

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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May 3, 6:45 pm ET

Ukrainian officials reported with increasing confidence that the Kremlin will announce mobilization on May 9. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate Chief Kyrylo Budanov said on May 2 that the Kremlin has begun to prepare mobilization processes and personnel ahead of the expected May 9 announcement and has already carried out covert mobilization.¹ Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council said that high-ranking Russian officials are trying to legitimize a prolonged war effort as the Third World War against the West, rather than the "special military operation" against Ukraine, as Russian President Vladimir Putin has hitherto framed Russia's invasion.² ISW has no independent confirmation of Russian preparations for mobilization.

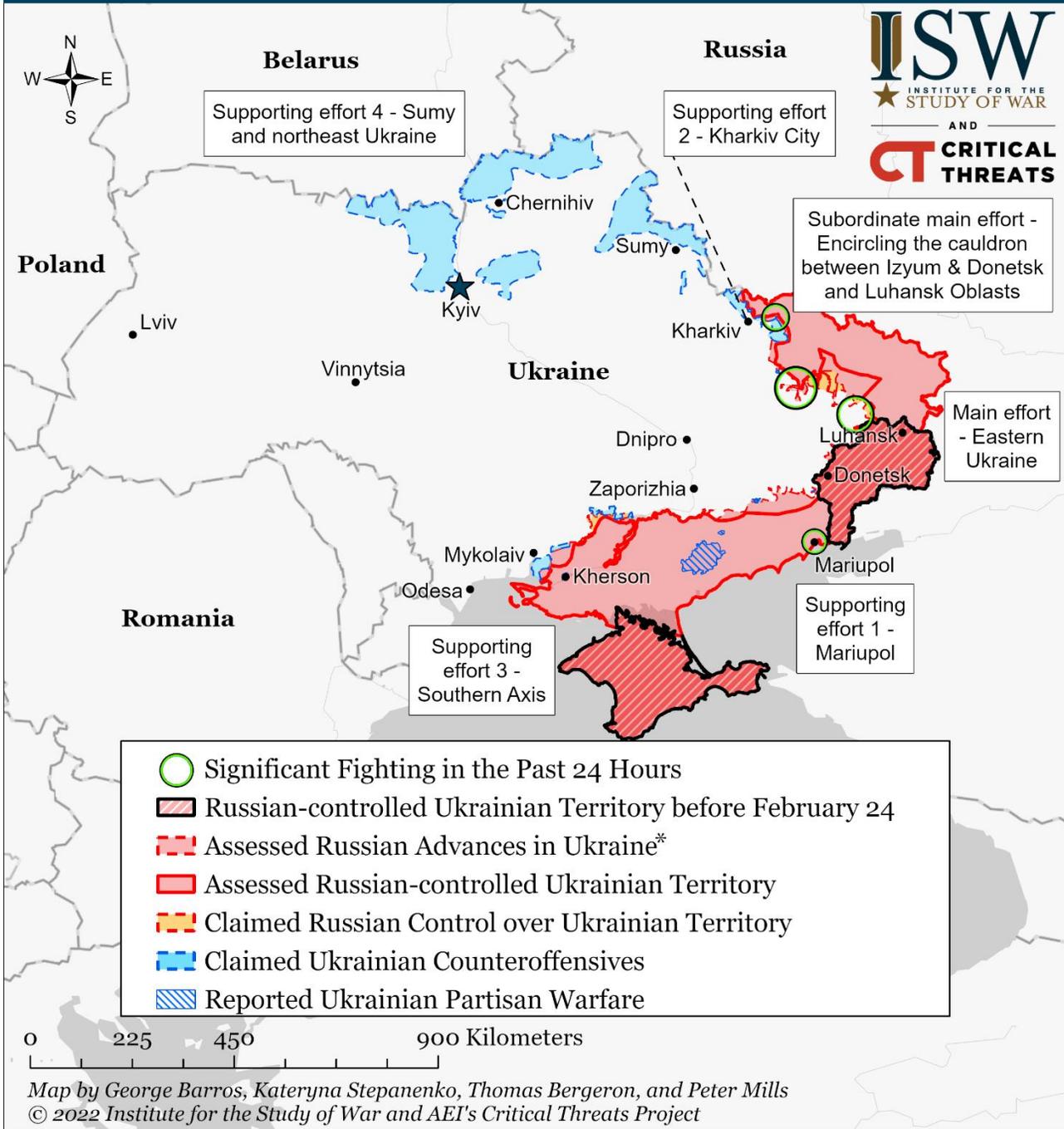
A significant Ukrainian counteroffensive pushed Russian forces roughly 40 km east of Kharkiv City.³ A senior American defense official reported the Ukrainian operation, which is consistent with social media reports from both Ukrainian and Russian sources that Ukrainian troops took control of Staryi Saltiv on May 2.⁴ This Ukrainian counteroffensive is very unlikely to affect Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum, as the Russians have not been relying on GLOCs from Kharkiv to support their operations in Izyum but have been using routes further to the east and well beyond the most recent Ukrainian counteroffensive's limit of advance. The Ukrainian counteroffensive may, however, unhinge the Russian positions northeast of Kharkiv and could set conditions for a broader operation to drive the Russians from most of their positions around the city. This possibility may pose a dilemma for the Russians—whether to reinforce their positions near Kharkiv to prevent such a broader Ukrainian operation or to risk losing most or all of their positions in artillery range of the city.

