

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 27

Riley Bailey, Kateryna Stepanenko, George Barros, Madison Williams, and Frederick W. Kagan
December 27, 8:00 pm ET

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

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that the Kremlin will continue to pursue a military solution to the war until the Ukrainian government capitulates to Russia's demands. Lavrov stated in a December 27 interview with Russian state news wire *TASS* that Ukraine and the West are "well aware of Russia's proposals on the demilitarization and denazification" of Ukrainian-controlled territory and that the Russian military will settle these issues if Ukraine refuses to accept these proposals.¹ Russian demands for "demilitarization" aim to eliminate Ukraine's ability to resist further Russian attacks, while the demands for "denazification" are tantamount to calls for regime change in Ukraine.² Lavrov added that Ukraine and the United States must recognize Russia's seizure of occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts. Lavrov stated that US-controlled Ukraine and the United States are responsible for prolonging the war as they could "put an end to [Ukraine's] senseless resistance."³ Lavrov's invocation of a military settlement for the war in Ukraine that achieves Russia's original war aims follows Russian President Vladimir Putin's deliberately vague statements that Russia is open for negotiations on December 25.⁴ ISW assessed that Putin's comments were not an offer to negotiate with Ukraine and indicated that he has not set serious conditions for negotiations.⁵

Lavrov stated that Russia is unable to work on any agreements with the West due to its provocative actions in Ukraine and elsewhere. Lavrov stated that the United States and its NATO allies are pursuing "victory over Russia on the battlefield" in Ukraine "as a mechanism for significantly weakening or even destroying" the Russian Federation.⁶ Lavrov nonsensically accused US military officials of planning a decapitation blow against the Kremlin that included killing Russian President Vladimir Putin.⁷ Lavrov also accused the United States and NATO members of being *de facto* parties to the war in Ukraine and of engaging in dangerous nuclear signaling.⁸ Lavrov argued that Russian officials are unable to maintain normal communications or work on any proposals or agreements with the United States under these conditions, as the United States seeks to inflict strategic defeat against the Russian Federation.⁹ Lavrov stated that Russian officials are ready to discuss security issues in the context of Ukraine and in a broader, strategic plan, but only when American officials "realize the defectiveness of the current course" and return to "building mutually respectful relations on the basis of the obligatory consideration of legitimate Russian interests."¹⁰

The Kremlin will likely continue to focus its grievances against the West and ignore Ukraine as a sovereign entity in support of ongoing information operations that seek to compel the West to offer preemptive concessions and pressure Ukraine to negotiate. The Kremlin routinely portrays Ukraine as a Western pawn that lacks any actual sovereignty in order to disqualify Ukrainian officials from future direct negotiations and instead frame negotiations with Russia as being the responsibility of Western officials.¹¹ The Kremlin routinely highlights its grievances with the West over the war in Ukraine instead of its grievances with Ukraine itself to capitalize on the Western desire for negotiations and create a dynamic in which Western officials feel pressed to make preemptive concessions to lure Russia to the negotiating table.¹² The Kremlin will routinely depict Ukrainian officials as needlessly prolonging the war while reiterating its war aims in an attempt to influence Western officials to pressure Ukraine to negotiate on terms more favorable to Russia.¹³ ISW

continues to assess that the Kremlin is not interested in serious negotiations that would produce a final settlement to the war in Ukraine, but instead seeks a temporary cessation of hostilities that would allow it to refit and replenish its military for further offensive campaigns against Ukraine.

The Kremlin is increasingly integrating select milbloggers into its information campaigns, likely in an effort to regain a dominant narrative within the information space. A prominent Russian milblogger involved in combat in occupied Donetsk Oblast gave a nearly 20-minute interview to a Russian federal channel pushing key Kremlin narratives on mobilization and support for the war effort.¹⁴ The milblogger explained that Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) forces recruited him out of prison in Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast in 2014, and accused mobilized men who complain to their wives about mobilization and poor conditions on the frontlines of being weak. The milblogger also made a sexist remark that Russian women are making emotional appeals and urged them to refrain from complaining about their husbands' problems. The milblogger criticized Russians who have left the country in protest of the war, stating that those Russians lacked respect for their society and its interests. The milblogger downplayed reports of poor frontline conditions, noting that these conditions are solely the fault of local commanders. These statements are consistent with recent acknowledgments by Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) of problems with mobilization and generating support for the war that likely aim to prepare the Russian society for a protracted war.¹⁵ This milblogger had also previously revealed that the Kremlin is now offering to collaborate with the milbloggers.¹⁶

