



## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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May 16, 2024, 7:55pm ET

**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on May 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian forces are stabilizing the situation along the northern border in Kharkiv Oblast and that the tempo of Russian offensive operations in the area continues to decrease.** Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated on May 16 that Ukrainian forces are partially stabilizing the situation in the Kharkiv direction, and the Ukrainian General Staff noted that Ukrainian forces have so far denied Russia's tactical objectives to penetrate Ukrainian defenses within Vovchansk (northeast of Kharkiv City) and establish a foothold in the area.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Ukrainian forces have forced Russian forces to significantly decrease the tempo of their offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted that Ukrainian forces continue to inflict significant losses on Russian forces in the area.[2] Kharkiv Oblast Military Administration Head Oleh Synehubov stated that Ukrainian forces have stopped Russian forces' active advance in Kharkiv Oblast and that Ukrainian forces have regained more favorable positions in some unspecified areas.[3] Synehubov added that Russian forces are transferring reserves to the area in an attempt to continue advancing.[4]

Zelensky stressed in an interview with *ABC News* on May 16 that the situation in the Kharkiv direction is very serious and that Ukrainian forces cannot afford to lose Kharkiv City.[5] Zelensky argued that Russia will not be able to seize Kharkiv City if Ukrainian forces receive two Patriot air defense systems to deploy to the area.[6] Russian fixed-wing aircraft have increasingly targeted Kharkiv City and its environs with glide bombs and various missile strikes in recent weeks to degrade Ukrainian defenses and prompt residents to flee the city.[7] Sufficient air defense coverage in the Kharkiv City area would allow Ukrainian forces to constrain Russian aviation operations, but only if Western countries permitted Ukraine to use the systems to intercept Russian aircraft in Russian airspace, since Russian aircraft can strike Kharkiv City without ever leaving Russian airspace.[8] Russia is leveraging Russian airspace as a sanctuary to strike Kharkiv Oblast due to prohibitions on the use of Western-provided systems to strike targets within Russia.[9]

**Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Ihor Klymenko reported that Russian forces have executed civilians and taken civilians captive in Vovchansk.** Klymenko stated on May 16 that Russian forces in northern Vovchansk are preventing residents from evacuating and are holding civilians captive in basements in the settlement.[10] Klymenko stated that Russian forces have begun to execute civilians and reported that in one instance Russian forces killed a fleeing civilian who refused to follow Russian commanders' orders.[11] The detention and summary execution of civilians is a war crime and emblematic of Russian forces' behavior in all occupied Ukrainian territories. The United Nations (UN) reported in December 2023 that it had documented at least 142 cases of Russian forces executing Ukrainian civilians.[12] Russian military massacres like the massacres in Bucha and Izyum are a microcosm of Russian atrocities throughout Russian-occupied areas, and the Russian military has shown no indication that it has attempted to constrain Russian forces from brutally victimizing Ukrainian civilians and committing other war crimes.[13] For almost the past year and half Russian forces have mainly been gradually advancing near small settlements that have been largely depopulated by the war, and it is notable that relatively rapid Russian tactical advances into a populated settlement were immediately accompanied by the detention and execution of civilians. Russian forces committed blatant war crimes in Bucha and Mariupol in the first months of the full-scale invasion; and over two years of fighting in Ukraine and the Kremlin's corresponding dehumanization of Ukrainians have likely inured Russian forces to such crimes. Russian attempts to seize major population centers like Kharkiv City do not just threaten Ukraine with operationally significant setbacks but also with war crimes and violations that accompany Russian occupation.

**Russian President Vladimir Putin likely views Russia's relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) as decisive to his effort to further mobilize the Russian economy and defense industry to support a protracted war in Ukraine.** Putin arrived in Beijing and met with PRC President Xi Jinping on May 16, and the two

leaders signed a series of documents intended to recognize and deepen their bilateral cooperation.[14] Putin and Xi signed a joint statement, several agricultural and ecological agreements, an infrastructure and engineering construction agreement, and several media agreements.[15] Putin and Xi highlighted bilateral trade and economic cooperation throughout their public speeches, and Putin's delegation included several Russian officials and businessmen likely involved in Putin's efforts to further mobilize the Russian defense industry, including Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu, Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation Head Dmitry Shugaev, Russian aluminum company RUSAL founder Oleg Deripaska, Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin, and Russian Direct Investment Fund CEO Kirill Dmitriev.[16] Belousov professed his intention to focus on integrating the Russian military's economy into the general Russian military economy during a speech on May 14, and Putin announced that Shoigu will work with the Presidential Administration's Military-Industrial Complex Commission on May 15.[17] The Russian delegation likely aimed to expand cooperation with their Chinese counterparts that will facilitate increased economic ties between Russia and the PRC. *The Economist* reported on April 29 that Russia's defense industry has increasingly relied on the PRC to provide dual-use goods, such as semiconductors and navigational equipment, to support arms production.[18] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated on May 1 that PRC exports of dual-use goods to Russia have helped Russia significantly increase its defense production and that 70 percent of Russia's machine tools and 90 percent of its microelectronics are from the PRC.[19] The PRC has previously signaled concerns that its economic relationship with Russia may place PRC entities under threat of secondary sanctions, and Putin likely intends to head off these concerns as the Russian defense industry grows increasingly reliant on the PRC.[20]

**Putin also used his meeting with Xi to promote known Kremlin narratives feigning interest in peace negotiations and a diplomatic resolution to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.** Putin and Xi signed a joint statement on May 16 that alluded to Russia's support for the PRC's proposed peace plan and a possible future PRC-led negotiation to end the war in Ukraine.[21] The statement claims that both Russia and the PRC are against any efforts that prolong or further escalate the war and that both countries support a "sustainable settlement" for the "Ukraine crisis." Xi stated during a joint press conference with Putin that the PRC and Russia both perceive a political settlement as the right way to resolve the situation in Ukraine.[22] ISW has previously assessed that the Kremlin will continue to use any calls for peace negotiations to feign interest in negotiations in hopes of undermining Western support for Ukraine and prompting the West to force Ukraine into negotiations with Russia that make concessions on Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.[23]

**Russian forces are reportedly able to conduct fixed-wing drone reconnaissance deep in the Ukrainian rear due to Ukraine's lack of air defense interceptors.** The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) reported on May 14 that Ukraine has had to husband its diminishing supply of surface-to-air missiles (SAM), which has allowed Russian reconnaissance drones to fly more freely into Ukrainian rear areas, including over Kharkiv City, and optimize Russian forces' reconnaissance fire complex (RFC).[24] RUSI stated that Ukraine's decreased air defense interceptor supplies have forced Ukraine to increasingly make difficult decisions between deploying air defense coverage to critical infrastructure in rear areas or to frontline areas, as ISW has repeatedly assessed.[25] RUSI noted that well-provisioned Ukrainian forces were previously able to curtail Russian reconnaissance capabilities for most of the full-scale invasion.[26] Russian forces have been conducting a large-scale air campaign against Kharkiv City as part of their offensive operations in northern Kharkiv City and have been using glide-bomb strikes to enable Russian ground maneuver in Kharkiv Oblast.[27] Russian forces notably used glide-bomb strikes to tactical effect during their seizure of Avdiivka.[28] Ukrainian forces require Western-supplied air defense interceptors in order to destroy Russian reconnaissance drones in both rear and frontline areas at scale and defeat the optimized Russian RFC that is enabling Russian tactical advances along the front.

**Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against a Russian defense industrial plant in Tula City on the night of May 15 to 16.** Ukrainian intelligence sources told several Ukrainian outlets that Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted successful drone strikes against the "Bazalt" defense industrial plant, which produces weapons and ammunition for the Russian military.[29] Footage published on May 16 purportedly shows the strike in Tula City.[30] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on May 16 that Russian forces downed two Ukrainian drones over Tula Oblast, and Bazalt denied claims that any drones struck its production facilities in Tula City.[31]

**Russian missile strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure since March 2024 have likely caused long-term damage to Ukrainian energy infrastructure and repeated energy blackouts.** Ukraine's largest private energy operator DTEK reported energy blackouts in Kyiv City and Oblast on May 14 and stated that blackouts occur without warning.[32] Ukrainian energy company Yasno stated that Russian strikes cause Ukrainian energy operators to conduct emergency blackouts in order to balance the power system.[33] Ukrainian state electricity transmission operator Ukrenergo's supervisory board member Yuriy Boyko stated that Ukraine may experience power outages that began on May

14 until August or September 2024.[34] The Ukrainian Energy Ministry reported on May 16 that it began receiving emergency electricity from Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.[35] DTEK warned in late March that more accurate and concentrated Russian strikes are inflicting greater damage to Ukrainian energy facilities than previous Russian attacks did.[36] Russian forces will likely continue to conduct mass strikes to cause long-term damage to Ukrainian energy infrastructure as degraded Ukrainian air defense capabilities persist until US-provided air defense missiles and other Western air defense assets arrive at scale.[37] Long-term damage to Ukraine's energy grid that generates persisting energy disruptions threatens to constrain Ukrainian efforts to expand its defense industrial base (DIB).[38]

**A Russian insider source, who has previously accurately reported on Russian military command changes, claimed that senior Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials are vying for the position of Chief of the General Staff.** The insider source claimed on May 14 that unspecified Russian deputy defense ministers and heads of unspecified main directorates in the Russian MoD are likely competing to become Russian Chief of the General Staff, a position that Army General Valery Gerasimov has held since 2012.[39] The insider source claimed that some unspecified actors are prioritizing placing disgraced Wagner-affiliated Army General Sergei Surovikin in the position of Chief of the General Staff, but that there are other considerations for Surovikin to take other roles, and that it is too early to determine whether Gerasimov's position as Chief of the General Staff is coming to an end. The insider source claimed that there are three main "centers of power" within the Russian MoD. The "preservation group" reportedly consists of Russian deputy defense ministers Ruslan Tsalikov, Colonel General Viktor Goremykin, and Nikolai Pankov. The "lockout group" reportedly consists of Russian deputy defense ministers Colonel General Alexander Fomin, Army General Pavel Popov, Colonel General Yuriy Sadovenko, Alexey Krivoruchko, and Tatyana Shevtsova — all of whom the insider source claimed will likely resign. The insider source did not expound upon the designations of "preservation group" and "lockout group." The insider source claimed that the "bastions" in the Russian MoD include Gerasimov and deputy defense ministers Colonel General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Lieutenant General Andrei Bulyga. The insider source claimed that Bulyga will likely resign. ISW cannot independently verify any of the insider source's claims. Several Russian milbloggers and insider sources claimed on May 13 that Tsalikov and Krivoruchko submitted their resignations to former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu a week before Putin removed Shoigu as defense minister.[40]

**Kremlin and Georgian officials promoted established Kremlin information operations alleging that the West is orchestrating protests against Georgia's "foreign agent" law in order to overthrow the Georgian government.** Several officials from the ruling Georgian Dream party alleged that Iceland, Lithuania, and Estonia are taking "hostile" steps and trying to overthrow the Georgian government after the Icelandic, Lithuanian, and Estonian foreign ministers visited protests in Tbilisi against the "foreign agents" law on May 15.[41] Russian Federation Council Vice Speaker Konstantin Kosachev similarly claimed that the West is orchestrating protests in Georgia in order to overthrow the Georgian government and that the Georgian "foreign agents" law is necessary to protect Georgia from "externally sponsored coups." [42] Kosachev reiterated longstanding Kremlin narratives about the US government's alleged involvement in Ukrainian protests in 2013–2014. ISW assessed on May 15 that Kremlin and Georgian officials would increasingly allege that the West is attempting to interfere in Georgian affairs, and ISW has recently observed how Georgian Dream and Georgian security officials have intensified their use of established Kremlin information operation and are increasing their rhetorical alignment with Russia against the West.[43] Georgian Dream actors likely intend to purposefully derail long-term Georgian efforts for European integration, which play into continued Russian hybrid operations to divide, destabilize, and weaken Georgia.[44]

**Turkey and Russia are reportedly exploiting European Union (EU) sanctions regulations to export Russian oil to the EU, allowing Russia to continue to receive significant oil revenues to fund its war effort in Ukraine.** *Politico* reported on May 15 that the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air, the Center for the Study of Democracy, and *Politico*'s independent reporting indicate that Turkey is likely disguising the origin of Russian oil in order to exploit EU sanctions regulations that allow "blended" oil containing certain proportions of Russian oil that have undergone "substantial transformation" to enter the EU.[45] *Politico* stated that Russian oil imports to the Turkish ports of Ceyhan, Marmara Ereğlisi, and Mersin significantly increased between February 2023 and February 2024 while these three ports' oil exports to the EU also significantly increased — "strongly" indicating that Turkey is "repackaging" large amounts of Russian oil. *Politico* stated that not all of the Turkish ports are "substantially transforming" Russian oil into entirely new products — as required by EU sanctions regulations — and that Turkey is "rebranding" the oil with a Turkish "certificate of origin." *Politico* reported that this scheme likely has generated up to three billion euros (about \$3.2 billion) of revenue for Russia between February 2023 and February 2024 from these three ports alone.

**Russia reportedly launched a satellite as part of its program to develop a nuclear anti-satellite weapon in the weeks before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, likely as part of Russian preparations for a future**

**confrontation with NATO.** The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on May 16 that US officials stated that Russia launched a satellite in space as part of its nuclear anti-satellite weapon development program on February 5, 2022 — 19 days before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[46] US officials reportedly stated that the satellite Russia launched does not contain a nuclear weapon but contains components of the new weapon system that Russia is developing to destroy hundreds of satellites in low Earth orbit, particularly in areas where there are many US government and commercial satellites, including SpaceX's Starlink satellites.

**Key Takeaways:**

- **Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian forces are stabilizing the situation along the northern border in Kharkiv Oblast and that the tempo of Russian offensive operations in the area continues to decrease.**
- **Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Ihor Klymenko reported that Russian forces have executed civilians and taken civilians captive in Vovchansk.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin likely views Russia's relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) as decisive to his effort to further mobilize the Russian economy and defense industry to support a protracted war in Ukraine.**
- **Putin also used his meeting with Xi to promote known Kremlin narratives feigning interest in peace negotiations and a diplomatic resolution to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces are reportedly able to conduct fixed-wing drone reconnaissance deep in the Ukrainian rear due to Ukraine's lack of air defense interceptors.**
- **Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against a Russian defense industrial plant in Tula City on the night of May 15 to 16.**
- **Russian missile strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure since March 2024 have likely caused long-term damage to Ukrainian energy infrastructure and repeated energy blackouts.**
- **A Russian insider source, who has previously accurately reported on Russian military command changes, claimed that senior Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials are vying for the position of Chief of the General Staff.**
- **Kremlin and Georgian officials promoted established Kremlin information operations alleging that the West is orchestrating protests against Georgia's "foreign agent" law in order to overthrow the Georgian government.**
- **Turkey and Russia are reportedly exploiting European Union (EU) sanctions regulations to export Russian oil to the EU, allowing Russia to continue to receive significant oil revenues to fund its war effort in Ukraine.**
- **Russia reportedly launched a satellite as part of its program to develop a nuclear anti-satellite weapon in the weeks before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, likely as part of Russian preparations for a future confrontation with NATO.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Lyptsi, Vovchansk, Kupyansk and Donetsk City.**
- **Several Russian opposition media outlets reported on May 16 that Russian State Duma Defense Committee Chairman Andrei Kartapolov rejected a bill that would grant deferment from mobilization to certain Russian civilians, likely to support ongoing and future crypto-mobilization efforts.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 16, 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.

