

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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January 25, 2024, 9pm ET

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

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

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

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:00pm ET on January 25. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 26 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian and Russian authorities opened criminal investigations into the January 24 Russian Il-76 military transport aircraft crash in Belgorod Oblast. The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) announced on January 25 that it opened an investigation to clarify the circumstances of the crash, and the Russian Investigative Committee stated that it opened a criminal case on charges of “terrorism” in connection with the Il-76 crash after claiming that an initial investigation determined that a Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile downed the aircraft.[1] Ukrainian and Western media reported that the UN Security Council (UNSC) held an emergency meeting to discuss the Il-76 crash at Russia's request on the evening of January 25 after Russian sources claimed that France rejected Russia's request for the meeting in France's capacity as rotating UNSC Chair.[2] Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lubinets warned that Russia intends to co-opt the Il-76 crash to destabilize Ukraine domestically and reduce Western support Ukraine.[3] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov noted that Russia has not provided any evidence of Russian claims that Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) were on the aircraft.[4] Russian State Duma Defense Committee Chairperson Andrei Kartapolov claimed that Russian authorities gave Ukraine a 15-minute warning before the Il-76 aircraft entered the area where it was shot down.[5] Ukrainian officials continue to deny that they received a written or verbal Russia request to secure the air space around Belgorod City, however.[6] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger insinuated that Russia should not provide any data from the crash site or evidence of the claimed presence of Ukrainian POWs on the aircraft because the international community has previously dismissed Russian evidence, referring to the international investigation into the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 by Russian-backed proxies in occupied Donetsk Oblast[7] Kartapolov stated that Russia will continue POW exchanges because Russia “cannot abandon [its] guys,” a notable reversal from Kartapolov's calls for all POW exchanges to pause indefinitely immediately following the[8] ISW continues to offer no assessment of the circumstances of the Il-76 crash at this time and cannot independently verify Russian or Ukrainian statements on the incident.

Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of January 24 to 25. Ukrainian military officials reported on January 25 that Russian forces

launched 14 Shahed-136/131 drones from Krasnodar Krai and occupied Crimea, four S-300 missiles from Belgorod Oblast, and another S-300 missile from occupied Donetsk Oblast.[9] Ukrainian air defenses destroyed 11 Shaheds.[10] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian air defenses also intercepted a Kh-59 missile over Mykolaiv Oblast.[11] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones struck an enterprise in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and an industrial facility and residential buildings in Odesa City, and that Russian S-300 missiles struck civilian targets in Rohan, Kharkiv Oblast and Druzhkivka, Donetsk Oblast.[12]

The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) reportedly conducted a successful drone strike on a Rosneft oil refinery in Tuapse, Krasnodar Krai on the night of January 24 to 25. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on January 25, citing an unspecified source, that the SBU conducted a drone strike on the refinery and that Ukraine will continue to target economically and militarily important objects in Russia.[13] Geolocated footage published on January 24 shows a fire at the Rosneft oil refinery in Tuapse, and additional footage reportedly shows drones operating in the area before and after residents reported explosions at the refinery.[14] Russian sources claimed on January 25 that the refinery had 112 tons of gasoline and 200 tons of fuel oil at the time of the strike.[15] Russian milbloggers claimed that the SBU strike shows that Ukrainian forces are not "suckers" and that rear areas are not "safe place[s]" in modern war.[16]

Russian forces are reportedly increasing their use of chemical weapons in Ukraine in continued apparent violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Russia is party. Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Center for the Research of Trophy and Prospective Weapons and Military Equipment of the Ukrainian General Staff Captain Andrii Rudyk stated on January 25 that Russian forces began using RG-VO grenades with chloroacetophenone, a type of tear gas used for riot control (also known as a Riot Control Agent [RCA]), in December 2023 and that Ukrainian officials observed 81 instances of Russian forces using the RG-VO grenades in December 2023.[17] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 13 that Russian forces began using a new type of special gas grenade containing CS gas (2-Chlorobenzalmalononitrile – also an RCA) on December 14 and that Russian forces have used chemical weapons at least 51 times in the first two weeks of 2024.[18] The Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade previously acknowledged on December 22 that the brigade deliberately uses chemical weapons by dropping K-51 grenades with CS gas from drones onto Ukrainian positions near Krynky in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast.[19] Rudyk stated that the RG-VO grenades can kill personnel in a dugout or an enclosed room within five minutes and that a study found that a recently used Russian RG-VO grenade was manufactured in an unspecified but likely Russian factory in 2023.[20] Rudyk added that Russia may be trying to gauge international reactions to the Russian use of chemical weapons in Ukraine in order to expand the type of weapons Russian forces are using.[21] Russia is party to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which prohibits the use of RCAs as a method of warfare.[22]

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that Russia's war in Ukraine is "directed against the very existence of Ukraine as a sovereign state."[23] Scholz stated at a press conference

with Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico on January 24 that Russian President Vladimir Putin “can end this war at any time” and warned that “if Ukrainians stop defending themselves, it will be the end of Ukraine.” Scholz warned against accepting the idea that the lack of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine is prolonging the war, noting that there was “no shortage of discussions” in the run-up to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Kremlin officials continue to indicate that Russia is not interested in negotiating with Ukraine in good faith and that Russia’s maximalist objectives — which are tantamount to full Ukrainian and Western surrender — remain unchanged.[24]

Russian authorities issued prison sentences in a number of high-profile cases on January 25, including that of imprisoned Russian ultranationalist and former officer Igor Girkin. A Moscow court sentenced Girkin to four years in prison on “calls for extremism” charges and banned Girkin from administering websites for three years.[25] Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) “Vostok” Battalion Commander Alexander Khodakovsky stated that despite his disagreements with Girkin, he “would prefer to see him free” and noted Girkin’s “significance for events in Donbas.”[26] A volunteer in a Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) brigade similarly claimed that his personal issues with Girkin “in no way undid everything [Girkin] did.”[27] A Russian milblogger claimed that there is something “wrong” with the fact that one of the Russian Spring leaders in Donbas from 2014 is in prison and not fighting on the front.[28]

The Second Western District Military Court in St. Petersburg sentenced Daria Trepova to 27 years in prison on charges of commissioning a terrorist attack, illegally trafficking explosive devices, and forging documents in the case of the assassination of Russian milblogger Maksim Fomin (Vladlen Tatarsky).[29] Moscow Duma Deputy Andrei Medvedev claimed that this verdict is a “precedent” that will guide future sentences and that will make “many who want to work with [Ukraine]...wonder if it is worth it.”[30] Kremlin newswire *TASS* stated that the Izmailovsky Court of Moscow sentenced former Penza Oblast Governor Ivan Belozertsev to 12 years in a maximum-security prison colony for taking bribes worth more than 30 million rubles (about \$337,000) from former Russian Senator Boris Shpigel.[31] The court also sentenced Shpigel to 11 years.[32]

