

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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January 26, 2024, 8:10pm 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.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:00pm ET on January 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin and US officials rejected rumors about Russian President Vladimir Putin's willingness to engage in meaningful negotiations amid continued indications from the Kremlin that Russia seeks nothing less than full Ukrainian and Western capitulation. *Bloomberg* reported on January 25 that two unspecified sources close to the Kremlin stated that Putin signaled to senior US officials through indirect channels that Putin is open to negotiations, including those that would provide "security arrangements" for Ukraine.[1] *Bloomberg* reported that an unidentified intermediary "conveyed signals" to US officials in December 2023 that Putin may be willing to drop his insistence on Ukraine's "neutral status" and even may ultimately abandon his opposition to Ukraine's NATO accession.[2] This report may refer to the same supposed backchannel communications reported by the *New York Times* in late December 2023 about Putin's supposed interest in a ceasefire.[3] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitri Peskov denied *Bloomberg's* report on January 26, stating that reports about Russian readiness to give up its demands that Ukraine not join NATO are "incorrect" and "untrue." [4] *Bloomberg* reported that US National Security Council Spokesperson Adrienne Watson stated that US officials are not aware of these alleged overtures, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated on January 19 that he does not see any indication that Putin is serious about looking for a way to end the fighting in Ukraine.[5]

Putin and Kremlin officials have increasingly stressed in recent weeks that Russia has no interest in negotiating with Ukraine in good faith, that Russia's maximalist objectives in Ukraine remain the same, and that Putin continues to pursue his overarching objective to weaken and dismantle NATO.[6] Former White House Official Fiona Hill told *Bloomberg* on January 26 that Russian actors want the West to create the idea of such a channel in order to scare Ukraine and frame the US as the only other relevant actor in Ukraine besides Russia.[7] Kremlin officials routinely frame the Russian war in Ukraine as a struggle against the West in order to deny Ukraine's agency in potential negotiations

and to set conditions that seek to convince the West to ignore centering Ukraine's interests in any negotiations.[8]

Russian demands for Ukrainian “neutrality” and a moratorium on NATO expansion have always been and continue to be one of Putin’s central justifications for his invasion of Ukraine, and any hypothetical concession on these demands would represent a major strategic and rhetorical retreat on Putin’s behalf that Putin is extremely unlikely to be considering at this time. Russian calls for Ukrainian “neutrality” are demands that Ukraine amend its constitution to remove commitments to seeking NATO membership and to commit itself permanently not to join NATO or the European Union (EU).[9] Demands for this “neutral status” are a nested goal within Putin’s decades-long effort to demand changes to the NATO alliance that would weaken the alliance to the point where it would be unable to deter or defeat future Russian aggression in eastern Europe.[10] Putin has long highlighted a permanent moratorium on NATO expansion as one of those goals, which would require a change in NATO’s charter that would, in turn, require a new treaty between member states and effectively grant Russia a veto over future NATO membership.[11] Any Kremlin concessions on these demands would also amount to a significant Russian defeat, as Putin has increasingly used public appearances to reiterate that the invasion’s initial objectives remain the same and to frame the war in Ukraine as a larger geopolitical confrontation with the collective West.[12] These concessions would also be inconsistent with the Kremlin’s apparent growing public confidence about Russian prospects in Ukraine and the attainability of Putin’s maximalist war objectives.[13] **Putin is highly unlikely to offer these concessions as he will not stop pursuing his objective to control Ukraine and weaken NATO, barring a decisive defeat.**[14]

Russian actors may be feigning interest in offering concessions on Ukraine’s place in Western institutions in an effort to prompt preemptive Western concessions on Ukraine’s territorial integrity. Reports about Putin’s openness to negotiations through back channels have not mentioned Russian openness to relinquishing any occupied Ukrainian territory. Russian officials continue to indicate that Putin’s maximalist objectives do not exclude Russia’s annexation of occupied Ukrainian territories or additional territorial conquests in Ukraine.[15] Ukraine’s accession into the EU and NATO are long processes that would not unfold in the immediate aftermath of any negotiated ceasefire, and Russia may seek to temporarily feign acquiescing on these demands to more immediately solidify control of occupied territories. ISW continues to assess that any ceasefire would benefit Russia, giving it time to reconstitute and regroup for future offensive campaigns in pursuit of the same maximalist objectives and further territorial conquest in Ukraine.[16] There is no reason to assess that Putin would not renege on any commitment to permit Ukraine to integrate into Western political, economic, and military institutions as long as the Russian military can pursue his objectives to prevent Ukraine from doing so. Putin has already violated Russia’s previous commitments not to violate Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Crimea, made in 1991 and 1994.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated boilerplate Kremlin narratives that blame Ukraine for the war while also highlighting Russian forces in the Soledar direction. Putin continued to claim on January 26 during a meeting with students at the St. Petersburg State Maritime Technical University who fought in the war in Ukraine that Ukraine “refused” to implement the Minsk Agreements, Ukraine committed “genocide” against Russians in “[Russia’s] historical territories” in Ukraine, and the West “deceived” Russia multiple times by expanding NATO – all of which he claimed

forced Russia to invade Ukraine in 2022.[17] Putin’s comments continue to indicate that the Kremlin is framing NATO expansion and Ukraine’s existence as an independent, sovereign state as existential threats to Russia that Russia must eliminate with force. Putin further falsely claimed that Russia’s full-scale invasion was a “response to [Ukraine’s] use of armed force” after Ukraine “started the war in Donbas in 2014” and that Russia had to “protect [its] interests.”

