

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 23

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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.

Moscow has been setting conditions for a new most dangerous course of action (MDCOA)--a renewed invasion of northern Ukraine possibly aimed at Kyiv--since at least October 2022.¹ This MDCOA could be a Russian information operation or could reflect Russian President Vladimir Putin's actual intentions. Currently available indicators are ambivalent—some verified evidence of a Russian buildup in Belarus makes more sense as part of preparations for a renewed offensive than as part of ongoing exercises and training practices, but there remains no evidence that Moscow is actively preparing a strike force in Belarus. Concern about the possibility that Putin might pursue this MDCOA is certainly not merely a Ukrainian information operation intended to pressure the West into supplying Kyiv with more weapons, as some Western analysts have suggested. ISW continues to assess that a renewed large-scale Russian invasion from Belarus is unlikely this winter, but it is a possibility that must be taken seriously.

Prominent Russian pro-war milbloggers are amplifying the possibility of the MDCOA over the winter-spring period. Former Russian military commander Igor Girkin, a prominent critical voice in the Russian milblogger space, responded to ongoing discussions within the Russian information space on December 23 about Russia's capacity to renew an assault on northwestern Ukraine from Belarus to sever ground lines of communication (GLOCs) between Kyiv and Europe.² Girkin broke the MDCOA into two possible sub-courses of action: Russia can invade from Belarus in an effort to capture territory or could alternatively conduct a diversionary operation to draw Ukrainian forces from other parts of the theater.³ Girkin argued that the Russian military could not effectively conduct an offensive operation to capture territory, but that a diversionary operation to support a Russian offensive elsewhere in Ukraine would make military sense. Girkin also pointed out that public discourse about this MDCOA had spread throughout the Russian-language internet and noted that other prominent milbloggers have hypothesized different scenarios for the MDCOA.⁴

Some milbloggers have been speculating about the likelihood of a renewed Russian attack on northern Ukraine since at least October 2022. Prominent Russian Telegram channel *Rybar*, whose author is currently part of Putin's mobilization working group, stated on October 20 that there were rumors of an "imminent" Russian offensive operation on Lviv, Volyn, Kyiv, Chernihiv, or Kharkiv.⁵ Another milblogger claimed on October 20 that joint forces in Belarus are too small to attack Kyiv but stated that he would not object if Russian forces attacked Chernihiv City.⁶

Putin's upcoming meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in St. Petersburg on December 26-27 will advance the Russian information operation around the MDCOA even if it does not directly support preparations for it. Lukashenko's office announced that Putin and Lukashenko will meet during a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) heads of state meeting in St. Petersburg on December 26-27.⁷ This meeting will advance the Kremlin's existing information operation about the MDCOA, as Putin's December 19 visit to Minsk did, given the growing Russian military presence in Belarus.⁸

The Russian military continues to trip limited indicators for the MCDOA, reinforcing an information operation designed to establish the plausibility of the MDCOA or actual preparations for executing the MDCOA. The Russian Ministry of Defense ostentatiously announced on November 24 that it has a field hospital in Belarus.⁹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 23 that Russian forces are planning to deploy at least one more field hospital in Belarus.¹⁰ Field hospitals are not necessary for training exercises and could indicate preparation for combat operations. The appearance of field hospitals in Belarus in early 2022 was among the final indicators observed before Russia commenced its full-scale invasion.¹¹ Russia continues to deploy forces to Belarus under the rubric of training. Some Russian T-90 tanks, reportedly deployed to Belarus in late December 2022, were observed with winter camouflage.¹² Equipping tanks with winter camouflage is not wholly necessary for training activity and could indicate preparation for actual winter combat operations. The deployment of field hospitals and repainting tanks could also be parts of an information operation.

