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**Snapshot of the day:**

**General, humanitarian:**

- Bodies of 42 Ukrainian defenders returned home.
- The Russian forces shelled the maternity ward of a Kherson hospital.
- 87% of Ukrainians oppose the restoration of the Soviet Union.

**Military:**

- Ukrainian forces created a threat of encircling the Russian garrison in Svatove, Luhansk Oblast.
- The Russian military lost an estimated 620 KIA in one day.

**The Grain initiative:**

- Russia deliberately delays ship inspections; 95 vessels are awaiting inspection, some of them for over a month

**International:**

- Sergey Lavrov threatened the West with a direct clash yet again.
- Dmitry Medvedev twitted bizarre geopolitical "predictions" for 2023 and elaborated on the state of the world and significant trends into the future.
- Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann pushes for more German support for Ukraine.
- Germany has sent to Ukraine over a quarter of its arms export.
- The Russian Central Bank admitted that the frozen Russian assets are unlikely to be returned.

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**Humanitarian aspect:**

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has confirmed **6,884 deaths and 10,947 injuries of civilians in Ukraine as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion**. These are the data the organization collected between February 24 and midnight on December 26. However, the organization notes that the actual death toll is much higher, as information from some places where intense fighting continues is delayed, and many reports still need to be confirmed.

Since the beginning of the full-scale war, the [Ukrainian] police have opened 53,190 criminal investigations into potential crimes of the Russian military and their accomplices in Ukraine.

**Russian shelling**

On December 26, the **Russian military struck 6 Oblasts of Ukraine**. Mostly civilian infrastructure was hit. One civilian was injured in Donetsk Oblast and one civilian in Kharkiv Oblast. Kherson Oblast was attacked 40 times, including 11 attacks on the city itself.

On December 27, **the Russian forces shelled the maternity ward of a Kherson hospital**. 2 children were born in the hospital today, Deputy Head of the Presidential Office Kyrylo Tymoshenko said. Before the attack, the doctors managed to complete a cesarean section. There are 5 women in the institution after giving birth.

### **Occupied territories:**

The Russians are preparing the so-called "evacuation" of the residents of the temporarily occupied Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia Oblast. The National Resistance Center reported that the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is supposed to prepare buses for the "evacuation". It's planned that people will be taken to the Crimean city of Dzhankoy. "At the beginning, the "evacuation" is voluntary, but in the future, the occupiers will do forced evictions," the Resistance Center reported.

### **Crimean Tatars**

According to the President's Representative to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Tamila Tasheva, about 1000 Crimean Tatars moved from the occupied Crimea to Turkey to avoid being drafted into the occupation army once President Putin announced the "partial mobilization".

At the same time, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian MOD reported that the number of people joining the Ukrainian special unit "Crimea" is constantly growing because residents of Crimea, occupied by Russia, joined it. "Today, the Crimean Tatars take an active part in the war against their historical enemy, the Russian Federation", the Intelligence Directorate said. A separate special unit, "Crimea", was formed from among the Crimean Tatars in the ranks of the MODs Intelligence Directorate, which now defends the Ukrainian land in Bakhmut. It also participated in successful special operations in the south of Ukraine and other hot spots.

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### **Operational situation**

(Please note that this section of the Brief is mainly on the previous day's (December 26) developments)

*It is the 307th day of the strategic air-ground offensive operation of the Russian Armed Forces against Ukraine (in the official terminology of the Russian Federation – "operation to protect Donbas").*

The Russian military concentrates its efforts on offensive actions in the areas of Bakhmut and Avdiivka. They try to improve their tactical position in the Lyman area. They conduct forward presence actions along the Ukrainian-Belarusian and Ukrainian-Russian section of the border, deploying units of the 38th separate airborne assault brigade, 103rd separate airborne brigade, and a detachment of the 5th separate SOF brigade of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus. Russian forces inflict systematic fire strikes on the positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and civilian infrastructure objects in the territorial communities of Sumy and Kharkiv Oblasts.

During the day, units of the missile and artillery troops of the Ukrainian Defense Forces hit one enemy command and control post, 6 areas of Russian manpower and military equipment concentration, an ammunition depot and one other important military target.

