

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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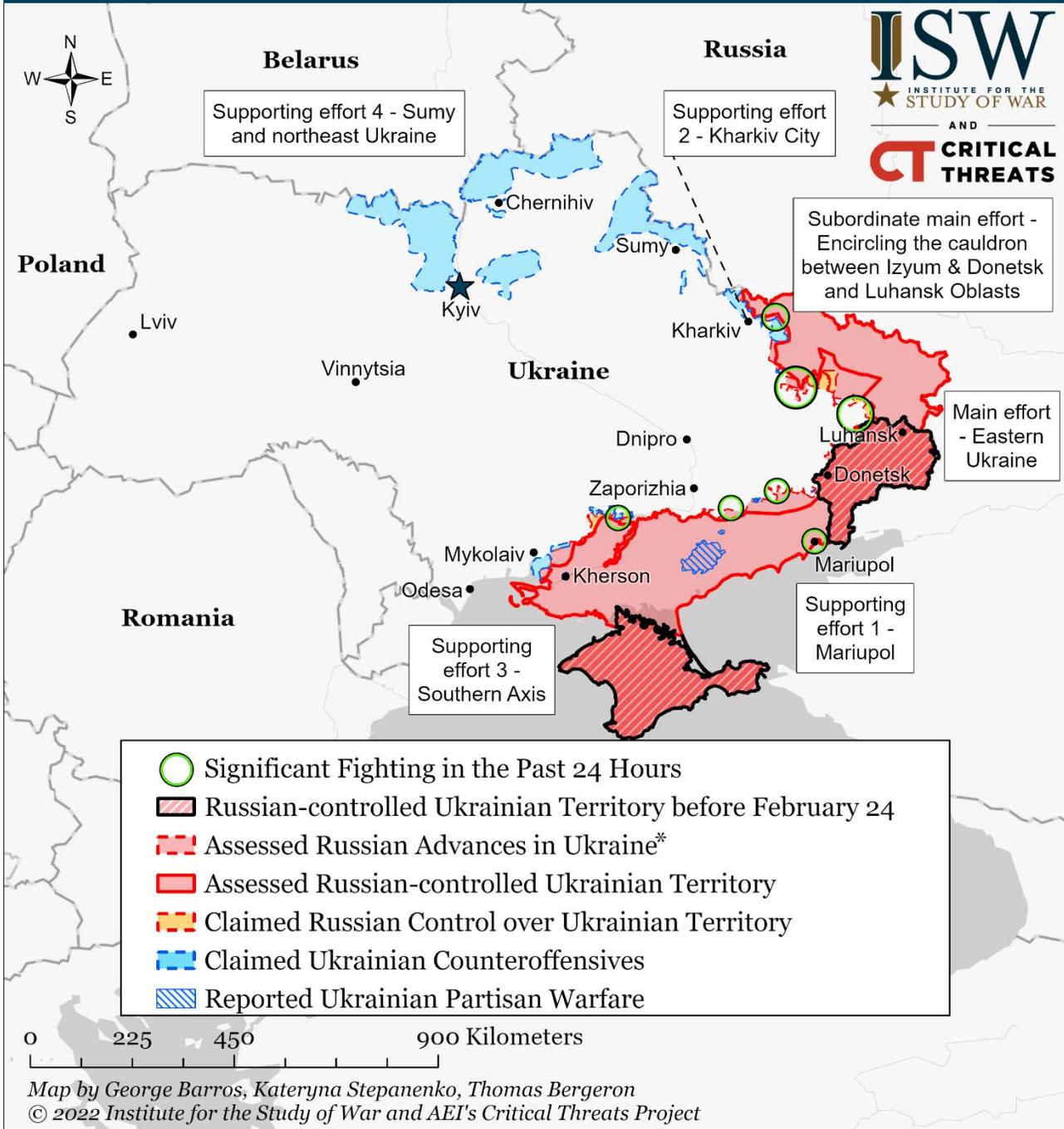
May 5, 7:00 pm ET