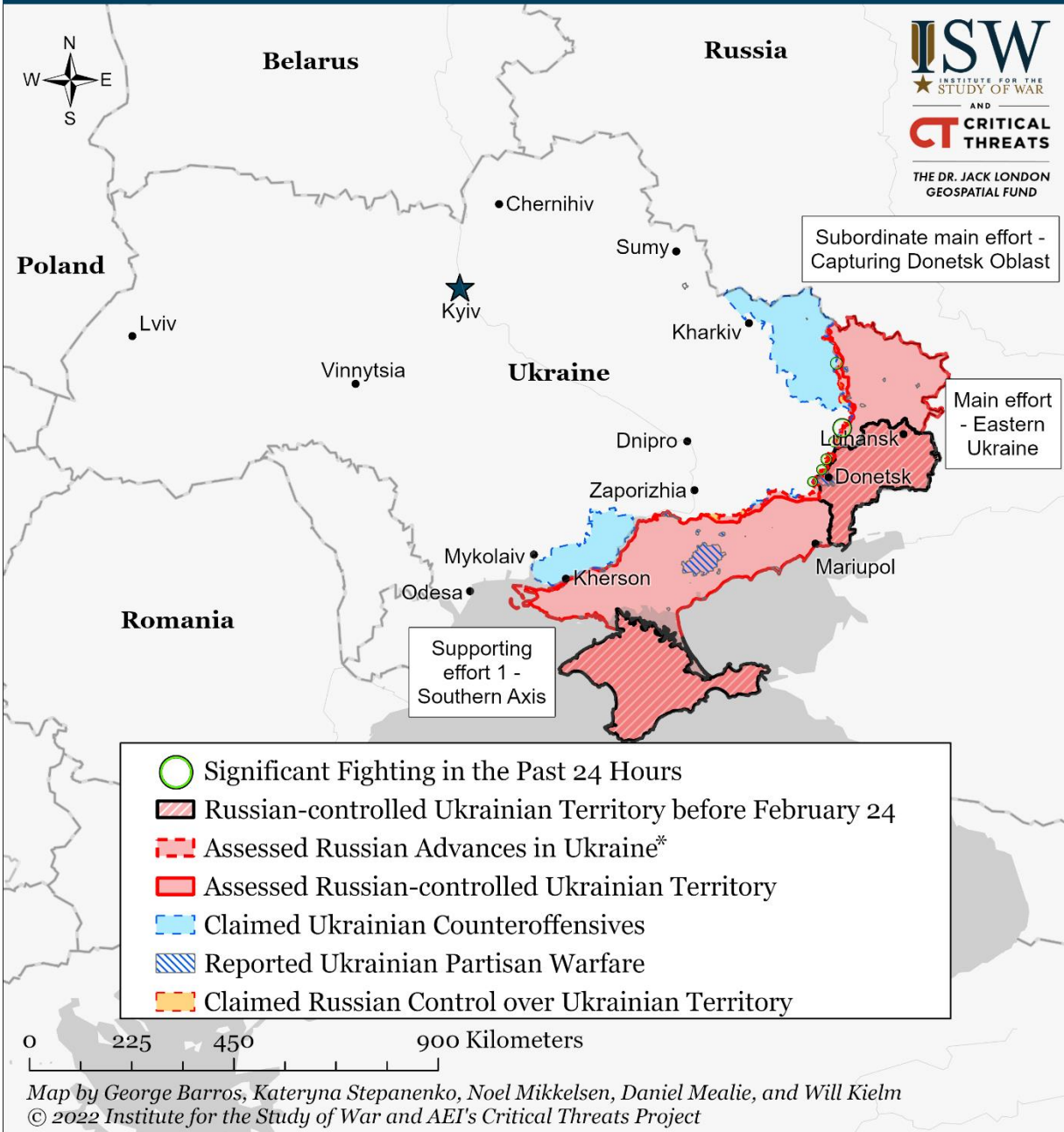
The Kremlin has also intensified its efforts to coopt prominent milbloggers by offering them positions of power, which in turn allows them to amplify some elements of official rhetoric. One Russian milblogger who Putin appointed to the Russian Human Rights Council amplified an official statement from the council claiming that it had not received any information about the forcible mobilization of prisoners to participate in the war.¹⁷ A Russian milblogger who has received a place on Putin's mobilization working group also expressed excitement over the prospect of delivering his concerns directly to Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu during the working group's first meeting on December 28.¹⁸ By offering these positions within the government, the Kremlin enforces self-censorship and introduces its narratives to some figures within the milblogger space. Putin's appointment of these milbloggers to official positions also suggests his approval of their extreme and sometimes genocidal statements.

The Kremlin could significantly benefit from the integration of some prominent milbloggers' voices into its information space, but Putin remains unlikely to domesticate the entire community. The Kremlin had partially integrated at least seven of the most prominent milbloggers into its information sphere who are generally not affiliated with other factions such as the Wagner Group, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, or Russian veteran communities. Russian outlets have started to rank milbloggers and their growing popularity, noting that there are at least 50 extremely influential milbloggers from different factions among thousands of milblogger Telegram channels.¹⁹ A prominent Russian milblogger noted that the milblogger community had been rescuing the Kremlin's poorly-implemented and outdated information campaign while simultaneously pointing out that it is "impossible to centralize" such a vast community.²⁰ Another milblogger noted that the Kremlin's information efforts are so laughable that it had made the milblogger community "the only decent source of information."²¹ The milblogger also stated that some milbloggers still face censorship from the Kremlin, which can ignite tensions within the community.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that the Kremlin will continue to pursue a military solution to the war until the US accepts its demands and forcing Ukraine to do the same.**
- **Lavrov stated that Russia is unable to work on any agreements with the West due to its supposed provocative actions.**
- **The Kremlin will likely continue information operations to seek to compel the West to offer preemptive concessions and pressure Ukraine to negotiate.**
- **The Kremlin is increasingly integrating select milbloggers into its information campaigns, likely in an effort to regain a dominant narrative within the information space.**
- **Ukrainian forces have likely made more gains in northeast Ukraine than ISW has previously assessed.**
- **Russian forces may be nearing culmination in the Bakhmut area amid continuing Russian offensive operations there and in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area.**
- **Russian forces are maintaining their fortification efforts in southern Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin is continuing its efforts to publicly punish deserters and saboteurs.**
- **Russian officials are intensifying efforts to deport children from occupied territories to Russia.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of December 27, 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

