



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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May 17, 2024, 6:35pm 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 2pm ET on May 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin framed Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast as part of Russian efforts to create a "buffer zone" to protect Russian border areas from Ukrainian strikes, confirming ISW's previous assessments. Putin responded to a journalist's question about Russian forces' objectives in the Kharkiv direction, stating that Russian forces are achieving success "according to plan" and that Russian forces have no immediate plans to seize Kharkiv City.[1] Putin stated that Russian offensive operations in the Kharkiv direction are aimed at creating a "buffer zone" to protect Russian border areas, including Belgorod City, from Ukrainian strikes. ISW previously assessed that Russian forces appear to be prioritizing the establishment of a "buffer zone" along the international border over setting conditions for deeper penetrations into northern Kharkiv Oblast.[2]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukrainian forces have stabilized the front in northern Kharkiv Oblast and that Russian forces have not reached Ukraine's "concrete" and "most powerful" line of defense in the area.[3] Zelensky stated that Russian forces have currently reached the "first line" that Ukrainian forces built further from the border and that Ukrainian forces have also built a second and third line of defense. Zelensky described the third line of defense as the "most powerful" as it is further from the border and was not under threat of Russian shelling during its construction. Zelensky noted that Ukrainian forces have stabilized the situation in the area and that the deepest Russian forces have advanced is 10 kilometers, which is consistent with ISW's assessment of Russian advances near Lyptsi. Western and Ukrainian media reported on May 10 that Ukrainian military sources stated that Russian forces intend to establish a 10-kilometer-deep buffer zone along the northern border of Kharkiv Oblast, and Russian forces will likely prioritize leveling the front in northern Kharkiv Oblast at this depth over deeper penetrations.[4]

Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that elements of the Russian military command strengthened the Northern Grouping of Forces with elements of the 6th Combined Arms Army and 11th and 44th Army Corps (all of the Leningrad Military District [LMD]), echoing previous statements from Ukrainian military observers about the Northern Grouping of Forces' composition.[5] Syrskyi stated that Russian forces launched offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast "well ahead of schedule" when Ukrainian forces were "turning over," possibly referring to a Ukrainian troop rotation.[6] Russian forces made their narrow penetration towards Ocheretyne in late April by attacking during a Ukrainian brigade-level rotation on the frontline, and Russian forces may have sought to take advantage of similar situations to penetrate Ukrainian positions.[7]

Russian forces will likely be able to stretch Ukrainian forces along a wide front and fix Ukrainian troops in the international border area even as the tempo of Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast slows. Syrskyi stated that Russian forces have expanded the area of active hostilities by about 70 kilometers since starting offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast and are trying to force Ukrainian forces to commit brigades from reserves to the frontline.[8] ISW continues to assess that Russian offensive operations along the Kharkiv international border likely have the strategic objective of drawing and fixing Ukrainian forces to this axis to enable Russian advances in other areas of eastern Ukraine.[9] Geolocated footage published on May 17 shows Ukrainian forces striking two Russian tanks moving towards the international border near Sumy Oblast.[10] Even limited Russian activity in other areas of the international border below the threshold of Russian offensive operations could have the effect of stretching Ukrainian forces along a wider front. Russian forces will be able to draw and fix Ukrainian forces to the border area as long as Russia sustains a presence in northern Kharkiv Oblast and threatens penetrations of other border areas. Russian forces have shown a propensity for conducting offensive operations along different sectors of the front in "pulses" with one sector decreasing in intensity as another increases, and Russian forces may slow offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast for a time but resume the tempo at a later time of their choosing.[11]

Russian forces reportedly leveraged notable electronic warfare (EW) capabilities to support tactically significant gains during the first days of their limited offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast. The *Washington Post* reported on May 17 that elements of a Ukrainian brigade operating in northern Kharkiv Oblast lost connection to drone and communications systems due to intense Russian EW jamming when Russian forces began their incursion into Kharkiv Oblast on May 10.[12] The *Washington Post* reported that the Ukrainian soldiers stated that the Russian EW jamming completely disrupted Ukrainian forces' satellite internet connection via Starlink devices, reportedly the first time that Russian EW has completely knocked out Ukrainian Starlink connection since the start of the full-scale invasion.[13] A Ukrainian soldier told the *Washington Post* that these disruptions forced Ukrainian forces to communicate only through radio and phones and prevented Ukrainian forces from conducting basic reconnaissance.[14] Russian and Ukrainian forces have been in an offense-defense race involving EW systems and counter-EW adaptations, and it is notable that Russian forces were able to achieve such a widespread effect with their EW capabilities in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[15] Russian forces may have waited to deploy a new EW adaptation to achieve widespread disruptions during the beginning of their limited offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces have previously adapted quickly to changes in each other's EW capabilities, and Russian forces may have decided that leveraging a new capability to make tactically significant gains at the outset of a new offensive operation would be the most worthwhile use of the capability's novelty.[16]

Senior NATO military commanders confirmed ISW's prior assessments that Russian forces do not have sufficient forces to achieve a "strategic breakthrough" in Ukraine. NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe and US European Command Commander General Christopher Cavoli stated on May 16 that Russian forces do not have the necessary number of troops or the skill to conduct operations at the scale necessary to achieve and exploit a strategic-level breakthrough in Ukraine, and expressed confidence that Ukrainian forces will "hold the line" near Kharkiv City.[17] Cavoli noted that NATO member states have not observed Russian forces accumulate the resources required for such a breakthrough, further supporting ISW's recent assessments that Russian forces are unlikely to make operationally significant gains against more well-provisioned Ukrainian forces during the Russian summer offensive effort.[18] NATO commanders also indicated that Russian forces are preparing for a longer-term war effort, however. Cavoli stated that Russian forces have improved in some unspecified areas but failed to improve in others, but that the Russian military has proven that it is a learning organization.[19] NATO Military Committee Chairperson Lieutenant Admiral Rob Bauer stated that the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) is more efficient than the Western DIB but that Russian forces still struggle with troop quality and training, all consistent with ISW's longstanding assessments about Russia's attempts to sustain its long-term war effort amid short to medium-term struggles with manpower and materiel.[20]

Ukrainian forces conducted a series of large-scale aerial and naval drone strikes against Russian energy and port infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai and occupied Crimea on the night of May 16 to 17. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on May 17 that its sources in Ukrainian intelligence stated that Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and Security Service (SBU) struck Russian military facilities in Novorossiysk and Tuapse, Krasnodar Krai and in occupied Sevastopol on the night of May 16 to 17.[21] The Ukrainian intelligence sources reportedly stated that the GUR and SBU targeted Black Sea Fleet (BSF) ships in Sevastopol and Novorossiysk. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on May 17 that Russian forces destroyed 123 drones over Crimea and Krasnodar Krai and 25 unmanned boats in the Black Sea in the past day.[22] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces launched over 140 drones and 20 unmanned boats in the overnight strikes on Sevastopol and Krasnodar Krai.[23] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that Ukrainian forces struck a port and fuel terminal in Novorossiysk.[24] The Krasnodar Krai operational headquarters stated that falling drone debris caused a fire at an oil refinery in Tuapse on the morning of May 17, and Russian milbloggers and opposition media posted footage of the Ukrainian strike on the Tuapse oil refinery.[25] *Reuters* reported that two unspecified sources stated that Russian authorities conducted an emergency shutdown of the Tuapse oil refinery after the drones hit the facility's liquified petroleum gas production unit but that the refinery will likely restart "relatively soon." [26] The SBU reportedly struck the Rosneft oil refinery in Tuapse in late January 2024, and *Reuters* reported that the oil refinery resumed operations in late April 2024.[27] Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhaev stated that drone debris damaged a power substation near Sevastopol and caused partial blackouts in the city.[28]

