

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 7, 2023

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February 7, 8:30pm 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 Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu held a press conference on the status of the war on February 7, likely in an attempt to posture the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) as an effective and involved leadership apparatus as the Russian military prepares for a renewed major offensive in Ukraine. Shoigu claimed that Russian forces are successfully developing operations near Bakhmut and Vuhledar and claimed that Russian troops have recently taken control of Soledar, Klischiivka, Pidhorodne, Krasnopolivka, Blahodatne, and Mykolaivka in the Bakhmut area and Lobkove in Zaporizhia Oblast.[1] Shoigu likely held this press conference in order to create the guise of formality and legitimacy for the Russian MoD as it continues efforts to reform the Russian military, prepare for a renewed offensive, and set conditions for prolonged operations in Ukraine. ISW has previously noted that Russian officials are preparing for an imminent Russian offensive in Ukraine in the coming months, and that these preparations are also happening on the strategic level with Russian command structures.[2]

Russian military command may be rushing to launch a large-scale offensive operation to conquer Donetsk Oblast in an unrealistic timeframe and likely without sufficient combat power. The UK MoD assessed on February 7 that Russia has highly likely been attempting to launch a major offensive operation to reach the Donetsk Oblast administrative borders since early January 2023 but had only been able to gain several hundred meters of territory per week.[3] The UK MoD attributed such a slow pace to Russian munitions shortages and a lack of maneuver units that are necessary for a successful and rapid offensive. The UK MoD noted that Russia is unlikely to build up the combat power necessary to substantially affect the outcome of the war while Russian military command continues to demand for unrealistic and sweeping advances. ISW similarly assessed on January 28 that Russian leadership may be once again planning a decisive offensive based on erroneous assumptions about Russian military capabilities and likely lacks the combat power necessary to sustain more than one major offensive operation.[4] ISW also observed the Kremlin signaling preparations for an early 2023 offensive in December but assessed that the time and space relationship may hinder Russian rapid and large-scale advance aspirations as Ukraine heads into a muddy spring season unsuitable for maneuver warfare.[5]

The Russian nationalist information space is continuing to express worry over Russia's inability to sustain a rapid and multi-pronged decisive offensive operation on a deadline. One prominent milblogger warned that Russian forces should not fall into the trap of attempting to start numerous offensive operations like they did in spring 2022 but instead focus on gradual advances that would generate high casualties among Ukrainian forces. The milblogger added that Russian military command should prioritize tiring Ukrainian forces and disrupting their logistics rather than conducting a frontal assault. Another milblogger stated that Russia still needs to create a breakthrough force and reject its current tactic of launching small, localized offensives that waste Russian combat on "capturing fields." [6] ISW previously assessed that Russian efforts to conduct spoiling attacks and to fix Ukrainian forces further undermine the sustainability of a major offensive.

Russian state energy company Gazprom may be creating its own private security force, likely in an effort to normalize state-affiliated paramilitary groups and undermine private military companies (PMCs). The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on February 7 that Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin privately authorized Gazprom subsidiary Gazprom Nafta to establish a 70 percent stake in its own private security company under a law on the safety of fuel and energy complex assets.[7] While it is not inherently unusual for state and private energy companies to establish private security forces to protect their assets, the GUR noted that the creation of this PMC aligns with ongoing tensions between the Kremlin and Wagner Group PMC financier Yevgeny Prigozhin. Russia may use these Gazprom security forces for purposes other than protecting Russian energy assets.

The Kremlin may be considering implementing some demands previously voiced by Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin to build rapport with other nationalist figures who advocated for similar policies. Head of the Russian State Duma Committee on Security and Anti-Corruption Vasily Piskarev is reportedly preparing amendments to the Russian Criminal Code to include provisions against discreditation of individuals who participated in combat operations and volunteer detachments that assist the Russian Armed Forces during the war in Ukraine.[8] Russian state media credited Prigozhin as the initiator of the amendment, and the provision will likely include Wagner mercenaries whom the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) repeatedly labeled as "volunteers." [9] The largest Russia media holding company, Gazprom Media, is reportedly planning to ban its media outlets (which include Russian

federal TV channels) from publishing content on YouTube.[10] Russian outlets also speculated that Gazprom Media's bans may be connected to efforts to block YouTube in Russia — another initiative that Prigozhin advocated for since late 2022.[11] Both provisions, if authorized, do not legalize Wagner or elevate Prigozhin's coveted political authority in Russia. However, those provisions appeal to the broader nationalist and milblogger communities who had been calling for stricter limitations on Western media in Russia and for the Kremlin's recognition of volunteers — which include proxy armed formations, volunteer battalions, and the Russian Combat Reserve (BARS).

