

## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 18, 2023

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May 18, 2023, 7:30pm 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 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 cutoff for this product was 3pm ET on May 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.*

*Correction: ISW corrected an earlier version of this assessment to fix a splice in the Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis paragraph.*

**Ukrainian forces have seized the tactical initiative and made tactically significant gains around Bakhmut in counter-attack operations on May 18.** These operations are a continuation of the localized counter-attacks Ukrainian forces have been conducting for some days and do not reflect the start of a major new operation. Multiple Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces drove through the Russian defensive lines south and southwest of Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut) and northwest of Klishchiivka (6km southwest of Bakhmut) from the northwest.[1] The milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces retreated from positions north of Sakko i Vantsetti (15km north of Bakhmut) to positions south of the settlement, but that Ukrainian forces have not yet entered the settlement. Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed that Russian forces yielded 570 meters of territory north of Bakhmut, which is consistent with Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar's statement that Ukrainian forces had advanced 500 meters north of Bakhmut and 1,000 meters south of Bakhmut.[2] Ukrainian Eastern Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that Ukrainian forces advanced up to 1,700 meters in the past day, and the Ukrainian 3rd Separate Assault Brigade stated that the brigade's counterattacks expanded the Ukrainian salient in the Bakhmut area to 2,000 meters wide by 700 meters deep.[3]

**Ukrainian officials indicated that Ukrainian forces have seized the battlefield initiative in the Bakhmut area.** Cherevaty stated on May 18 that Ukrainian forces regained the battlefield initiative and are forcing Russian forces to respond to Ukrainian actions, including by transferring Russian Airborne (VDV) elements to Bakhmut's flanks to defend against the Ukrainian advances.[4] Malyar stated that Russian forces have deployed most of their reserves to the Bakhmut area, very likely to the detriment of other areas of the frontline.[5] ISW recently assessed that the Russian military command is reallocating military assets to the Bakhmut area in order to augment Wagner's offensive capabilities and to gain a tactical victory ahead of a Ukrainian counteroffensive.[6] The limited nature of Wagner's offensive operations in Bakhmut compared to the localized Ukrainian counterattacks underscores the loss of Russian initiative in the area. Russian milbloggers claimed that

Wagner forces began assaulting one of the final Ukrainian fortified areas in western Bakhmut.[7] Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official and prominent Russian information space voice Vladimir Rogov claimed that Wagner forces cut the Bakhmut-Chasiv Yar road in western Bakhmut on May 17, although ISW is unable to confirm this claim.[8] Prigozhin claimed that Wagner forces advanced 260 meters in Bakhmut and that Ukrainian forces only control 1.28 square kilometers of the city.[9] One milblogger optimistically claimed that Wagner forces increased their pace of advance following Russian ammunition deliveries to Wagner, though Prigozhin's claimed daily rate of advance has remained largely consistent.[10]

**Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin admitted on May 18 that Wagner mercenaries are unable to encircle the Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut due to the loss of stable flanks north and south of Bakhmut.** Prigozhin accused the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) of losing advantageous positions after MoD-subordinated units retreated from their positions on Bakhmut's flanks necessary for an encirclement.[11] Prigozhin and Wagner sources have long indicated Wagner's intent to encircle Bakhmut and trap Ukrainian forces but proved unable to do so after the Ukrainian military command decided to defend the city. ISW had previously assessed that Russian forces were unlikely to encircle Bakhmut after Wagner forces made several rapid breakthroughs north, south, and east of the city in winter-spring 2023.[12] Prigozhin likely anticipated that Ukrainian forces would entirely withdraw from Bakhmut out of fear of imminent encirclement and even offered to allow President Volodymyr Zelensky to withdraw Ukrainian forces from the city on March 3.[13] The Ukrainian defensive operation, however, prioritized the defense of the Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) west of Bakhmut, which forced Wagner forces into urban warfare and grinding directly through the city itself. Prigozhin's admission further supports Ukrainian officials' statements that Wagner is losing the initiative on the battlefield.

**Prigozhin and Wagner-affiliated milbloggers are blaming Russian conventional forces for military failures in and around Bakhmut.** Prigozhin directly appealed to Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov to hold Sakko i Vantsetti for at least few more days.[14] Prigozhin also blamed Gerasimov for the retreats of Russian conventional forces from Bakhmut's flanks.[15] A prominent Wagner-affiliated milblogger stated on May 18 that Russian forces lack the organization, fire support, coordination, and training necessary to defend the Bakhmut's flanks.[16] The milblogger complained that Russian forces allow Ukrainian forces to "drive a BMP [infantry fighting vehicle] for 15 minutes" into the Russian rear without destroying it, with the Ukrainian assault lasting only 16 minutes.[17] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces would not be able to drive an infantry fighting vehicle into the Ukrainian rear without Ukrainian forces destroying it.[18] The milblogger also claimed that Russian airborne forces attempted to occupy territory in the "grey zone" and Ukrainian forces immediately interdicted their efforts with artillery fire, making it impossible for Russian forces to move and gain a foothold in the targeted location.[19] A non-Wagner-affiliated milblogger noted the lack of coordination between Wagner and conventional Russian forces and claimed that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) needs "competent command and control" to strengthen interactions between Russian forces and Wagner fighters for operations after Bakhmut.[20]