US officials reiterated the White House's unwillingness to support Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons in strikes against military targets in Russia. US Defense Department Spokesperson Sabrina Singh stated on May 16 that the Biden Administration has not changed its position against Ukrainian forces using US weapons to strike targets within Russia and that the administration believes that the equipment should be used to liberate occupied Ukrainian territory.[29] ISW continues to assess that US and other Western limitations on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets in Russia have created a sanctuary in Russia's border areas from which Russian

aircraft can conduct glide bomb and missile strikes against Ukrainian positions and settlements and where Russian forces and equipment can freely assemble before entering combat.[30] This US policy is severely compromising Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[31]

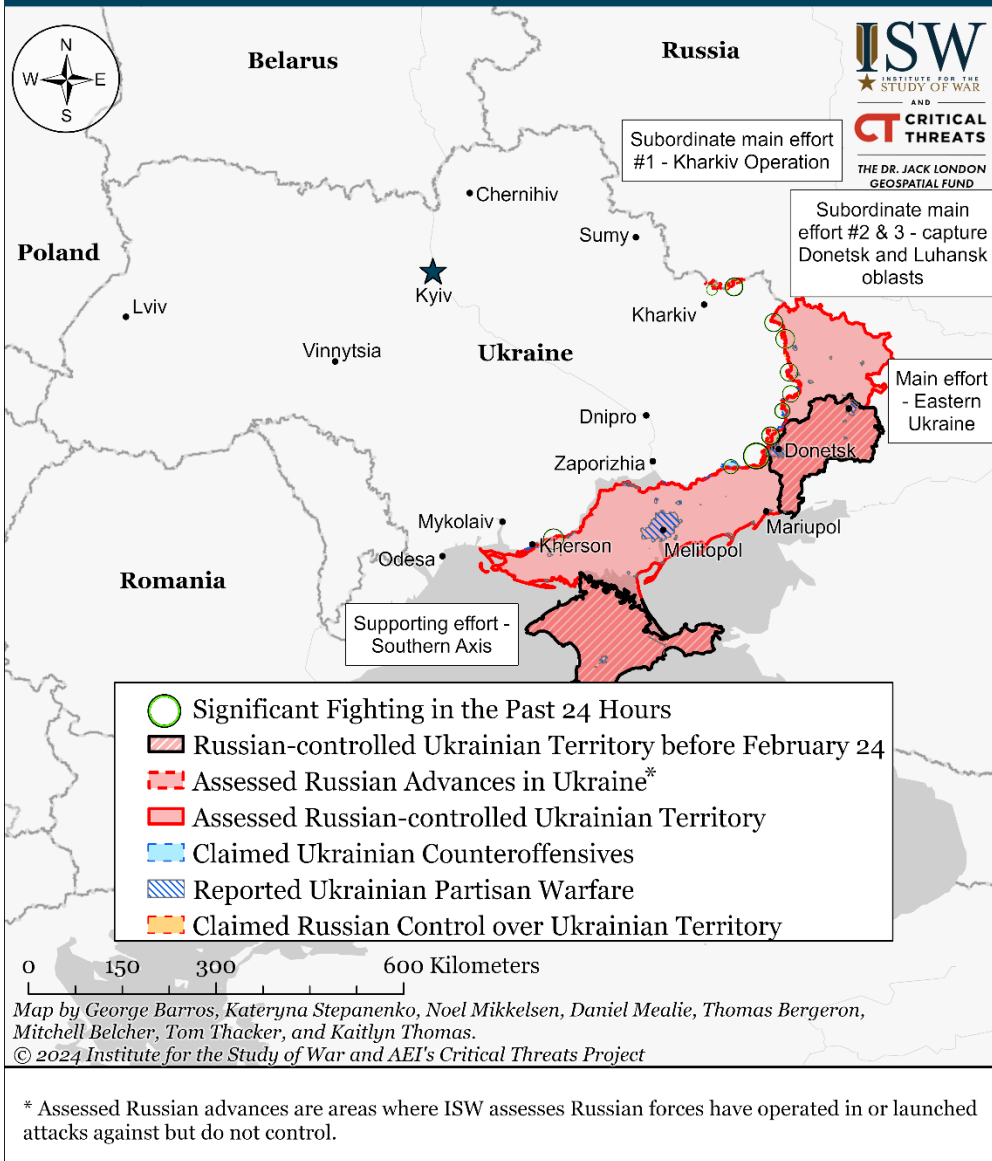
Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to further known Russian information operations intended to directly undermine Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy as president. Putin claimed during his press conference in Harbin on May 17 that the current Ukrainian government "has its origins" in a Western-facilitated coup d'état, referring to the Kremlin's information operation falsely asserting that Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution in 2014 was an externally organized and funded coup against pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich that installed a series of pro-Western governments in Ukraine.[32] Putin additionally claimed that Ukraine's political and legal systems must determine if Zelensky will still be considered Ukraine's legitimate president when his first term technically expires on May 20. Ukraine would have held its presidential election on March 31 and would have begun a new presidential term on May 20 if Russia had not illegally invaded Ukraine.[33] Ukraine's constitution permits postponing elections and allows a sitting president to continue to serve after the designated end of his term under martial law, and Zelensky's decision not to hold elections given Ukraine's ongoing existential defensive war is fully in accord with the Ukrainian constitution.[34] Ukrainian officials have repeatedly warned that the Kremlin is currently running a series of information operations aimed at undermining and questioning Zelensky's legitimacy.[35]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin framed Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast as part of Russian efforts to create a "buffer zone" to protect Russian border areas from Ukrainian strikes, confirming ISW's previous assessments.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukrainian forces have stabilized the front in northern Kharkiv Oblast and that Russian forces have not reached Ukraine's "concrete" and "most powerful" line of defense in the area.**
- **Russian forces will likely be able to stretch Ukrainian forces along a wide front and fix Ukrainian troops in the international border area even as the tempo of Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast slows.**
- **Russian forces reportedly leveraged notable electronic warfare (EW) capabilities to support tactically significant gains during the first days of their limited offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast.**
- **Senior NATO military commanders confirmed ISW's prior assessments that Russian forces do not have sufficient forces to achieve a "strategic breakthrough" in Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted a series of large-scale aerial and naval drone strikes against Russian energy and port infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai and occupied Crimea on the night of May 16 to 17.**
- **US officials reiterated the White House's unwillingness to support Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons in strikes against military targets in Russia.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to further known Russian information operations intended to directly undermine Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy as president.**

- **Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Avdiivka.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin attended the annual Russian-Chinese Expo and forum on interregional cooperation and visited Harbin Polytechnic University during the second and last day of his trip to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on May 17.**
- **Ukrainian and Western sources continue to report that Russian forces are committing war crimes in newly occupied areas of Kharkiv Oblast.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 17, 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 – Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