The Ukrainian counteroffensive out of Kharkiv city may disrupt Russian forces northeast of Kharkiv and will likely force Russian forces to decide whether to reinforce positions near Kharkiv or risk losing most or all of their positions within artillery range of the city. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zalyzhnyi stated on May 5 that Ukrainian forces are transitioning to counteroffensive operations around Kharkiv and Izyum, the first direct Ukrainian military statement of a shift to offensive operations. Ukrainian forces did not make any confirmed advances in the last 24 hours but repelled Russian attempts to regain lost positions. Russian forces made few advances in continued attacks in eastern Ukraine, and Ukrainian forces may be able to build their ongoing counterattacks and successful repulse of Russian attacks along the Izyum axis into a wider counteroffensive to retake Russian-occupied territory in Kharkiv Oblast.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued ineffectual offensive operations in southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts without securing any significant territorial gains in the past 24 hours.**
- **Ukrainian officials and military officers confirmed that Russian forces have breached the Azovstal facility itself and confirmed that Ukrainian forces are losing ground. Russian forces will likely capture the facility in the coming days.**
- **Ukrainian offensive operations around Kharkiv likely intend to push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv city, force Russian units to redeploy from the Izyum axis, and potentially threaten Russian lines of communication.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations toward Zaporizhia City but did not conduct any attacks in Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts in the last 24 hours. Ukrainian forces claimed to recapture additional territory west of Kherson, but ISW cannot independently confirm any advances.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 5, 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 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, retaining pressure on Kharkiv City, holding occupied territory on 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 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

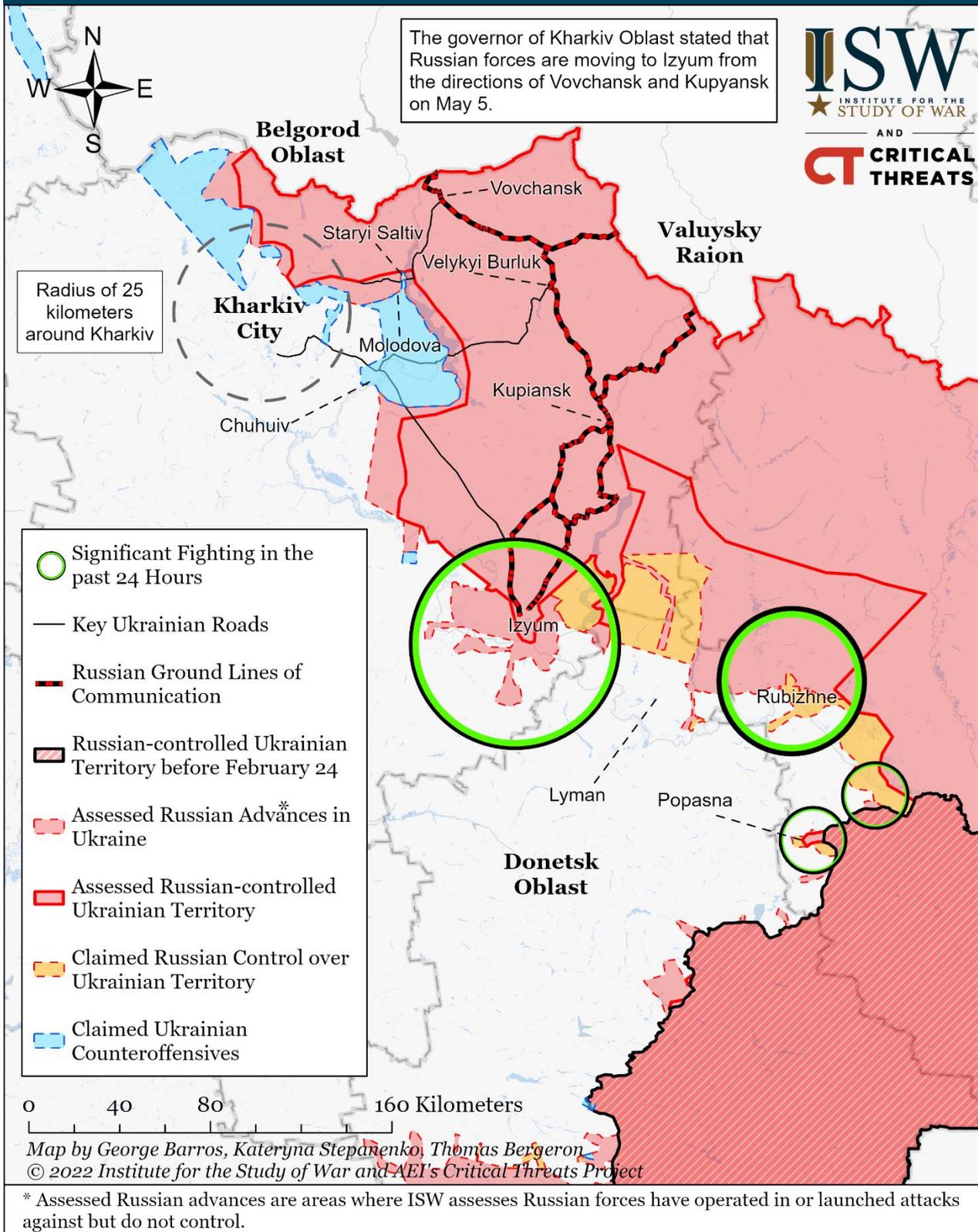
Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued ineffectual offensive operations in southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk Oblasts without securing any significant territorial gains in the past 24 hours. The Pentagon assessed that Russian forces have not been able to make further advances due to their inability to conduct offensive operations far from their ground lines of communication (GLOCs) along highways, as ISW previously assessed, and muddy terrain.¹ Russian GLOCs supporting the Izyum axis likely run from the Russian border to Kupyansk and Vovchansk, and local Kharkiv civilian authorities reported additional Russian reinforcements moving through these settlements towards the front line as of May 5.² Russian forces are reportedly suffering losses in stalled attacks along the Izyum axis, with the Ukrainian General Staff reporting that elements of the 4th Tank Division and the 106th Airborne Division withdrew to Russia after sustaining heavy losses in the past several days.³

Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks in Lyman, Severodonetsk, and Popasna, and maintained shelling along the line of contact in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.⁴ Russian forces also used thermobaric munitions against Ukrainian positions in Lyman and are unsuccessfully attempting to leverage massed artillery fire to break through Ukrainian defenses.⁵ Russian forces targeted grain facilities in Rubizhne and Soledar, a settlement located approximately 30 kilometers from Popasna, likely to deprive Ukrainian forces and civilians of supplies.⁶ The Donetsk People’s Republic claimed to

have seized Troitske (a village approximately 25 kilometers from occupied Horlivka) on May 5, but social media imagery confirmed that Ukrainian artillery inflicted heavy damage on Russian munitions depots, tanks, and armored personnel carriers in the area.⁷

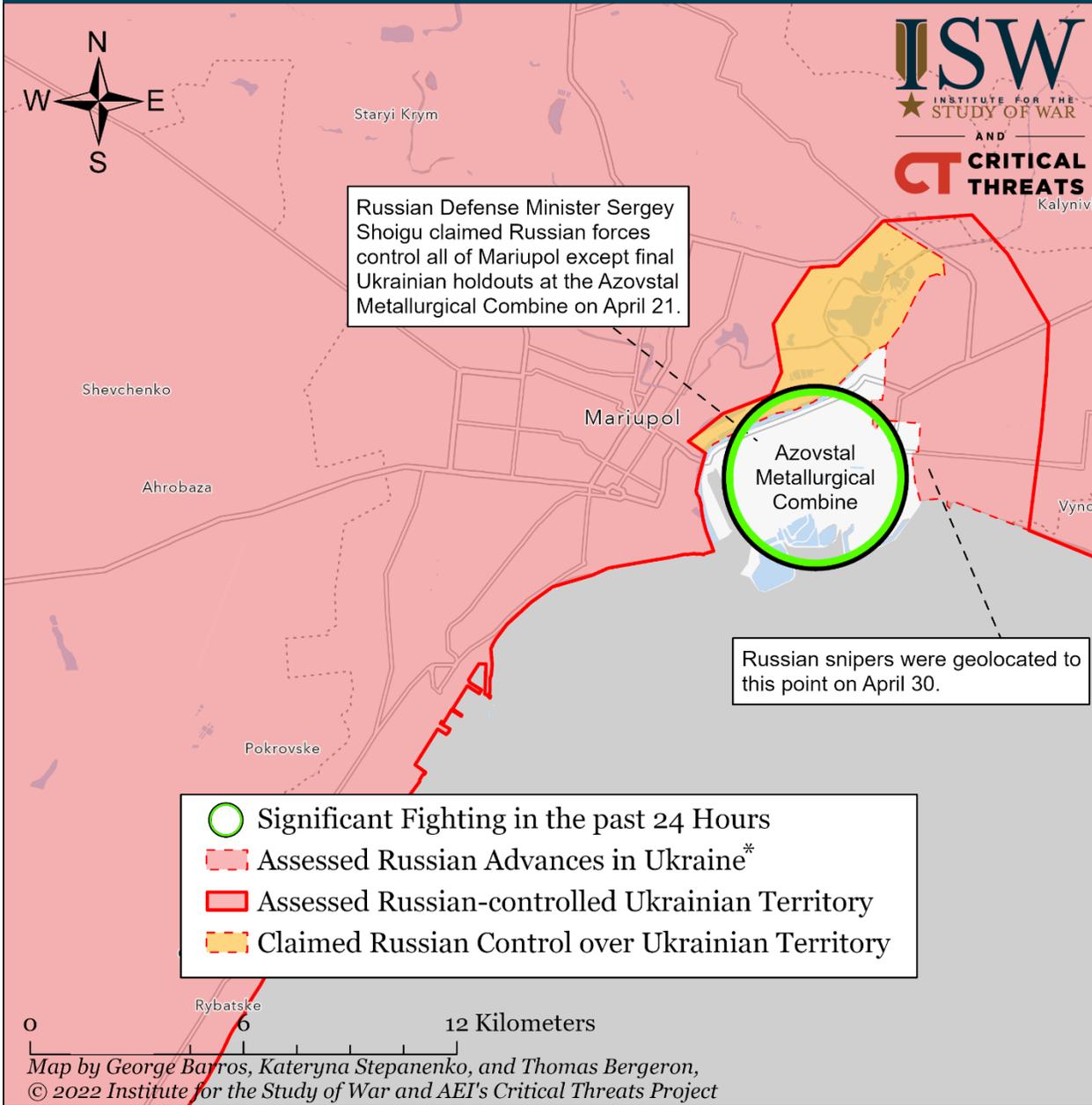
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 5, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

Russian forces continued assaults on the Azovstal Steel Plant with supporting airstrikes and naval artillery on May 5.⁸ Ukrainian officials and military officers confirmed that Russian forces have breached the Azovstal facility itself and that Ukrainian forces are losing ground.⁹ Azov Regiment Deputy Commander Svyatoslav Palamar released a video on Telegram reporting the current Russian assault began on May 3 and confirmed that Russian forces are inside the facility.¹⁰ Palamar said the remaining defenders and civilians were unable to evacuate on May 5, despite reports from the Ukrainian government that Russian and Ukrainian forces agreed to a ceasefire in Mariupol between May 5 and May 7.¹¹ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that 344 Mariupol residents, including over 150 evacuees from Azovstal, evacuated on May 4.¹² Russian forces will likely completely capture the Azovstal facility in the coming days, but Ukrainian forces have successfully tied down and degraded large numbers of Russian forces in Mariupol for several months.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of May 5, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



