

# **Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 13, 2023**

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and Frederick Kagan**  
**February 13, 10:30 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.

**Moscow continues to leverage its relationship with Iran to provide military support for the war in Ukraine.** The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) intercepted audio on February 10 reportedly of two Shahed drone operators coordinating targets in what the GUR claimed was a "Kurdish dialect interspersed with Farsi words."<sup>1</sup> ISW cannot identify the dialect in the audio intercept with high confidence, but the fact that the individuals in the audio clip are Shahed operators indicates that they may be operators from Iranian Kurdistan who are likely affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). It is far less likely that Russia has been able to identify or import individual Kurdish militants with experience operating drones to conduct Shahed strikes on Ukraine. ISW has previously reported that IRGC-affiliated elements are likely supporting Russia's use of Shahed drones by acting as operators and trainers, and the operators in the GUR intercept are likely part of the same line of effort.<sup>2</sup> UK outlet *The Guardian* relatedly reported on February 13 that Iran has smuggled at least 18 long-range drones to Russia using boats and Iranian state-owned aircraft.<sup>3</sup> *The Guardian* found that these shipments include six Mohajer-6 drones and 12 Shahed-121 and 129 drones, which have air-to-ground strike capabilities and are designed to deliver a payload to the target and return to base, unlike the Shahed-131 and 136 loitering munition-type drones that Russian forces have widely used in Ukraine thus far.<sup>4</sup> Russian milbloggers noted on February 13 that IRGC-affiliated Il-76 cargo aircraft routinely fly to Russia, suggesting that Tehran consistently provides Moscow with a variety of material using IRGC-affiliated planes.<sup>5</sup> These data points, taken in tandem, suggest that Russia continues to rely on Iran for military and technological support in Ukraine and that some Iranian personnel are likely in Ukraine directly supporting Russian attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure, as ISW has previously reported.<sup>6</sup>

**The Wagner Group's continued dissemination of deliberately brutal extrajudicial execution videos and generally graphic content is normalizing an increasing level of brutality and thuggishness within the domestic Russian information space.** A Wagner Group-affiliated Telegram channel posted a video on February 12 showing the brutal execution of former Wagner fighter Dmitry Yakushchenko with a sledgehammer.<sup>7</sup> Yakushchenko reportedly was convicted of robbery and murder in Crimea and was serving a 19-year sentence when he joined Wagner.<sup>8</sup> The Wagner-affiliated Telegram channel accused Yakushchenko of defecting to Ukraine and posted a video reportedly of Yakushchenko expressing pro-Ukrainian sentiments while in Ukrainian captivity.<sup>9</sup> Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin later posted a video that appears to be of Yakushchenko alive and uninjured and thanking Wagner for forgiveness.<sup>10</sup> Whether the videos of Yakushchenko's execution or alleged proof-of-life are real—or in what sequence they might have been recorded—are less important than the wider issue highlighted by the creation and dissemination of such videos. Several prominent milbloggers responded positively to the execution video, claiming that such vicious and inhumane killing is an appropriate way for Wagner to deal with betrayal in its ranks.<sup>11</sup> The Wagner-affiliated channel that originally circulated the video claimed that being accused of brutality during a war is like getting fined for speeding during a car race, which is the same remark made by the channel following the summary execution of ex-Wagner fighter Yevgeny Nuzhin in November 2022.<sup>12</sup>

The continued justification and glorification of such brutal tactics is symptomatic of the wider pathology that Wagner has come to represent—one where excessive and performative violence is taken as a necessary tactic of military practice. Many military justice systems, including America's, include death penalties for various crimes, particularly in combat. Militaries fighting for healthy societies that are themselves professional and well-disciplined do not, however, conduct executions with sledgehammers nor do they glory in the vicious brutality of the capital punishments they execute. The Kremlin will likely need to balance its continued desire to use Wagner as a stop-gap measure in pursuing operations in Ukraine with the damage that the increasingly evident chaotic brutality that Wagner has come to institutionalize is inflicting on Russian society.

**Russian authorities are increasingly undertaking measures to promote self-censorship in Russia under the guise of countering increased information threats resulting from the invasion of Ukraine.** A representative of Russia's Main Radio Frequency Center (GRChTs), a subsidiary of Russian state media censor Roskomnazor, announced the launch of the "Okulus" automatic search system that automates scanning text, images, and video footage to detect state-censored content, extremist themes, calls for mass illegal activity, suicide, and pro-drug and pro-LGBTQ content (which Moscow apparently views as posing a national security threat). The GRChTs will reportedly fully develop Okulus by 2025.<sup>13</sup> The Russian Okulus has no connection to any technology offerings of Western companies that have similar names. The GRChTs claimed that an unprecedented amount of fake information disseminated at high speed has flooded the Russian information space following the start of the invasion of Ukraine and that Okulus can analyze 200,000 images per day (an increase from the manual processing of 106 images and 101 videos per day) to address this increase in information.<sup>14</sup> A Belarusian hacker group that supposedly hacked into Okulus claimed that GRChTs programmed Okulus to find personal insults directed at Russian President Vladimir Putin, including comparisons to unflattering figures.<sup>15</sup> Okulus, alongside other recent Kremlin efforts to digitize Russian society while simultaneously expanding control of digital Russia, are likely efforts to scare Russians into further self-censorship. It is also unclear to what extent the Kremlin will shield critical milbloggers from such systems.

