

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 4, 2023
Kateryna Stepanenko, Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Angela Howard, and Frederick W. Kagan
February 4, 7:15 pm ET

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

Russian decisive offensive operations are unlikely to target Zaporizhia City from the western Donetsk–Zaporizhia frontline as the Russian military continues to prepare for an offensive in western Luhansk Oblast. Advisor to the exiled Ukrainian mayor of Mariupol, Petro Andryushenko, stated that Russian soldiers in Mariupol are telling residents that the Russian military ordered offensive operations against Vuhledar, areas southwest of Bakhmut, Zaporizhia City and Zaporizhia Oblast.[1] Andryushenko added that Russia is also building up forces at barracks and settlements on roads leading to frontline positions, and that Russia had brought an extra 10,000–15,000 troops to Mariupol and its outskirts.[2] Andryushenko noted the Russian forces reportedly have 30,000 troops in the greater Mariupol area. ISW continues to assess that Russia is concentrating troops and military equipment to stage a decisive offensive on the western Luhansk Oblast and Bakhmut areas.

Western and Ukrainian military officials have repeatedly noted that Russian forces are likely setting conditions to reach the Luhansk and Donetsk oblast borders — an objective that Russian Chief of General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov had also outlined on December 22.[3] ISW continues to observe Russian transfers of military equipment and elite units and the preparations of logistics in occupied Luhansk Oblast that support Western, Ukrainian, and Russian forecasts for the western Luhansk Oblast–Bakhmut offensive.[4] Russian forces are also intensifying attacks on Bakhmut while neglecting frontlines around Donetsk City.[5] The Ukrainian military has reported that Russian forces have not massed a powerful enough strike group to conduct an offensive in the Zaporizhia direction.[6]

Russian sources have been claiming Russian forces have been making territorial gains in Zaporizhia Oblast in late January, claims that ISW assesses were likely an information operation aimed at dispersing Ukrainian forces ahead of the decisive offensive in the east.[7] Andryushenko had previously stated that Russian officials were restricting Mariupol residents from accessing non–Russian information and were misrepresenting the situation on the frontlines, so Russian forces spreading rumors about an attack on Zaporizhia City may be a continuation of such information operations.[8] Andryushenko has also consistently reported increases of Russian forces in Mariupol throughout different stages of the war and noted that Russian forces are using the city as a military base due to its proximity to Russia.[9]

Russia has not shown the capacity to sustain the multiple major offensive operations that would be necessary to simultaneously reach the Donetsk Oblast administrative borders and take Zaporizhia City. Andryushenko's reported Russian troop concentration of 30,000 servicemen in the Mariupol area is not sufficient to attack Zaporizhia, a city of roughly three–quarters of a million people, while continuing offensive operations to encircle Bakhmut and launching a new major attack in Luhansk Oblast. Russian conventional forces, reserves, and Wagner forces have committed tens of thousands of troops to the effort to seize Bakhmut already, reportedly suffering many thousands of casualties in that effort.[10] Bakhmut had a pre–war population of slightly over 70,000.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has launched a series of efforts to restructure and consolidate the mismatched blend of irregular forces supporting Russia's war in Ukraine into Russia's conventional military

forces. A Russian MoD map published on February 3 included occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts in the Southern Military District's (SMD) area of responsibility.[11] The SMD press service also announced that the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Militias are integrating into the Russian Armed Forces.[12] The UK MoD assessed on February 4 that integration of occupied Ukrainian territories into the SMD zone likely follows Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's January 17 reform announcement about the formation of "self-sufficient force groupings" in Ukraine.[13] The UK MoD further assessed that these integration efforts aim to integrate occupied territories into Russia's long-term strategic posture but are unlikely to generate an impact on combat operations in the near term. ISW has also previously assessed that the Kremlin's effort to reconstitute the Russian Armed Forces is a long-term commitment in its preparations both for a protracted war and to rebuild Russia's conventional military might generally.[14]

The Russian MoD might be taking some steps to integrate volunteer battalions into its framework. A prominent Russian milblogger stated on February 4 that the Union of Volunteers of Donbas military units elected to create a single Russian Armed Forces Volunteer Corps from Russian Armed Forces volunteer units.[15] A DNR Telegram channel claimed on February 2 that Russian officials coerced mobilized miners into taking military oaths to Russia despite months of prior service.[16] Russian media outlet *TASS* also reported on February 4 that the Russian government expanded military medical commissions' mandate to provide care for volunteer formations as well.[17]