***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)**

***NOTE: ISW is adding a section to cover Russian offensive operations along the Belgorod-Kharkiv axis as these offensive operations comprise an operational effort separate from Russian offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line. ISW may enlarge the scope of this section should Russian forces expand offensive operations along the Russian-Ukrainian international border in northeastern Ukraine.***

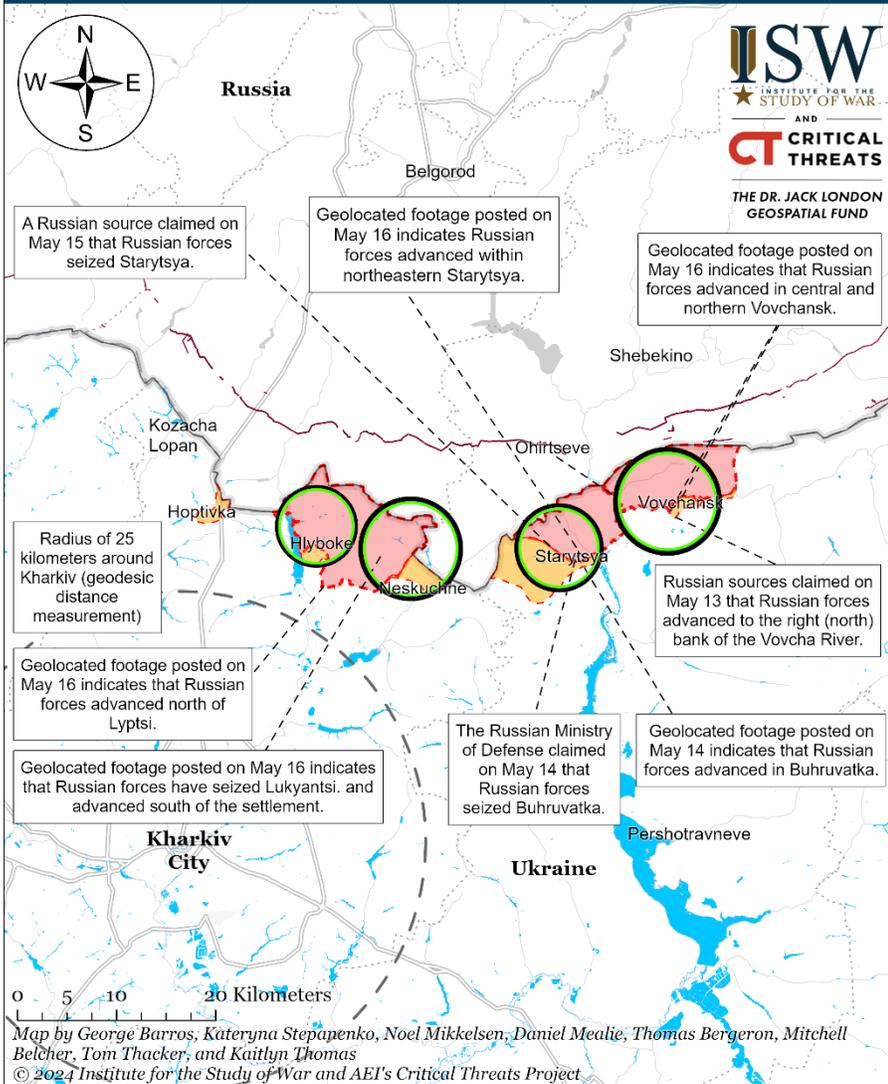
Russian forces recently seized Lukyantsi (northeast of Lyptsi) and advanced closer to Lyptsi amid continued offensive operations in the area on May 16. Geolocated footage published on May 15 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced south of Lukyansti, and ISW assesses that recent reports that Russian forces seized the settlement are accurate.[47] Geolocated footage published on May 16 indicates that Russian forces advanced closer towards Lyptsi from the northeast.[48] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 1.2 kilometers in depth near the southern outskirts of Hlyboke (north of Lyptsi), although ISW has not yet observed evidence of further Russian gains in the area.[49] Russian forces continued offensive operations north of Lyptsi near Pylna, Lukyantsi, and Hlyboke and near Lyptsi itself.[50]

Russian forces recently advanced within northern Vovchansk and continued offensive operations in the area on May 16. Geolocated footage published on May 16 indicates that Russian forced advanced up to Taras Shevchenka Street and along Korolenka Street in northern Vovchansk and seized the Vovchansk Central District Hospital.[51] Geolocated footage published on May 16 indicates that Russian forces recently made marginal gains in northeastern Starytsa (west of Vovchansk on the western side of the Siverskyi Donets River).[52] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced up to three kilometers within Vovchansk and are approaching the Vovchansk cemetery in northeastern Vovchansk and the Aggregate Plant in central Vovchansk.[53] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued offensive operations near Starytsya, Pletenivka (north of Vovchansk), and Vovchansk.[54]

The limited combat power that Russian forces have so far committed to offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast may already be degraded Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on May 16 that elements of the 18th Motorized Rifle Division and the 7th Motorized Rifle Regiment (both 11th Army Corps [AC], LMD) have suffered heavy

losses attacking along the Hlyboke-Lukyantsi front and that the recent tempo of Russian offensive operations in the area has significantly decreased.[55] Mashovets stated that elements of the 1st Tank Regiment (2nd Motorized Rifle Division) and 47th Tank Division (both 1st Guards Tank Army, Moscow Military District [MMD]) are currently conducting offensive operations near Vovchansk.[56] Mashovets stated that the Russian Northern Grouping of Force is "leasing" limited elements from the 1st Guards Tank Army, which is currently responsible for renewed offensive operations northwest of Svatove.[57] Ukrainian military observer Yuriy Butusov stated on March 25 that elements of the 138th and 25th motorized rifle brigades (6th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are also operating within northern Vovchansk, however.[58] Ukrainian sources reported that limited elements of the 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th AC, LMD) and the 128th Motorized Rifle Brigade (44th AC, LMD) participated in initial assaults in northern Kharkiv Oblast, and Mashovets stated that Russian forces could use these elements to relieve 11th AC elements in the Lyptsi area.[59] Mashovets noted that other Russian force groupings do not have "free" combat ready forces and assets at the regiment-brigade level to transfer to the Northern Grouping of Forces that would help sustain and intensify offensive operations along the border.[60] A Ukrainian battalion commander in the Kharkiv direction stated on May 16 that Chechen Akhmat forces are also operating in the area, although these are likely limited elements that transferred to Belgorod Oblast for border security purposes in summer 2023.[61] Russian forces appear to have launched their offensive operation in northern Kharkiv before they had completed bringing the Northern Grouping of Forces up to its reported planned end strength and may lack sufficient combat-ready forces to achieve their operational objectives in Kharkiv Oblast.[62]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 16, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



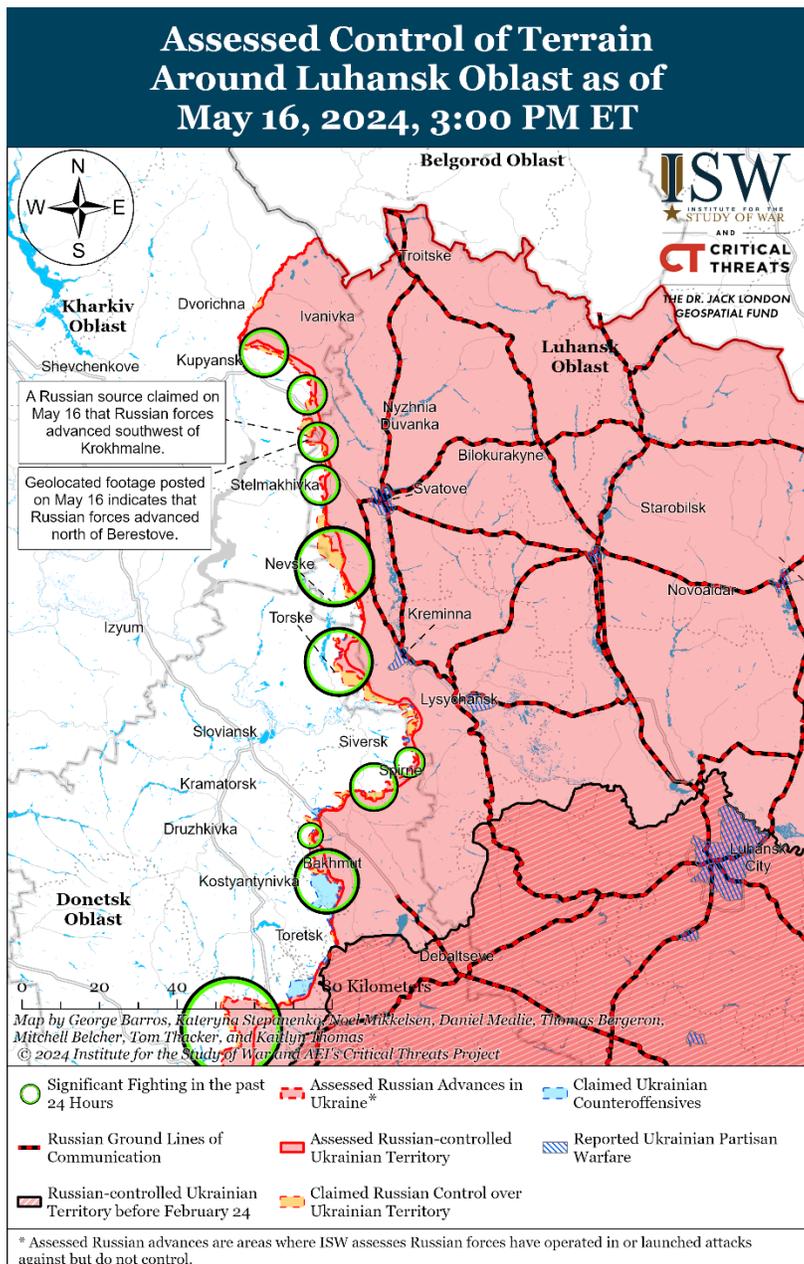
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Field Fortifications

