



## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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**May 7, 2024, 6:15pm ET**

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on May 7. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 8 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Russian President Vladimir Putin began his fifth term as Russian President on May 7 and stressed Russia's need for unchallenged autocratic rule while indirectly calling for victory in Ukraine.**[1] Putin thanked Russian citizens, the residents of Russia's "historical lands," participants in the "special military operation," and those who have "defended the right to be together with the motherland," and called on Russia to unite for victory. Putin did not specify what this Russian victory entails and only vaguely referenced Russia's "serious challenges." Putin has long justified his effort to destroy Ukrainian statehood by claiming that Russia is fighting for "historic lands" in Ukraine and coming to the aid of "compatriots abroad" who desire to reunite with Russia.[2] Putin likely intended to acknowledge the war without setting heightened expectations for Russian prospects in Ukraine with his vague call for victory. Putin more heavily suggested that Russia "needs" strong autocratic rule, claiming that the Russia state and socio-political system must be strong and must resist any challenges and threats in order to ensure the development, unity, and independence of Russia. Putin added that his ability to fulfill his duties as president depends on Russian unity and cohesion and warned Russians to remember historical lessons "about the tragic price of internal turmoil and upheaval." Putin has routinely invoked historical parallels to justify his own increasingly autocratic rule by suggesting that autocracy is a Russian tradition and has regularly argued that without unchallenged autocracy Russia would lose its sovereignty.[3] Putin notably alluded in October 2022 to the Pugachev Rebellion that challenged Catherine the Great's authority in the mid-1770s to warn deceased Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin about challenging the Kremlin, a warning that did not prevent Prigozhin from launching his own failed rebellion in June 2023.[4] Putin had observed in 2022 that the Pugachev Rebellion occurred because the "weakening of the central power" caused someone to claim that he was the tsar. Putin's inauguration speech was otherwise filled with tired, boilerplate rhetoric and vague calls for national triumph, and his focus on internal stability indicates that Putin likely sought

to emphasize to the Russian public that his fifth term as president will continue to be increasingly autocratic.

**Russian ultranationalists lauded the start of Putin's fifth term as a historic event and explicitly approved of the autocratic tradition in which Putin is casting himself, with one of them hailing him as "imperator," the formal title of the Russian tsars since the time of Peter the Great.** Russian ultranationalists claimed that Putin's fifth term would be a new stage for Russia and expressed hope that Putin would make meaningful changes to government officials and military commanders.[5] Several ultranationalist Russian milbloggers attended the inauguration, including Alexander "Sasha" Kots, who is on the Kremlin Human Rights Council, and Kremlin-affiliated *WarGonzo* Telegram channel founder Semyon Pegov.[6] The *WarGonzo* channel marked the inauguration by describing Putin as Russia's *imperator*, the Russian literal translation of emperor, and notably the official title of the Russian tsars from 1721 to 1917.[7] *WarGonzo* dubbed Putin's fifth his "imperial term" and asserted that the presidential term is only presidential in law but not in character.[8] Many Russian ultranationalists have long embraced Putin's autocratic character, and the unabashed praise for Putin as emperor from a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger suggests that the Kremlin is likely coordinating with co-opted milbloggers to justify the Kremlin's increasing autocracy.

**Russian ultranationalists also expressed hope that Putin will continue to deepen an anti-Western ideology that the Kremlin has been heavily developing since the start of the full-scale invasion.** *WarGonzo* claimed that Putin carried out a "coup d'etat" against a "globalist" Russian elite who have ruled Russia since Boris Yeltsin's presidency following the collapse of the Soviet Union.[9] *WarGonzo* claimed that Putin had given Russian elites a choice during the past two years of the war in Ukraine to cut ties with other "globalists and oligarchs" and support Russia's current path, and implied that Putin would soon begin to disempower the elites who chose poorly by continuing the war in Ukraine and pursuing a new domestic political course.[10] *WarGonzo's* calls to cut ties with "globalists" likely refers to permanently severing economic ties between the West and Russia, and *WarGonzo's* focus on breaking with the precedents set during Yeltsin's presidency likely includes both the enrichment of Russia's oligarchs as well as Russia's attempted democratization and involvement in Western multilateral bodies.[11] *WarGonzo's* claims and hopes are reflective of an increasingly widespread and entrenched anti-Western ideological viewpoint in Russia, one that Putin will likely continue to foster in his fifth term. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* recently reported that a source close to the Russian Presidential Administration claimed that Putin is focused on conservatism, removing all dissenters, achieving victory in the war in Ukraine, and "turning to the East." [12] The Kremlin is currently attempting to forge a multilateral partnership with the People's Republic of China (PRC), Iran, and North Korea. This will likely intensify the Kremlin's use of anti-Western ideology to justify this effort.[13] The Kremlin has been attempting to establish a more coherent ideology for the war in Ukraine and Russia's expansionist future, and anti-Western sentiment appears to be one of the most consistent ideological narratives the Kremlin has pursued and will likely be a main element of whatever ideology the Kremlin establishes.[14]

**The current Russian cabinet of ministers and Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin formally resigned on May 7 as constitutionally mandated, and the ministers who return to service and the ones whom Putin replaces will indicate who has Putin's favor and signal his political priorities for his fifth term.**[15] The Russian Constitution requires that the current cabinet of ministers, including the prime minister, resign upon the inauguration of the elected Russian

head of state, and stipulates that the new president has two weeks to nominate a new prime minister following cabinet resignations.[16] Mishustin and all cabinet ministers accordingly resigned their powers to Putin on May 7, changing all minister titles to "acting" in the interim.[17] Incumbent ministers and new candidates must submit their applications for Putin's review before May 15.[18]

The resignation of the Russian government is standard political practice, but the ministers whom Putin decides to re-appoint, or those he decides to let go and replace, will signal exactly whom Putin trusts, and what political tasks he hopes they will accomplish. Putin can use this opportunity to build an even more consolidated cadre of political appointees, who will help guide Russian domestic and foreign policy in line with Putin's objectives. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on May 6 that certain elites and Kremlin officials are already vying for positions within the new cabinet, potentially in a premature bid to secure high-ranking positions in the event that Putin leaves power at the end of his new term.[19] Putin is likely to re-appoint several trusted high-ranking cabinet members, such as Mishustin and acting First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Sergei Kiriyenko.