The Russian MoD may be rushing to integrate and professionalize irregular forces into its conventional structure while Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov has the favor of Russian President Vladimir Putin.[18] Russian irregular forces in Ukraine include contract soldiers, mobilized soldiers, the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics' (DNR and LNR) forces, volunteer battalions, Russian Combat Army Reserve (BARS) forces, Cossack and Chechen units, and Wagner Group mercenaries. These formations have different objectives, limitations, pre-requisites, hierarchies, and legal statuses. The Russian MoD has initiated several professionalization efforts since Gerasimov's appointment as the Commander of the Joint Grouping of Forces in Ukraine on January 11, and it is logical that the Russian MoD would seek to cohere the current odd mix of forces into a more traditional structure.[19] These integration efforts coincide with the launching of decisive offensive operations, however, and will likely generate short-term disruptions and pushback among units needed for those operations. Undertaking complex structural and administrative changes while launching major offensive operations is an unusual step, however appropriate the changes. Gerasimov likely feels that he has a limited window to make changes to Russian forces before the impossibility of achieving the grandiose objectives he has apparently been set causes him to lose Putin's favor once again.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin is likely overcompensating for his declining influence by continuing to frame himself as the sole victor in the Bakhmut area and attempting to leverage his remaining influence online. Prigozhin responded to a question on February 4 about rumors of a new Russian offensive by comparing Wagner Group forces' battle strategy to a chess game in which players must "hit [their opponents'] head with a chessboard." [20] Prigozhin also called for Russian authorities to investigate US-based Russian-language international media outlet *RTVI* for disseminating "slandorous information," one of many recent calls for Russian officials to take action based on his demands alone.[21] Select Russian milbloggers no longer flock to Prigozhin's defense, however. One Russian milblogger, for example, characterized Prigozhin as a "brilliant troll" and claimed that DNR and LNR mobilized forces suffer significant casualties on the entire Donbas frontline without sufficient support while Wagner Group forces concentrated their efforts around Bakhmut.[22]

Russia and Ukraine conducted a prisoner of war (POW) exchange on February 4, exchanging 63 Russian POWs for 116 Ukrainian POWs.[23] The Russian MoD claimed that the Russian POWs included personnel of an unspecified “sensitive category,” and the MoD credited the United Arab Emirates leadership for mediating the exchange. A Russian milblogger expressed continued frustration at uneven Russo-Ukrainian POW exchanges.[24]

Key Takeaways

- **A Russian decisive offensive operation is unlikely to target Zaporizhia City from the western Donetsk-Zaporizhia frontline.**
- **Russian forces have not shown the capacity to sustain the multiple simultaneous large-scale offensive operations that would be necessary to reach the administrative borders of Donetsk Oblast and seize Zaporizhia City.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has launched a series of efforts to restructure and consolidate the mismatched blend of irregular forces supporting Russia’s war in Ukraine into Russia’s conventional military forces.**
- **The Russian MoD’s decision to undertake significant structural reform while preparing for a major offensive in eastern Ukraine likely represents an effort by Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov to complete reforms while he has Russian President Vladimir Putin’s often fleeting favor.**
- **Wagner financier Yevgeny Prigozhin is overcompensating for his declining influence by continuing to frame himself as the sole victor in the Bakhmut area.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian officials exchanged 63 Russian POWs for 116 Ukrainian POWs.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations northwest of Svatove and continued offensive operations around Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut and Vuhledar but have slowed the pace of their offensives along the western outskirts of Donetsk City.**
- **Ukrainian forces continue to target Russian military assets in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast.**
- **Russian authorities are attempting to reinvigorate force generation efforts by drawing from broader pools of manpower.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 4, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

