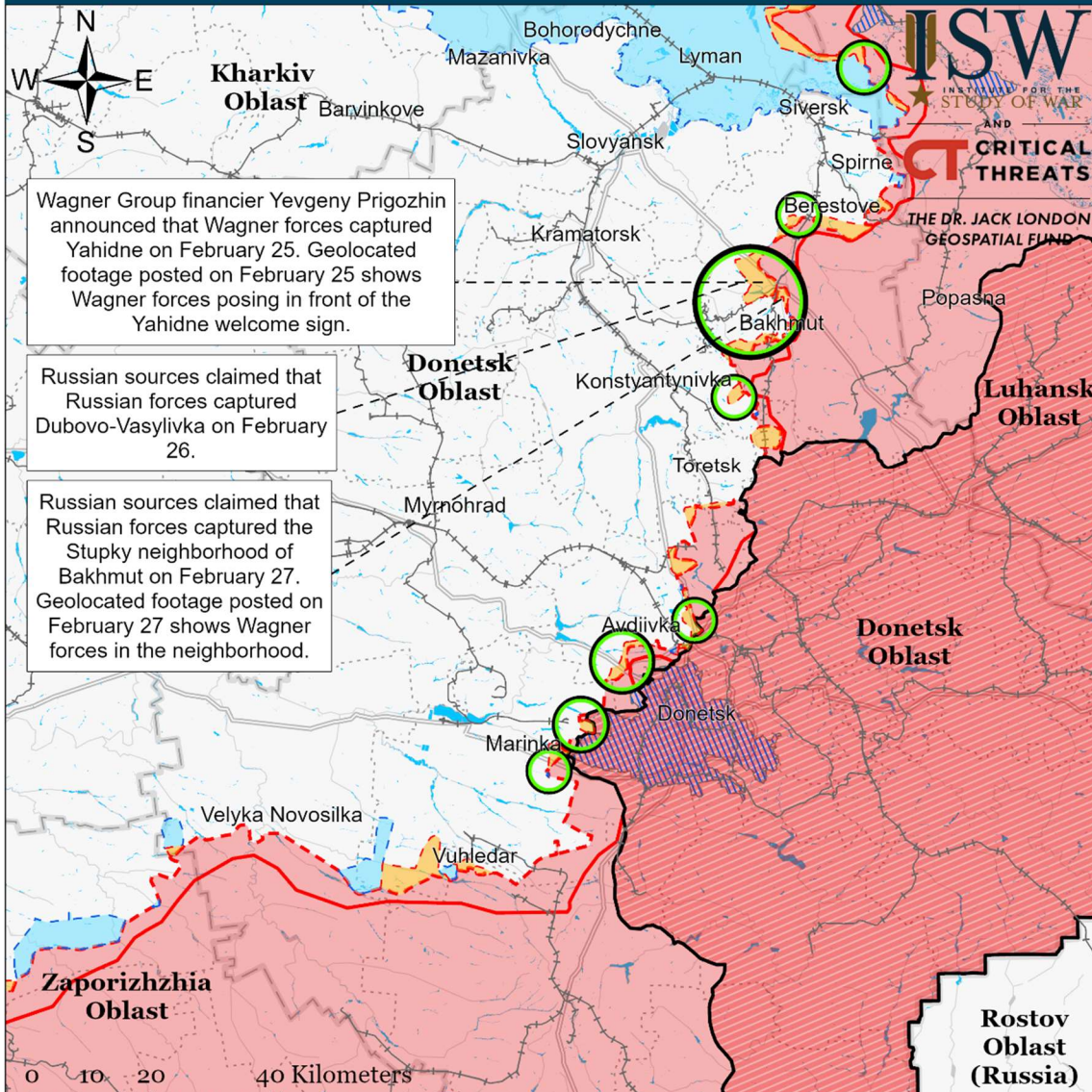
## **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