**Prigozhin's efforts to blame the Russian military for failures around Bakhmut are causing some ultranationalists to accuse him of using the Battle for Bakhmut to satisfy his personal ambitions.** Russian serviceman and prominent ultranationalist Andrey Morozov (known under the alias Murz) criticized a Wagner-affiliated Telegram channel for wrongfully

attributing successful artillery fire of the 4th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 2nd Army Corps to Wagner mercenaries.[21] Morozov argued that Prigozhin's claims that Russian conventional forces are abandoning the flanks is another part of Prigozhin's narratives aimed at saving his forces at the expense of other units that deployed to reinforce Wagner forces. Morozov accused Prigozhin of improving his financial standing at the expense of the war while setting up reinforcement units for failure and claimed that elements of 4th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade nearly all died when attempting to secure the flanks southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka. Morozov also claimed that Prigozhin is blaming conventional units in order to promote himself. ISW assessed on May 17 that Russian strongmen (*siloviki*) are attempting to discredit Prigozhin by accusing him of attempting to use victory in Bakhmut to further his political aspirations in Russia.[22] Morozov's criticism is notable as it may indicate a shift in ultranationalists' perception of Prigozhin.

**Russian forces conducted another large-scale missile strike across Ukraine on the night of May 17 to 18, targeting Kyiv for the ninth time since the beginning of May.[23]**

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces launched 22 Kh-101/555 air-launched cruise missiles, six Kalibr sea-launched cruise missiles from Black Sea vessels, and two Iskander-K ground-launched cruise missiles at Kyiv, Odesa, and Mykolaiv cities.[24] Ukrainian Commander in Chief General Valeriy Zaluzhnyi reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed 29 cruise missiles, two Shahed-136/131 drones, and two reconnaissance drones.[25] Russian forces are likely attempting to use reconnaissance drones after launching missile strikes to locate Patriot air defense systems.

**The Kremlin continues to strengthen domestic repression measures likely to encourage self-censorship and prepare Russian society for a prolonged war.**

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on May 17 amending the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Regulations to expand the responsibility and reach of the FSB.[26] The amendment explicitly states that the FSB is responsible for state security issues within its powers, strengthens the FSB and its director's powers in matters of information security. This allows the FSB head to determine the conditions for FSB personnel combining FSB work and military service. These amendments are likely part of a prolonged effort to expand the FSB's domestic power, and ISW has previously reported on the FSB expanding its powers and involvement in the war in Ukraine.[27] Russian opposition news outlet *Meduza* reported on May 18 that Russian authorities conducted mass searches of residences of individuals allegedly associated with the Congress of People's Deputies and former Russian State Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomarev under the accusation of spreading false information about the Russian military.[28] Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on May 18 that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) Russian State Duma deputies are preparing a bill to punish "Russophobia" with fines of 100,000 to 300,000 rubles (about \$1,250 to \$3,730), and up to five years in prison, or service in a forced labor colony.[29] ISW previously reported on Russian efforts to criminalize "Russophobia" as another method of domestic repression and censorship.[30]

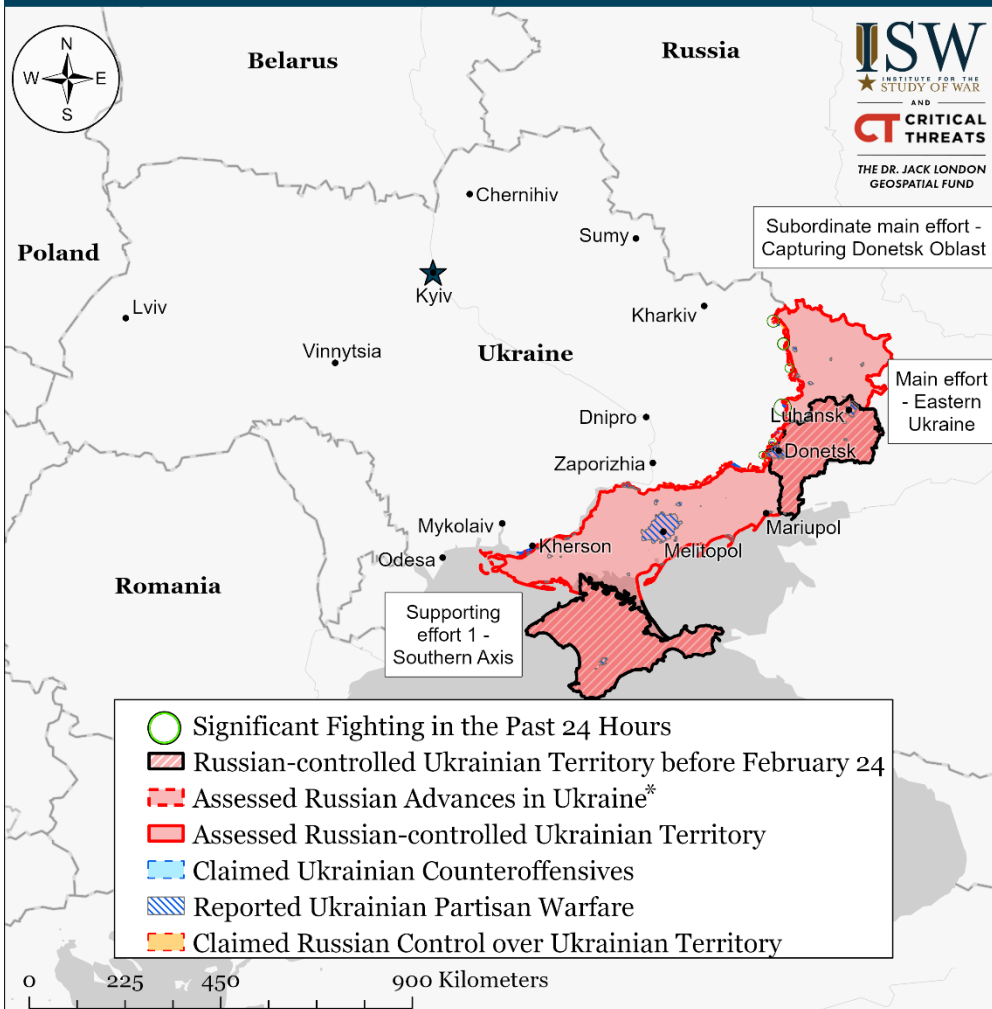
**NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO may discuss the possible provision of Western fighter jets to Ukraine at the June Defense Ministers meeting.[31]**

