The Russian military conducted another set of massive, coordinated missile strikes on Ukrainian critical infrastructure in a misguided attempt to degrade the Ukrainian will to fight. Ukrainian Air Force Command reported on November 23 that Russian forces launched 70 cruise missiles and five drones at Ukrainian critical infrastructure targets.\(^1\) Ukrainian Air Force Command reported that Ukrainian air defenses shot down 51 of the Russian cruise missiles and all five drones.\(^2\) The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces struck residential buildings, thermal power plants, and substations in the city of Kyiv as well as in Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Lviv, and Zaporizhia oblasts.\(^3\) Ukrainian officials reported widespread disruptions to energy, heating, and water supplies as a result of the Russian strikes.\(^5\) ISW has previously assessed that the Russian military is still able to attack Ukrainian critical infrastructure at scale in the near term despite continuing to deplete its arsenal of high-precision weapons systems.\(^6\) Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that the Russian military mistakenly believes that the destruction of energy infrastructure will direct Ukrainian efforts to protect rear areas and divert Ukrainian attention away from the front in eastern and southern Ukraine.\(^7\) Malyar stated that Russia’s campaign against critical infrastructure will not weaken the motivation of Ukraine’s civilian population, and the Ukrainian Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov asserted that Russian missile and drone strikes will not coerce Ukraine into negotiations.\(^8\)

Prominent Russian politicians continue to promote openly genocidal rhetoric against Ukraine. Moscow City Duma Deputy and pro-Kremlin journalist Andrey Medvedev posted a long rant to his Telegram channel on November 23 wherein he categorically denied the existence of the Ukrainian nation, relegating Ukrainian identity to a “political orientation.”\(^9\) Medvedev called Ukraine a pagan cult of death that worships prisoner executions and called for the total “liquidation of Ukrainian statehood in its current form.”\(^10\) This rhetoric is openly exterminatory and dehumanizing and calls for the conduct of a genocidal war against the Ukrainian state and its people, which notably has pervaded discourse in the highest levels of the Russian political mainstream. As ISW has previously reported, Russian President Vladimir Putin has similarly employed such genocidal language in a way that is fundamentally incompatible with calls for negotiations.\(^11\)

The Kremlin has not backed down from its maximalist goals of regaining control of Ukraine but is rather partially obfuscating Russia’s aims to mislead Western countries into pressuring Ukraine to sue for peace. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on November 21 that changing the current government in Ukraine is not a goal of the Russian “special military operation” in Ukraine, observing that Russian President Vladimir Putin “has already spoken about this.”\(^12\) Putin had said on October 26 that Ukraine has “lost its sovereignty” and come fully under NATO’s control.\(^13\) Putin’s speech at the Valdai Discussion Club on October 27 again rejected Ukraine’s sovereignty, noting that Russia “created” Ukraine and that the “single real guarantee of Ukrainian sovereignty” can only be Russia.\(^14\) Putin has also consistently upheld his talking point that Ukraine is a Nazi state that must be “denazified.”\(^15\) Putin’s demands amount to a requirement for regime change in Kyiv even if he does not explicitly call for it in these recent statements. The fact that Peskov refers back to these comments by Putin makes reading any serious walking-back of Russian aims into Peskov’s comments highly dubious.
The Kremlin’s obfuscation of its aims likely intended for a Western audience is nevertheless confusing Russian war supporters. Peskov’s statement likely aimed to mitigate the effects of Vice-Speaker of the Russian Federation Council Konstantin Kosachev’s pro-war rant declaring that Russia can only normalize relations with Ukraine following the capitulation of the Ukrainian government. The two contrasting statements confused the pro-war community. A Wagner Group-affiliated milblogger sarcastically observed that Russia is aimlessly fighting a war without a clear goal in response to Peskov’s statement. ISW has reported on similar reactions to the Kremlin’s decision to exchange Ukrainian prisoners of war from Mariupol, whom Kremlin officials and propagandists vilified as “Nazis” and “war criminals.”

The Kremlin’s hesitance to publicly commit fully to an extreme nationalist ideology and to the war is also bewildering propagandists who preach such ideology to the Russian masses. Russian political and military “experts” on a Russian state TV show pushed back against Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyov’s claim that Kherson Oblast is fully Russian, which would justify the use of nuclear weapons. The “experts” said that the use of nuclear weapons to defend territory that is not fully occupied is irrational and even said that NATO poses no threat to Russia. Russian propagandists have been making outlandish nuclear threats and accusing NATO of planning to attack Russia throughout Putin’s regime and especially before and during the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine; such dismissal of common Kremlin talking points in such a forum is unprecedented. ISW has also previously reported that Russian extreme nationalist ideologist Alexander Dugin accused Putin of not fully committing to the pro-war ideology. Putin has generally sought to balance extreme nationalist talking points to gather support from the nationalist-leaning community and a more moderate narrative to maintain the support of the rest of the Russian population. Russian military failures and the increasing sacrifices Putin is demanding of the Russian people to continue his disastrous invasion are bringing his deliberate obfuscation of war aims and attempts to balance rhetorically into sharp relief, potentially fueling discontent within critical constituencies.