Putin highlighted Russian forces fighting in the Soledar direction in Ukraine during a conversation with a veteran who reportedly fought in the area. Putin claimed that Ukrainian forces are unsuccessfully counterattacking from all sides in the Soledar direction and that Russian forces are advancing “almost every day, little by little.” Putin claimed that Russian units in the area work “harmoniously [and] confidently.” The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) published footage of elements of the 106th Airborne (VDV) Division participating in the capture of Vesele in the Soledar direction on January 18, and Putin was likely trying to keep attention on recent Russian successes in the area.[18] Putin’s comment that units in the Soledar direction are “harmonious” is also possibly an attempt to suppress recent claims of mistreatment within the 106th Division’s 119th VDV Regiment and the subsequent allegations that a faction of Putin’s inner circle organized these public claims of mistreatment as part of an ongoing “clan war” with another Kremlin faction.[19]

The circumstances of the January 24 crash of a Russian Il-76 military transport aircraft in Belgorod Oblast remain unclear. Ukrainian officials continued to warn that Russia is attempting to use the Il-76 crash to reduce Western support for Ukraine and noted that Russia has not provided any new evidence from the crash site.[20] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated that Russian authorities rejected the creation of an international commission to investigate the circumstances of the crash.[21] Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated Russian allegations that Ukrainian authorities knew about the presence of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the Il-76 aircraft prior to shooting the plane down and stated that the Russian Investigative Committee will publicize all details of the crash in the coming days.[22] The Russian Investigative Committee stated that its preliminary investigation confirmed initial reports that a Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile launched from Liptsy, Kharkiv Oblast, downed the aircraft, and Russian media reported that investigators are decrypting the Il-76’s black boxes.[23] UN Deputy Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo stated on January 25 that the UN cannot verify Russian or Ukrainian reports about the circumstances of the Il-76 crash.[24]

The European Union (EU) will provide Ukraine with an additional five billion euros to meet “urgent military needs” in the near future. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Joseph Borrell announced on January 26 that EU member states should reach an agreement to provide an additional five billion euros (\$5.4 billion) from the European Peace Fund to Ukraine in the coming days.[25] Borrell added that the EU will discuss the use of frozen Russian assets to aid Ukraine before the next EU Council on Foreign Affairs meeting in early 2024. The 50 billion euros would reportedly be dispensed over 2024-2027.[26]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues efforts to expand Russia’s influence and subsume previous Wagner Group operations in Africa. The Russian MoD-controlled Africa Corps stated on January 26 that a Russian MoD delegation arrived in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.[27] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that the MoD delegation will discuss the rights and powers of the Russian military contingent in Burkina Faso and future cooperation between Burkina Faso and Russia.[28] The milblogger claimed that Burkina Faso will likely become the “main

coordination center” between Sahel Alliance members Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali and that the formalization of Russia’s military presence in the Sahel suggests that this relationship will likely last for years.[29] The milblogger also claimed that Russian media is also operating in Burkina Faso to “compete with French media” and “create a loyal information space.”[30]

The Russian Officers’ Union for International Security (OUIS) Director Alexander Ivanov told Kremlin newswire *TASS* that several hundred Russian military personnel in the Central African Republic (CAR) would be “sufficient and effective.”[31] Ivanov claimed that such a Russian military contingent would strengthen Russia’s position in CAR and the region and would show that cooperation between CAR and Russia is “of a strategic long-term nature.” Ivanov labeled previous claims by a CAR presidential advisor that the Russian military base in CAR could accommodate 10,000 personnel “a clear exaggeration.”[32] Russian Ambassador to CAR Alexander Bikantov told Russian outlet *RIA Novosti* that the creation of a Russian military base in CAR will protect CAR’s national sovereignty.[33] Bikantov stated that the Russian and Central African Republic MoDs are discussing the base’s location and have yet to determine the timing of the Russian military contingent’s arrival and the number of Russian personnel. The US Treasury Department sanctioned OUIS and Ivanov on January 26, 2023 for acting as a Wagner Group front company operating in CAR, and Ivanov’s statements to Russian state media about future Russian MoD forces in CAR suggest that the Russian MoD has been successful in co-opting some former Wagner Group structures in CAR.[34]