Russia's long-term intentions regarding the status of Mariupol and other occupied areas seem confused. Some anecdotes from Mariupol indicate that Russia may plan to incorporate Mariupol and the surrounding environs into the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), and possibly annex the DNR to the Russian Federation. Other anecdotes suggest that Russia could directly absorb Mariupol into Rostov Oblast. These inconsistencies could simply be artifacts of reporting or confusion on the ground, but they could also indicate actual confusion about Russia's long-term plans for governing the Ukrainian regions that Moscow's forces currently occupy. **These anecdotes clearly support the assessment that Putin has no intention of ceding occupied territories back to an independent Ukraine and is, at most, considering exactly how he intends to govern regions that Russia has illegally seized.**

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces resumed air, artillery, and ground assaults on the Azovstal Steel Plant following the conclusion of the May 2 evacuation efforts.**
- **Russian forces continued to regroup on the Donetsk-Luhansk axis in likely preparation for a westward advance in the direction of Lyman and Slovyansk.**
- **The Ukrainian Armed Forces conducted a counteroffensive that likely pushed Russian forces up to 40 km east of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground offensives in Zaporizhia Oblast in the vicinity of Huliapole and intensified reconnaissance operations in the vicinity of Odesa amid growing tensions in Transnistria.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 3, 2022, 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 those 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 population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

ISW has updated the structure of its discussion of the primary efforts that Russian forces are currently engaging in. The main Russian effort is concentrated in Eastern Ukraine and includes one subordinate main effort and four supporting efforts. The subordinate main effort is the encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron formed between the Izyum-Slovyansk highway and the Kreminna-Rubizhne-Popasna frontline in Luhansk. The four supporting efforts are: completing the seizure of Mariupol, Kharkiv City, the Southern Axis, and threatening northeastern Ukraine from Russian and Belarusian territory.

ISW has updated its assessment of the five primary efforts Russian forces are engaged in at this time:

- Main effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and four supporting efforts);
- Subordinate main effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron between Izyum and the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts
- Supporting effort 1—Mariupol;
- Supporting effort 2—Kharkiv City;
- Supporting effort 3—Southern axis;
- Supporting effort 4—Sumy and northeastern Ukraine.

