



## **Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment February 28, 2022**

**Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko  
February 28, 3:30pm EST**

**The Russian military is reorganizing its military efforts in an attempt to remedy poor planning and execution based on erroneous assumptions about Ukrainians' will and ability to resist.** Russian operations around Kyiv remain limited as logistics and reinforcements arrive but will likely resume in greater strength in the next 24 hours. Ukrainian military leaders say that they have used the pause to strengthen Kyiv's defenses and prepare to defend their capital in depth. The Ukrainian military likely cannot prevent Russian forces from enveloping or encircling Kyiv if the Russians send enough combat power to do so, but likely can make Russian efforts to gain control of the city itself extremely costly and possibly unsuccessful.

The Russian military has begun using area-attack weapons in the city of Kharkiv, dramatically increasing the damage to civilian infrastructure and the number of civilian casualties it is causing. It is using tube- and rocket artillery against Kharkiv, and unconfirmed reports indicate that it is also using thermobaric weapons, which can have devastating effects, especially on civilian targets. Ukrainian resistance in and around Kharkiv remains determined, but it is unclear how long Ukrainian defenders can hold if Russia sustains or increases attacks of this variety coupled with ground attacks supported by arriving Russian reinforcements.

Russian advances in southern Ukraine remain slower than they had been in the initial days of the war, possibly due to Russian efforts to concentrate sufficient combat power to conduct decisive operations against Mariupol and, possibly, Zaporizhia.

**The next major phase of Russian offensive operations will likely begin within the next 24 hours and play out over the ensuing 48-72 hours.**

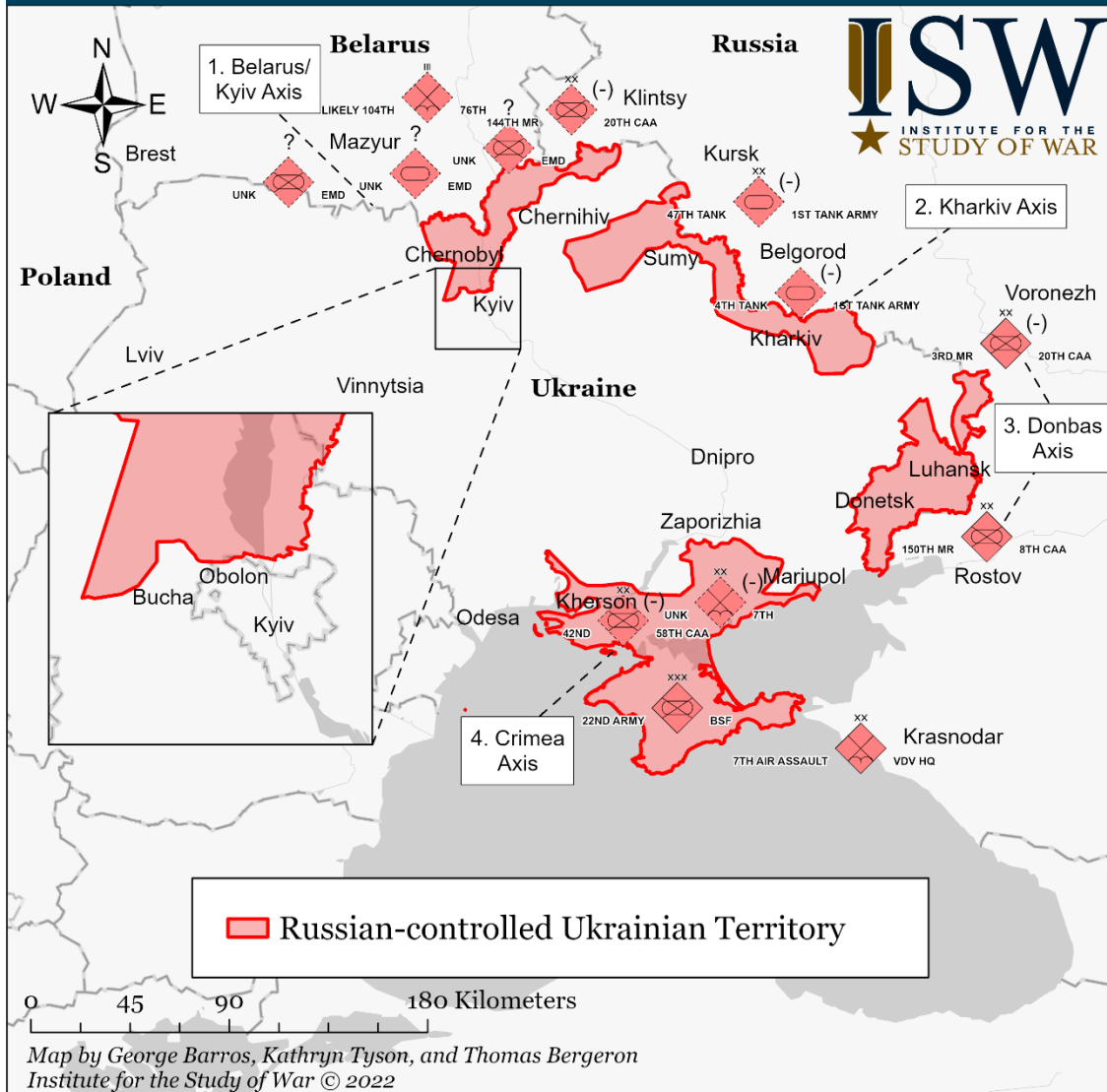
Ukrainian resistance remains remarkably effective and Russian operations, especially on the Kyiv axis, have been poorly coordinated and executed, leading to significant Russian failures on that axis and at Kharkiv. Russian forces remain much larger and more capable than Ukraine's conventional military, however, and Russian advances in southern Ukraine threaten to unhinge the defense of Kyiv and northeastern Ukraine if they continue unchecked.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Russia deployed additional heavy forces and artillery that it has so far failed to employ in assaults on Kyiv to the city's western approach on February 27-28. Russian forces will likely launch a renewed assault on western Kyiv on March 1.**

