Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 30, 2023 Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Philipson, George Barros, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan January 30, 8:30pm ET

Click <u>here</u> 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.

Western, Ukrainian, and Russian sources continue to indicate that Russia is preparing for an imminent offensive, supporting ISW's assessment that an offensive in the coming months is the most likely course of action (MLCOA).¹ NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg stated on January 30 that there are no indications that Russia is preparing to negotiate for peace and that all indicators point to the opposite.² Stoltenberg noted that Russia may mobilize upwards of 200,000 personnel and is continuing to acquire weapons and ammunition through increased domestic production and partnerships with authoritarian states such as Iran and North Korea.³ Stoltenberg emphasized that Russian President Vladimir Putin retains his maximalist goals in Ukraine.⁴ Head of the Council of Reservists of the Ukrainian Ground Forces, Ivan Tymochko, relatedly stated that Russian forces are strengthening their grouping in Donbas as part of an anticipated offensive and noted that Russian forces will need to launch an offensive due to increasing domestic pressure for victory.5 Stoltenberg's and Tymochko's statements support ISW's previous forecast that Russian forces are setting conditions to launch an offensive effort, likely in Luhansk Oblast, in the coming months.⁶ Russian milbloggers additionally continued to indicate that the Russian information space is setting conditions for and anticipating a Russian offensive. Milbloggers amplified a statement made by a Russian Telegram channel that the current pace and nature of Russian operations indicate that the main forces of the anticipated offensive and promised breakthrough have not yet "entered the battle." This statement suggests that Russian milbloggers believe that Russian forces have not yet activated the elements required for a decisive offensive effort.8

Russia and Iran continued efforts to deepen economic ties. *NOTE: This item appeared in the Critical Threats Project (CTP)'s January 30 Iran Crisis Update.* Iranian state media reported that Iran and Russia established direct financial communication channels between Iranian banks and more than 800 Russian banks on January 29.9 Iranian Central Bank Deputy Governor Mohsen Karami announced that Iranian and Russian banks have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on financial messaging, effective immediately. Karami added that Iranian banks abroad were also included in the MoU and would be able to exchange standard banking messages with Russian banks. ¹⁰ Iranian officials and state-affiliated media outlets framed the MoU as a means to circumvent Western sanctions on Iran and Russia and compared the messaging system to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), which serves as the world's largest financial messaging system. ¹¹ ISW has previously reported on the deepening of economic and military ties between Tehran and Moscow. ¹²

Key Takeaways

• Western, Ukrainian, and Russian sources continue to indicate that Russia is preparing for an imminent offensive, supporting ISW's assessment that an offensive in the coming months is the most likely course of action (MLCOA).

- Iranian state media reported that Iran and Russia established direct financial communication channels between Iranian banks and more than 800 Russian banks on January 29.
- Russian forces continued ground attacks to regain lost positions west of Kreminna as Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations northwest of Svatove.
- Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian force concentrations in rear areas in Luhansk Oblast.
- Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks across the Donetsk Oblast front line.
- Russian forces continued to make marginal territorial gains near Bakhmut.
- Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continued measures to professionalize the Russian military as it faces continued backlash against these measures.
- Russian forces and occupation authorities continue to target Crimean Tatars in an effort to associate anti-Russia sentiment with extremist or terrorist activity.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 30, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

<u>Ukrainian Counteroffensives</u> (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