Independent Russian language opposition outlet *Meduza* reported that Roskomnazor may soon ban YouTube and that Russian state-affiliated social media outlet *VK* is expanding its social media monopoly to recruit famous Russian-language content creators on YouTube to its video service. *VK* is also attempting to expand its music streaming service, likely in an effort to eliminate Russians' interactions with unwanted content.<sup>16</sup> Russian authorities also seek to expand the scope of rhetoric eligible for censorship. A United Russia State Duma Deputy announced on February 12 that he is planning to propose legislation to introduce criminal liability for insulting Russian military figures with the titles "Hero of Russia" and "Hero of the USSR."<sup>17</sup> The Kremlin's collective skin appears to be thinning as the war protracts at a rate that can be measured by the number of phrases and words Russians are forbidden to say.

**Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to publicly stand by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) as Russian forces continue to suffer catastrophic casualties around Vuhledar, Donetsk Oblast.** Putin commented on a Russian state TV show recorded on February 9 and broadcast on February 12 that Russian "naval infantry is working as it should right now" and that the Pacific and Northern fleets are "heroically fighting."<sup>18</sup> Putin likely deliberately praised his Pacific and Northern fleets against the backdrop of highly published and substantial losses to mechanized elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Pacific Fleet in their assault on Vuhledar.<sup>19</sup> The

Russian MoD had been silent regarding Russian losses in Vuhledar, and Putin's comment follows Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's statement on February 7 that Russian forces are successfully developing an offensive in Vuhledar.<sup>20</sup> Putin is likely deliberately doubling down on the Russian MoD's extremely overly optimistic description of the Vuhledar frontline to sustain the narrative of an imminent and sweeping major Russian offensive in Donetsk Oblast. Putin is also likely refraining from siding with critical milbloggers who had been increasingly accusing the Russian MoD and military command of failing to learn from their previous mistakes when conducting mechanized drives.<sup>21</sup>

Putin's comment, however, may also signal an intent to reinforce the assault on Vuhledar with more mobilized forces or by recommitting remaining Northern Fleet elements to the area.<sup>22</sup> ISW recently observed Ukrainian forces destroying Russian surface-to-air missile systems—reportedly belonging to the 80th Separate Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Northern Fleet—in occupied Kherson Oblast.<sup>23</sup> Ukrainian officials have also previously reported that the Russian military had been accumulating some forces in Mariupol, just 75km southeast of Vuhledar.<sup>24</sup> These indicators suggest that Russian forces, including elements of the Northern Fleet, may be preparing for commitment to Vuhledar. Putin may have been signaling his continued support for Russian forces there to offset news of significant defeats to conventional Russian units on critical sectors of the front.

**The Russian military's use of mobilized personnel as replacements in battle-damaged units is unlikely to generate sufficient offensive capabilities for a large-scale and rapid mechanized advance.** Representative of the Ukrainian Tavriisk operational direction, Oleksiy Dmytrashkivskiy, stated that the Russian military will need to restaff the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade for the third time due to its losses in Vuhledar and previous military failures around Kyiv Oblast and Pavlivka, Donetsk Oblast.<sup>25</sup> Dmytrashkivskiy noted that the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade had 5,000 servicemen prior to its defeat in Vuhledar. A Russian serviceman from the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade who participated in an assault on Vuhledar told a Russian opposition outlet that the brigade was 80% to 90% staffed with mobilized men because the Russian military command consistently reinforces Russian units with mobilized servicemen.<sup>26</sup> Russia's continued reliance on mobilized men who were unable to perform military tasks such as identifying and detecting minefields or knowing what to do having blundered into them during the assault indicates that these mobilized elements do not have the necessary combat experience necessary to stage a successful mechanized offensive. These mobilized men have likely received limited individual training and lack the unit cohesion and professional training or experience necessary for large-scale mechanized offensives. Russia may deploy additional mobilized elements that may be able to conduct sound defensive operations or attrition-based offensive operations to the Vuhledar frontline, but these mobilized soldiers are unlikely to become effective mechanized elements capable of mounting successful offensive operations in any short period of months.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Moscow continues to leverage its relationship with Iran to provide military support for the war in Ukraine.**
- **The Wagner Group's continued dissemination of deliberately brutal extrajudicial execution videos and generally graphic content is normalizing an increasing level of brutality and thuggishness within the domestic Russian information space.**
- **Russian military command is facing challenges integrating irregular armed formations with conventional forces.**

- **Russian authorities are increasingly undertaking measures to promote self-censorship in Russia under the guise of countering increased information threats resulting from the invasion of Ukraine.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to publicly stand by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) as his naval infantry continues to suffer catastrophic casualties around Vuhledar, Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks northwest of Svatove and near Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces made marginal territorial gains near Bakhmut and continued to conduct ground attacks across the Donetsk Oblast front line.**
- **Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked Ukrainian positions in western Zaporizhia Oblast while continuing to fortify their positions in the region.**
- **Russian officials and regime-linked actors continue to exploit assets from captured Ukrainian cities for economic and military benefit.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 13, 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.

***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.***

- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1—Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

### **Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine**

**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1- Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

***ISW continues to assess the current Russian most likely course of action (MLCOA) is an imminent offensive effort in Luhansk Oblast and has therefore adjusted the structure of the daily campaign assessments. We will no longer include the Eastern Kharkiv and Western Luhansk Oblast area as part of Ukrainian counteroffensives and will assess this area as a subordinate part of the Russian main effort in Eastern Ukraine. The assessment of Luhansk Oblast as part of the Russian main effort does not preclude the possibility of continued Ukrainian counteroffensive actions here or anywhere else in theater in the future. ISW will report on Ukrainian counteroffensive efforts as they occur.***