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

Note: 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. A Ukrainian source stated on May 12 that Russian forces seized about 100 square kilometers near the Kharkiv Oblast border. A Russian source claimed on May 12 that Russian forces advanced 30 kilometers wide and seven kilometers deep near Ohirtseve. A Russian source claimed on May 12 that Russian forces advanced approximately four kilometers in the Kharkiv direction. A Ukrainian source claimed on May 12 that Russian forces advanced between 3.2 and 3.7 kilometers towards Hlyboke and Lukyantsi. A Russian source claimed on May 12 that Russian forces advanced 20 kilometers wide and eight kilometers deep at the western Russian penetration in the Kharkiv direction. A Russian source claimed on May 12 that Russian forces seized approximately 27 square kilometers in the Vovchansk direction.

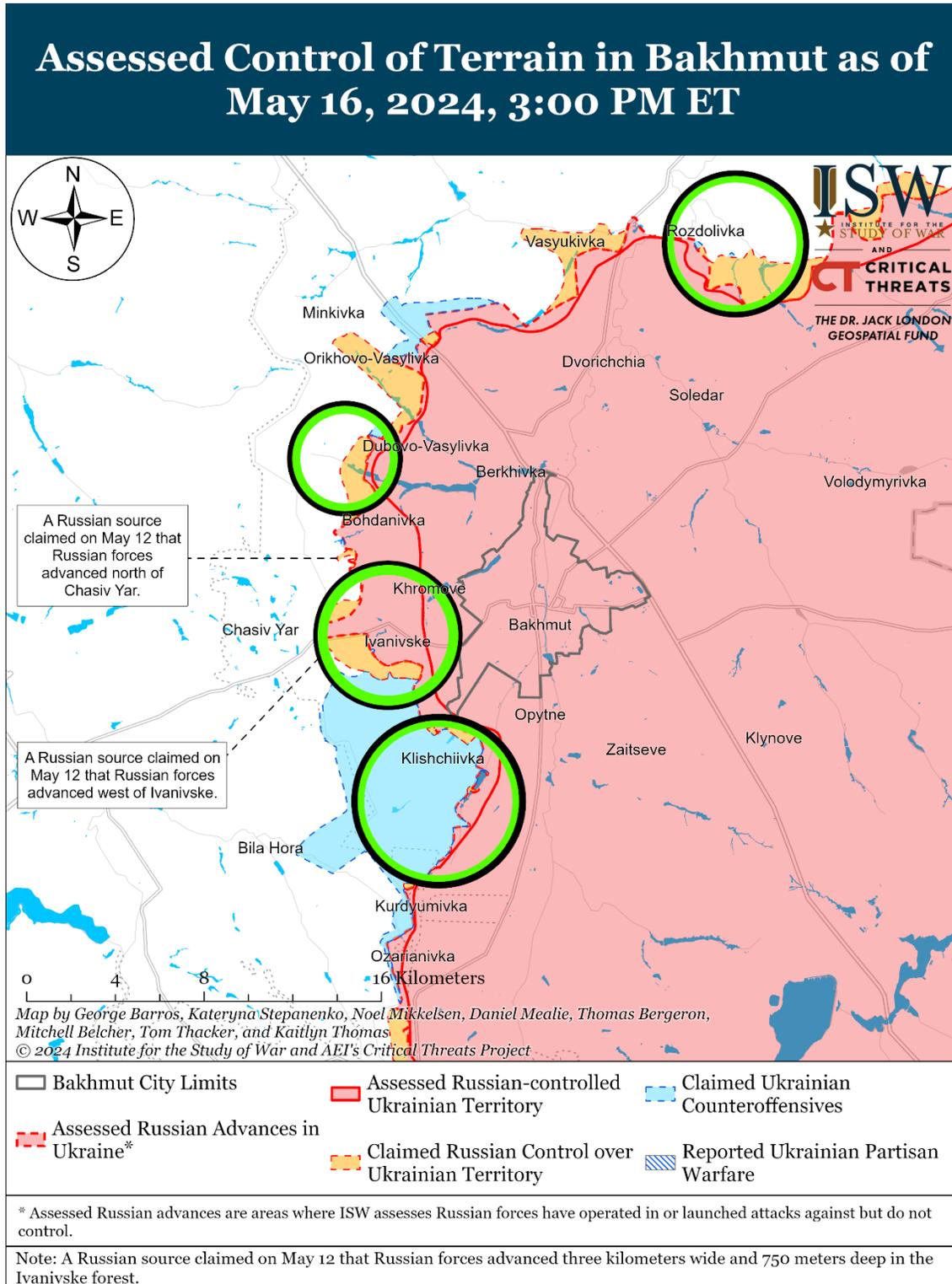
**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Kupyansk amid continued fighting along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on May 16. Geolocated footage published on May 16 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced north of Berestove (southeast of Kupyansk), and Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are advancing towards the northern outskirts of the settlement.[63] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted a mechanized assault of an unspecified size in the direction of Berestove and that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces out of positions near Kyslivka (southeast of Kupyansk).[64] The spokesperson for a Ukrainian unit operating in the Kupyansk direction stated that Russian forces have recently intensified assaults in the Kupyansk direction and are suffering heavy personnel losses.[65] Russian forces continued assaults northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Pishchane, Ivanivka, and Stelmakhivka; and southwest of Svatove near Novoyehorivka and Novosadove.[66] Elements of the Russian 47th Tank Division (1st Guard Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) are reportedly operating near Synkivka.[67]