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

Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

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

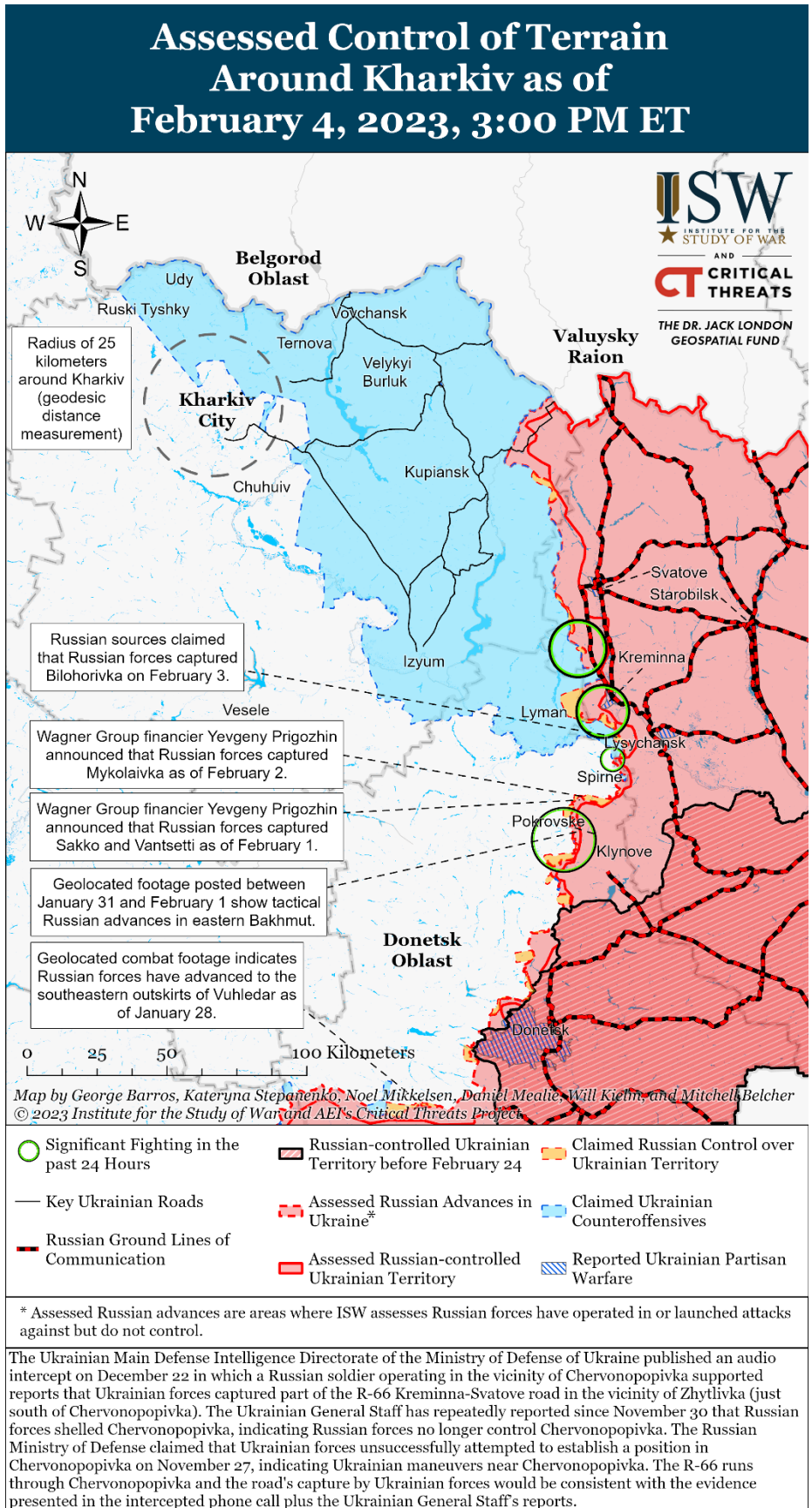
Russian sources reported that Russian forces conducted limited offensives northwest of Svatove on February 4. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces conducted successful offensive actions near Dvorichne, Kharkiv Oblast (53km northwest of Svatove) and pushed Ukrainian forces out of the western outskirts of the settlement.[25] Other Russian sources amplified the claim, although ISW has not observed any visual confirmation that Russian forces have advanced in the area.[26] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also conducted an attack in the direction of Stelmakhivka (15km west of Svatove).[27]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kreminna area on February 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Kreminna itself and Hrekivka (27km northwest of Kreminna), Nevske (18km northwest of Kreminna), and Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna).[28] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division of the 20th Guards Combined Arms Army of the Western Military District launched an offensive along the Chervonopopivka–Kreminna line a few days ago and advanced close to Yampolivka, Donetsk Oblast (16km west of Kreminna), where fighting is reportedly ongoing.[29] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces out of positions south and southwest of Dibrova and advanced closer to Hryhorivka (11km south of Kreminna).[30] Russian milbloggers continue to make contradictory claims about Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna), with one milblogger claiming that Russian forces captured the settlement and are currently clearing it and another claiming that Russian forces are still fighting to capture Bilohorivka.[31]

Ukrainian forces reportedly continue to strike Russian logistics in Luhansk Oblast. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces struck an industrial facility in Svatove with HIMARS rockets on February 4.[32]

A fire at an industrial facility in Belgorod Oblast may further disrupt Russian logistics in Ukraine. Russian, Ukrainian, and social media sources posted footage on February 4 showing an oil depot burning at a facility in Borsivka, Belgorod Oblast that reportedly produces metal structures for the repair of the Kerch Strait Bridge in Crimea.[33] Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Vladimirovich claimed that Ukrainian forces struck an industrial facility in Borisvka Raion in Belgorod Oblast.[34] The fire may have damaged the industrial facility and

could disrupt ongoing Russian repair efforts for the Kerch Strait Bridge, a critical ground line of communication (GLOC) for Russian forces in southern Ukraine.



Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

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

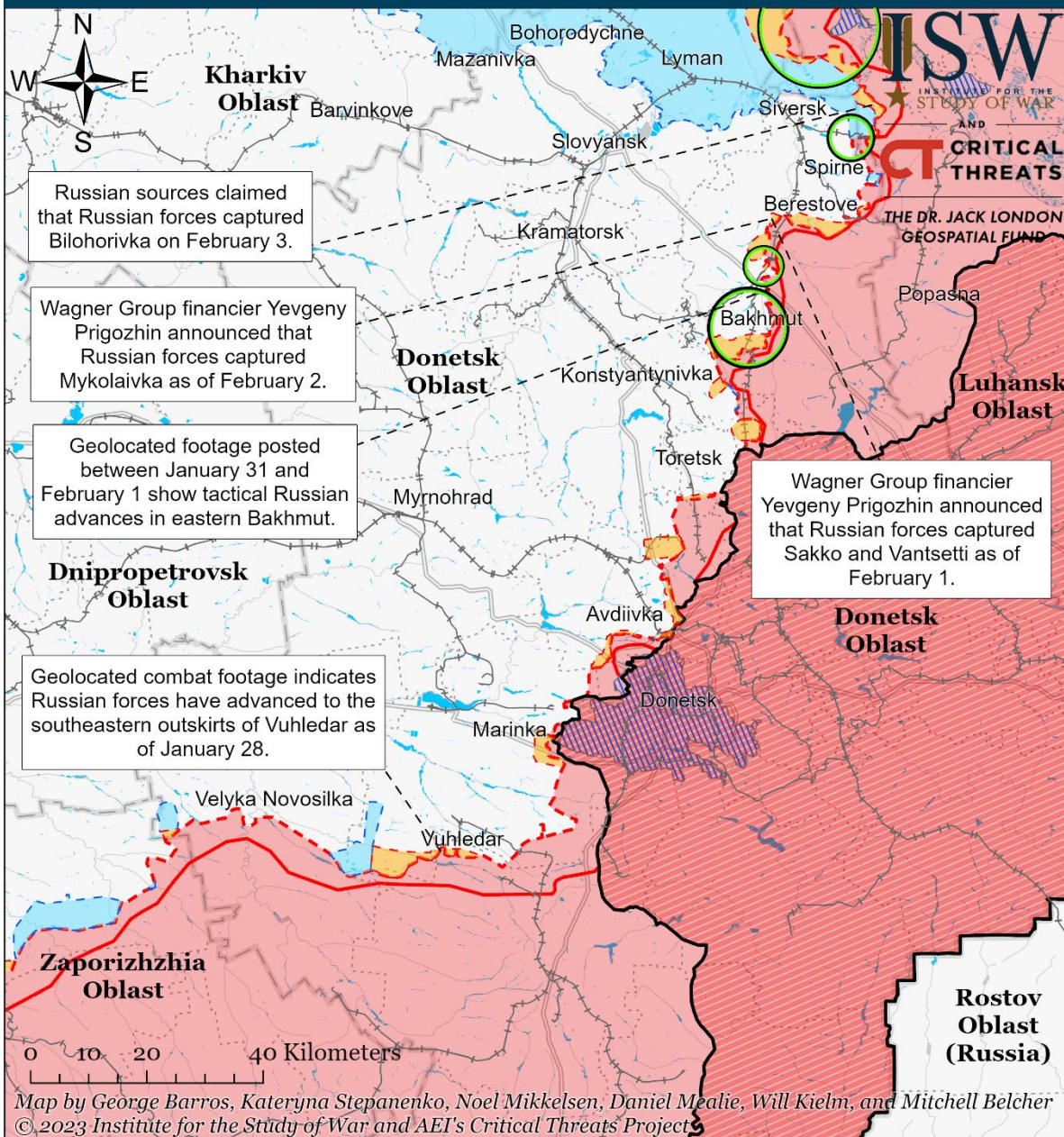
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut area on February 4. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that Russian forces have committed a substantial portion of their forces to offensive operations in the direction of Bakhmut intending to break through Ukrainian defenses in the past week but that they have been unsuccessful.[35] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut itself, within 31 km northeast of Bakhmut near Verkhokamianske, Krasna Hora, and Paraskoviivka; and 6 km west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske.[36] Geolocated footage published on February 4 indicates that Russian forces likely advanced west of Sil (13 km north of Bakhmut).[37] Russian sources claimed that Wagner Group fighters continued assaults near Rozdolivka (17 km northeast of Bakhmut) and Vasyukivka (15 km north of Bakhmut), and that Russian forces attempted to advance in the direction of Spirne (28 km northeast of Bakhmut).[38] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces continue offensive operations southwest of Bakhmut attempting to reach the T0504 Highway between Chasiv Yar and Bakhmut.[39] Former Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Minister Vitaly Kiselyov claimed that Russian forces between Ivanivske and Stupochky (12 km southwest of Bakhmut) advanced to within a kilometer of the highway, although other Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces were still several kilometers away from the highway.[40] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of Russian forces being closer than 2.5 km to the T0504 highway.