The Russian State Duma further formalized the institution of social benefit schemes in occupied territories of Ukraine in order to further consolidate administrative control of occupied areas. State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin stated on February 7 that the Duma adopted the first reading of four bills on the legislative integration of social rights of the residents of occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts.[12] The bills define the minimum level of income, pension payments, sick leave, pregnancy and childcare benefits, and social support for veterans and the disabled and notably allows residents to submit documents to apply for social benefits in Ukrainian without a notarized translation into Russia.[13] The Duma bills represent the highest level of legislative integration of social benefit schemes thus far, having previously been defined and advertised in local forms by individual occupation officials. ISW continues to assess that such social benefit measures are a method of consolidating administrative control of occupied areas, as residents of occupied areas are forced to interact with Russian-controlled administrative organs to receive necessary payments.[14] The Duma bills codify and formalize these practices as part of the Russian legislative code.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu is likely attempting to posture the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) as an effective and involved leadership apparatus as the Russian military prepares for a renewed major offensive in Ukraine.**
- **Russian military command may be rushing to launch a large-scale offensive operation to conquer Donetsk Oblast in an unrealistic timeframe and likely without sufficient combat power.**
- **The Russian nationalist information space is continuing to express worry over Russia's inability to sustain a rapid and multi-pronged decisive offensive operation on a deadline.**
- **Russian state energy company Gazprom may be creating its own private security force, likely in an effort to normalize state-affiliated paramilitary groups and undermine non-state private military companies (PMCs).**
- **The Kremlin may be implementing some demands previously voiced by Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin to build rapport with other nationalist figures who advocated for similar policies.**
- **The Russian State Duma further formalized the institution of social benefit schemes in occupied territories of Ukraine in order to further consolidate administrative control of occupied areas.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks near Svatove and Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces continued ground attacks around Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces did not make confirmed territorial gains on the southern axis.**
- **Russian officials appear to be investing in railway infrastructure to increase the efficiency of military logistics.**
- **The Russian MoD is reportedly proposing a bill to allow all military personnel, including conscripts, to voluntarily participate in Russian peacekeeping missions.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 7, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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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