The Russian military has been much more clearly setting conditions for an offensive in northwestern Luhansk Oblast, however. The Ukrainian General Staff reported observing an increased volume of railway transport of personnel, military equipment, and ammunition to combat areas on December 23.¹³ Geolocated footage published on December 23 also shows a train loaded with Russian T-90M and T-62M tanks heading toward Luhansk Oblast from Rostov Oblast.¹⁴ ISW previously observed Russian forces transferring elite airborne troops and other elements that previously operated in the Kherson and Kharkiv directions to Luhansk Oblast.¹⁵ The Kremlin continues to prioritize committing mobilized men to stabilize the Svatove-Kremina line over other areas of the front such as Bakhmut, Avdiivka, or western Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces are unlikely to attack across the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast after just withdrawing from western Kherson, and Russian mining and fortification efforts in Zaporizhia Oblast indicate that Russian forces do not seek to conduct an offensive there. The Kremlin could also attempt a spoiling attack on southeastern Kharkiv Oblast from Luhansk Oblast to regain lost territories west of the Oskil River. It is far from clear whether Russian forces would be able to effectively conduct such an operation since the terrain advantages the Ukrainian defenders and Russian offensive capabilities are very limited.

The Russian military may nevertheless attempt to conduct a diversionary attack on the ground or in the information space against northern Ukraine, likely in an effort to divert Ukrainian forces from defending in Donbas or in conjunction with an offensive in Luhansk or, less plausibly, elsewhere. Chief of the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Kyrylo Budanov stated on December 23 that Russia is trying to divert Ukrainian forces from the southeast by setting up a feint in Belarus, noting that military activity in Belarus is an element of a disinformation campaign.¹⁶ The success of the Russian diversionary attack, however, relies on Russia's ability to convince Ukraine of the plausibility of the threat of a deeper offensive operation. Ukrainian military officials continue to indicate that Ukrainian forces are prepared to defend their northern borders, and Ukraine's fierce defenses around Bakhmut demonstrate that Ukrainian forces can hold off much larger numbers of Russian attackers.¹⁷

ISW's December 15 MDCOA warning forecast about a potential Russian offensive against northern Ukraine in winter 2023 remains a worst-case scenario within the forecast cone.¹⁸ ISW currently assesses the risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine from Belarus as low, but possible. Belarusian forces remain extremely unlikely to invade Ukraine without a Russian strike force. Ukrainian military officials noted that Russia had not created strike groups in Belarus.¹⁹ Russian

milbloggers also note that Russia has not fixed fundamental flaws in its military campaign such as the lack of new equipment, poor leadership, and insufficient forces to sustain a successful offensive operation.²⁰

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is reportedly preparing to present a peace plan in February 2023, which may be timed to exploit a failed Russian winter offensive. The *Wall Street Journal*, citing Ukrainian and European diplomats, reported on December 22 that Zelensky's team is planning to present an unspecified peace plan in February 2023.²¹ Zelensky laid out a 10-point peace plan at the G20 summit in November 2022 that requires Russia to make concessions, including withdrawing all its troops from Ukraine and respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity under international law.²² Zelensky may be preparing to present this peace plan around an anticipated failed Russian military offensive in early 2023.

The Kremlin continues to deflect criticism about Russia's military failures in Ukraine by rhetorically narrowing the definitions of its initial war objectives without formally changing them. When asked about the Russian invasion's progress, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that Russian forces achieved "significant progress" in its war objective of "demilitarization" of Ukraine on December 23.²³ Girkin lambasted Peskov's response, sarcastically noting that Ukraine's armed forces increased from about 250,000 personnel before the war to 700,000 personnel today and that Ukrainian forces are now equipped with advanced Western anti-tank ground missiles, precision artillery, and other systems that Ukraine did not have before Russia's invasion.²⁴ ISW continues to assess that Russia's maximalist war objectives have not changed despite Peskov's floundering to save face with the Kremlin's Russian domestic audience.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's renewed public appearances likely indicate that he has become more concerned about his popularity and image in Russia. Putin has been seemingly making more public appearances in Russian cities and more frequently delivering vague statements about Russia's invasion of Ukraine in recent days compared to his marked absence from public activity outside the Kremlin throughout the first ten months of the war.²⁵ Putin visited the KBP Instrument Design Bureau in Tula Oblast (an arms manufacturing facility) on December 23 and reportedly also planned to visit the Uralvagonzavod machine-building factory in Nizhny Tagil on the same day before canceling the event at the last minute.²⁶ Such appearances are likely a part of the Kremlin's effort to present Putin as a wartime leader and regain the dominant narrative in the domestic information space as Russia heads into the second year of the war.²⁷ Putin consistently relied on in-person appearances throughout his rule, which helped him to create an image of an all-seeing and ever-present ruler.²⁸ Putin may be attempting to set favorable conditions in the information space ahead of Russia's next presidential elections in early 2024.

