



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

May 23, 2024, 7pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:00pm ET on May 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin is pursuing a concerted effort to remove senior Russian defense officials and has likely expanded this effort to senior officers commanding Russian combat operations in Ukraine. The Russian Investigative Committee announced on May 23 the arrests of Russian Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Head of its Main Communications Directorate Lieutenant General Vadim Shamarin and Head of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Department for State Procurement, Vladimir Verteletsky.[1] Shamarin is accused of accepting a bribe of at least 36 million rubles (about \$392,000), and two defendants in the Russian telecommunications industry have agreed to testify against him.[2] Verteletsky is accused of corruption and accepting a large bribe with total damages of 70 million rubles (about \$763,000).[3] Five senior Russian MoD officials and former military commanders have been arrested on corruption charges since the arrest of Russian Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov on April 24, and a Russian insider source previously claimed that six more MoD officials plan to resign following former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's removal from the MoD.[4] The Kremlin is likely using the guise of corruption charges as an excuse to hide the real reasons for ousting specific individuals from the MoD who have fallen from favor, as ISW has recently assessed.[5]

Russian ultranationalist milbloggers also claimed that the Russian MoD dismissed the commander of the 20th Combined Arms Army (Moscow Military District [MMD], formerly Western Military District [WMD]), Lieutenant General Sukhrab Akhmedov.[6] ISW is unable to confirm Akhmedov's removal, but claims of his removal are notable as this would be the first removal of an officer actively commanding Russian forces in Ukraine as a part of the most recent round of dismissals. The 20th CAA is currently heavily committed to offensive operations in the Lyman direction and failed to achieve significant tactical gains in the area during the Winter-Spring 2024 offensive on the Kharkiv-Luhansk axis.[7] The milbloggers also directly connected Akhmedov's arrest with significant command issues in Ukraine, referencing their prior complaints about Akhmedov by name for his role in commanding attritional Russian assaults near Vuhledar, Donetsk Oblast in winter 2022–2023 when he commanded the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade or his role in Russian forces suffering significant casualties due to a Ukrainian rear area strike in summer 2023.[8]

Official Kremlin statements and milblogger speculation about the arrests and command changes signal that more senior officers could face removal. Russian state newswire TASS cited Russian law enforcement on May 23 as saying there will be continued investigations in connection with Shamarin's arrest.[9] Some Russian milbloggers and insider sources have alleged that some of the arrested officials have ties to Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov but have largely not gone so far as to claim that Gerasimov himself will be removed.[10] Peskov oddly stated on May 13 that "no changes are foreseen yet" when specifically asked about Gerasimov's position, however, suggesting that Gerasimov's tenure over the longer term is not assured.[11] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov notably denied on May 23 that there is a "campaign" against Russian MoD officials, instead asserting that the MoD arrests are part of a consistent fight against corruption.[12] Peskov has previously deflected reporters' questions about the Russian MoD, and his decision to answer questions about the MoD's command changes and arrests indicates that the Kremlin may want its support of these purges.[13] Peskov's claim that the removals are part of a consistent effort are difficult to square with the sudden flurry of dismissals and arrests at an anomalous rate and with high publicity.

Russian milbloggers largely celebrated the arrests of Russian MoD officials they have claimed were inept and speculated about possible additional removals of senior commanders and officials. Russian ultranationalist milbloggers celebrated the arrests of Shamarin and Verteletsky and the alleged removal of Akhmedov and

have offered criticisms of MoD officials and military officers more vocally than they had been doing before the start of the arrests in late April.[14] The milbloggers began speculating about which officials and commanders could be removed or charged next. Some named a deputy defense minister as likely next to face investigation and pointed to supposed connections between arrested or dismissed individuals and remaining MoD and military officials, presumably to indicate future possible targets.[15] Many milbloggers vaguely claimed that Russian authorities are not done with their investigations and detentions of these officials and celebrated the arrests as the start of an effort to bring corrupt officials to justice under new Defense Minister Andrei Belousov.[16] The Kremlin is likely allowing these criticisms because they are specifically directed against individuals the MoD is targeting, thereby supporting Belousov's image as the one who will solve issues within the MoD in a way that Shoigu has not. The Kremlin also benefits from allowing the milbloggers to emphasize that no Russian defense or military official is safe from the consequences of falling from Putin's favor. The Kremlin is likely attempting to secure the loyalty of the milbloggers who have long argued for significant changes in the Russian MoD and military command by allowing them to criticize the ousted individuals after months of active censorship and self-censorship as long as the criticism advances larger Kremlin objectives.