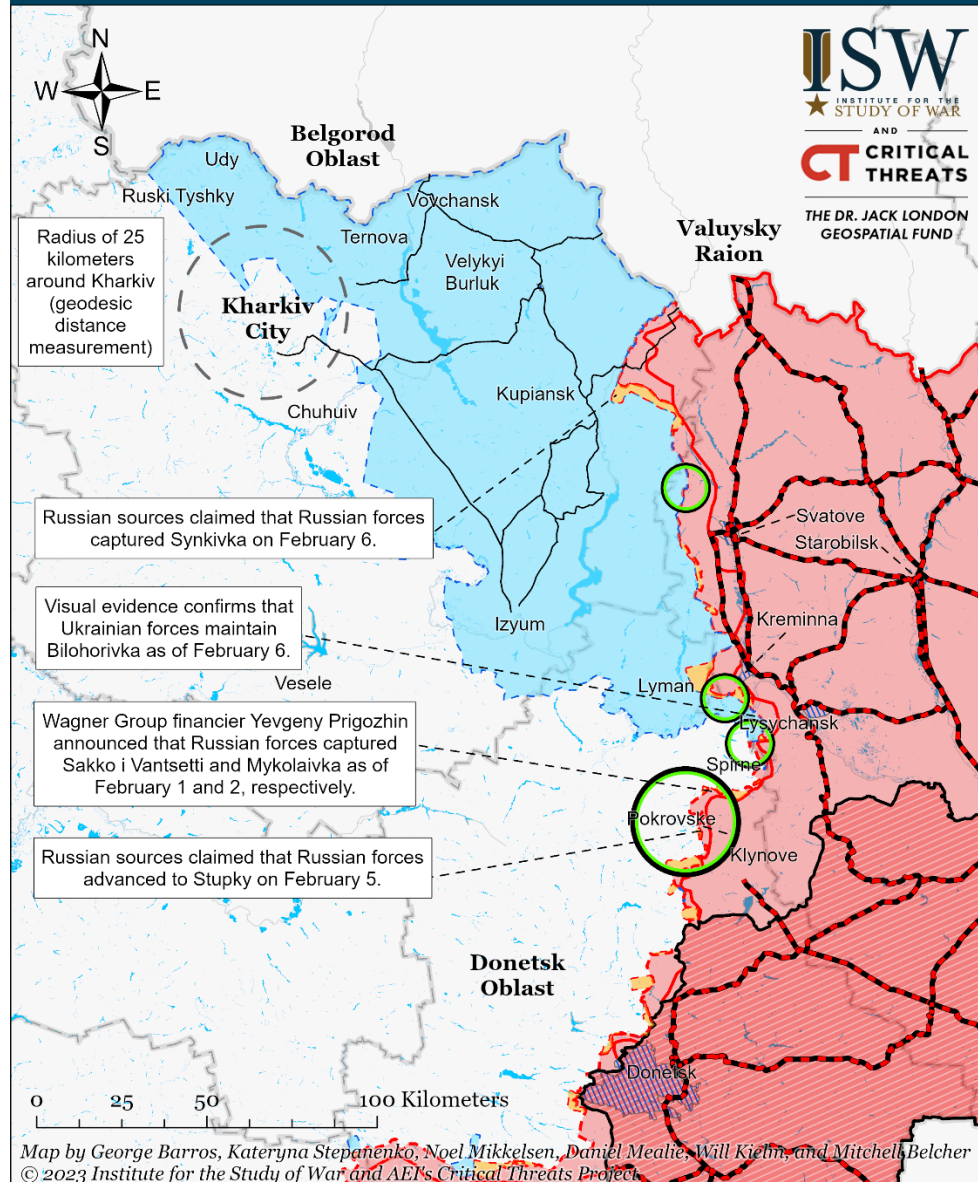
Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

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

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks near Svatove and Kreminna on February 7. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian ground attack near Novoselivske, 13km northwest of Svatove.[15] Kremlin-sponsored news outlet *RIA Novosti* published footage reportedly of Russian forces repelling a Ukrainian ground attack in Novoselivske on an unspecified but likely recent date.[16] Geolocated footage posted on February 6 shows that Russian T-90 tanks firing at Ukrainian forces in Novoselivske.[17] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks near Kreminna and Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna).[18] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced several kilometers near Bilohorivka, from which the milblogger claimed Ukrainian forces had previously withdrawn.[19] Ukrainian forces still maintain a presence in Bilohorivka, as ISW has recently reported.[20]

Russian sources are increasingly framing Russian offensive operations around Siversk (17km southwest of Kreminna) as supporting a broader effort against Lyman (23km west of Kreminna) rather than Bakhmut. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed that Russian forces experienced unspecified successes near Siversk and claimed that Russian forces must take Siversk in order to later take Lyman.[21] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are advancing towards Siversk from the northeast near Bilohorivka, from the east near Zolotarivka, and from the southeast near Spirne.[22]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of February 7, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

The Ukrainian Main Defense Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine published an audio intercept on December 22 in which a Russian soldier operating in the vicinity of Chervonopopivka supported reports that Ukrainian forces captured part of the R-66 Kreminna-Svatove road in the vicinity of Zhytlyvka (just south of Chervonopopivka). The Ukrainian General Staff has repeatedly reported since November 30 that Russian forces shelled Chervonopopivka, indicating Russian forces no longer control Chervonopopivka. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to establish a position in Chervonopopivka on November 27, indicating Ukrainian maneuvers near Chervonopopivka. The R-66 runs through Chervonopopivka and the road's capture by Ukrainian forces would be consistent with the evidence presented in the intercepted phone call plus the Ukrainian General Staff's reports.