Key Takeaways

• The Russian military conducted another set of massive, coordinated missile strikes on Ukrainian critical infrastructure.
• Russian politicians continue to promote openly genocidal rhetoric against Ukraine.
• The Kremlin continues to pursue its maximalist goals and is likely issuing vague statements about its intent to mislead Western Countries into pressuring Ukraine into negotiations.
• Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the directions of Kreminna and Svatove.
• Russian forces continued offensive operations around Bakhmut and Avdiivka.
• Russian forces continued defensive operations on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast.
• The Kremlin is continuing crypto-mobilization efforts at the expense of other Russian security services.
• Russian forces and occupation officials continued to forcibly relocate residents and confiscate their property.
Significant Fighting in the Past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory

* 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 sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the directions of Svatove and Kreminna on November 23. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian artillery units thwarted a Ukrainian assault within 14km northwest of Svatove in the direction of Novoselivske. A Russian milblogger posted videos purporting to show Russian forces striking a Ukrainian reconnaissance and sabotage group in the direction of Svatove. The Russian MoD also claimed that Russian artillery units repelled a Ukrainian assault within 6km northwest of Kreminna near Chervonopopivka. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted the assault toward Chervonopopivka to cut a section of the R-66 highway that connects Kreminna to Svatove. A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces are concentrating forces in Kharkiv Oblast in preparation for a possible major offensive against Svatove. ISW does not assess claims about future Ukrainian operations.

Russian forces conducted limited counterattacks aimed at constraining the actions of Ukrainian forces in Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts on November 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces neutralized a Russian reconnaissance and sabotage group within 47km northeast of Kharkiv City near Staritsa, Kharkiv Oblast. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted an assault within 15km northwest of Svatove in the direction of Stelmakhivka. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also repelled a Russian attack within 12km south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued routine indirect fire along the line of contact in eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian forces continued to target Russian military concentrations and logistics in Luhansk Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 23 that Ukrainian forces struck several Russian manpower and equipment concentrations and destroyed a Russian ammunition depot in Luhansk Oblast in the previous days. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces killed about 50 Russian military personnel and wounded up to 50 others in the strikes.
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of November 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Merdes, and Will Klein
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Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
Key Ukrainian Roads
Russian Ground Lines of Communication
Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine
Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

Spokesman for the Ukrainian Eastern Forces, Colonel Serhiy Cherevati stated on November 20 that Ukrainian forces have already liberated 12 settlements in Luhansk Oblast since the start of the eastern counteroffensive. ISW will update our maps when independent sources disclose the area of Ukrainian advances.
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 to conduct offensive operations in the direction of Bakhmut on November 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut, within 14km south of Bakhmut near Kurdiumivka, and within 30km northeast of Bakhmut near Spirne and Berestove. A Russian milblogger claimed that Wagner Group units are continuing to attempt to push through Ukrainian defensive positions on the outskirts of Bakhmut and that Russian forces conducted assaults within 26km northeast of Bakhmut on Yakovlivka and Bilhorivka, Donetsk Oblast. The milblogger also claimed that there is fierce fighting southeast of Soledar (12km northeast of Bakhmut). Russian sources continued to claim that Ukrainian forces are suffering heavy losses in the Bakhmut area but did not provide specific information on said losses. Social media sources posted geolocated footage showing Russian forces firing incendiary munitions near Ukrainian positions near Spirne. Protocol III of the Geneva Convention prohibits the use of air-delivered incendiary munitions against military targets within a concentration of civilians.

Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on November 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults within 28km southwest of Avdiivka near Krasnohorivka, Pervomaiske, Nevelske, Sieverne, and Marinka, and within 15km northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also conducted assaults southwest of Avdiivka near Novomyhailivka and Opytne, and within 6km northeast of Avdiivka near Kamianka. Another Russian milblogger posted geolocated footage showing Russian forces making minimal advances towards Nevelske and claimed that the new positions would allow Russian artillery units to fire on roads leading to Krasnohorivka. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces continued to advance in Marinka, and social media sources posted geolocated footage showing that Russian forces are making minimal advances. One Russian source argued that control of Marinka is of key importance for Russian efforts to capture the Vuhledar salient. These Russian advances in Marinka are less than 1km from the 2014 territorial boundaries in Donetsk Oblast and are the fruit of more than 8 years of Russian military efforts.