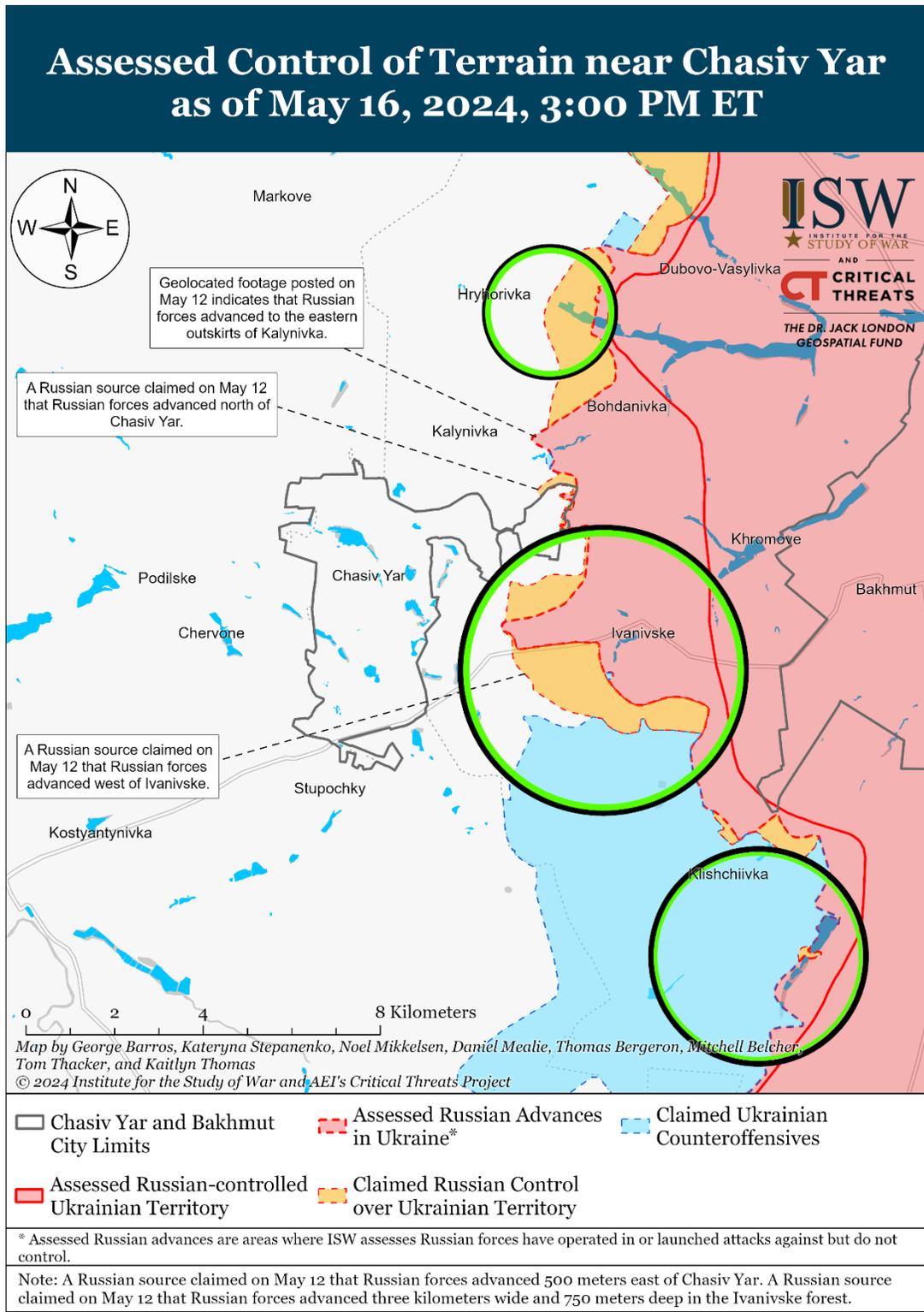


**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

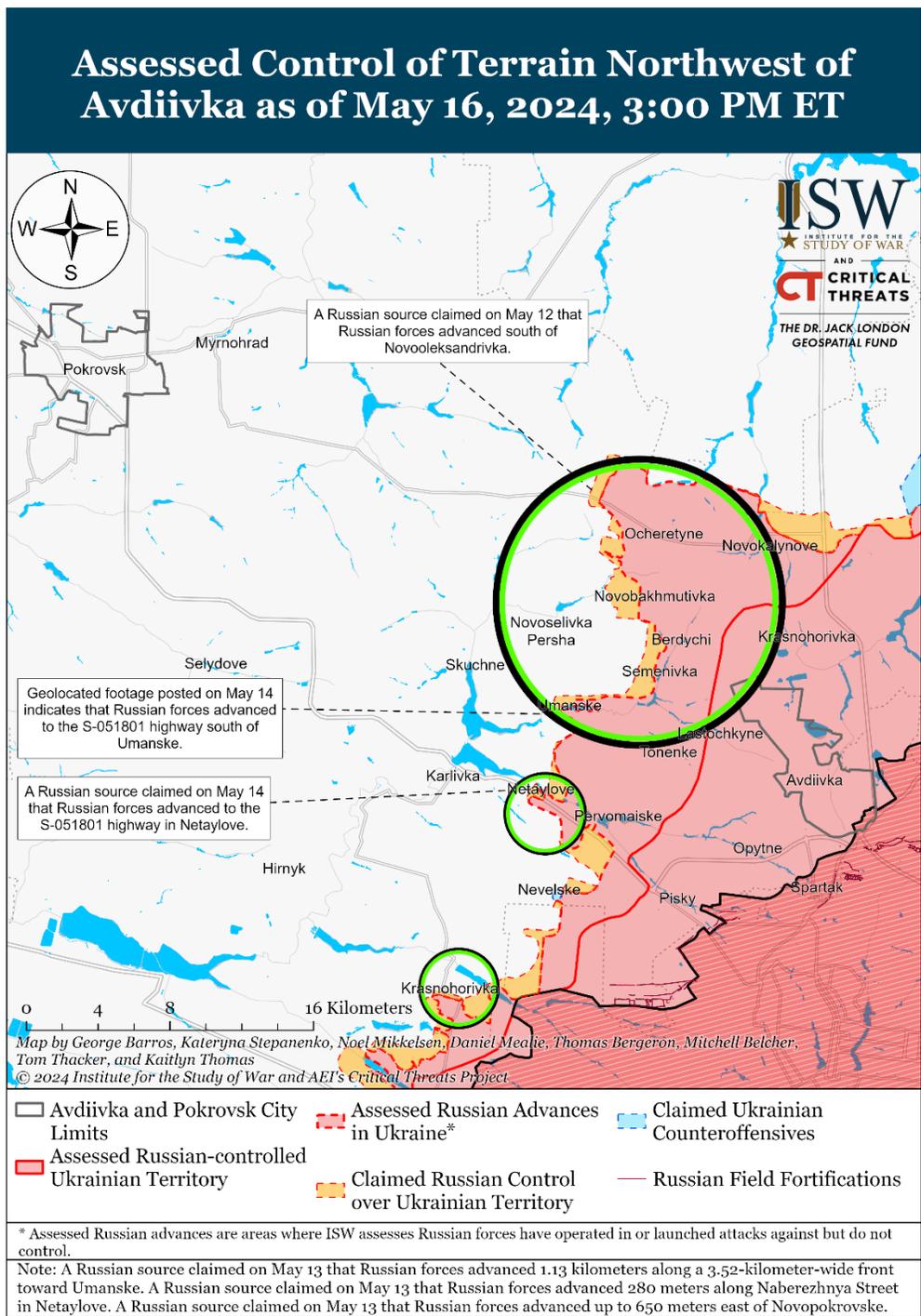
Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Siversk direction (northeast of Bakhmut) near Spirne (southeast of Siversk) and near Rozdolivka and Zvanivka (both south of Siversk) on May 16.[68]



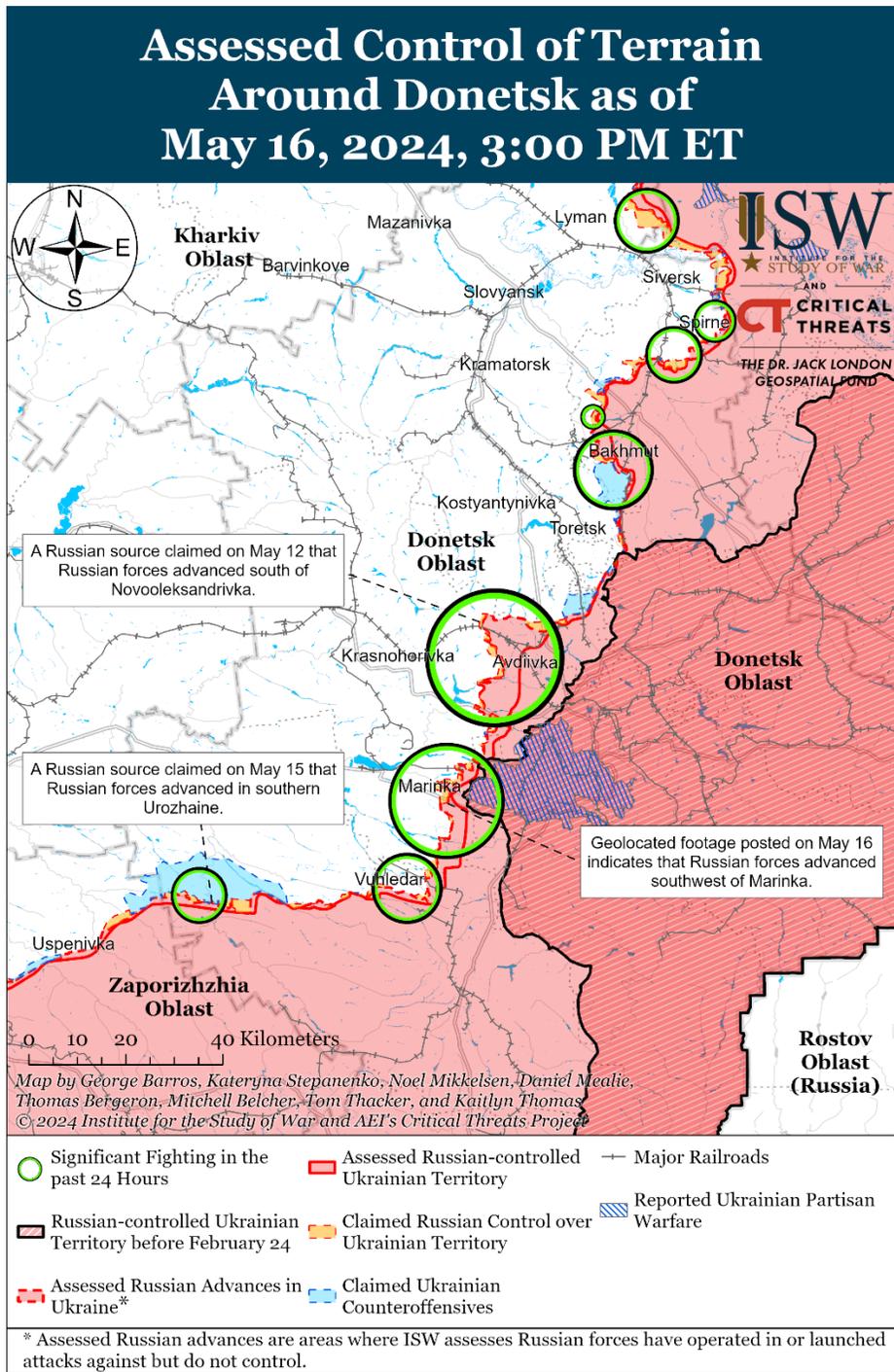
Russian forces continued offensive operations near Chasiv Yar on May 16, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian forces continued assaults north of Chasiv Yar near Hryhorivka, near the Novyi and Kanal microrraions in eastern Chasiv Yar, and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[69] Elements of the Russian 58th Spetsnaz Battalion (Main Directorate of the Russian General Staff [GRU]) and the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District) are reportedly operating near Chasiv Yar.[70]