**Belarus has announced a surprise nuclear readiness inspection likely as part of the Kremlin's re-intensified reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-making.** Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko ordered on May 7 that Belarusian and Russian forces participate in a joint inspection of the non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapon carriers, forces, and means under the Union State framework.[20] Belarusian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin stated that a battery of Iskander missile launchers and a squadron of Su-25s will be on standby for the inspection.[21] Lukashenko reiterated standard rhetoric regarding Belarusian doctrine on the deterrent use of nuclear weapons and his desire to avoid entering the war against Ukraine.[22] Lukashenko's announcement comes a day after the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced preparations for non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons exercises to "practice the preparation and use" of tactical nuclear weapons, and is likely meant to bolster the Kremlin's effort to coerce the West into self-detering from providing additional military assistance to Ukraine.[23] ISW continues to assess that neither Russia nor Belarus seeks nuclear escalation and that their use of nuclear weapons remains unlikely.[24] The US Department of Defense (DoD) reported on May 6 that it has not observed a change in the disposition of Russia's strategic nuclear forces despite Russia's "irresponsible rhetoric." [25]

**Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reported on May 7 that it exposed a network of Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) operatives who were planning to assassinate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other high-ranking Ukrainian intelligence and military officials.**[26] The SBU stated that the exposed agents included two colonels of Ukraine's Office of State Security (State Guard) who were operating as part of the FSB's Fifth Service.[27] The FSB's Fifth Service originates from the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB)'s Fifth Service, which conducted counterintelligence and espionage operations in non-Russian Soviet states and now essentially functions as a foreign espionage branch of the FSB.[28] The SBU noted that the FSB recruited the agents out of Ukraine's State Guard before the 2022 full-scale invasion.[29] Both agents are facing life imprisonment on charges of treason.

**The Russian Prosecutor General's Office declared US non-governmental organization (NGO) Freedom House an "undesirable organization" on May 7, likely as part of an ongoing effort to consolidate control over the domestic information space and further deprive Russians of access to civil society organizations and independent assessments of**

**Russian civil and political rights.** The Russian Prosecutor General's Office justified Freedom House's designation as an "undesirable organization" by claiming that Freedom House had previously supported Western assistance to Ukraine to "defeat Russia" and Western efforts to use frozen Russian assets to aid Ukraine.[30] The Russian Prosecutor General's Office also blamed Freedom House for providing legal and financial support to "pro-Western" Russian activists and Russian activists opposing Russian "traditional values." Freedom House publishes annual "Global Freedom Scores" that rate access to political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries and territories using qualitative analytical methodologies, and ranked Russia "16/100 Not Free" in 2022 and further downgraded the rating to "13/100 Not Free" in 2023.[31] Freedom House also supports civil society and democratization in Europe and Eurasia through partnering with local NGOs and activist organizations.[32] The Kremlin has been increasing its control over the Russian information space by depriving Western and independent Russian journalists and civil society organizations of the ability to operate in Russia.[33] The Kremlin notably blocked access to the website of French organization Reporters Without Borders on April 21, which scores countries according to a Freedom Index, similar to the one created by Freedom House, and had also scored Russia as having decreasing civil and political rights in recent years.[34]

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin began his fifth term as Russian President on May 7 and stressed Russia's need for unchallenged autocratic rule while indirectly calling for victory in Ukraine.**
- **Russian ultranationalists lauded the start of Putin's fifth term as a historic event and explicitly approved of the autocratic tradition in which Putin is casting himself, with one of them hailing him as "imperator," the formal title of the Russian tsars since the time of Peter the Great. Russian ultranationalists also expressed hope that Putin will continue to deepen an anti-Western ideology that the Kremlin has been heavily developing since the start of the full-scale invasion.**
- **The current Russian cabinet of ministers and Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin formally resigned on May 7 as constitutionally mandated, and the ministers who return to service and the ones whom Putin replaces will indicate who has Putin's favor and signal his political priorities for his fifth term**
- **Belarus has announced a surprise nuclear readiness inspection likely as part of the Kremlin's re-intensified reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-making.**
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- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka, Donetsk City, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**

- Russian occupation officials continue efforts to forcibly recruit Ukrainian civilians into the Russian military in occupied Kherson Oblast.
- The Kremlin is working with occupation administrators to strengthen Russia's control over the child welfare system in occupied Ukraine.

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 7, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



***We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of***

***these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.***

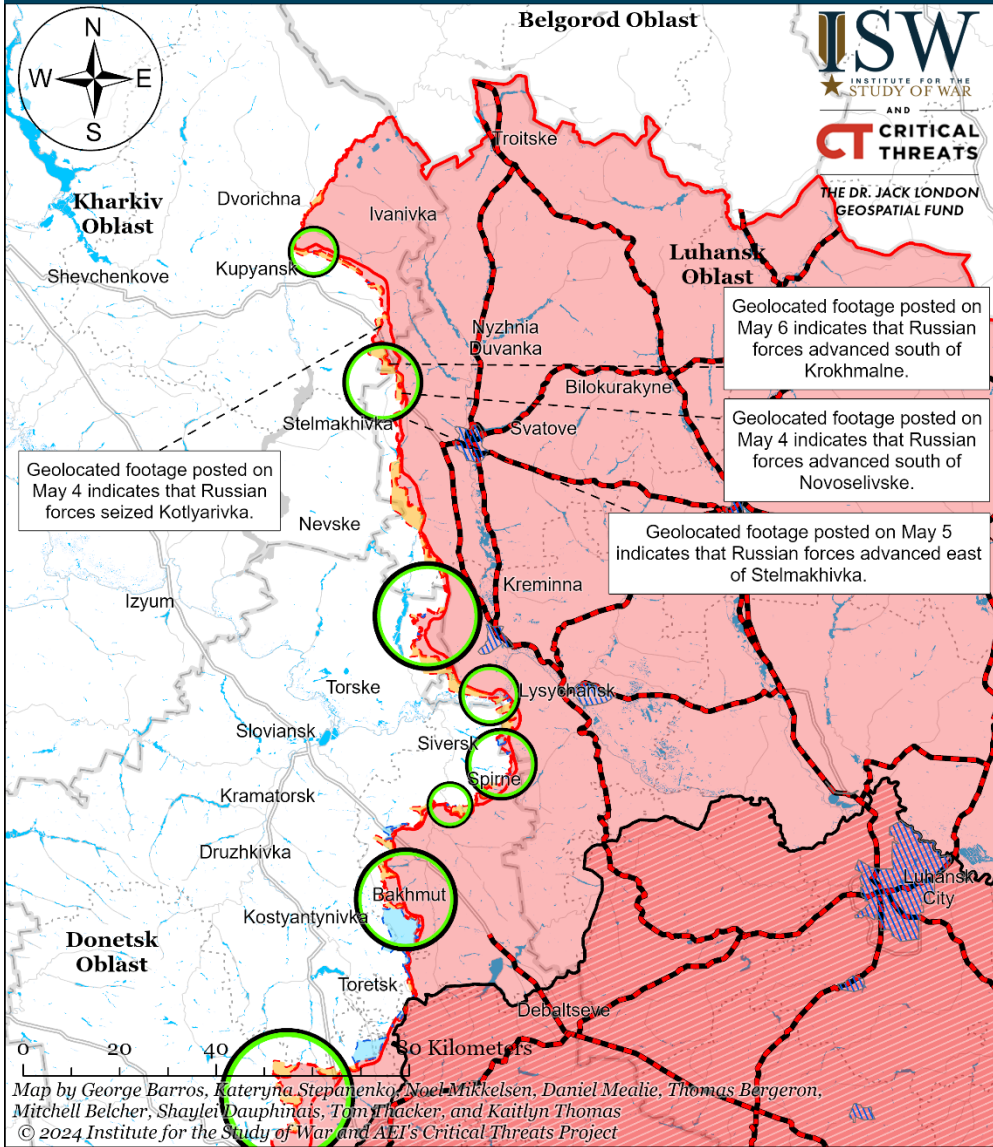
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian 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 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kremlinna line on May 7 but there were no changes to the frontline. Russian sources claimed on May 6 and 7 that Russian forces continued to advance northwest of Svatove near Kyslivka and Kotlyarivka, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[35] Russian forces also continued offensive operations northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; northwest of Svatove near Pishchane, Berestove, and Stelmakhivka; northwest of Kremlinna near Nevske; west of Kremlinna near Terny and Yampolivka; and south of Kremlinna near the Serebryanske forest area and Bilohorivka on May 7.[36] A Russian milblogger claimed that unspecified Russian airborne (VDV) elements are operating near the Serebryanske forest area, although ISW has not observed confirmation that any VDV elements are currently operating or have recently been operating in the area.[37] Select Russian and Ukrainian sources have recently claimed that elements of the 76th VDV division may be redeploying from western Zaporizhia, but have not explicitly claimed that these elements may be redeploying to the Kremlinna area.[38]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of May 7, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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Geolocated footage posted on May 4 indicates that Russian forces seized Kotlyarivka.