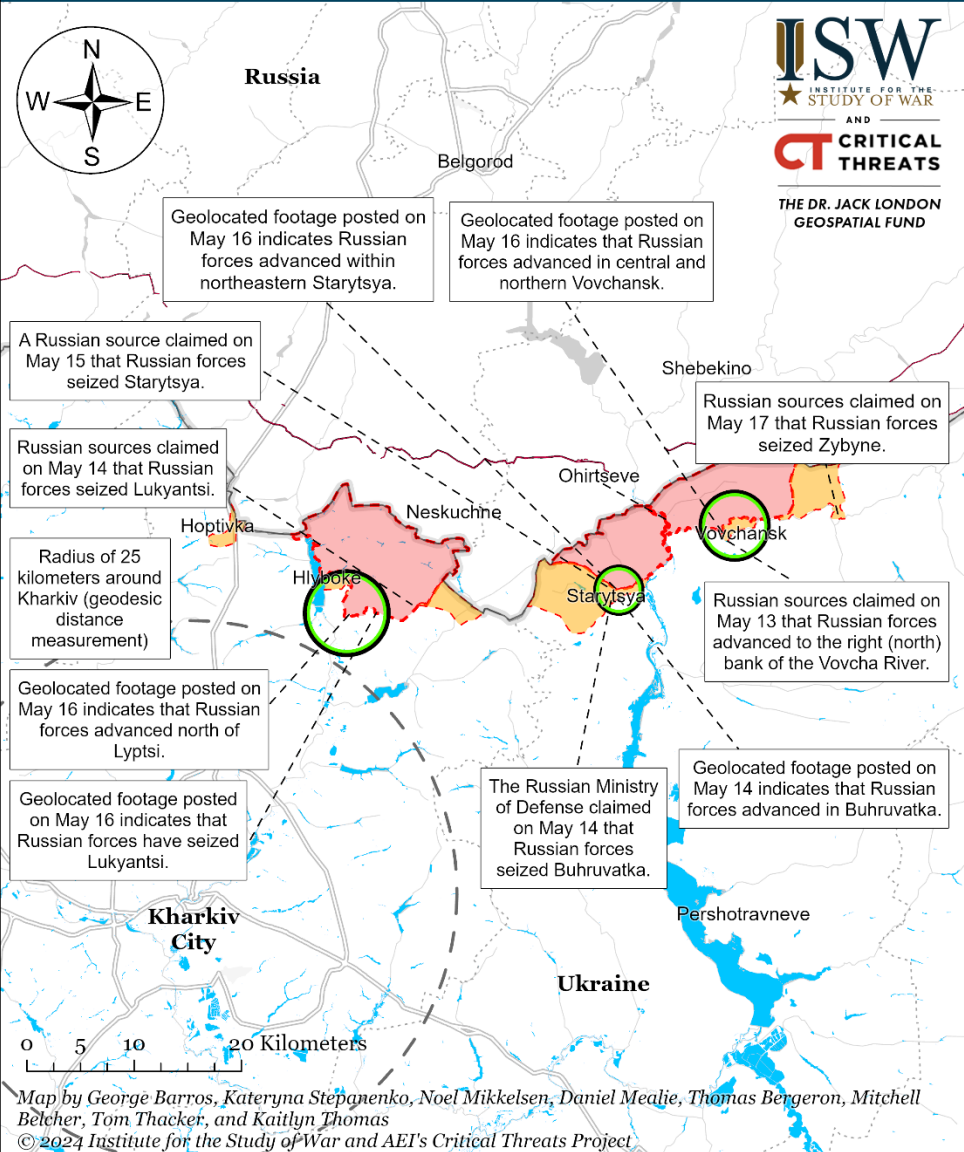
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Kharkiv Oblast (Russian objective: Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City)

Russian forces continued offensive operations near Lyptsi on May 17, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian forces continued offensive operations near Lyptsi and Hlyboke (north of Lyptsi).[36] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced south of Hlyboke and are fighting on the outskirts of Lyptsi, with one milblogger claiming that Russian forces advanced 300 to 600 meters towards Lyptsi.[37] A Russian source claimed that Russian forces are expanding their zone of control near Lukyantsi (northeast of Lyptsi).[38] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims, however. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian minefields are complicating and slowing Russian advances near Lyptsi and Zelene (east of Lyptsi).[39] Ukrainian journalist Yuriy Butusov stated that Russian infantry is probing Ukrainian positions and attacking near Lyptsi in roughly squad to reduced company-sized groups and are taking advantage of dense forest areas that allow small groups to conduct concealed maneuvers.[40] A Ukrainian battalion commander operating in the Kharkiv direction stated that Russian forces are mostly conducting attacks with infantry but are also trying to use armored vehicles.[41] The Ukrainian commander stated that Ukrainian forces have destroyed up to half of the Russian vehicles involved in offensive operations.[42] Pasi Paroinen, an OSINT analyst with the Finnish Black Bird Group, stated that unspecified Russian airborne (VDV) elements are participating in Russian offensive operations in an unspecified area of northern Kharkiv Oblast.[43] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on May 5 that an unspecified VDV battalion is part of the Russian grouping in Kursk Oblast, and a Russian milblogger, who has an avowed bias against the VDV and "Dnepr" Grouping of Forces Commander General Mikhail Teplinsky, claimed on May 5 that the Russian 104th VDV Regiment's (76th VDV Division) 3rd VDV battalion is in Kursk Oblast.[44] ISW has yet to observe confirmation that any VDV elements are participating in the limited offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast.

Russian forces reportedly advanced near Vovchansk on May 17, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced east of Tykhe (northeast of Vovchansk) and seized Zybyne (east of Vovchansk), but ISW has not observed visual

confirmation of these claims.[45] A Ukrainian sergeant operating near Vovchansk told the *Wall Street Journal* that Russian forces control the northern half of Vovchansk, although it is unclear if he means the entire section of Vovchansk north of the Vovcha River.[46] ISW has not yet observed confirmation that Russian forces have seized all of Vovchansk north of the Vovcha River, however. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces continued offensive operations in northern Vovchansk, near the Aggregate Plant and the Vovchansk Central District Hospital in central Vovchansk, and west of Vovchansk near Starytsa and Buhruvatka.[47] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued offensive operations near Starytsa and Vovchansk.[48] A Russian milblogger claimed that a Russian serviceman who was recently operating near Vovchansk stated that Russian forces are trying to make up for insufficient counterbattery fire with guided glide bomb strikes but that Russian forces lack sufficient quantities of guided glide bombs.[49] The Russian servicemen allegedly claimed that some Russian artillery pieces are suffering from barrel wear and that Ukrainian drones are not allowing Russian forces to move to new firing positions.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 17, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Tom Thacker, and Kaitlyn Thomas
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- ▨ Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Russian Field Fortifications
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