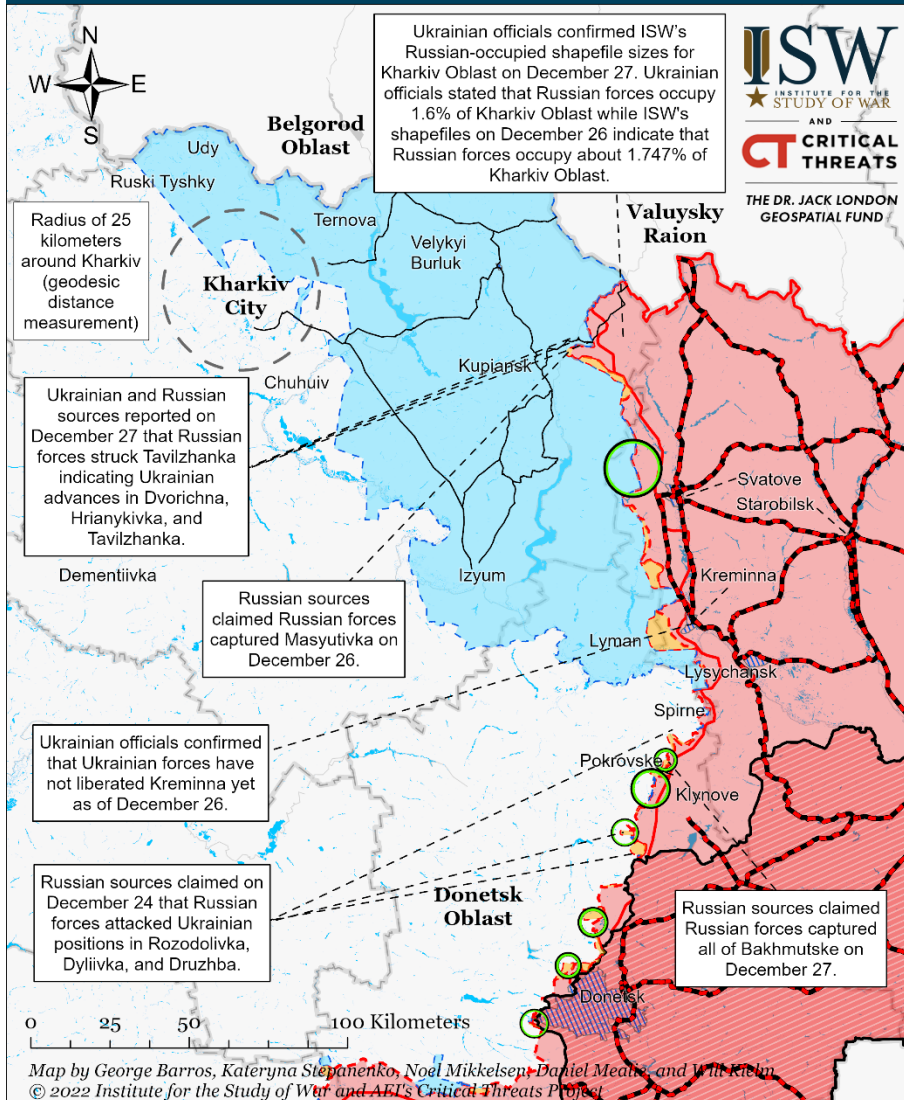
Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

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

Russian forces reportedly repelled Ukrainian attacks on the Svatove-Kreminna line on December 27. Multiple Russian sources reported on December 27 that Russian forces—including elements of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division and its 254th Motorized Rifle Regiment which previously operated in the Izyum area—repelled Ukrainian attacks on the Svatove-Kreminna sector.²² One prominent Russian milblogger reported that Ukrainian forces captured a Russian strongpoint near Chervonopopivka (about 5 km northwest of Kreminna), where ISW assesses Ukrainian forces have likely advanced since at least December 23.²³ Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces are regrouping and deploying reinforcements from Kharkiv Oblast to resume offensive operations on the Kreminna-Svatove line and Kreminna City, although ISW cannot confirm this report.²⁴

Ukrainian forces have likely made larger gains in northeast Ukraine than ISW has previously assessed. Kharkiv Oblast Administration Head Oleh Synhubov stated on December 27 that Russian forces occupy 1.6 percent of Kharkiv Oblast.²⁵ ISW's control of terrain assessment as of December 26 had Russian forces occupying about 1.747 percent of Kharkiv Oblast (a difference of about 46 square kilometers). Ukrainian forces likely captured Dvorichna, Novomlynsk, and Tavilzhanka in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast and Kolomiychikha in Luhansk Oblast given that both Russian and Ukrainian sources reported Russian shelling against these settlements on December 27.²⁶ ISW has updated its maps accordingly.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of December 27, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

