

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 17, 2023

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January 17, 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 Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced on January 17 that he will implement Russian President Vladimir Putin’s directive to conduct large-scale military reforms between 2023-2026 to expand Russia’s conventional armed forces, likely in preparation for a protracted war in Ukraine and also to set conditions to build a significantly stronger Russian military quickly. Shoigu stated that Putin ordered Russian authorities to increase the number of Russian military personnel to 1.5 million (from the current 1.35 million). Shoigu outlined that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) will institute unspecified “large-scale changes” in the composition, complement, and administrative divisions of the Russian Armed Forces between 2023-2026.¹ Shoigu noted that Russia also needs to strengthen the key structural components of the Russian Armed Forces. Shoigu announced that Russia will reestablish the Moscow and Leningrad military districts, form a new army corps in Karelia (on the Finnish border), form new self-sufficient force groupings in occupied Ukraine, and form 12 new maneuver divisions.² Shoigu added that Russia needs to increase its capabilities to adequately prepare its forces by developing more training grounds and increasing the number of trainers and specialists. Shoigu first foreshadowed aspects of this reform at the Russian MoD Collegium meeting on December 21 when he proposed that Russia form two new airborne assault divisions, three new motorized rifle divisions, and reform seven existing brigades of the Northern Fleet and Western, Central, and Eastern Military districts into seven new motorized rifle divisions while expanding five existing naval infantry brigades into five naval infantry divisions.³ It appears that Shoigu did not include the reformation of five naval infantry brigades into divisions in his January 17 statement. It is unclear if that part of the plan has been dropped.

These reforms demonstrate Russia’s intent to reform the Russian military to conduct large-scale conventional warfighting in general and not just for the current war against Ukraine, as ISW has previously assessed.⁴ It is unclear if the Russian military will be able to grow as Shoigu described within three years.⁵ Russia can nominally form new divisions but it remains unclear if Russia can generate enough forces to fully staff them to their doctrinal end strengths amid an ongoing war. Shoigu made previous announcements about Russian military reforms that never came to fruition, such as in May 2022 when he called for the formation of 12 new Western Military District (WMD) units of unspecified echelon by the end of 2022 and for the Russian MoD to recruit 100,000 reservists in August 2021.⁶ Russia has previously faced challenges with fully staffing existing brigades and regiments, lacking sufficient trainers, and fully forming one new division it announced in 2020 before the start of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.⁷ The restructuring of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army) took over a year.⁸ Russia will also continue to face economic problems, which may continue to strain the Russian military command’s ability to supply its forces.

Russia’s ability to generate large-scale rapid change in its military capacity depends on President Vladimir Putin’s willingness to redirect large portions of the federal budget to a military buildup and putting Russia on something like a war footing for several years. There are signs that Putin might be willing to do so. Reform and expansion on the scale Shoigu outlined will not happen in time to affect

the war in Ukraine materially for many months, but it could change the correlation of forces going into 2024, and it could establish conditions for a much more formidable Russian military threat to its neighbors, including NATO, in the coming years. Ukraine likely continues to have a window of opportunity into and through the summer if the West provides it the support it needs.⁹

Putin may announce a second mobilization wave to expand his army in the coming days—possibly as early as January 18. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announced on January 17 that Putin will deliver a speech in St. Petersburg on January 18 in commemoration of the 80th anniversary of Soviet forces breaking the Nazi siege of Leningrad, Putin’s hometown.¹⁰ Putin is fond of using symbolic dates to address the Russian people, and some Russian pro-war milbloggers noted that he will seize this opportunity to either declare mobilization or war with Ukraine.¹¹ Ukrainian and Western intelligence also repeatedly warned of Putin’s mobilization preparations scheduled for mid-January.¹²

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is trying to improve professionalism within the Russian armed forces and likely test and improve the effectiveness of its chains of command down to the small unit level. Several milbloggers commented on a reported list of guidelines for Russian troops in Ukraine that restricts the use of personal vehicles and certain personal electronic devices in the combat zone and sets stricter guidelines for the grooming standards of men on the frontlines.¹³ The Russian MoD is likely attempting to institute these measures to instill greater professionalism in Russian troops and potentially gauge the ability of lower-level commanders to execute orders to standard, two issues that were brought to light in the wake of the December 31 Ukrainian strike on a Russian concentration area in Makiivka that killed up to 400 mobilized Russian servicemen. Following the Makiivka strike, the Russian MoD highlighted the lack of sound operational security (OPSEC) practices among Russian servicemen and blamed personal cellphone use—among other factors—for enabling the strike.¹⁴ These guidelines likely are part of the ongoing Russian MoD line of effort to conduct widespread military reforms and bolster the overall professionalism of the Russian armed forces in order to avoid further failures such as the Makiivka strike.