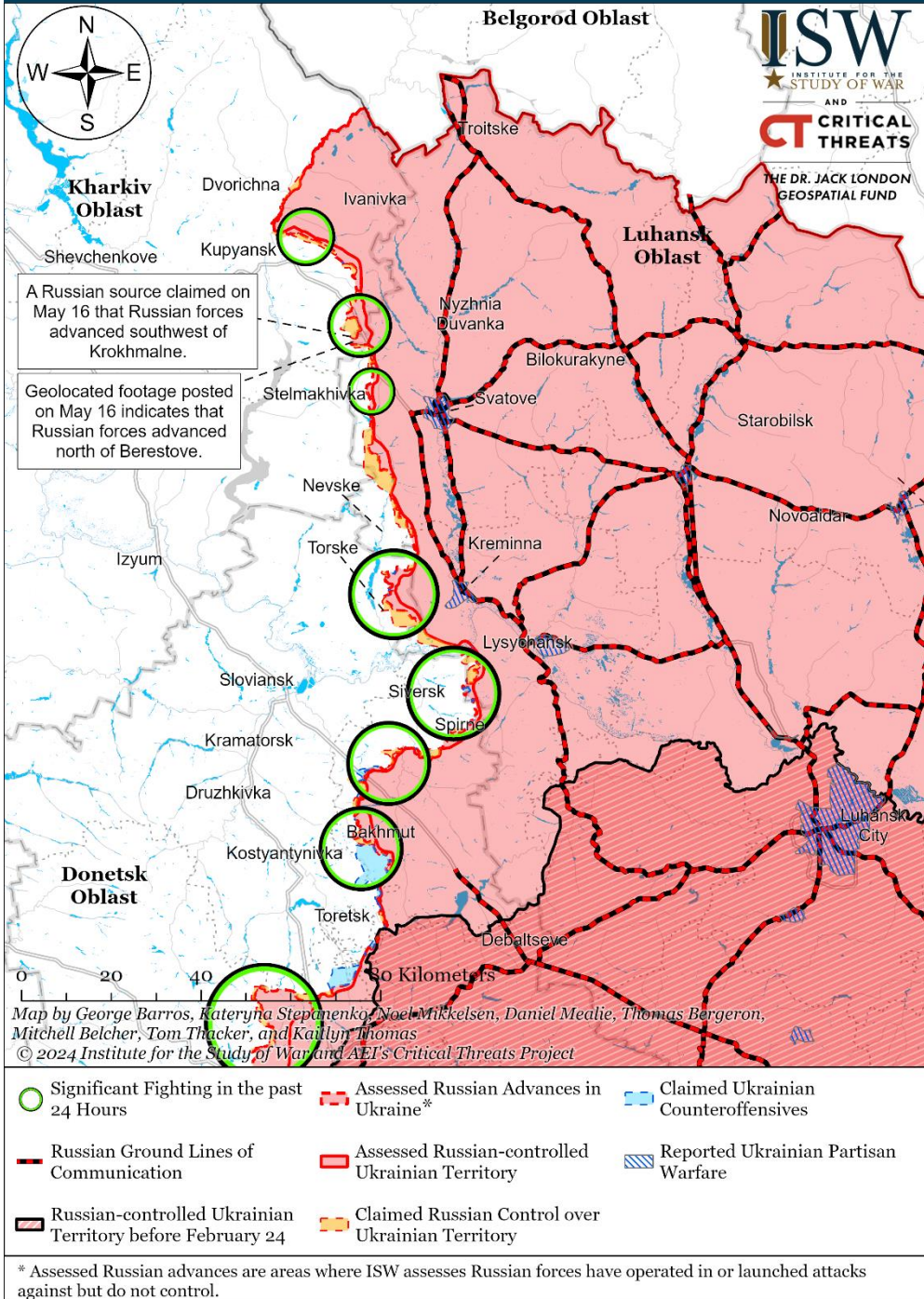
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on May 17 that the maximum extent of Russian advances into Kharkiv Oblast was 10 kilometers. A Russian source claimed on May 17 that Russian forces advanced between 300 and 600 meters toward Lyptsi. Russian sources claimed on May 16 that Russian forces advanced 2.89 kilometers wide and one kilometer deep in Vovchansk. A Russian source claimed on May 14 that Russian forces seized 10 settlements and more than 186 square kilometers in Kharkiv Oblast over the past three days.

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

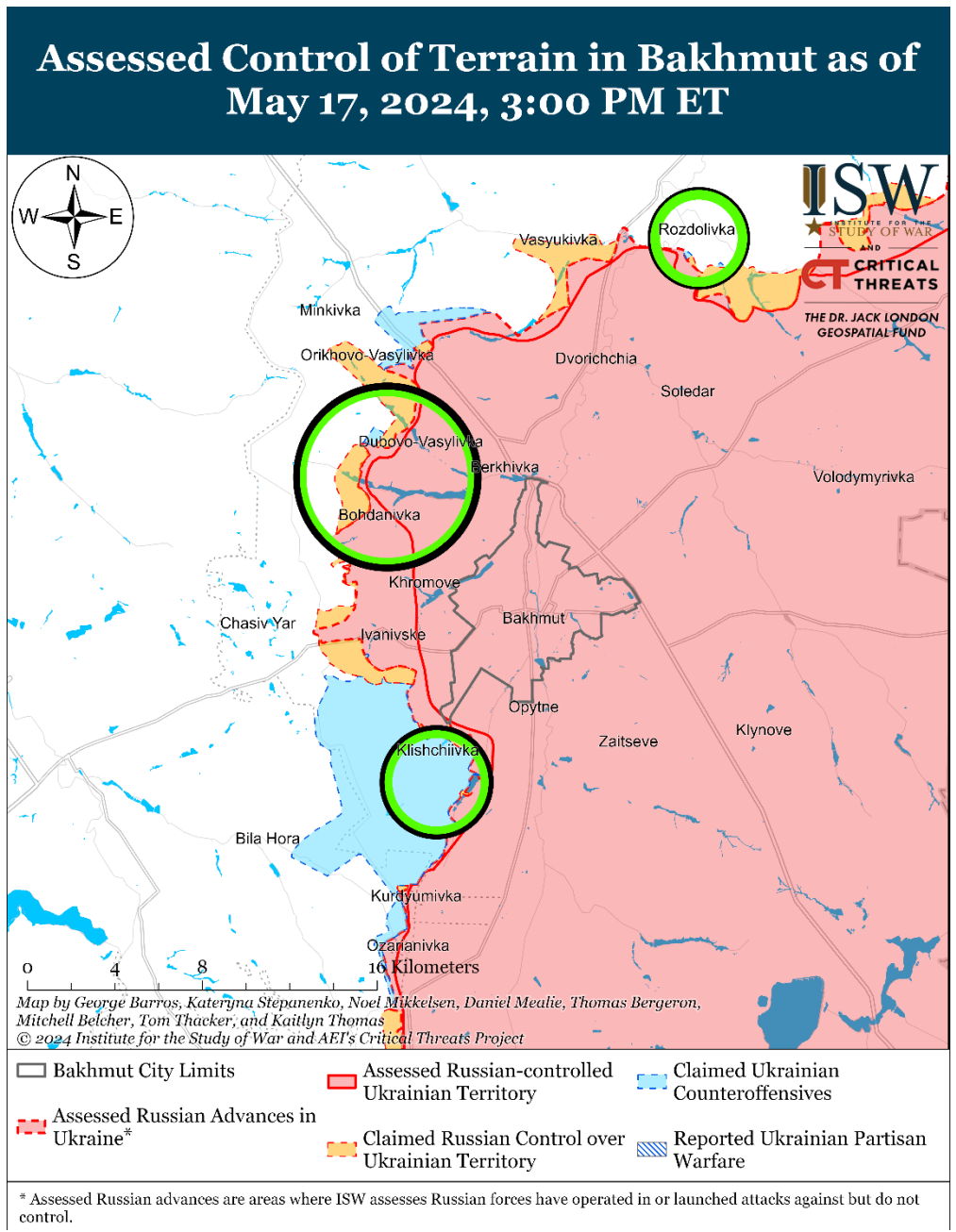
Russian forces reportedly advanced northwest of Svatove and south of Kreminna on May 17, although there were no confirmed changes to the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna front. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced along a front 4.97 kilometers wide and 1.71 kilometers deep west and south of Krokhmalne (northwest of Svatove) and three kilometers towards Pishchane (northwest of Svatove).[50] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced within northeastern Bilohorivka (south of Kreminna).[51] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these Russian claims. Russian forces continued offensive operations northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka and Vilshana; northwest of Svatove near Ivanivka, Berestove, Kyslivka, and Stelmakhivka; west of Svatove near Myasozharivka; southwest of Svatove near Novoyehorivka; northwest of Kreminna near Nevske; and southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova.[52]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of May 17, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