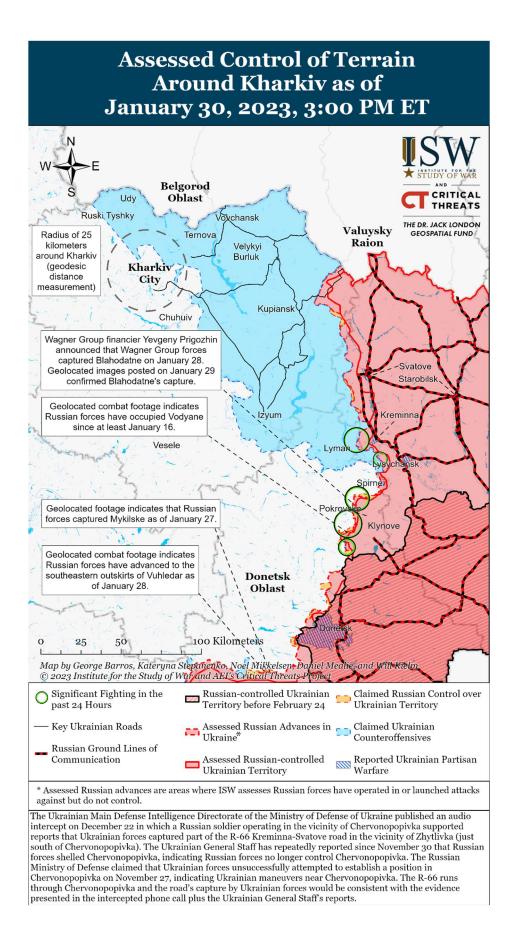
Eastern Ukraine: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive preparations northwest of Svatove on January 29 and 30. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 29 that Ukrainian forces attempted to counterattack in the Kuzemivka direction (13km northwest of Svatove), but Russian forces repelled the attack. Another Russian milblogger claimed on January 30 that Ukrainian forces laid mines along bridges northwest of Svatove in case Russian forces attempted to cross the Oskil River. Another Russian milblogger claimed on January 30 that the 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) advanced one kilometer north and occupied a few unspecified forest belts near Svatove.

Russian forces continued ground attacks to regain lost positions west of Kreminna on January 29 and 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 29 and January 30 that Ukrainian forces repelled assaults on Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna) and Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna) in Luhansk Oblast, and Yampolivka (16km west of Kreminna) in Donetsk Oblast. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 30 that Russian forces made unspecified advances in the Dibrova area and attacked in the direction of Yampolivka. Russian milbloggers posted footage on January 29 allegedly showing elements of the 76th Guards Air Assault Division (Western Military District), LNR 4th Territorial Defense Brigade, and 144th Motorized Rifle Division conducting offensive operations near Kreminna. Geolocated combat footage posted on January 30 shows Ukrainian forces shelling unspecified Russian targets west of Dibrova on an unspecified date, indicating that Ukrainian forces have made marginal advances southwest of Kreminna.

Ukrainian forces continue targeting Russian concentration areas in the rear of Luhansk Oblast. Geolocated footage posted on January 29 shows the aftermath of a purported Ukrainian HIMARS strike on a hospital in Novoaidar (55km east of Kreminna along the H21 Starobilsk-Luhansk City highway) in Luhansk Oblast.²¹ The LNR People's Militia claimed on January 30 that Ukrainian forces

used HIMARS to strike Alchevsk (38km west of Luhansk City). ²² Ukrainian forces reportedly struck Kadiivka (48km west of Luhansk City) with HIMARS on the night of January 29 to January 30. ²³