Key Takeaways

- **ISW assesses that the Kremlin has been setting conditions for a new most dangerous course of action (MDCOA)—a renewed offensive from Belarus possibly aimed at Kyiv—since at least October 2022. The Kremlin may be conducting an information operation or may actually be preparing for this MDCOA, which ISW continues to assess to be unlikely but possible.**
- **Prominent Russian pro-war milbloggers are amplifying the possibility of the MDCOA over the winter-spring period.**

- **The Russian military continues to trip indicators for the MCDOA, reinforcing an information operation designed to establish the plausibility of the MDCOA or preparations to execute it.**
- **The Russian military has more clearly been setting conditions for an offensive in northwestern Luhansk Oblast.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is reportedly preparing to present a peace plan in February 2023, which could be timed to exploit a failed Russian winter offensive.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin’s renewed public appearances likely indicate that he has become more concerned about his popularity and image in Russia.**
- **Russian forces conducted at least two reconnaissance-in-force operations in northern and northeastern Ukraine on December 22-23.**
- **Ukrainian forces likely made tactical gains east and south of Bakhmut City over the past 72 hours.**
- **Russian forces are continuing to establish defensive positions in left-bank Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts and are conducting defensive operations in southern Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin is intensifying its censorship efforts to silence concerns over an expansion of the Russian Armed Forces and a second mobilization wave.**
- **Ukrainian partisans continued to target Russian officials in occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

- 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)

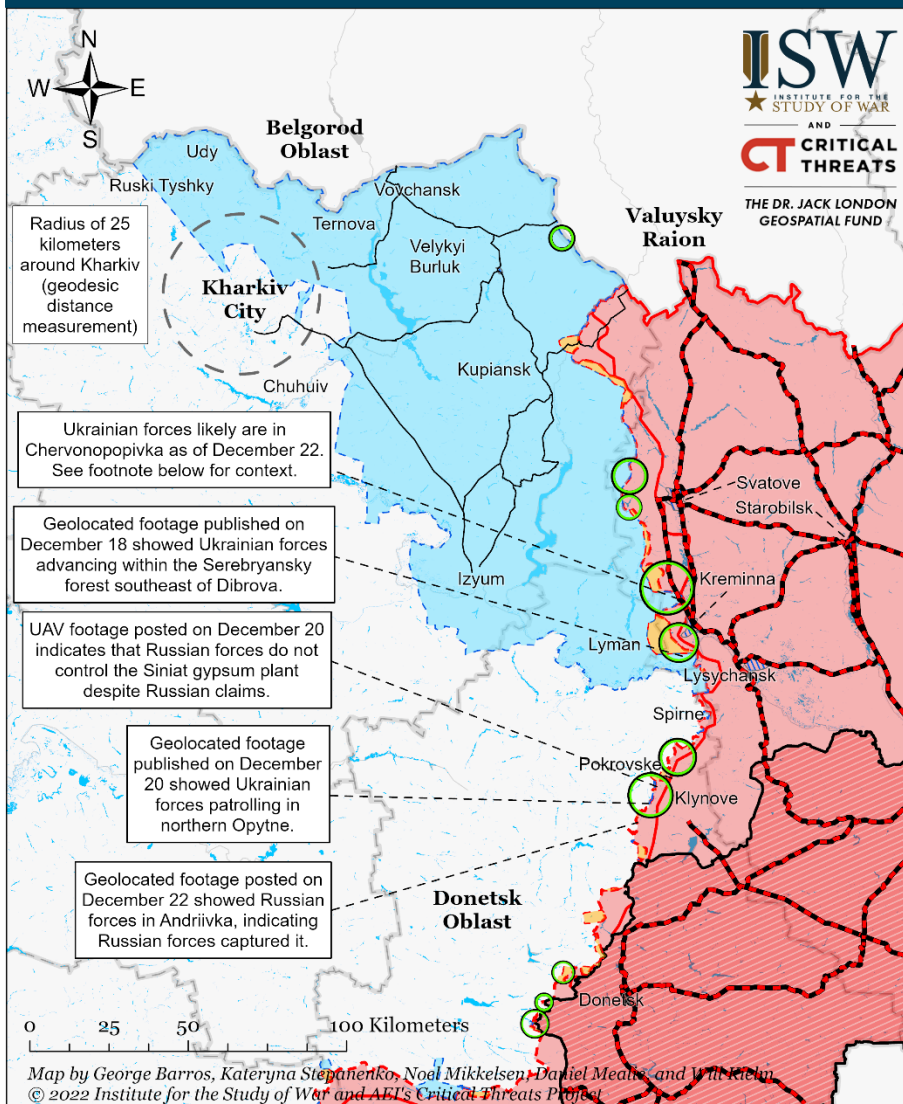
Russian forces likely conducted at least two reconnaissance-in-force missions in northern and northeastern Ukraine on December 22-23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks in Vysoke in Sumy Oblast (Vysoke is on the international border 50 km southeast of Sumy City) and Khatne in Kharkiv Oblast (about 8 km from the international border and 90 km northeast of Balakliya).²⁹ Sumy Oblast Military Administration Head Dmytro Zhyvytskyi reported that Ukrainian territorial defense forces destroyed a Russian sabotage and reconnaissance group in Vysoke on December 22.³⁰ Russian reconnaissance of Ukraine's northern border advances both a Russian information operation designed to convince Ukraine and the West that Russian forces will attack northern Ukraine, as well as preparations for an actual operation.