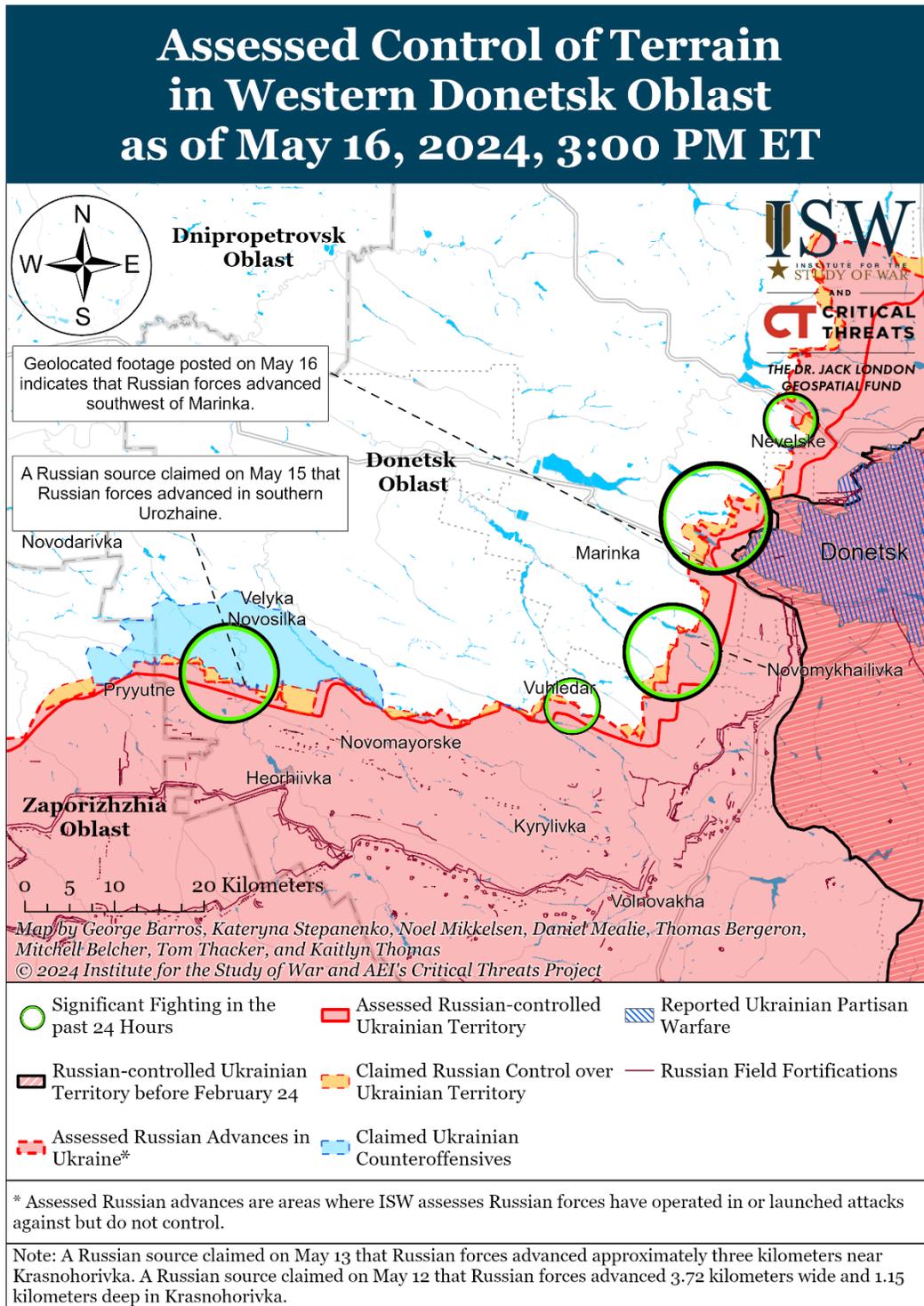
Russian forces continued offensive operations near Avdiivka on May 16, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced near Solovyove and towards Yasnobrodivka (both northwest of Avdiivka), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[71] A Russian source claimed that Russian forces are struggling to clear the area between Pervomaiske and Nevelske (both southwest of Avdiivka) and that the Balka Domakha stream that runs between Netaylove (southwest of Avdiivka) and Nevelske is a contested "gray zone." [72] Russian forces conducted assaults northwest of Avdiivka near Kalynove, Arkhanhelske, Novooleksandrivka, Sokil, Novopokrovske, and Solovyove; west of Avdiivka near Umanske and Orlivka; and southwest of Avdiivka near Netaylove and Pervomaiske.[73] Elements of the Russian 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) are reportedly operating near Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka).[74]



Russian forces recently made a confirmed advance west of Donetsk City amid continued Russian offensive operations west and southwest of Donetsk City on May 16. Geolocated footage published on May 16 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Marinka (southwest of Donetsk City).[75] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces marginally advanced towards Kostyantynivka (southwest of Donetsk City), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[76] Russian forces continued offensive operations west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka; southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda, Novomykhailivka, Paraskoviivka, and Kostyantynivka; and east of Vuhledar near Mykilske and Vodyane.[77] Elements of the Russian 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th AC) are reportedly operating near Kostyantynivka, and elements of the 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA, Southern Military District) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka.[78]