Geolocated footage posted on May 6 indicates that Russian forces advanced south of Krokmalne.

Geolocated footage posted on May 4 indicates that Russian forces advanced south of Novoselivske.

Geolocated footage posted on May 5 indicates that Russian forces advanced east of Stelmakhivka.

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

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

Note: A Russian source claimed on May 6 that Russian forces advanced 1.32 kilometers wide and 1.15 kilometers deep near Kyslivka. A Russian source claimed on May 6 that Russian forces advanced 300 meters on the eastern outskirts of Stelmakhivka.

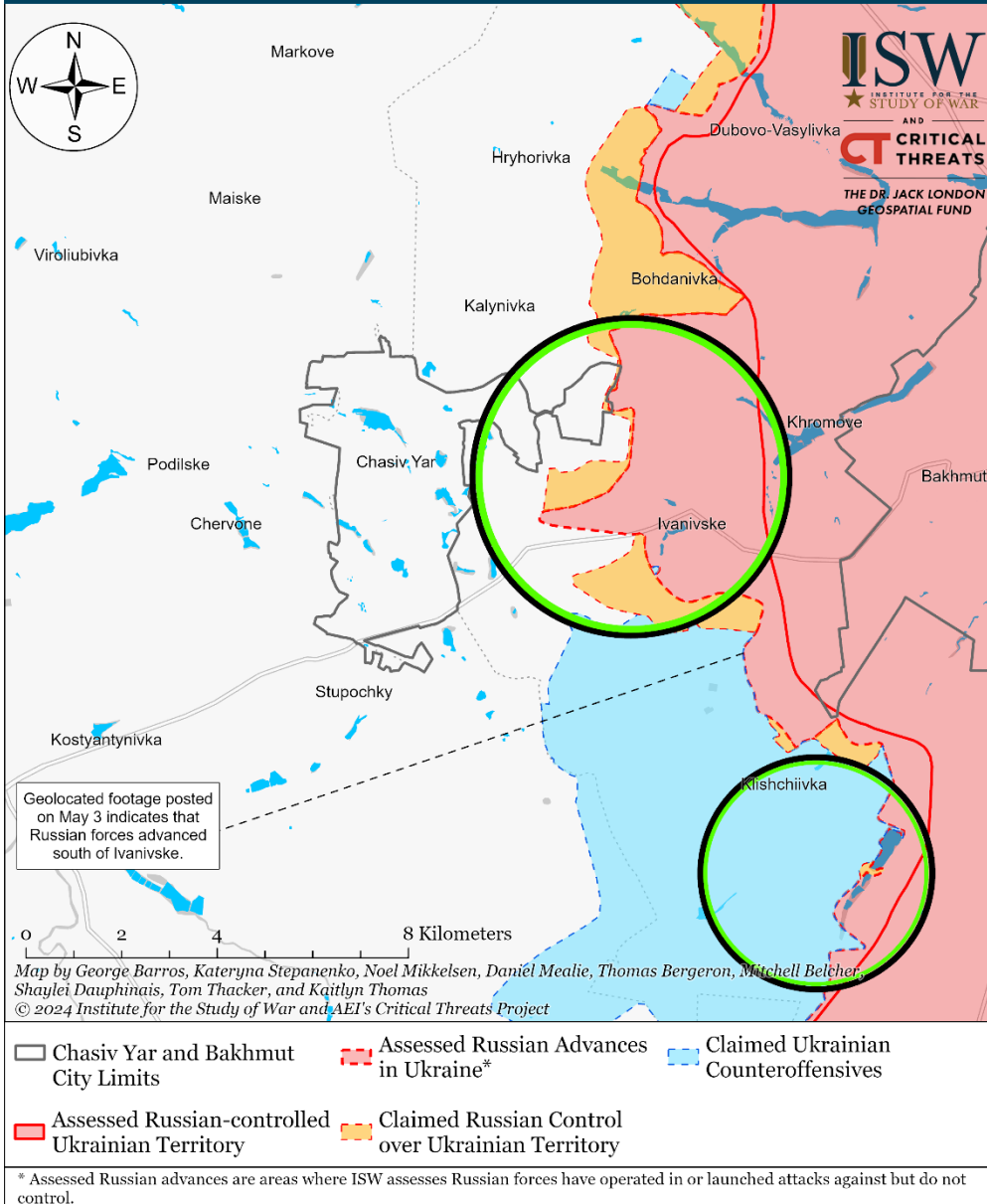
**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Siversk direction near Verkhokamyanske (east of Siversk), Spirne (southeast of Siversk), Vyimka (southeast of Siversk), and Rozdolivka (south of Siversk) on May 7, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline.[39]