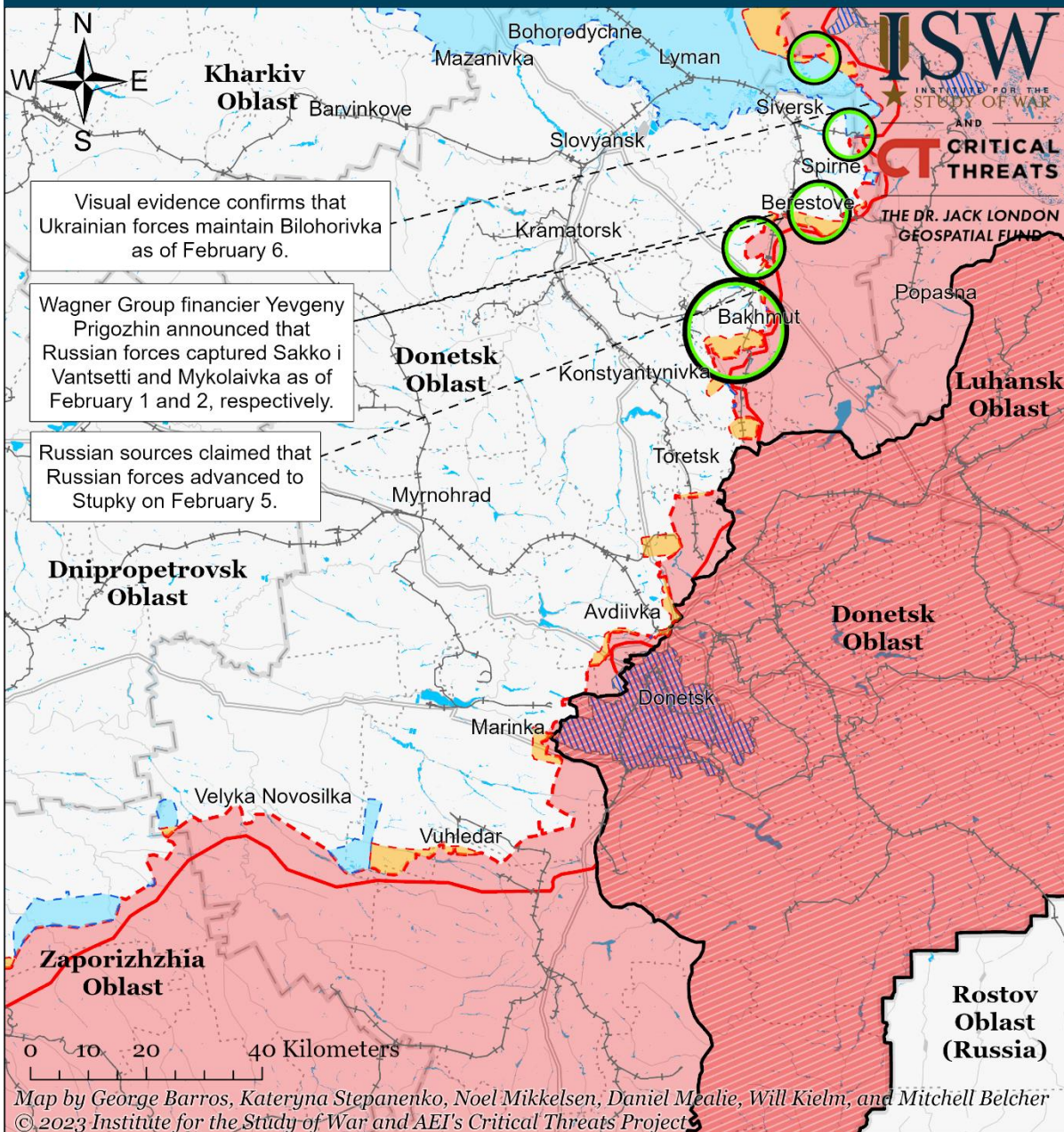
Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