Russian milbloggers are attempting to portray Russian offensives northeast of Bakhmut and south of Kreminna as being a complementary effort to encircle Siversk. A prominent milblogger claimed that the simultaneous advances of the Wagner Group from the direction of Soledar and Russian forces claimed advances in the direction of Lyman and around Bilohorivka, Luhansk Oblast create the prerequisites for encircling Siversk from the south, north, and east.[41] Another Russian milblogger claimed that renewed Russian offensive operations south of Kreminna indicate that Russian forces plan to encircle Siversk.[42] These Russian milbloggers may believe that Russian forces only need to cut off sections of the T0513 highway north and south of Siversk to operationally encircle the settlement, but Ukrainian forces would still be able to supply forces in the settlement from country roads leading west. Russian forces would need to advance upwards of 15 km to come close to cutting off all the ground lines of communication (GLOCs) likely required to encircle Siversk. That level of advance would require a substantially more concerted Russian offensive effort in the direction of Siversk from the north, east, and south than ISW has hitherto observed.

Russian offensive operations along the western outskirts of Donetsk City appear to have slowed in recent days. The Ukrainian General Staff has reported that Russian forces have not conducted assaults on specified settlements in the Donetsk City–Avdiivka area for the previous three days.[43] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces conducted an assault near Paraskoviivka (34 km southwest of Avdiivka) and amplified footage claiming to show elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division of the 8th Guards Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District clearing a captured Ukrainian fortified position in the western part of Marinka (27 km southwest of Avdiivka).[44] The slowed pace of Russian assaults in the Avdiivka–Donetsk City area may support ISW’s assessment that Russian forces likely lack the combat power to sustain multiple large offensive operations in Ukraine, and thus, Russian forces may have slowed their pace of assaults in this area to prioritize their offensive to capture Bakhmut and their likely imminent offensive in Luhansk Oblast.

Russian forces reportedly continued offensive operations around Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City) on February 4. Geolocated footage published on February 4 shows Russian forces with armored vehicles attempting to advance north of Mykilske (27km southwest of Donetsk City) towards the T0524 highway leading into Vuhledar from the northeast.[45] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces continued offensive operations near the dacha areas south and west of Vuhledar and unsuccessfully attempted to bypass the settlement in an unspecified direction.[46] One Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces have denied Russian forces the opportunity to gain a foothold on the outskirts of the settlement.[47] Russian milbloggers amplified footage purporting to show units of the 40th and 155th Naval Infantry Brigades of the Pacific Fleet conducting assaults near Vuhledar.[48] A Ukrainian military officer reported that Russian forces continue to bring in artillery and infantry personnel into the Vuhledar area and are likely preparing for the slow grinding assaults characteristic of Russian offensives in the rest of eastern Ukraine.[49] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian personnel transfers and probing of Russian defenses in the area may suggest that Ukrainian forces intend to launch a localized counteroffensive around Vuhledar, although ISW does not make assessments about specific future Ukrainian operations.[50]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 4, 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
- Major Railroads
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