Stoltenberg told German outlet *Der Spiegel* on May 18 that NATO members are "constantly discussing whether modern Western fighters are needed in both Europe and Ukraine," adding that the provision of fighter jets to Ukraine will also require ammunition, spare parts, and "round-the-clock" aircraft maintenance.[32]

## Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces have seized the tactical initiative and made tactically significant gains around Bakhmut in counter-attack operations on May 18.**
- **Ukrainian officials indicated that Ukrainian forces have seized the battlefield initiative in the Bakhmut area.**
- **Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin admitted on May 18 that Wagner mercenaries are unable to encircle the Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut due to the loss of stable flanks north and south of Bakhmut.**
- **Prigozhin and Wagner-affiliated milbloggers are blaming Russian conventional forces for military failures in and around Bakhmut.**
- **Prigozhin's efforts to blame the Russian military for failures around Bakhmut are causing some ultranationalists to accuse him of using the Battle for Bakhmut to satisfy his personal ambitions.**
- **Russian forces conducted another large-scale missile strike across Ukraine on the night of May 17 to 18, targeting Kyiv for the ninth time since the beginning of May.**
- **The Kremlin continues to strengthen domestic repression measures likely to encourage self-censorship and prepare Russian society for a prolonged war.**
- **NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO may discuss the possible provision of Western fighter jets to Ukraine at the June Defense Ministers meeting.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks northeast of Kupyansk and along the Svatove-Kreminna line.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks on the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line.**
- **Unknown actors, possibly Ukrainian partisans, attacked a Russian rail line in Crimea.**
- **The Russian Supreme Court ruled on May 18 that Russian military personnel who voluntarily surrender on the battlefield will be prosecuted under treason charges.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue to announce patronage programs with Russian federal subjects to support infrastructure projects in occupied territories.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

\* 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.