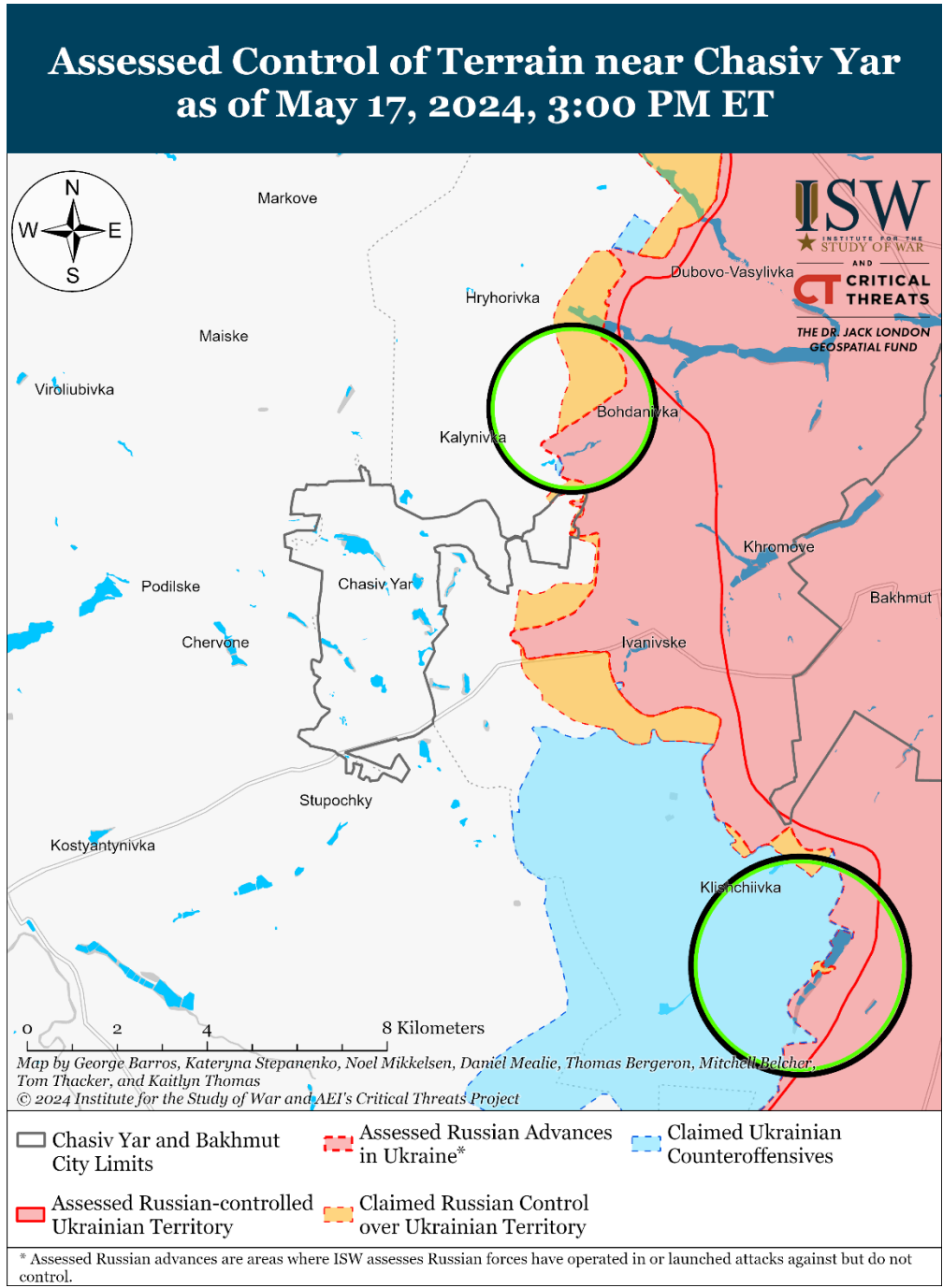
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Siversk direction (northeast of Bakhmut) near Spirne (east of Siversk), Vyimka (southeast of Siversk), and Rozdolivka (south of Siversk) on May 17.[53]



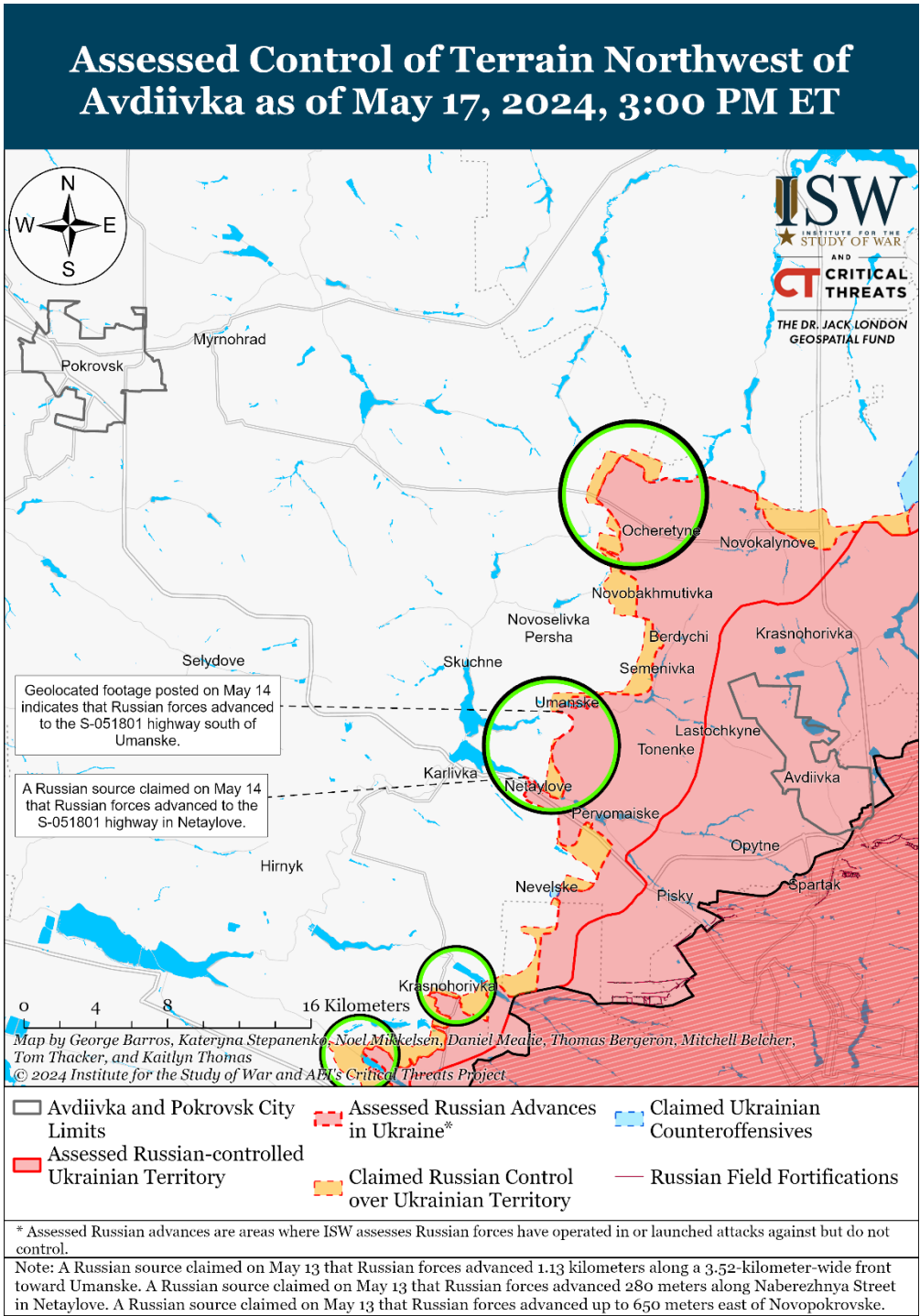
Russian forces continued assaults near Chasiv Yar on May 17 but did not make any confirmed advances. Russian forces conducted ground attacks near the Novyi Microraion in eastern Chasiv Yar; northeast of Chasiv Yar near Kalynivka and Bohdanivka; east of Chasiv Yar near Ivanivske; and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka, Andriivka, and Niu York.[54] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Kalynivka and that Ukrainian forces maintain limited positions

in basements in western Bohdanivka.[55] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division and the 58th Spetsnaz Battalion (Russian General Staff Main Directorate [GRU]) continue to operate in the Chasiv Yar direction, and elements of the Russian 6th Motorized Rifle Division (3rd Army Corps [AC]) reportedly operate near Klishchiivka.[56]