Ukrainian forces may have captured another village in the direction of Svatove. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces shelled Kolomyichykha in Luhansk Oblast (10 km northwest of Svatove) for the first time on December 23.³¹ Geolocated combat footage posted on December 22 but likely from an earlier date shows pro-Ukrainian Belarusian volunteer forces shelling Russian positions in Kolomyichykha. Ukrainian forces may have advanced into Kolomyichykha recently.³²

Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian attacks along the Kreminna-Svatove line. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled attacks against Stelmakhivka (15 km northwest of Svatove), Andriyivka, Chervonopopivka (6 km northwest of Kreminna), and Ploshanka (2 km from the R-66 Kreminna-Svatove highway).³³ Pro-Kremlin Telegram channel WarGonzo reported that Russian artillery targeted Ukrainian forces in the vicinity of Chervonopopivka on December 23.³⁴ ISW assesses that Ukrainian forces are likely in Chervonopopivka despite the lack of visual evidence of Chervonopopivka's liberation.³⁵

Russian sources claim that Ukrainian forces intensified reconnaissance activities near Dibrova (5 km southwest of Kreminna). The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces destroyed two Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups in the forests south of Dibrova on December 23.³⁶ A prominent Russian milblogger amplified reports that Ukrainian forces intensified reconnaissance in this same forest area on December 22.³⁷

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of December 23, 2022, 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 a claimed audio intercept on December 22 in which a Russian soldier purportedly operating in the vicinity of Chervonopivka supported reports that Ukrainian forces captured part of the R-66 Kreminna-Svatove road in the vicinity of Zhytlivka (just south of Chervonopivka). The Ukrainian General Staff has repeatedly reported since November 30 that Russian forces shelled Chervonopivka, indicating Russian forces no longer hold control of terrain over Chervonopivka. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to establish a position in Chervonopivka on November 27, indicating Ukrainian maneuvers near Chervonopivka. The R-66 runs through Chervonopivka and its capture 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)

Ukrainian forces likely made tactical gains east and south of Bakhmut City over the past 72 hours.

Ukrainian forces likely drove Russian forces that temporarily entered eastern Bakhmut back to the industrial zone in eastern Bakhmut over the past 72 hours. Geolocated footage posted on December 23 shows Ukrainian forces conducting indirect fire against Russian forces in Bakhmut’s eastern industrial areas.³⁸ The footage, if confirmed to be recent, supports previous Ukrainian social media reports that Ukrainian forces conducted a tactical counterattack that repelled Russian forces from the outskirts of Bakhmut on December 21.³⁹ Girkin stated on December 22 that Ukrainian forces drove Wagner Group forces in Bakhmut out of positions they occupied several days ago and back to the eastern industrial zone.⁴⁰