Russian border guards removed buoys in Estonian waters of the Narva River, which demarcates the Estonian-Russian international border, likely to set conditions to further question maritime borders and test NATO resolve. The Estonian Police and Border Guard Board reported on May 23 that on the night of May 22 to 23 Russian border guards removed 24 buoys used to mark shipping routes in Estonian waters in the Narva River, which demarcates the international border between Estonia and Russia.[17] The Estonian Eastern Prefecture Border Guard Bureau Head Eerik Purgel stated that Estonia had placed the first 50 of a planned 250 buoys on May 13 in accordance with a 2022 Estonian-Russian agreement made prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[18] Purgel reported that Russia announced that it did not agree with the locations of about half of the planned placements of the buoys earlier in 2024. The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated that Russia's removal of the buoys "fits well within the broader pattern of Russia's provocative behavior" and stated that Estonia would treat the event as a "provocative border incident." [19] The Estonian MFA demanded an explanation from Russian border and diplomatic officials and the buoys' immediate return. Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas stated that "Russia uses border issues as a means to create fear and anxiety." [20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed on May 21 that the Russian government reassess its maritime borders in the Baltic Sea, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov called the Russian MoD's proposal "appropriate steps" to "ensure [Russian] security" in response to the escalation of tensions and the increased level of confrontation in the Baltic region.[21] Russian border guards are likely attempting to create contention along the international border between Russia and a NATO member country to gauge NATO reactions to future Russian efforts to challenge established delimitations.

Select US officials are reportedly pressing for a reconsideration of the White House's current policy prohibiting Ukraine from using US-provided weapons to strike within Russia. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on May 22 that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is urging US President Joe Biden to lift restrictions on the Ukrainian use of American weapons for strikes within Russia but noted that the proposal is in a formative stage.[22] NYT reported that two US officials stated that it is still unclear how many people within the Biden administration support the measure and added that the proposal's proponents have yet to formally present it to Biden.[23] ISW assesses that Western limitations on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets in Russia have created a sanctuary in Russia's border areas from which Russian aircraft can conduct glide bomb and missile strikes against Ukrainian positions and settlements and where Russian forces and equipment can freely assemble before entering combat.[24]

Polish Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Pawel Wronski stated on May 23 that Poland is considering using its air defense to protect Ukrainian airspace against Russian strikes.[25] Wronski stated that Poland is considering protecting unspecified airspace along the Ukrainian-Polish border and acknowledged that Ukrainian officials have submitted a request to Poland on the matter.[26] Wronski stated that Poland has yet to make any decisions on the policy and that international law and technical specialist should review it.[27] Russian forces have targeted Ukrainian energy and gas infrastructure in western Ukraine in recent months, including in Lviv Oblast, which borders Poland.[28]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian defense industrial facilities in the Republic of Tatarstan on May 23. Sources in Ukrainian special services told Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* that the GUR's drones attacked Russian defense industrial facilities in Kazan and Nizhnekamsk, which is notably just south of the Shahed-136/131 drone production facility in Tatarstan's Alabuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ).[29] *Suspilne* and Russian media outlets reported that Russian officials evacuated employees from the Nizhnekamsk Thermal Power Plant, Teneko oil refinery, Taif-Nk oil refinery, Nizhnekamskneftekhim petrochemical facility, and Nizhnekamskshina tire production facility in Nizhnekamsk and the Kazanorgsintez chemical plant in Kazan.[30] Yelabuga City Mayor Rustem Nuriyev stated that Russian air defenses destroyed a Ukrainian drone near the city

and denied that the strikes caused any damage in the area.[31] Footage published on May 23 purportedly shows Russian air defenses destroying at least one Ukrainian drone near Nizhnekamsk.[32] Ukrainian forces conducted a long-range strike against Russian defense industrial and oil refining infrastructure in the Alabuga SEZ on April 2, and ISW assessed that the April 2 strike represented a significant inflection in Ukraine's demonstrated ability to conduct long-range strikes far into the Russian rear.[33]

Iranian leaders have used the occasion of President Ebrahim Raisi's funeral events to emphasize close ties with Armenia even as tensions between Yerevan and Moscow continue to increase. NOTE: A version of this text appears in ISW-CTP's May 23 Iran Update. Mokhber met with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Egyptian Foreign Affairs Minister Sameh Shoukry, and Tajikistani President Emomali Rahmon on May 22.[34] Mokhber emphasized that Iran will continue its policy of "expanding relations and cooperation" with neighboring countries during his meeting with Pashinyan.[35] Mokhber added that Iran will continue to adhere to its "commitments and agreements" with Armenia. Pashinyan also met with Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on May 22.[36] It is notable that Khamenei and Mokhber met with Pashinyan amid his deteriorating relations with Russia. Pashinyan's meetings with Khamenei and Mokhber come shortly after he indirectly accused Russia of helping Azerbaijan to prepare for the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.[37]