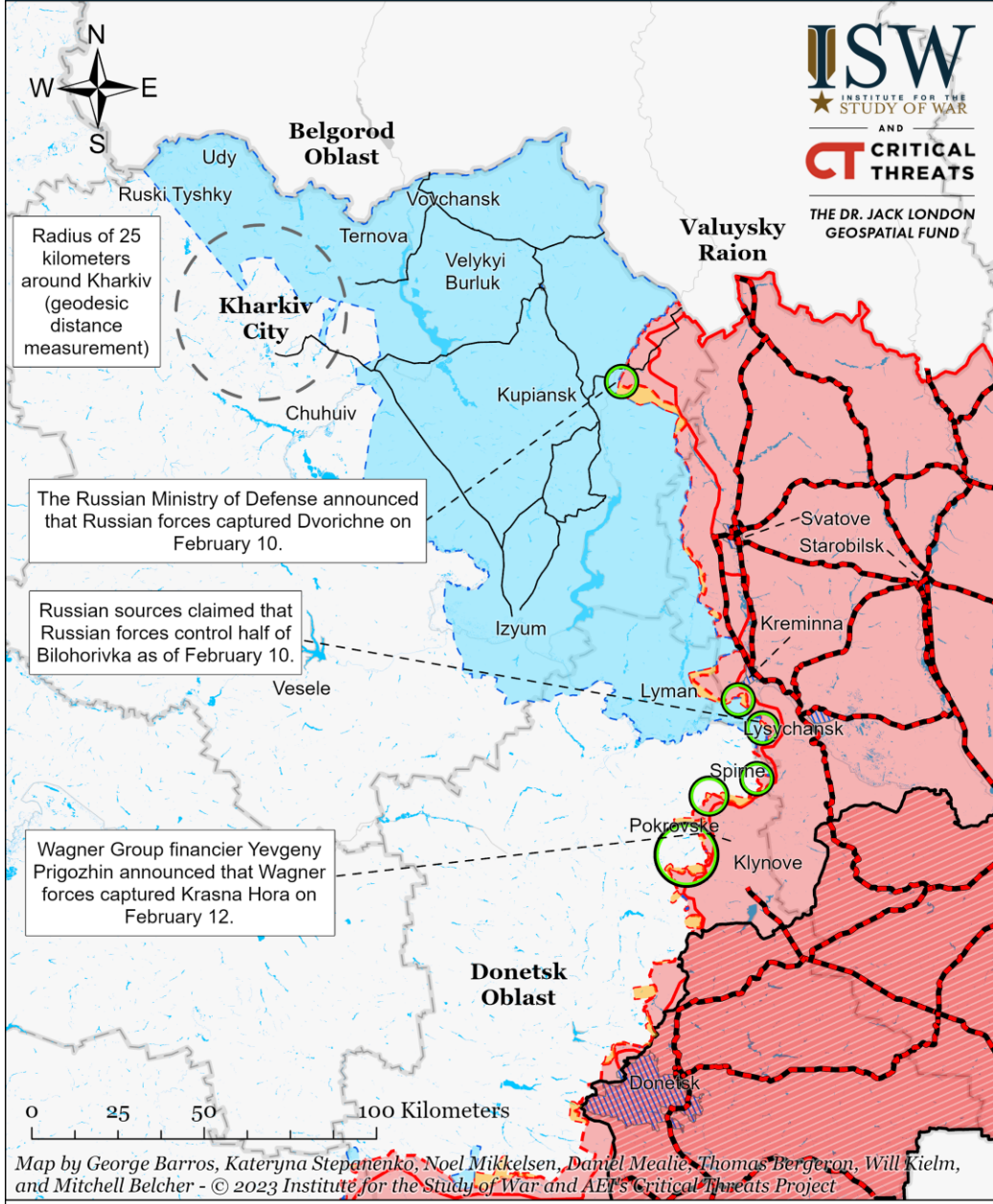
Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks northwest of Svatove on February 12 and 13. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian ground attack near Hryanikivka (55km northwest of Svatove) on February 13.<sup>27</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced up to five kilometers in unspecified areas in the Kupyansk direction (about 50km northwest of Svatove) and made marginal territorial gains near Hryanykivka, Dvorichne, Synkivka, and Lyman Pershyi, all within 16km northeast of Kupyansk.<sup>28</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on February 12 that Russian and Ukrainian forces clashed near Kotlyarivka and Kyslivka, 26km northwest of Svatove.<sup>29</sup> Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted reconnaissance-in-force in the Dvorichna and Novomlynsk areas, within 20km northeast of Kupyansk.<sup>30</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Kreminna area on February 12 and 13. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults near Kreminna itself; 10km south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka and the Hryhorivka forest area in Luhansk Oblast; and

13km west of Kreminna near Torske, Donetsk Oblast, on February 12 and 13.<sup>31</sup> Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhii Cherevaty stated on February 12 that Russian forces are concentrating their efforts in the Lyman direction west of Kreminna and increasing their use of artillery in Luhansk Oblast.<sup>32</sup> Russian sources claimed that Russian forces pushed back Ukrainian forces 1km in an unspecified forest area near Kreminna.<sup>33</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on February 12 that Russian forces attacked Bilohorivka and attempted to advance on Zarichne from positions in Dibrova, both just southwest of Kreminna.<sup>34</sup> Another Russian milblogger posted footage in which Russian personnel claim that Russian Spetsnaz forces are correcting Russian fire against Ukrainian positions in the Torske area west of Kreminna and that professional forces and mobilized personnel work together efficiently, suggesting that Russian sources want to create a narrative that Russian forces are dedicating effective personnel to offensive operations near Kreminna.<sup>35</sup>

Russian milbloggers are increasingly claiming that Ukrainian forces are preparing for a Russian offensive along the entire Luhansk Oblast frontline. Milbloggers claimed on February 12 and 13 that Ukrainian forces expect Russian forces to make massive territorial gains and are increasing fortifications and transporting reserves to areas near the Luhansk Oblast frontline.<sup>36</sup> Some milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are withdrawing from certain active areas in the front line.<sup>37</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of February 13, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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Radius of 25 kilometers around Kharkiv (geodesic distance measurement)

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that Russian forces captured Dvorichne on February 10.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces control half of Bilohorivka as of February 10.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced that Wagner forces captured Krasna Hora on February 12.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiehl, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AET's Critical Threats Project

- 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.