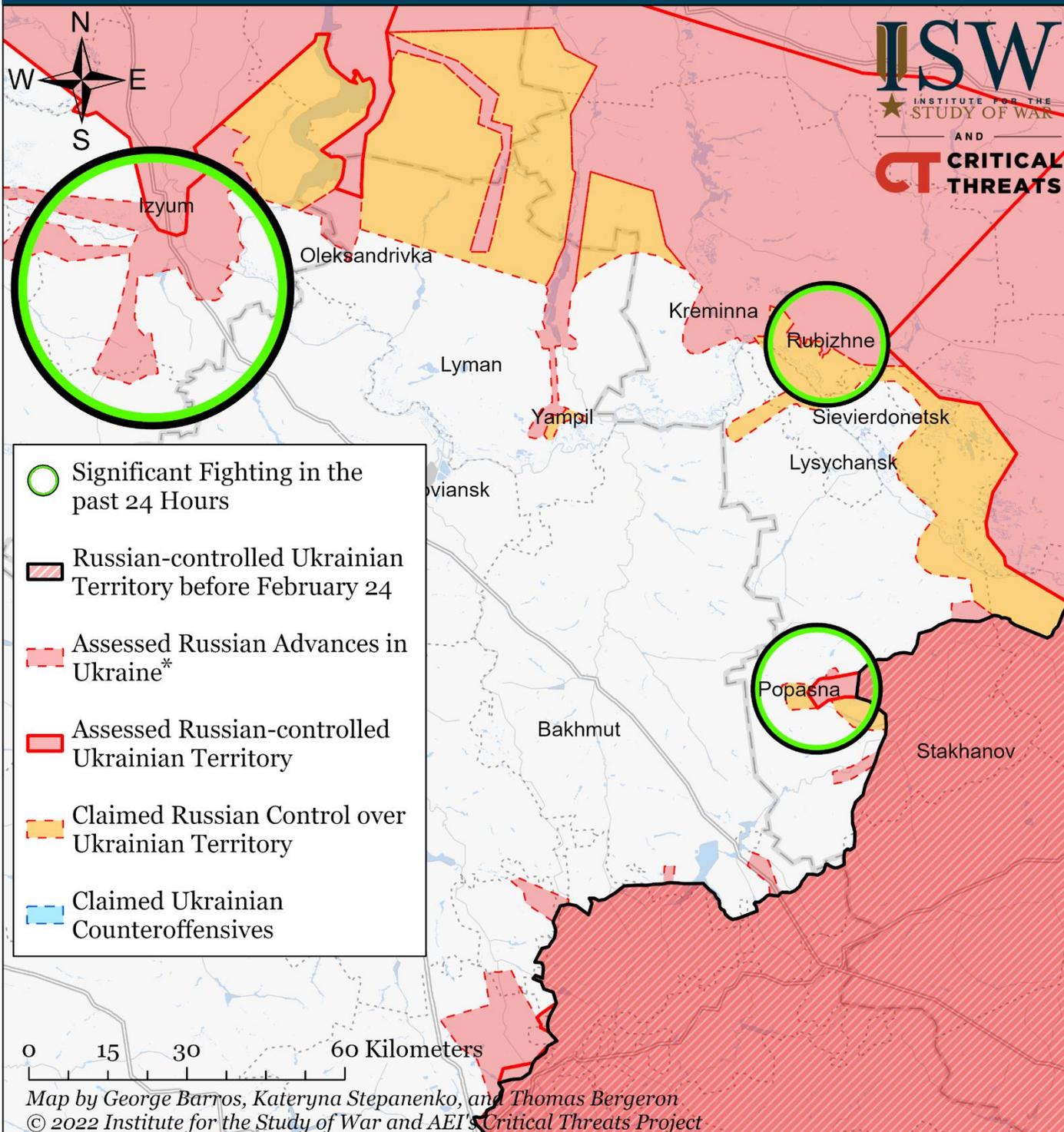
Main effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas.)

Russian forces continued to conduct unspecified offensive operations southwestward from Izyum towards Barvinkove on May 3. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that elements of the Airborne Forces (VDV), 1st Tank Army, 20th, 29th, 35th, and 36th Combined Arms Armies, and 68th Army Corps are operating in the Barvinkove direction and suffering continuous losses.⁵

Russian forces continued to fire along the Donetsk-Luhansk frontline and did not make any confirmed ground attacks on May 3.⁶ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that elements of the 1st and 2nd Army Corps (forces of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics), 8th, 58th, and 5th Combined Arms Armies, Pacific Fleet, 2nd and 41st Combined Arms Armies, 90th Tank Division, and unspecified VDV elements are regrouping to advance westward in the direction of Lyman and Slovyansk.⁷ Remotely sensed NASA data for fires and heat anomalies observed significant high-temperature anomalies in Lyman between May 2 and 3 over the past 24 hours, indicating Russian indirect fire that was likely in preparation for such an advance.⁸ The large number of combined arms armies, divisions, and other organizations identified as contributing troops to this effort suggests that many if not most of the Russian units engaged on this axis are understrength and in ad-hoc organizations. That observation, if true, may help explain the slow and halting pace of the Russian advance.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of May 3, 2022, 3:00 ET