***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 these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.***

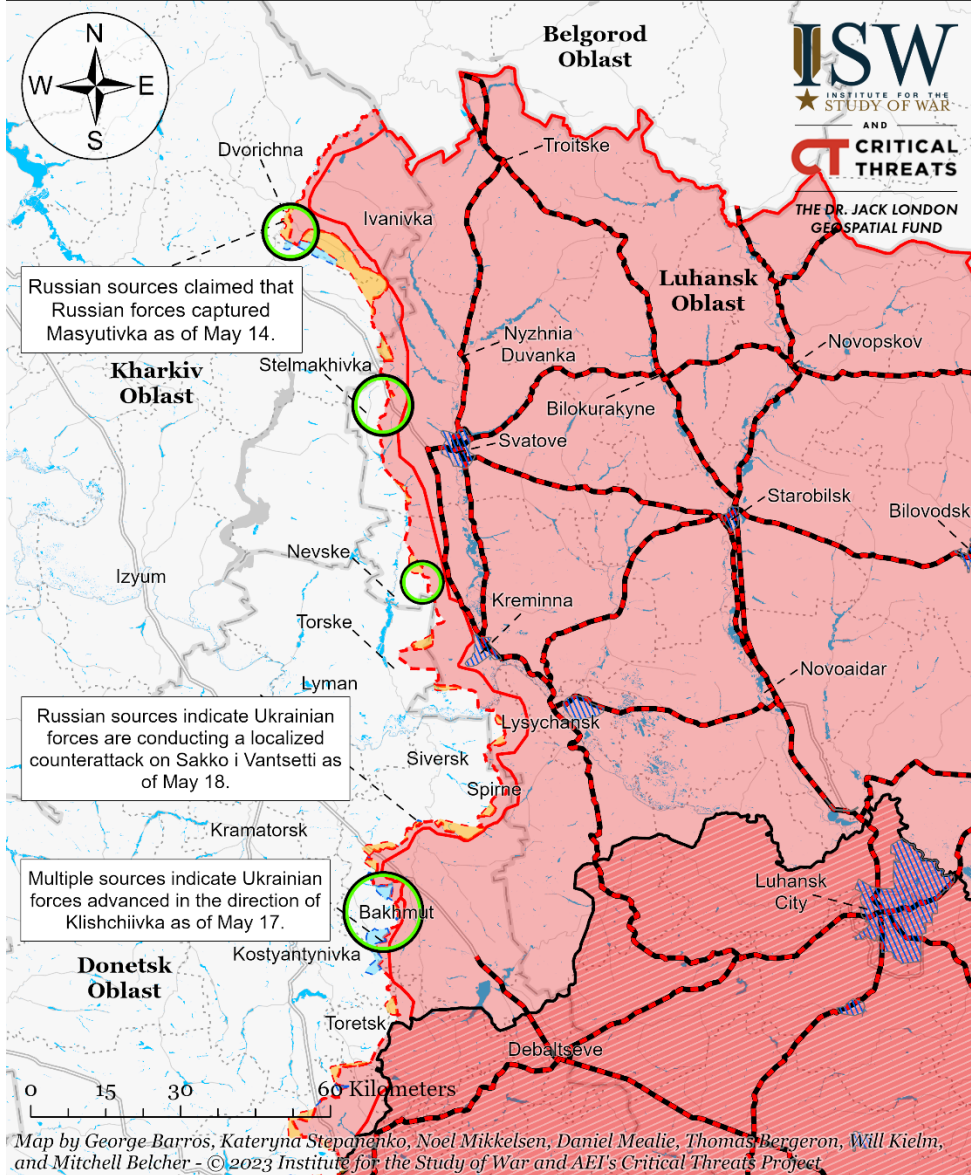
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks northeast of Kupyansk and along the Svatove-Kreminna line on May 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Masyutivka (13km northeast of Kupyansk), Novoselivske (14km northwest of Svatove), and Nevske (19km northwest of Kreminna).[33] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russia forces attacked near Masyutivka and Stelmakhivka (15km northwest of Svatove) and failed to advance near Novoselivske.[34] The Ukrainian National Guard’s Main Administration Department of Application Planning Deputy Director Colonel Mykola Urshalovych reported that Russian forces are recruiting additional BARS (Russian Army Combat Reserve) and “Storm-Z” formations composed of criminals to operate in the Lyman direction and that this recruitment signals that Russian forces are critically exhausted.[35] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that the 27th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Guards Tank Army, Western Military District) and 138th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) repelled two Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups in the Kupyansk direction. The MoD also claimed that elements of the 98th Airborne (VDV) Division repelled two sabotage and reconnaissance groups southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova.[36]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of May 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Masyutivka as of May 14.

Russian sources indicate Ukrainian forces are conducting a localized counterattack on Sako i Vantseti as of May 18.

Multiple sources indicate Ukrainian forces advanced in the direction of Klishchiivka as of May 17.

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- 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.

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 Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

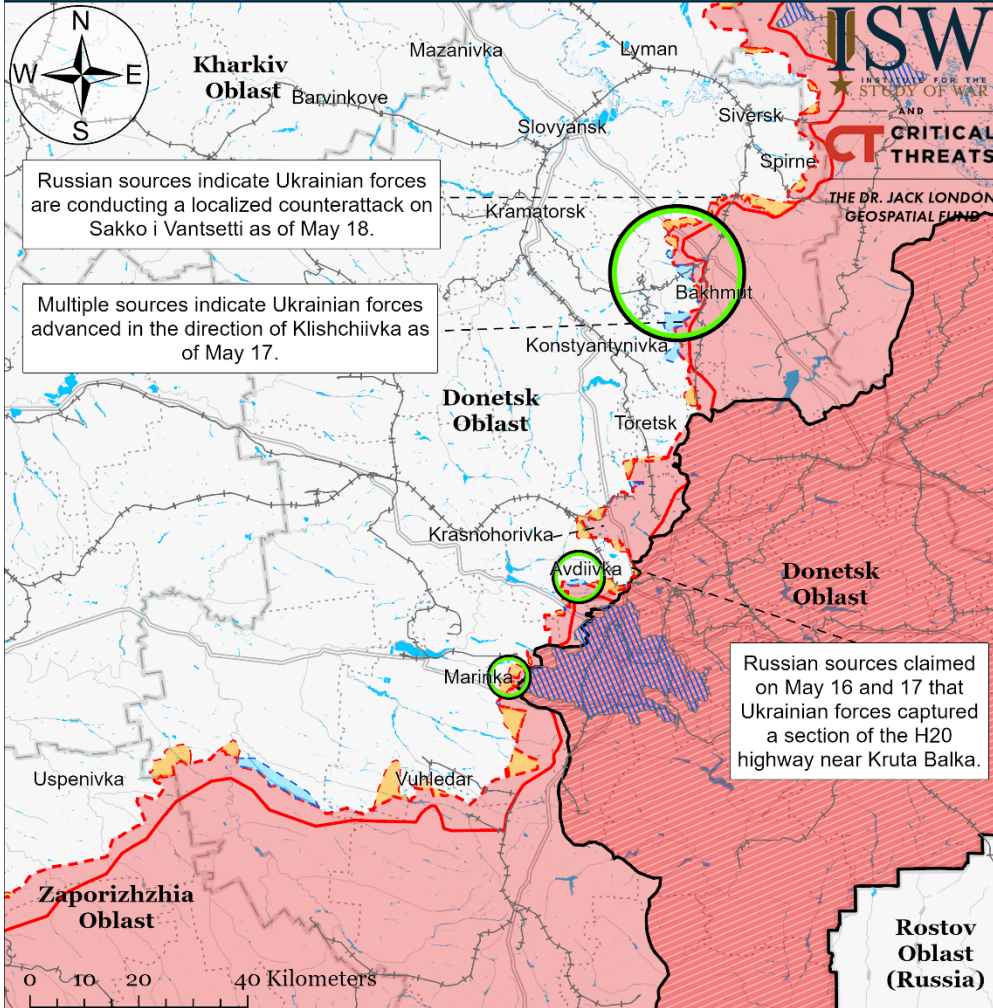
See topline text on Bakhmut.