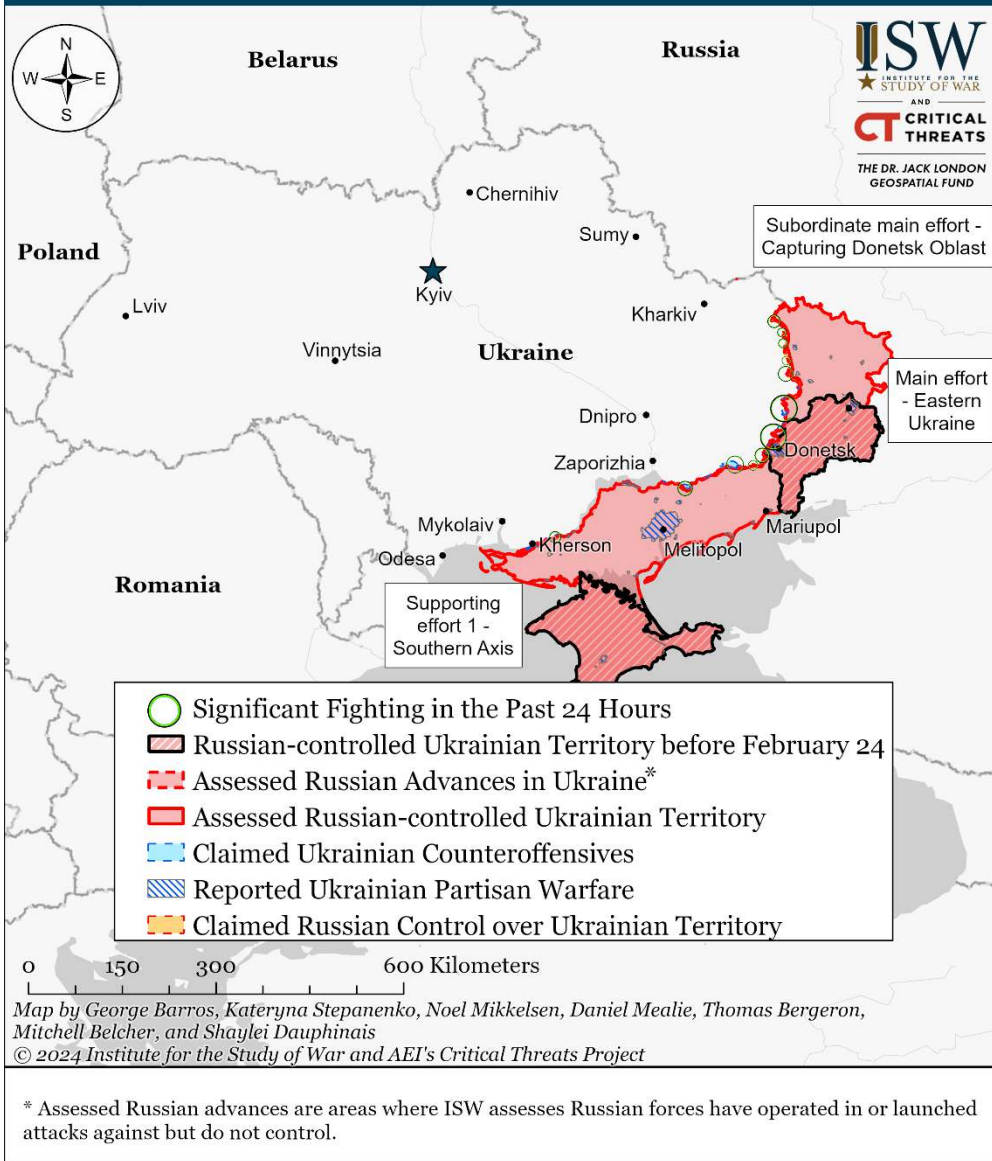
Russia reportedly imported \$1.7 billion worth of advanced microchips and semiconductors in 2023, primarily from the West, skirting Western sanctions intended to deprive Russia of such technology. *Bloomberg* reported on January 25 that classified Russian customs service data shows that Russia imported over one billion dollars worth of advanced US and European-produced chips and that more than half of the semiconductors and integrated circuits that Russia imported in early 2023 were manufactured in the US and Europe.[35] *Bloomberg*’s report does not definitively indicate whether Western companies violated sanctions or provide identities of the likely intermediaries that trafficked the technology to Russia. Russia reportedly imported \$2.5 billion worth of Western-made microchips and semiconductors in 2022 and Russia’s demand for this technology would have likely increased during 2023, given Russia’s ongoing efforts to expand its military equipment and weapons production capabilities, particularly for drone and missile production.[36] Western sanctions are likely the driving force behind Russia’s decreased import of microchips and semiconductors despite ongoing Russian efforts to evade such sanctions. ISW previously assessed that China, Iran, Belarus, and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states have likely been heavily involved in various Russian sanctions evasion schemes.[37]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin and US officials rejected rumors about Russian President Vladimir Putin’s willingness to engage in meaningful negotiations amid continued indications from the Kremlin that Russia seeks nothing less than full Ukrainian and Western capitulation.**
- **Russian demands for Ukrainian “neutrality” and a moratorium on NATO expansion have always been and continue to be one of Putin’s central justifications for his invasion of Ukraine, and any hypothetical concession on these demands would represent a major strategic and rhetorical retreat on Putin’s behalf that Putin is extremely unlikely to be considering at this time.**

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated boilerplate Kremlin narratives that blame Ukraine for the war while also highlighting Russian forces in the Soledar direction.**
- **The circumstances of the January 24 crash of a Russian Il-76 military transport aircraft in Belgorod Oblast remain unclear.**
- **The European Union (EU) will provide Ukraine with an additional five billion euros to meet “urgent military needs” in the near future.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues efforts to expand Russia’s influence and subsume previous Wagner Group operations in Africa.**
- **Russia reportedly imported \$1.7 billion worth of advanced microchips and semiconductors in 2023, primarily from the West, skirting Western sanctions intended to deprive Russia of such technology.**
- **Russian forces advanced near Avdiivka amid continued positional engagements throughout the theater.**
- **Elements of Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin’s alleged personal private military company (PMC) may have deployed to Ukraine.**
- **Russian opposition media reported on January 26 that Viktor Filonov, a Russian soldier in the 234th Airborne Regiment (76th VDV Division) serving in Ukraine, adopted a Ukrainian child from occupied Donetsk Oblast.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 26, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these 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 the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