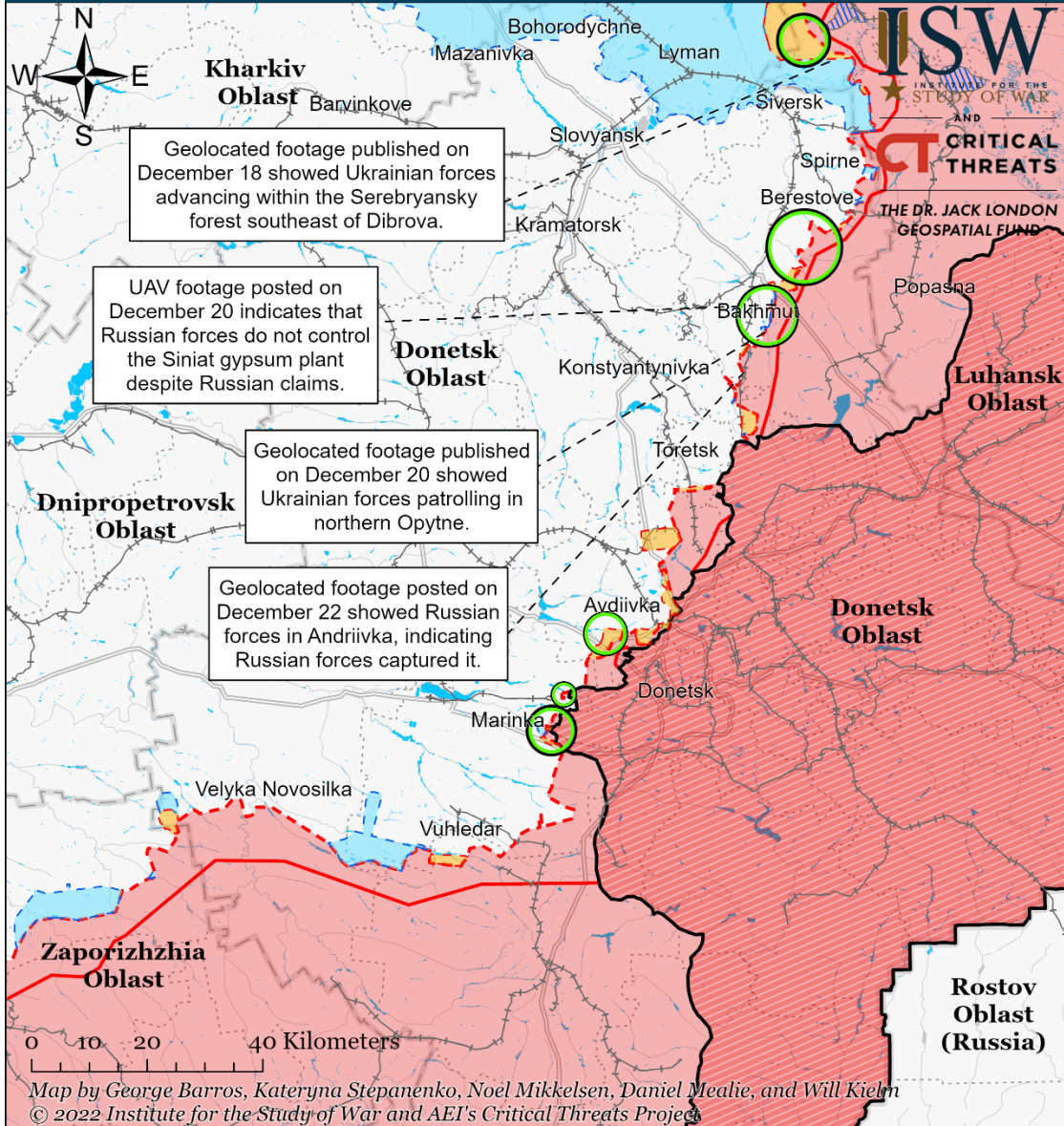
Ukrainian forces recaptured a trench line 700 meters west of Ozarianivka (13 km south of Bakhmut) around December 22. Geolocated combat footage posted on December 23 shows elements of Ukraine’s 28th Mechanized Brigade after clearing a previously Russian-occupied trench west of Ozarianivka, likely on December 22.⁴¹ A prominent Russian milblogger stated that elements of Ukraine’s 28th Mechanized Brigade were fighting in Ozarianivka and failed to retake the settlement on December 23.⁴²