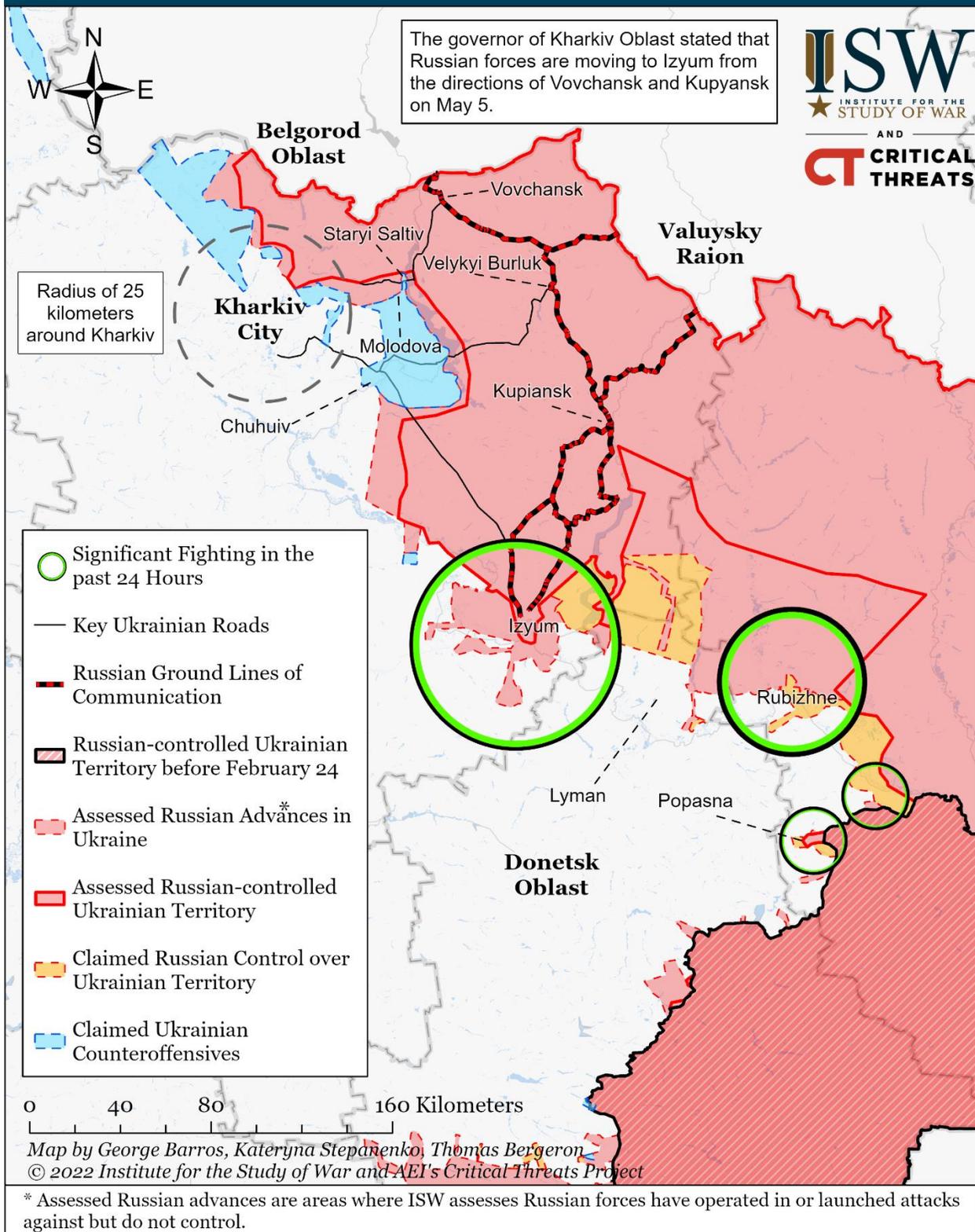
The Kremlin declared victory in Mariupol on April 21 after capturing the city besides Ukrainian holdouts in the encircled Azovstal Metallurgical Combine. Russian forces reportedly conducted an assault on the remaining Ukrainian defenders at Azovstal on May 4. Ukrainian forces engaged in small-scale street 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.

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

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.)

Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zalozhnyi stated on May 5 that Ukrainian forces are transitioning to counteroffensive operations around Kharkiv and Izyum, the first direct Ukrainian military statement of a shift to offensive operations.¹³ Ukrainian forces likely intend to push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv city, force Russian units to redeploy from the Izyum axis, and potentially threaten Russian lines of communication. Ukrainian forces did not make any confirmed advances in the last 24 hours but repelled Russian attempts to regain lost positions. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted an unsuccessful assault on Strykiv (approximately 40 kilometers east of Kharkiv City) on May 5, after Ukrainian forces liberated the settlement on May 2.¹⁴ Russian forces also reconnoitered Ukrainian positions and continued to shell Ukrainian positions in the northeastern outskirts of Kharkiv City.¹⁵ Pro-Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces blew up a bridge near the occupied settlement of Cherkaski Tishki, approximately 25 kilometers northeast of Kharkiv City, which could indicate an ongoing Ukrainian counterattack in the area targeting the bridge to interdict Russian movements.¹⁶

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 5, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

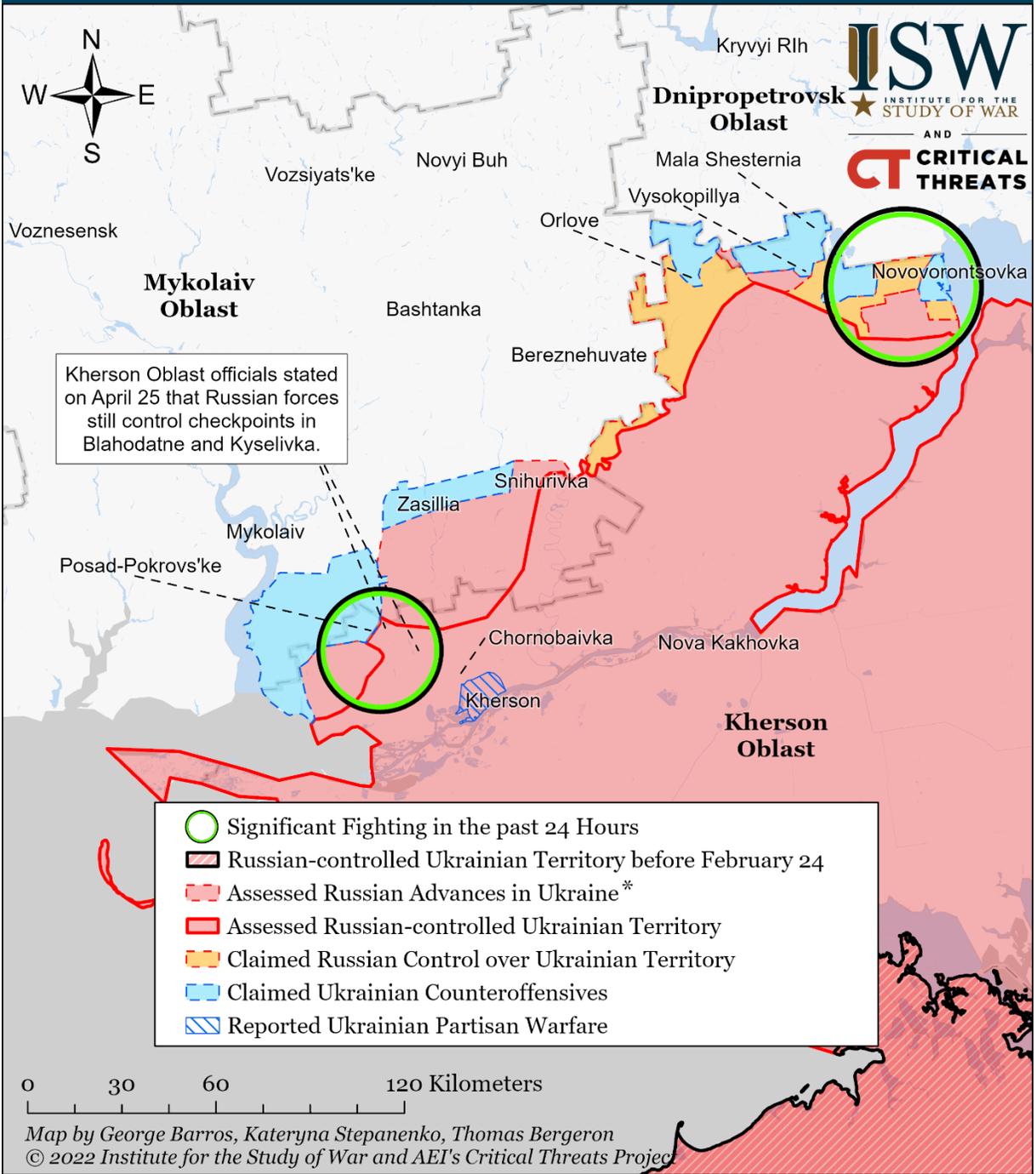


Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces continued offensive operations toward Zaporizhia City but did not conduct any attacks in Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts on May 5.¹⁷ Ukraine's Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian forces attacked Hulyaipole, near the Donetsk Oblast border, throughout the day.¹⁸ The Administration additionally stated up to 13 battalion tactical groups are concentrated on this line of advance toward Zaporizhia City or the Donetsk Oblast administrative borders from the west, though these battalion tactical groups (BTGs) are almost certainly understrength.¹⁹ Zaporizhia authorities noted that Russian forces operating in the region are more cautious than during the initial stage of the war and are increasing their use of reconnaissance assets.²⁰

Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in Kherson or Mykolaiv oblasts.²¹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces liberated unspecified villages along the border between Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts on May 5, but ISW cannot independently verify these claims.²² Ukraine's Operational Command South reported that Ukrainian forces successfully pushed Russian forces around 20 kilometers away from Mykolaiv City, possibly indicating that these liberated villages are in northwestern Kherson Oblast, though we have previously assessed that Ukrainian forces have taken most territory within this 20km arc and have not updated our maps with this Ukrainian claim.²³ Russian authorities in occupied Crimea claimed on May 5 that Russian forces restored railway connections between Crimea and Kherson Oblast for cargo and passenger trains, likely to improve logistics on the southern front.²⁴

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 5, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