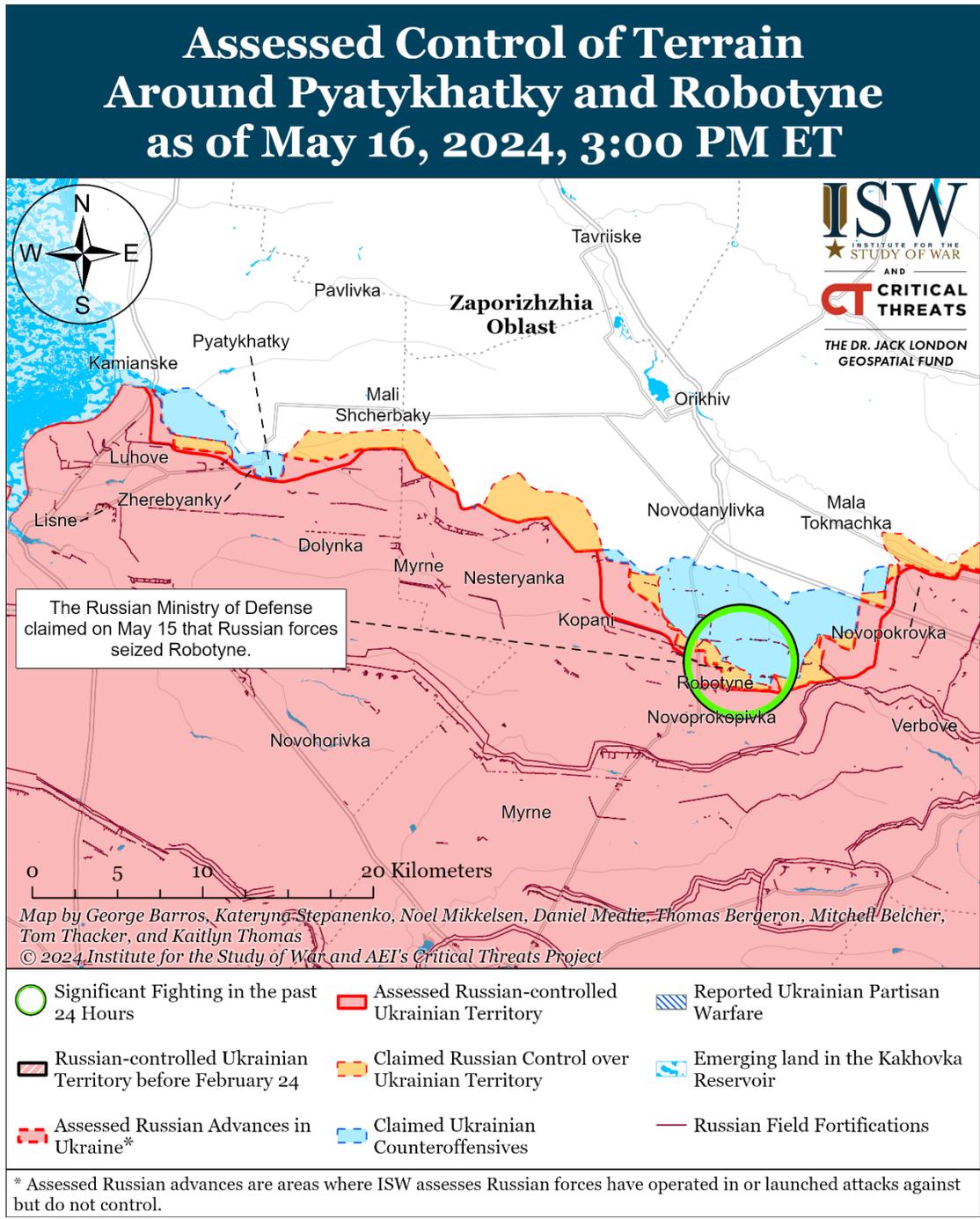


Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in southern Urozhaine (south of Velyka Novosilka), and ISW assesses that Russian forces advanced in these areas given confirmed Russian advances in the surrounding area.[79] Russian forces continued ground attacks south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske and Urozhaine.[80] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command and Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on May 16 that Russian forces have intensified efforts to storm Ukrainian positions in southern Ukraine and conducted 19 unsuccessful assaults near Staromayorske in the past day.[81]

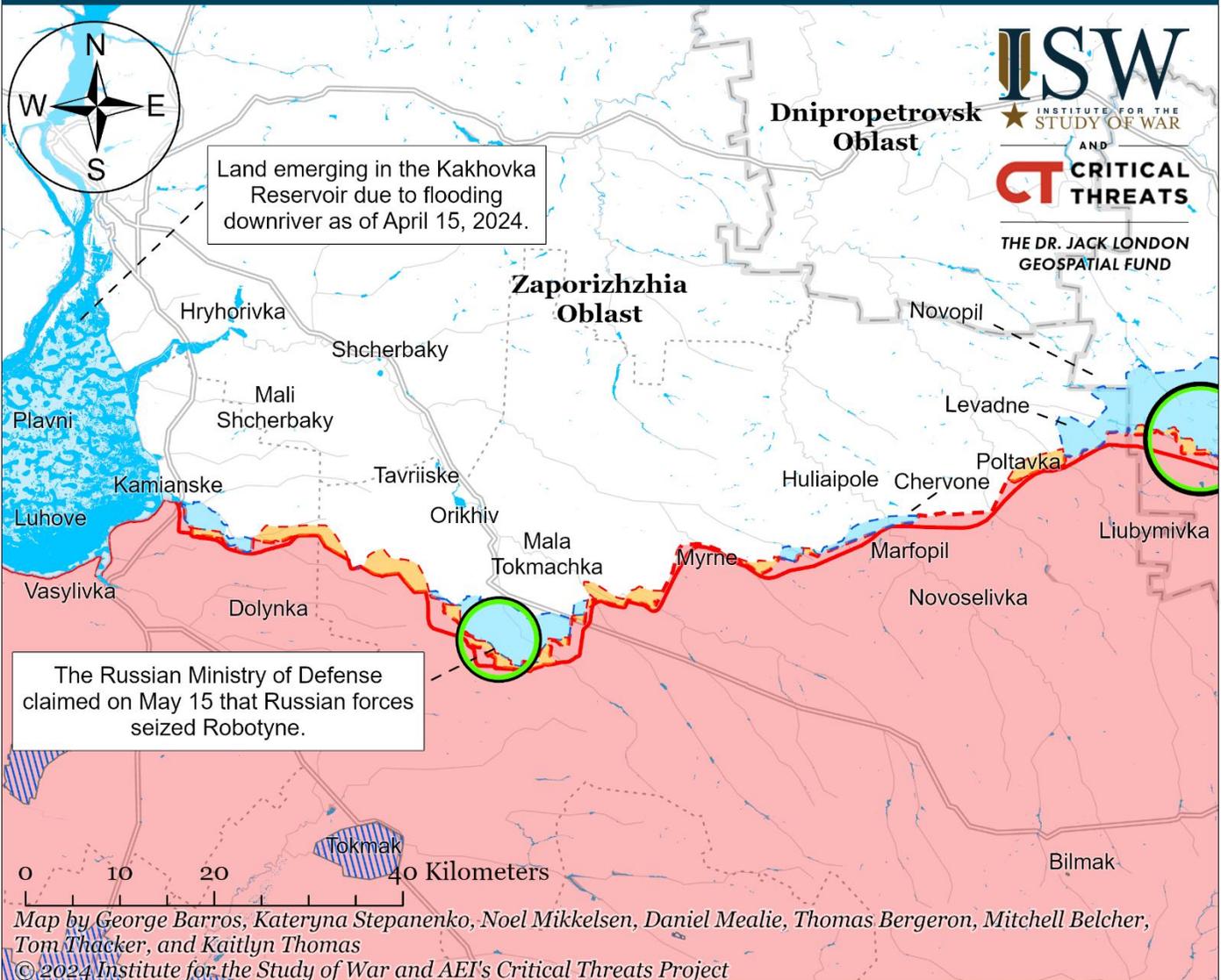


**Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Russian sources widely refuted the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) May 15 claim that Russian forces seized Robotyne on May 16. The Telegram channel of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Brigade, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from one of their main positions in Robotyne, but that heavy fighting continues in the settlement.[82] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces maintain positions in the northern outskirts of Robotyne and that it is too early to discuss the seizure of the settlement.[83] Russian forces also continued attacking northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[84] Elements of the Russian BARS-1 (Combat Army Reserve) unit are reportedly operating near Robotyne.[85]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of May 16, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