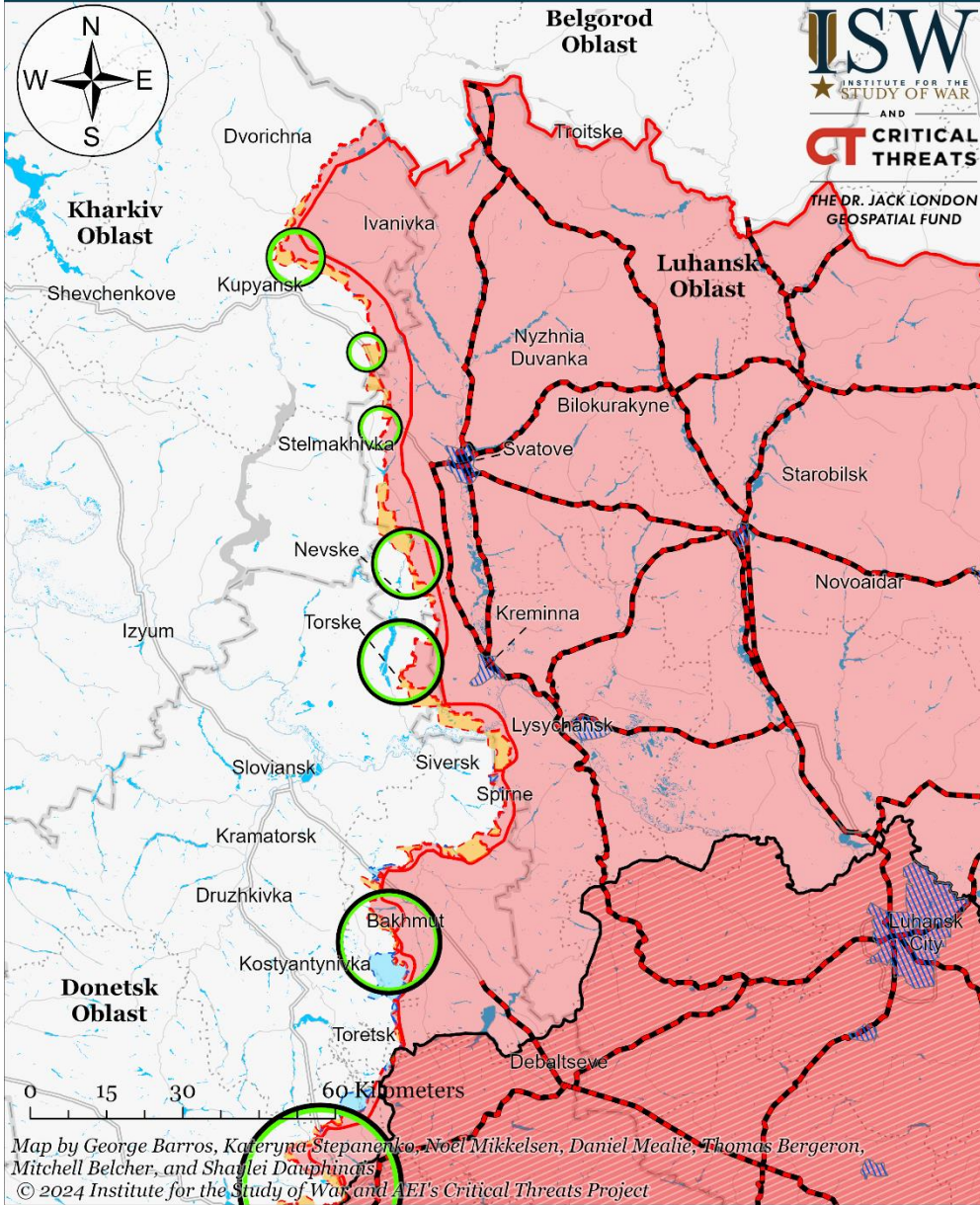
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Activities in Russian-Occupied Areas
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian and Ukrainian forces continued positional engagements along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on January 26. Positional fighting continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkikva, southeast of Kupyansk near Tabaivka, northwest of Svatove near Stelmakhivka, southwest of Svatove near Makiivka, west of Kreminna near Torske and Terny, near Kreminna itself, and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna) and Hryhorivka.[38] Elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army (Western Military District) are reportedly operating in the Kupyansk direction and elements of the 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] Army Corps) are reportedly operating near Bilohorivka.[39]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of January 26, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Shalei Dauphinais
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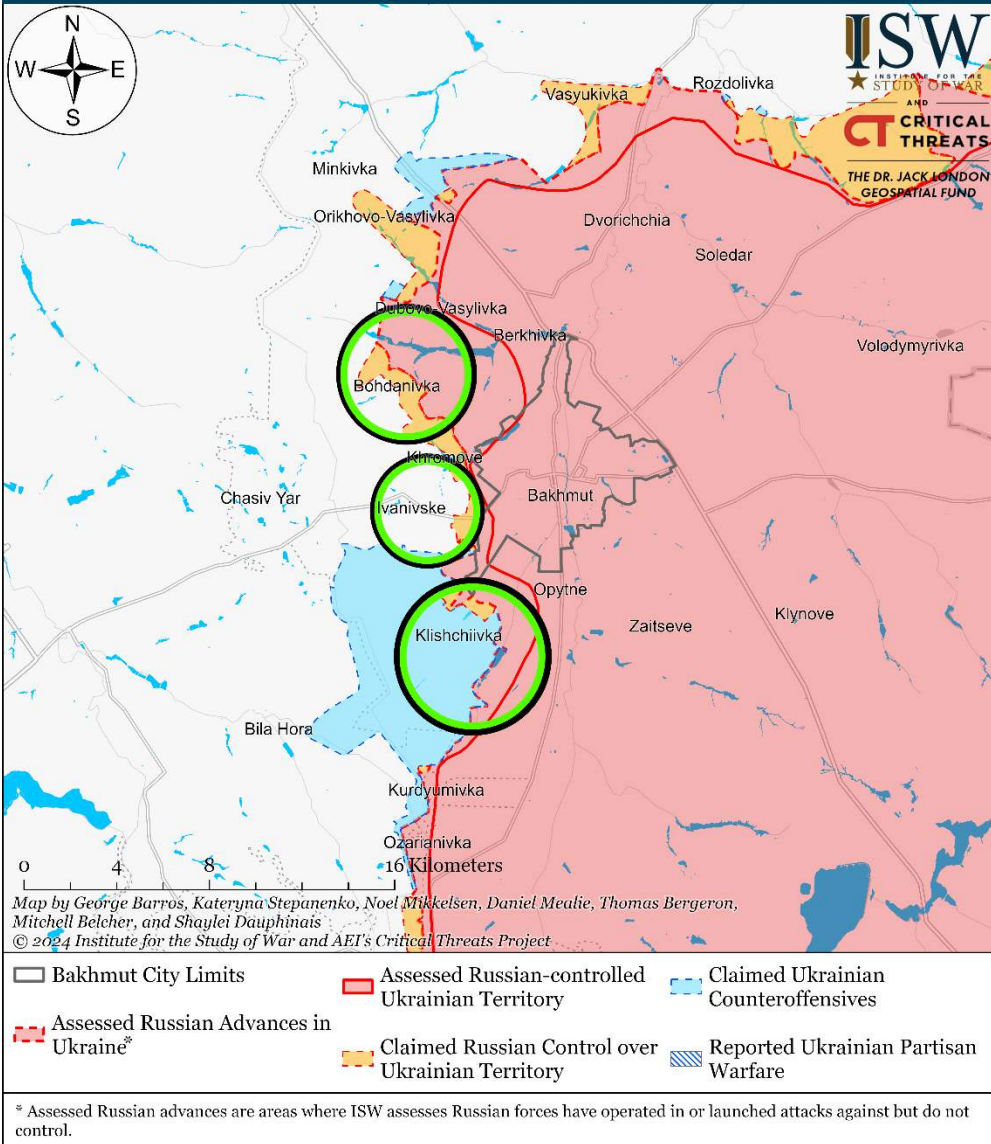
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian 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)