Russian forces continued assaults near Chasiv Yar on May 7, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian forces conducted ground attacks northeast of Chasiv Yar near Bohdanivka; in eastern Chasiv Yar in the Novyi Microraion; east of Chasiv Yar near Ivanivske; and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[40] Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated that Ukrainian forces are rebuilding bridges across the Siverskyi Donets-Donbas Canal to reestablish communications routes.[41] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces routinely strike Ukrainian bridges across the canal.[42] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division and 83rd VDV Brigade reportedly continue fighting near Chasiv Yar.[43]



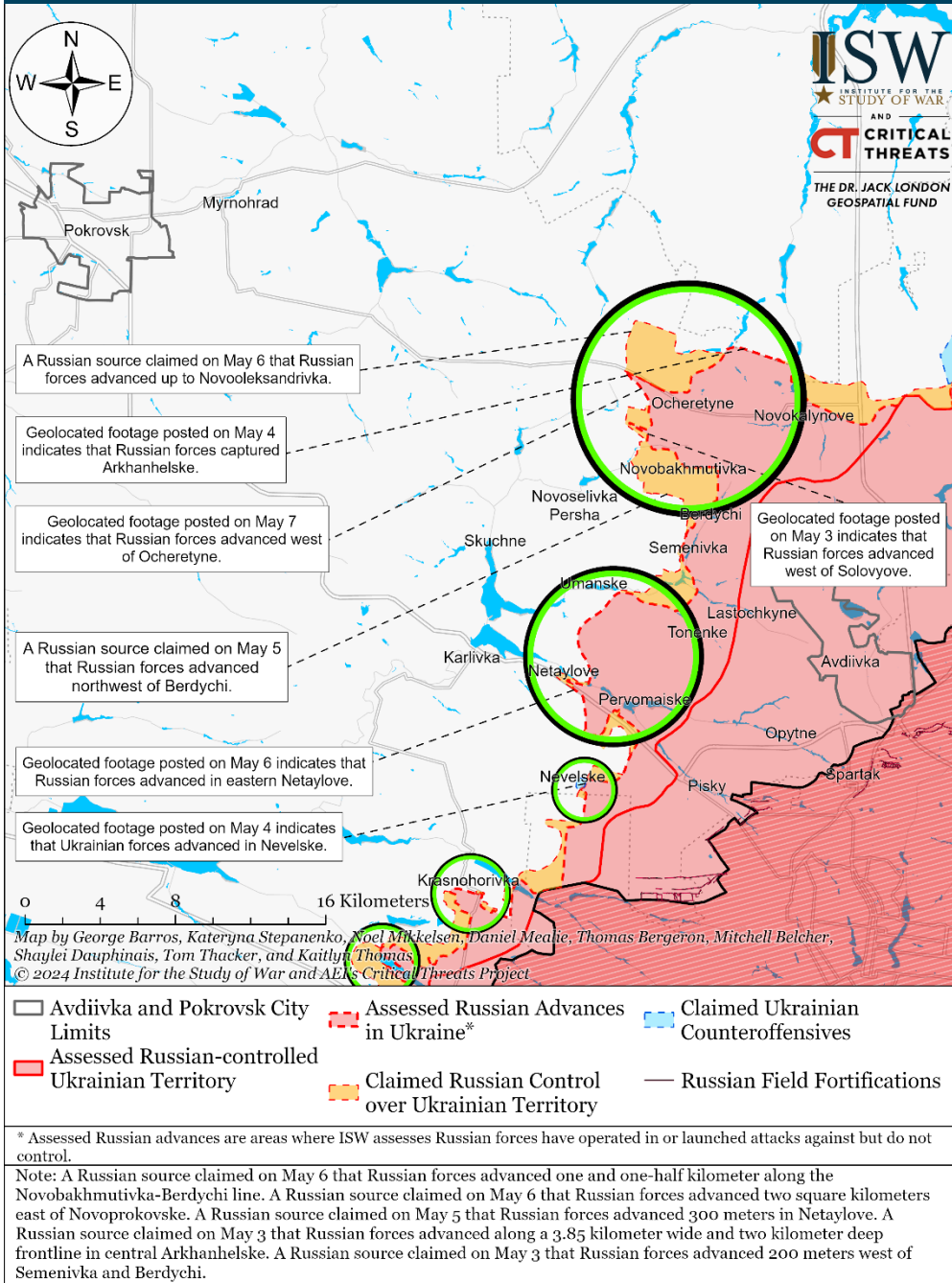
# Assessed Control of Terrain near Chasiv Yar as of May 7, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Avdiivka amid continued offensive operations in the area on May 7. Geolocated footage published on May 7 shows that Russian forces advanced along a railway line west of Ocheretyne (northwest of Avdiivka).[44] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced westward in fields east of Novopokrovske (northwest of Avdiivka and southwest of Ocheretyne) and up to the settlement's southern outskirts.[45] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced 1.5km in depth to a windbreak along the Novobakhmutivka-Berdychi line (south of Ocheretyne and northwest of Avdiivka).[46] ISW has not observed confirmation of these Russian claims, however. Russian forces also continued ground assaults northwest of Avdiivka near