### **Kharkiv direction**

- *Topoli - Siversk section: approximate length of combat line - 154 km, number of BTGs of the RF Armed Forces - 23-28, the average width of the combat area of one BTG - 5.5 km;*

- *Deployed enemy BTGs: 26th, 153rd, and 197th tank regiments (TR), 245th motorized rifle regiment (MRR) of the 47th tank division (TD), 6th and 239th TRs, 228th MRR of the 90th TD, 25th and 138th separate motorized rifle brigades (SMRBr) of the 6th Combined Arms (CA) Army, 27th SMRBr of the 1st Tank Army, 252nd and 752nd MRRs of the 3rd MRD, 1st, 13th, and 12th TRs, 423rd MRR of the 4th TD, 201st military base, 15th, 21st, 30th SMRBr of the 2nd CA Army, 35th, 55th and 74th SMRBr of the 41st CA Army, 275th and 280th MRRs, 11th TR of the 18th MRD of the 11 Army Corps (AC), 7th MRR of the 11th AC, 80th SMRBr of the 14th AC, 76th Air assault division, 106th airborne division, 2nd, 3rd, 14th, 24th and 45th separate SOF brigades of the Airborne Forces, military units of the 1st AC of so-called DPR, 2nd and 4th SMRBr of the 2nd AC, PMCs.*

Units of the Ukrainian 92nd separate mechanized brigade and the Belarusian volunteer regiment named after Kostus Kalinovsky [legally fighting for Ukrainian Forces] broke through the Russian defenses in the Pidkuychansk area and liberated the town. They entrenched in it, thereby creating a threat of encircling the Russian garrison in Svatove. This relatively insignificant advance forced the Russians to throw almost all units of the 4th and 47th tank divisions deployed in Svatove into the breakthrough area and move their headquarters to Luhansk.

Units of the Ukrainian 25th separate airborne brigade crossed the R-66 highway at several points in the section between Ploschanka and Zhytlivka, thus creating a threat to the communications of the Russian garrison in Kreminna. The Russian military tried to restore the position, but the Ukrainian 95th separate airborne assault brigade repelled all attempts with steady defense and reserve maneuvers.

Positional battles continue along the Ploschanka – Chervonopopivka – Dibrova line.

Units of the "Wagner" PMC attacked the northern outskirts of Soledar from three directions simultaneously, namely from Yakovlivka, Nova Kamianka, and Bakhmutse. All of their attacks were repulsed by units of the 10th separate mountain assault brigade with the support of the 17th separate tank brigade. The Ukrainian defense forces carried out several counterattacks and recovered partially lost positions. The Russian army, however, continues to hold Yakovlivka.

Due to significant personnel losses in Luhansk Oblast, an increased number of desertion cases among Russian servicemen and instances of them leaving combat positions is noted. To maintain control over the situation, the Russian military leadership increased the number of patrols to detain and return deserters to their units.

### **Donetsk direction**

- *Siversk - Maryinka section: approximate length of the combat line - 144 km, the number of BTGs of the RF Armed Forces - 13-15, the average width of the combat area of one BTG - 9.6 km;*
- *Deployed BTGs: 68th and 163rd tank regiments (TR), 102nd and 103rd motorized rifle regiments of the 150 motorized rifle division, 80th TR of the 90th tank division, 35th, 55th, and 74th separate motorized rifle brigades of the 41st Combined Arms Army, 51st and 31st separate airborne assault*

*brigades, 61st separate marines brigade of the Joint Strategic Command "Northern Fleet," 336th separate marines brigade of Baltic Fleet, 1st, 3rd, 5th, 15th, and 100th separate motorized rifle brigades, 9th and 11th separate motorized rifle regiment of the 1st Army Corps of the so-called DPR, 6th motorized rifle regiment of the 2nd Army Corps of the so-called LPR, PMCs.*

The Russian military tries to seize the initiative and does not stop attacks north of Bakhmut, trying to get to the city from the north, attacking along the M-03 Pidgorodnie highway. The counterattack of the 54th separate mechanized brigade units repelled the Russian forces and finally cleared the city's eastern outskirts from the [Russian] invaders.