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

Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

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

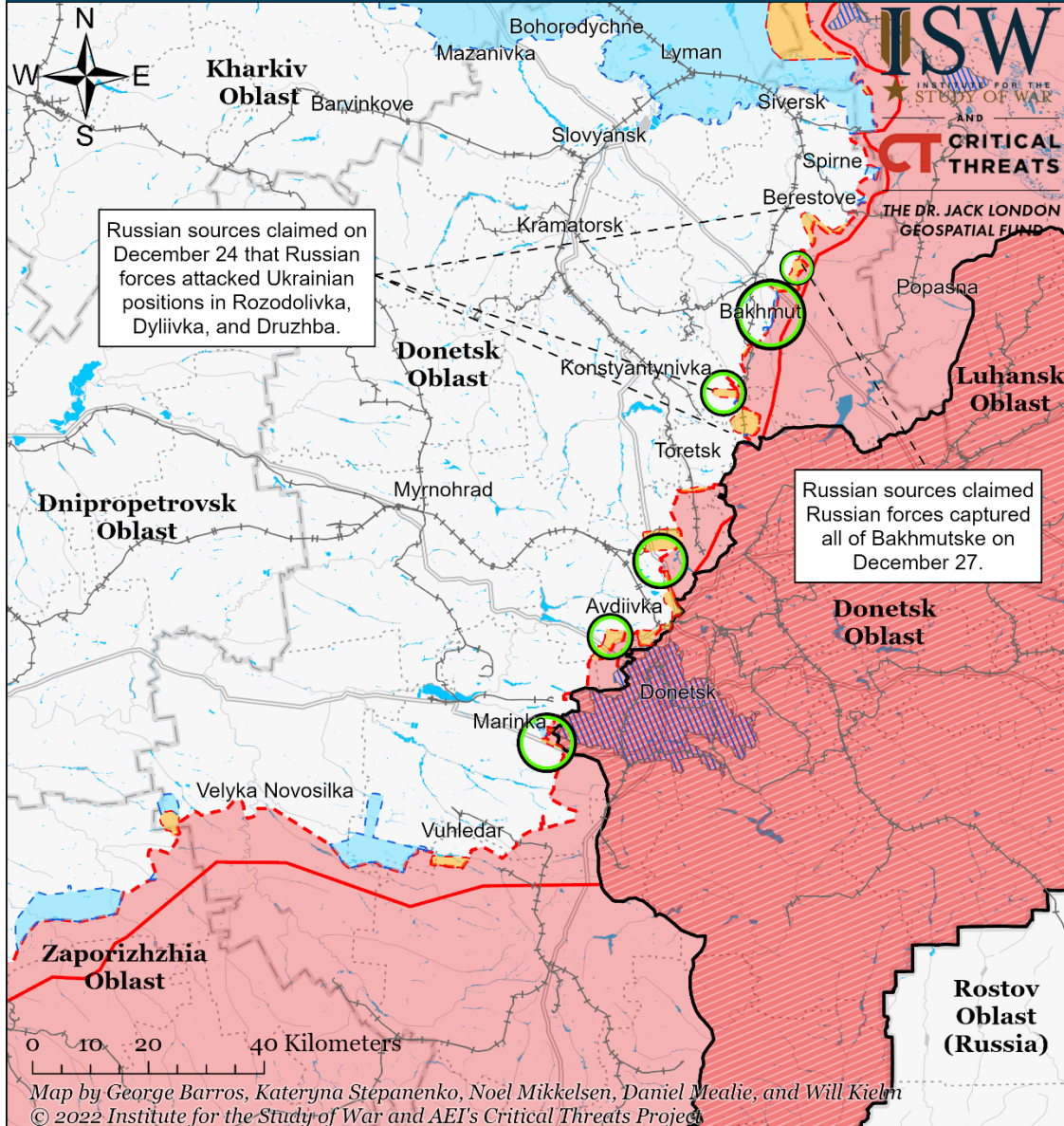
Russian forces in Bakhmut may be nearing culmination as Russian forces in Kherson did in August 2022. Russian combat losses are likely forcing the Russian military in the Bakhmut area to use squad-sized assault groups. Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty reported on December 27 that Russian forces in the Bakhmut area are no longer operating as company and battalion tactical groups and are instead operating in smaller groups of ten to fifteen servicemembers (squad-size organizations).²⁷ Russian forces similarly degenerated from company and battalion tactical groups to individual squad-sized groups when Russian units in Kherson Oblast became markedly degraded in August 2022.²⁸ ISW assessed at the time that the Russian military’s use of squad-sized groups in Kherson Oblast indicated that the Russian offensive had culminated as Russian ground forces were degraded so badly that they could no longer operate elements at echelons high enough to make meaningful gains.²⁹ The Russian military’s rate of advance in the Bakhmut area has recently slowed amidst growing personnel and munitions constraints that will likely prevent it from maintaining a high pace of offensive operations in the area in the near term.³⁰ The Russian military’s reported use of squad-sized groups is likely a result of prolonged attritional warfare and indicates the degradation of larger doctrinal formations above the platoon level. Russian rate of advances in the Bakhmut area will likely decrease if Russian forces continue advancing at all unless significant new reinforcements and supplies of artillery rounds arrive soon.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces increased the pace of offensive operations to capture Soledar. Russian sources claimed on December 27 that elements of the Wagner Group intensified offensive operations to capture Soledar and pushed Ukrainian forces out of much of Bakhmutske (3km southeast of Soledar).³¹ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are attempting to advance towards Soledar from positions to the southeast and east of Soledar and from positions northeast of Soledar near Yakovlivka (6km northeast of Soledar).³² Another Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Wagner Group continued to advance in the eastern outskirts of Soledar.³³ The intensification of offensive operations to capture Soledar will likely further exacerbate the constraints on personnel and equipment that are impacting the Wagner Group’s slowing rate of advance in the Bakhmut area.³⁴

Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut on December 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault near Dylivka (16km southwest of Bakhmut).³⁵ Pro-Wagner Russian outlet *RIA FAN* claimed that there have been heavy battles between Russian and Ukrainian forces in Opytne (4km south of Bakhmut) for more than a month and that assault detachments of the Wagner Group continue to break through Ukrainian defenses in the settlement.³⁶ A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Wagner Group pushed Ukrainian forces out from an unspecified stronghold in Opytne.³⁷ The Russian milblogger claimed that there was fierce fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces on the outskirts of Klishchivka (7km south of Bakhmut).³⁸ The Russian milblogger also claimed that elements of the Wagner Group and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) People’s Militia conducted several assaults near Bakhmut and that there is fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces northeast of Bakhmut near Rozdolivka and Vesele.³⁹

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on December 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults within 32km southwest of Avdiivka near Krasnohorivka, Vodyane, Vesele, Marinka, and Pobieda.⁴⁰ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces in Marinka are not making significant progress.⁴¹ Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are concentrating efforts to capture Marinka in order to reduce Ukrainian forces' ability to shell Donetsk City, to launch further offensive operations towards a key Ukrainian transport hub in Kurakhove, and to better encircle Ukrainian fortified positions in Avdiivka.⁴² Avdiivka City Head Vitaly Barabash reported that Russian forces have notably decreased the number of artillery strikes in the direction of Avdiivka due to supply issues with artillery munitions.⁴³ The Russian military's offensive operations in eastern Ukraine have heavily relied on artillery support to augment ground assaults, and supply issues with artillery munitions may substantially impact Russian forces' ability to maintain their current pace of offensive operations in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued indirect fire along the line of contact in Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.⁴⁴

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of December 27, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Major Railroads
Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives	

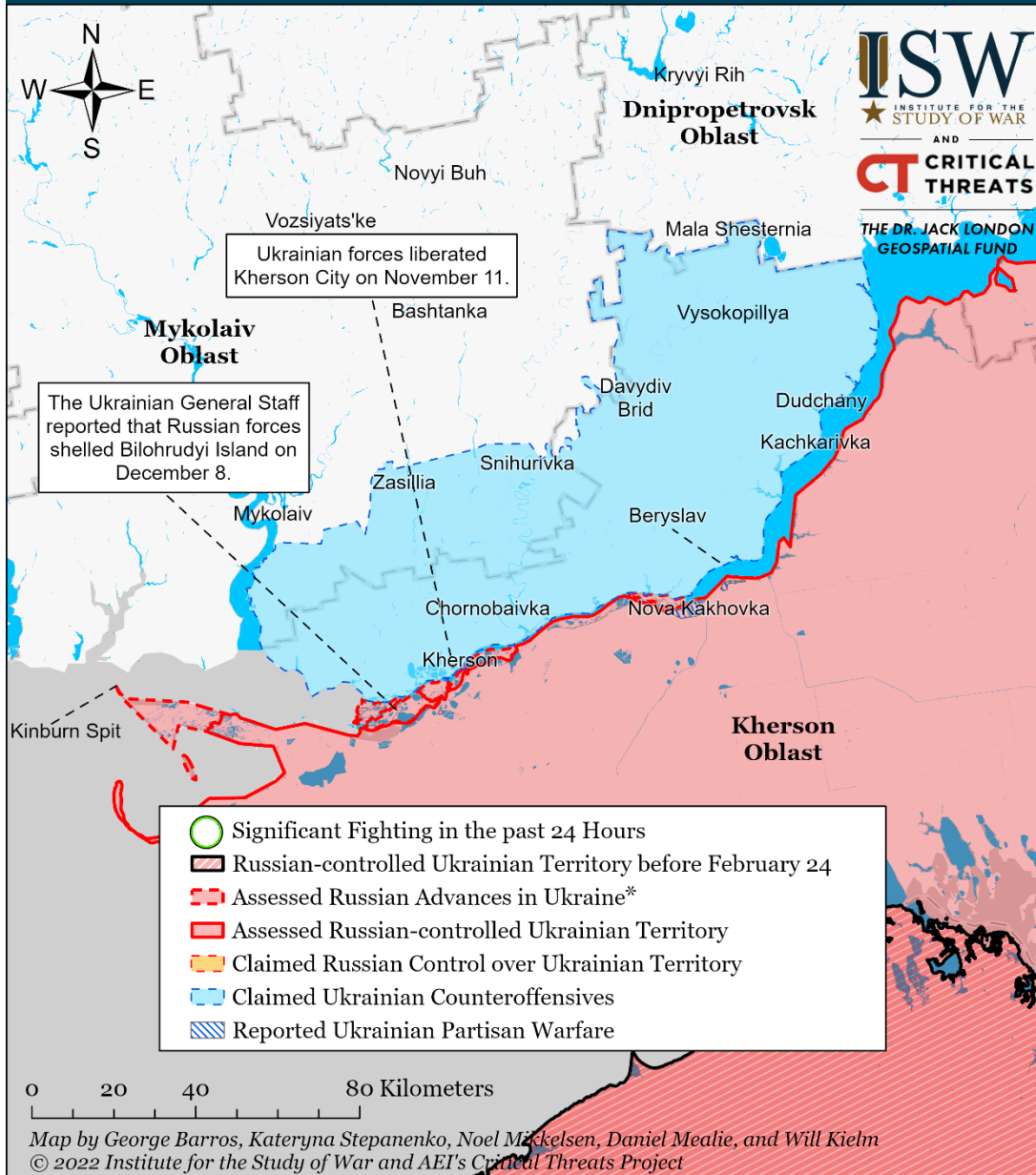
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