The Russian MoD may have additionally issued these guidelines in an attempt to gauge the effectiveness of Russian commanders in executing orders. The issue of grooming on the frontlines, as ISW previously reported on January 16, has been a sticking point between lower-level commanders and undisciplined troops who refuse to obey orders to shave.¹⁵ While the basic presentation of frontline troops may seem like a trivial matter, in reality, adherence to or disregard for such standards can indicate the professionalism or lack thereof of conventional forces. In poorly performing and demoralized units, failure to adhere to such standards can fuel demoralization and poor performance. Attempting to enforce those standards even in the circumstances facing the Russian military in Ukraine today, therefore, makes sense. The order to enforce such standards is also a way for higher echelons of the Russian command to test the ability of lower-level commanders to execute a relatively straightforward order on the individual soldier level.

Several prominent voices in the pro-war information space, including Russian and Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) officials, seized on these guidelines to support further criticisms of the Russian MoD, suggesting that the Russian MoD will likely face stiff resistance in continued attempts at professionalization and modernization. Moscow City Duma Deputy Andrei Medvedev complained that the Russian MoD is ignoring real issues on the front and instead banning the movement of personal vehicles in combat zones, which, Medvedev noted,

restricts the ability of volunteers to provide servicemen on the frontline with crowdfunded vehicles and supplies that the MoD has failed to procure for them.¹⁶ Medvedev and Deputy DNR Information Minister Daniil Bezsonov both noted that the prohibition of certain personal electronics will impede soldiers' ability to control quadcopters and store terrain maps offline.¹⁷ These responses suggest that Russian military leadership will struggle to institute meaningful and sustainable reforms as long as they continue to place the onus for change on an individual basis. While these suggested changes are sound and prudent decisions in principle, the Russian MoD will likely struggle to effectively implement them due to continued fragmentations in the information space that skew strongly against the conventional MoD apparatus. The MoD faces a challenge using improved enforcement of standards to raise the quality of the Russian Armed Forces with such a significant trust deficit.

Serbian President Alexander Vucic called on the Wagner Group to cease recruitment in Serbia on January 16. Vucic posed a rhetorical question, asking why Wagner is violating Serbia's laws.¹⁸ Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin stated that Wagner does not operate in Serbia and claimed that no Serbian nationals are enlisted in Wagner detachments because "Serbs themselves are doing an excellent job at handling their problems."¹⁹ Prigozhin's statement may be a form of sarcasm, given recent tensions between Kosovo and Serbia.²⁰ Russian sources posted footage on January 17 purporting to show Serbian volunteers serving in a Russian volunteer battalion deployed to Zaporizhia Oblast, although ISW has not observed any Serbian nationals serving in Ukraine as a part of the Wagner Group.²¹

Key Takeaways

- **Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced on January 17 that he will implement Russian President Vladimir Putin's directive to conduct large-scale military reforms between 2023-2026 to expand Russia's conventional armed forces, likely in preparation for a protracted war in Ukraine and also to set conditions to build a significantly stronger Russian military quickly.**
- **Putin may announce a second mobilization wave in the coming days, possibly as soon as January 18.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is trying to improve professionalism within the Russian armed forces and likely test and improve the effectiveness of its chains of command down to the small unit level.**
- **Several prominent voices in the pro-war information space seized on these guidelines to support further criticisms of the Russian MoD, suggesting that the MoD will likely face stiff resistance.**
- **Serbian President Alexander Vucic called on the Wagner Group to cease recruitment in Serbia.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct limited counterattacks near Kreminna as Ukrainian officials continued to suggest that Russian forces may be preparing for a decisive effort in Luhansk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive actions across the Donetsk Oblast front line.**
- **The Russian information space is struggling to portray tactical Russian gains around Soledar as operationally significant.**
- **Russian forces in Kherson Oblast continue to struggle to maintain their logistics efforts in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast due to Ukrainian strikes.**

- **A Russian occupation official claimed that Putin will make an "important statement" pertaining to the war in Ukraine on January 18.**
- **Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin may be attempting to establish the Wagner Group as a legal entity in Russia.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 17, 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.