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

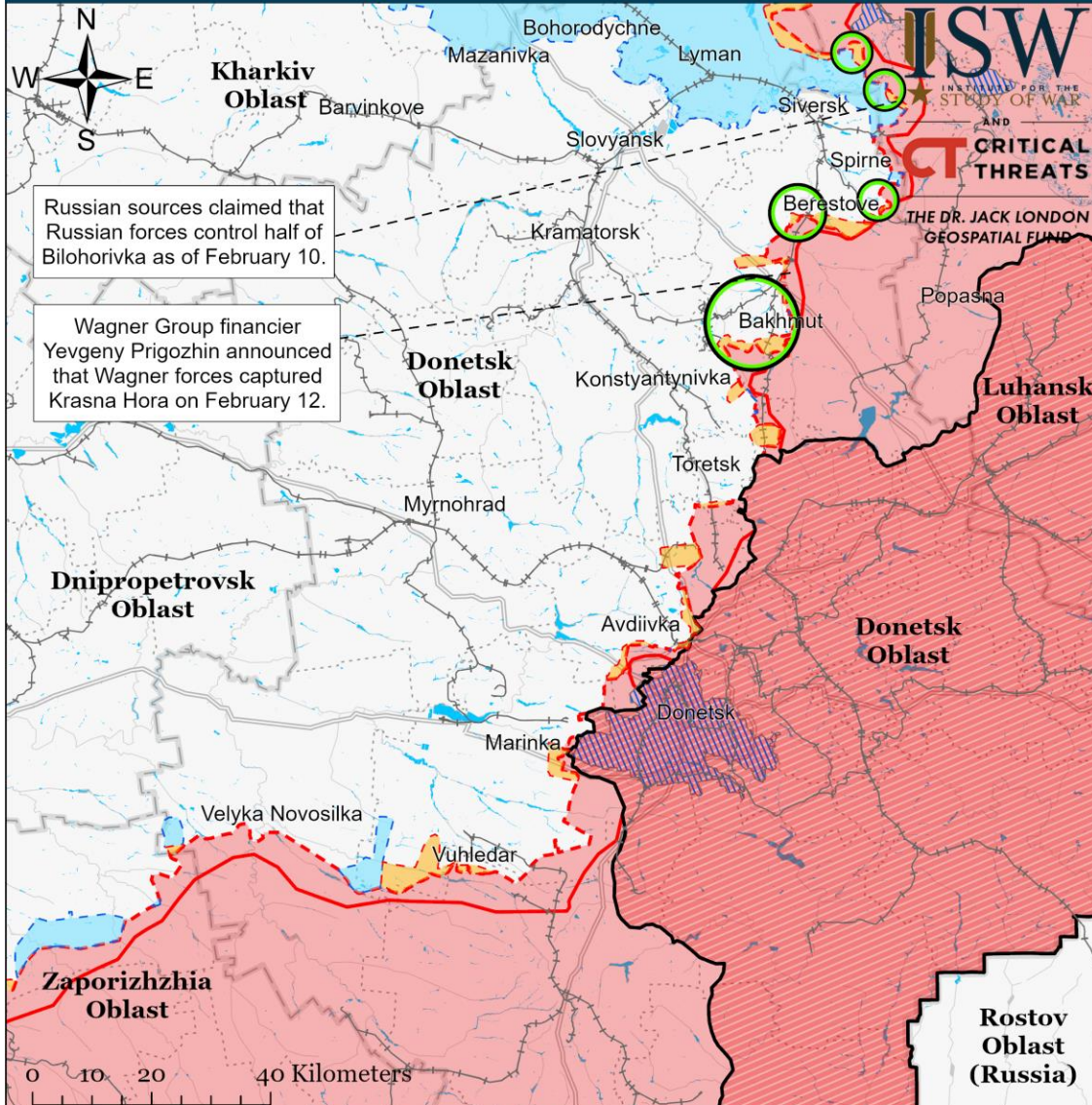
Russian forces continued making tactical gains and conducted ground attacks around Bakhmut on February 12 and 13. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself; northeast of Bakhmut near Fedorivka (15km northeast) and Vyimka (22km northeast); north of Bakhmut near Vasyukivka (12km north); southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka (7km southwest); and west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west) and Chasiv Yar (10km west) on February 12 and 13.<sup>38</sup> Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces spokesperson Colonel Serhii Cherevaty stated on February 12 that Russian and Ukrainian forces engaged in 19 combat clashes over the course of the day and that fighting occurred near Fedorivka, Chasiv Yar, and Ivanivske.<sup>39</sup> Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that Wagner Group forces captured Krasna Hora (4km north of Bakhmut) on February 12, which is confirmed by footage and imagery of Wagner Group fighters in Krasna Hora.<sup>40</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed the capture of Krasna Hora on February 13 and stated that "volunteers of assault detachments" took the settlement, continuing the Russian MoD's campaign to undermine Wagner's role in operations around Bakhmut.<sup>41</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner Group forces are now fighting for Paraskoviivka (just north of Krasna Hora and about 5km north of Bakhmut) but that Ukrainian forces maintain control of the settlement.<sup>42</sup> Russian sources additionally claimed on February 12 and 13 that fighting continued along the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway and near the E40 Bakhmut-Slovyansk highway.<sup>43</sup> Russian sources reiterated that Russian forces have not yet completed the operational encirclement of Bakhmut as of February 13.<sup>44</sup>