Russian forces continued offensive operations on Bakhmut on December 23. A Russian source claimed that Russian forces captured the eastern part of Klishchiivka (4 km south of Bakhmut) on December 23, though ISW is unable to verify this claim.⁴³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Yakovlivka, Bakhmutsk, Bakhmut City, Mayorsk, and Niu York.⁴⁴

Russian forces conducted strikes against unspecified Ukrainian targets in Ukraine’s rear area in Kramatorsk on December 22-23. Russian sources reported that Russian forces struck Ukrainian concentration areas and a barrack.⁴⁵

Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast on December 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks on Vodyane, Krasnohorivka, and Marinka.⁴⁶ Russian Naval Infantry elements continue to operate in western Donetsk Oblast. Geolocated combat footage posted on December 22 shows Ukrainian forces repelling Russian Naval Infantry elements west of Neskuchne (30 km west of Vuhledar).⁴⁷ Footage from mid-to-late December documents elements of the Pacific Fleet’s 40th Naval Infantry Brigade operating in the Vuhledar area.⁴⁸

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of December 23, 2022, 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.

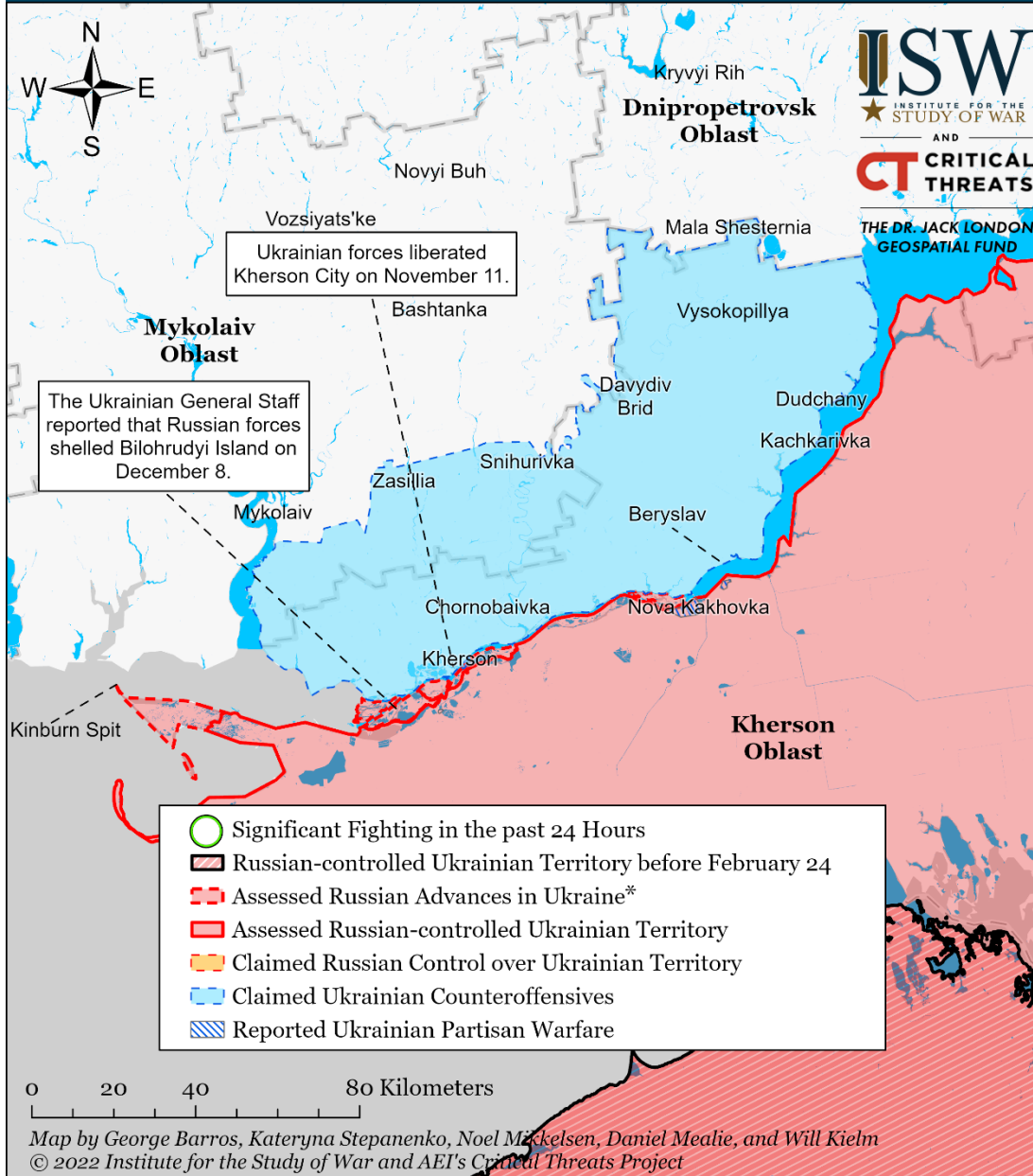
Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces are continuing to establish defensive positions in left-bank Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts and are conducting defensive operations in southern Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 23 that Russian forces are engineering positions along the Krasnoperekopsk-Dzhankoy highway in northern Crimea.⁴⁹ Satellite imagery also shows that Russian forces constructed trenches around the perimeter of Tokmak, an operationally significant settlement in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast on Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Berdyansk and Melitopol.⁵⁰ The head of the Ukrainian Joint Press Center of the Tavrisk Direction Defense Forces, Yevhen Yerin, stated that Russian forces have not changed their tactics in southern Ukraine and are continuing to use sabotage and reconnaissance groups to reconnoiter the islands on the Dnipro River delta in Kherson Oblast.⁵¹