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks on the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on May 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations towards Sieverne (5km west of Avdiivka) and Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka).[37] A Russian milblogger complained that Marinka is the only area of the front where Russian forces advance, and another source claimed that Ukrainian forces control less than one square kilometer of territory in Marinka.[38] Footage published on May 18 purportedly shows artillery elements of the 114th Brigade and 2nd Infantry Battalion of the 87th Regiment (1st Donetsk People’s Republic Army Corps) operating near Avdiivka, and elements of the 110th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People’s Republic Army Corps) operating near Nevelske (15km southwest of Avdiivka).[39]

Russian forces did not conduct confirmed or claimed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on May 18.[40] Video footage published on May 17 purportedly shows artillery elements of the 40th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Pacific Fleet operating near Vuhledar.[41]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of May 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian sources indicate Ukrainian forces are conducting a localized counterattack on Sakko i Vantsetti as of May 18.

Multiple sources indicate Ukrainian forces advanced in the direction of Klischiivka as of May 17.

Russian sources claimed on May 16 and 17 that Ukrainian forces captured a section of the H20 highway near Kruta Balka.

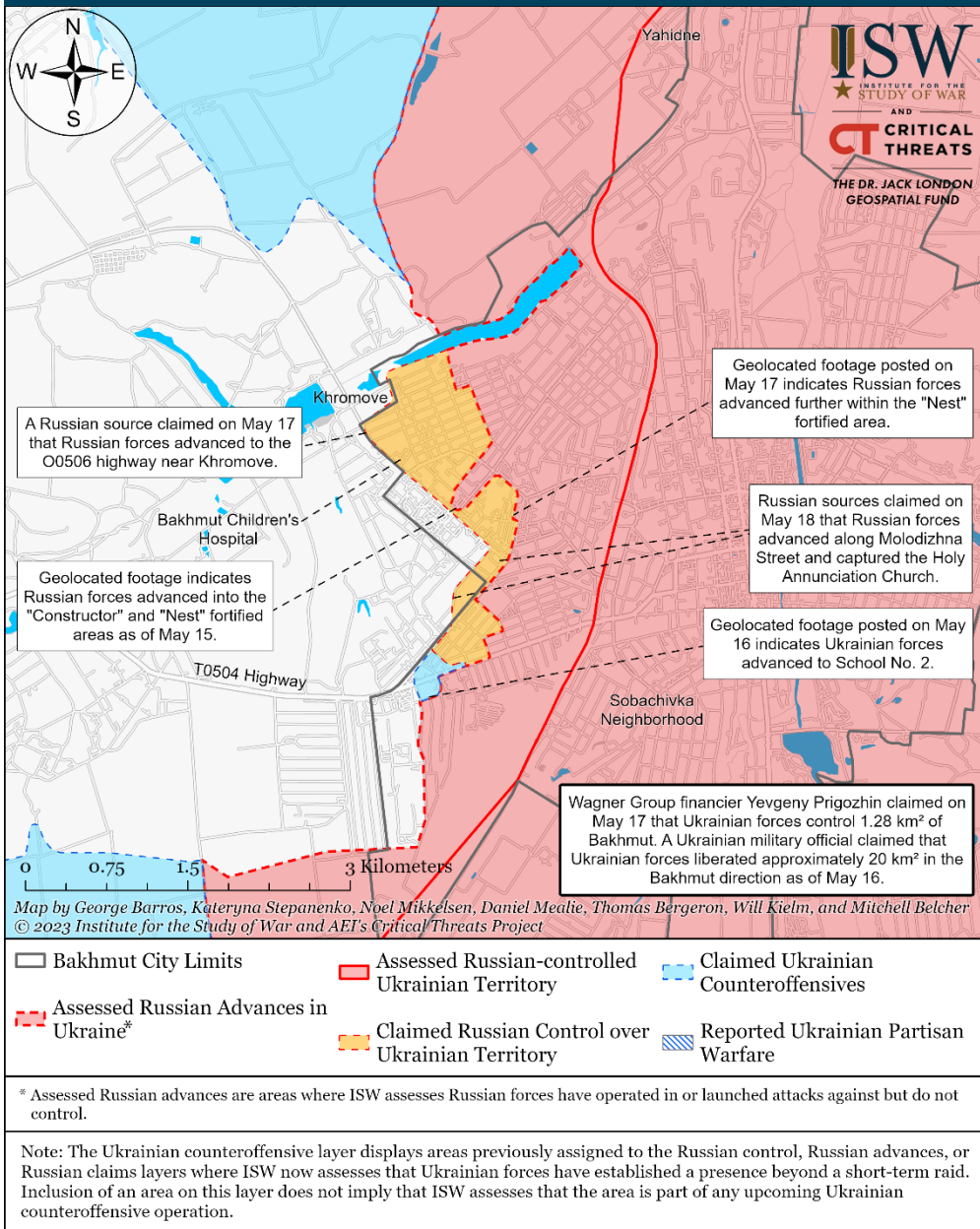
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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