Russian forces conducted ground attacks along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on February 12. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Pervomaiske and on the southwestern outskirts near Pobieda and Marinka on February 12 and did not confirm any ground attacks in this area on February 13.<sup>45</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on February 12 that Russian troops continued attacking towards Nevelske (on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City) and fought in Marinka.<sup>46</sup> A Russian milblogger posted footage on February 13 of the 132nd Motor Rifle Division of the 1st Army Corps (forces of the Donetsk People's Republic) striking Ukrainian trenches north of Avdiivka, and notably characterized the 1st Army Corps as part of the Russian Southern Military District (SMD), which is consistent with the official February 3 integration of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic (DNR and LNR) militias into the SMD.<sup>47</sup> Other milbloggers posted footage of assault groups of the 150th Motor Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army, SMD) operating in Marinka.<sup>48</sup> DNR troops that have been subsumed into the SMD are likely experiencing logistical issues associated with the integration of irregular formations into conventional units. ISW is continuing to monitor for reports of additional SMD (or other) regular units moving into the Donetsk City area as a possible indicator that the Russians will launch a significant offensive on this axis. The lack of a major new Russian offensive on the Donetsk City axis prevents Russian operations around Vuhledar and Bakhmut from being mutually supporting. ISW has not yet observed any such indicators.

Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack in western Donetsk Oblast on February 12. The

Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled a Russian attack near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City) on February 12 and did not confirm any ground attacks in this area on February 13.<sup>49</sup> Geolocated footage posted on February 12 shows Russian tanks hitting mines east of Vuhledar, indicating that Russian troops previously made minor advances in this area.<sup>50</sup> Commander of the DNR "Vostok" battalion Alexander Khodakovsky claimed on February 13 that a Ukrainian HIMARS strike on Vostok headquarters killed the headquarters commander but that Russian command and control in the Vuhledar area will not be impacted by the strike because of duplicated communication channels.<sup>51</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 29th Combined Arms Army (SMD), 155th Naval Infantry Brigade, DNR formations, and 3rd Army Corps have occupied new ground near Vuhledar and are escalating offensive operations in this area.<sup>52</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 13, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian sources claimed that Russian forces control half of Bilohorivka as of February 10.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced that Wagner forces captured Krasna Hora on February 12.

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Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiehl, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- 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)**

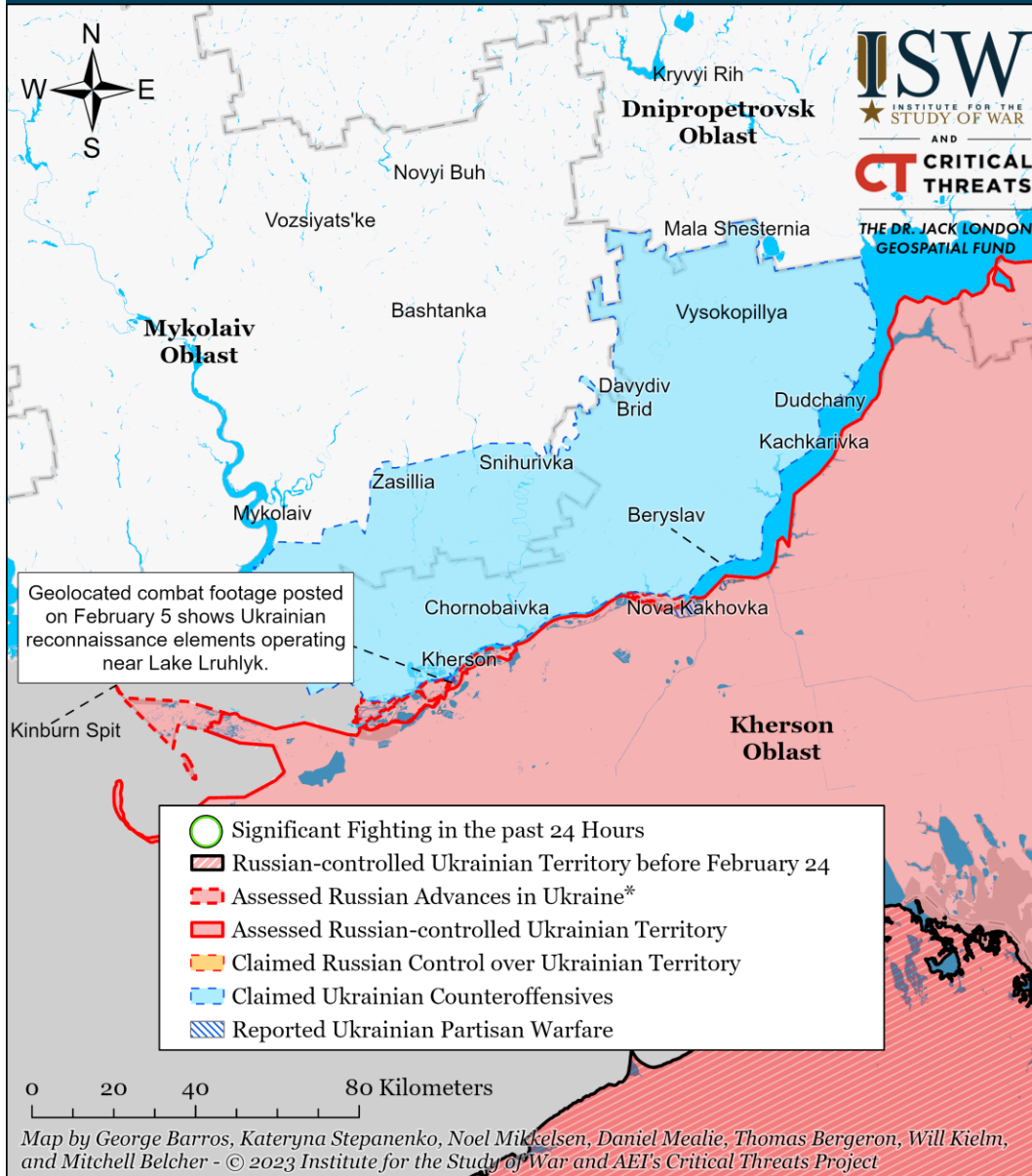
Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked Ukrainian positions in western Zaporizhia Oblast on February 13 while continuing to fortify their positions in the region. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault on Zaliznychne (about 78km southeast of Zaporizhzhia City).<sup>53</sup> The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that open-source imagery shows that as of February 7, Russian forces have further bolstered defensive fortifications in central Zaporizhia Oblast - particularly in Tarasivka (about 26km southwest of Zaliznychne).<sup>54</sup> The UK MoD added that Russian forces also extended a stretch of fortifications on the Orikhiv-Vasylivka line south of Zaporizhzhia City. The UK MoD assessed that Russian forces are expanding the construction of defensive lines and deploying personnel to Zaporizhia and Luhansk oblasts out of concern for Ukrainian counteroffensives, despite maintaining an operational focus on offensives in Donbas. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger also expressed concerns over the possibility of a Ukrainian counteroffensive in southern Ukraine via western Zaporizhia Oblast in late spring to early summer.<sup>55</sup> ISW makes no effort to forecast Ukrainian activity, however.

Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in Kherson or Mykolaiv oblasts between February 12 and February 13. Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Southern Defense Forces, Nataliya Humenyuk stated on February 12 that Russian forces are not deploying military equipment or personnel to Kherson Oblast that would threaten Ukrainian positions on the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River.<sup>56</sup> Humenyuk added that Russian forces have recently conducted a troop rotation on the Kinburn Spit, Mykolaiv Oblast, and noted that Russian forces are concentrated at the base of the spit to avoid Ukrainian artillery fire on narrower areas.<sup>57</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russia deployed 200 Rosgvardia servicemen to Lazurne (approximately 65km southwest of Kherson City) to strengthen counter-subversive measures in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast.<sup>58</sup> Russian forces continued to shell Kherson City and settlements in its vicinity and reportedly damaged a major railway track near the city.<sup>59</sup> Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces continued to target Russian positions on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River, and geolocated footage reportedly showed a Ukrainian loitering munition destroying a Russian autonomous observation post on the Nova Kakhovka Dam.<sup>60</sup>

A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger denied Western reports about Russia's deliberate efforts to lower the water levels in the Kakhovka Reservoir in an effort to create an ecological disaster that would shut down the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant's (ZNPP) cooling system.<sup>61</sup> The milblogger downplayed the reasons for lowered levels in the reservoir as preparations for snow melting and spring floods.<sup>62</sup>

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces shot down a Ukrainian drone over the Sea of Azov and 12 drones in the vicinity of Dzhankoy, Crimea, between February 11 and February 12.<sup>63</sup> Geolocated footage published on February 12 showed the activation of Russian air defenses in Kirovske Air Base, Crimea.<sup>64</sup>

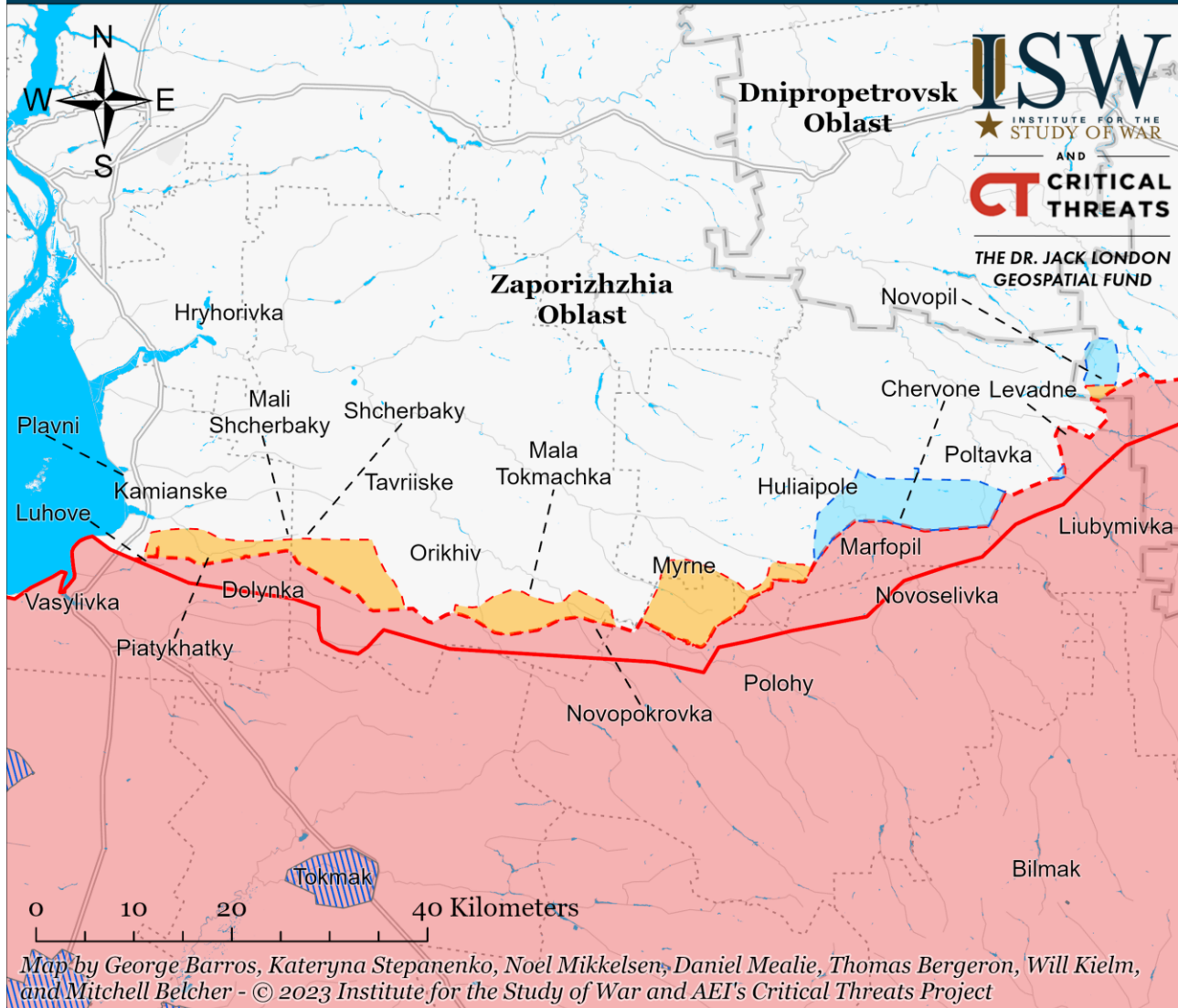
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 13, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