Russian forces continued to shell Ukrainian positions and civilian infrastructure in Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on December 23.⁵² Ukrainian military officials and social media users shared footage that reportedly showed Russian forces shelling Kherson City with white phosphorus munitions.⁵³ Ukrainian military officials added that the use of incendiary munitions against civilian populations is a war crime. Yerin also noted that Russian forces are continuing to use the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) as cover for their forces.⁵⁴

Social media users amplified video of an explosion reportedly caused by a Ukrainian strike on the Russian headquarters in Tokmak on December 22.⁵⁵

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of December 23, 2022, 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.

Light reconnaissance elements of the Ukrainian Carlson special volunteer unit placed a Ukrainian flag on a tower in the wetlands on the left bank of the Dniester River, approximately 600 meters south of Kherson City and claimed the area will become a Ukrainian bridgehead that will support future operations to further liberate southern Kherson on December 3. ISW does not assess that Ukrainian forces have established a bridgehead or lodgment in this location as Carlson claimed as of December 3. The Carlson element's ability to operate in the area uncontested and the lack of observed Russian fortifications or defensive forces in the area indicate that Russian forces do not exercise full control over the area. Russian control lines are likely south of the Konk River.

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

The Kremlin is intensifying its censorship efforts to silence concerns over an expansion of the Russian Armed Forces and a second mobilization wave. Two anonymous sources affiliated with Russian state media structures told *The Moscow Times* that the Kremlin banned Russian federal outlets from covering mobilization news.⁵⁶ The sources added that the order came from the Russian presidential administration and will effectively bar state media from offering forecasts on mobilization or even sharing statements about mobilization from senators and parliamentarians. An independent Russian human rights project, *OVD-Info*, found that the Kremlin has been intensifying its repressive measures throughout 2022 by banning over 210,000 websites and adopting 22 new repressive laws further limiting rights for free speech and assembly.⁵⁷ The Kremlin, however, is not introducing similar repressive measures against the pro-war milbloggers who have been consistently criticizing Russian war efforts and military failures to their ever-growing audiences.

Wagner Group-affiliated milbloggers revisited their critiques of the Russian commander responsible for the disastrous assault on Pavlivka, Donetsk Oblast, in late October. A few milbloggers noted that an unnamed Russian commander had not signed a document that would award Russian naval infantry operating in Pavlivka Hero of Russia status.⁵⁸ Milbloggers hypothesized that unspecified figures within the Russian military command might be holding a grudge against the naval infantry for exposing the high Russian casualties in Pavlivka that resulted from poor leadership. Wagner-affiliated milbloggers are continuing to criticize the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) likely in an effort to enhance the reputation of Wagner forces at the expense of the conventional Russian military establishment.