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# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of May 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



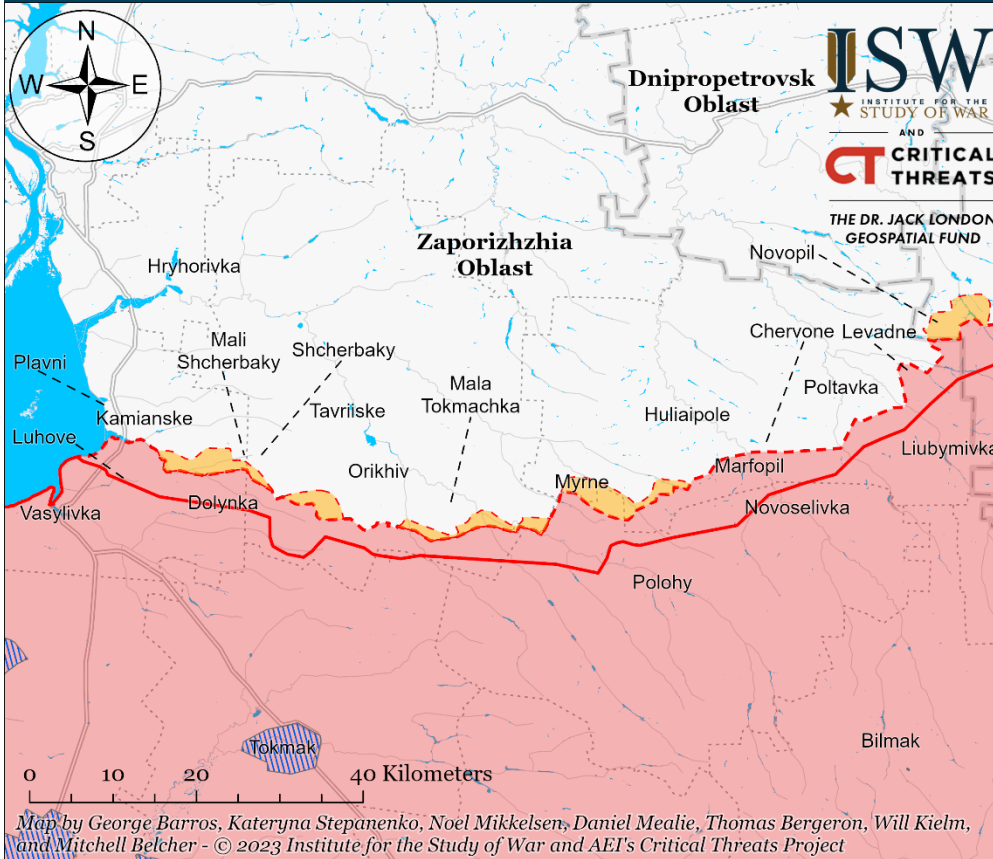
## Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a failed raid across the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast on May 17. The milblogger claimed that Russian forces prevented Ukrainian forces from landing but that Ukrainian activity near the Dnipro River delta islands has increased recently.[42] Ukrainian forces have routinely conducted raids across the Dnipro River for some time.

A Ukrainian official stated that Russian forces artificially raised the water level in the Kakhovka Reservoir, hindering Russian defensive operations. Ukrainian Southern Forces Joint Press Center Head Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces flooded their own positions on the reservoir banks, sustaining losses and igniting scandal.[43] Humenyuk also stated that Russian forces rely on stolen boats for logistics to the Dnipro delta islands.