- **Russian forces began using heavy artillery against central Kharkiv on February 28, indicating a dangerous inflection in Russian operations as the Kremlin chooses to use air and artillery assets it has held in reserve to date.**
- **Russian forces resumed limited advances in northeastern Ukraine on February 28 after an operational pause on February 26-27.**
- **Russian and proxy forces resumed assaults on Ukrainian forces defending Mariupol from the east and deployed additional artillery and anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) assets to the Mariupol front line on February 28. Russian forces may attempt a renewed assault on Mariupol in the coming days.**
- **Russian forces increasingly targeted Ukrainian airfields and logistics centers on February 28, particularly in western Ukraine. Russia likely seeks to ground the Ukrainian air force and interdict the ability of Western states to resupply the Ukrainian military.**
- **Russian and Belarusian forces may be preparing for an additional line of advance from Belarus into western Ukraine.**
- **Russian successes in southern Ukraine are the most dangerous and threaten to unhinge Ukraine's successful defenses and rearguard actions to the north and northeast.**
- **Russian troops are facing growing morale and logistics issues, predictable consequences of the poor planning, coordination, and execution of attacks along Ukraine's northern border.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 28, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



## Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

Elements of the 104th Airborne Regiment of the 76th Airborne Division attacked Kyiv Oblast likely from Gomel, Belarus.

Elements of the 26th Tank Regiment of the 47th Tank Division of the 1st Tank Army attacked Sumy Oblast from Kursk, Russia.

Elements of the 96th Separate Reconnaissance Brigade and elements of the 423rd Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 4th Tank Division of the 1st Tank Army attacked Kharkiv Oblast from Belgorod, Russia.

Elements of the 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 6th Combined Arms Army (CAA) attacked Kharkiv Oblast from Belgorod, Russia.

Elements of the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 2nd CAA attacked Chernivtsi Oblast from Bryansk, Russia.

**Russian forces increasingly targeted Ukrainian airfields and logistics centers on February 28, particularly in western Ukraine. Russia likely seeks to ground the Ukrainian air force and interdict the ability of Western states to resupply the Ukrainian military.** The Ukrainian General staff reported that Russian airstrikes increasingly concentrated on military and civilian airfields and air-defense assets on February 28.<sup>1</sup> Russian forces conducted thirty missile strikes and four airstrikes from 11:00 am local time February 27 to 11:00 am February 28.<sup>2</sup> US intelligence officials reported that Russia has fired 380 missiles, predominantly short-range ballistic missiles, since February 24.<sup>3</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian air assets are increasingly targeting Ukraine from Belarusian airspace, though no Belarusian assets have launched operations as of now.<sup>4</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense falsely claimed to have secured air supremacy over Ukraine on February 28.<sup>5</sup> Russian forces have still not secured air superiority five days into the invasion but likely seek to do so in coming days through increased strikes on Ukrainian air assets.<sup>6</sup> Western military aid to the Ukrainian air force, including EU plans announced on February 27 to send fighter jets to Ukraine, will be crucial in preventing Russian forces from achieving air superiority.<sup>7</sup> Russian forces likely seek to interdict US and European aid shipments through western Ukraine.