The Kremlin is reportedly no longer offering pardons to convict recruits and is significantly changing the terms of their service, likely in response to the reduction of the pool of convicts suitable for recruitment into Russian force generation efforts. The *BBC* reported that Russian officials likely ended recruitment into “Storm-Z” units in August 2023 and began recruiting convicts into “Storm-V” units based on new contract terms in September 2023.[33] Russian officials previously recruited convicts through promises of pardons and six-month contracts, and “Storm-V” units reportedly provide no promise of pardon or even parole and extend convicts’ contracts indefinitely until the end of the war.[34] Russian officials likely extended the contracts on the basis of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s partial mobilization order as the Russian military does for mobilized personnel. The *BBC* reported that Russian military registration and enlistment offices formally release convict recruits in a procedure that is no longer legally equivalent to “parole/conditional release,” suggesting that convict recruits are legally still considered prisoners.[35]

Russia has heavily relied on convict recruits to maintain a level of force generation that is roughly equivalent to Russian losses in Ukraine, and which is likely helping enable Russian forces to conduct regular operational-level rotations.[36] Russian officials reported that as of October 2023 the Russian prison population was 266,000 people — a notable reduction of 54,000 prisoners from January 2023.[37] The loss of convict recruits to attritional assaults in Ukraine and the relatively short terms of their service contracts may have prompted the Kremlin to enact more restrictive terms of service in order to retain more convict recruits at the front in Ukraine. The contract terms for service in new “Storm-V” units are far less attractive and may dampen efforts to recruit convicts, although Russian officials have routinely used coercive measures to force convicts to sign contracts.[38]

Russian officials may have also changed the status of convict recruits in order to relieve force generation burdens on the Russian federal budget. Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on January 25 that Storm-Z personnel addressed a letter to Putin asking him to resolve a widespread lack of promised payments, payments for injuries, and documents on the expungement of criminal records for Storm-Z personnel.[39] *Vazhnye Istorii* reported that a response from a Russian military prosecutor’s office to a Storm-Z fighter stated that Putin’s recent decree promising single payments in cases of injury or death do not apply to Storm-Z fighters.[40]

A Russian insider source claimed that the Russian military command recently replaced the Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) and appointed a new SMD Chief of Staff, although ISW cannot confirm this claim. The Russian insider source, who has previously provided accurate reports regarding several other Russian command changes, claimed on January 25 that the Russian command appointed 8th Combined Arms Army Commander (CAA) Colonel General Gennady Anashkin as SMD Chief of Staff and replaced SMD Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Aleksey Zavizion with Lieutenant General Andrey Sychevoy.[41] The change in command positions within the SMD is particularly notable given that several formations of the SMD, particularly elements of the 8th CAA, are committed to ongoing localized offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast.[42] Changes in command do not necessarily translate to battlefield effects, although such changes may present temporary challenges to Russian command and control (C2). The Russian Command previously dismissed Sychevoy as Western Grouping of Forces Commander in late August 2022, following the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast, and from an unspecified command position in October 2023 and replaced Zavizion as Chief of Staff of the Western Military District (WMD) in late June 2022.[43]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian and Russian authorities opened criminal investigations into the January 24 Russian Il-76 military transport aircraft crash in Belgorod Oblast.**
- **Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of January 24 to 25.**

- **The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) reportedly conducted a successful drone strike on a Rosneft oil refinery in Tuapse, Krasnodar Krai on the night of January 24 to 25.**
- **Russian forces are reportedly increasing their use of chemical weapons in Ukraine in continued apparent violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Russia is party.**
- **German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that Russia’s war in Ukraine is “directed against the very existence of Ukraine as a sovereign state.”**
- **Russian authorities issued prison sentences in a number of high-profile cases on January 25, including that of imprisoned Russian ultranationalist and former officer Igor Girkin.**
- **The Kremlin is reportedly no longer offering pardons to convict recruits and is significantly changing the terms of their service, likely in response to the reduction of the pool of convicts suitable for recruitment into Russian force generation efforts.**
- **A Russian insider source claimed that the Russian military command recently replaced the Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) and appointed a new SMD Chief of Staff, although ISW cannot confirm this claim.**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka amid continued positional engagements along the entire line of contact on January 25.**
- ***Bloomberg* reported on January 24 that labor shortages in Russia have increased wages in civilian sectors enough to compete with relatively lucrative military salaries, likely making military service even less appealing to Russian citizens.**
- **Crimean occupation head Sergei Aksyonov signed a decree on January 25 that introduces a “special regime” for entry and exit between occupied Crimea and occupied Kherson Oblast reportedly in an effort to “localize threats to the security of the population and military and other facilities” in occupied Crimea.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Activities in Russian-Occupied Areas
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

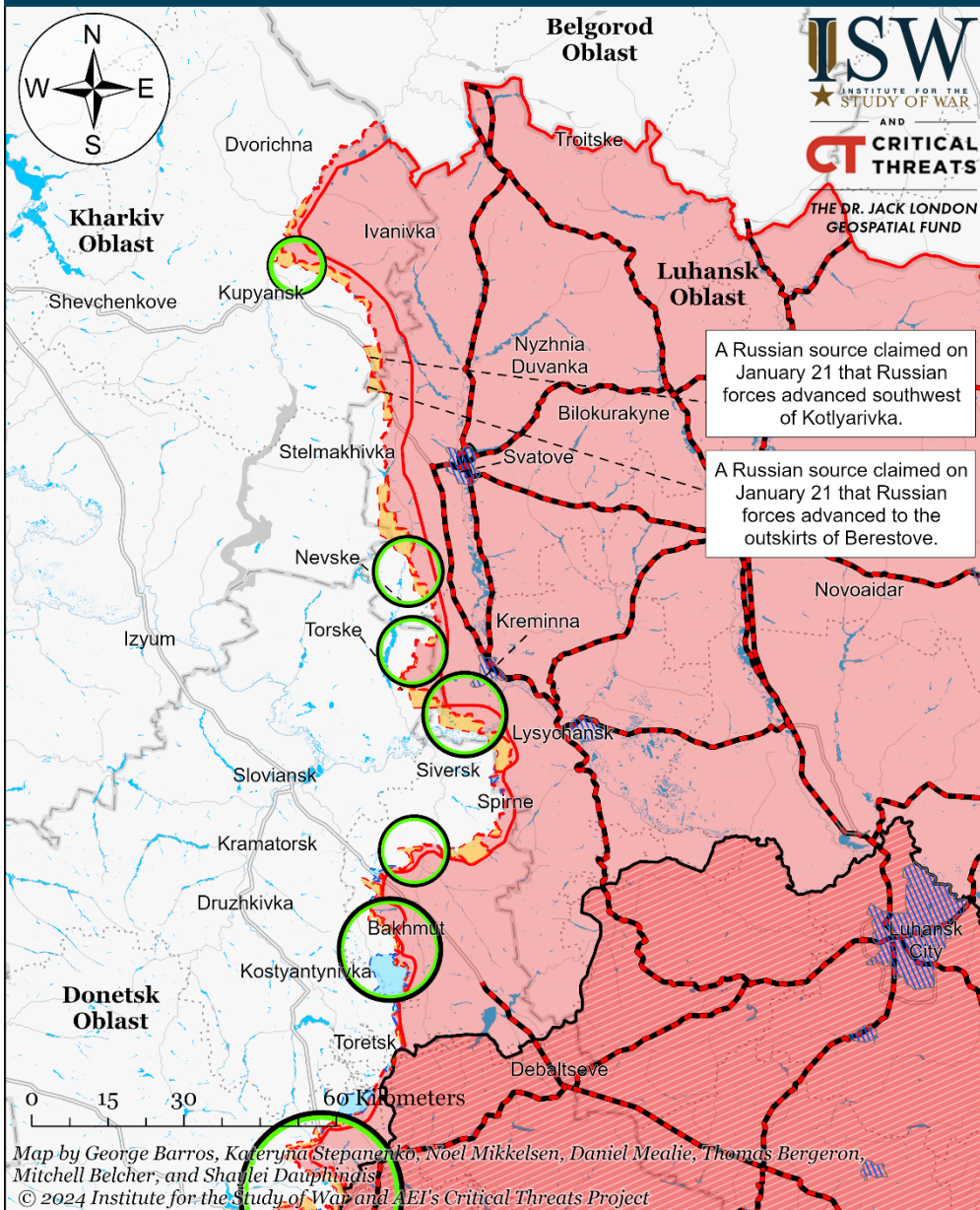
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Positional engagements continued near Kupyansk, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area on January 25. Positional engagements continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka and southeast of Kupyansk near Krokmalne.[44] The spokesperson for a Ukrainian unit operating in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction stated that Russian forces continue conducting attacks with infantry groups of up to 20 personnel with unspecified mechanized support and that the intensity of Russian artillery fire in the area almost doubled in the past day.[45] The Ukrainian spokesperson stated that Russian forces are conducting personnel rotations almost weekly but that there is no noticeable increase in the number of Russian personnel in the area.[46]