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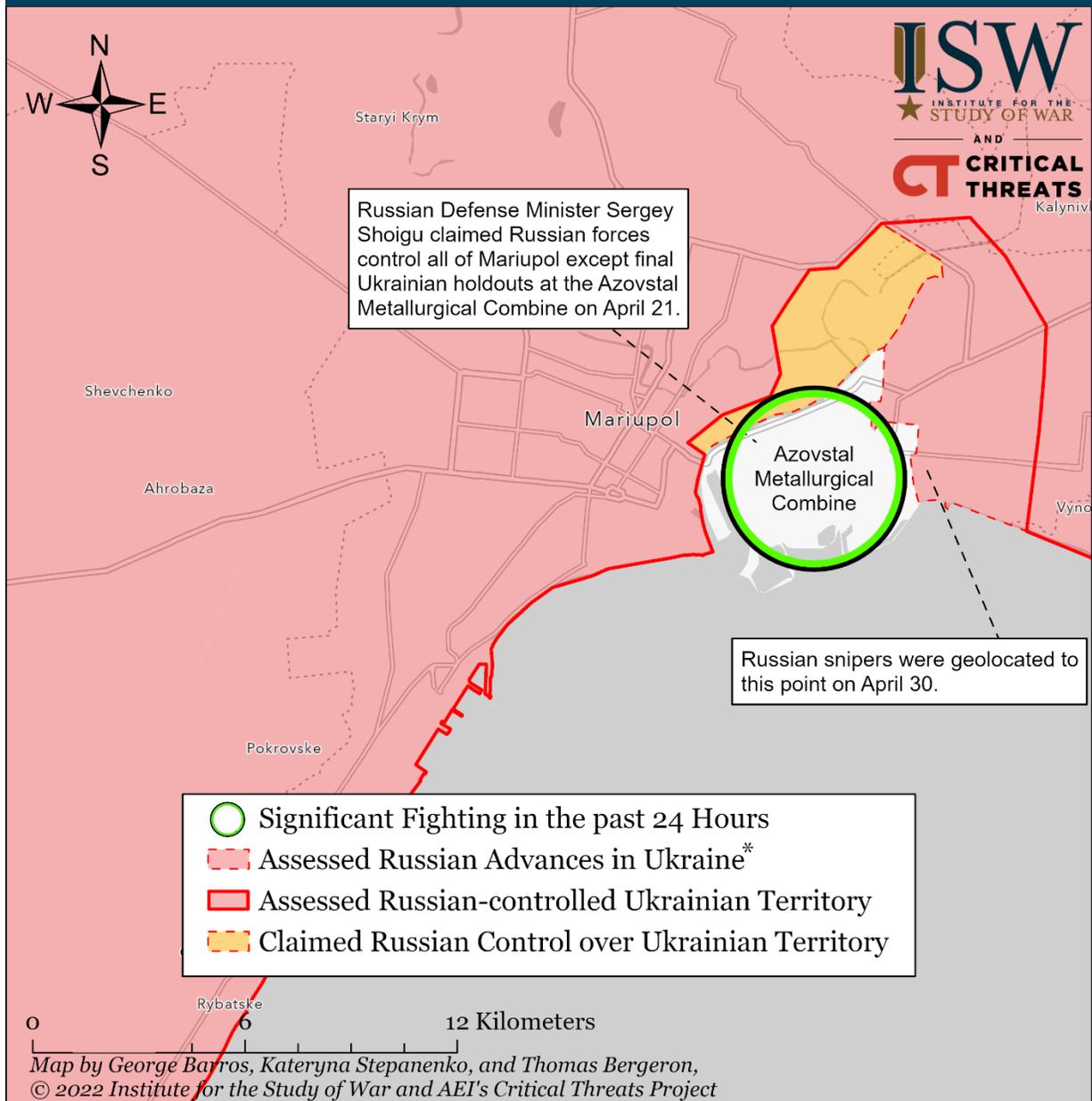
[Source: NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System over Lyman for May 2 and May 3]

Supporting Effort #1—Mariupol (Russian objective: Capture Mariupol and reduce the Ukrainian defenders.)

Russian forces resumed air, artillery, and ground attacks on the Azovstal Steel Plant on May 3 after the conclusion of preliminary evacuation efforts.⁹ Deputy Commander of the Azov Regiment Sviatoslav Palamar stated that Russian forces conducted a ground assault to attempt entry of Azovstal under the cover of airstrikes that killed two civilians inside the plant.¹⁰

Russian occupying forces continue to set conditions for the administrative occupation of Mariupol. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that private enterprises in Rostov, Russia, received orders to produce official seals and stamps for public institutions in Mariupol that reportedly contain the inscription: “Russia, the Republic of Donbas, Mariupol, the military-civilian administration.”¹¹ GUR’s report is consistent with Advisor to the Mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushchenko’s statement that children in the Mangush region near Mariupol are signing their school notebooks with “Rostov Oblast” and indicates continued Russian efforts to further institutionalize control of occupied territories in anticipation of potential annexation to Russia.¹² These reports taken in tandem, however, indicate potential confusion in the Kremlin’s ultimate end goal for the status of Mariupol and other occupied areas. Occupation authorities are likely unclear as to whether the intention is to absorb Mariupol into the existing administration of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR), which then may be annexed to Russia, or to directly attach Mariupol to Russia as part of Rostov Oblast. Russia has not formally annexed the DNR, moreover, but rather recognized its independence, putting the formulation “Russia, the Republic of Donbas” at variance with Russia’s current formal stance. These oddities may indicate inconsistencies in the plans or implementation of occupational frameworks that could likely play out in occupied areas beyond Mariupol.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of May 3, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