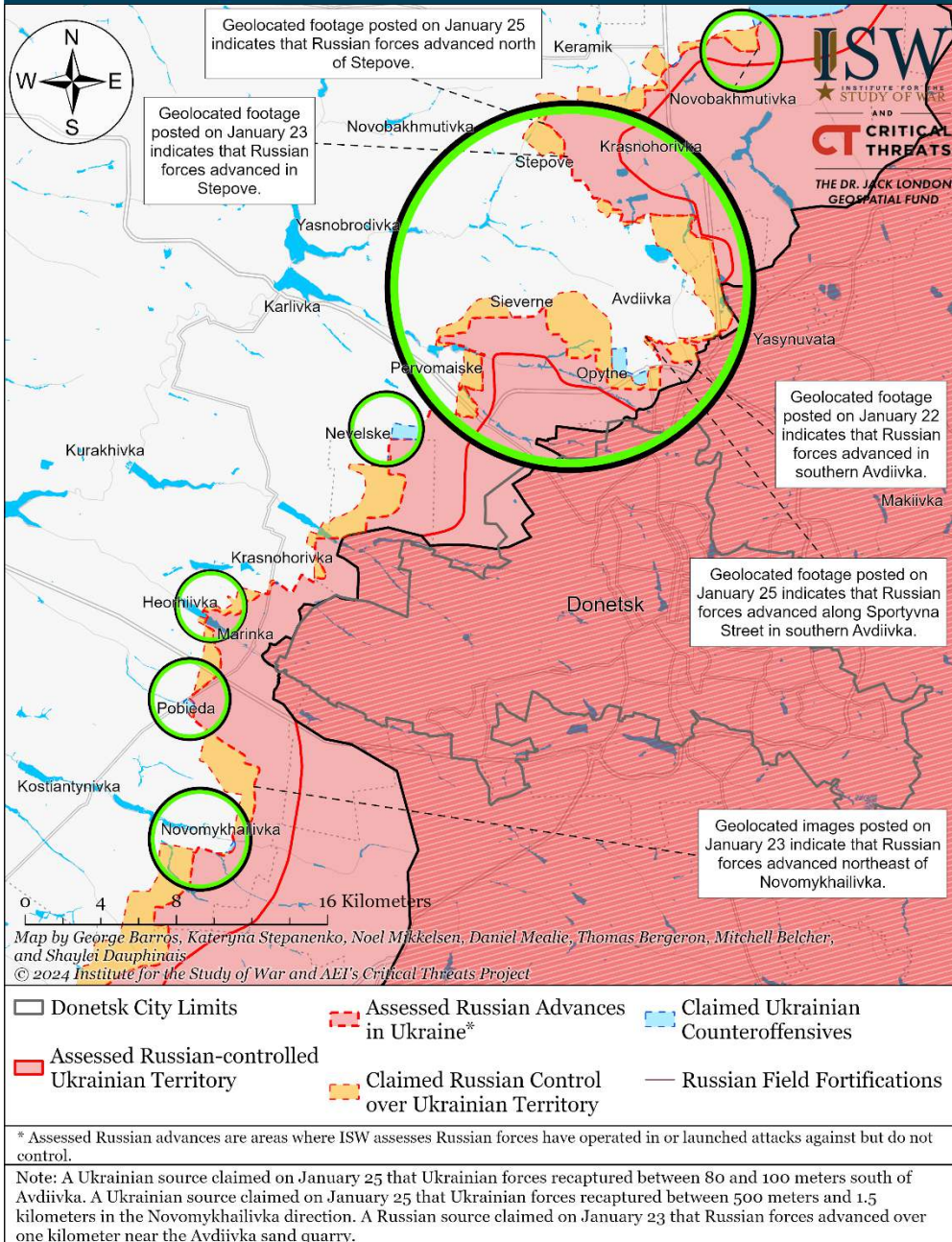
Ukrainian and Russian forces continued positional engagements near Bakhmut on January 26, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area. A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced on the outskirts of Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[40] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces withdrew from central Bohdanivka, but retain control over the settlement’s northeastern outskirts.[41] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional fighting continued northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka, west of Bakhmut from Khromove and near Ivanivske, and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[42] The Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that unspecified elements of the Russian Volunteer Corps, the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Northern Fleet), and the 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division are operating near Bohdanivka.[43]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of January 26, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently marginally advanced near and in Avdiivka amid continued positional fighting in the area on January 26. Geolocated footage published on January 25 indicates that Russian forces recently marginally advanced north of Stepove (3km northwest of Avdiivka) and along Sportyvna Street in the southernmost residential area of Avdiivka.[44] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near the "Tsarska Okhota" restaurant area in Avdiivka's southern outskirts.[45] Positional fighting continued northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka and Stepove, northeast of Avdiivka from Kamianka, near Avdiivka's southeastern outskirts, and southwest of Avdiivka near Vodyane, Pervomaiske and Nevelske.[46]