**Russian ground forces are advancing on four primary axes, discussed in turn below:**

1. Kyiv;
2. Northeast front;
3. Donbas and Mariupol; and
4. Crimea-Kherson.

**1) Kyiv axis: Russia deployed additional heavy forces and artillery it has so far failed to employ in assaults on the city to the western approach to Kyiv on February 27-28. Russian forces will likely launch a renewed assault on western Kyiv on March 1. Attacks by Russian light forces on the outskirts of the city failed to make progress on February 28. Ukrainian forces are unlikely to capitulate.**

- Russia deployed substantial additional forces to its offensive along the western bank of the Dnipro River on February 27-28. Maxar Technologies satellite imagery (see Appendix A below) captured an 11-mile-long Russian convoy approaching Antonov airport, about 17 miles from downtown Kyiv, at 11:00 am local time on February 28. Social media users observed additional Russian forces moving through southern Belarus on February 28.<sup>8</sup> Russian logistics columns were additionally spotted in southeastern Belarus, likely to support Russian attacks on eastern Kyiv.<sup>9</sup> Russian forces will likely attempt a renewed assault on western Kyiv with supporting artillery on March 1.
- Russian light forces continued unsuccessful attacks on Kyiv the night of February 27-28.<sup>10</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported Ukrainian forces have established a “dense and multilevel system of defense of the capital” on February 28.<sup>11</sup> Ukrainian forces likely successfully took advantage of the time granted by Russia’s operational pause February 26-27 to reinforce defenses in the city.
- Russian forces are likely continuing attempts to infiltrate the city. Ukrainian forces reported Russian troops attempted to use three captured ambulances to infiltrate Ukrainian lines in Kyiv on February 27.<sup>12</sup> UK media outlet the *Times* reported on February 28 that more than 400 Russian mercenaries are currently operating in Kyiv under orders to kill Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, prompting Ukrainian forces to implement a strict curfew on February 26.<sup>13</sup> ISW cannot confirm this report, though it would track with Russia’s likely efforts to decapitate the Ukrainian government.

- Ukrainian forces continue to successfully defend against Russian efforts to encircle Kyiv west of the city, repulsing an attack on Irpin the night of February 27 and possibly temporarily recapturing Hostomel airport from Russian forces.<sup>14</sup>

**2) Northeast axis: Russian forces began using heavy artillery against central Kharkiv on February 28, indicating a dangerous inflection in Russian operations as the Kremlin chooses to use fire assets it has held in reserve to date. Russian forces additionally resumed limited advances in northeastern Ukraine on February 28 after an operational pause on February 26-27. Ukrainian forces continue to delay and inflict losses on the Russian advance but will likely not be able to halt further advances if the Kremlin commits additional reserves.**

- Russian forces used close air support and heavy artillery, including unconfirmed reports of thermobaric artillery, in assaults on Kharkiv on February 28. Russian Su-34 fighter bombers conducted strikes in Kharkiv on February 28, and Russian forces will likely increase their use of close air support in the coming days.<sup>15</sup> Russian Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) and traditional tube artillery began striking central Kharkiv on February 27-28, inflicting numerous civilian casualties.<sup>16</sup>
- **The Russian use of heavy artillery against urban areas indicates a dangerous new phase in Russian operations.** ISW previously warned that Russian forces would likely need to increase their use of air and artillery assets to overcome heavier-than-expected Ukrainian resistance but that Russia refrained from doing so to limit the informational and diplomatic effects of causing heavy Ukrainian civilian casualties and to avoid creating rubble and other obstacles-to-movement into and through Ukrainian cities. Russian forces will likely be able to overcome Ukrainian defenses in Kharkiv (and in Kyiv, if they choose to apply similar firepower there) while inflicting heavy civilian casualties and doing massive property damage.
- Russian forces resumed offensive operations in northeastern Ukraine, between Chernihiv and Sumy, on February 28.<sup>17</sup> Ukrainian forces claimed to halt attacks by Russian forces out of Khomutovka (in Kursk Oblast, Russia) towards Hlukhiv and Baturyn, west of Sumy.<sup>18</sup> Russian forces have not previously attacked this sector of northeastern Ukraine and likely seek alternate routes through to-date strong Ukrainian defenses. Elements of Russia's 14th Army Corps of the Northern Fleet and 47th Tank Division of the 1st Guards Tank Army are operating along this axis.<sup>19</sup>
- Ukrainian forces also repulsed attacks on eastern Kyiv in Baturyn, from the direction of Chernihiv, on February 28.<sup>20</sup>