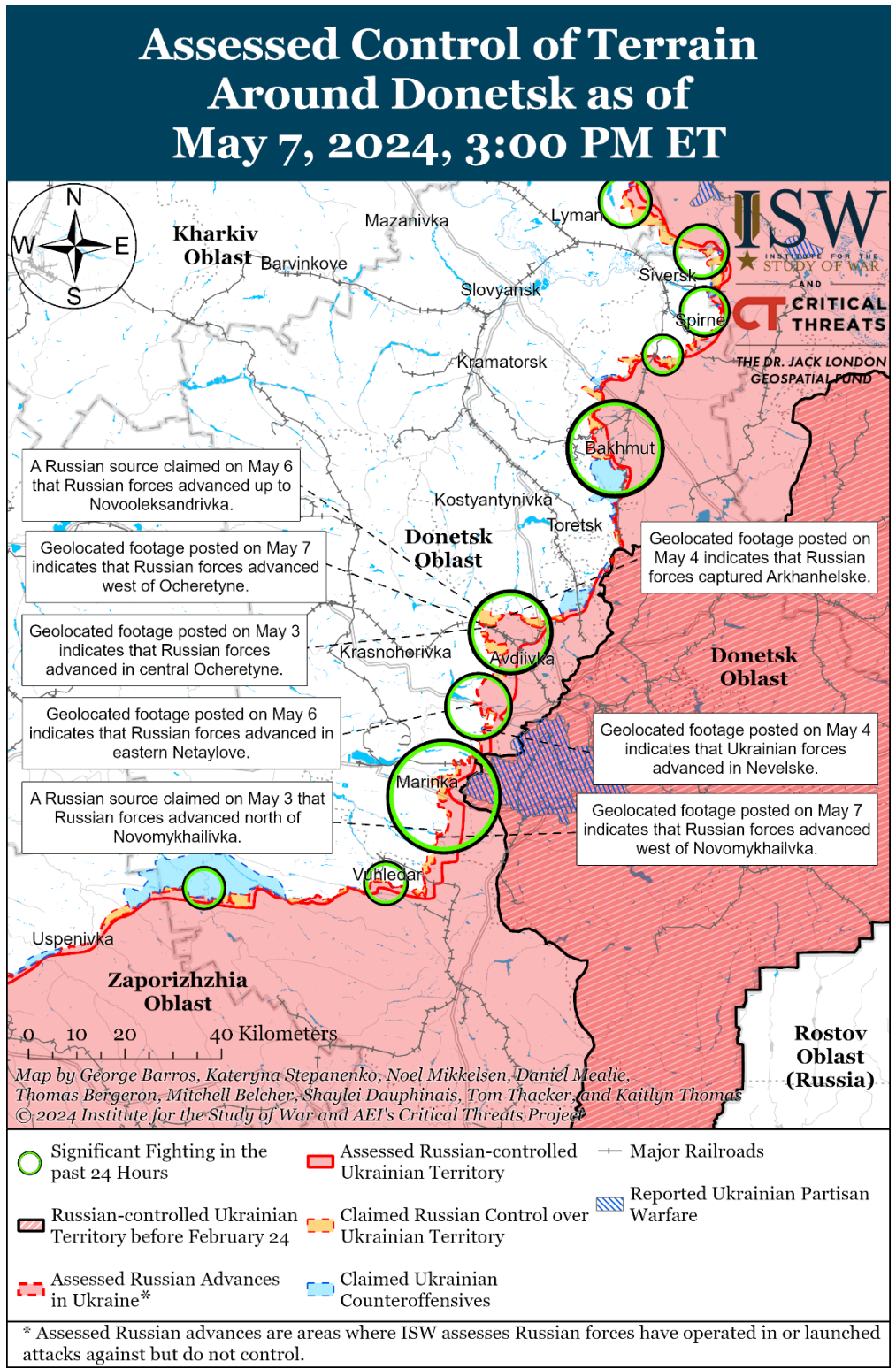
Novooleksandrivka, Sokil, Prohres, Yevhenivka, and Novoselivka Persha; west of Avdiivka near Umanske and Yasnobrodivka; and southwest of Avdiivka near Netaylove and Nevelske.[47] Elements of the Russian "Arbat" Spetsnaz Battalion, "Vega" Spetsnaz detachment (24th Guards Spetsnaz Brigade, Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff [GRU]), and other elements of 24th Spetsnaz Brigade reportedly continue to operate in the Avdiivka direction, and elements of the Russian 35th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) reportedly fight near Ocheretyne.[48]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Northwest of Avdiivka as of May 7, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

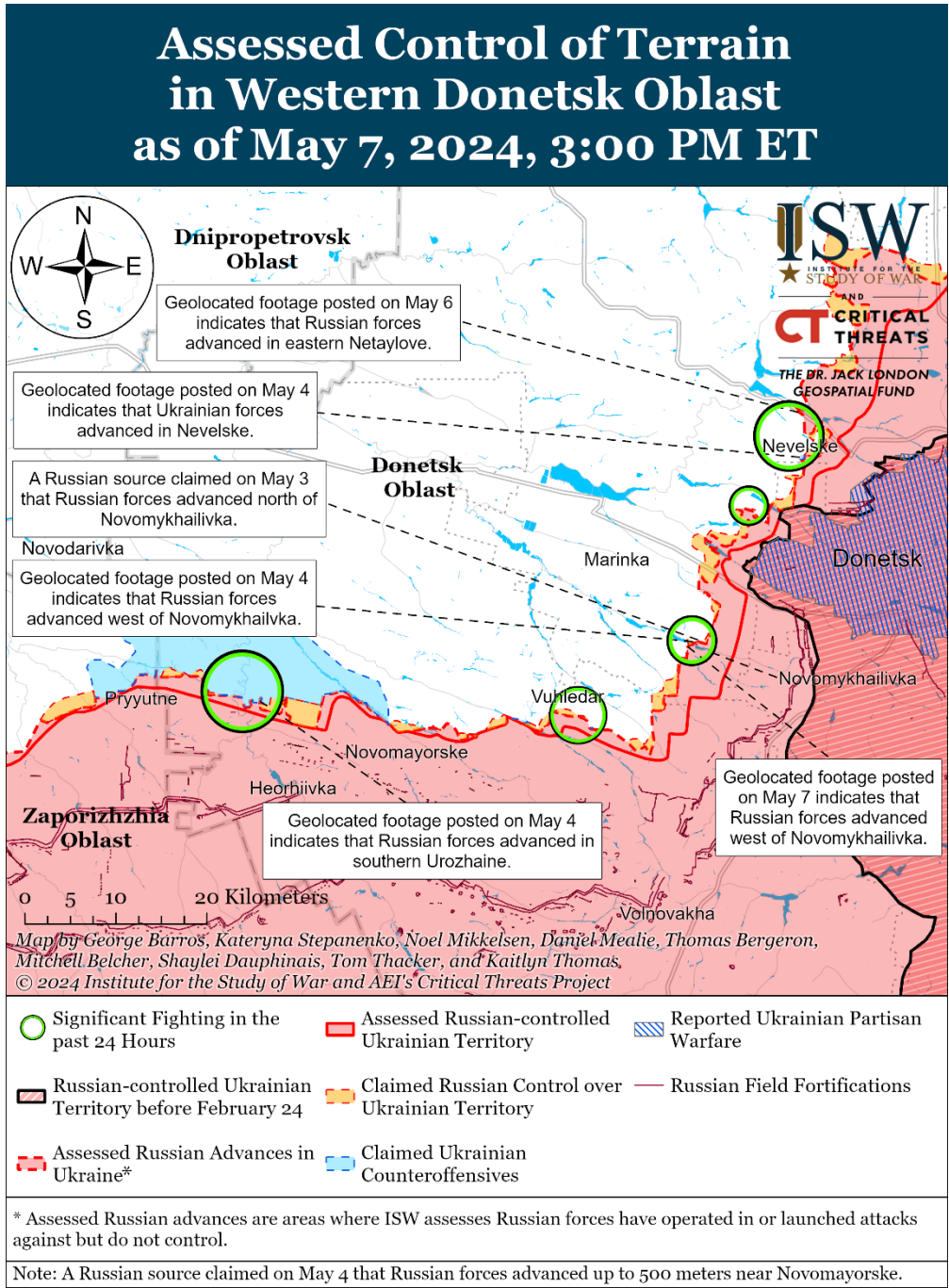


Russian forces recently marginally advanced southwest of Donetsk City amid continued ground attacks to the west and southwest of the city on May 7. Geolocated footage published on May 7 shows that Russian forces made a slight advance in western Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[49] Russian forces also continued ground attacks west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Paraskoviivka, Kostyantynivka, and Vodyane (northeast of