It is also notable that the Azerbaijani prime minister and foreign affairs minister, who both traveled to Iran to attend Ebrahim Raisi's funeral, have not yet met with senior Iranian officials, such as Khamenei and Mokhber, on the sidelines of the funeral.[38] Raisi inaugurated a dam on the Iran-Azerbaijan border with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev shortly before his death on May 19.[39] Iranian media highlighted on May 22 that Aliyev, along with the presidents of Russia, Syria, Turkey, and Venezuela, did not attend Raisi's funeral.[40]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin is pursuing a concerted effort to remove senior Russian defense officials and has likely expanded this effort to senior officers commanding Russian combat operations in Ukraine.**
- **Russian border guards removed buoys in Estonian waters of the Narva River, which demarcates the Estonian-Russian international border, likely to set conditions to further question maritime borders and test NATO resolve.**
- **Select US officials are reportedly pressing for a reconsideration of the White House's current policy prohibiting Ukraine from using US-provided weapons to strike within Russia.**
- **Polish Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Pawel Wronski stated on May 23 that Poland is considering using its air defense to protect Ukrainian airspace against Russian strikes.**
- **Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian defense industrial facilities in the Republic of Tatarstan on May 23.**
- **Iranian leaders have used the occasion of President Ebrahim Raisi's funeral events to emphasize close ties with Armenia even as tensions between Yerevan and Moscow continue to increase.**
- **Ukrainian forces advanced near Lukyantsi and Kreminna, and Russian forces advanced near Berestove, Chasiv Yar, Avdiivka, Donetsk City, and Velyka Novosilka.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed applying regular military punishments to volunteers, likely as part of the MoD's continued formalization efforts.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 23, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of three subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

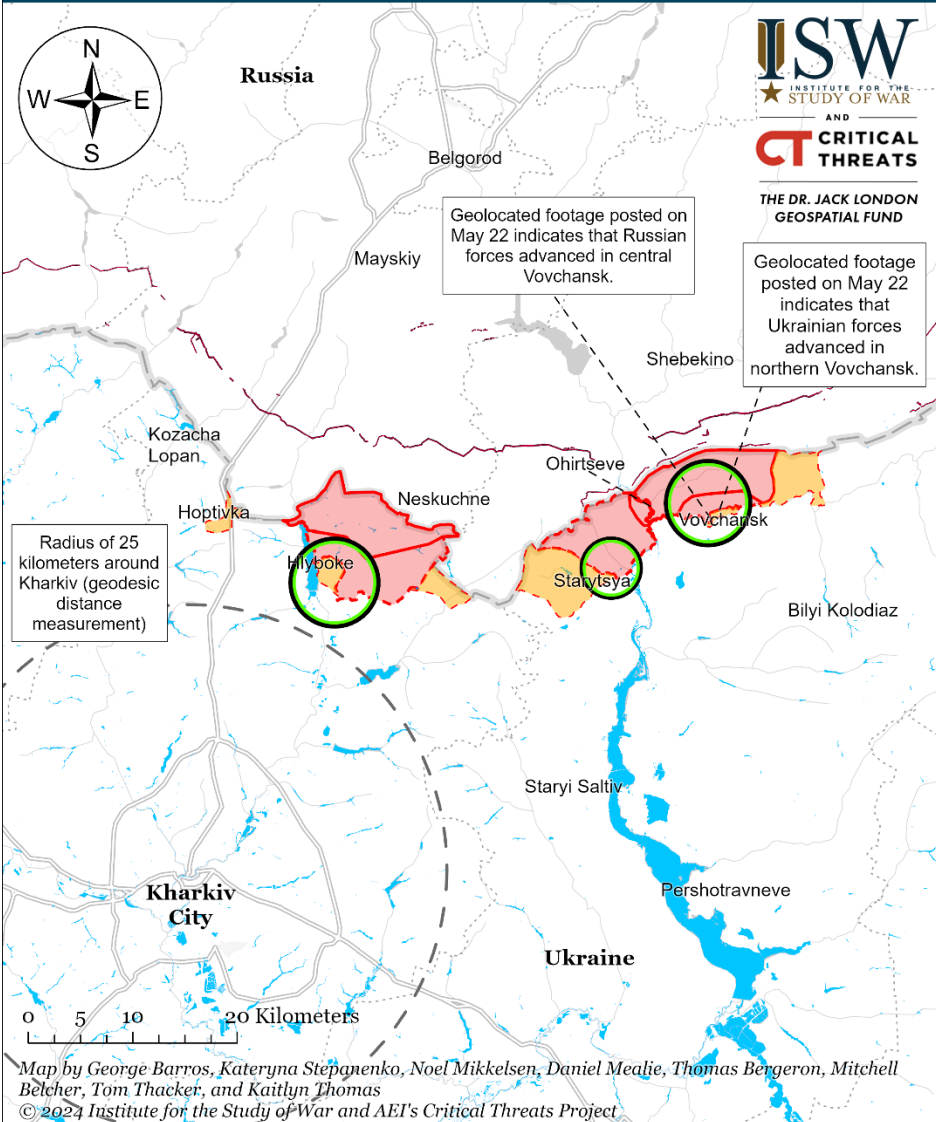
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Kharkiv Oblast (Russian objective: Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City)

Ukrainian forces recently recaptured marginal territory north of Kharkiv City amid continued Russian ground attacks in the area on May 23. Geolocated footage published on May 22 shows that Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced southeast of Lukyantsi (northeast of Lyptsi).[41] Russian forces continued ground attacks near Lyptsi, and Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Lyptsi and Hlyboke (north of Lyptsi).[42] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 500 meters in depth near Lyptsi, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[43] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Russian forces have switched to an active defense in the Lyptsi direction.[44]