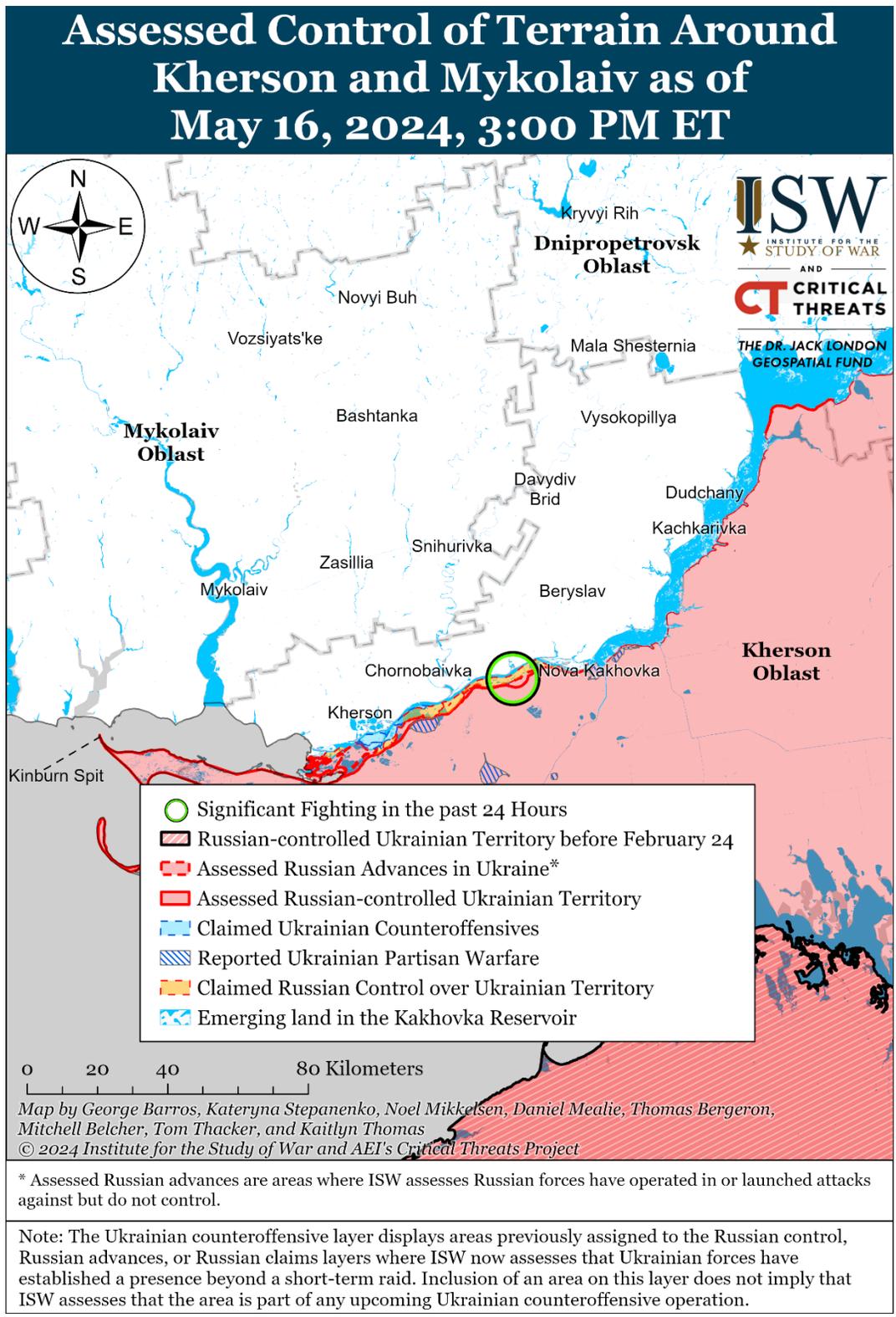


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GEOSPATIAL FUND

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- 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.

Russian forces continued assaults in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast near Krynky on May 16.[86] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 61st Naval Infantry Brigade (a district-level unit operating under the Leningrad Military District [LMD], formerly Northern Fleet) are operating on unspecified Dnipro River islands.[87]



Ukrainian forces conducted ATACMS and drone strikes against occupied Crimea on the night of May 15 to 16. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces destroyed five ATACMS missiles and two Ukrainian drones over Crimea on the night of May 15 to 16 and destroyed 11 Ukrainian naval drones in the Black Sea later during the day on May 16.[88] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces launched a first wave of aerial and naval drones targeting occupied Sevastopol to distract Russian air defenses and then launched several ATACMS missiles, which Russian forces downed over Belbek Airfield.[89] Ukrainian forces conducted an ATACMS strike against the Belbek Airfield on the night of May 14 to 15.[90] Pletenchuk stated that Ukrainian forces had not yet verified the result of the strikes against the airfield, although the Atesh Crimean partisan movement stated that its agents confirmed that Ukrainian forces successfully struck the airfield and that there were several hours of secondary detonations at the airfield's main missile and artillery warehouse.[91] Ukraine-based open-source organization Frontelligence Insight, citing low-resolution satellite imagery, stated that at least three missiles struck the Belbek Airfield in the past two days- two near the airfield's apron and one near the fuel depot - but could not determine the extent of the damage to the airfield.[92] High resolution satellite imagery collected by Maxar on May 16 indicates that the strike destroyed at least two MiG-31s and one Su-27 and damaged one MiG-29.[93]

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

Russian forces conducted several individual missile strikes against Ukraine on May 16. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces struck civilian infrastructure in Mykolaiv City with an unspecified ballistic missile.[94] The Kharkiv Oblast Prosecutor's Office reported that Russian forces launched an unspecified number and type of missiles at Chuhuiv from Belgorod Oblast and noted that Russian forces launched two S-300 air defense missiles from Belgorod Oblast at Kharkiv Oblast in the past day.[95] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) published footage claiming to show Russian forces conducting an Iskander ballistic missile strike against a Ukrainian formation operating in Kharkiv Oblast.[96]

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

Several Russian opposition media outlets reported on May 16 that Russian State Duma Defense Committee Chairman Andrei Kartapolov rejected a bill that would grant deferment from mobilization to certain Russian civilians, likely to support ongoing and future crypto-mobilization efforts. Russian opposition media outlets reported that Kartapolov rejected a bill that would grant deferments from mobilization to fathers with three children.[97] Russian State Duma Deputy Nina Ostanina disagreed with the bill's rejection and noted that the Russian presidential decree defines a "large family" as having three or more children.[98] The Russian State Duma previously decided not to adopt amendments that would guarantee deferment from mobilization for fathers with three or more children, disabled children, or single fathers in October 2022, shortly after the start of Russia's partial mobilization in September 2022.[99] The State Duma has adopted an amendment granting deferments for fathers with four or more children under 16, however, likely to posture Russia's support for "traditional values" and to avoid domestic discontent.[100] Russia likely wants to maintain as large of a pool of men eligible for mobilization as possible to support ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts.

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

Russian defense company "PPSh Laboratory" General Director Denis Oslomenko stated on May 16 that PPSH Laboratory is developing a thermal imaging system for the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) to use for repelling naval drone attacks.[101] Oslomenko stated that Russian forces, presumably those operating BSF surface vessels, lack thermal imaging equipment making it difficult for them to repel naval drone attacks at night. Oslomenko stated that the thermal imaging systems are able to detect targets from over a kilometer away.

### **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)**

*ISW is not publishing coverage of activities in Russian-occupied areas today.*

**Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

A Kremlin official reiterated a long-standing Russian information operation meant to deter the West from providing long-range strike capabilities to Ukraine and from allowing Ukrainian forces to conduct strikes against legitimate military targets in Russia with Western-provided weapon systems. Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin claimed that Russia would retaliate with more powerful weapons if Ukrainian forces used Western weapons to strike Russian territory.[102] Volodin's threat rings hollow given that Russian law (illegally) defines Crimea, and the Ukrainian oblasts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson as Russia, and Ukrainian forces regularly strike these Russian-occupied territories with Western-provided weapons. Ukrainian operations to strike systems in Russia's de jure territory that are directly supporting Russia's offensive ground operations in Ukraine would be an inherently defensive effort, and Western policies prohibiting Ukrainian forces from using Western-provided systems to strike military targets in rear areas is compromising Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russian offensive operations.[103] The US Helsinki Commission stated on May 15 that the US should "not only allow but encourage" Ukrainian forces to strike Russian forces firing and staging in Russia's border areas as part of Russia's offensive operations into northern Kharkiv Oblast.[104]

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev attempted to baselessly link the assailant who attempted to assassinate Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico to Ukraine. Medvedev did not explicitly allege that the assailant had ties to Ukraine but baselessly claimed that the assailant had expressed support for Ukraine.[105] Medvedev also called the assailant's assassination attempt "Russophobic." Medvedev is a notably nationalistic and extreme voice in the Russian government and routinely makes deliberately outlandish and unfounded statements as part of information operations aimed at the West.[106]

**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)**

Belarus and Iran continue to develop their bilateral relations. Head of the Belarusian MoD's Department of International Military Cooperation Major General Valery Revenko and Iranian military attaché Captain First Rank Reza Khosravi Moghadam met on May 16 at an accreditation meeting in Belarus and discussed international and regional security and the development of Belarusian–Iranian military cooperation.[107] Belarus and Iran have pursued increased military, economic, and technical cooperation in the past, and Russia likely benefits from these relations through the Union State framework.[108]

**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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