Russian forces continued ground attacks near Bakhmut and made tactical gains within Bakhmut on February 28. Wagner Group-affiliated media outlet *RIAFAN* posted footage on February 27 and 28 showing Wagner fighters walking around northern Bakhmut near the Stupky railway station and “Sady Bakhmuta” garden store, indicating that Wagner has advanced in northern Bakhmut.<sup>30</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; north of Bakhmut near Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest), Orikhovo-Vasylivka (10km northwest), Berkhkivka (4km north), Yahidne (1km northwest), Vasyukivka (13km northwest), and Bohdanivka (8km northwest); west of Bakhmut near Chasiv Yar (10km west); and southwest of Bakhmut near Bila Hora (15km southwest).<sup>31</sup> Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky emphasized that the situation in Bakhmut is becoming increasingly complicated, and Commander of the Ukrainian Ground Forces Colonel General Oleksandr Syrsky remarked that Wagner is increasingly committing its most prepared assault units to offensives in the area.<sup>32</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner forces are trying to advance on central Bakhmut from the north near the Stupky station and from positions on the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut.<sup>33</sup> A Russian milblogger remarked that Russian troops are attacking towards Bohdanivka in order to threaten the Khromove-Bakhmut route.<sup>34</sup> Geolocated footage posted on February 27 shows Ukrainian troops striking Wagner positions near Ivanivske (5km west of Bakhmut), and a Russian milblogger claimed that Russian troops continue assaults towards Ivanivske itself.<sup>35</sup> Footage taken by a Ukrainian soldier in Chasiv Yar shows heavy incoming fire directed at the settlement, suggesting that Russian forces are continuing to strike areas along the T0504 Kostiantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway.<sup>36</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on February 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive actions in the Avdiivka area near Kamianka; on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Pervomaiske; Krasnohorivka, and Nevelske; and on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Marinka and Pervomaiske.<sup>37</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian troops broke through Ukrainian defensive lines in Pobieda and gained new footholds within Marinka.<sup>38</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff detailed a successful strike on a Russian grouping in Marinka on February 27 that destroyed five tanks and seven BMP infantry fighting vehicles.<sup>39</sup>

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on February 28. The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian troops continued unspecified offensive actions in the western Donetsk Oblast direction.<sup>40</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian naval infantry elements are fighting towards Vuhledar from the Mykliske dacha area and within Vuhledar itself, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of Russian troops within Vuhledar.<sup>41</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 28, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced that Wagner forces captured Yahidne on February 25. Geolocated footage posted on February 25 shows Wagner forces posing in front of the Yahidne welcome sign.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Dubovo-Vasylivka on February 26.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured the Stupky neighborhood of Bakhmut on February 27. Geolocated footage posted on February 27 shows Wagner forces in the neighborhood.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiern, and Mitchell Belcher - © 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	Major Railroads
Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
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.



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

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces may be preparing for offensive operations in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces are defending in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts but are trying to create conditions that will allow Russian forces to conduct offensives in some unspecified areas of this part of the front.<sup>42</sup> Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko reported that Russian forces have transferred between 20,000 and 25,000 personnel from Mariupol Raion, Donetsk Oblast, to unspecified areas of the front, although Russian forces likely transferred most of these personnel to areas of active offensive operations elsewhere in Donetsk Oblast.<sup>43</sup> Russian forces have conducted infrequent localized attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast in recent months but have not conducted any meaningful offensive activity in Kherson Oblast since withdrawing from the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River in November 2022. ISW has not observed indicators that Russian forces are preparing to resume prolonged offensive activity in Zaporizhia Oblast or any offensive activity in Kherson Oblast.

A Ukrainian official reported that Russian forces are vulnerable to Ukrainian strikes on the Kinburn Spit in Mykolaiv Oblast and may be preparing to withdraw from positions closer to the Dnipro River on the east (left) bank in Kherson Oblast. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command spokesperson Natalia Humenyuk stated that Russian shelling of Mykolaiv Oblast has become less intense because Russian forces are hesitant to go to the end of the Kinburn Spit to shell Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast and surrounding areas.<sup>44</sup> Humenyuk stated that Ukrainian forces immediately locate Russian artillery units on the Kinburn Spit once they fire and that these Russian units do not have enough time to evacuate the area before Ukrainian forces conduct counterbattery fire.<sup>45</sup> Humenyuk also claimed that Russian forces are shelling Russian-occupied settlements on the east (left) bank in Kherson Oblast to give Russian occupation officials and forces the pretext to conduct evacuations from Oleshky, Skadovsk, and Nova Kakhovka and withdraw closer towards Crimea.<sup>46</sup>