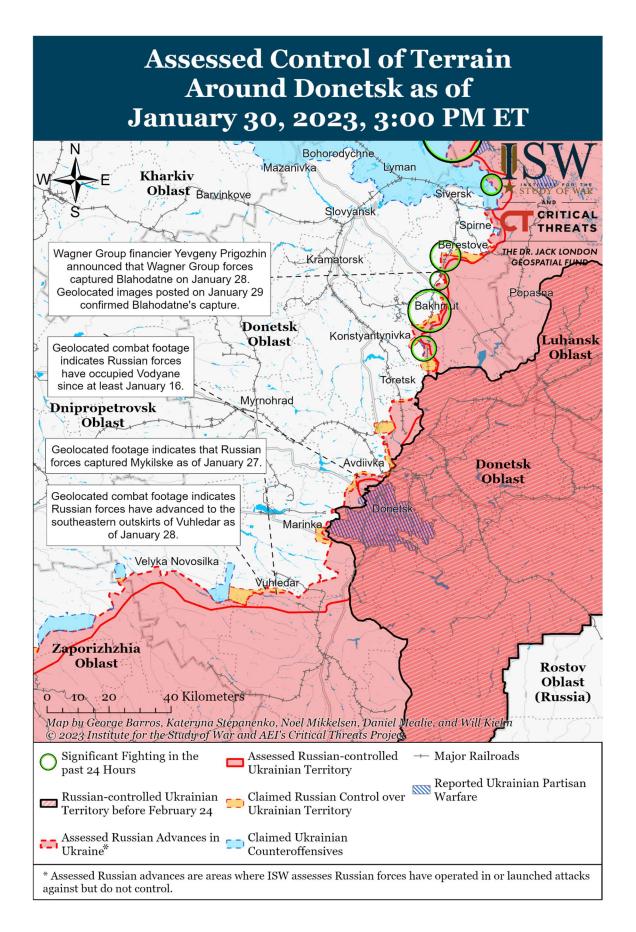
Russian Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued making marginal advances during ground attacks around Bakhmut on January 29 and 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northeast of Bakhmut near Verkhnokamyanske (30km northeast), Rozdolivka (13km northeast), Sil (10km northeast), Blahodatne (7km north), Paraskoviivka (5km north), and Vasyukivka (15km north); and southwest of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km southwest), Klishchiivka (7km southwest), Kurdiumivka (13km southwest), and Ozerianivka (15km southwest).²⁴ Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced on January 28 that the Wagner Group took control of Blahodatne—a claim later confirmed by geolocated imagery published on January 29 showing Wagner Group fighters along the T1302 Bakhmut-Siversk highway south of Blahodatne. ²⁵ Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group fighters northeast of Bakhmut are continuing attacks on Krasna Hora (5km north of Bakhmut) and reached the outskirts of Sacco and Vanzetti village (10km north of Bakhmut).²⁶ Several Russian sources suggested that Russian advances northeast of Bakhmut along the T1302 are intended to push on Siversk from the south.²⁷ This claim is improbable given the focus on Wagner Group efforts on targets closer to Bakhmut and more immediately relevant to enveloping or encircling that city. A Russian milblogger additionally claimed that Wagner fighters are storming urban areas in the Zabakhmutivka area in eastern Bakhmut.²⁸ Russian sources continued to discuss Wagner's efforts south of Bakhmut to push northwest from the Klishchiivka area and cut the To504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway near Ivanivske.²⁹

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on January 29 and 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks near Vodyane (on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City) and Marinka and Novomykhailivka (on the southwestern outskirts) on January 29.30 A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) 100th Brigade are operating near Nevelske, also on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City.31 Geolocated combat footage from Vodyane shows that Russian forces have likely occupied the settlement since January 16.32 Russian sources continued to discuss fighting in the western part of Marinka on January 30.33

Russian forces continued ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on January 29 and 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks near Pobieda (8km southwest of Donetsk City along the To524 Donetsk City-Vuhledar highway) and Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City) on January 29.34 The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the Eastern Military District (EMD) occupied unspecified advantageous lines in this direction on January 30.35 Russian milbloggers continued to discuss heavy fighting within Vuhledar on January 29 and 30, and one milblogger claimed that Russian naval infantry is advancing deep into Vuhledar as of January 30.36 Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian troops interdicted the To524 highway near Vuhledar and are trying to capture the *Pivdennodonbaska* coal mine northeast of Vuhledar in order to encircle the settlement.37 Russian sources posted footage of Russian offensive operations in the Vuhledar area between January 29 and 30.38



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

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast on January 29 and 30. Head of the Ukrainian Joint Press Center of the Tavrisk Direction Defense Forces Yevhen Yerin reiterated on January 30 that Russian forces are not conducting offensive operations in the Zaporizhia direction and have not concentrated enough manpower and equipment for a full-scale offensive.³⁹ Yerin noted that Russian forces continue to conduct failed attacks in groups of 10 personnel in some unspecified areas to improve their tactical positions.⁴⁰ Some Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), claimed on January 29 and 30 that Russian forces occupied unspecified advantageous positions in the Zaporizhia direction.⁴¹ Other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in the area.⁴²

Ukrainian forces continued to target Russian logistics lines in rear areas of Zaporizhia Oblast. Ukrainian forces conducted a HIMARS strike against a rail bridge in Svitlodolynske on the To401 Melitopol-Tokmak highway on January 29.43 A Russian milblogger claimed that the strike killed workers who had been repairing the damage on the bridge from prior Ukrainian strikes and that the rail bridge supplies Russian forces closer to the front line. 44