Russian forces reportedly advanced along the Svatove-Kreminna line, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area on January 25. Positional engagements continued northwest of Svatove near Stelmakhivka; northwest and west of Kreminna near Yampolivka, Makiivka, Torske, and Terny; southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova and the Serebryanske forest area; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.[47] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces near Svatove are trying to establish control over Berestove (northwest of Svatove) and the nearby heights.[48] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced towards Terny and east and south of Bilohorivka, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[49] A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian minefields are complicating Russian offensive operations near Bilohorivka.[50] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 20th Combined Arms Army (Western Military District [WMD]) and the 25th Combined Arms Army (reportedly either Central Military District or Eastern Military District) have not advanced to Terny or cut off the P07 Torske-

Yampolivka-Terny-Nevske road after resuming offensive operations in the area 1.5 weeks ago.^[51] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 252nd Motorized Rifle Regiment and 237th Tank Regiment (both of the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division, 20th Combined Arms Army, WMD) abandoned several unspecified positions near Makiivka.^[52]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of January 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



A Russian source claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced southwest of Kotlyarivka.

A Russian source claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced to the outskirts of Berestove.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shaylei Dauphinais
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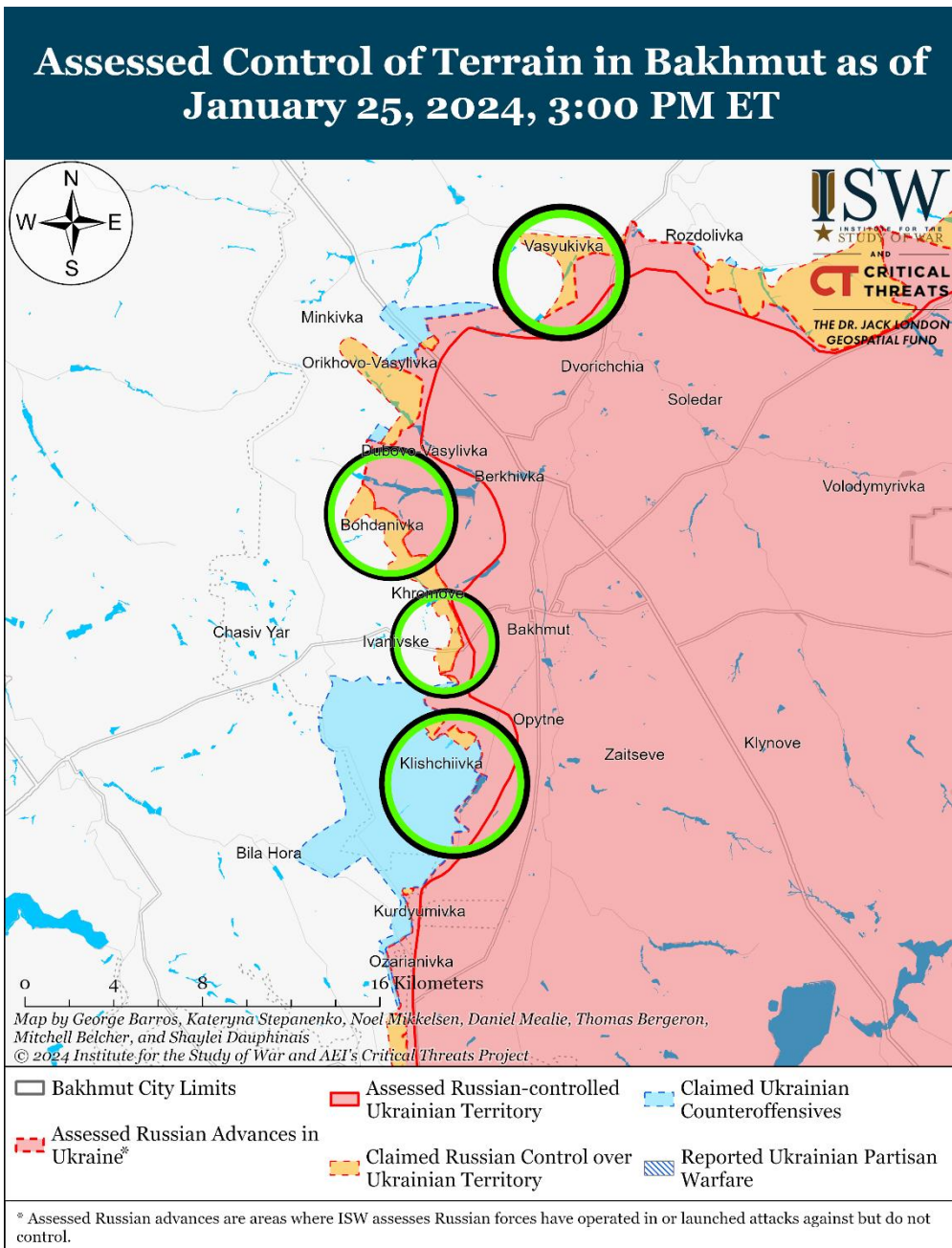
	Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours		Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*		Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
	Russian Ground Lines of Communication		Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory		Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
	Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24		Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory		

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

Note: A Russian source claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced up to 400 meters along a 1.5-kilometers-wide front near Bilohorivka. A Russian source claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced four kilometers along a 1.5-kilometers-wide front along the Kotlyarivka-Kyslivka line.