Russian forces continued to conduct defensive operations in western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts on November 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces are on the defensive in these directions. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian assault near Pavlivka (52km southwest of Donetsk City). A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian artillery units have been holding back further Russian offensive operations in the Pavlivka area. Geolocated footage posted on November 23 shows Ukrainian forces in Pavlivka despite repeated Russian claims that Russian forces have completely taken the settlement. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued routine indirect fire along the line of contact in Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of November 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, and Will Klein © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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

Note: ISW will report on activities in Kherson Oblast as part of the Southern Axis in this and subsequent updates. Ukraine’s counteroffensive in right-bank Kherson Oblast has accomplished its stated objectives, so ISW will not present a Southern Ukraine counteroffensive section until Ukrainian forces resume counteroffensives in southern Ukraine.

Russian forces continued defensive operations on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on November 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops in the Kherson direction are conducting positional defense, improving fortifications, and deploying additional equipment to defensive lines along the M14 (Kakhovka-Melitopol) highway.\(^{48}\) Satellite imagery taken between November 2 and November 15 shows the construction of Russian fortifications north of Radensk, 25km southeast of Kherson City along the E97 highway that runs between Kherson City and Armiansk, occupied Crimea.\(^{49}\) Satellite imagery also shows the ongoing construction of defensive positions, including construction materials, infantry trenches, and support-line trenches near Zaozerne, along the P47 Kakhovka-Henichesk route.\(^{50}\) Russian forces reportedly struck Kherson City with incendiary munitions on November 23 and continued firing on settlements along the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River.\(^{51}\) Russian forces conducted routine artillery strikes along the line of contact on western bank Kherson Oblast and in Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhia oblasts.\(^{52}\)

Ukrainian forces continued striking Russian concentration areas in Zaporizhia Oblast on November 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that a Ukrainian strike destroyed a Russian S-300 surface-to-air missile system near Orikhiv, a checkpoint near Vesele, and a personnel concentration in Melitopol between November 21 and 23.\(^{53}\) Russian milbloggers continued to warn about the potential of an imminent Ukrainian offensive on the Zaporizhia Oblast frontline.\(^{54}\)

Ukrainian nuclear power company Energoatom announced on November 23 that due to a decrease in the availability of energy supply in Ukraine, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) went into full blackout mode and that all diesel generators are in operation.\(^{55}\) Energoatom’s statement is underscored by discussions between International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi and Rosatom Director General Alexey Likhachev in Istanbul, Turkey, to establish a nuclear safety and security protection zone around the ZNPP.\(^{56}\) Rosatom notably continues to accuse Ukraine of shelling the plant, and Rosatom advisor Renat Karchaa claimed that Ukrainian artillery fire damaged distillate tanks between two of the ZNPP’s power units between November 19 and 20.\(^{57}\) Russian officials will likely continue to conduct an information operation accusing Ukraine of endangering the ZNPP in order to undermine attempts at negotiations with the IAEA and consolidate Russian control of the plant.
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of November 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mickelsen, Daniel Medlin, and Will Kiehn
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* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

ISW expanded Ukrainian counteroffensives to all of right bank Kherson Oblast on November 11 based on geolocated footage of Ukrainian forces liberating Kherson City and settlements north of the Dnipro River. Russian forces partially destroyed the Kakhovka and Antonivsky bridges, which indicates that Russian forces are not intending to hold positions on the right (western) bank. ISW assesses with high confidence that Ukrainian forces will clear the remaining settlements along the western bank of the river in the coming days, although some Russian troops may have remained behind to conduct partisan operations. Russian sources indicated on November 21 that Ukrainian forces are holding positions on Karantynny Island near Kherson City, but it is unclear if Ukrainian forces regained control over other islands along the Dnipro River.
Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

The Kremlin continues its attempts to address force generation issues at the expense of other Russian security services and is continuing crypto mobilization. A Russian milblogger reported that the Russian Armed Forces are training mobilized reservists of the Russian military police in North Ossetia, who will participate in combat in Ukraine.58 Russian forces have also continued the forced mobilization of men in proxy republics and have reportedly mobilized all men (including those under 60 years of age) in Dovzhanska, Luhansk Oblast.59 Russian milbloggers have shared video footage showcasing the early graduation of students from the Donetsk City Military School in April 2022, noting that of those students 12 have died and almost all were wounded in combat.60 The milbloggers added that the class of 2023 will also graduate early. ISW previously reported that Russian officials have planned early graduations for cadets in Russia.61 The Wagner Group has also continued to recruit personnel, with several prominent milbloggers sharing recruitment ads for a three-month-long “business trip” to Ukraine.62