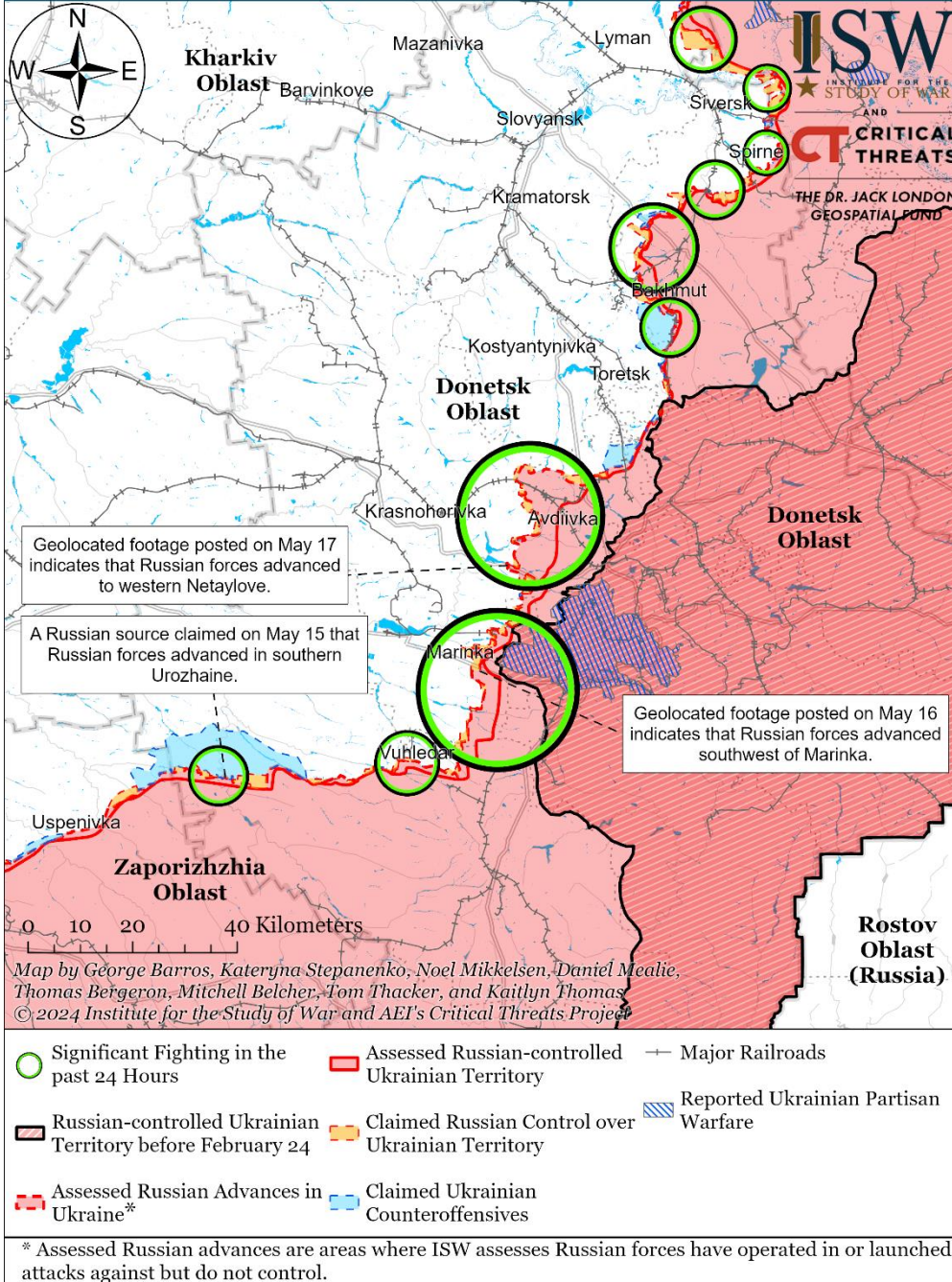
Russian forces recently advanced northwest and west of Avdiivka amid continued offensive operations in the area on May 17. Geolocated footage published on May 15 and 16 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced along a windbreak southwest of Solovyove (northwest of Avdiivka) and along Neberezhna Street in western Netaylove (west of Avdiivka), respectively.[57] Russian milbloggers

claimed that Russian forces also advanced east of Novooleksandrivka (northwest of Avdiivka), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of the Russian claim.[58] The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces conducted a tactical regrouping in an unspecified area of the Avdiivka direction due to Russian offensive operations.[59] Russian forces also continued ground attacks northwest of Avdiivka near Arkhanhelske and Ocheretyne and west of Avdiivka near Umanske and Yasnobrodivka.[60]



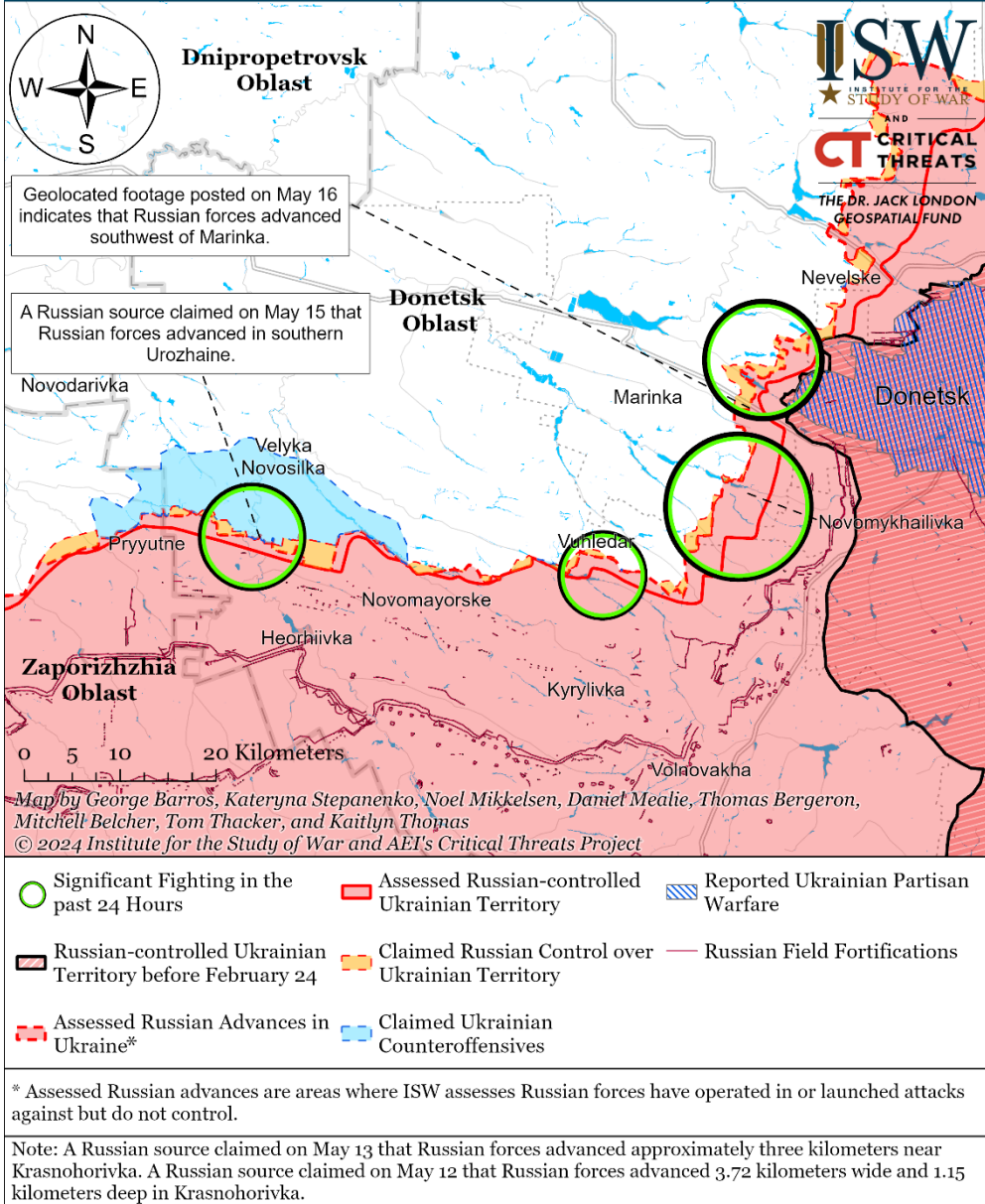
Russian forces reportedly recently advanced west of Donetsk City amid continued attacks west and southwest of the city on May 17. A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) advanced up to the western outskirts of Heorhiivka (west of Donetsk City), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[61] Russian forces also continued ground assaults west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka; southwest of Donetsk City near Paraskoviivka, Novomykhailivka, and Pivdenne Mine No. 1; northeast of Vuhledar near Vodyane; and southeast of Vuhledar near Mykilske.[62] Elements of the Russian 14th Spetsnaz Brigade (GRU) are reportedly operating near Vuhledar.[63]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of May 17, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces continued limited ground assaults in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on May 17 near Staromayorske and Urozhaine (both south of Velyka Novosilka).[64] Elements of the Russian 11th Air Force and Air Defense Army (Russian Aerospace Forces [VKS] and Eastern Military District [EMD]) continue to operate near Urozhaine.[65]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Donetsk Oblast as of May 17, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