Unknown actors, possibly Ukrainian partisans, attacked a Russian rail line in Crimea on May 18.[44] Crimean occupation officials claimed that unspecified “unauthorized persons” detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) along a railway on the southwestern outskirts of Simferopol near Chystenke, derailing eight train cars.[45] Geolocated imagery shows the aftermath of the derailment.[46] No Ukrainian sources, Ukrainian partisan groups acknowledged responsibility but Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov attributed the attack to saboteurs.[47] Aksyonov announced later on May 18 that authorities completed repairs to the track and the railway will resume freight and passenger traffic on May 19.[48]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of May 18, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

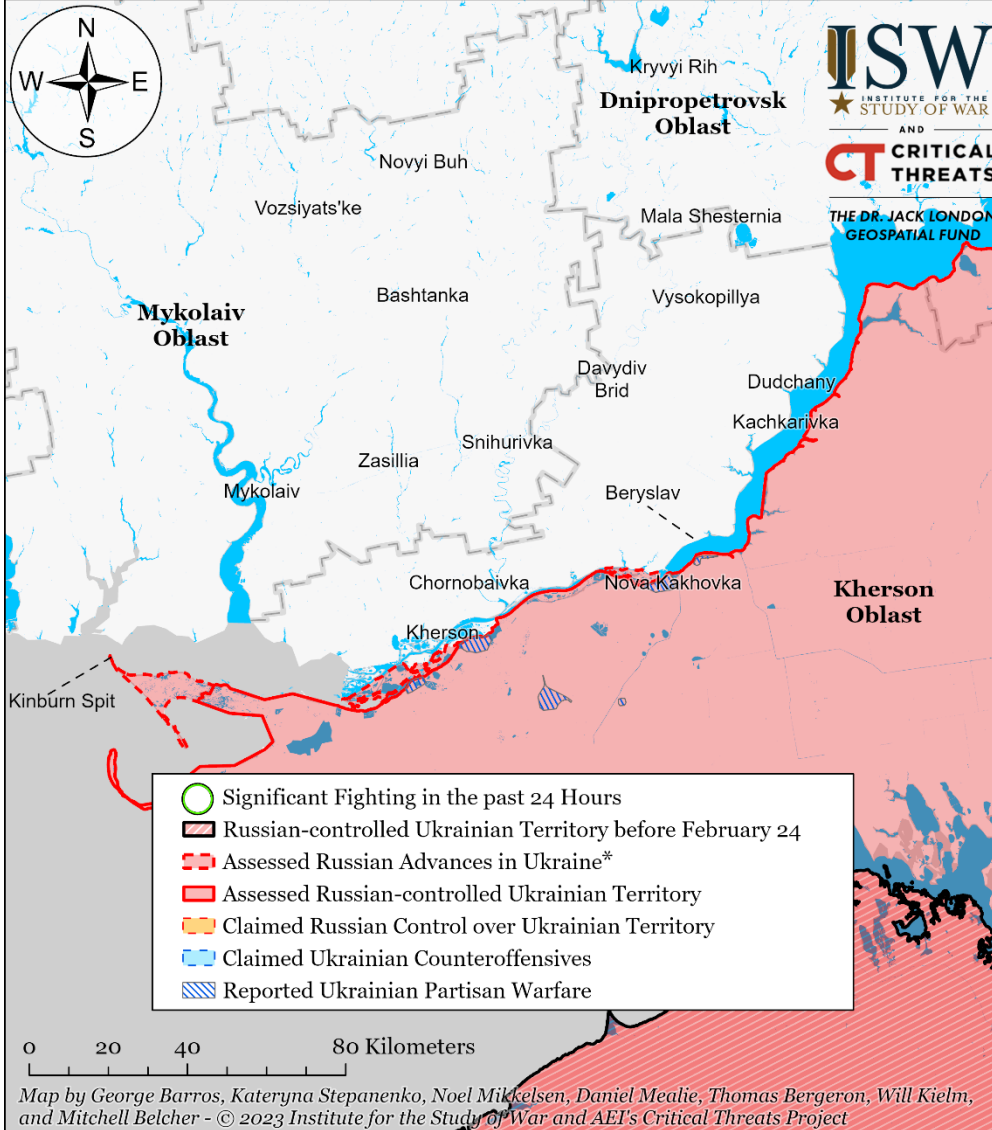


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian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

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

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# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 18, 2023, 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 Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

The Russian Supreme Court ruled on May 18 that Russian military personnel who voluntarily surrender on the battlefield will be prosecuted under treason charges.[49] The Supreme Court

clarified that Russian military personnel are committing a crime if they voluntarily and knowingly surrender to enemy forces when it was possible to resist capture. The Supreme Court ruled that a Russian serviceman may be released from criminal responsibility only if he did not previously voluntarily surrender, undertook all possible measures to ensure his release, returned to his location of service, and did not commit other crimes while in detention. Wounded servicemen or personnel who are unable to resist due to a physical condition are not criminally liable for treason. The Russian judicial system is likely establishing conditions for the persecution and punishment of captured Russian prisoners of war given its previous mistreatment of wrongfully mobilized personnel.[50]

The Russian State Duma is considering several bills incentivizing recruitment efforts and financial support for the war effort. Russian State Duma officials submitted a draft law that will grant indefinite academic leave to college students who decide to participate in the war.[51] Russian students currently can take an academic leave for up to two years, and the bill is likely an attempt to incentivize enlistment among students. Russian State Duma officials also introduced a draft law that will establish a one percent tax from purchases at restaurants, night clubs, and bars to support the war effort.[52]