- 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

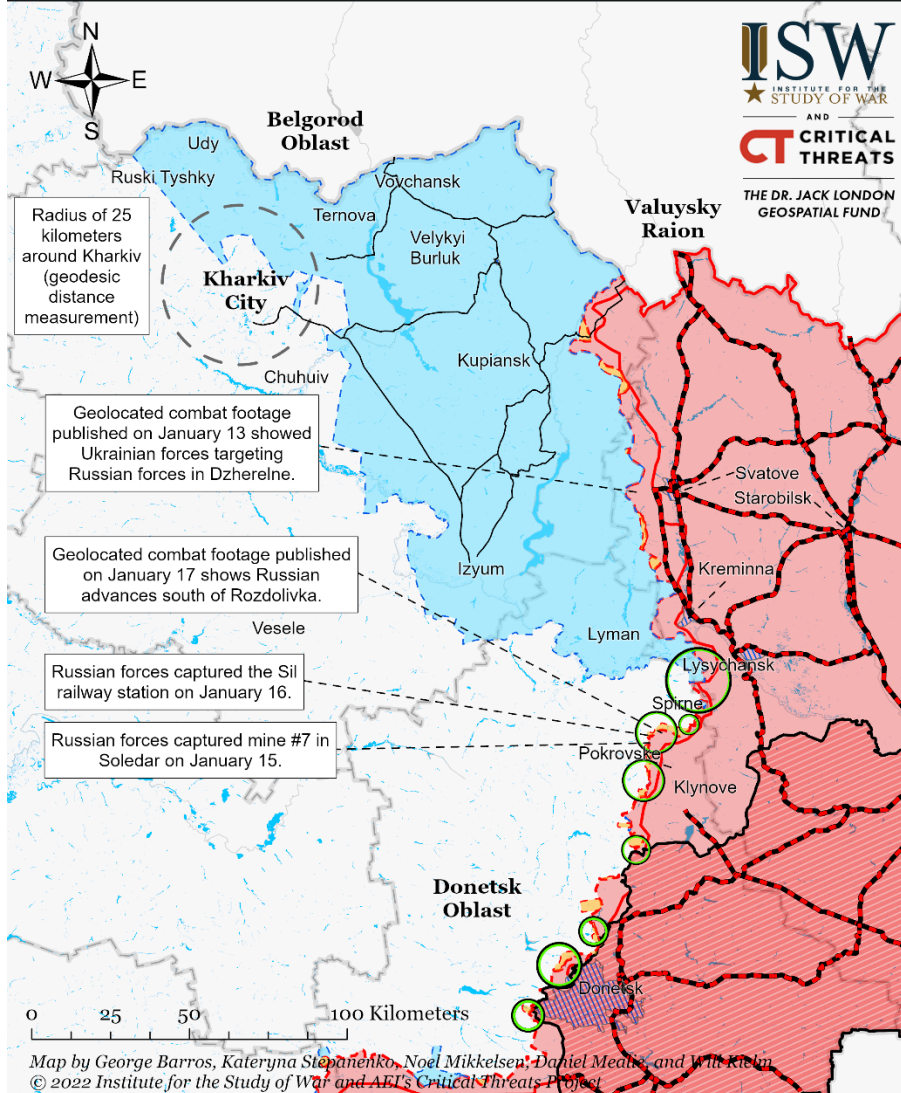
Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

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

Russian forces continued limited counterattacks to regain lost positions near Kreminna on January 17. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are gradually advancing along the Makiivka—Zhuravaka Balka river line (22km northwest of Kreminna) and conducted an assault near Chervonopopivka (6km north of Kreminna).²² Geolocated footage published on January 17 shows Russian forces holding positions west of Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna).²³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).²⁴

Ukrainian officials continued to suggest that Russian forces may be preparing for a decisive effort in Luhansk Oblast. Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated that a large-scale Russian offensive in Luhansk Oblast is possible and that Russian forces continue to routinely transfer reinforcements to the Kreminna-Svatove line.²⁵ ISW has assessed that Russian forces are likely preparing for a decisive effort in Luhansk Oblast.²⁶ Haidai also claimed that Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups disguised in Ukrainian uniforms tried to break through Ukrainian defenses in an unspecified area of Luhansk Oblast.²⁷