From the south, detachments of the "Wagner" PMC and the 58th separate motorized rifle brigade try to capture Opytne and break through to Bakhmut. Fighting continues for the railway station in Klishchiivka.

Units of the Russian Armed Forces unsuccessfully attacked along the front line from New York in the north through Novobakhmutivka, Krasnohorivka, Kamianka, Opytne, and Vodyane to Pisky and Nevelske. Attacks on Krasnohorivka, Pobyeda, Novomykhaliivka and further to Vuhledar failed. The Russian military tries to break through to Krasnohorivka and then to Avdiivka. Fighting continues in Marinka.

#### **Zaporizhzhia direction**

- *Maryinka – Vasylivka section: approximate length of the line of combat - 200 km, the number of BTGs of the RF Armed Forces - 17, the average width of the combat area of one BTG - 11.7 km;*
- *Deployed BTGs: 36th separate motorized rifle brigade (SMRBr) of the 29th Combined Arms (CA) Army, 38th and 64th SMRBr, 69th separate cover brigade of the 35th CA Army, 5th separate tank brigade, 135th, 429th, 503rd and 693rd motorized rifle regiments (MRR) of the 19th motorized rifle division (MRD) of the 58th CA Army, 70th, 71st and 291st MRRs of the 42nd MRD of the 58th CA Army, 136th SMRB of the 58 CA Army, 46th and 49th machine gun artillery regiments of the 18th machine gun artillery division of the 68th Army Corps (AC), 39th SMRB of the 68th AC, 83th separate airborne assault brigade, 40th and 155th separate marines brigades, 22nd separate SOF brigade, 1st AC of the so-called DPR, and 2nd AC of the so-called LPR, PMCs.*

In the Vuhledar-Pavlivka section of the front, where the Russian 155th separate marines brigade was defeated earlier in the battles for Pavlivka, the 36th separate motorized rifle brigade was brought into battle from the southeast of Vuhledar. It suffered significant losses in the first attacks and retreated without completing its tasks.

The enemy continues preparations for a defensive operation in this direction, building a system of defensive lines and positions, and strengthening its grouping in the Melitopol area.

#### **Tavriysk direction**

- *Vasylivka – Stanislav section: approximate length of the battle line – 296 km, the number of BTGs of the RF Armed Forces - 39, the average width of the combat area of one BTG - 7,5 km;*

- *Deployed BTGs of: the 8th and 49th Combined Arms (CA) Armies; 11th, 103rd, 109th, and 127th rifle regiments of the mobilization reserve of the 1st Army Corps (AC); 35th and 36th CA Armies; 3rd AC; 90th tank division; the 22nd AC of the Coastal Forces; the 810th separate marines brigade of the Black Sea Fleet; the 7th and the 98th airborne division, and the 11th and 83rd separate airborne assault brigades of the Airborne Forces, 10th separate SOF brigade.*

The Russian military is preparing to conduct a defensive operation, building up a defensive line beyond the reach of the Ukrainian artillery.

#### **Azov-Black Sea Maritime Operational Area:**

*The forces of the Russian Black Sea Fleet continue to stay ready to carry out two operational tasks against Ukraine:*

- *to project force on the coast and the continental part of Ukraine by launching missile strikes from surface ships, submarines, coastal missile systems, and aircraft at targets in the coastal zone and deep into the territory of Ukraine and readiness for the naval amphibious landing to assist ground forces in the coastal direction*
- *to control the northwestern part of the Black Sea by blocking Ukrainian ports and preventing the restoration of sea communications by carrying out attacks on ports and ships and concealed mine-laying.*

*The ultimate goal is to deprive Ukraine of access to the Black Sea and extend and maintain control over the captured territory and Ukraine's coastal regions.*

The Russian Navy keeps 10 surface ships and submarines at sea. They are located along the southwestern coast of Crimea. Among them are three Kalibr cruise missile carriers: two submarines with 4 missiles and 1 surface ship carrying 8 missiles each. The total number of the ready to launch missiles could be up to 16.

In the Sea of Azov, on the approach to the Mariupol and Berdiansk seaports, 2 patrol boats are located with the purpose of blocking the Azov coast.