Ukrainian and Russian forces continue to engage in reconnaissance activity and skirmishes in the Dnipro River delta. Geolocated footage published on February 27 claims to show Ukrainian Special Forces conducting a raid against Russian forces on Krukhyk Island (4km south of Kherson City) and likely indicates that Ukrainian forces hold positions on at least the northern part of neighboring Velikiy Potemkin Island.<sup>47</sup> Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian sabotage and reconnaissance occasionally try to move between islands in the Dnipro River in converted civilian vessels and that Ukrainian forces destroyed two of these watercraft on February 28.<sup>48</sup>

Ukrainian forces continue to strike Russian force concentrations and logistics in southern Ukraine. Ukrainian Polohy Mayor Yuriy Konovalenko reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian force concentration area in the southern part of Polohy, Zaporizhia Oblast, on February 27.<sup>49</sup> Humenyuk reported that Ukrainian forces do not shell residential areas or critical infrastructure in southern Ukraine and strike Russian forces ensuring that local residents will not be affected.<sup>50</sup>

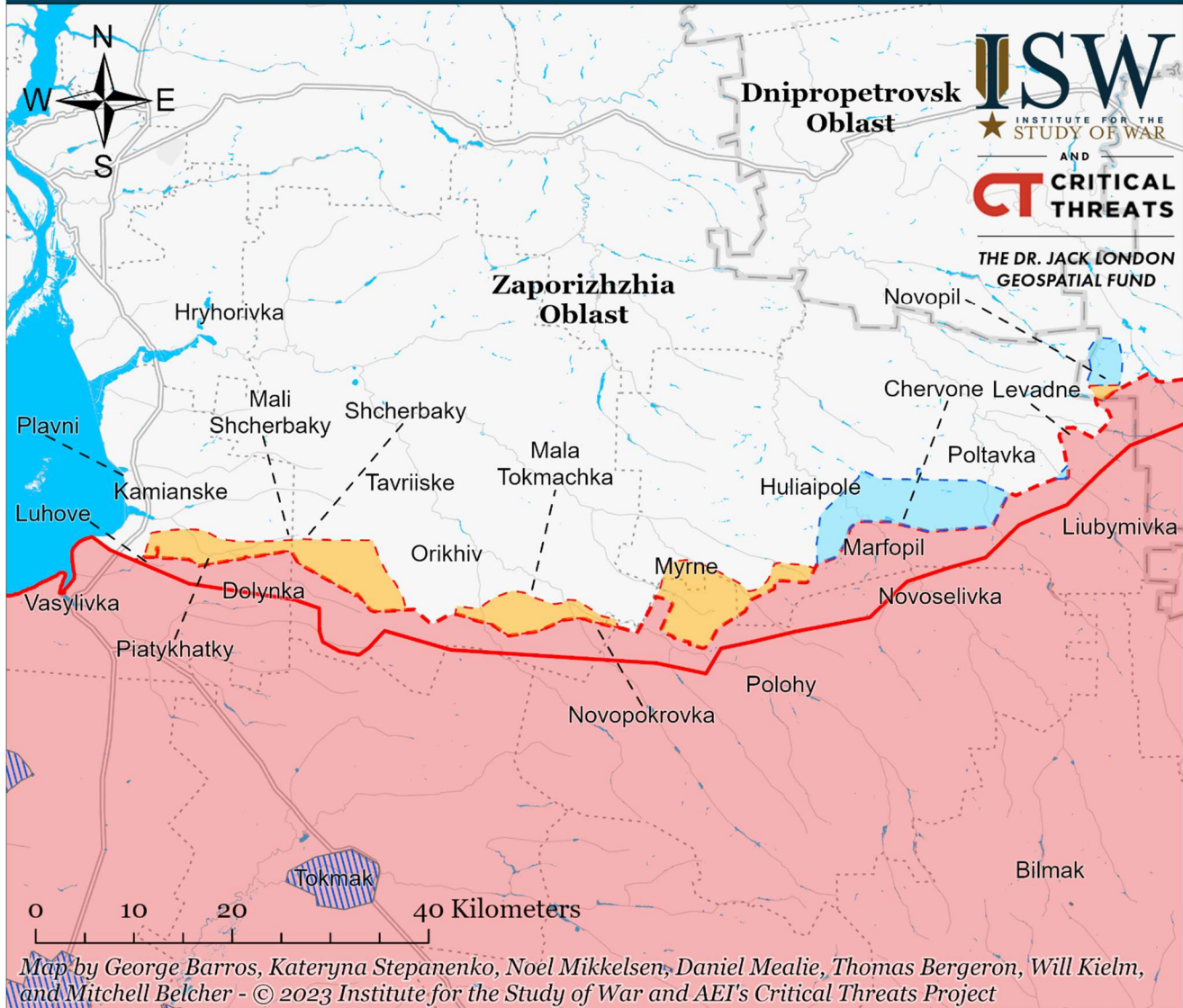
Russian forces continued routine fire west of Hulyaipole and in Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts.<sup>51</sup> Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces struck Kherson City, Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast, and Nikopol, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.<sup>52</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 28, 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 Zaporizhia as of February 28, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