Russian forces continued ground attacks in and around Vovchansk on May 23 but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 400 meters in depth within Vovchansk, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[45] Another prominent Russian milblogger claimed that fighting in Vovchansk is becoming positional.[46] Syrskyi stated that Russian forces are now "bogged down" in street fighting in Vovchansk despite initial tactical successes and are now transferring reserves to the area from other operational directions.[47] Russian forces also continued ground attacks near Starytsya (southwest of Vovchansk), and Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian counterattacks within Vovchansk.[48]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 23, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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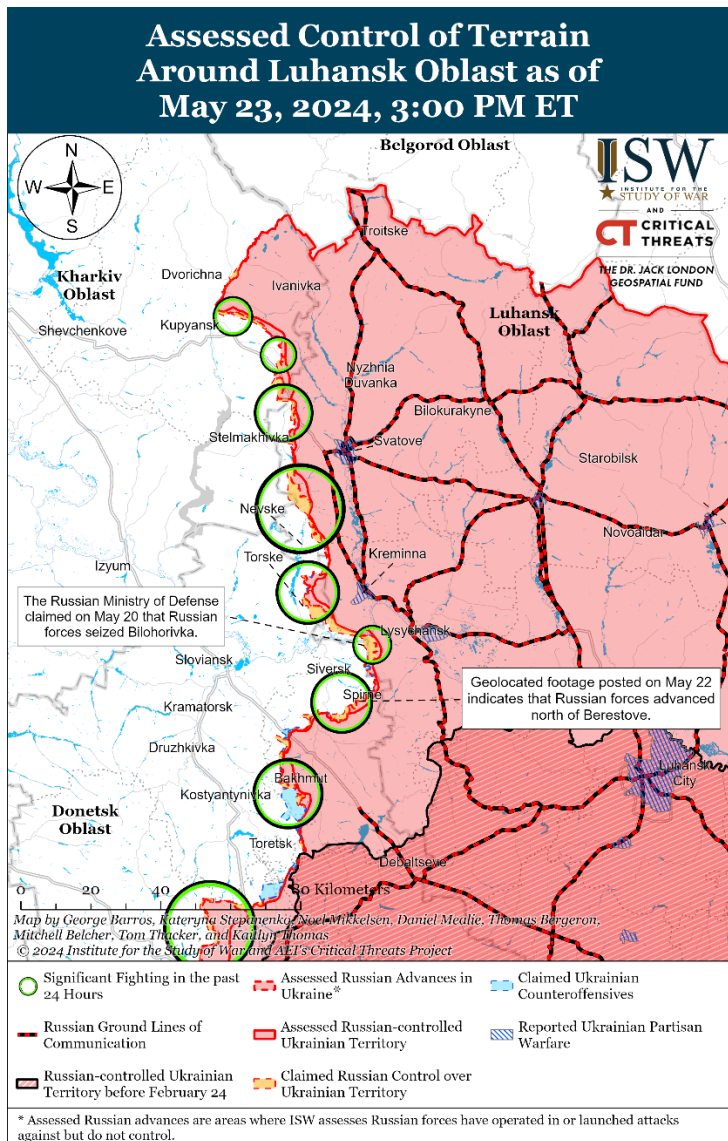
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian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