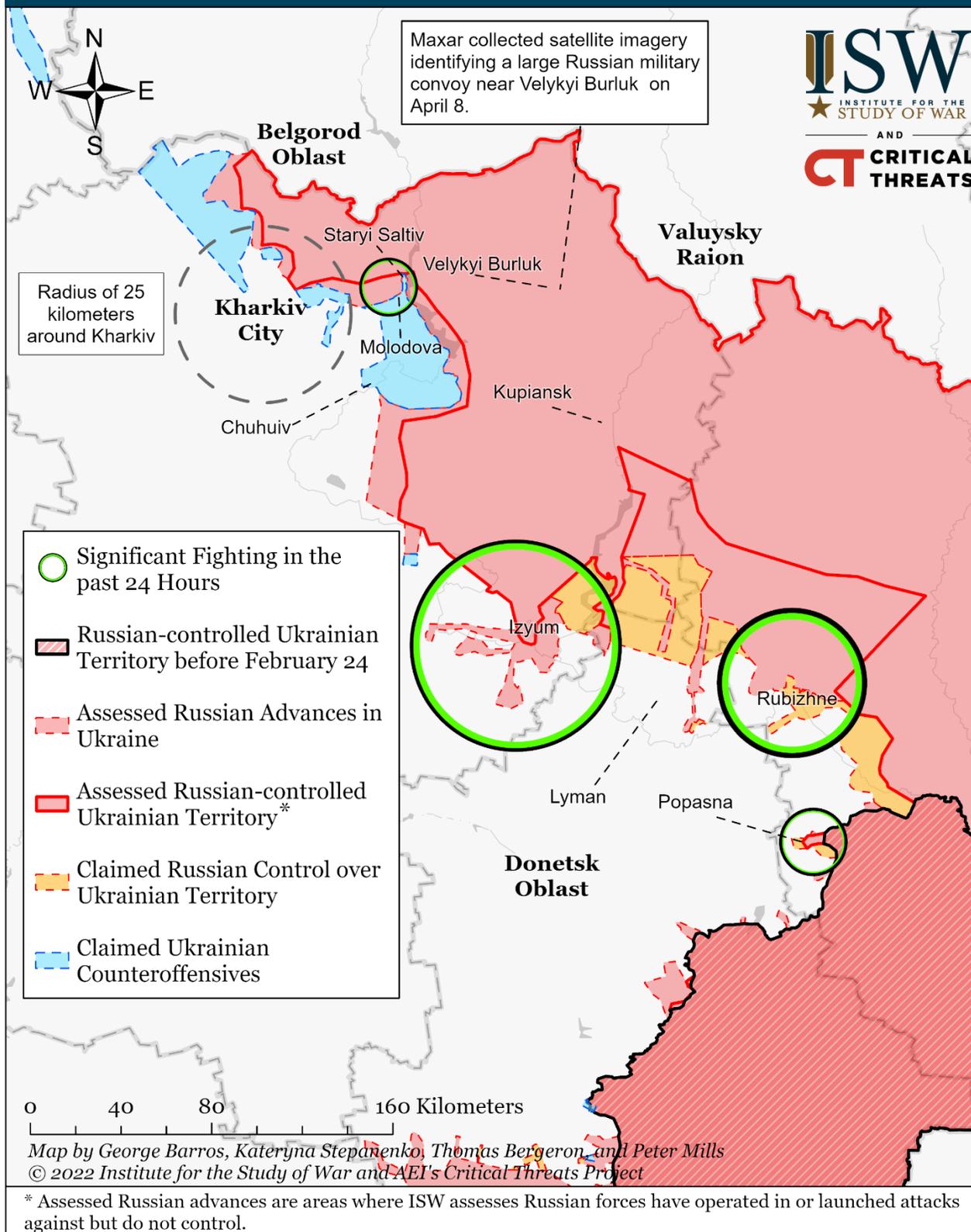
The Kremlin declared victory in Mariupol on April 21 after capturing the city besides Ukrainian holdouts in the encircled Azovstal Metallurgical Combine. Russian forces continued naval artillery and air strikes on remaining Ukrainian defenders at Azovstal on May 2. Ukrainian forces engaged in small-scale street fights in the Left Bank District outside Azovstal on April 27. Russian war reporters filmed some Russian elements redeploying from Mariupol northward on April 24 and April 25. The Ukrainian General Staff notably did not mention Ukrainian defensive activity near the port of Mariupol or Primorsky District on April 22, indicating Russian clearing efforts. The Kremlin will spin the (still incomplete) capture of Mariupol into a major victory in Ukraine to compensate for stalled or failed Russian offensives elsewhere.

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Supporting Effort #2—Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Continue to pressure Kharkiv City to fix Ukrainian defenders there and prevent their movement to reinforce defenders on other axes.)