**3) Donbas axis: Russian and proxy forces resumed assaults on Ukrainian forces defending Mariupol from the east and deployed additional artillery and anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) assets to the Mariupol front line on February 28. Russian forces may attempt a renewed assault on Mariupol in the coming days. Russian forces likely intend to pin Ukrainian forces in place on the line of contact to enable Russian forces breaking out of Crimea to isolate them. The Russians may be content to leave them there while concentrating on capturing Kyiv and imposing a new government on Ukraine. They may alternatively seek to encircle and destroy them or force them to surrender.**

- Russian forces advancing on Mariupol from the west continued assembling in Berdyansk on February 28 but did not make any major assaults.<sup>21</sup> Russia may be halting these forces to instead prioritize the other two Russian advances out of Crimea toward Zaporizhia and Mykolayiv. They may, on the other hand, be waiting until they have concentrated enough combat power in this

region before launching a full attack. Additionally, several videos of Ukrainian citizens in Berdyansk interdicting and harassing Russian forces circulated on Ukrainian social media on February 28.<sup>22</sup>

- Russian proxies in the 1st and 2nd Army Corps (the Ukrainian designations for the Russian-controlled military forces of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, respectively) conducted assaults along the line of contact in Donbas, supported by Russian artillery.<sup>23</sup> Proxy forces reportedly captured Hranitne, northeast of Mariupol, on February 28.<sup>24</sup> Ukrainian forces remain largely in place on the line of contact in Donbas. Russian forces likely seek to achieve a larger envelopment using forces breaking out from Crimea and currently advancing on Mariupol from the west.
- Ukrainian forces reported capturing a Russian sniper from the 102nd Motor Rifle Regiment of the 150th Motor Rifle Division in Donbas on February 28.<sup>25</sup> **If confirmed, this indicates at least elements of the previously uncommitted Russian 8<sup>th</sup> Combined Arms Army are active in Donbas.**
- Russian forces additionally deployed additional MLRS, thermobaric artillery, and ATGM assets toward Mariupol in Donetsk Oblast on February 28.<sup>26</sup> Russian forces may attempt an assault on Mariupol from the east in the coming days.

#### **4) Crimea axis: Russian forces continued limited advances on two axes out of Crimea—north toward Zaprozhia and west toward Mykolayiv, reaching the outskirts of Mykolayiv on February 28. Russia may struggle to fully supply both axes of advance and may be forced to choose which advance to prioritize.**

- Russian forces continued to advance north toward Zaprozhia on February 28 but have not yet entered the city. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed to capture the Zaporizhia nuclear power plant, approximately 50km southwest of the city, on February 28.<sup>27</sup> Russian forces in Melitopol likely deployed north to attack Zaporizhia on February 28.<sup>28</sup> ISW cannot confirm the extent of Russian advances toward Zaporizhia on February 28.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops launched an assault on Mykolayiv at 11:00 am local time on February 28.<sup>29</sup> ISW cannot confirm the extent of Russian advances west of the Dnipro River, though Russian forces have likely encircled Kherson.

**Russian and Belarusian forces may be preparing for an additional line of advance from Belarus into Western Ukraine.** The Belarusian 38th Air Assault Brigade deployed to Kobryn, near Brest in southwestern Belarus, on February 28.<sup>30</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 28 that there is a high likelihood of Belarusian forces joining Russian operations.<sup>31</sup> ISW previously reported a Russian armored column assembling in Stolin, Belarus, on February 25 to support a possible advance into Rivne Oblast in western Ukraine.<sup>32</sup> Russian forces have not launched a ground attack as of this publication. A Russian offensive in western Ukraine would likely seek to cut Ukraine off from ground shipments of Western aid through Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. However, Belarusian airborne forces would likely face similar difficulties to previous, failed, Russian airborne operations against Kyiv if they attempted airdrops.