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of January 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- 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 Zhytliivka (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 continued offensive operations around Soledar on January 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Soledar itself and within 24km north of Soledar near Verkhokamianske, Spirne, Krasnopolivka, Sil, and Bilohorivka.²⁸ Geolocated footage published on January 16 indicates that Russian forces likely made marginal advances north of Bilohorivka (11km northeast of Soledar).²⁹ Geolocated footage published on January 17 shows Wagner Group elements south of Rozdolivka (7km north of Soledar) and north of Soledar.³⁰ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are continuing offensives towards Rozdolivka and Vesele (8km northeast of Soledar).³¹ One Russian milblogger reiterated claims that Wagner Group elements completely captured Sil, although ISW still cannot verify this claim.³² The DNR Territorial Defense announced that Russian forces have officially captured Soledar, the third official Russian statement about Russian forces capturing the settlement in the past week.³³ Ukrainian forces may still maintain positions in western Sil (which is in Soledar) since Ukrainian officials continue to claim that Ukrainian forces are in Soledar.³⁴ Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed that Russian forces are still conducting clearing operations in Soledar as of January 17 and that further Russian advances around the settlement have been slow because Russian forces need to consolidate their positions and repel Ukrainian counterattacks.³⁵ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are also conducting offensives in the direction of Blahodatne (5km west of Soledar), Paraskoviivka (5km southwest of Soledar), and Krasna Hora (5km southwest of Soledar).³⁶

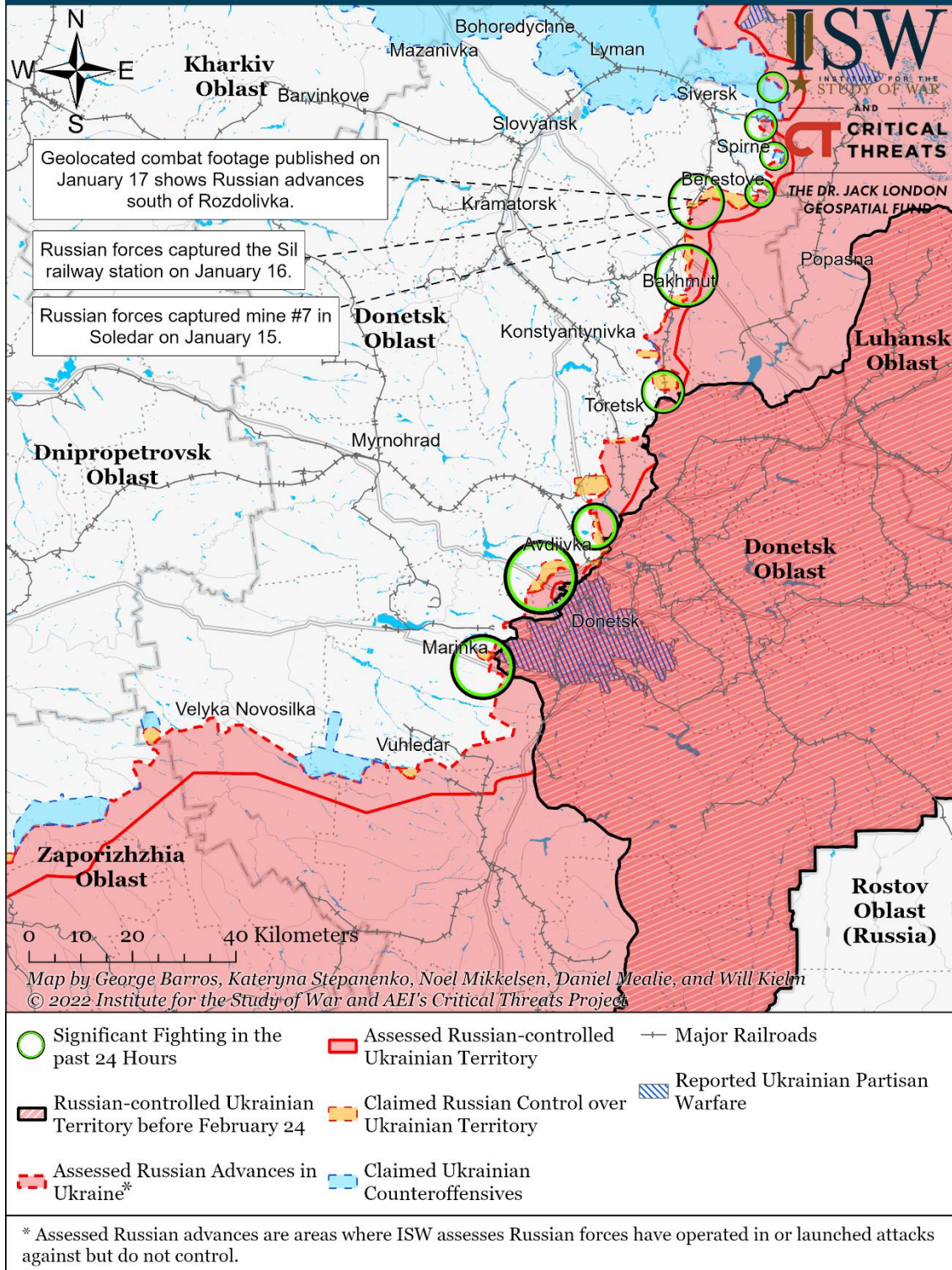
The Russian information space has yet to determine how to frame tactical advances in Soledar as operationally significant as of January 17. Russian sources previously suggested that the capture of Soledar presaged an imminent encirclement of Bakhmut or even a Ukrainian retreat as far back as Slovyansk and Kramatorsk.³⁷ Some Russian sources claimed on January 17 that the capture of Soledar allows Russian forces to cut Ukrainian supply routes between Siversk and Bakhmut (T0513 highway), creating a Russian bridgehead for offensives on Siversk.³⁸ Another Russian source claimed that the capture of Soledar will allow Russian forces to take Paraskoviivka and cut a section of the road from Slovyansk to Bakhmut (E40 highway).³⁹ The fact that the Russian information space has not identified the key ground line of communication (GLOC) that Russian forces are now better positioned to take, or any other operational advantage associated with Russian tactical advances in Soledar further underscores that the offensive to capture the settlement has not significantly changed Russian operations in the wider Bakhmut area.

Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut on January 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut itself and Pivnichne (22km southwest of Bakhmut).⁴⁰ Russian milbloggers claimed that heavy fighting continued on the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut.⁴¹ Russian milbloggers refuted previous Russian claims that Russian forces captured Klishchiiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and claimed that Wagner Group fighters broke through Ukrainian defenses in the settlement, where there are ongoing battles for its control.⁴² Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin stated that Wagner Group elements have not captured Klishchiiivka and that Ukrainian forces control a large part of the settlement as of January 17.⁴³ Geolocated footage posted on January 16 and 17 indicates that Russian forces have made marginal advances near the settlement.⁴⁴

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on January 17. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted an assault near Novobakhmutivka (14km northeast of Avdiivka).⁴⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Kamianka (5km northeast of Avdiivka) and within 32km southwest of Avdiivka near Vodyane, Nevelske, Marinka, and Pobieda.⁴⁶ Pushilin claimed on January 16 that Russian forces are close to being able to announce the capture of Vodyane (8km southwest of Avdiivka) and a Russian milblogger claimed on January 17 that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces out of positions in the eastern outskirts of the settlement.⁴⁷ ISW cannot independently verify either of these claims. Pushilin also claimed on January 17 that Russian forces have cleared all high-rise buildings in Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka) and are close to capturing the settlement.⁴⁸ Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces broke through Ukrainian defenses on the western outskirts of the settlement and that Russian forces need to capture as little as 300 meters of the western outskirts to completely control the settlement.⁴⁹ ISW also cannot independently verify these claims. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also conducted assaults near Krasnohorivka (23km southwest of Avdiivka), Pervomaiske (12km southwest of Avdiivka), and Novomykhailivka (36km southwest of Avdiivka).⁵⁰ Another Russian milblogger published footage on January 17 purporting to show the aftermath of battles near Novomykhailivka.⁵¹