Vuhledar).[50] Elements of the Russian 14th Artillery Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) continue to operate near Krasnohorivka.[51]



Positional fighting continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area near Staromayorske and Urozhaine (both south of Velyka Novosilka) on May 7.[52] Elements of the Russian 218th Tank Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) and the 11th Air Force and Air Defense Army (EMD and Russian Aerospace Forces [VKS]) continue to operate near Urozhaine.[53]

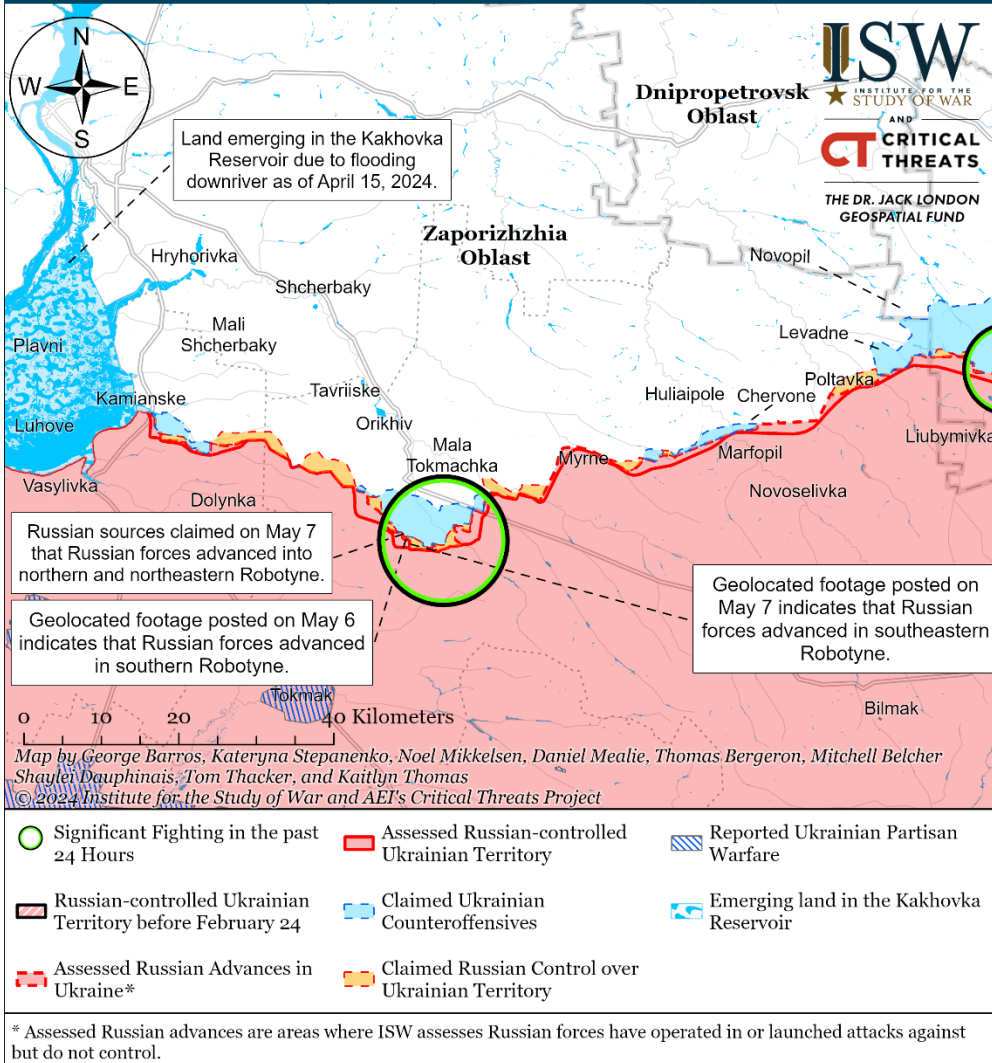


**Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Russian forces recently made a confirmed advance in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Geolocated footage published on May 7 shows that Russian forces advanced along Skidhna Street to new positions in southeastern Robotyne.[54] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also advanced in northwestern Robotyne, although ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Russian troops operating in this area.[55] Russian sources reported that Russian forces also conducted attacks northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[56] Elements of the Russian 56th Guards Air Assault (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) reportedly continue to operate near Robotyne, and elements of the North Ossetian "Storm Ossetia" volunteer battalion are operating in the Zherebryanky-Pyatykhatky area (northwest of Robotyne).[57]