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

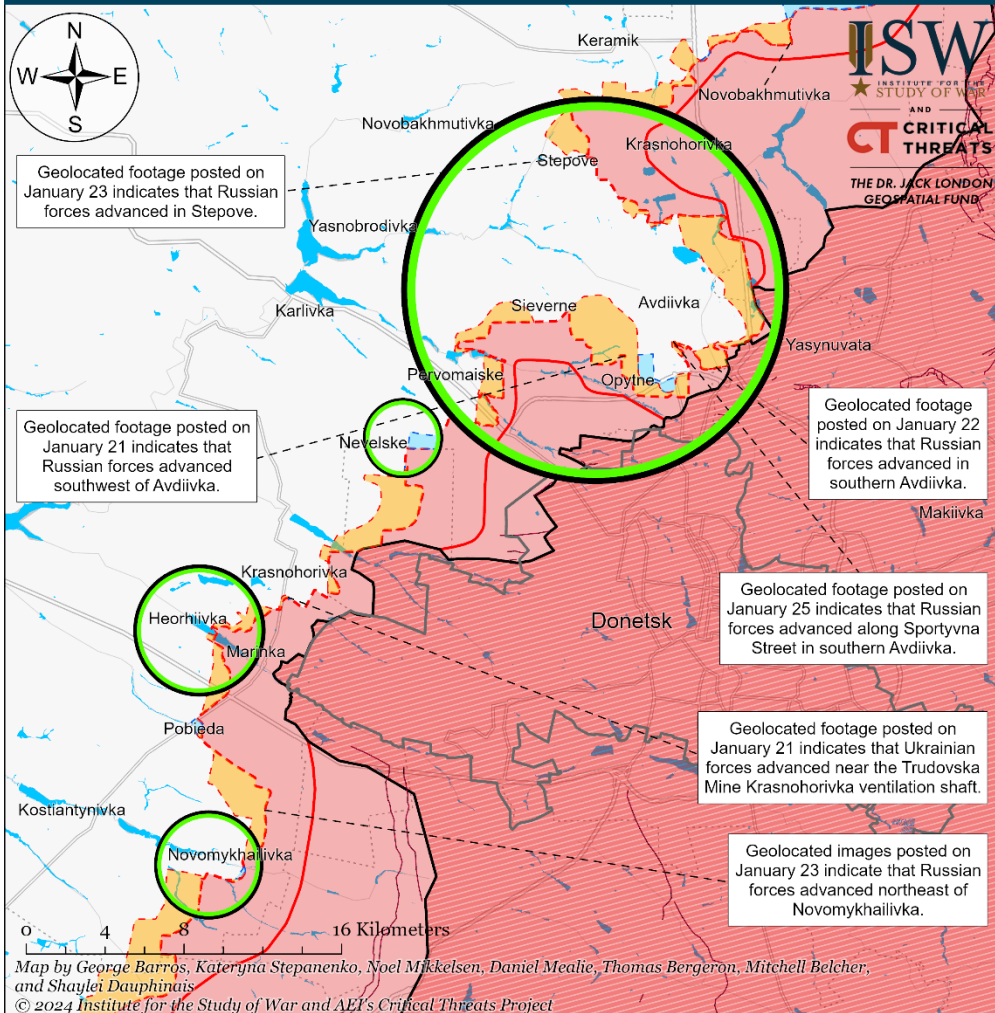
Positional engagements continued near Bakhmut on January 25. Positional fighting occurred northwest of Bakhmut near Vasyukivka and Bohdanivka, west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske, and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[53] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division's 331st and 217th VDV regiments, elements of the Volunteer Assault Corps, the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Northern Fleet), and 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] 2nd Army Corps) are reportedly operating west and northwest of Bakhmut.[54] Elements of the 72nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd Army Corps, Western Military District) and other unspecified elements of the LNR 2nd Army Corps and 3rd Army Corps are reportedly operating near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[55]



Russian forces recently advanced north of Avdiivka and on Avdiivka's southern outskirts, and Ukrainian forces reportedly recently made marginal gains south of the settlement. Geolocated footage published on January 25 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Stepove (northwest of Avdiivka) and along Sportyvna street in the southernmost residential area of Avdiivka.[56] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces recently advanced up to 100 meters near the "Tsarska Okhota" restaurant area, although ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[57] Russian sources claimed on January 25 that Ukrainian forces have been counterattacking to regain previously lost positions near the "Tsarska Okhota" restaurant area for the previous three days.[58] Positional fighting continued northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka and Stepove, on Avdiivka's southern outskirts, south of Avdiivka near Opytne and Spartak, west of Avdiivka near Sieverne, and southwest of Avdiivka near Nevelske and Pervomaiske.[59] Ukrainian National Guard Spokesperson Colonel Ruslan Muzychuk stated that Russian forces are using slightly fewer armored vehicles near Avdiivka and are relying more on small infantry groups to conduct reconnaissance and assaults.[60] Muzychuk stated that during the day Ukrainian forces observed Russian forces near Avdiivka conduct 10 assaults employing varying tactics and that Russian forces in the area routinely employ a combination of various tactics during offensive operations.[61] Elements of the 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka, elements of the 1st Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) and the 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) are reportedly operating near Opytne and Spartak, and elements of the "Veterany" Reconnaissance and Assault Brigade (Volunteer Assault Corps) are reportedly operating near the "Tsarska Okhota" restaurant area.[62] Elements of the 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) are also reportedly operating in the Avdiivka area.[63]

Russian forces appear to be preparing to fight their way through Avdiivka after failing to encircle the settlement. Russian forces have recently focused offensive operations on the southern residential area of Avdiivka and have made marginal gains there.[64] Russian forces are still attacking against Avdiivka's northern and southern flanks but at a tempo far below the scale of the initial waves of Russian mechanized assaults on Avdiivka's flanks in fall 2023.[65] The overall tempo of Russian offensive operations suggests that Russian forces have prioritized fighting through Avdiivka block-by-block from the town's southern residential area instead of trying to further encircle the settlement from further southwest or to the north, where Russian forces have made only limited gains. Russian forces may seek to replicate attritional light infantry frontal assaults to make tactical gains by brute force, as Russian forces did during the Battle of Bakhmut after breaching Bakhmut's city limits. Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs Major Maxim Morozov stated on January 25 that Russian forces have accumulated 40,000 personnel near Avdiivka and are preparing to intensify offensive operations against the city.[66] It is unclear if the rate of Russian advance in Avdiivka will increase substantially. Future combat in the city will likely resemble recent instances of urban warfare in eastern Ukraine, wherein Russian forces conduct attritional assaults for marginal gains.[67] Ukraine's hypothetical loss of Avdiivka would not threaten to unhinge Ukraine's defense of Donetsk Oblast, even if Russian forces eventually manage to make costly tactical gains in the town over the coming months.

Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of January 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



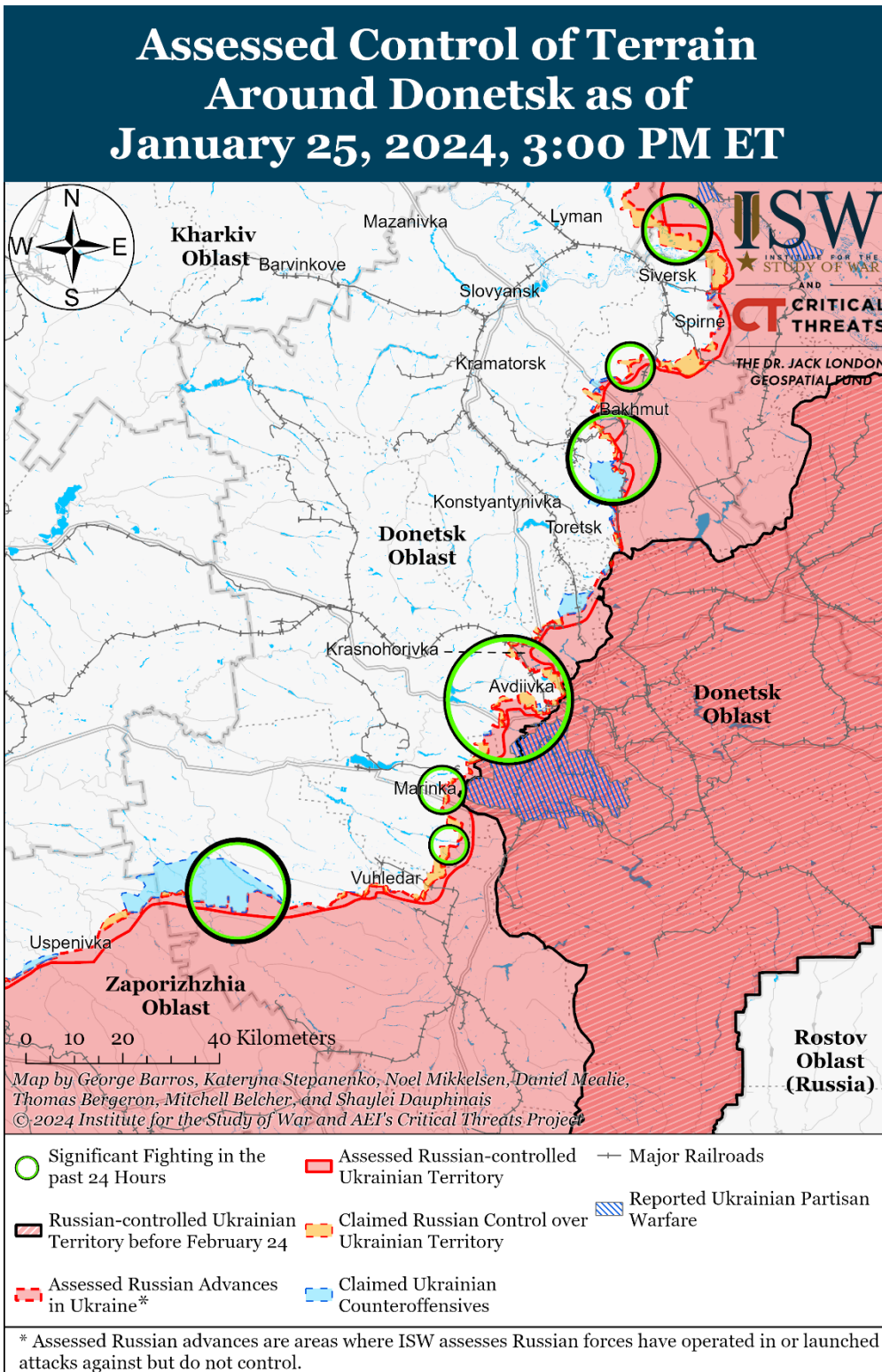
Donetsk City Limits	Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	Russian Field Fortifications

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

Note: A Ukrainian source claimed on January 25 that Ukrainian forces recaptured between 80 and 100 meters south of Avdiivka. A Ukrainian source claimed on January 25 that Ukrainian forces recaptured between 500 meters and 1.5 kilometers in the Novomykhailivka direction. A Russian source claimed on January 23 that Russian forces advanced over one kilometer near the Avdiivka sand quarry. Russian sources claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced up to 300 meters on Zhovtneva Street and along a frontline 250 meters wide and 240 meters deep near the Church of All Saints in Heorhiivka. A Russian source claimed on January 21 that Russian forces advanced up to one and a half kilometers wide and 700 meters deep in an unspecified area south of Avdiivka.

Ukrainian forces reportedly recently advanced southwest of Donetsk City. Mashovets stated on January 25 that Ukrainian forces recently advanced 500 meters to 1.5 kilometers along a section of the frontline south of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City), although ISW has not seen confirmation of this advance.[68] Mashovets stated that elements of the 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps, Eastern Military District) had previously established footholds at elevated positions near Novomykhailivka but that the Russian command continued to commit degraded elements of the 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade without resting, reequipping, or reinforcing the force, allowing Ukrainian

forces to recapture territory in the area.[69] Positional fighting occurred near Heorhiivka (west of Donetsk City), Pobieda (southwest of Donetsk City), and Novomykhailivka.[70] Elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) and the 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Guards Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) are reportedly operating near Novomykhailivka.[71]