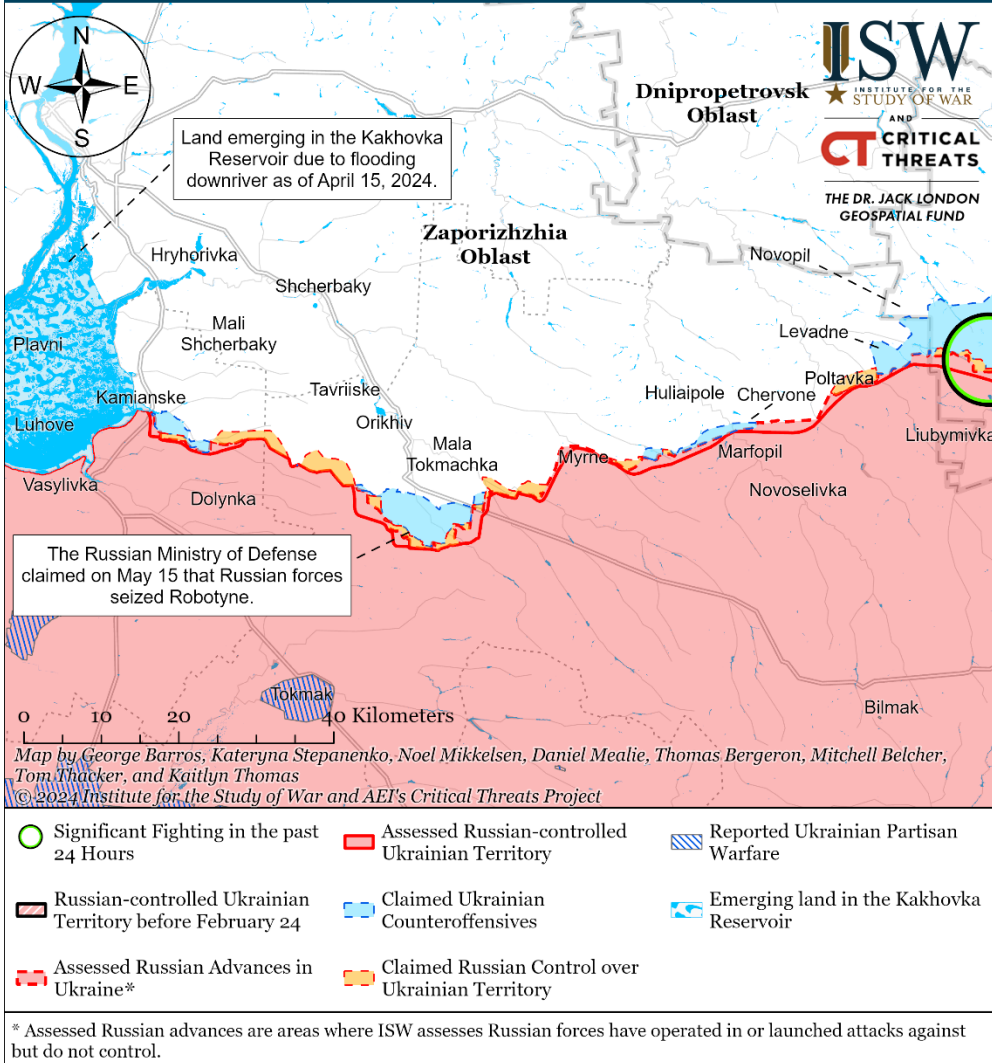
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are continuing to clear Robotyne as of May 17, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[66] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on May 17 that Russian forces have not seized Robotyne.[67] Russian milbloggers claimed that positional fighting

continued near Verbove (east of Robotyne).[68] Elements of the Russian 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) and the 69th Covering Brigade (35th CAA, EMD) are reportedly operating near Hulyaipole (northeast of Robotyne).[69]