On the southern outskirts of Dzhankoy (Crimea), the number of [Russian] military equipment has increased. It currently numbers more than 200 units ready to be redeployed in the direction of Kherson Oblast. The movement intensity of the military equipment by road and rail transport from Crimea to the Kherson region remains stable.

Railway freight trains arrive on the territory of Kherson Oblast from the Crimean side, unloading military equipment and ammunition at the "Kalanchak", "Brylivka" and "Novooleksiiivka" stations.

Russian aviation continues to fly from the Crimean airfields of Belbek and Hvardiyske over the northwestern part of the Black Sea.

**"The Grain Initiative":** 9 ships with 390,000 tons of agricultural products for Africa, Asia and Europe have left the ports of Greater Odesa in 2 days.

Among them are the ALANDA STAR and SSI PRIVILEGE bulkers, with 68,000 tons of wheat for Egypt and Indonesia, and the EUROCHAMPION tanker, with 45,000 tons of oil for India.

Ports of Greater Odesa loaded more than 860,000 tons of agricultural products on 24 vessels. Then they would wait for the Joint Coordination Center (JCC) inspection. Today, 95 ships await inspection in the Bosphorus, including 73 vessels headed west to the ports for loading and 22 that already carry Ukrainian agricultural products. Some vessels have been waiting in Turkish waters for more than a month. "Deliberate actions of the delegation of the Russian Federation in the JCC have brought this. Their purpose is to slow down the process of ship inspections. At first, they reduced the number of inspection groups to 3; now, they have begun to extend the time of the inspections. Representatives of the Russian Federation began to check even indicators that are not provided for by the JCC documents and have nothing to do with the subject of the inspection (for example, whether the ship's units are working well, how much fuel, etc.).

When this algorithm is followed, the inspection of one vessel takes at least 4 hours. This is unproductive and contributes to the increase in the queue. An increase in the queue means a decrease in the volume of exports of agricultural products from our [Ukrainian] ports and millions of losses for cargo owners due to downtime," explains Yuriy Vaskov, Deputy Minister of Community Development, Territories and Infrastructure.

As of December 25, Inspection Team #3 has not conducted any inspections. As a result, only 6 out of 10 planned inspections took place per day. A stable "grain corridor" calls for at least 12 inspections per day. Currently, 3 ships are moving along the "grain corridor" with 93,000 tons of agricultural products. Since August 1, 594 ships have left the ports of Greater Odesa, exporting 15.5 million tons of Ukrainian food to Asia, Europe and Africa.

On December 26, Turkish President Erdogan announced that a new gas field had been discovered during the exploration of the Sakarya mineral zone in the Black Sea (140 miles northeast of the Bosphorus). Its reserves are now estimated at 652 billion cubic meters of gas. The Sakaria field is expected to start supplying gas to the Turkish grid in the first quarter of 2023. Until the latest news of the bigger gas volume, it was expected to meet about a third of Turkey's domestic needs after peak production.

### **Russian operational losses from 24.02 to 27.12.22**

Personnel - almost 103,220 people (+620);

Tanks - 3,016 (0)

Armored combat vehicles – 6,024 (+7);

Artillery systems – 1,998 (+2);

Multiple rocket launchers (MLRS) - 418 (0);

Anti-aircraft warfare systems - 212 (0);

Vehicles and fuel tanks – 4,652 (+5);

Aircraft - 283 (0);

Helicopters – 267 (0);  
UAV operational and tactical level – 1,707 (0);  
Intercepted cruise missiles - 653 (0);  
Boats/ships - 16 (0).

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### **Ukraine, general news**

The Security Service of Ukraine reported that, based on its materials, a shipment of iron ore worth almost two billion hryvnias, owned by the company of Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov (who is part of the inner circle of the top military-political leadership of the Kremlin) was arrested. The ore was hidden in several Ukrainian ports and was supposed to be secretly transported to Russia to be used for its military-industrial complex.

According to a Razumkov Center poll, 87% of Ukrainians oppose restoring the Soviet Union [one of the Russian propaganda notions promoted by Putin to justify the war]. In comparison, in 2000, only a little more than half (53%) of the respondents answered unequivocally that they did not seek the restoration of the Soviet Union. In 2021 the share of such respondents was already 69%. Only 3% said they unequivocally supported the restoration of the USSR, and 11% said they wanted it but understood it was unrealistic. Those who oppose the restoration of the USSR comprise a majority in all regions of Ukraine.