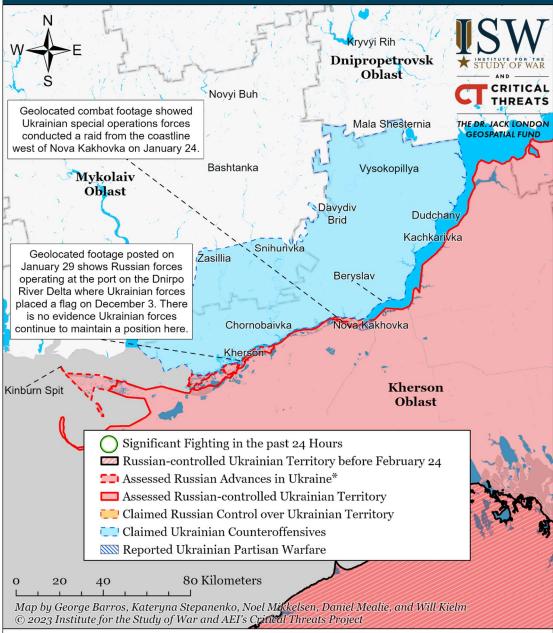
Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces struck areas in southern Ukraine with incendiary munitions on January 29 and 30. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces used incendiary munitions to strike Beryslav, Kherson Oblast on January 29, and Orikhiv, Zaporizhia Oblast on January 30.⁴⁵ A Ukrainian official posted footage of incendiary munitions detonating over Beryslav overnight on January 29.⁴⁶ Continued Russian usage of incendiary munitions to conduct what would otherwise be routine strikes in southern Ukraine supports ISW's prior assessment that Russian forces face a shortage of conventional artillery ammunition.⁴⁷

Russian forces continued to fire on routine areas in Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on January 29 and 30.48

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of January 30, 2023, 3:00 PM ET Dnipropetrovsk **Oblast** THE DR. JACK LONDON GEOSPATIAL FUND Zaporizhzhia Novopil Hryhorivka Oblast Chervone Levadr Mali Shcherbaky Pląvni Shcherbaky Mala Poltavka Tokmachka **Tavriiske** Huliaipole Kamianske Luhove Liubymivka Marfopil Orikhiv Myrne Novoselivka Vasylivka , Piatykhatky Polohy Novopokrovka The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces shelled Ukrainian forces near Luhove on January 28. Bilmak 40 Kilometers 10 Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, and Will Kielm © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project Reported Ukrainian Partisan Significant Fighting in the Assessed Russian-controlled Warfare past 24 Hours Ukrainian Territory Russian-controlled Ukrainian Claimed Russian Control over Territory before February 24 **Ukrainian Territory** Assessed Russian Advances in Claimed Ukrainian Ukraine* 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 January 30, 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.

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

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continued measures to professionalize the Russian military as it faces continued pressure from these measures. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced on January 30 that the Russian MoD will take over the provisioning of Russian volunteer units with weapons, equipment, clothing, medical care, and food, supporting ISW's prior assessments that Russian federal subjects (regions) bore the financial burden of provisioning these units during the heavy recruitment period in the late summer and fall.⁴⁹ The Russian MoD stated that this new measure will not require additional funds from the federal budget and also holds Russian volunteers accountable for equipment damaged through negligence. These measures indicate that these problems still occur frequently enough that the MoD feels a need to address them. A Russian milblogger speculated on January 29 that Shoigu is under pressure to make progress on professionalizing Russian forces and report back to Russian President Vladimir Putin by February 1.⁵⁰

Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko warned on January 30 that Russian forces are redistributing their manpower and equipment in southwestern Donetsk Oblast. Andryushchenko stated that Russian forces deployed over 4,000 mobilized personnel to Bylosarayska Kosa and other villages north of Mariupol Raion along the border of Mariupol and Volnovakha raions. Andryushchenko stated that Russian forces are also reprovisioning their forces in Luhansk Oblast with new weapons. Andryushchenko noted that Russian sources say that Russian forces are massing for an offensive against Vuhledar, and Andryushchenko noted that there are 3,000-5,000 Russian military personnel in Mariupol Raion who could participate in an offensive.