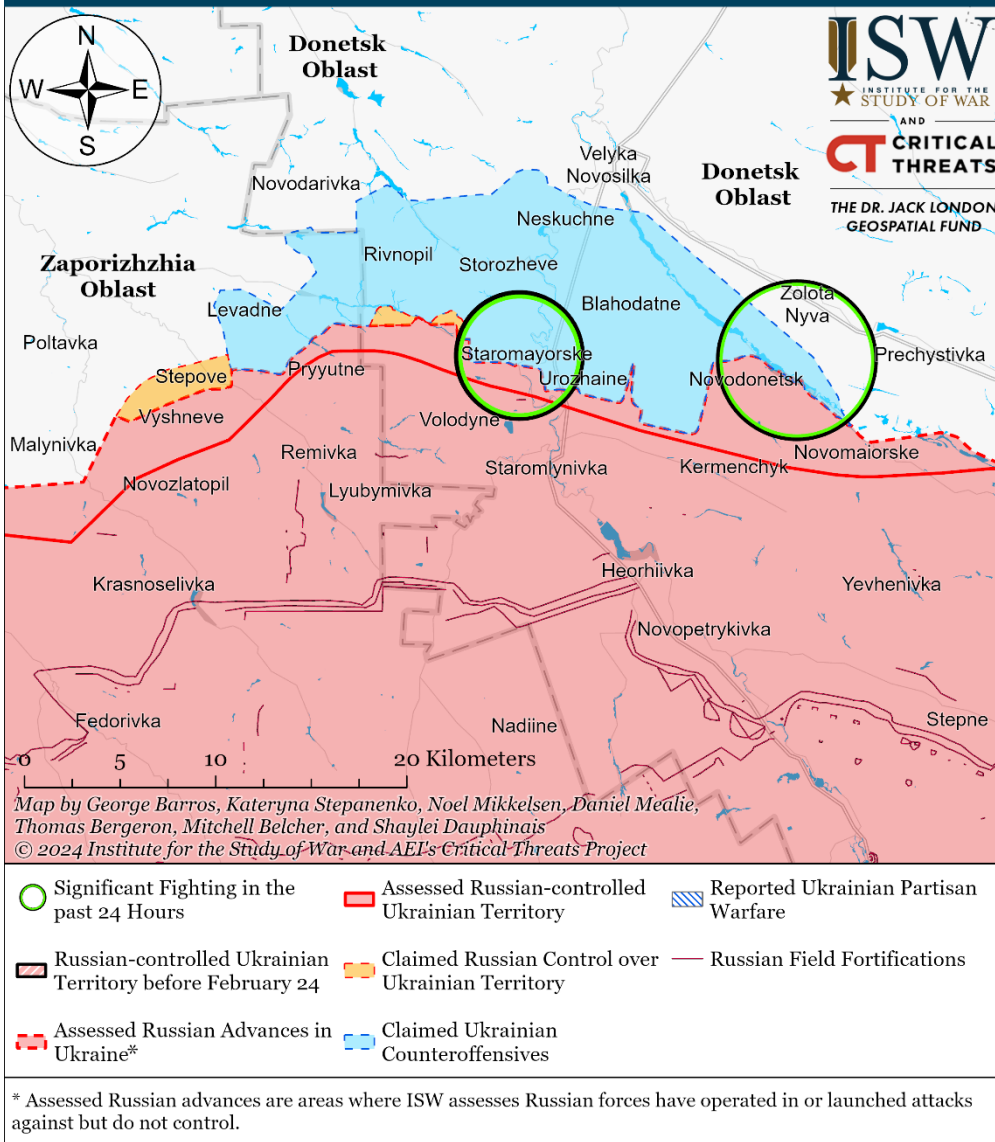


Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian drone training facility near occupied Ilovaisk, Donetsk Oblast, on January 25.[72] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces struck a drone training facility operated by Russian military unit no. 78528 near Pokrovka (east of Ilovaisk), killing 24 Russian personnel.[73] A Russian source suggested that poor operational security led to the Ukrainian strike.[74]

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

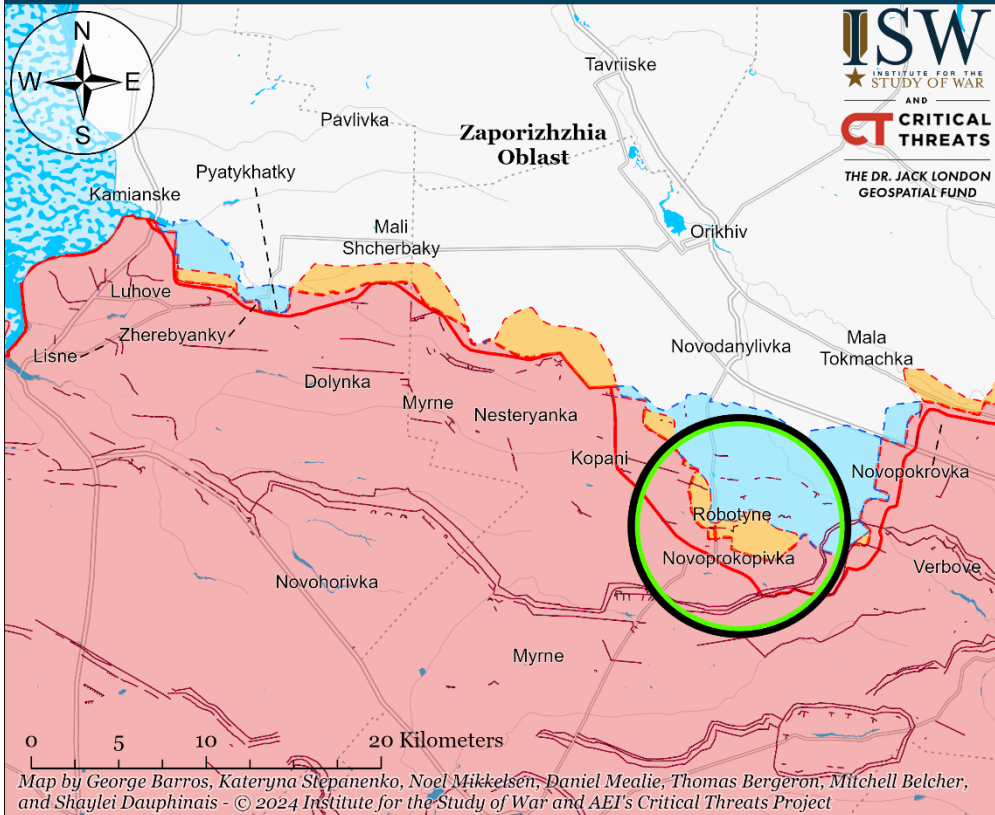
A Ukrainian source reported on January 25 that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast, but ISW has not observed visual evidence to confirm this report. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported that Ukrainian forces pushed back Russian forces by 150 meters northeast of Zavitne Bazhannya (12km south of Velyka Novosilka).[75] Mashovets specified that elements of the Russian 60th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District) and 37th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th CAA, EMD) are operating near Zavitne Bazhannya. Positional engagements continued east and west of Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka) and south of Zolota Nyva (southeast of Velyka Novosilka).[76] Elements of the 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) are reportedly continuing to operate in the southern Donetsk direction (an area from Novomykhailivka to the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area).[77]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of January 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Ukrainian forces reportedly recently advanced northwest of Robotyne but ISW have not observed recent changes to the frontline as of January 25. Mashovets reported that Ukrainian forces advanced up to one kilometer in depth southwest of Myrne (16km northwest of Robotyne) within the defense zone of the Russian 69th Covering Brigade (35th CAA, EMD).[78] Mashovets reported that Ukrainian forces were able to repel an attack by elements of the Russian 70th Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, Southern Military District) back towards Novoprokopivka (south of Robotyne) after these elements attempted to attack Ukrainian positions near Robotyne.[79] Mashovets added that Ukrainian forces continue holding positions 1.5 to two kilometers (presumably in frontage) on the Russian main defensive line northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne) despite continuous pressure from the Russian 76th Airborne (VDV) Division. Positional battles occurred southeast and west of Robotyne and near Verbove.[80]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of January 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