\* 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.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of February 12, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- 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.

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

Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) representative Vadym Skibitsky stated on February 12 that Russia will postpone a second wave of mobilization as Russia is still experiencing difficulties with the first wave of mobilization.<sup>65</sup> Russian authorities however continue to carry out crypto-mobilization efforts in order to mitigate the negative consequences of an announced second wave of mobilization, as ISW has previously assessed.<sup>66</sup> Putin previously tasked the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) with resolving systematic failures within the mobilization systems on a short deadline and may be using the lack of improvements as a premise to delay the unpopular but likely necessary second mobilization wave.<sup>67</sup> Geolocated satellite imagery captured in late January and early February also showed Russians constructing a new field camp in the vicinity of Pogonovo Training Ground in Voronezh Oblast, which may support future mobilization efforts.<sup>68</sup>

Wagner Group mercenaries are continuing to suffer high casualties as a result of costly operations in eastern Ukraine. Two Wagner fighters and ex-convicts told *CNN* that their units sustained serious losses in "first wave" style assaults.<sup>69</sup> One soldier claimed that 60 of 90 personnel in his unit died in an assault near Bilohorivka, Luhansk Oblast, and observed that Wagner command would commit another unit to sustain the attack despite heavy casualties.<sup>70</sup> Another Wagner soldier also claimed that Wagner commanders threatened to kill retreating soldiers and would not evacuate wounded personnel from the battlefield.<sup>71</sup> These claims are consistent with previous ISW reporting on Wagner's treatment of inexperienced convicts as cannon fodder.<sup>72</sup>

The Russian military command is facing challenges integrating irregular armed formations into conventional force structures. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 13 that Russian mobilized personnel integrated into the units of the former Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) 1st Army Corps (now part of the Russian Southern Military District) are increasingly refusing to participate in the offensive.<sup>73</sup> DNR commanders and servicemen are likely trying to throw inexperienced Russian mobilized men onto the frontlines due to frustrations with the lack of rotations of their own men or as retribution for unequal treatment of proxy forces in the past. Igor Girkin, a prominent milblogger and former Russian officer who commanded militants in Donbas in 2014, complained that Russian officials have removed several mobilized Russian units from the frontlines following their appeals to local governors but did not offer the same treatment to units from illegally annexed territories.<sup>74</sup> A Russian milblogger also claimed that members of the Russian 51st Guards Airborne Regiment (of the 106th Guards Airborne Division) are purposefully injuring themselves in order to not fight alongside Wagner units. The post also claims Wagner forces threatened to shoot members of members of the 51st Airborne Regiment if they did not save wounded Wagner fighters.<sup>75</sup>

## **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 and regime-linked actors continue to exploit assets from captured Ukrainian cities for economic and military benefit. *BBC Russia* reported on February 13 that Chechen businessman and close friend of Chechen Head Ramzan Kadyrov, Valid Korchagin, became a co-owner of the Mariupol metallurgical combine (Ilyich Iron and Steel Works in Mariupol) and a Russian chain of restaurants

and cafes in Mariupol.<sup>76</sup> *BBC Russia* reported that Korchagin is likely related to Chechen Senator Suleyman Geremeyev and Deputy Head of the Chechen Ministry of Construction Vakhit Geremeyev, both of whom are reportedly related to close Kadyrov ally and State Duma parliamentarian Adam Delimhanov.<sup>77</sup> The head of Transparency International—Russia, Ilya Shumanov, suggested that the Kremlin is rewarding members of the Geremeyev family who have fought in Ukraine.<sup>78</sup> Russian officials will likely continue to exploit economic assets in occupied areas to build out corrupt patronage networks for personal gain.