Russian forces are maintaining their fortification efforts in southern Ukraine and are continuing to shell Ukrainian positions and civilian infrastructure in Kherson, Mykolaiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhia oblasts.⁴⁵ Geolocated satellite imagery showed that Russian forces established defensive lines approximately 70km east of Tokmak and dug trenches around a radar station in Lazurne, southeastern Crimea.⁴⁶ Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Southern Defense Forces Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces are continuing to shell right-bank Kherson Oblast but Ukrainians are retaliating by returning fire on Russian positions on the left bank of the Dnipro River.⁴⁷ Russian forces continued to strike Ukrainian facilities—namely a factory and private and apartment buildings—in Kherson City, despite reportedly experiencing ammunition shortages in the Donetsk City direction.⁴⁸ Russian forces also shelled port areas in Ochakiv and settlements along the right bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts.⁴⁹ Russian forces, thus, appear to be prioritizing maintaining artillery fire against densely populated areas in southern Ukraine and holding a stabilized frontline along the Dnipro River over transferring ammunition to Avdiivka and Bakhmut areas that reportedly suffer shortages.⁵⁰

Ukrainian forces continued to target Russian rear areas. Ukrainian social media sources reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian base with mobilized men in Tytove (approximately 75km west of Mariupol).⁵¹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that a Ukrainian strike on December 25 killed and wounded up to 100 Russian servicemen, 15 of whom were personnel from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), near Novobilozerivka (approximately 57km northwest of Melitopol).⁵²

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of December 27, 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 Dnipro 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 Konka River.

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

The Kremlin continues to intensify its efforts to punish deserters and saboteurs in Russia in the public eye. A Russian media outlet reported that Russian authorities detained eight mobilized men from Kaliningrad Oblast who deserted their positions in Luhansk Oblast and arrived in Moscow to surrender their weapons.⁵³ The outlet also reported that Russian authorities began sentencing men who refused to participate in the war, sentencing a Kamchatka man to almost two years in prison for "failure to comply with an order in wartime."⁵⁴ Russian sources also reported that the FSB killed two men on December 26 in Kabardino-Balkarian Republic who were suspected of preparing an attack on a local military recruitment center.⁵⁵ Russian officials continue to persecute people for "discrediting" the Russian Armed Forces.⁵⁶ The Kremlin is likely setting conditions for further persecution of protesters, deserters, and saboteurs amidst a protracted war.

Some Russians are continuing to express their dissatisfaction with Russia's force generation efforts. A retired pensioner couple committed an arson attack against a Russian military recruitment center in Podolsk, Moscow Oblast on December 27.⁵⁷ A Russian independent outlet also reported that a young man in Syktyvkar, Komi Republic, committed an act of self-harm in a military recruitment center, likely out of fear of conscription.⁵⁸

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 authorities intensified efforts to deport Ukrainian children to Russia. ISW previously reported that Russian occupation officials require children in occupied territories to undergo mandatory Russian-administered medical examinations that may result in their deportation to Russia.⁵⁹ The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on December 27 that senior Russian officials have allocated more than 350 million rubles for the program since October 2022.⁶⁰ Zaporizhia Occupation Deputy Vladimir Rogov reported that the Russian Cabinet of Ministers is the senior Russian body responsible for funding this medical examination program and has allocated 435 million rubles for its continuation.⁶¹ The Russian Cabinet of Ministers implements its own decrees and directives and operates as the second highest executive entity in the Russian government, second only to the Russian President.⁶² Russian President Vladimir Putin can cancel any Russian Cabinet of Ministers decisions that do not have his approval or are contradictory to the Russian Constitution and Russian federal law.⁶³ ISW maintains that the forced deportation of Ukrainian children represents a possible violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.⁶⁴

Russian occupation authorities continue to intensify deportation efforts in occupied territories. Kherson Oblast Occupation Administration Head Vladimir Saldo stated on December 27 that the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations has "evacuated" 150,000 residents from Kherson Oblast in 2022.⁶⁵ The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian occupation officials are evacuating residents from Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast with the intention of creating a humanitarian crisis.⁶⁶ The report stated that Russian occupation officials aim to distort Ukrainian population demographics and advance information operations about Ukrainians "fleeing" Ukraine.⁶⁷

Wagner Group mercenaries may have murdered an ethnically Romani family, including three children, in occupied Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast. Ukrainian open-source intelligence aggregators reported that

Wagner mercenaries killed a Ukrainian Romani family of eight—including three children aged one, seven, and nine years old—in Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast on December 26.⁶⁸ One Ukrainian open-source aggregator claimed that it was unlikely Wagner mercenaries committed this crime.⁶⁹ Russian sources claimed that three previously-convicted residents from Kalininskiy Raion, Donetsk City committed the heinous crime to steal valuable property and the family's car.⁷⁰ Another Russian source claimed that there was “a group armed with machine guns” at the location of the shooting.⁷¹ ISW is unable to independently confirm any of these reports.