Several Russian opposition news sources reported on February 28 that Armenian police detained Russian citizen Nikita Kamensky in Yerevan, Armenia for vandalism, ostensibly because Russian authorities added him to their wanted persons database in December for allegedly painting anti-war slogans on Timiryazevskaya Metro Station, Moscow in July.<sup>53</sup> This arrest demonstrates Russian authorities' willingness and ability to target Russian citizens abroad in Russia-friendly countries for acts of protest committed previously within Russia. The extension of Russian prosecution efforts and Armenian cooperation are both significant events, though it is noteworthy that Russia and Armenia have an existing extradition treaty.<sup>54</sup> Armenian officials have not yet publicly commented on the potential to extradite Kamensky to Russia.<sup>55</sup>

Russian forces continue to face severe difficulties in replenishing military equipment and ammunition. The Ukrainian General Staff amplified on February 28 a report from Ukraine's Head of the Center for Trophy Research, Colonel Alexander Zaruba, assessing that Russian purchases of equipment from North Korea and Iran and deployment of outdated Kh-22 missiles indicate that Russia itself cannot meet wartime production needs.<sup>56</sup> *Business Insider* on February 28 cited an unspecified Western official observing that the Russian demand for tanks is outpacing supply and production by a factor of 10.<sup>57</sup> Russia reportedly loses 150 tanks a month in Ukraine while Russia's sole tank production factory, UralVagonZavod, produces 20 tanks a month.<sup>58</sup> *Business Insider* and *The Economist* noted that 18 Russian factories are refurbishing old tanks and that two more repair plants will soon join the efforts.<sup>59</sup> *Business Insider* concluded that Russian production remains unlikely to meet demand levels, however.<sup>60</sup> A prominent Russian milblogger on February 28 amplified a report from a Russian soldier on December 9 that Russia has also fallen behind Ukrainian forces in terms of drone production and drone-operator training.<sup>61</sup>

Russian authorities are increasing recruiting efforts targeting foreigners. Russian opposition source *Meduza* reported on February 27 that Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree allowing foreigners to sign one-year military contracts as privates and sergeants, as opposed to the traditional five-year contracts. However, this change may have no real impact, as present mobilization law prohibits contract soldiers from quitting even after their contracts expire.<sup>62</sup>

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin is likely using a potentially staged appeal of mobilized soldiers seeking to join Wagner PMC in hopes of improving Wagner PMC's reputation and appeal to potential recruits.<sup>63</sup> Video footage posted to social media on February 27 shows a group of mobilized Russian soldiers from the dissolved 352nd Motorized Rifle Regiment requesting that Prigozhin help them serve in the Wagner Group rather than in traditional mobilized units.<sup>64</sup> Prigozhin praised the soldiers and stated that he has already asked Russian military authorities to transfer them to a Wagner subgroup.<sup>65</sup>