Russia reportedly continues to suffer shortages of combat-ready military personnel and is attempting to exploit all sources of recruitment to sustain the war effort in Ukraine. Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that Russians are committing remaining Wagner personnel, criminals, BARS (combat army reserve), territorial troops, and conventional units mostly staffed with mobilized servicemen to unspecified frontlines in Ukraine.[53] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian forces are coercing Russian veterans of the Afghanistan war to undergo military training in occupied Kerch Raion, Crimea.[54] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger published footage showing a Russian veteran who served in Afghanistan in the Avdiivka area.[55] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported that Russian forces are coercing Ukrainian men into military service and noted that Russians are training Russian prisoners in training camps in Rohove and Mozhnikivka, Luhansk Oblast.[56] Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that personnel of Rosgvardia's 96th Operational Regiment deployed to Ukraine.[57]

The Russian military command is reportedly reactivating the Soviet-era 25th Combined Arms Army (CAA) to integrate Russian recruits from the Far East. The 25th CAA participated in Soviet-Japanese War in 1945 and was ultimately disbanded in 1957. Russian independent outlet *MobilizationNews* reported that residents of the Russian Far East began receiving messages recruiting men to join the 25th CAA.[58]

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu visited a training ground on May 18 where Western Military District's contract servicemen train before deploying to Ukraine.[59] Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces Army General Oleg Salyukov claimed that officers who participated in the Russian war in Ukraine are training new recruits. Shoigu's meeting is likely part of an ongoing attempt to promote military enlistment.

### **Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)**

Russian occupation authorities continue to announce patronage programs with Russian federal subjects to support infrastructure projects in occupied territories. Luhansk People's Republic (LNR)

Head Leonid Pasechnik stated on May 18 that Volgograd Oblast will support 59 infrastructure projects in Alchevsk, Luhansk Oblast, of which Volgograd Oblast is a formal patron.[60] Pasechnik stated that specialists from Chelyabinsk Oblast repaired two electric trains belonging to the “Luhansk Railway” on May 17, and that builders from Krasnoyarsk Krai are helping restore social infrastructure in Sverdlovsk Raion in occupied Luhansk Oblast.[61] Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin stated that he and Chukotka Autonomous Okrug Governor Vladislav Kuznetsov discussed on May 18 areas for possible economic cooperation, as well as plans to restore Debaltseve, of which Chukotka is a formal patron.[62]

**Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.)**

**ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.**

Independent Belarusian monitoring organization the Hajun Project reported on May 18 that satellite imagery shows a line of dragon’s teeth anti-tank structures in the vicinity of Gomel near the M8 highway 20km from the border with Ukraine.[63] The Hajun Project also reported that satellite imagery shows construction, likely of fortifications, taking place near the dragon’s teeth.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense published footage on May 18 showing Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko addressing the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Parliamentary assembly and calling the Ukrainian counteroffensive “misinformation.”[64]

**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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[1] <https://t.me/brussininf/6006>, <https://t.me/brussininf/6003>, [https://rybar dot ru/piwigo/upload/2023/05/18/20230518002720-e2a2370f.jpg](https://rybar.ru/piwigo/upload/2023/05/18/20230518002720-e2a2370f.jpg); <https://t.me/brussininf/6010>; <https://t.me/vrogov/9591>; [https://t.me/grey\\_zone/18674](https://t.me/grey_zone/18674); [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/86160](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/86160); <https://t.me/NeoficialniyBeZsonoV/25502>; <https://t.me/voenkorrKotenok/47695>; <https://t.me/wargonz0/12592>

[2] [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/990](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/990); <https://t.me/annamaliar/764>

[3] [https://armyinform dot com.ua/2023/05/18/za-mynulu-dobu-nashi-pidrozdily-poblyzu-bahmuta-prosunulys-upered-na-vidstan-vid-150-do-1700-metriv-sergij-cherevatyj/](https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/05/18/za-mynulu-dobu-nashi-pidrozdily-poblyzu-bahmuta-prosunulys-upered-na-vidstan-vid-150-do-1700-metriv-sergij-cherevatyj/); [https://suspilne dot media/479689-projsli-vpered-do-1700-metriv-cerevatij-rozkazav-pro-prosuvanna-sil-oboroni-poblizu-bahmuta/](https://suspilne.media/479689-projsli-vpered-do-1700-metriv-cerevatij-rozkazav-pro-prosuvanna-sil-oboroni-poblizu-bahmuta/); <https://www.facebook.com/ab3.army/posts/196011223374753>; <https://suspilne>

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[4] <https://armyinform dot com.ua/2023/05/18/za-mynulu-dobu-nashi-pidrozdiy-poblyzu-bahmuta-prosunulys-upered-na-vidstan-vid-150-do-1700-metriv-sergij-cherevatyj/>; <https://suspilne dot media/479689-projsli-vpered-do-1700-metriv-cerevatij-rozkazav-pro-prosuvanna-sil-oboroni-poblizu-bahmuta/>

[5] <https://t.me/annamaliar/764>

[6] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-16-2023>

[7] <https://t.me/rybar/47231>; [https://t.me/z\\_arhiv/21421](https://t.me/z_arhiv/21421); <https://t.me/brussininf/6003>; <https://t.me/milchronicles/1939>; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/86153](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/86153)

[8] <https://t.me/vrogov/9591>

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