Russian forces reportedly conducted limited ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on January 17. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted ground assaults near Velyka Novosilka (55km southwest of Avdiivka) and Prechystivka (42km southwest of Avdiivka) in western Donetsk Oblast.⁵² The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued routine indirect fire along the line of contact in Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.⁵³

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



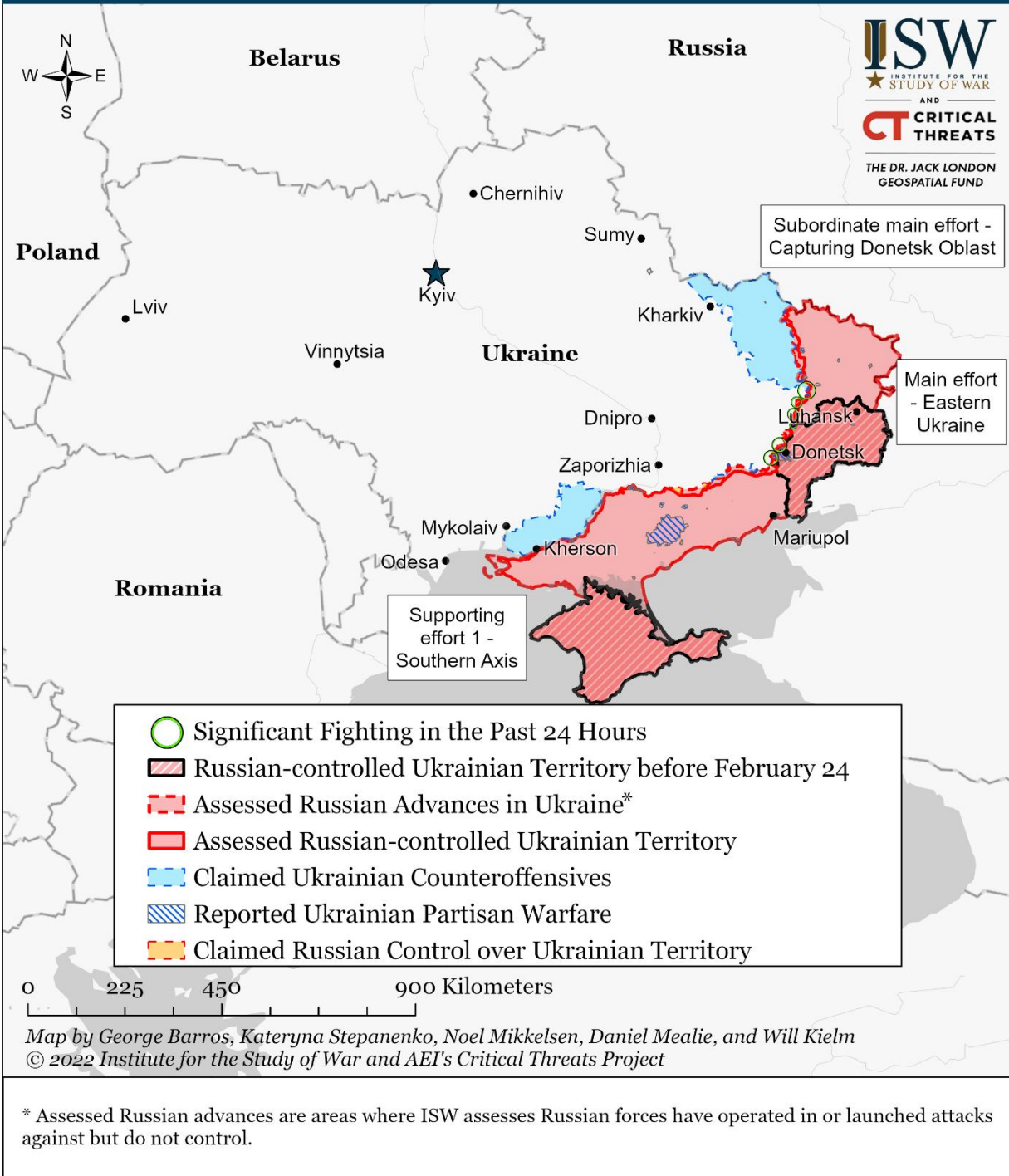
Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces in Kherson Oblast continue to struggle with their logistics efforts in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast due to Ukrainian strikes. Satellite imagery from January 3 and 9 suggests that Russian forces decreased their usage of a rail station with visible damage from strikes in Myrne, Kherson Oblast, and heavily use a rail station further to the rear in Sokolohirne, Kherson Oblast on the Kherson-Zaporizhia Oblast border.⁵⁴ Footage posted on January 17 reportedly shows Russian forces shelling Kherson City with incendiary munitions on January 17, the second observed instance of Russian forces using incendiary munitions against Kherson City in the past 10 days.⁵⁵ The 1980 Protocol III on Incendiary Weapons of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons restricts the use of incendiary weapons against or near civilians.⁵⁶ Russian forces continued to strike areas on west (right) bank Kherson Oblast, including Kherson City, Beryslav, and their environs.⁵⁷