The Kremlin is attempting to introduce new provisions to incentivize more Russians to join the war effort. The Russian Federation Council approved a law on December 23 that suspends legal proceedings against mobilized servicemen and volunteers who participate in hostilities during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁹ This law will also require Russian banks to suspend debt collection and the repayment of loans. This law could incentivize Russians with pending criminal proceedings or bank loans to join the war effort. The Kremlin continues to target migrants to recruit them into the war. A milblogger reported that Russian enlistment officials were distributing pamphlets advertising military service to migrants in Moscow.⁶⁰

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 officials continued efforts to consolidate administrative control of occupied territories on December 23. A pro-Russia Telegram channel stated that the Russian Federation Council presented eight Russian-appointed representatives of occupied territories with official certificates on December 23. The pro-Russia Telegram channel also amplified Speaker of the Federation Council Valentina Matvienko's claims that these individuals represent civilians in occupied territories who reject Ukrainian authority and seek to preserve "their" language, history, and culture.⁶¹

Ukrainian partisans continued to target Russian occupation officials in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast on December 23. Russian and Ukrainian sources confirmed that Ukrainian partisans wounded two likely

Federal Security Service (FSB) officers in an improvised IED attack in the center of Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁶²

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to intensify law enforcement crackdowns to identify possible partisan activities in occupied territories. Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on December 23 that Russian FSB officials justify searches of private residences, phones, and documents as “counter-sabotage” measures seeking to identify possible partisans in occupied-Luhansk Oblast.⁶³ Ukrainian Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov stated on December 23 that Russian occupation authorities are continuing to arrange forced evacuations and intensify pressure on Ukrainian civilians to identify partisans in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.⁶⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 22 that approximately 500 Russian Rosgvardia servicemen arrived in Berdyansk to strengthen administrative control and law enforcement.⁶⁵

Russian occupation officials are demolishing a Ukrainian cultural landmark in Mariupol, likely in an effort to conceal the destruction Russian forces caused when seizing the city. Ukrainian Culture and Information Policy Minister Oleksandr Tkachenko stated on December 23 that Russian officials are destroying the Mariupol Drama Theater to cover up war crimes, noting that Russia does not care about the destruction of Ukrainian cultural landmarks.⁶⁶ A pro-Russia milblogger rejected these accusations on December 23, instead referring to previous Russian occupation officials’ statements that part of the Drama Theater must be destroyed in order to fully restore it by 2023.⁶⁷ ISW reported on December 2 that Maxar satellite imagery from November 30 showed that Russian forces established a poorly-constructed fence around the Mariupol Drama Theater.⁶⁸

Russian occupation officials continue to seize and redirect civilian infrastructure to support Russian forces. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 23 that Russian forces seized multiple tourist facilities to house Russian servicemen and transformed a recreation center into a military hospital to treat wounded Russian servicemen in Berdyansk, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁶⁹ Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on December 23 that Russian forces are taking civilian doctors in occupied Luhansk Oblast to work in military hospitals.⁷⁰

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

1

<https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Offensive%20Campaign%20Assessment%2C%20December%2015%2C%202022.pdf>;

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³ <https://t.me/strelkovii/3596>

⁴ <https://t.me/strelkovii/3599>

⁵ <https://t.me/rybar/40469>

⁶ <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/41887>

⁷ <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/aleksandr-lukashenko-sovershit-rabochiy-vizit-v-rossiyskuyu-federaciyu-1671801265>

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⁹ <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/20221124427-ewCAB.html>

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<https://twitter.com/KofmanMichael/status/1491860247912325127>

¹¹ https://twitter.com/brenna_smith/status/1493292912783863811;

https://twitter.com/Angry_Staffer/status/1492198181492379652

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¹³

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¹⁵ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-12>

¹⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/23/world/europe/belarus-ukraine-invasion-threat.html>

¹⁷

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¹⁹

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²² <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/the-10-point-peace-plan-for-ukraine-proposed-by-zelensky>;

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<https://t.me/hueviyherson/31514>; <https://t.me/hueviyherson/31521>; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/73456;
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