The Ukrainian Armed Forces conducted a large-scale counteroffensive east of Kharkiv City on May 2, which could unhinge Russian positions to the northeast. A US senior defense official reported that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces about 40 km east on May 2, and social media reports corroborate that report by showing Ukrainian forces liberating the settlement of Saryi Saltiv.¹³ Russian forces reportedly retreated in the direction of Volchansk near the Russian state border.¹⁴ Ukraine's Advisor to the Internal Affairs Minister Anton Herashchenko said that Ukrainian forces liberated the village of Molodova near Saryi Saltiv on May 3.¹⁵ Ukrainian forces likely liberated more settlements along the T2104 highway based on May 1 reports that fighting occurred in highway adjacent settlements of Khotomlya, Shestakove, Saryi Saltiv, Molodova, and Peremoha.¹⁶ Russian forces maintained artillery positions in Tsyrukun, approximately 20 km from downtown Kharkiv City.¹⁷ Russian forces will likely seek to retain their remaining settlements in Kharkiv's vicinity to continue daily artillery fire and pin Ukrainian units in the area but may have to reinforce their positions in this area to do so.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 3, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

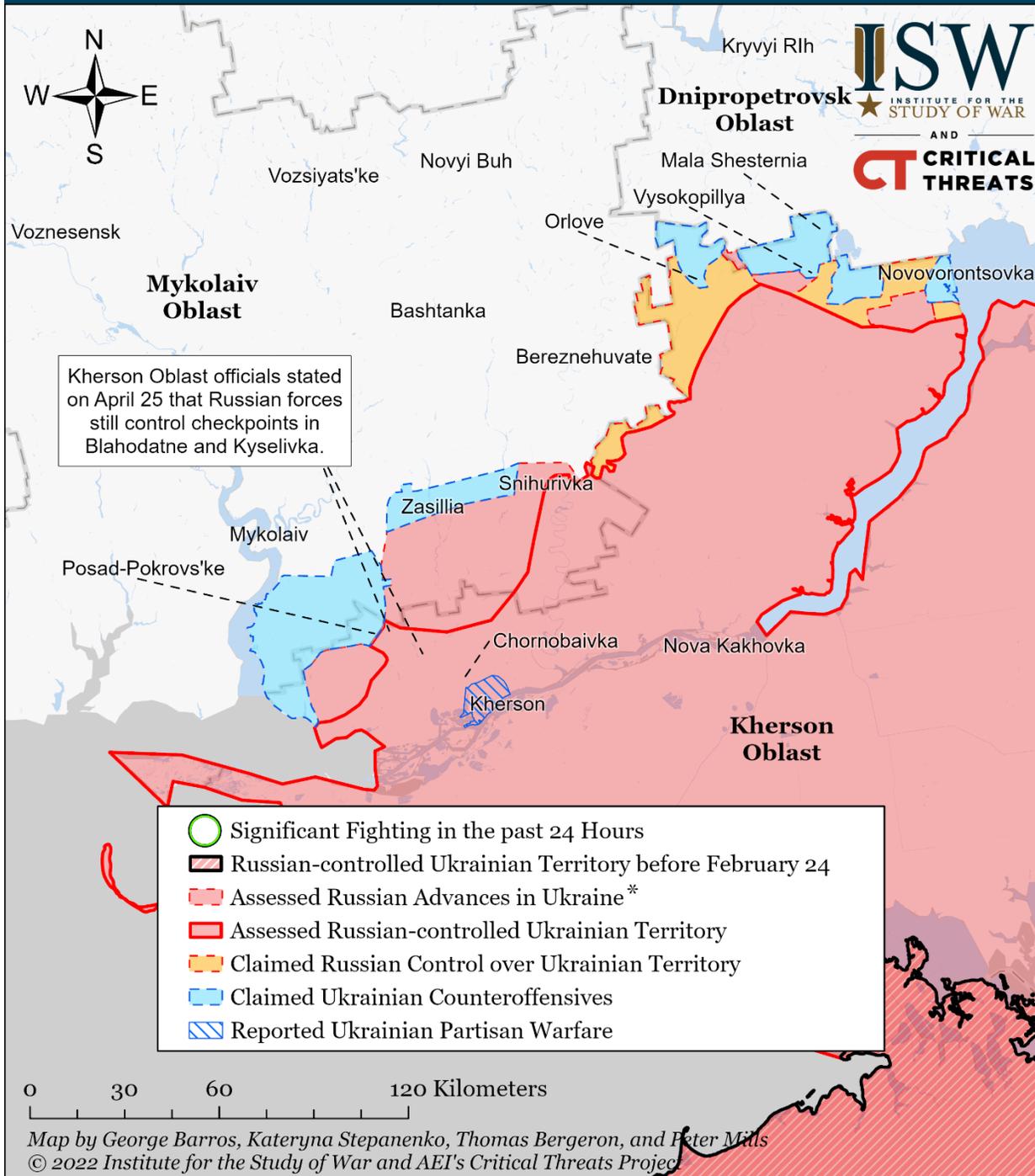


Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces conducted limited ground offensives in Zaporizhia Oblast on May 3 but confined themselves to shelling elsewhere in southern Ukraine.¹⁸ Zaporizhia Oblast Administration Head Oleksandr Staruch reported that Russian forces launched an assault on the outskirts of Huliapole and on the area east of the settlement but did not seize any new territories.¹⁹ Russian forces shelled the settlement of Zaluznychne around 8 km from Huliapole, likely to break the Ukrainian defenses and secure the northbound T0401 highway.²⁰

The Russian Defense Ministry released a video of Bastion coastal defense complexes firing Oniks anti-ship cruise missiles at land targets, claiming that Russian forces struck a Ukrainian logistics center in Odesa Oblast on May 3.²¹ The use of the Oniks anti-ship missile in a ground-attack role may suggest that Russian forces are experiencing shortages of the other types of long-range precision-guided munitions necessary to disrupt Ukrainian logistics.²²

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 3, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



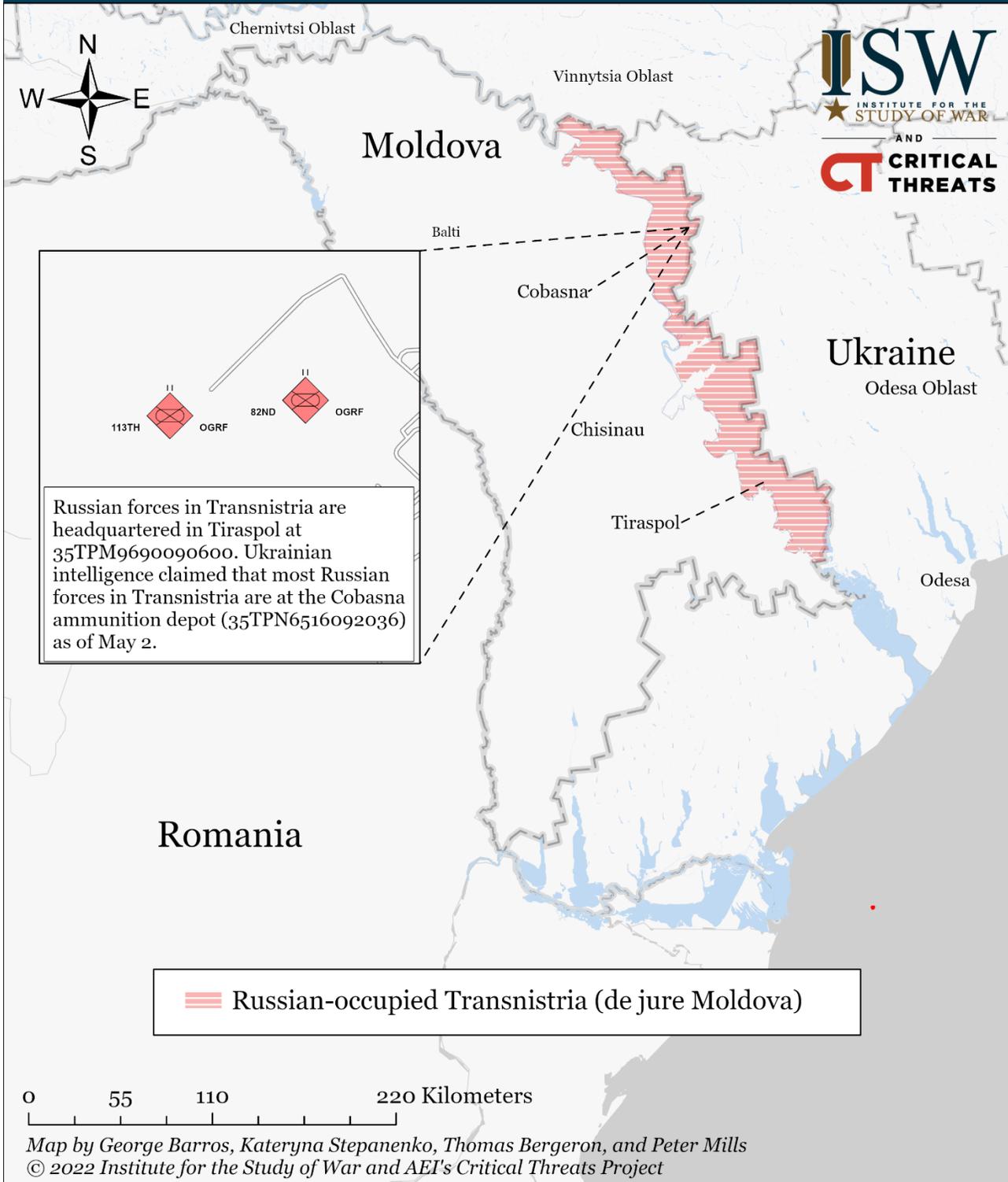
Kherson Oblast officials stated on April 25 that Russian forces still control checkpoints in Blahodatne and Kyselivka.