Russian mobilized men and their families are continuing to complain about mobilization issues. Video footage showed Russian mobilized servicemen from Serpukhov, Moscow Oblast, complaining about mismanagement and poor leadership.63 Mobilized men noted that the Russian command abandoned them in Baranykivka, Luhansk Oblast, on the Svatove-Kreminka frontline without any directions. Mobilized men added that as a result of poor leadership, half of the unit ended up in Ukrainian-liberated Makiivka, west of Baranykivka. Another video showed mobilized men in Yekaterinburg appealing to the city administration regarding the lack of payments.64 Russian parliamentarian Maksim Ivanov also claimed to receive appeals from 537 families of mobilized men from Sverdlovsk Oblast regarding the lack of promised payments.65 Russian pro-war milbloggers also accused the local administration of spending money on holiday decorations rather than paying the mobilized.66 Russian mobilization nevertheless continues to drain the budgets of local governments. Mayor of Naberezhnye Chelny Nayil Magdeyev promised to allocate half a billion rubles (about 10 million dollars) to support mobilized and their families for a six-month period.67 Such budget allocations for just one city in the Republic of Tatarstan reveal the costliness of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s mobilization.

Russian mobilized men continue to show signs of low morale. Twenty mobilized men from the Republic of Mordovia reportedly did not return to a training ground in Ulyanovsk after their military command gave them a vacation day for Russia’s Unity Day on November 4.68 Russian sources also reported that a mobilized man from Saratov Oblast who had previously shared a video of poor living conditions and then publicly retracted his statements ended up in a psychiatric hospital.69 The man reportedly told his family that other soldiers wanted to drown him and that he is now in a drugged state.70

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces are training operators for both Russian and Iranian-made UAVs in an educational institution in Russian-occupied Sevastopol.71 Russian forces are reportedly currently training 30 servicemen for three weeks. Belarusian Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran on November 23, and Ukrainian officials previously reported that Iran may help Belarus produce artillery shells.72

Geolocated footage showed a Russian military buildup in Belgorod Oblast near the international border on November 9, but the footage may show damaged and withdrawn Russian military equipment from Kharkiv Oblast.73 Social media users geolocated two areas of military equipment concentrations in Verigovka and Biriuch, about 25km northeast of Velykyi Burluk. Social media users pointed out that much of the equipment appears damaged or in need of repair.
Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of occupied and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian forces and occupation officials continued the relocation of civilians and the confiscation of private and public Ukrainian property on November 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued to forcibly resettle Ukrainian residents in Luhansk Oblast under the pretext of eliminating subversive actions and relocated at least 20 locals from Denezhnykove and Shtormove, Luhansk (about 25km northeast of Severodonetsk) to an unknown location.74 Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai also reported that Russian forces continued to evict residents from their houses and occupy abandoned homes in Starobilsk Raion, Luhansk.75 The Ukrainian Resistance Center notably reported that Russian forces continued to turn educational institutions in occupied territories into barracks due to an increased need for barrack space in that area after the Russian withdrawal from Kherson Oblast.76 The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian forces occupy parts of educational institutions while education programs continue to take place.77 The Ukrainian Resistance Center also noted that Russian forces continued to treat wounded Russian servicemembers in civilian hospitals in occupied territories.78 These efforts may constitute an effort to use civilians and civilian objects in occupied areas as human shields.

Russian occupation authorities continued extensive efforts to tighten social control and erode Ukrainian national identity in occupied territories on November 23. Ukrainian Mariupol City advisor Andryushchenko reported that Russian occupying forces check schoolchildren’s belongings before the schoolchildren enter school and require them to sing the Russian and Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) anthems every morning.79 The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that occupation officials in Melitopol erected a monument in mid-November to Grigory Boyarinov, a Russian war hero and People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) employee who is known for leading the storming of Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin's palace in Kabul, Afghanistan, and participating in Amin's assassination in 1979 at the start of the Soviet invasion.80 The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on November 23 that Melitopol residents painted the monument black in protest.81 Zaporizhia Oblast Occupation Head Yevheny Balitsky notably reported that Zaporizhia occupation authorities plan to carry out extensive nationalization of socially significant Ukrainian objects and infrastructure in Zaporizhia Oblast. Balitsky stated that occupation officials have identified over 400 social objects that they plan to nationalize by the end of 2022 and noted that they are currently working on an inventory of a children's music school in Melitopol.82 This plan essentially legalizes the looting of Ukrainian property, consolidates administrative control of occupied areas, and contributes to the erosion of Ukrainian identity and culture by subsuming socially-significant infrastructure into Russian systems.

Russian and Ukrainian forces participated in another prisoner exchange on November 23. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that Russian and Ukrainian forces exchanged 35 Ukrainian servicemen and one Ukrainian civilian for 35 Russian servicemen and one Russian civilian.83 Latvia-based independent Russian language news agency Meduza reported that, among the Ukrainian servicemembers exchanged, a few were defenders of the Azovstal Plant in Mariupol and a few were Ukrainian National Guardsmen who defended the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the early stages of the war.84

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.