

Project Gray Zone

Project Gray Zone is a Kalyna OSINT initiative launched on February 12, 2026. As the concept of “gray zones” has shifted with changes in the character of war, our goal is to update the public framework for understanding them and to encourage the OSINT community to refine how “gray zones” are defined in open-source analysis. This page is maintained as a living reference, consolidating definitions, analytic criteria, cases, and sources.

This analysis will be updated as research progresses and additional data becomes available; what you are reading is not the final version. You can revisit the latest iteration via the “Projects” section on the official Kalyna OSINT website.

New Mapping Reference Standard

As we revise our definition of gray zones, the front line depicted on our interactive map (Kalyna Battle Map) will be updated accordingly. We will apply this standard first in the Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia regions.

Under the new approach, the “gray zone” layer is removed. The front line will consist only of red and blue control areas and the portions where these areas overlap. The implications of this change are explained below.

Previous Definitions of the Gray Zone

In earlier periods—especially across 2023–2024—research institutions and the OSINT community commonly used two related notions: a “gray zone” and a “contested zone.” The gray zone referred to areas where neither side held established positions, while the contested zone referred to areas where forces could temporarily enter and make contact but could not reliably consolidate control.

By contrast, both sides could maintain relatively stable control lines. Within these lines, friendly forces held positions and controlled reinforcement routes, leaving limited room for deep infiltration. As a result, geolocation-based verification of front-line changes was often straightforward: strikes attributed to the enemy typically indicated friendly control, strikes attributed to friendly forces often indicated enemy control, and areas with frequent mutual strikes were treated as contested.

What “Gray Zone” Means Today

In 2025, limited breakthrough capacity, manpower constraints, and propaganda pressures led Russian forces to insert infantry into target locations at scale—often through high-risk assaults or infiltration intended to “show the flag.” After entering, these troops frequently concealed themselves without reliable reinforcement or resupply from stable control areas. In many cases, they could not realistically consolidate control on their own; their primary objective became survival rather than sustained combat—and sometimes avoiding contact altogether.

For additional context, see our report on the Russian forces’ [first infiltration into Pokrovsk](#), which illustrates the dynamics described above. Variations of this pattern have

appeared across much of the front, and many observers have already encountered similar accounts.

Moreover, adverse weather and the widespread use of drones have further altered the tactical environment, often making infantry infiltration easier than before.

References

Martin. (n.d.). Post on X (Twitter).

<https://x.com/TuiteroMartin/status/2021980963253756136?s=20>