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

Note: We recoded assessed Russian advance west of Snihurivka from Chervone and Novopetrivka to Ukrainian counteroffensives given this territory likely had to be liberated to support the April 27 counteroffensive on Shyroke, Novopetrivka, and Lyubin. ISW will update our maps once we can verify more data.

Ukraine's Southern Operational Command said that Ukrainian forces destroyed a Russian "Forpost" reconnaissance drone in Odesa Oblast on May 3, confirming ongoing Russian reconnaissance in the area amid growing tensions in Transnistria.²³ Ukrainian officials blocked the Kuchurhan-Pervomaisc border checkpoint with Transnistria amid new Transnistrian claims that the proxy republic repelled a terrorist drone attack on May 3, likely in preparation for possible escalations.²⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff said that Russian officials are taking unspecified measures to prepare for evacuations of Russian military families from Transnistria.²⁵

Moldova Situational Map as of May 3, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Note: Russia maintains two motorized rifle battalions (subordinate to the Russian Western Military District) and a command battalion in Transnistria in Tiraspol. Ukrainian intelligence claimed these forces are mostly in Cobasna guarding the ammunition depot there as of May 3.

Supporting Effort #4—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine: (Russian objective: Withdraw combat power in good order for redeployment to eastern Ukraine)

There were no significant activities on this axis in the past 24 hours.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces will likely continue to merge offensive efforts southward of Izyum with westward advances from Donetsk in order to encircle Ukrainian troops in southern Kharkiv Oblast and Western Donetsk.
- Russia may change the status of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, possibly by merging them into a single “Donbas Republic” and/or by annexing them directly to Russia.
- Russian forces will likely attempt to starve out the remaining defenders of the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol and continue to mount air, artillery, and ground attacks
- Ukrainian counteroffensives around Kharkiv City may unhinge Russian positions northeast of the city, possibly forcing the Russians to choose between reinforcing those positions or abandoning them if the Ukrainians continue to press their counterattack.
- Russian forces may be preparing to conduct renewed offensive operations to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in the coming days.



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¹ [https://nv dot ua/ukr/ukraine/politics/gur-minoboroni-shcho-vidomo-pro-herson-i-donbas-interv-yu-nv-novini-ukrajini-50238690.html](https://nv-dot-ua/ukr/ukraine/politics/gur-minoboroni-shcho-vidomo-pro-herson-i-donbas-interv-yu-nv-novini-ukrajini-50238690.html)

² [https://armyinform dot com.ua/2022/05/03/rosiya-namagayetsya-vydaty-svoyu-agresiyu-proty-ukrayiny-za-tretyu-svitovu-czpd-rnbo/](https://armyinform-dot-com.ua/2022/05/03/rosiya-namagayetsya-vydaty-svoyu-agresiyu-proty-ukrayiny-za-tretyu-svitovu-czpd-rnbo/)

³ <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3017053/senior-defense-official-holds-a-background-briefing/>; https://twitter.com/ukraine_map/status/1521195694530433025;
<https://twitter.com/blacksmithVakul/status/1521035557794684928>

⁴ [https://t dot me/epoddubny/10306](https://t-dot-me/epoddubny/10306); https://twitter.com/ukraine_map/status/1521195694530433025;
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⁶ <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2239>; <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2265>; https://t.me/pavlokyrylenko_donoda/3248;
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- ¹⁰ <https://t.me/polkazov/4455>; <https://t.me/mariupolnow/9006>
- ¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/DefenceIntelligenceofUkraine/posts/303874791923948>
- ¹² <https://t.me/andriyshTime/624>
- ¹³ https://twitter.com/ukraine_map/status/1521195694530433025;
<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3017053/senior-defense-official-holds-a-background-briefing/>
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- ¹⁹ https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/7269
- ²⁰ https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/7279
- ²¹ https://t.me/mod_russia/15104; <https://t.me/faceofwar/19165>
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