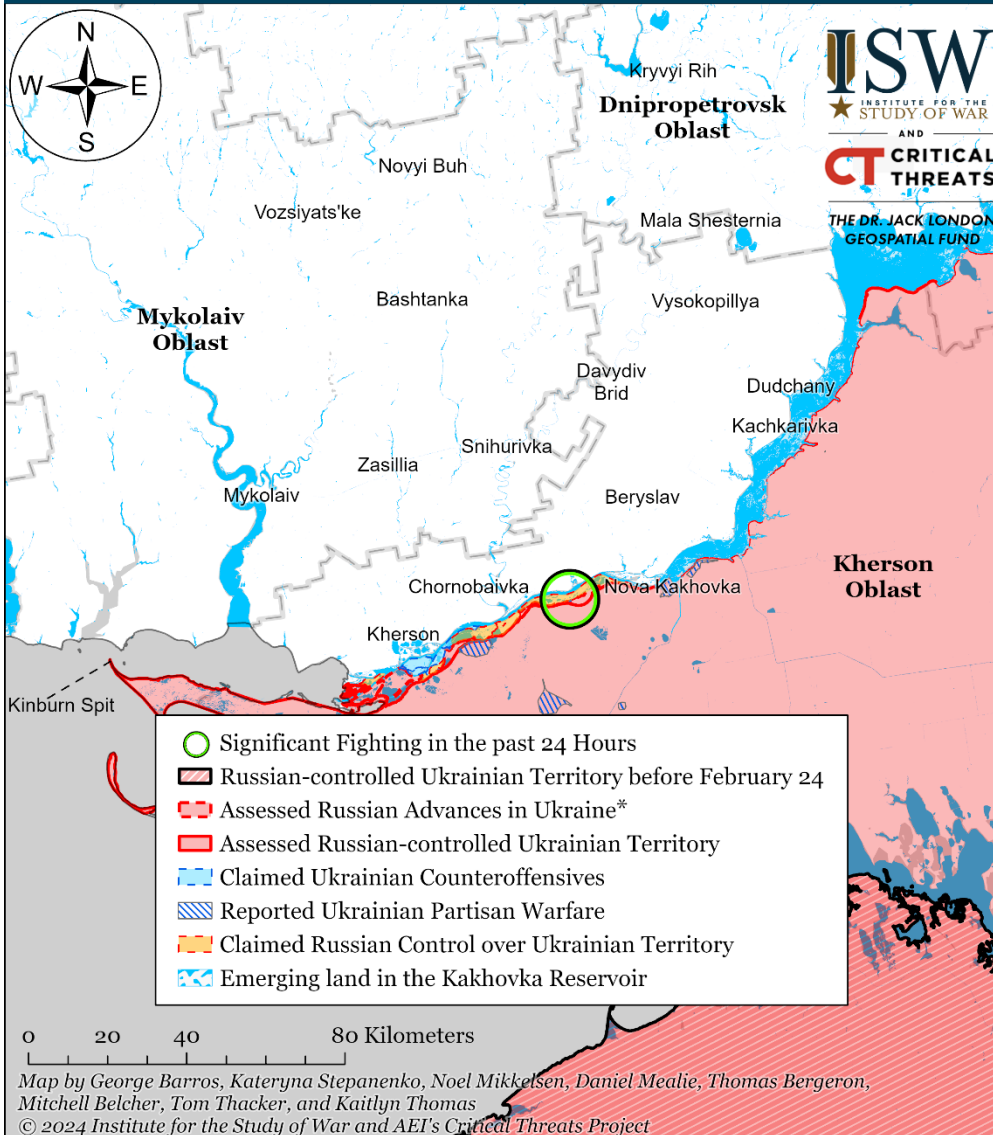


Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of May 17, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces intensified assaults against Ukrainian positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on May 17, but there were no confirmed changes to the front. Pletenchuk stated that Russian forces intensified their assaults near the limited Ukrainian tactical bridgehead in Krynyky over the past day but that Ukrainian forces have not lost any positions in the area.[70] Pletenchuk added that Russian forces have not tried to assault Nestryha island in the Dniipro River Delta in recent days.[71] Positional fighting continued between Oleshky Sands National Park and Krynyky and Kozachi Laheri and Krynyky.[72] Elements of the Russian 104th Airborne (VDV) Division and the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) are reportedly operating in the Kherson direction.[73]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 17, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: The Ukrainian counteroffensive layer displays areas previously assigned to the Russian control, Russian advances, or Russian claims layers where ISW now assesses that Ukrainian forces have established a presence beyond a short-term raid. Inclusion of an area on this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the area is part of any upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive operation.

Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign (Russian Objective: Target Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure in the rear and on the frontline)

Russian forces conducted a limited series of drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of May 16 to 17 and individual missile strikes on May 17. Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk reported that Russian forces launched 20 Shahed-136/131 drones from Primorsko-

Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai, and Kursk Oblast and that Ukrainian forces destroyed all 20 Shaheds over Kharkiv, Poltava, Vinnytsia, Odesa, and Mykolaiv oblasts on the night of May 16 to 17.[74] Odesa Oblast Military Administration head Oleh Kiper reported that Russian forces struck Odesa City with an unspecified number and type of missiles on May 17.[75]

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin attended the annual Russian-Chinese Expo and forum on interregional cooperation and visited Harbin Polytechnic University during the second and last day of his trip to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on May 17. Putin focused his remarks at both events on increased Russian-Chinese economic cooperation and cultural exchange.[76] Putin also met with PRC Vice Chairman Han Zheng.[77] ISW continues to assess that Putin likely views Russia's relationship with the PRC as decisive in his effort to further mobilize the Russian economy and defense industry to support a protracted war in Ukraine.[78] US State Department Spokesperson Dev Patel stated on May 16 that the US believes that the PRC's "reconstruction" of Russia's defense industry is deeply problematic and that the US continues to monitor the situation.[79]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues its effort to formalize its control over Russian irregular and volunteer forces. The Russian MoD published footage on May 17 showing Russian officials issuing vehicles and electronic warfare (EW) equipment to an unspecified BARS detachment (Combat Army Reserve) from Rostov Oblast.[80]

Regional Russian officials are reportedly recruiting lower-level Russian officials to join volunteer units and fight in Ukraine. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on May 17 that Kamchatka Krai Governor Vladimir Solodov recently called on other Kamchatka Krai regional and municipal officials and civil servants to join a volunteer unit and serve on the frontline in Ukraine.[81] *Verstka*'s sources claimed that there is very little support for Solodov's initiative, and one source told *Verstka* that it is unlikely Solodov is pushing the initiative without a "command from above."

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

Russian Strela Research and Production Association told Kremlin newswire *TASS* on MAY 17 that the company developed a new Strela drone variant that can strike Ukrainian targets as far as 35 kilometers from the frontline.[82] Strela claimed that the new drone has a number of unspecified developments that help overcome electronic warfare (EW) interference and that the drone is compact and easy to carry. Strela reported that the drone can operate for one and a half hours in reconnaissance mode or as a strike drone with a three-kilogram payload.

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

ISW is not publishing coverage of Ukrainian defense industrial efforts today.

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)

Ukrainian and Western sources continue to report that Russian forces are committing war crimes in newly occupied areas of Kharkiv Oblast. The Kharkiv Oblast Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal case on May 17 into the execution of a disabled civilian by advancing Russian forces in Vovchansk.[83] Ukrainian forces discovered the body of a deceased civilian in a wheelchair while conducting aerial reconnaissance over Vovchansk, and Ukrainian officials believe that Russian forces likely killed the civilian as the civilian attempted to flee from a nearby medical facility. Kharkiv Oblast Investigative Department Head Serhii Blovinov reported that Russian forces are holding 35 to 40 civilians hostage in a basement in Vovchansk next to a Russian command post and are essentially using the civilians as human shields, in apparent violations of the Geneva Convention on POWs and protected civilians.[84] Blovinov reported that Russian forces and self-identified Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) employees are interrogating the civilians.[85] A Ukrainian police officer in Vovchansk told the *Wall Street Journal* that Russian snipers fired on Ukrainian police officers attempting to protect and evacuate civilians from the settlement.[86] Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Ihor Klymenko reported on May 16 that Russian forces are preventing residents from evacuating and are holding civilians captive in basements in northern Vovchansk and that Russian forces have begun to execute civilians.[87] The detention and summary execution of civilians is a war crime and is emblematic of Russian forces' behavior throughout occupied Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Reintegration reported on May 15 that Ukrainian officials returned an orphaned Ukrainian child from Russian-occupied Zaporizhia Oblast to their aunt in Ukrainian-controlled territory.[88]

Occupation officials continue efforts to settle Russian families in occupied Ukraine. The Ukrainian Mariupol City Council reported on May 16 that over 7,800 more Russians have likely settled in occupied Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast in the past six months and that this number is based on the increased number of Russian school children in occupied Mariupol.[89] The Ukrainian Mariupol City Council reported that at least 2,600 more Russian children have enrolled in schools in occupied Mariupol since September 2023 and noted that occupation officials are attempting to Russify Mariupol.

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Putin continued to use his visit to China on May 17 to promote longstanding boilerplate information operations about Russia's feigned interest in negotiations.[90] Putin repeatedly referenced a Russian information operation alleging that Western officials previously coerced Ukraine to reject an agreement favorable to Russia during a press conference with People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping.[91] Putin claimed that the PRC is sincerely trying to solve the war in Ukraine, attempting to depict the PRC as a neutral mediator in the hopes that Chinese involvement in envisioned negotiation processes may lead to negotiations that are more favorable to Russia.[92] The Kremlin will continue to feign interest in negotiations in hopes of undermining Western support for Ukraine and prompting the West to offer concessions on Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers continue to allege that Romania and the Moldovan government are threatening Moldovan language and culture as part of Kremlin information operations that aim to justify future Russian aggression in all of Moldova.[93] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

Spokesperson Maria Zakharova recently accused the Moldovan government of engaging in a Nazi-like "genocide" in Moldova — a notable inflection in Kremlin rhetoric about Moldova that is likely meant to set conditions for a Russian effort to secure control over Moldova and not just Moldova's two pro-Russian regions.[94]

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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