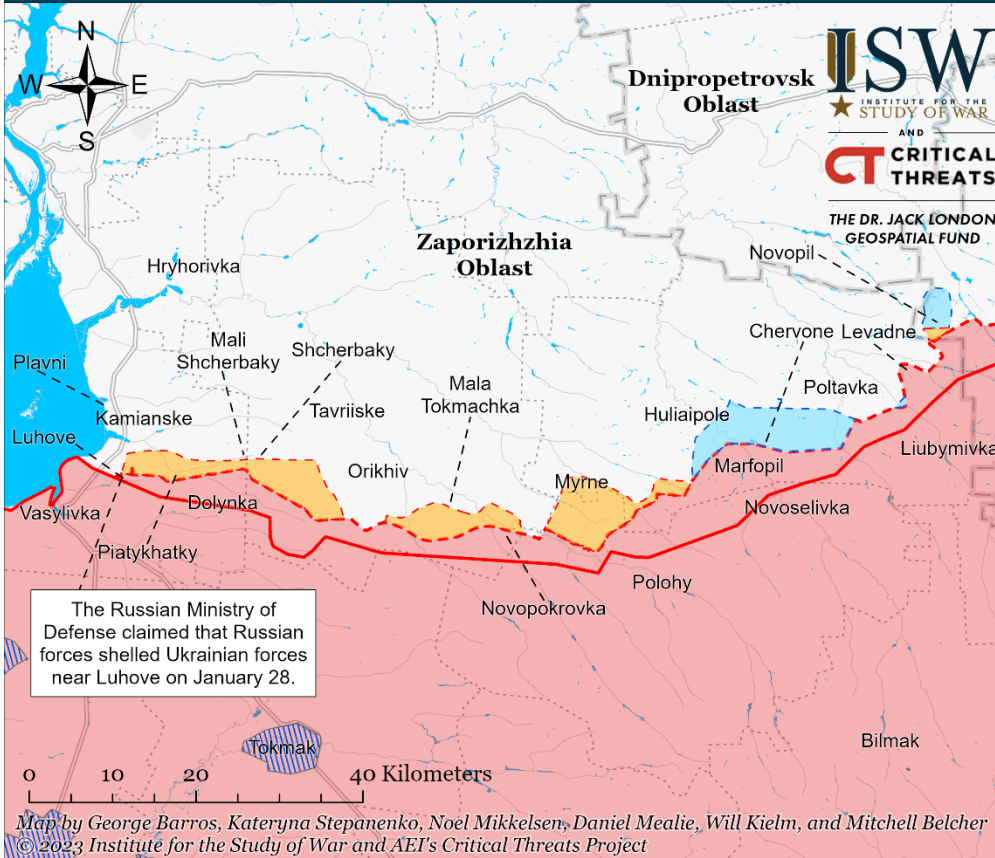
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

Ukrainian forces continue to target Russian military assets in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast. Geolocated footage shows Ukrainian forces striking a Russian Tor M2DT air defense system 12km southwest of Nova Kakhovka, Kherson Oblast and 8km from the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River on February 3, the second instance in two days.[51] The presence of these short-range air defense systems optimized for Arctic warfare near the riverbank suggests that the Russian 80th Separate Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Northern Fleet is operating close to the riverbank and has brought its own air defense systems.[52] The Tor M2DT was clearly unable to defend itself against whatever system Ukraine used to destroy it in a single shot.

Russian forces continued to conduct routine fire west of Hulyaipole and in Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts on February 4.[53] A Ukrainian source claimed that Russian forces shelled Kherson City with incendiary munitions.[54]