Some Russians continue limited resistance to the war in Ukraine. A Saint Petersburg local news source reported that a graduate student faces criminal charges for breaking a window at the Vyborg Raion, Saint Petersburg military registration and enlistment office, and painting anti-war slogans in the office on February 26.<sup>66</sup> A prominent Russian milblogger amplified criticism of reports that a student group represented the people of Ukraine, and thus conducted "ideological sabotage" against Russia's war effort, at a February 27 event honoring various national groups at the Russian University of the Friendship of Peoples in Moscow.<sup>67</sup> *Meduza* reported on February 27 that Russian authorities are prosecuting a single father in Efremov, Tula Oblast after his daughter drew an anti-war graphic in an art class.<sup>68</sup> Russian independent media outlets also reported on February 27 that Russian courts extended the sentence of a Moscow resident previously sentenced for an arson attack on a military

commissariat and sentenced a Volgograd resident to four years in prison for setting fire to the back room of a military registration and enlistment office on May 15.<sup>69</sup>

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

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky enacted a Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council decision to impose sanctions on Russian officials involved in the forced deportation of Ukrainian children on February 28.<sup>70</sup> The decision imposes sanctions on 109 Russian citizens involved in the deportation and forced adoption of Ukrainian children, including many regional representatives of the Russian Children's Rights Commission and Human Rights Commission.<sup>71</sup> ISW reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed in a February 16 meeting with Russian Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova that the Kremlin is directly involved in facilitating the deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children into Russian families.<sup>72</sup> The decision also imposes sanctions on seven Russian humanitarian and social movement organizations involved in various Russian schemes aiming to deport children.<sup>73</sup> The Ukrainian General Prosecutor's Office reported on February 28 that Russian officials have forcibly removed 16,000 Ukrainian children from Ukraine to Russia and Belarus and that Ukrainian officials have managed to return 307 of those children to Ukrainian-held territory.<sup>74</sup> Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stated on February 27 that Russia's forced deportation of Ukrainian children is "probably the largest forced deportation in modern history" and a genocidal crime.<sup>75</sup> ISW continues to assess that the forced deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children may constitute a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Russian occupation officials continue efforts to use educational institutions to eradicate Ukrainian identity in occupied territories. Kherson Oblast occupation administration head Vladimir Saldo called on teachers from Russia to teach in Kherson Oblast, specifically Russian history, and stated that his administration intends to shape the educational curriculum with lessons on patriotism and military affairs under the guidance of the Russian Military Historical Society.<sup>76</sup> The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian occupation officials in Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast are forcing students to write letters to Russian military personnel and attend daily hour-long informational sessions that present the Russian framing of the war in Ukraine.<sup>77</sup>

**Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.**

**ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.)**

Damage to the Russian Aerospace Forces Beriev A-50 airborne early warning and control plane at the Machulishchi Air Base in Minsk, Belarus, remains unclear as of February 28. Satellite imagery taken on February 28 shows the first pictures of the A-50 since Belarusian partisans reportedly attacked it on February 26.<sup>78</sup> The images do not show any obvious damage to the aircraft fuselage but do seemingly show color differences on the aircraft's wings and radar dome, potentially indicating repainting.<sup>79</sup> Neither Belarusian nor Russian authorities have commented on the reported attack as of this publication. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense reported that Russia's Aerospace Forces would likely have only six operational A-50s in service if this attack were successful.<sup>80</sup>

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. Unspecified Belarusian airborne elements—likely of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade – conducted airborne parachute exercises from Il-76 aircraft at the Brest Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, on February 28.<sup>81</sup>

**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.**

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/24466](https://t.me/mod_russia/24466); [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/24467](https://t.me/mod_russia/24467); [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/24468](https://t.me/mod_russia/24468)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-20-2023>; [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/24273](https://t.me/mod_russia/24273)

<sup>3</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar022323>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar02242023>

<sup>4</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar022123>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-12-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-27-2023>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-does-not-see-significant-near-term-russian-gains-ukraine-pentagon-official-2023-02-28/>; <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bvmwk4/pentagon-putin-nukes-ukraine>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-6>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/special-report-assessing-putin%E2%80%99s-implicit-nuclear-threats-after-annexation>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-21-2023>

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70597>

<sup>9</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70597>

<sup>10</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar013123>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar121322>;

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-russia-open-ukraine-talks-wont-give-up-annexed-regions-2023-02-28/> ;

<sup>12</sup> <https://tass.com/politics/1582547>

<sup>13</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122722>

<sup>14</sup> <https://tass.com/politics/1582471>

<sup>15</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar120222> ; [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1790809/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1790809/); [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/rso/nato/1790818/](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-sejchas-unikalnyj-moment-chtoby-ostanovit-konflikt-v-ukraine-poka-rossija-ne-postavila-552793-2023/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-sejchas-unikalnyj-moment-chtoby-ostanovit-konflikt-v-ukraine-poka-rossija-ne-postavila-552793-2023/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-12-2023> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122722> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122122> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar120922> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar120222> ;