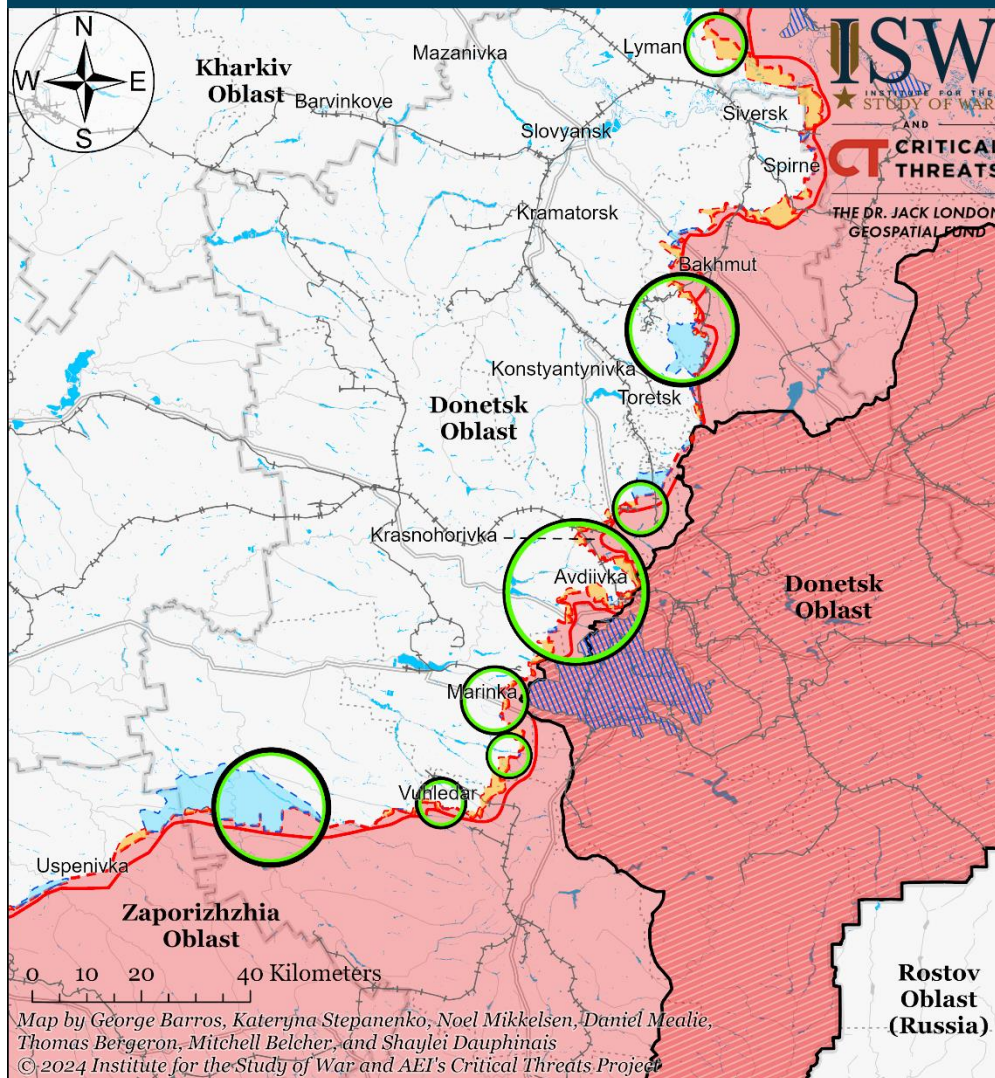
Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of January 26, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Positional fighting continued west and southwest of Donetsk City, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in the area on January 26. A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Heorhiivka (west of Donetsk City) and Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City), although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[47] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that positional fighting continued west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda and Novomykhailivka.[48] Elements of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle

Division (8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) are reportedly operating near Heorhiivka.[49]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 26, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

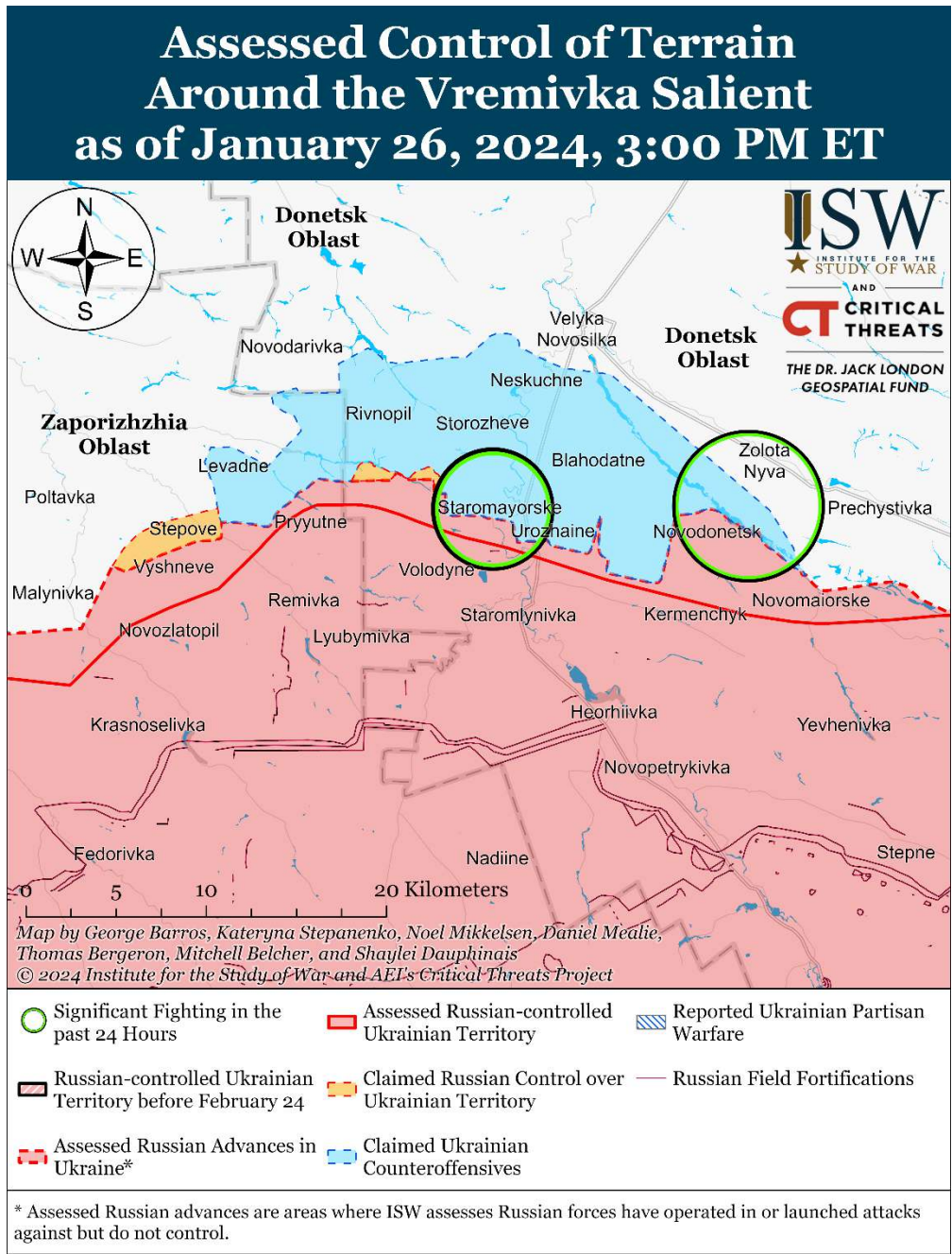


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
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- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads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