Russian forces continued routine fire against areas in Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Mykolaiv oblasts on January 17.⁵⁸ Ukrainian Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration Head Oleksandr Starukh stated that Russian forces intensified the shelling of residential and civilian infrastructure facilities in Zaporizhia Oblast.⁵⁹ Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov expressed continued concern that Ukrainian forces are preparing for a potential counteroffensive in Zaporizhia Oblast.⁶⁰

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continued efforts to establish a safety and security zone around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). The IAEA stated on January 17 that the backup external powerline from the ZNPP disconnected briefly for maintenance on January 16 after suffering repeated power cuts in recent weeks.⁶¹ IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi stated that the nuclear safety and security situation is precarious and called for a protection zone around the plant.⁶²

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

The Russian government continued efforts to expand the categories of Russians eligible for mobilization. Independent news outlet *Meduza* reported on January 16 that the Russian State Duma rejected a proposal to defer mobilization for doctoral students.⁶³ ISW previously assessed that Kremlin officials are discussing expanding eligibility protocols for the conscripted, mobilized, and mobilized reserve as an intensified force generation effort.⁶⁴ Putin expanded mobilization eligibility by signing an order to allow the mobilization of convicts in November 2022.⁶⁵ Other Russian reports indicated that Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov terminated mobilization exemptions for fathers of three or more children in January 2023—which Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov neither confirmed nor denied—on January 14.⁶⁶

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin may be attempting to establish the Wagner Group as a legal entity in Russia. The *BBC*'s Russia service and independent Russian news outlet *Meduza* reported on January 17 that unknown actors legally registered a joint-stock company called "PMC Wagner Center" in Russia's Unified State Register of Legal Entities on December 27, 2022—the first time that any Wagner Group-affiliated legal entity has appeared in Russia.⁶⁷ *BBC*'s Russia service explained that this means that the PMC Wagner Center now has the ability to—among other things—receive government orders and grants without disclosing its beneficiaries (which are highly likely to include Wagner personnel).⁶⁸ Under Russian law, private military companies are still illegal given the Russian Constitution reserves all matters of defense and security for the Russian state.⁶⁹ The registration of a Wagner Group legal entity in Russia is likely another ploy by Prigozhin to seek increased legitimization of and state benefits for Wagner forces while bolstering his own reputation. Prigozhin previously advocated that Wagner fighters get their own specially recognized burial grounds in Russia, for example.⁷⁰

Prigozhin claimed on January 17 that a fourth round of prisoners who completed their contracts with the Wagner Group to fight in Ukraine received pardons.⁷¹ This is only the second time that Prigozhin has publicly “pardoned” ex-convicts who completed their contracts with the Wagner Group: the first time was on January 5, as ISW previously reported.⁷² ISW reported on January 9 that Russian Human Rights Council member Eva Merkacheva stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin issued secret and preemptive pardons to Russian convicts fighting with the Wagner Group in Ukraine, under a secret presidential decree.⁷³ ISW notes that the Russian Criminal Code and Article 89 of the Russian Constitution stipulate that only the Russian President may issue a pardon to an individual.⁷⁴ ISW continues to assess that these public announcements are an attempt by Prigozhin to inflate his political influence and power.