Russian officials continue to institute measures suggesting they are preparing for a second wave of mobilization. Head of the State Duma Committee on Defense Andrey Kartapolov stated on January 28 that the State Duma Committee on Defense is reviewing over 20 laws on mobilization deferrals, including those for families with disabled children or more than three children.⁵² A Russian source claimed that Russian military recruiters in Ostrov, Pskov Oblast are attempting to recruit unemployed people into volunteer contract service.⁵³ Another Russian source reported that mobilization departments of universities in St. Petersburg, Omsk, and Vladimir oblasts demanded that students provide military registration data as part of preparations for a second wave of mobilization in February 2023.⁵⁴

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

Russian forces and occupation authorities continue efforts to identify and arrest Crimean Tatars under allegations that they associate with a pan-Islamist political organization banned in Russia. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on January 30 that Russian forces searched 25 Tatar homes and arrested nine people under accusations that they associate with Hizb ut-Tahrir (a pan-Islamist political organization that has historically been active in Central Asia and in Crimea amongst the Crimean Tatar community and that is banned in Russia). The Center also reported that Russian forces are conducting an ethnic cleansing campaign against Crimean Tatars under the guise of fighting terrorism. Russian occupation authorities have historically targeted Crimean Tatar communities to consolidate social control of occupied Crimea, promoting the notion that anti-Russian sentiment is extremist or terrorist

activity by affiliating it with Hizb ut-Tahrir.⁵⁷ ISW previously reported that the Russian Federal State Security Service (FSB) conducted similar raids on Crimean Tatar households in Dzankoi, occupied Crimea, on January 24.⁵⁸

Russian forces and occupation authorities are continuing to evict and deport Ukrainians from their homes in occupied territories under the guise of "evacuation." Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai reported on January 30 that Russian occupation authorities are housing Russian and Wagner forces in abandoned homes after forcibly evicting residents from settlements along the frontlines in occupied Luhansk Oblast.⁵⁹

<u>Significant activity in Belarus</u> (ISW assesses it very unlikely that Russian or Belarusian forces will attack northern Ukraine in early 2023 and has thus restructured this section of the update to orient away from the previous most dangerous course of action warning forecast about a Russian offensive against northern Ukraine to report on significant activity in Belarus. ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus.)

There is still no indication that Russian forces are forming a strike group in Belarus as of January 30 despite continued Russian training rotations to Belarus. The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of January 30.60 A senior Ukrainian State Border Guard Service official stated on January 30 that the Russian military deployed new military units to Belarus and redeployed some Russian elements that trained in Belarus back to Russia and that there are 9,000 Russian personnel in Belarus.61 The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate stated that there are 5,800 Russian personnel in Belarus as of January 25.62 Russia likely deployed more forces to Belarus after elements of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Division of the 1st Guards Tank Army of the Western Military District completed training in Belarus in late January and redeployed to Russia and Luhansk Oblast.63

Belarusian mechanized elements continue to deploy across Belarus for exercises. Logistics elements of the Belarusian 11th Mechanized Brigade conducted readiness tasks to support the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Troops (RGV) in an unspecified location on January 30.⁶⁴ Footage posted on January 29 shows elements of the Belarusian 11th Mechanized Brigade conducting readiness tasks in Slonim, Grodno Oblast.⁶⁵ The Hajun Project reported that a column of at least 30 unspecified vehicles of the Belarusian 11th Mechanized Brigade deployed through Slonim in Grodno Oblast on January 27.⁶⁶

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.

Institute for the Study of War & The Critical Threats Project 2023

¹ https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-23-2023;

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- ³ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions 211296.htm
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- ¹⁴ https://t.me/rybar/43122
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- ¹⁹ https://t.me/boris rozhin/76787; https://t.me/Z4LPR/445
- ²⁰ https://twitter.com/Danspiun/status/1620084424330342400?s=20&t=A2PgJG78tv4Qax8dMBGK0g;

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- ³⁴https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02QHamXFR4d51ztutFyVRN3EvjKBXRfEtrLjYUgRVpXdU3ThCNiE4tr24y5p5xXSJgl
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