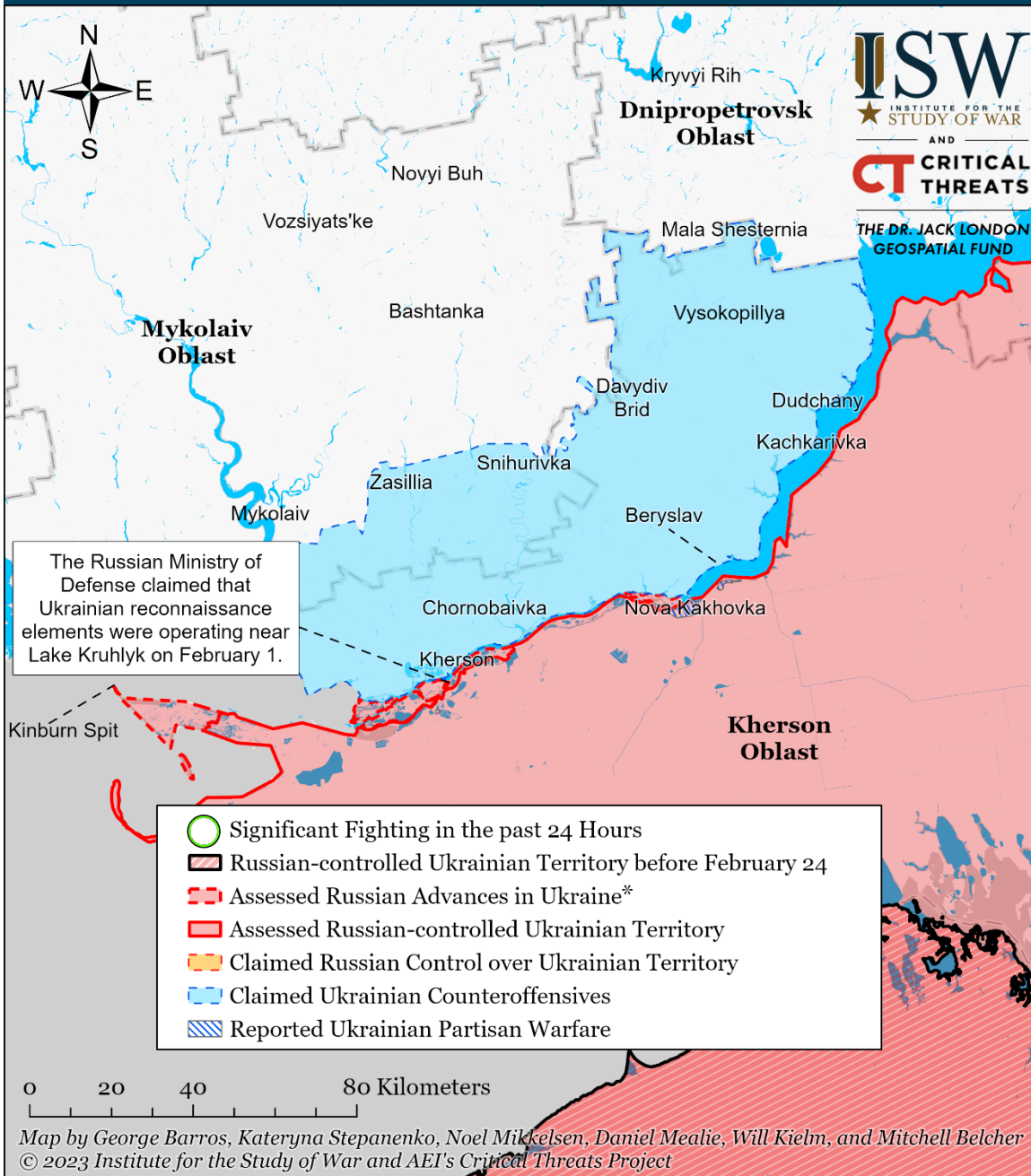
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of February 4, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- 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
- 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.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 4, 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.

ISW recoded the northeast section of Velykyi Potomkin Island in Kherson Oblast from reported Ukrainian counteroffensives to Russian claims based on Russian milblogger reports and video footage published on January 5 that claimed Russian forces recaptured that part of the island where Ukrainian forces placed a flag on January 2. ISW cannot confirm if Russian forces recaptured the same positions as Ukrainian forces as of January 5. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 3 that the island is in a gray zone because Russian forces are still operating in the northern part of the island. Geolocated footage published on January 2 does show Ukrainian forces striking Russian positions on an adjacent island east of Velykyi Potomkin Island, which indicates that Russian forces are still operating within the Dniro River delta areas.

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

Russian authorities are attempting to reinvigorate force generation efforts by drawing from broader personnel pools. The Ukrainian General Staff stated on February 4 that Russian forces have expanded convict recruitment efforts to target women, reportedly recruiting about 50 women from a women’s correctional colony in occupied Snizhne, Donetsk Oblast over the course of a week.[55] Russian State Duma parliamentarian (and a member of the Russian Mobilization Working Group) Dmitry Gusev proposed that Russian authorities mobilize scientists, engineers, and IT specialists in an interview with a state-affiliated outlet on February 2.[56] Gusev advocated that Russian officials deploy these professionals within specialized units but acknowledged that such a framework would require increased subtlety within the Russian “mobilization machine.”[57] Russian State Duma parliamentarian Maksim Ivanov stated on February 3 that he supports the mobilization of unemployed Russians in place of valuable specialists and engineers.[58] Kremlin-affiliated outlet reported that the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights criticized Ivanov’s suggestion and that a council member claimed that every Russian is valuable.[59]

The war in Ukraine has likely created a domestic shortage of Russian medical professionals, fueling limited protests. A Russian source stated on February 3 that Russian residents in Volchikha, Altai Krai demanded the resignation of a head physician and held a rally to show their dissatisfaction with local healthcare after the death of a local child at a hospital with no doctor on site.[60] A separate source reported that the regional minister of health heard complaints from local residents and an investigative committee opened a case investigating criminal negligence following the death of a child in Gorny, Zabaykalsky Krai.[61] The child was discharged from a hospital and died while waiting for an ambulance after her condition deteriorated.[62] The sources reporting on both instances attributed the personnel shortages, deaths, and publicized dissatisfaction to heavy Russian military recruitment of medical specialists.[63]