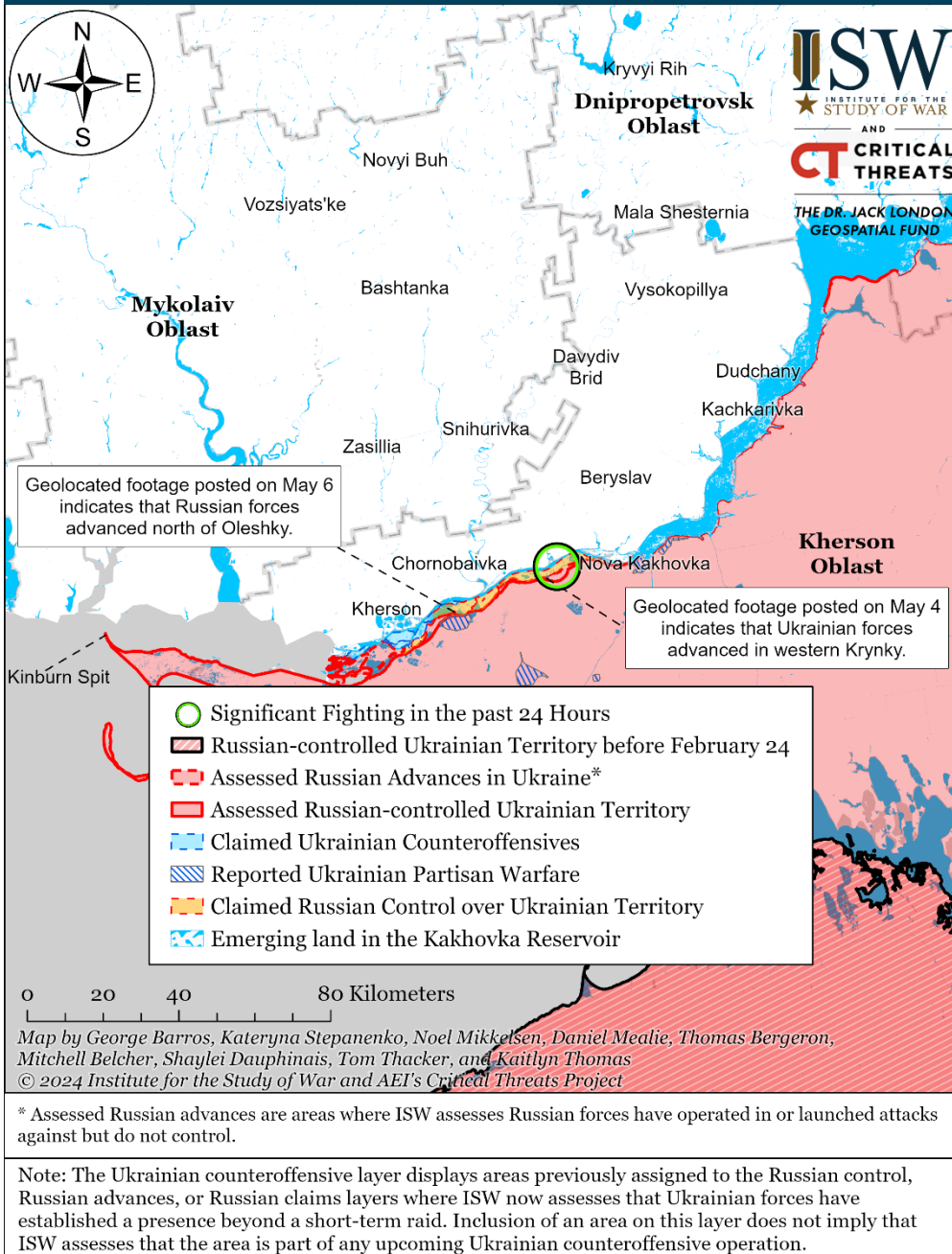


# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of May 7, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Limited positional engagements continued in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast, including near Krynky, on May 7, but there were no recent confirmed changes to the frontline.[58] Geolocated footage published on May 7 shows that Russian forces hold positions in a residential area just north of the Krynky-Kozachi Laheri road, although this advance likely did not occur in the last 24 hours.[59] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk noted that Russian forces continue efforts to consolidate positions on Nestryha Island (southwest of Kherson City), but that Russian troops are unable to move forward further onto the island due to heavy Ukrainian fire.[60] Elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and 126th Coastal Defense Brigade (22nd Army Corps, Black Sea Fleet) are reportedly operating in the Kherson direction.[61]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 7, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russia's fear of Ukrainian strikes on military assets in occupied Crimea is reportedly having a tangible impact on Russia's logistics on the occupied peninsula. Russian news outlets and milbloggers reported on the night of May 6-7 that Russian occupation authorities closed the airspace over Crimea and the Kerch Strait Bridge out of fears that Ukraine was preparing for a combined missile and naval drone strike.[62] The Kerch Strait Bridge re-opened to vehicle traffic after a thirty-minute pause.[63] UK



outlet the *Independent* reported on May 6 that Russia has almost entirely switched to using overland railway routes that run through occupied Ukraine since Ukraine's July 2023 attack on the Kerch Strait Bridge, noting that satellite imagery shows that almost no military trains have transited the bridge over the past three months.[64] Ukraine's recent successful strikes against Russian assets in occupied Crimea appear to have succeeded in forcing Russia to bring their logistics routes closer to the frontline, and closer to Ukraine's long-range weapons arsenal.

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

The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down two Russian Kh-59/69 cruise missiles over Odesa Oblast during the day on May 7.[65]

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

Russian occupation officials continue efforts to forcibly recruit Ukrainian civilians into the Russian military in occupied Kherson Oblast. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Military Administration Head Oleksandr Prokudin reported on May 7 that the Kremlin intends to increase the total number of Russian military "volunteer battalions" by 10 percent in occupied Kherson Oblast and is using a single military register that sends electronic summonses to forcibly recruit civilians in occupied Ukraine.[66] The Geneva Convention forbids any occupying power from forcing civilians in occupied territories to serve in the occupying power's military or auxiliary services.[67]

Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on May 7 that the Russian military's "Dnepr River Flotilla" is currently not a threat to the combat situation in Kherson Oblast due to under-resourcing. Pletenchuk stated that some Russian units, including naval infantry units, have their own boats, while other Russian units stole fishing boats from locals.[68] A Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces are using "abandoned" boats from locals along the Dnipro River.[69] Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced on March 20 that Russia formed the Dnepr River Flotilla and a "brigade" of boats as part of the flotilla.[70] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces could use the Dnepr River Flotilla to conduct limited cross-river raids, although it likely lacks the manpower and equipment necessary to establish an enduring large-scale Russian presence in the west (right) bank of Kherson Oblast or credibly threaten to re-occupy significant territory in Kherson Oblast, consistent with Pletenchuk's May 7 statements.[71]

The Ukrainian Prosecutor's General Office reported on May 7 that Russia has launched about 50 North Korean ballistic missiles, likely referring to Hwasong-11 Ga missiles, against Ukraine between late December 2023 and late February 2024.[72] Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin stated that about half of North Korean missiles failed and exploded in the air.

The Russian military continues to deny Storm-Z convict personnel their veteran statuses and corresponding health and monetary benefits. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* amplified footage on May 7 of a group of Storm-Z convicts from Kaluga Oblast who returned to Russia after fighting in Ukraine appealing to Russian President Vladimir Putin for help in receiving veteran status and corresponding social benefits.[73] The convicts claimed that they had not received combat veteran certificates, payments for injuries, or disability benefits and some claimed that the Russian military sent them conscription notices.[74] Kremlin-affiliated business outlet *Kommersant* reported on March that

Krasnodar Krai military court denied the rights of an injured Storm-Z convict to undergo a medical examination at a Russian military hospital because that would have confirmed his rights to receive veteran benefits.[75] The military court claimed that the convict did not sign a contract with a volunteer formation and therefore, did not have military personnel status. Storm-Z personnel and their families have frequently appealed to Putin on claims of poor treatment by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and lack of typical veteran benefits.[76]

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

Russia reportedly continues to coerce university students into working at Russian defense industrial base (DIB) factories. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* northwestern Russia service *Sever Realii* reported on May 6 that Russia is forcing students at the Baltic State Technical University in St. Petersburg to sign work contracts with Russian DIB companies, likely to assemble drones or other military equipment, on threat of expulsion.[77] The students will reportedly receive a salary of 60,000 rubles per month (about \$650). Russian authorities previously compelled high-school- and university-age students to produce Shahed drones at the Alabuga Polytechnical College in the Republic of Tatarstan.[78]

Russian military and civilian aircraft manufacturer and Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec subsidiary, Yakovlev (formerly Irkut), has reportedly been successfully bypassing international sanctions and procuring military equipment from abroad since 2022. Russian outlet the *Moscow Times* reported that Yakovlev, which manufactures Su-30 fighter aircraft and Yak-130 combat trainer jets, has purchased almost \$500 million worth of military equipment from abroad since 2022.[79] Russia notably sent at least Yak-130 jets to Iran in September 2023.[80] The *Moscow Times* reported that Yakovlev mainly purchased components for radar equipment and programmable controllers for military aircraft.