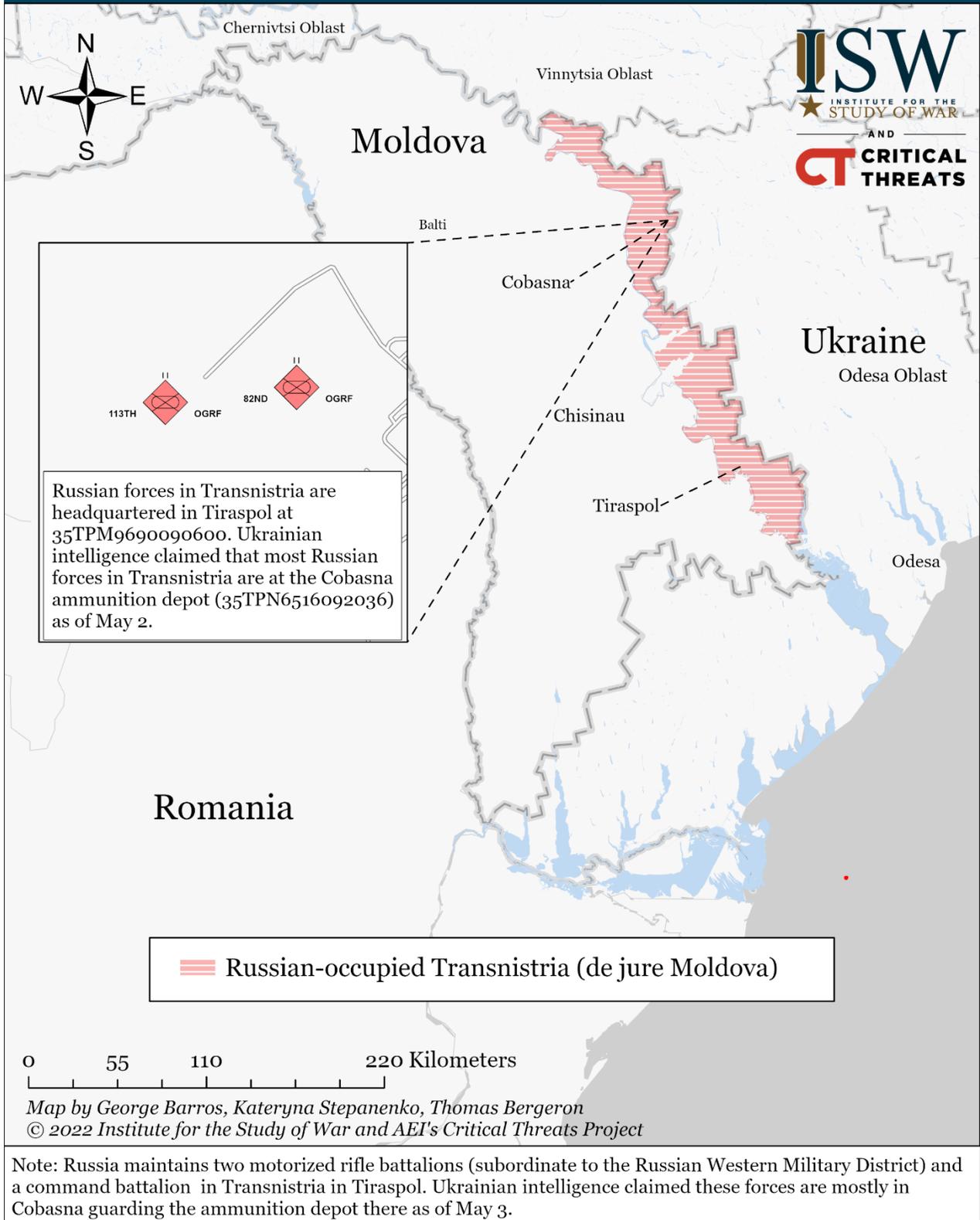


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Note: Ukraine's General Staff reported on May 5 that Ukrainian forces regained control over several unspecified settlements on the border of Mykolaiv and Kherson oblasts. Ukrainian forces also announced regaining control over four unspecified villages along the Kherson-Mykolaiv border on May 3. This is insufficient evidence and information to update our maps at this time. ISW will update our map once open sources name the liberated settlements.

Transnistrian media reported unspecified indiscriminate shooting near the Kuchurhan-Pervomaisc border checkpoint with Ukraine on May 5, two days after Ukraine blocked the crossing.²⁵ Transnistrian media claimed that Ukrainian forces are conducting military exercises in Pavlivka, a village on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border. Transnistrian Foreign Minister Vitaliy Ignatiev also claimed that Transnistrian forces neutralized another Ukrainian drone on May 5.²⁶ ISW cannot independently verify any of these Transnistrian claims. Ukraine's Operational Command South reported that the Transnistrian border is stable and that Ukrainian forces are taking counter-sabotage measures.²⁷ Russian forces and their Transnistrian proxy will likely continue to stage provocations to threaten Ukrainian forces with the possibility of a military operation out of Transnistria to fix Ukrainian forces in Odesa in place.

Moldova Situational Map as of May 5, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that some unidentified Belarusian units increased their combat readiness amid ongoing snap exercises on May 5.²⁸ Belarusian social media users spotted Belarusian forces deploying military equipment in the direction of Pinsk, a settlement near western Ukraine and on the way to Brest.²⁹ Belarusian forces remain highly unlikely to enter the war in Ukraine and likely aim to pin Ukrainian forces in place by threatening further action.

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 have apparently decided to seize the Azovstal plant through ground assault and will likely continue operations accordingly.
- 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://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3020478/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-holds-a-press-briefing/>

² <https://t.me/synegubov/3098>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/310027201310365>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/309656384680780>; <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2326>;

<https://www.facebook.com/JFTaskForce/posts/363927519095898>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1522189581654888448?cxt=HHwWgMC49YHX858qAAAA>;

<https://t.me/sashakots/32252>; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/310027201310365>;

⁶ <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1521887314120790023>;

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⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/309656384680780>; <https://t.me/mariupolnow/9205>;

<https://t.me/stranaua/40253>; <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1522203615921852416> https://m.vk.com/wall-123538639_2532794

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- ¹² https://t dot me/V_Zelenskiy_official/1500
- ¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/309839231329162>.
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- ¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/kargolow/status/1522256928436637696>; https://t.me/ukrainian_guide/1326 https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1522181194342965248?cxt=HHwWglC9yefu758qAAAA
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- ²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/okPivden/posts/2048688411969068>; <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=539888341038398>; <https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1521968047975710720?cxt=HHwWglCysYf4jp8qAAAA>; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/309656384680780>
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