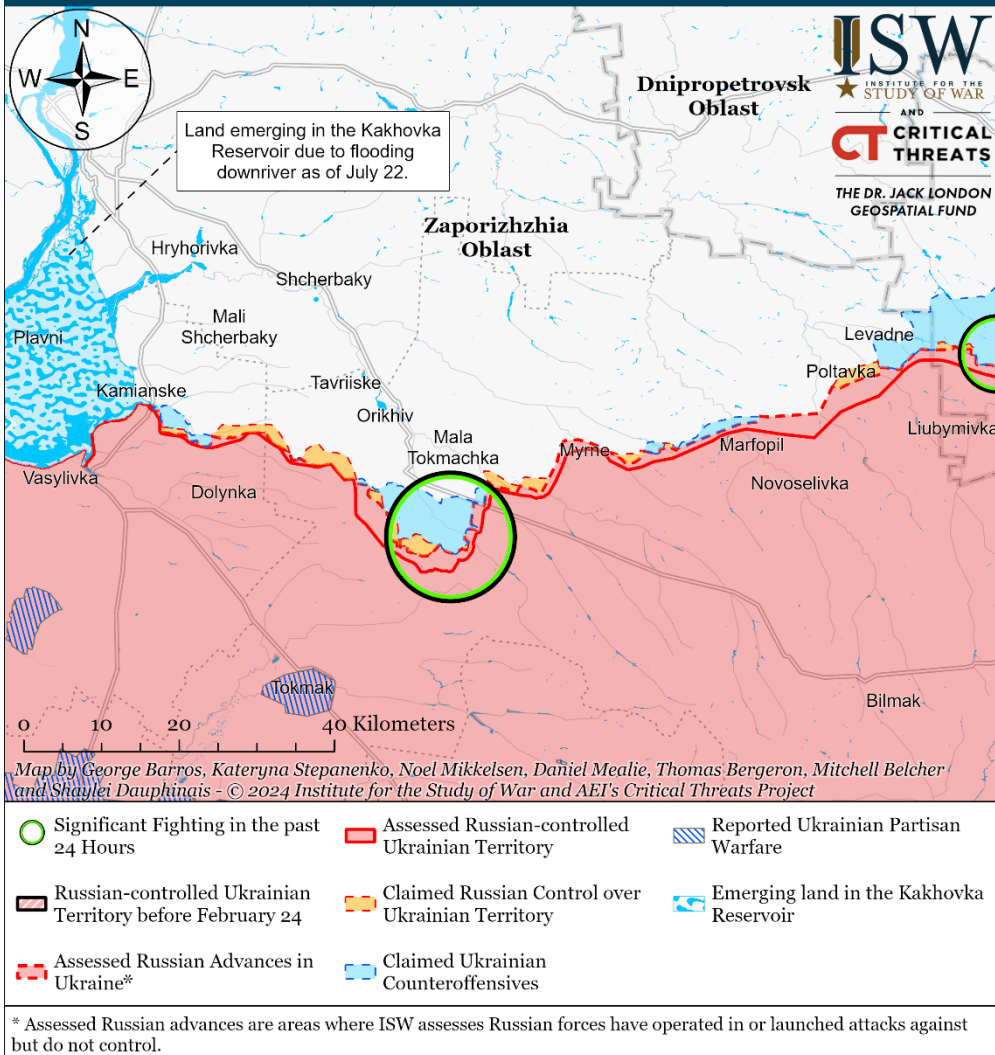
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shaylei Dauphinais - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory | Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir |
| Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine* | Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives | Russian Field Fortifications |

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

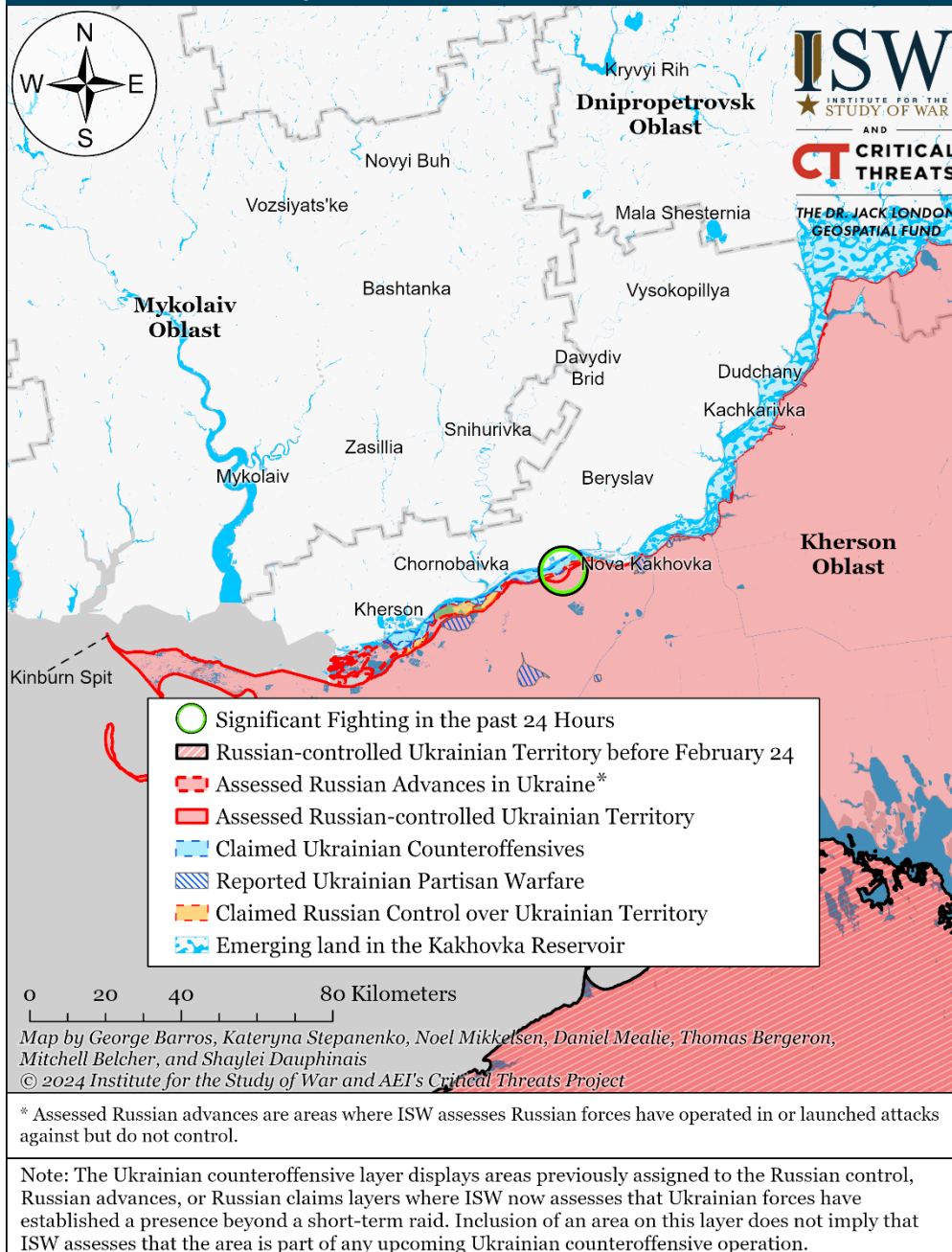
Note: A Ukrainian source claimed on January 25 that Ukrainian forces recaptured up to one kilometer in the Orikhiv direction.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of January 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Positional fighting continued on January 25 in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast near Krynky, but neither side made any confirmed advances.[81] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces made an unspecified advance in the Krynky area, but other Russian sources noted that the frontline did not change.[82]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 25, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

Bloomberg reported on January 24 that labor shortages in Russia have driven up private sector wages enough to compete with relatively lucrative military salaries, likely making military service even less appealing to Russian citizens. *Bloomberg* reported that Russian civilian wages increased between eight and 20 percent in 2023 and that Russian skilled and semi-skilled workers can now opt for civilian sector jobs with salaries comparable to or greater than military salaries. Kremlin-affiliated outlet *Izvestiya*

reported on December 24, 2023 that data from the Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) and the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences indicated that Russia's labor shortage in 2023 amounted to about 4.8 million people, and ISW assessed at that time that Russia's labor shortages will likely continue to exacerbate competing Kremlin efforts aimed at increasing Russian economic output and generating new forces.[83] ISW previously assessed that Russia continues to face shortages in both skilled and unskilled labor, a problem that is further compounded by the Kremlin's inconsistent rhetoric towards Russians who fled Russia because of the war and migrant workers in Russia.[84] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated during an interview on January 15 that the main motivation for Russians to join the military is "the salary," particularly for Russians from poorer Russian federal subjects.[85] Reported increases in civilian salaries to rival military salaries will likely worsen Russia's force generation issues.