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 ground attacks around Bakhmut on February 7. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northeast of Bakhmut near Verkhokamyanske (30km northeast) and Vesele (17km northeast); north of Bakhmut near Zaliznyanske (6km north), Krasna Hora (4km north), and Paraskoviivka (5km north); and west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west).[23] Geolocated footage published on February 6 confirms Russian tactical advances north of Bakhmut near Blahodatne (7km north of Bakhmut) and Krasna Hora.[24] Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group forces are continuing efforts to take Krasna Hora and Paraskoviivka but that Ukrainian troops still hold these two settlements.[25] One milblogger claimed that Wagner has cleared up to 50 percent of Krasna Hora.[26] Several Russian sources also claimed that Wagner Group forces reached the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway but did not offer specifics on where this may have occurred.[27] Russian milbloggers continue to report that Ukrainian troops maintain control of Ivanivske, a critical settlement along the T0504.[28] Regardless of whether Wagner has reached the T0504, they are already close enough to the highway to substantially threaten Ukrainian supply capabilities along the route. The fact that the Ukrainian defense of Bakhmut continues despite tangible threats to the T0504 suggests that its interdiction will not be the operationally significant victory that Russian sources have presented it as.

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in the Avdiivka–Donetsk City area or in western Donetsk Oblast on February 7. A Russian milblogger reported that elements of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) “Somalia” and “Sparta” battalions and “Slavic” Brigade are responsible for operations in the Avdiivka area.[29] Russian media outlet *RT* posted a report from Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City) and claimed that Ukrainian forces are fighting for the western part of the settlement but that it is harder for Ukrainian forces to hold their fortified areas due to high losses.[30] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian troops conducted limited counterattacks near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City) on the evening of February 6.[31] Footage and imagery posted to social media shows the aftermath of Ukrainian strikes on Russian positions near Vuhledar, and a Ukrainian reserve officer claimed that Russian forces lost up to 30 armored vehicles during the counterattacks and associated strikes.[32]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 7, 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

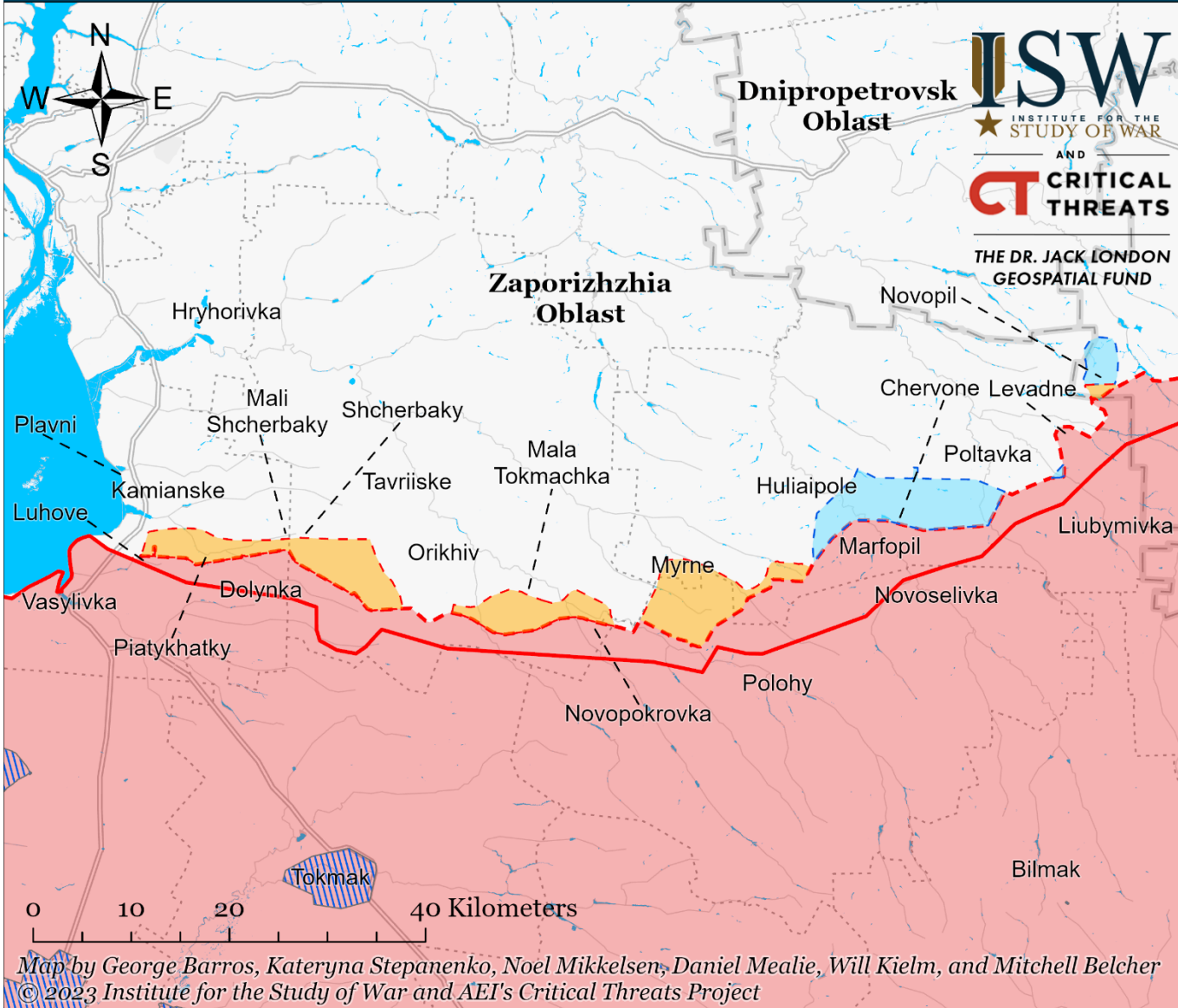
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