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.dw.com/ru/lukashenko-pribyl-s-vizitom-v-kitaj/a-64846196>

<sup>20</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-27-2023>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-updates-2022>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-27-2023>

<sup>23</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/11149>

<sup>24</sup> <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10899>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dDf2w34VWwwcuYqnxSQK2uqi7eAHRCJMaaiC5uKJN2MQtspEmJ1oJtfwh1W9zQnpl>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dDf2w34VWwwcuYqnxSQK2uqi7eAHRCJMaaiC5uKJN2MQtspEmJ1oJtfwh1W9zQnpl>

- 
- <sup>26</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/11149>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-19-2023>
- <sup>27</sup> <https://t.me/btr80/5171>; [https://twitter.com/auditor\\_ya/status/1630579576446361604](https://twitter.com/auditor_ya/status/1630579576446361604);  
<https://twitter.com/EjShahid/status/1630263342756515840>
- <sup>28</sup> [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/79250](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/79250); <https://t.me/sashakots/38680>
- <sup>29</sup> [https://twitter.com/bayraktar\\_1love/status/1630616430210170880?s=20](https://twitter.com/bayraktar_1love/status/1630616430210170880?s=20);  
[https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1630546909625458688](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1630546909625458688); <https://twitter.com/2MMisery/status/1630567427099459584>;  
[https://t.me/LPR\\_JCCC/8071](https://t.me/LPR_JCCC/8071); [https://t.me/LPR\\_JCCC/8069](https://t.me/LPR_JCCC/8069)
- <sup>30</sup> <https://twitter.com/fdov21/status/1630339835058593794> ; <https://t.me/yaremshooter/1064>; <https://t.me/yaremshooter/1062>;  
<https://t.me/kommunist/16106>; [https://t.me/riafan\\_everywhere/17052](https://t.me/riafan_everywhere/17052); [https://t.me/rlz\\_the\\_kraken/56707](https://t.me/rlz_the_kraken/56707)
- <sup>31</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dDf2w34VWwwcuYqnxSQK2uqi7eAHRcJMaajC5uKJN2MQtspEmJ1oJtfwh1W9zQnpl>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0kQHvtyjbQjUHxBu3jTjtkbRmfLkLgQufFXTq1Y7agYAXi6SCRtHPQuR3SbsWBmPl>
- <sup>32</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/president.gov.ua/> ; <https://suspilne dot media/399023-na-bahmutskomu-napramku-frontu-situacia-uskladnuetsa-zelenskij/>; <https://suspilne dot media/399485-oleksandr-sirskij-rozpoviv-pro-situaciu-v-bahmuti/>
- <sup>33</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/53706>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/53701>; [https://t.me/riafan\\_everywhere/17052](https://t.me/riafan_everywhere/17052);  
[https://t.me/rlz\\_the\\_kraken/56707](https://t.me/rlz_the_kraken/56707)
- <sup>34</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/53706>
- <sup>35</sup> <https://t.me/ukrbavovna/6824>; [https://twitter.com/seanders\\_geo/status/1630340200520974339?s=20](https://twitter.com/seanders_geo/status/1630340200520974339?s=20);  
<https://t.me/readovkanews/53706>
- <sup>36</sup> [https://twitter.com/chris\\_759/status/1630324113616297984?s=20](https://twitter.com/chris_759/status/1630324113616297984?s=20)
- <sup>37</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dDf2w34VWwwcuYqnxSQK2uqi7eAHRcJMaajC5uKJN2MQtspEmJ1oJtfwh1W9zQnpl>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0kQHvtyjbQjUHxBu3jTjtkbRmfLkLgQufFXTq1Y7agYAXi6SCRtHPQuR3SbsWBmPl>
- <sup>38</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/11149>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/53706>
- <sup>39</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=133231762743931>