Occupation Mariupol Mayor Oleg Morgun similarly claimed on February 12 that Russian forces may establish a Black Sea Fleet base at the Azov shipyard in occupied Mariupol, further indicating that Russian forces intend to transform Mariupol into a large military base rather than rebuilding the city for its inhabitants.<sup>79</sup> The Mariupol occupation administration could seek to exploit Mariupol's port resources and continue to militarize occupied areas, but it is unclear how it can construct the infrastructure necessary for a major naval base in any reasonable period of time.

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to import personnel from Russia to compensate for shortages of willing collaborators with whom to staff occupation administrations. Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated on February 13 that Russian occupation authorities imported deputies from Chelyabinsk and Krasnoyarsk Krai, Russia, to occupied Zaporizhia Oblast as Ukrainian civilians are continuing to refuse to cooperate with the Russian occupation administration.<sup>80</sup> Fedorov also stated on February 12 that Russian occupation authorities imported 800 police officers to occupied Zaporizhia Oblast from Russia to fortify occupation law enforcement and further suppress anti-Ukraine sentiment in occupied territories.<sup>81</sup>

**Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.**

**ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.)**

Nothing significant to report.

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

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gur.gov.ua/content/dlia-orhanizatsii-ataky-droniv-po-terytorii-ukrainy-okupanty-imovirno-zaluchyly-inozemnykh-naimantsiv.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignOct12>; <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignOct18>



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/12/iran-uses-boats-state-airline-smuggle-drones-into-russia>  
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/12/iran-uses-boats-state-airline-smuggle-drones-into-russia>  
<sup>5</sup> [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/77964](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/77964); <https://t.me/ChDambiev/22225>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020623>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar013023>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar012323>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar010423>  
<sup>7</sup> \*\*\*\*GRAPHIC\*\*\* [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/17170](https://t.me/grey_zone/17170)  
<sup>8</sup> \*\*\*GRAPHIC\*\*\* [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/17170](https://t.me/grey_zone/17170)  
<sup>9</sup> \*\*GRAPHIC\*\*\* [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/17170](https://t.me/grey_zone/17170)  
<sup>10</sup> [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/437](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/437)  
<sup>11</sup> <https://t.me/voenkorkotenok/45197>; [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/17178](https://t.me/grey_zone/17178); [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/15770](https://t.me/grey_zone/15770);  
[https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/77988](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/77988)  
<sup>12</sup> [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/17178](https://t.me/grey_zone/17178); [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/15770](https://t.me/grey_zone/15770)  
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.vedomosti dot ru/technology/articles/2023/02/13/962682-roskomnadzor-zapustil-sistemu-poiska-okulus>  
<sup>14</sup> <https://www.vedomosti dot ru/technology/articles/2023/02/13/962682-roskomnadzor-zapustil-sistemu-poiska-okulus>  
<sup>15</sup> <https://meduza dot io/episodes/2023/02/13/vkontakte-sosredotochilsya-na-svoem-videonapravlenii-vyglyadit-tak-budto-rossiya-gotovitsya-k-blokirovke-yutyuba-ochen-mozhet-byt>  
<sup>16</sup> <https://meduza dot io/episodes/2023/02/13/vkontakte-sosredotochilsya-na-svoem-videonapravlenii-vyglyadit-tak-budto-rossiya-gotovitsya-k-blokirovke-yutyuba-ochen-mozhet-byt>  
<sup>17</sup> <https://t.me/sultanhamzaev/3782>; <https://ria dot ru/20230212/deputat-1851474888.html>  
<sup>18</sup> [https://t.me/Ukraine\\_365News/46176](https://t.me/Ukraine_365News/46176)  
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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-9-2023>;  
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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-11-2023>  
<sup>22</sup> <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/12/arctic-brigade-severely-weakened>  
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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-may-have-lost-an-entire-elite-brigade-near-a-coal-mining-town-in-donbas-ukraine-says/>  
<sup>26</sup> [https://t.me/horizontal\\_russia/19532](https://t.me/horizontal_russia/19532)  
<sup>27</sup>  
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<sup>28</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/52532>; <https://t.me/rybar/43540>; <https://t.me/rybar/43554>; <https://t.me/voenkorkotenok/45196>  
<sup>29</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/52532>  
<sup>30</sup> [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/77998](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/77998)  
<sup>31</sup>  
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<sup>33</sup> [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/77851](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/77851); <https://t.me/DKulko/220>  
<sup>34</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/10835>  
<sup>35</sup> <https://t.me/epoddubny/14896>  
<sup>36</sup> <https://t.me/readovkanews/52537>; <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10747>; <https://t.me/rybar/43540>;  
<https://t.me/kommunist/15800>; [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/9083](https://t.me/dva_majors/9083); [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/77974](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/77974)  
<sup>37</sup> <https://t.me/rybar/43540>; <https://t.me/readovkanews/52532>

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<sup>39</sup> <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/02/12/golovnym-napryamkom-udariv-voroga-zalyshayetsya-bahmutskiy-vidtynok-frontu-sergij-cherevatyj/>

<sup>40</sup> [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/431](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/431); <https://t.me/readovkanews/52539>; [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/17160](https://t.me/grey_zone/17160) ;

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<sup>43</sup> <https://t.me/rybar/43543>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/10835>; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/77908](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/77908); <https://t.me/rybar/43554>

<sup>44</sup> <https://t.me/rybar/43543>; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/77908](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/77908); <https://t.me/readovkanews/52606>

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<sup>46</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/10835>

<sup>47</sup> [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/77978](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/77978); <https://t.me/shorokhOFF/4691>;

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<sup>51</sup> [https://t.me/aleksandr\\_skif/2582](https://t.me/aleksandr_skif/2582)

<sup>52</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/10851>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/10847>

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<sup>54</sup> <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1625014916133318657/photo/1>

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