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

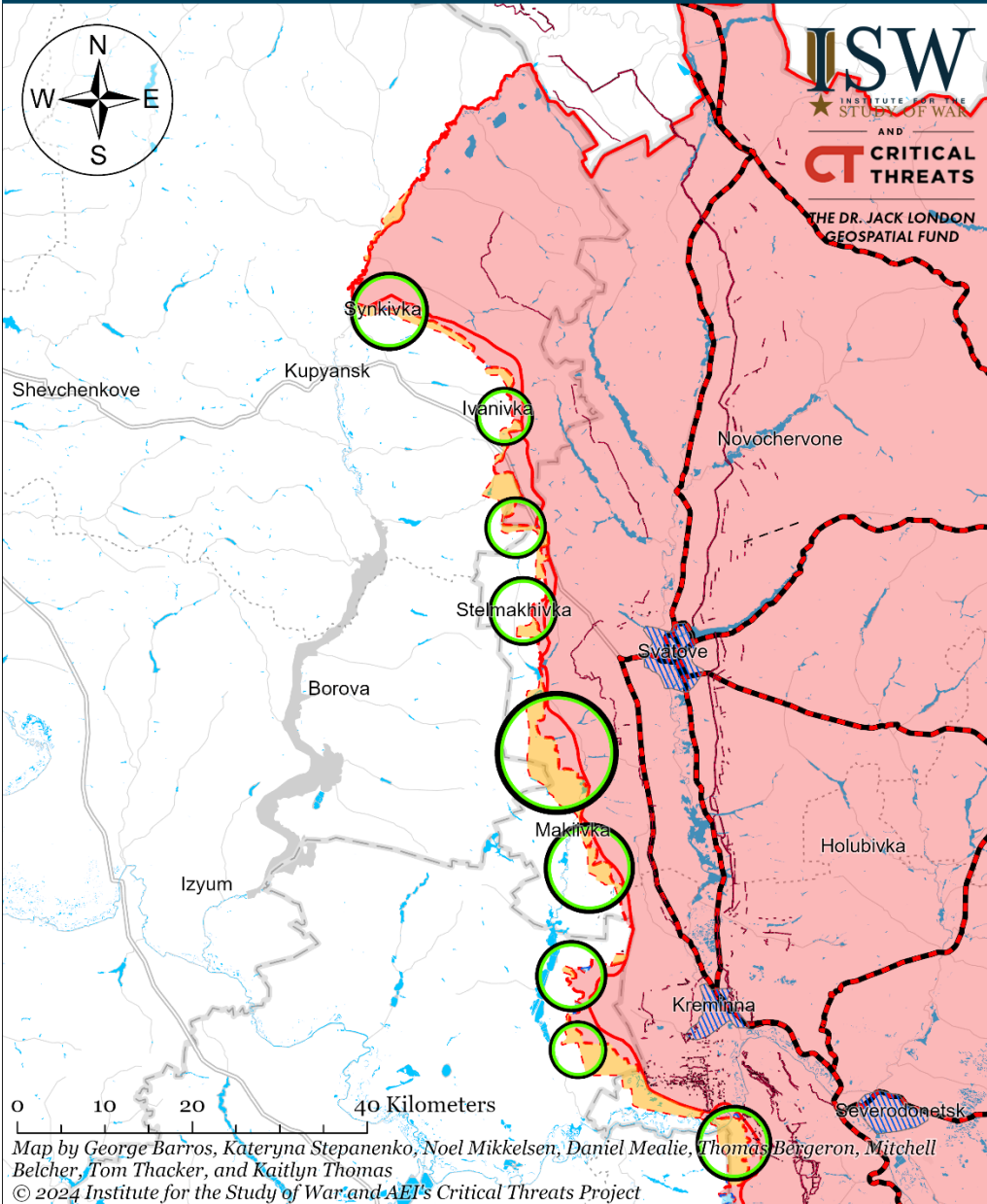
Note: A Russian source claimed on May 23 that Russian forces were advancing 500 meters per day in the Lyptsi direction. A Russian source claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced up to 280 meters in Starytsya. A Russian source claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced two kilometers near Tykhe. A Russian source claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced between 100 and 300 meters deep in the direction of Vovchansk. A Russian source claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced between 200 meters and 1.2 kilometers in the direction of Lyptsi. A Russian source claimed on May 21 that Russian forces advanced between 300 and 450 meters near Lyptsi. A Russian source claimed on May 21 that Russian forces advanced between 100 and 350 meters in Vovchansk.

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

Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced south of Kreminna amid continued Russian ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on May 23. Geolocated footage published on May 23 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced north of Bilohorivka (south of Kreminna).[49] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported on May 23 that Russian forces continued assaults in forest areas north of Kupyansk and are trying to break through Ukrainian defenses near Kyslivka (southeast of Kupyansk) in order to reach the Oskil River.[50] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are advancing along a railway line north of Kyslivka in the direction of Ivanivka (southeast of Kupyansk) and are conducting reconnaissance-in-force operations near Ivanivka's southern outskirts.[51] A Russian milblogger denied the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) May 20 claim that Russian forces seized Bilohorivka (south of Kreminna) and claimed that Russian forces have only made limited advances in the area at the cost of significant manpower losses.[52] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces lost several hundred troops per day during infantry-led frontal assaults on Bilohorivka in February 2024 and that Russian forces temporarily suspended assaults on Bilohorivka in late April but resumed assaults in early May after reinforcements arrived in the area. Russian forces also conducted assaults northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Berestove and Stelmakhivka; southwest of Svatove near Novoyehorivka, Hrekivka, Nevske, Makiivka, Druzhelyubivka, and Novovodyane; west of Kreminna near Terny and Torske; and south of Kreminna near Hryhorivka and Bilohorivka.[53]



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kupyansk as of May 23, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