Prigozhin acknowledged Wagner Group deserter Andrey Medvedev's January 12 escape to Norway and prior involvement in the Wagner Group on January 16. Prigozhin stated that Medvedev served in Wagner's Norwegian "Nidhogg" battalion but claimed that Medvedev mistreated Russian prisoners and should be prosecuted.⁷⁵ Prigozhin stated that he plans to release the details of Medvedev's “mistreatment” to Russian officials and warned that Medvedev is “very dangerous.”⁷⁶

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 occupation authorities are intensifying law enforcement measures in occupied territories, specifically targeting fellow occupation officials in the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR). The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on January 17 that the DNR Ministry of Internal Affairs held a meeting to identify the parties responsible for the Ukrainian strike against Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast, on December 31.⁷⁷ The report also stated that the self-proclaimed Ministry of State Security of the DNR arrested the deputy chief of the Makiivka Regional Police Department and seven other policemen for reportedly neglecting their duties of detecting and preventing the Ukrainian strike.⁷⁸ The GUR stated that Russian forces are deploying large numbers of personnel to the DNR in an effort to strengthen counterintelligence and are housing them in previously-seized private residences.⁷⁹ The GUR also noted that DNR officials are treating Chechen servicemen with greater suspicion as the Russian military has shown heightened distrust of Chechen forces.⁸⁰

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to intensify filtration measures in occupied territories. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Military Administration Advisor, Serhiy Khlan, reported on January 17 that Russian forces continued shelling civilian infrastructure in occupied-Kakhovka, Kherson Oblast, in an effort to intimidate residents to evacuate and repurpose private homes to house Russian servicemen.⁸¹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 17 that Russian forces are intensifying raids to identify possible deserters and pro-Ukrainian saboteurs in occupied Kherson Oblast.⁸²

Russian occupation authorities continue efforts to consolidate societal control of occupied territories. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 17 that Russian occupation authorities in Zavodivka, Hornostaivka, and Kairy, Kherson Oblast, replaced all Ukrainian television channels with Russian broadcasting.⁸³ The Ukrainian General Staff also reported on January 17 that Russian occupation authorities have replaced all Ukrainian mobile communication services with Russian operators in occupied territories.⁸⁴

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:

- Nothing significant to report.

Observed ambiguous indicators for MDCOA in the past 24 hours:

- The Belarusian Ministry of Defense reported that Russian and Belarusian pilots conducted unspecified joint combat training tasks as part of the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV) on January 17.⁸⁵

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 January 17 and that Russian forces in Belarus are doing training rotations.⁸⁶
- Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) representative Andriy Chernyak stated on January 16 that mobilized Russian forces in Belarus are undergoing training and redeploying to active frontlines elsewhere in Ukraine.⁸⁷ Chernyak stated that Russian forces are very unlikely to attack Ukraine from Belarus in the next two-to-three weeks.⁸⁸

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://t.me/mod_russia/23498

² <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-21>;
https://t.me/mod_russia/23498

³ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-21>;

⁴ <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>

⁵ <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>

⁶ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/explainer-russian-conscription-reserve-and-mobilization>;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-23>

⁷ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-21>

⁸ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-21>

⁹ <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>

¹⁰ <https://iz dot ru/1455933/2023-01-17/obrashchenie-putina-18-ianvaria-meropriiatiia-ko-dniu-proryva-blokady>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/wartranslated/status/1615379520193794049>; <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/18269>

¹² <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-15-2023>

¹³ <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonov/21406>; <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonov/21421>;

<https://t.me/MedvedevVesti/12797>; <https://t.me/rybar/42769>; https://t.me/dva_majors/7887;

<https://t.me/rybar/42755>; <https://t.me/Andrafanaslive/8240>; <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/10548>;

<https://t.me/rybar/42758>

¹⁴ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar010423>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar010223>

¹⁵ <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-16-2023>

¹⁶ <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonov/21421>; <https://t.me/MedvedevVesti/12797>; <https://t.me/rybar/42769>

¹⁷ <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonov/21406>; <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonov/21421>;

<https://t.me/MedvedevVesti/12797>; <https://t.me/rybar/42769>

¹⁸ <https://www.rtvbn dot com/4037952/vucic-poslao-poruku-ruskim-prijateljima-sto-to-radite-sto-zovete-iz-vagnera#>

¹⁹ https://t.me/concordgroup_official/283

²⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64099388>

²¹ <https://t.me/milinfove/95633> ; <https://t.me/BalitskyEV/692>

²² <https://t.me/wargonzo/10370> ; <https://t.me/rybar/42771>

²³ <https://twitter.com/Danspiun/status/1615373928448380929?s=20&t=fqdn0mTS65vW7taPsK5udw;>
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