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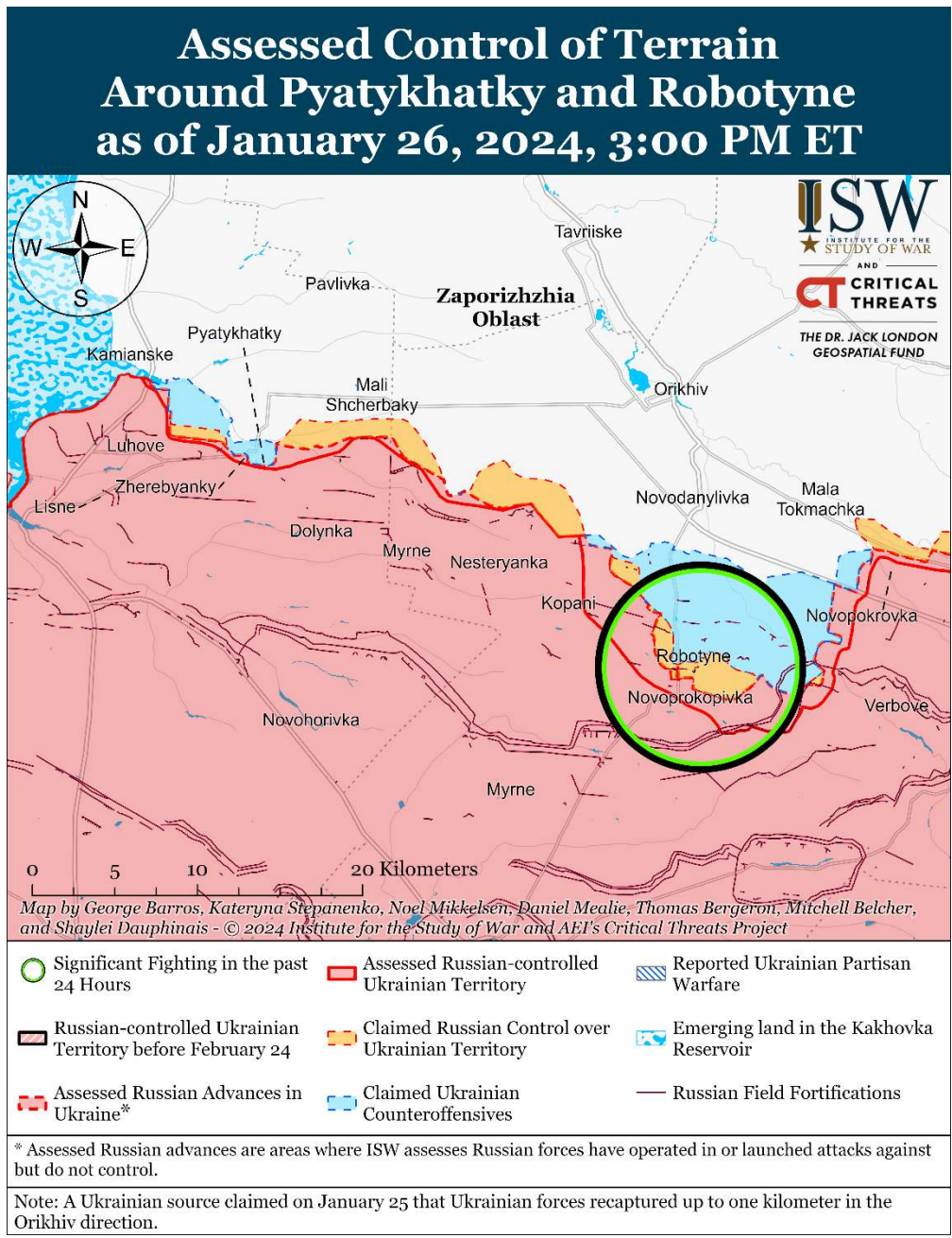
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Positional engagements continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on January 26, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Zolota Nyva; southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Pryyutne and Chervone; and south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske.[50]



Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhia Oblast on January 26, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional

engagements continued near Robotyne and Verbove (east of Robotyne).[51] Elements of the Russian 56th and 108th Airborne (VDV) Regiments (both of the 7th VDV Division) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhzhia direction.[52]



Positional engagements continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on January 26, but there were no confirmed changes to the front in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued near Krynky.[53] A Russian source claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from a number of unspecified positions in Krynky, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[54] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces need constant electronic warfare (EW) coverage to protect Russian forces from Ukrainian first-person view (FPV)

drones near Krynyky and are therefore struggling to give Russian drone operators time "windows" without disruption from Russian EW operations so that Russian pilots can fly their own drones.[55]



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

Elements of Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin's alleged personal private military company (PMC) may have deployed to Ukraine. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 26 that the Russian 28th Regiment of the 70th Division is currently operating near Krynky in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast and that the regiment is nicknamed "Sobyeninsky" and consists of volunteers from Moscow.[56] A Russian insider source claimed on December 2, 2023 that Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin began efforts to create his own private military company (PMC) shortly after the Wagner Group's rebellion in June 2023.[57] ISW cannot independently verify the insider source's claims nor the Russian milblogger's implication that Sobyenin's alleged PMC may be connected to the 28th Regiment.

Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials highlighted the successes and priorities of Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) at the Unified Day of Acceptance of Military Products on January 26. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that the expansion and modernization of DIB facilities and increased labor productivity allowed Russia to significantly increase its production of unspecified, weapons and ammunition currently in high demand.[58] Shoigu also stated that Russia should focus particular attention to increasing the range and accuracy of high-precision weapons, increasing weapons' resistance to electronic warfare (EW), and improving Russian EW systems.[59] Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexei Krivoruchko claimed that Russian DIB enterprises plan to supply over 36,000 pieces of various military equipment; over 16.5 million unspecified weapons; and over one million pieces of man-portable weapons, body armor, and communications equipment to Russian forces in 2024.[60] Krivoruchko stated that the Russian MoD's main tasks in 2024 include making the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) system operational, delivering Tu-160M strategic missile carriers and S-500 anti-aircraft missile systems to the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS), and delivering the *Prince Pozharsky* nuclear submarine to the Russian Navy.[61]

Construction began on a new Russian icebreaker on January 26. Russian President Vladimir Putin took part in the ceremony marking the start of construction of the *Leningrad* icebreaker at the Baltic Shipyard in St. Petersburg on January 26.[62] The construction of the icebreaker is part of the federal "Development of the Northern Sea Route" project, and the *Leningrad* will be the sixth Project 22220 nuclear icebreaker. Putin announced that Russia will begin construction of the *Stalingrad*, another Project 22220 icebreaker, in 2025.

Russian Technological Adaptations (Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)

Alexei German, the general director of Russian development company Hardberry-RusFactor, stated on January 26 that the company created the "Lovkiy" tiltrotor drone.[63] The drone reportedly has a flight speed of up to 200 kilometers per hour, a flight range of up to 50 kilometers, a flight altitude of up to five kilometers, and a flight duration of 1.5 hours. German stated that Hardberry-RusFactor increased the payload of the drone and constructed it out of carbon fiber after a prototype underwent tests in the war in Ukraine. German claimed that Ukrainian air defenses cannot detect the drone. German stated that Hardberry-RusFactor is looking for investors to start mass production of the drone.

Kremlin newswire TASS stated on January 26 that the Kalashnikov Concern modernized the Supercam 350 drone.[64] The new SKAT 350M drone reportedly has a new wing design with improved aerodynamics and modernized ground control equipment. TASS stated that the Kalashnikov Concern will present the SKAT 350 M for the first time at the World Defense Show 2024 in February in Saudi Arabia.

Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)

[Click here](#) to read ISW's new analysis on Ukrainian long-term efforts to develop a self-sufficient DIB with US and European support.

Ukraine continues to foster joint defense production agreements with partner states. The Ukrainian Ministry of Strategic Industries announced on January 26 that Ukraine and Belgium signed six documents on defense industry cooperation during a joint defense industry seminar with defense companies from both states.[65] The Ukrainian and Belgian Ministries of Defense (MoDs) also signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a long-term Ukrainian and Belgian partnership to support Ukrainian strategy. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis stated during a meeting with Ukrainian National Defense and Security Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov on January 26 that Ukraine and Lithuania can jointly produce drones on Lithuanian territory.[66]

Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian opposition media reported on January 26 that Viktor Filonov, a Russian soldier in the 234th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (76th VDV Division) serving in Ukraine, adopted a Ukrainian child from occupied Donetsk Oblast.[67] Russian officials reportedly transferred a seven-year-old Ukrainian boy from an orphanage in occupied Donetsk Oblast to Russia in November 2022, and Filonov and his wife later adopted the boy.[68] Russian opposition outlet *Sever Realii* reported that Filonov is suspected to have participated in the killings of civilians in Bucha, Kyiv Oblast, during the Russian occupation of Bucha in February and March 2022.[69] Filonov's wife, Maria Filonova, is reportedly the head of the Pskov headquarters of the veterans' organization "Committee of Families of Soldiers of the Fatherland." [70] Russian officials have previously illegally "adopted" Ukrainian children from occupied Ukraine, and the continued pattern of these adoptions suggests that Russian officials and now military personnel may be adopting children to set administrative and cultural precedents to escalate Russia's campaign to deport Ukrainians, specifically children, to Russia.[71] ISW continues to assess that the deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children likely amounts to a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.[72]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated boilerplate Kremlin rhetoric blaming the West for deteriorating relations with Russia during a press conference on Russian diplomacy in 2023 on January 26.[73] Lavrov blamed Finland for "destroying the entire system" of Russian-Finnish relations and claimed that Russian-French relations are experiencing a "deep crisis." Lavrov also reiterated false claims attempting to spoil further Western military assistance to Ukraine and accusing the West of interference in Russian domestic affairs.

The Russian information space is attempting to manipulate domestic US political events to sow domestic political instability in the US and interfere with US policy debates about further US military assistance to Ukraine. The Russian ultranationalist community seized on Texas Governor Greg Abbott's

January 26 response to the US Supreme Court’s January 22 ruling, flooding the information space with false claims that Abbott has declared Texan independence and war against the US government.[74] These claims are very likely part of a deliberate Russian information campaign. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev amplified this narrative, which an unusually large number of Russian bloggers seized on with abnormally high numbers of posts.[75] The Russian ultranationalists’ narratives about Texas mirror previously observed Russian information operations aimed at Ukraine that sought to undermine faith in the Ukrainian government and to support disruptive secessionist movements.[76] Russian information actors have repeatedly leveraged and amplified political events in the US to spread conspiracy theories that aim to foment internal instability and undermine US institutions and leadership abroad.[77]

Pro-Kremlin actors continue information operations aimed at undermining domestic political support in Western states for further military assistance provisions to Ukraine. German outlet *Der Spiegel* reported that the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) uncovered a Russian disinformation campaign on X (formerly Twitter) wherein over 50,000 fake accounts posted over one million German-language tweets between December 20, 2023 and January 20, 2024 condemning German support for Ukraine.[78]

Significant Activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)

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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[1] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-25/russia-ukraine-putin-signals-interest-in-discussing-end-to-war?srnd=premium>

[2] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-25/russia-ukraine-putin-signals-interest-in-discussing-end-to-war?srnd=premium>

[3] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar122323>

[4] https://t.me/tass_agency/228234 ; <https://tass dot ru/politika/19824595>

[5] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-25/russia-ukraine-putin-signals-interest-in-discussing-end-to-war?srnd=premium>; <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/watch-live-secretary-of-state-blinken-gives-remarks-on-rising-tension-between-ukraine-russia>

[6] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011824> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-17-2024> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011624> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar010224>

[7] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-25/russia-ukraine-putin-signals-interest-in-discussing-end-to-war?srnd=premium>

[8] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar010224>

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