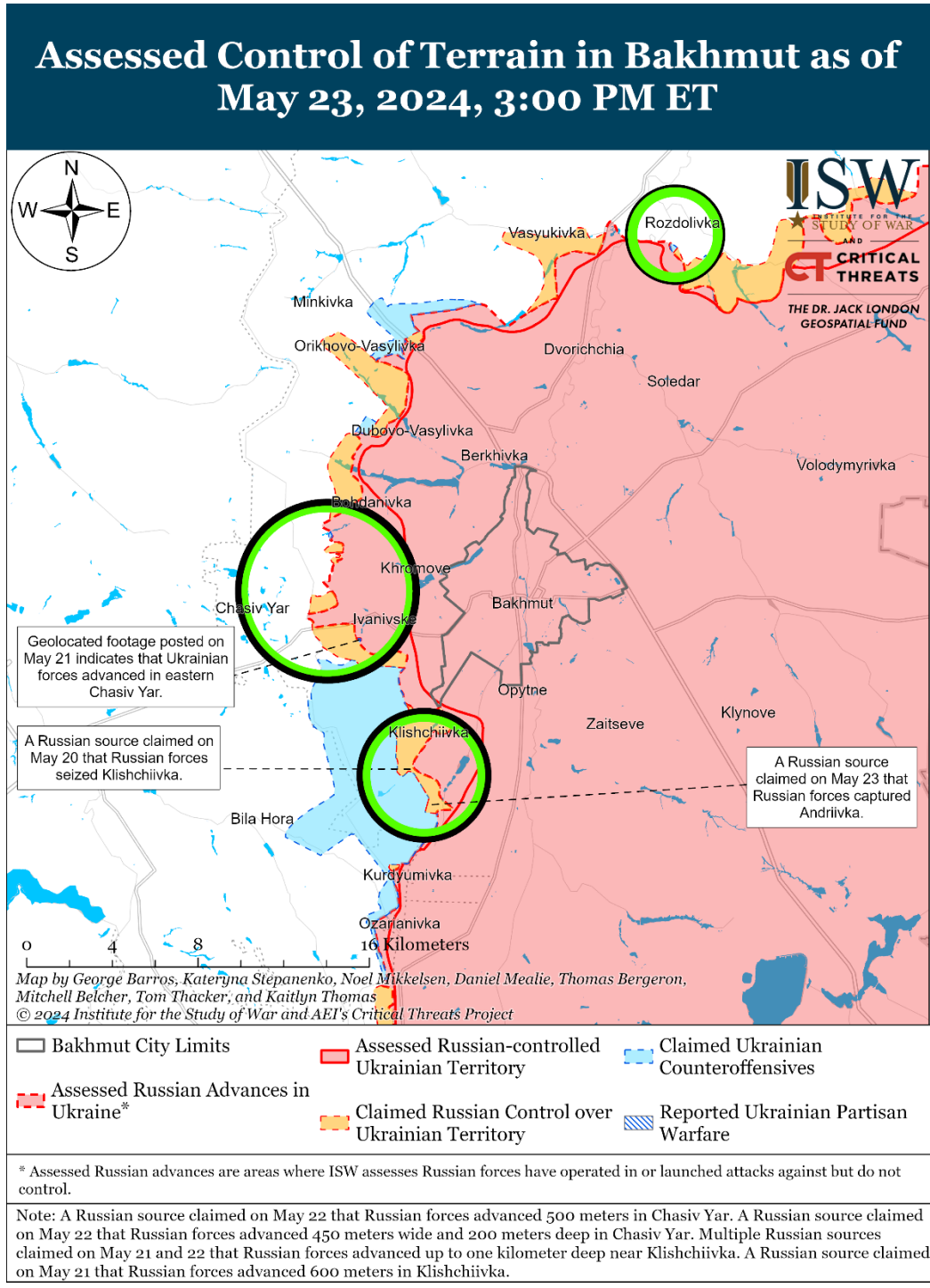


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine *
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February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

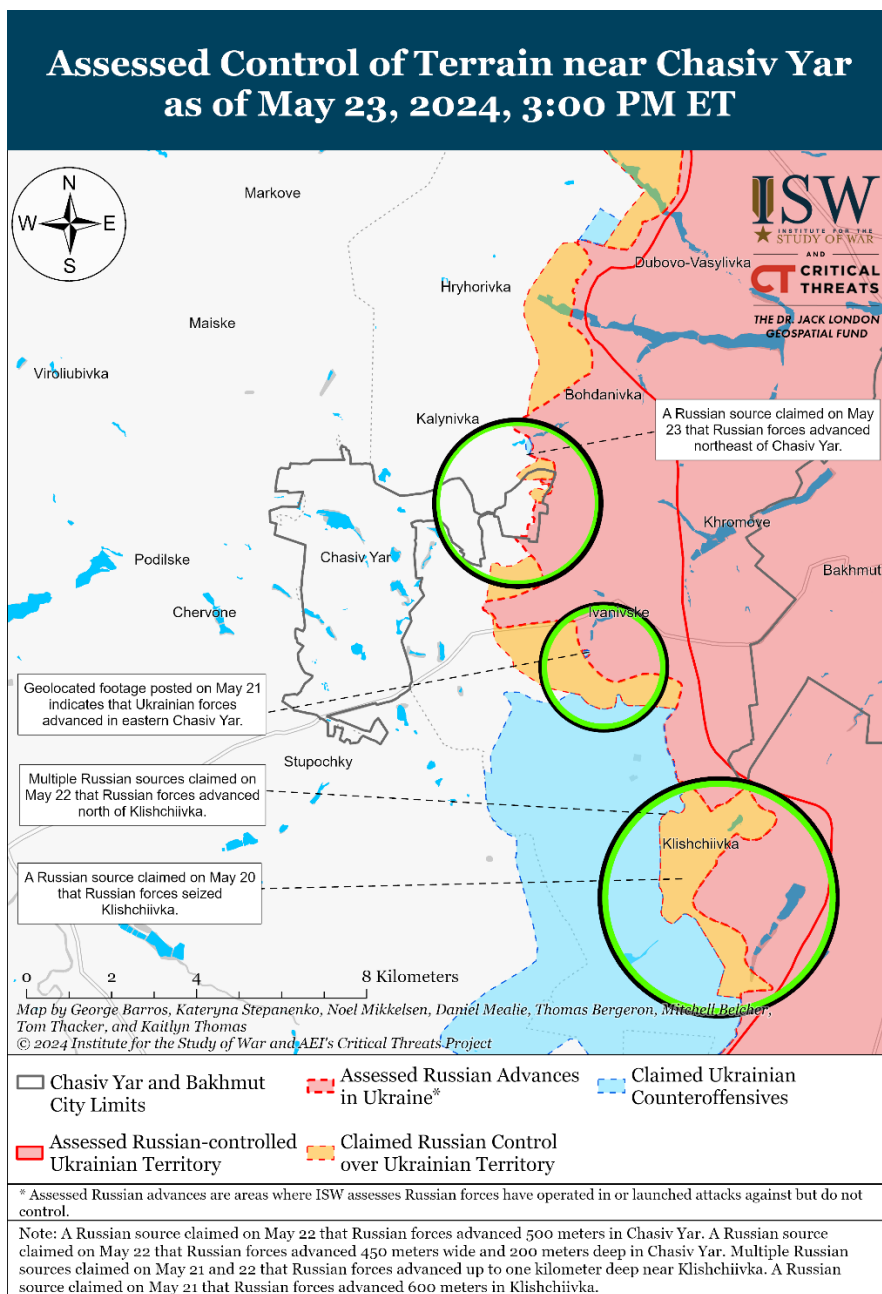
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