- <sup>40</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dDf2w34VWwwcuYqnxSQK2uqi7eAHRcJMaajC5uKJN2MQtspEmJ1oJtfwh1W9zQnpl>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0kQHvtyjbQjUHxBu3jTjtkbRmfLkLgQufFXTq1Y7agYAXi6SCRtHPQuR3SbsWBmPl>
- <sup>41</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/53706>; <https://t.me/sashakots/38685>
- <sup>42</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dDf2w34VWwwcuYqnxSQK2uqi7eAHRcJMaajC5uKJN2MQtspEmJ1oJtfwh1W9zQnpl>
- <sup>43</sup> <https://t.me/andriyshTime/7176>
- <sup>44</sup> <https://armyinform.com dot ua/2023/02/28/kinburnska-kosa-kvytok-v-odyn-kinecz-dlya-okupanta-nataliya-gumenyuk/>
- <sup>45</sup> <https://armyinform.com dot ua/2023/02/28/kinburnska-kosa-kvytok-v-odyn-kinecz-dlya-okupanta-nataliya-gumenyuk/>
- <sup>46</sup> <https://suspilne dot media/399500-rosijski-okupanti-ogolosuut-evakuaciu-koli-zbirautsa-tikati-gumenuk-pro-situaciu-na-livoberezzi-hersonsini/> ; <https://suspilne dot media/398990-armia-rf-obstrilue-okupovani-naseleni-punkti-hersonsini-sob-vipravdati-svou-vtecu-gumenuk/>
- <sup>47</sup> <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/39332>; <https://twitter.com/Danspiun/status/1630625229989920768?s=20>
- <sup>48</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/OperationalCommandSouth/posts/pfbid0QKZqHXVCM4mswKAMktbTjL9YoQCPo3C5TNyXZDZ6pwXjHiaUJZ2AmRztpj8KKSpZl>
- <sup>49</sup> <https://suspilne dot media/399572-zsu-vlucili-po-rosianah-u-timcasovo-okupovanomu-misti-pologi-na-zaporizzi/>
- <sup>50</sup> <https://suspilne dot media/399500-rosijski-okupanti-ogolosuut-evakuaciu-koli-zbirautsa-tikati-gumenuk-pro-situaciu-na-livoberezzi-hersonsini/>
- <sup>51</sup> <https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/3344> ; [https://t.me/Yevtushenko\\_E/2691](https://t.me/Yevtushenko_E/2691) ;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dDf2w34VWwwcuYqnxSQK2uqi7eAHRcJMaajC5uKJN2MQtspEmJ1oJtfwh1W9zQnpl> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0kQHvtyjbQjUHxBu3jTjtkbRmfLkLgQuFfxZTq1Y7agYAXi6SCRtHPQuR3SbsWBmPl> ;  
<https://www.facebook.com/OperationalCommandSouth/posts/pfbid0KZqHXVCM4mswKAMktbTjL9YoQCPo3C5TNyXZDZ6pwXjHiaUJ2ZAmRztpj8KKSpZl> ; <https://t.me/mykolaivskaODA/4411>  
<sup>52</sup> <https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/3344> ; [https://t.me/Yevtushenko\\_E/2691](https://t.me/Yevtushenko_E/2691) ; <https://t.me/mykolaivskaODA/4411> ;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0dDf2w34VWwwcuYqnxSQK2uqi7eAHRCJMaajC5uKJN2MQtspEmJ1oJtfwh1W9zQnpl> ;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0kQHvtyjbQjUHxBu3jTjtkbRmfLkLgQuFfxZTq1Y7agYAXi6SCRtHPQuR3SbsWBmPl>  
<sup>53</sup> <https://meduza dot io/news/2023/02/28/v-erevane-zaderzhali-rossiyanina-podozrevaemogo-po-delu-ob-antivoennyh-nadpisyah-v-moskve>; <https://www.police dot am/ru/news/view/%D5%BE%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5%A1%D5%AC%D5%B%D5%A6%D5%B4280223.html>; <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32292266.html>; <https://www.themoscowtimes dot com/2023/02/28/armenia-detains-russian-anti-war-activist-at-airport-a80355>; <https://ovd dot news/express-news/2023/02/28/podozrevaemogo-po-delu-ob-antivoennyh-nadpisyah-v-moskve-zaderzhali-v>  
<sup>54</sup> <https://www.themoscowtimes dot com/2023/02/28/armenia-detains-russian-anti-war-activist-at-airport-a80355>  
<sup>55</sup> <https://www.azatutyun dot am/a/32292266.html>  
<sup>56</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0NL2GH6ye8Z9QKkzyTCrv3oWszNbxDxXPkwqyxXMBa6Fqt37QFWosAKEeXaDBYMLl>  
<sup>57</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-demand-tanks-outstrips-production-by-factor-of-10-report-2023>  
<sup>58</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-demand-tanks-outstrips-production-by-factor-of-10-report-2023>;  