Russian authorities continue to frame limited Russian efforts to sabotage military infrastructure as terrorism in an effort to crack down on sources of resistance. A Russian news source from Chita, Zabaykalsky Krai reported on February 2 that Russian authorities opened a criminal case under laws prohibiting the public justification of terrorism against leaders of an unregistered regional youth organization. The organization allegedly justified the sabotage of Russian railways and the arson of military registration and enlistment offices.[64] A Russian opposition news source reported on February 3 that Russian authorities are investigating a blogger from Moscow Oblast for preparing a sabotage attack on a Russian railway because the man maintained a microblog on *Instagram* (an illegal platform in Russia) and demonstrated an “unhealthy interest” in rail transit items including military cargo.[65] An independent Russian news outlet reported on February 3 that a court in Podolsk, Moscow Oblast ordered a 70-year-old pensioner who committed an arson attack on a military enlistment office to receive psychiatric treatment.[66]

The Russian Armed Forces continue to struggle with desertion and disorder among soldiers. Several Russian sources reported on February 3 and 4 that Russian authorities apprehended a deserter who fled his unit near Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast and two soldiers who left their positions in Russia without proper authorization.[67] An Ulyanovsk Oblast news source reported on February 3 that an Ulyanovsk court sentenced two mobilized soldiers to 5.5 and 5 years in a correctional colony for committing “violent acts” against their commanders.[68]

Russian State Duma Deputy from Novosibirsk Dmitry Savelyev quietly went to Moscow after publicizing his decision leave Novosibirsk to join the Vega battalion in Ukraine.[69] Savelyev’s apparent ruse that he would serve on the front lines in Ukraine was likely an effort to deflect criticism that Russian officials avoid mobilization, ignore the challenges of ordinary Russians, and do not contribute to the war effort.

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)

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 4 that occupation authorities and their families are preparing to leave Troitskyi Raion, in northwestern Luhansk Oblast.[70]

Russian authorities continue to forcibly deport Ukrainian children from occupied Ukraine to Russia. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) and Republic of Karelia officials discussed a scheme to send Ukrainian children from occupied Luhansk Oblast to Karelia under a scheme for “rest and rehabilitation.”[71] The Resistance Center reported that Russian regional authorities aim to import certain quotas of Ukrainian children under the rest and rehabilitation scheme to improperly write off budget funds. The Resistance Center also noted that there is evidence that some Russian officials may be using these efforts to engage in human trafficking.

Advisor to the exiled Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral, Petro Andryushenko, reported that Russian occupation officials banned all Protestant and non-Orthodox churches from operating in Mariupol and began nationalizing the assets of these churches.[72] Russian officials have notably run an information operation falsely claiming that Ukrainian officials discriminate against certain religions, including the Kremlin-affiliated Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.[73] ISW previously reported that Russian occupation officials in Zaporizhia Oblast reportedly nationalized and closed places of worship belonging to the Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Christian communities.[74] Mariupol occupation officials may have banned and nationalized these churches as part of a larger Russian effort to establish the Kremlin-affiliated Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Church as the dominant faith in the occupied territories.[75]

An unspecified actor shot Russian soldier Igor “Bereg” Mangushev at close range in the back of the head at a checkpoint in occupied Kadiivka, Luhansk Oblast on February 4.[76] Russian authorities declined to release more information about the attack, but Russian milbloggers condemned the attack and speculated that Mangushev may have been on his knees and shot from behind.[77] Mangushev previously called for the destruction of the Ukrainian population while holding a skull, which he claimed belonged to a Ukrainian defender of the Azovstal Plant in Mariupol.[78] One Western expert noted that Mangushev has ties to Wagner Group and that an attack against Mangushev may have indirectly targeted Wagner Group and its financier, Yevgeny Prigozhin.[79]

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.)

Nothing significant to report.

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

[1] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/signs-of-coming-russian-offensive-on-multiple-fronts-in-ukraine-mount-11675513922>; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/6405>

[2] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/signs-of-coming-russian-offensive-on-multiple-fronts-in-ukraine-mount-11675513922>

[3] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-22>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-1-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-27-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-30-2023>

[4] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-22>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-1-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-27-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-30-2023>

[5] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-31-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-1-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-2-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-28-2023>

[6] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-26-2023>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-22-2023>

[7] <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Offensive%20Campaign%20Assessment%2C%20January%2023%2C%202023%20PDF.pdf>

[8] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/5575>; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/6398>

- [9] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/6405>; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/3609>;
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- [10] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-23-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-31-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-28-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-24>
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