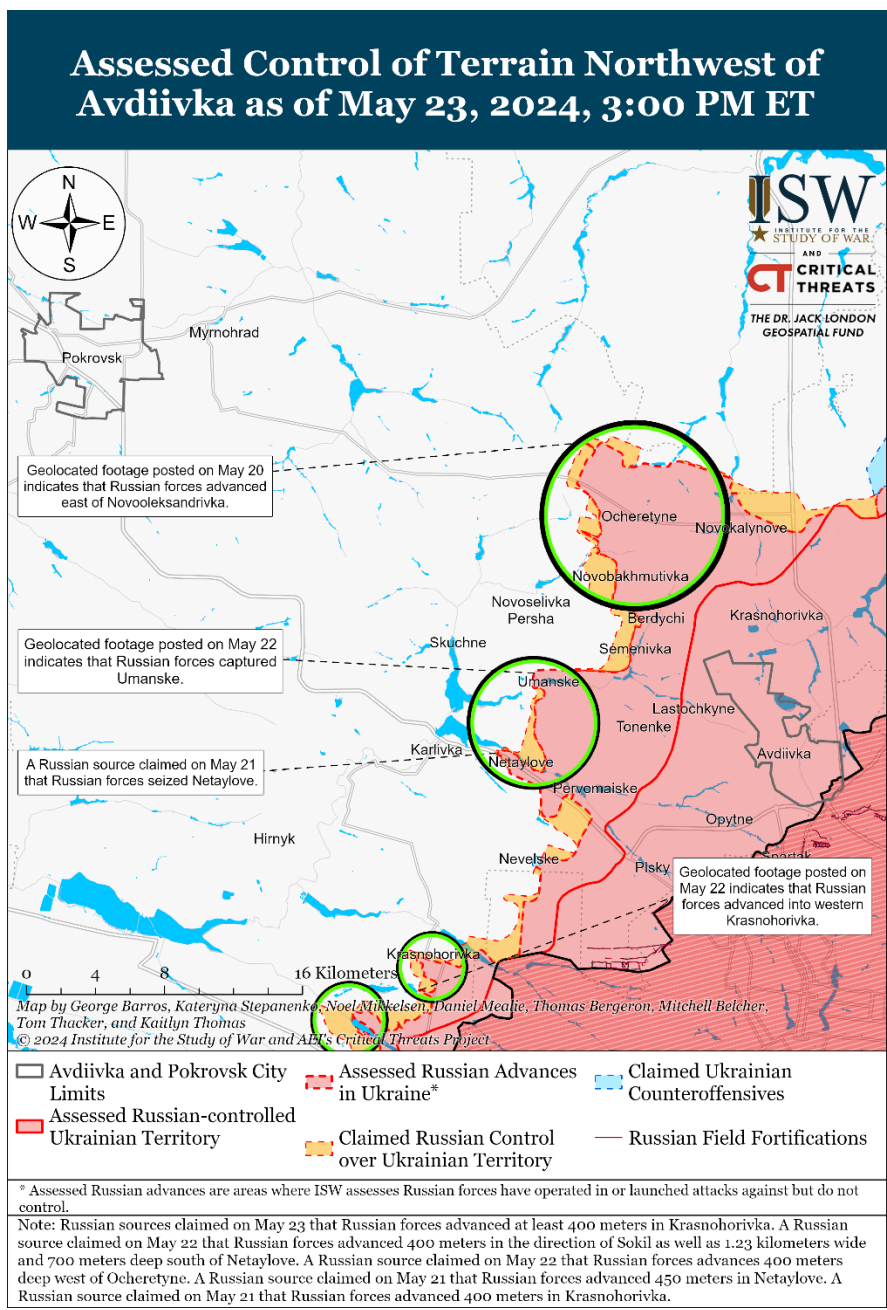
Russian forces recently advanced in the Siversk direction. Geolocated footage published on May 22 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced north of Berestove (southeast of Siversk).[54] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 22 that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Verkhokamyanske (southeast of Siversk).[55] Elements of the Russian 123rd Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC]) reportedly continue operating near Berestove.[56]