Deputy Chairperson of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev chaired a meeting of the Military-Industry Commission working group on January 25 and discussed increasing the effectiveness of Russian counterbattery warfare and the development and production of radar systems and artillery reconnaissance.[86]

A Russian insider source claimed on January 25 that former Wagner Group personnel who joined Rosgvardia are recruiting personnel for an unspecified claimed Wagner "revival".[87] The insider source claimed that former Wagner personnel are attempting to attract other former mercenaries to fight in Ukraine and are advertising that recruitment will begin around February 10 in Kozachiye Lageri, Rostov Oblast. Wagner-affiliated Russian milbloggers previously claimed in October and November 2023 that significant elements of the Wagner Group that previously fought in Ukraine became detachments of Rosgvardia and retained its structures and commanders.[88] ISW cannot confirm the insider source's claim.

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

A Russian milblogger claimed on January 25 that the Russian "Perseus" drone production project and the "NPO TsVBP" research and development organization are partnering to produce drones and remote-controlled tracked vehicles with domestically produced speed controllers and electronic components.[89]

Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)

Click [here](#) to read ISW's new analysis on Ukrainian long-term efforts to develop a self-sufficient DIB with US and European support.

Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov stated on January 25 that Ukraine will receive 2,020 first-person view (FPV) drones equipped with Ukrainian-made ammunition weighing up

to four kilograms to Ukrainian forces during an unspecified time period.[90] Fedorov stated that he expects Ukraine to receive 3,000 strike drones with thermal imaging optics.

The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) stated on January 25 that the SBU, the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office, and the Ukrainian MoD have returned almost 1.5 billion Ukrainian hryvnia (almost \$40,000,000) to the Ukrainian budget after the SBU exposed a Ukrainian official trying to embezzle budget funds allocated for the purchase of artillery shells for Ukrainian forces.[91] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated that the Ukrainian MoD continues to work to expose such schemes and return embezzled funds to the state budget.[92]

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on January 25 that Sweden and the United Kingdom are joining the Latvian-created coalition to provide Ukraine with drones and that the UK will co-lead the coalition with Latvia.[93]

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius stated on January 24 that Germany plans to provide Ukraine over 80 Leopard tanks, over 230,000 rounds of ammunition, and an unspecified number of armored personnel carriers, drones, mine clearing systems, radar systems, and reconnaissance systems in 2024.[94] Pistorius stated that Germany also plans to train more Ukrainian personnel in Germany in 2024.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Dmytro Klimentov stated on January 25 at a meeting with Permanent Secretary of the Estonian Ministry of Defense Kusti Salm and Director of the Estonian Center for Defense Investments Magnus-Valdemar Saar that Estonia plans to provide Ukraine with military aid worth 0.25 percent of Estonia's GDP over the next four years.[95]

Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Crimean occupation head Sergei Aksyonov signed a decree on January 25 that introduces a "special regime" for entry and exit between occupied Crimea and occupied Kherson Oblast reportedly in an effort to "localize threats to the security of the population and military and other facilities" in occupied Crimea.[96] The decree stipulates that people must cross the border at three designated automobile and two railway checkpoints. The decree also specifies that military columns must move between the two areas along specially designated roads in cooperation with the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). The decree stipulates that people at the checkpoints must present identification documents and that military personnel and law enforcement officers must present combat orders or service certificates.

Russian occupation officials continue efforts to prepare for the March 2024 presidential election and ensure high voter turnout numbers. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov stated that members of the election commission will begin door-to-door visits on February 17 to spread information about election procedures.[97] Rogov stated that residents of occupied Zaporizhia Oblast without Russian passports will be able to vote by using other identity documents. Ukrainian Melitopol

Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated that occupation officials' door-to-door visits are part of efforts to force locals to vote and that workers from other countries whom Russian authorities have brought to occupied Ukraine will also be able to vote.[98] The Ukrainian Resistance Center stated on January 25 that Russian occupation authorities are looking for residents to participate in "election commissions" in exchange for money.[99] A Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) news outlet claimed on January 25 that Artem Zhoga, whom the Kremlin has previously portrayed as asking Putin to run for re-election in 2024, visited occupied Luhansk City to meet with Russian military personnel, their families, and residents as part of a campaign event for Russian President Vladimir Putin.[100] Zhoga reportedly stated that one of the goals of his visit was to convey that Putin cares about occupied Luhansk Oblast.

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian President Vladimir Putin demonstratively traveled to Kaliningrad on January 25 amidst the Kremlin's recent efforts to set information conditions for future Russian aggression against Baltic countries.[101] Putin notably condemned Russia's "neighbors" who are removing Soviet World War II memorials and monuments dedicated to 19th Century Russian poet Alexander Pushkin and noted that these removals show "stunning ignorance" with bad consequences.[102] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitri Peskov claimed that Putin's visit to Kaliningrad and his tour of the Kant Baltic Federal University is not a message to NATO but rather part of Putin doing his job.[103] Putin last travelled to Kaliningrad seven months into the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in September 2022.[104] Putin also reiterated Kremlin narratives about a multipolar world order and Russia's development. Putin similarly discussed growing Russian-Indian relations, likely in an attempt to woo India.[105]

Kremlin officials continued to push a false narrative that the West and NATO are escalating tensions with Russia by supporting Ukraine as part of efforts to deter Western military aid to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated the Kremlin narrative that Russia would not have launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine if the West had not backed Ukraine in 2014 during a press conference at the United Nations on January 24.[106] Peskov stated that the West continues to inflict pressure on Russia and that NATO's current exercises best show the West's anti-Russia policy.[107]

Russian sources intensified a known Russian information operation by amplifying a tired narrative that the United States is opening its 13th biological laboratory, now in Gyumri, Armenia — a narrative that Russia used to shape the Russian information space in winter 2022 before launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[108] ISW previously observed the Kremlin use information operations targeting Ukraine and the US during the COVID-19 pandemic to advance long-standing objectives abroad.[109]

Significant Activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)

A Russian milblogger posted footage on January 24 purportedly showing Wagner Group instructors training internal troops of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) in an unspecified location in Belarus.^[110]

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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