Russian forces did not make confirmed territorial gains on the southern axis on February 7. Zaporizhia Oblast Occupation Administration member Vladimir Rogov claimed on February 7 that Russian forces secured their frontline positions in Zaporizhia Oblast and are fortifying new positions seized in January.[33] Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Military Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on February 6 that Russian forces continue to shell the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River to encourage Ukrainian civilians living there to relocate deeper into occupied areas.[34] Ukrainian forces additionally continue to target Russian concentration areas in Kherson Oblast on February 7. Khlan added that Ukrainian forces destroyed a Russian watercraft and struck a Russian base on the east bank of the Dnipro River.[35] Geolocated footage published on February 7 showed a Ukrainian State Border Guard Service drone and artillery strike on Russian positions in Kardashynka (13km south of Kherson City on the east bank of the Dnipro) in Kherson Oblast.[36] Russian forces continued routine shelling in Kherson, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Mykolaiv oblasts on February 7.[37]

Russian occupation officials continue efforts to consolidate control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). Advisor to the Head of Rosenergoatom Renat Karchaa claimed on February 7 that Russian repairmen are completing the construction of structures to protect nuclear waste storage from shelling.[38] Karchaa claimed that Ukrainian workers who refused to sign contracts with Rosenergoatom are not allowed to work at the ZNPP.[39]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of February 7, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 7, 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 Dnipro River delta areas.

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

Russian officials appear to be investing in railway infrastructure to increase the efficiency of military logistics. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed during a teleconference on February 7 that Russia has been working to construct the Ulak-Fevralsk section (339km) of the Baikal-Amur Mainline Railroad since April 2021.[40] Shoigu claimed that Russian workers have completed the most intensive portion of the project and will fulfill the reconstruction task in a timely manner. Russian President Vladimir Putin also met with Russian Railways CEO Oleg Belozyorov on February 6.[41]