Russian officials continue to nationalize private Ukrainian property to support the war effort. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on December 27 that the Kremlin tasked occupation administration officials with seizing Ukrainian industrial facilities in occupied territories to supply the Russian military.⁷² Russian occupation authorities reportedly seized unspecified industrial facilities and appointed new Russian management because most workers refused to work with occupation officials.⁷³ The Ukrainian Resistance Center also reported that Russian occupation officials seized property and real estate in Henichesk, Zaporizhia Oblast, from Ukrainians who fled occupation and distributed notices announcing that residents are required to bring proof of ownership to Russian occupation officials.⁷⁴ The report stated that if residents do not provide proof, then Russian occupation officials will nationalize the property.⁷⁵ A Ukrainian source reported that Henichesk occupation officials did not provide an address or phone number for residents to report to and show their proof of ownership.⁷⁶

ISW will continue to report daily observed indicators consistent with the current assessed most dangerous course of action (MDCOA): a renewed invasion of northern Ukraine possibly aimed at Kyiv.

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. ISW currently assesses the risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine from Belarus as low, but possible, and the risk of Belarusian direct involvement as very low. This new section in the daily update is not in itself a forecast or assessment. It lays out the daily observed indicators we are using to refine our assessments and forecasts, which we expect to update regularly. Our assessment that the MDCOA remains unlikely has not changed. We will update this header if the assessment changes.

Observed indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense reiterated previous reports that elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army are likely in Belarus as of December 27.⁷⁷ All maneuver elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army have taken heavy losses near Kharkiv, Sumy, and eastern Kyiv Oblast, making its “elite” status and effective combat power even after reconstitution with mobilized reservists and/or conscripts questionable.

Observed ambiguous indicators for MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met on the sidelines of a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) meeting in St. Petersburg on December 27. Both Russian and Belarusian official readouts from this meeting are vague and do not indicate any significant activity.⁷⁸ The meeting marked an increased tempo for meetings between the two heads of state over the past year, however.⁷⁹ Putin and Lukashenko previously

met in Minsk on December 19.⁸⁰ Putin additionally gifted the eight CIS heads of state—including Lukashenko - specially made rings made of silver and gold.⁸¹ ISW has previously assessed that Putin seeks to establish Russian suzerainty over CIS member states.⁸²

- Geolocated footage posted on December 27 shows a train with at least 13 tanks in transit near Yakutsk, Sakha Republic, reportedly heading towards Ukraine.⁸³ It is unclear whether the tanks are heading to Belarus, Donbas, or elsewhere.

Observed counter-indicators for the MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- The Ukrainian General Staff reiterated that it has not observed Russian forces in Belarus forming a strike group as of December 27.⁸⁴
- Ukrainian State Border Guard Service Spokesman Andriy Demchenko stated on December 27 that situation on the Belarusian border remains under control and “somewhat tense in the information field.”⁸⁵ Demchenko stated that Belarusian elements remain on the Ukrainian-Belarusian border, but that their composition, positions, and sizes are not changing. Demchenko stated that Belarus and Russia are deliberately causing tensions on the border through demonstrative joint training, equipment deployments, and activity within the Union State’s Regional Grouping of Forces.

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://tass dot ru/interviews/16693267>

² <https://isw.pub/UkrWar120822>

³ <https://tass dot ru/interviews/16693267>

⁴ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-26>

⁵ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-26>

⁶ <https://tass dot ru/interviews/16693267>

⁷ <https://tass dot ru/interviews/16693267>

⁸ <https://tass dot ru/interviews/16693267>

⁹ <https://tass dot ru/interviews/16693267>

¹⁰ <https://tass dot ru/interviews/16693267>

¹¹ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-26> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122222>

¹² <https://isw.pub/UkrWar120222>

¹³ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar121522> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar120922> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar120822>

¹⁴ <https://www.1tv dot ru/shows/vremya-pokazhet/samoe-vremya/vladlen-tatarskiy-samoe-vremya-fragment-informacionno-kanala-ot-26-12-2022>; <https://t.me/vladlentatarskiy/18329>

¹⁵ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-24>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-23>;

<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-22>;
<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-21>

¹⁶ <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/18302>

¹⁷ https://t.me/president_sovet/2402 ; <https://t.me/sashakots/37855>

¹⁸ <https://t.me/wargonzo/10053>

¹⁹ <https://t.me/readovkanews/49678>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/49679>

²⁰ <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/18302>

²¹ <https://t.me/vladlentatarsky/18305>

²² <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10387>; https://t.me/miroshnik_r/10028; <https://t.me/readovkanews/49709>;
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<https://www.facebook.com/RomanTymbaliuk/posts/5251627698203792>

²³ <https://t.me/rybar/42303> ; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-23>

²⁴ <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10387>; https://t.me/miroshnik_r/10028; <https://t.me/readovkanews/49709>;
https://t.me/ruskiy_opolchenec/35401; <https://t.me/readovkanews/49711>; <https://t.me/rybar/42303>

²⁵ <https://suspilne dot media/346962-16-harkivskoi-oblasti-zalisaetsa-pid-okupacieu-rf-sinegubov/>

²⁶ <https://t.me/rybar/42298>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid04pYwrBMoU1vFWvYJhCjhZshg8K6Ygei73uPhy1tf9HTYrwdU4WR6eB6QtY MjD5hgl>

²⁷ <https://armyinform.com dot ua/2022/12/27/bahmut-zalyshayetsya-golovnym-napryamkom-udaru-rosijskyh-vijsk/>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5vvrB1YsqU>