### **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)**

The Kremlin is working with occupation administrators to strengthen Russia's control over the child welfare system in occupied Ukraine. Kremlin-appointed Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova met with Kherson Oblast occupation governor Vladimir Saldo on May 2 to discuss building "an effective child protection system" in occupied Kherson Oblast.[81] Lvova-Belova and Saldo emphasized the importance of guaranteeing children's rights and claimed that a priority task will be to establish a centralized accommodation facility in occupied Kherson Oblast for children without parental care or legal guardians. Lvova-Belova has notably implicated herself in the forced deportation of Ukrainian children from the exact type of institution she claims to be trying to establish in occupied Kherson Oblast—orphans and care homes for children without legal guardians.[82] The effect of Lvova-Belova's and Saldo's efforts to create a new institution to accommodate children without parental

or guardian care is that such children will be removed from the orphanages and care homes they are currently residing in (which were mostly financed and run by the Ukrainian government prior to the full-scale invasion) to Russian-controlled children's homes. Such Russian-run homes will allow Russian authorities full access to the identity documents of Ukrainian children and will likely facilitate the process of forcibly adopting Ukrainian children into Russian families. The forcible transfer of children from one group to another group is an act constituting genocide.[83]

Russian occupation officials are using television and radio broadcasts to expand Russia's control over the information space in occupied Ukraine. Luhansk People's Republic Head Leonid Pasechnik met with several Russian officials, including First Deputy Head of the Russian Presidential Administration Sergei Kiriienko and Deputy Minister of Digital Development, Communications, and Mass Communications Dmitry Ugnivenko on May 5 to discuss the quality of communications, television, and radio networks in occupied Luhansk Oblast.[84] Pasechnik reported that the occupation administration will soon restart the installation of "Russkiy Mir" satellite dishes in occupied Luhansk Oblast.[85] The "Russkiy Mir" satellite project began operation in occupied Ukraine in December 2022 and promises to provide users with access to federal and regional television channels, as well as entertainment packages.[86] The installation of "Russkiy Mir" satellites in occupied Ukraine allows the Russian government to directly control what news and media residents are consuming, thereby consolidating control over the information space and platforming Kremlin propaganda as mainstream news. The Ukrainian Resistance Center noted on May 7 that Russian occupation administrations have effectively blocked all Ukrainian radio, television, and news sources in occupied Ukraine.[87]

Unknown actors, likely Ukrainian partisans, conducted an improvised explosive device (IED) attack against a member of the Zaporizhia Oblast occupation administration who reportedly was involved in the detention and torture of Ukrainian prisoners.[88] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on May 5 that a car belonging to Yevhen Ananievskiyi exploded in Berdyansk on May 5, killing Ananievskiyi.[89] GUR noted that Ananievsky was an employee at Berdyansk Correctional Colony No. 77, where he oversaw crimes perpetrated against Ukrainian prisoners.[90]

Russian occupation officials continue the forced passportization of occupied Ukraine and using the absence of Russian passports to control and restrict free movement. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Head Oleksandr Prokhubin stated on May 7 that Russian officials use coercive and threatening measures to force residents of occupied Ukraine to obtain Russian passports by withholding medical care, pensions, benefits, humanitarian aid, employment opportunities, or documentation if someone does not have a Russian passport.[91] Prokhubin noted that Russian officials can threaten to deport those without Russian passports out of occupied Ukraine under the pretext that they are foreigners without documentation, and also reported that it is impossible for residents to leave occupied Ukraine of their own volition if they do not have Russian passports. Prokhubin's remarks are consistent with ISW's previous assessments of the tactics Russian officials use to forcibly disseminate Russian citizenship throughout occupied Ukraine.[92]

### **Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

Kremlin officials continue to re-intensify Russia's reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-making with nuclear threats and diplomatic manipulation. Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov reiterated claims that "aggressive" Western policies forced Russia to prepare to conduct snap nuclear exercises.[93] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Maria Zakharova reiterated claims that UK Foreign Minister David Cameron's assertion that Ukraine can use

UK-provided weapons to strike military targets inside Russia is escalatory and that Russia can respond by striking UK military facilities "in Ukraine and beyond." [94] Russian troops engage in routine nuclear exercises as part of this wider nuclear rhetoric information operation, but ISW continues to assess that Russia is highly unlikely to use a tactical nuclear weapon on the battlefield in Ukraine or anywhere else. [95] Russian officials will likely continue to intensify Russia's reflexive control campaign to discourage ongoing Western military support for Ukraine and discourage Western governments from allowing Ukrainian forces to use Western-provided systems to strike military targets in Russia. [96]

A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger falsely portrayed ongoing NATO Steadfast Defender 2024 exercises as Western efforts to expand control into Moldova and threaten Russia. The milblogger claimed that military contingents of NATO member states, including Romania, will be in Moldova for the Swift Response exercises and claimed that this is evidence of NATO expanding control over Moldova via Romanian forces entering Moldova. [97] US Army Europe and Africa reported that the Swift Response exercises will occur in Estonia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Hungary, and Italy. [98] Russian officials and Kremlin mouthpieces have routinely and deliberately misrepresented NATO Steadfast Defender 2024 exercises as a threat against Russia despite the exercises' defensive response to real Russian aggression against Ukraine and overt Russian threats against NATO states. [99]

The same milblogger also attempted to criticize the Kazakh government for alleged anti-Russian actions and perceived weakness against the West. The milblogger claimed that hackers exposed alleged plans for a senior Ukrainian official to visit Kazakhstan and meet with aircraft repair specialists. [100] The milblogger also seized on an Almaty exhibit showing photos of a victim of the Kazakh protests in January 2022 and claimed that such an exhibit demonstrates the West's influence over Kazakhstan and the weakness of Kazakh authorities. [101] This Russian milblogger routinely portrays any perceived democratic civil society efforts in post-Soviet countries as inherently Western influenced and anti-Russian.

### **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)**

See topline text.

**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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