#### **Immediate Items to Watch**

- Russian forces advancing north and east from Crimea threaten to cut off Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine if Kyiv does not withdraw them in the coming days.
- Russian forces began using artillery against residential areas in Kharkiv on February 28, likely signaling a dangerous new phase of Russian operations.
- Russian forces face growing morale and supply issues but will likely be able to overcome these handicaps.

- Russian forces continue to refrain from using their likely full spectrum of air and missile capabilities. The Ukrainian air force also remains active. Russian operations will likely steadily wear down Ukrainian air capabilities and eventually take the Ukrainian air force out of the fight.
- Russia has sufficient conventional military power to reinforce each of its current axes of advance and overpower the conventional Ukrainian forces defending them.

## Appendix A – Satellite Imagery



Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies.



Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies.



Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies.





Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261189039527515>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>.  
<sup>3</sup> [https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1498322785180995586?s=20&t=nzhdZrM77YggarMaCuP\\_da](https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1498322785180995586?s=20&t=nzhdZrM77YggarMaCuP_da).  
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>.  
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XN24My3vFeg>.  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>.  
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-02-26/card/zjCJ5iME2keSkxfiaIpr>;  
<https://www.axios.com/eu-weapons-ukraine-russia-invasion-331bfcbc-5193-47bo-8afb-03f194d95619.html>.  
<sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/gfusfus/status/1497989547203842051>.  
<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/MotolkoHelp/status/1498226217941671936>;  
<https://twitter.com/MotolkoHelp/status/1498270383262343171>.  
<sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261156522864100>;  
<sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261034776209608>.  
<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/260936159552803>.  
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/volodymyr-zelensky-russian-mercenaries-ordered-to-kill-ukraine-president-cvcksh79d>.  
<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261034776209608>;  
<https://twitter.com/defencehq/status/1498191541675958273?s=21>.  
<sup>15</sup> <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498220414300045319>;  
[https://twitter.com/CITeam\\_en/status/1498284750850740228](https://twitter.com/CITeam_en/status/1498284750850740228);  
<https://twitter.com/KofmanMichael/status/1498304259447828481>.  
<sup>16</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=672925393899103>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/26093615955280>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261453089501110>;  
<https://twitter.com/olliecarroll/status/1498264116871507971>;  
<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498270787081547777>.  
<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>.  
<sup>18</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>.  
<sup>19</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>;  
[https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1498181728921436163?cxt=HHwWhoC-lYiWzsopAAAA](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1498181728921436163?cxt=HHwWhoC-lYiWzsopAAAA).  
<sup>20</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>;  
<https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1498318233946161155>.  
<sup>21</sup> <https://twitter.com/COUPSURE/status/1497989234476699655>;  
<https://twitter.com/nigroeneveld/status/1498072845607444484>;  
<sup>22</sup> <https://twitter.com/ArmedForcesUkr/status/1498298228802007042?s=20&t=F3QRgHEoM9-x5TGbj6bwrw>;  
<https://twitter.com/PVB40/status/1498300930613207049?s=20&t=F3QRgHEoM9-x5TGbj6bwrw>.  
<sup>23</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>.  
<sup>24</sup> [https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1498298575339638784?s=20&t=F3QRgHEoM9-x5TGbj6bwrw](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1498298575339638784?s=20&t=F3QRgHEoM9-x5TGbj6bwrw).  
<sup>25</sup> [https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1498256738562318337](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1498256738562318337);  
[https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1498174702107381760](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1498174702107381760).  
<sup>26</sup> <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498255416203087872>;  
<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498265765811834884>;  
[https://twitter.com/666\\_mancer/status/1498219680242311171?cxt=HHwWhoC9xY-338opAAAA](https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1498219680242311171?cxt=HHwWhoC9xY-338opAAAA) ;  
<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498254707420241921>  
<sup>27</sup> <https://tass dot ru/armiya-i-opk/13892671>.  
<sup>28</sup> <https://twitter.com/KofmanMichael/status/1498301907202457600?cxt=HHwWgIC-ka7phMspAAAA>.  
<sup>29</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>.  
<sup>30</sup> <https://twitter.com/COUPSURE/status/1498250818306420740>.  
<sup>31</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/261400946172991>.  
<sup>32</sup> [https://twitter.com/konrad\\_muzyka/status/1497115295512776711](https://twitter.com/konrad_muzyka/status/1497115295512776711);  
<https://twitter.com/MotolkoHelp/status/1497108720953835543>.