<https://www.economist.com./the-economist-explains/2023/02/27/how-quickly-can-russia-rebuild-its-tank-fleet>  
<sup>59</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-demand-tanks-outstrips-production-by-factor-of-10-report-2023>;  
<https://www.economist.com./the-economist-explains/2023/02/27/how-quickly-can-russia-rebuild-its-tank-fleet>  
<sup>60</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-demand-tanks-outstrips-production-by-factor-of-10-report-2023>  
<sup>61</sup> [https://t.me/Sladkov\\_plus/7267](https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/7267); <https://t.me/Lunay14/3910>  
<sup>62</sup> <https://t.me/meduzalive/79461>  
<sup>63</sup> [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/528](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/528)  
<sup>64</sup> [https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1630478324215455745](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1630478324215455745); [https://t.me/flashpoint\\_news/6690](https://t.me/flashpoint_news/6690)  
<sup>65</sup> [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/17471](https://t.me/grey_zone/17471); [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/528](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/528); <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/19630>  
<sup>66</sup> <https://www.fontanka dot ru/2023/02/27/72090578/>; <https://t.me/astrapress/21942>  
<sup>67</sup> <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/19653>; <https://t.me/SergeyKolyasnikov/46660>; <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/19656>  
<sup>68</sup> <https://meduza dot io/feature/2023/02/27/shkolnitsa-iz-tulskoy-oblasti-narisovala-antivoenny-risunok-teper-otets-kotory-vospityvaet-ee-odin-figurant-ugolovnego-dela-o-diskreditatsii-armii>  
<sup>69</sup> <https://t.me/astrapress/21972>; <https://t.me/sotaproject/54572>  
<sup>70</sup> <https://minre.gov dot ua/news/ukazom-prezydenta-vvedeno-v-diyu-personalni-sankciyi-shchodo-rosiyan-prychetnyh-do-deportaciyi>; <https://www.president.gov dot ua/documents/1152023-45957>  
<sup>71</sup> <https://minre.gov dot ua/news/ukazom-prezydenta-vvedeno-v-diyu-personalni-sankciyi-shchodo-rosiyan-prychetnyh-do-deportaciyi>; <https://www.president.gov dot ua/documents/1152023-45957>  
<sup>72</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021623>  
<sup>73</sup> <https://minre.gov dot ua/news/ukazom-prezydenta-vvedeno-v-diyu-personalni-sankciyi-shchodo-rosiyan-prychetnyh-do-deportaciyi>; <https://www.president.gov dot ua/documents/1152023-45957>  
<sup>74</sup> <https://armyinform.com dot ua/2023/02/28/rosiya-nasylnovyvezla-z-ukrayiny-ponad-16-tysyach-ditej-ofis-genprokurora/>  
<sup>75</sup> <https://www.dw dot com/en/ukraine-calls-transfer-of-children-to-russia-genocidal-crime/a-64835163>  
<sup>76</sup> [https://t.me/SALDO\\_VGA/481](https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/481) ; [https://t.me/SALDO\\_VGA/480](https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/480)  
<sup>77</sup> <https://sprotyv.mod dot gov.ua/2023/02/28/rosiyan-zmushuyut-ukrayinskyh-ditej-pysaty-lysty-okupantam/>  
<sup>78</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/background/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-27-2023>  
<sup>79</sup> <https://twitter.com/EliotHiggins/status/1630535360735334400>;  
<https://twitter.com/GianlucaMezzo/status/1630577307260690435>; <https://twitter.com/bellingcat/status/1630584928982188032>;  
<https://twitter.com/GianlucaMezzo/status/1630577307260690435?s=20>  
<sup>80</sup> <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1630453726304518144>  
<sup>81</sup> <https://t.me/modmilby/23811>