Russian officials continue efforts to target opposition voices who have left Russia. Russian State Duma Committee on Culture chairperson Elena Yampolskaya stated on February 6 that the Duma is forming a working group to establish potential punitive measures against people who left Russia, discredit the Russian Armed Forces, and support Ukraine.[42] The Duma working group will reportedly hear proposals on the confiscation of personal property, removal of state awards, and internet content bans and will report to Duma chairman Vyacheslav Volodin, who first proposed the confiscation of property in January.[43] Russian State Duma Committee of State Construction and Legislation chairperson Pavel Krashennnikov, however, opposed efforts to punitively confiscate property from those who left Russia and emphasized the need for legislative amendments for existing law before such a motion can pass.[44] The divergence between Krashennnikov and the Volodin camp suggests that there are certain fractures within the Russian political sphere on how to treat those who fled the country due to the war, as ISW has previously assessed.[45] United Russia parliamentarian Andrey Kolesnik called for those who left Russia and criticize the Russian Armed Forces to face the death penalty, suggesting that even more hardline factions continue to advocate for their positions. [46]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is reportedly proposing a bill to allow all military personnel, including conscripts, to voluntarily participate in Russian peacekeeping missions.[47] Russian outlet *RBC* claimed on February 7 to have received a document pertaining to the bill, which reportedly proposes to expand categories of personnel eligible for participation in peacekeeping missions to be recruited "on a voluntary basis by military personnel who have undergone preliminary special training," which includes conscripts under existing Russian law.[48] The explanatory note on the document states that the Russian MoD is proposing this law to "improve the procedure" and "expand the possibilities" of recruitment for peacekeeping activities.[49] It is unclear why the Russian MoD is pursuing this proposal as it continues efforts to formalize Russian operations in Ukraine, but it may be an effort to set conditions to secure capabilities for peacekeeping missions abroad.

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)

Russian occupation authorities continue to target religious organizations that lack Kremlin backing. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on February 7 that Russian occupation authorities are searching churches and detaining religious leaders of several denominations, including the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses, in order to decrease local competition for influence with the state-affiliated Russian Orthodox Church.[50]

Russian authorities simplified the process to deprive Ukrainian citizens of their citizenship. The Russian State Duma adopted the first reading of a bill on February 7 that automatically deprives Ukrainian citizens of Ukrainian citizenship when they file to renounce their citizenship.[51] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 7 that occupation authorities in Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast, threaten to dismiss state employees without Russian citizenship and require all employees with Russian citizenship to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship in writing.[52] The Luhansk Oblast Military Administration stated on February 7 that occupation authorities in Luhansk Oblast predicate pensions and teaching positions on renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship and possession of a Russian passport.[53] The Luhansk Oblast Military Administration also stated that occupation authorities near Kremmina allow teachers who have not renounced Ukrainian citizenship and accepted Russian citizenship to continue working but reduce their salaries by 30 percent.[54]

Ukrainian partisans continue to target Russian military infrastructure in rear areas of occupied Ukraine. Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai stated on February 7 that Ukrainian partisans committed arson against a Rovenky-Anratsyt railway connection control station near Yasenivskiy, Luhansk Oblast.[55]

Russian authorities continue to frame partisan activity and other forms of resistance in occupied Ukraine as terrorist activity to justify crackdowns against pro-Ukrainian actors. The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Territorial Defense Headquarters announced on February 7 that the DNR is forming an anti-terrorist commission to organize law enforcement efforts and official means of preventing alleged "terrorist and extremist manifestations." [56] A prominent Russian news source claimed

that some Ukrainian residents near the Vuhledar, Donetsk Oblast front line who refuse to evacuate to rear areas may transmit information about Russian troop movements to Ukrainian forces.[57] The source claimed that Russian forces see the “evacuation” of civilians to rear areas as the best solution to this problem, suggesting that Russian authorities may increase measures to force civilians to evacuate and cooperate with the occupation government.

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.)

Senior Belarusian leadership, including unspecified members of the presidential administration, security council, and department heads, conducted a large-scale training simulation on national security responses at the Belarusian Military Academy on February 7.[58] The Belarusian Ministry of Defense previously announced a snap military readiness check of the Military Academy of Belarus on February 6, as ISW has reported.[59]

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. Two unspecified airborne assault companies of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Assault Brigade conducted live fire and reconnaissance exercises at the Brest Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, on February 7.[60]

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

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[4] <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-28-2023>

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