²⁸ <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignAugust27>

²⁹ <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignAugust27>

³⁰ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-24>

³¹ <https://t.me/brussinf/5438> ; <https://t.me/epoddubny/14349> ; <https://t.me/readovkanews/49722> ;
<https://t.me/rybar/42299> ;

³² <https://t.me/brussinf/5438>

³³ <https://t.me/rybar/42306>

³⁴ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122422>

³⁵

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0jZ1A94Ft2d5tPFEXHW7e8cGzFp3vTENksbPP1CNW3hALrN1w9 QprQ1DhflQwTd3YI>

³⁶ https://t.me/riafan_everywhere/15609

³⁷ <https://t.me/rybar/42306>

³⁸ <https://t.me/rybar/42306>

³⁹ <https://t.me/rybar/42306>

⁴⁰

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0jZ1A94Ft2d5tPFEXHW7e8cGzFp3vTENksbPP1CNW3hALrN1w9 QprQ1DhflQwTd3YI>

⁴¹ <https://t.me/wargonzo/10041>

⁴² https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/6912

⁴³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUTHgecoEnM>; <https://suspilne dot media/346752-9-mln-ukrainciv-bez-svitla-u-genstabi-poperedili-pro-zagrozu-novih-raketnih-udariv-rf-307-den-vijni-onlajn/>

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Geolocated to 44.640452, 34.382704

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5vvrB1YsqU>; <https://suspilne dot media/346752-9-mln-ukrainciv-bez-svitla-u-genstabi-poperedili-pro-zagrozu-novih-raketnih-udariv-rf-307-den-vijni-onlajn/>

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<https://t.me/hueviyherson/31834>

⁴⁹ <https://t.me/khersonskaODA/2767>; <https://t.me/rybar/42298>; <https://t.me/hueviyherson/31840>;

<https://t.me/hueviyherson/31839>; <https://t.me/mykolaivskaODA/3840>; <https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/2831>

⁵⁰ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-26>;

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⁵¹ <https://t.me/hueviyherson/31824>

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⁵³ <https://t.me/bazabazon/15169>

⁵⁴ <https://t.me/bazabazon/15171>; [https://meduza \[dot\] io/news/2022/12/27/na-kamchatke-voennogo-prigovorili-pochti-k-dvum-godam-kolonii-poseleniya-za-otkaz-ot-uchastiya-v-voyni](https://meduza [dot] io/news/2022/12/27/na-kamchatke-voennogo-prigovorili-pochti-k-dvum-godam-kolonii-poseleniya-za-otkaz-ot-uchastiya-v-voyni)

⁵⁵ <https://t.me/bazabazon/15170>

⁵⁶ [https://meduza \[dot\] io/news/2022/12/27/zhitelya-belgoroda-oshtrafovali-po-statii-o-diskreditatsii-armii-iz-za-plakata-obnimi-esli-ty-za-mir](https://meduza [dot] io/news/2022/12/27/zhitelya-belgoroda-oshtrafovali-po-statii-o-diskreditatsii-armii-iz-za-plakata-obnimi-esli-ty-za-mir)

⁵⁷ <https://t.me/bazabazon/15178>

⁵⁸ <https://t.me/sotaproject/51571>

⁵⁹ According to this scheme the Russian doctors reportedly falsely claim that the children require medical treatment in Russia, convince the children that Russia is a safer place to live, and – after deportation – delay their return from Russia, consequently forcing Ukrainian parents to leave Ukraine to be with their children. Once the parents arrive in Russia, martial law prohibits both the child and the parent from returning to occupied Ukrainian territories.

<https://sprotyv.mod dot gov.ua/2022/12/27/vorog-prodovzhyt-praktyku-deportacziyi-ukrayinskyh-ditej-v-nastupnomu-roczi/>; <https://sprotyv.mod dot gov.ua/2022/11/04/trykryvayuchys-likuvannyam-rosiyan-deportuyut-ditej-z-tot-na-terytoriyu-rf/>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-26>;

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⁶¹ <https://t.me/vrogov/6784>

⁶² <https://tass dot ru/info/7529869>

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- ⁶³ <https://tass dot ru/info/7529869>
- ⁶⁴ https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf
- ⁶⁵ https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/267
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- ⁶⁸ <https://twitter.com/JayinKyiv/status/1607640696118181888> ; <https://twitter.com/TreasChest/status/1607620302674231306>
- ⁶⁹ https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1607619471778144256?s=20&t=6eAXpe-h4xlnYKI34d_gSA; https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1607688524836339718?s=20&t=6eAXpe-h4xlnYKI34d_gSA;
- ⁷⁰ <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBezsonoV/20833> ; <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBezsonoV/20834> ; <https://t.me/readovkanews/49712> ; <https://t.me/voenkorkotenok/44009>; https://t.me/rian_ru/189887
- ⁷¹ <https://t.me/itsdonetsk/49028>
- ⁷² <https://sprotyv.mod dot gov.ua/2022/12/27/rosiyany-planuyut-ekspluatuvaty-zahopleni-promyslovi-obyekty-na-tot-u-svoyih-vlasnyh-czilyah/>
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- ⁷⁶ <https://t.me/hueviyherson/31819>
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- ⁷⁹ <https://twitter.com/BBCSteveR/status/1604440695485366272>
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- ⁸³ <https://twitter.com/raging545/status/1607674541375115264?s=20&t=hl26tN-9TA04XA9DEzeXEg>
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