### **International diplomatic aspect**

Sergey Lavrov expressed his deep "concern" about the "bacchanalia of propaganda around the issue of nuclear weapons" in the US and the entire West. He went on by saying that "the policy of total containment of Russia is extremely dangerous. It can eventually escalate into a direct armed confrontation between nuclear powers." He accused the West of planning the elimination of Vladimir Putin.

Dmitriy Medvedev made the day by twitting his bizarre geopolitical "predictions" for 2023. In his lengthy "Christmas" article, the former Russian President elaborated on the current situation and trends for the future. He believes in skyrocketing energy prices (\$150 a barrel and \$5.000 per 1.000 cubic meters of gas), the UK rejoining the EU, triggering the collapse of the Union. Medvedev pushed further the Kremlin's propaganda thesis of Poland and Hungary annexing Ukrainian territories and fantasized about Germany becoming the Fourth Reich and fighting a war with France. He prophesies a civil war in the US and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system.

Once widely seen as a liberal, Medvedev underlined the key thought that Russia doesn't have anyone in the West to talk to, there's nothing to talk about, and there is no need for that. "Now it is completely clear that in the relationship of independent and sovereign states with the Anglo-Saxon world in the current configuration, there can be no talk of trust, hope for the decency of partners, their loyalty to their word and even their own beautifully stated principles." He claimed that there is "the global ideological and philosophical collapse of the Western worldview, its model of the world order," therefore "the West has driven itself into a cage," and should "sit in isolation."

He rejected any talks with the "Nazi" government in Ukraine and repeated the goal of overthrowing it. He outlined the goals of the war as protection of "compatriots" in the new [illegally annexed] territories, denazification, and demilitarization of the Ukrainian state, and gaining guarantees against "aggression" in the future.

Traditionally, one of the top Russian officials humiliated the CEE countries and blamed the "intrigues" of the "Anglo-Saxons". He bashed Angela Merkel for her recent revelation about the Minsk arrangements as the way for Ukraine to strengthen. "Unfortunately, we trusted our partners, not expecting direct betrayal and open work to destroy our country," Medvedev wrote. So, the former German Chancellor's comments neither received [political] payback from Ukraine, which had not gotten any defensive assistance from her government, nor from Russia, which was buying German defense and dual-use items and enjoying ever-increasing energy cooperation.

The Bundestag's defense committee's chairwoman has criticized the Chancellor's refusal to provide Ukraine with tanks. Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann believes that the "Russian narrative is working and is preventing some in the Chancellery from giving Ukraine the much-needed tanks." She sees it necessary for NATO to give Ukraine security guarantees till Ukraine eventually becomes the Alliance's member. In her view, the Ukrainian economy must be strengthened so that it is "again able to produce defensive weapons and Russia does not dare to attack Ukraine again." The chairwoman thinks that any calls for negotiations now would help Russia "to regenerate the army and then launch new attacks. There is no longer any trust in Russia." Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann called Vladimir Putin "a war criminal, a terrorist, a mass murderer." She believes most Russians support Putin's course and the war against the neighboring country.

Over a quarter of the weapons and military equipment Germany exported to foreign countries in 2022 was directed to Ukraine. With €2.24 billion worth of assistance, Germany occupies the third place of top suppliers after the US, the EU, and the UK. However, it is in 17th place in the assistance per GDP ratio, left behind by the ultimate champion – Estonia.

### **Russia, relevant news**

The number of foreigners visiting Russia as part of an organized tour plummeted by more than 90% during 2022, the Kommersant business daily reported on Tuesday. Official figures place the year-on-year drop in Russia's inbound tourist numbers as a whole at just 40%, from almost 290,000 last year to 190,000 in 2022, Kommersant said.

The Central Bank of the Russian Federation said in a statement that as a result of the sanctions, part of the assets of Russian banks turned out to be blocked entirely. The prospects for the return of these assets "seem extremely low", although, from a legal point of view, they have not yet been confiscated.

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