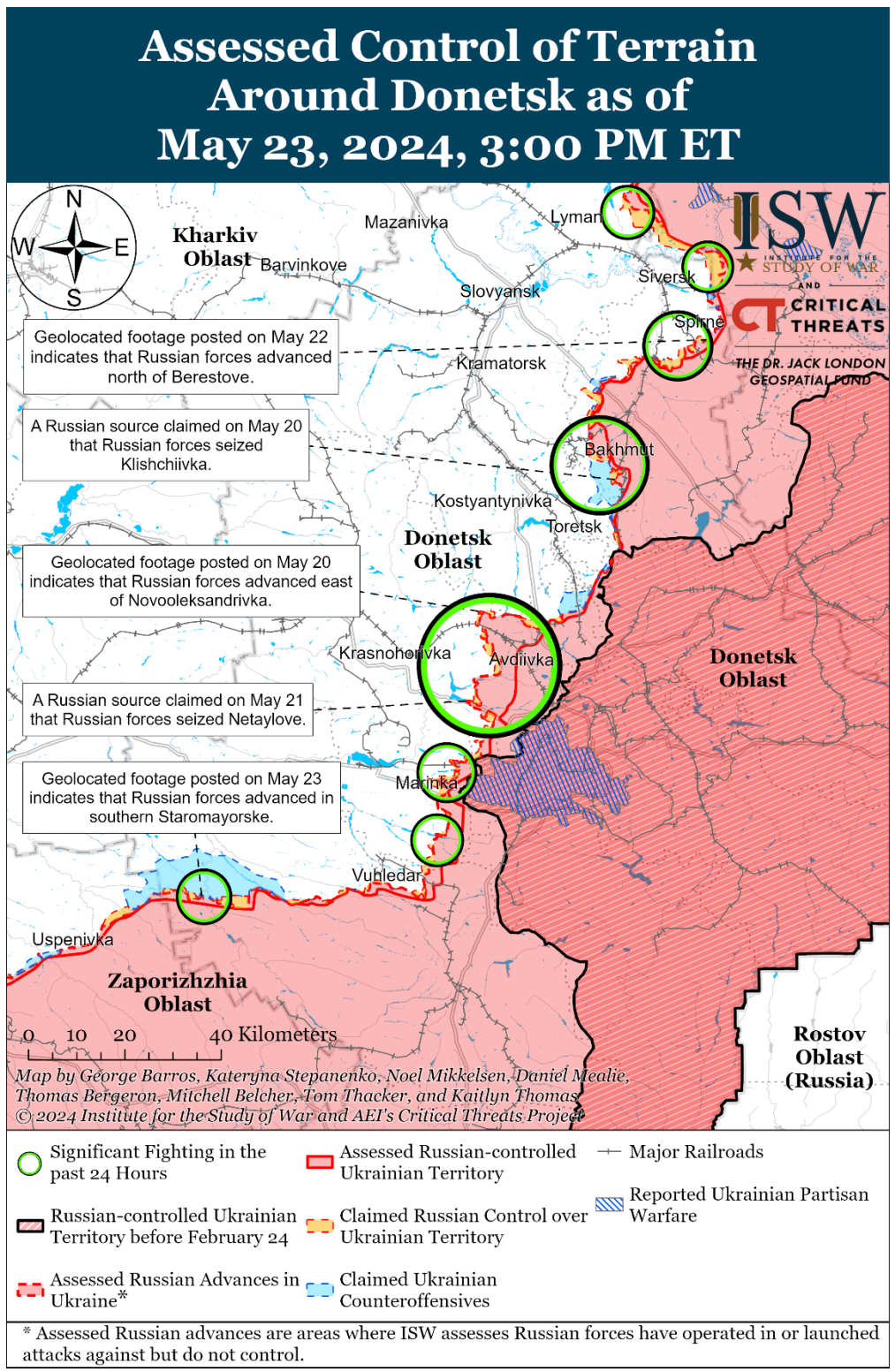
Russian forces reportedly advanced near Chasiv Yar on May 23, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces seized Andriivka (southeast of Chasiv Yar).[57] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced on the northeastern outskirts of the Kanal Microraion (easternmost Chasiv Yar), within Kanal, and near the Novyi Microraion (eastern Chasiv Yar).[58] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 800 meters deep and 1.55 kilometers wide in the northern part of the Stupky-Holubovski 2 nature reserve (southeast of Chasiv Yar).[59] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these Russian claims. Fighting also continued east of Chasiv Yar near Ivanivske and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka.[60] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Russian forces are attempting to seize Chasiv Yar "at any cost" and are using T-90 tanks and infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) in the area, which Ukrainian forces destroy with anti-tank systems and first-person view (FPV) drones.[61] Elements of the Russian 58th Spetsnaz Battalion (1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) and Sever-V Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps) are reportedly operating near Chasiv Yar, and elements of the 98th Airborne (VDV) Division are reportedly operating near Novyi.[62]



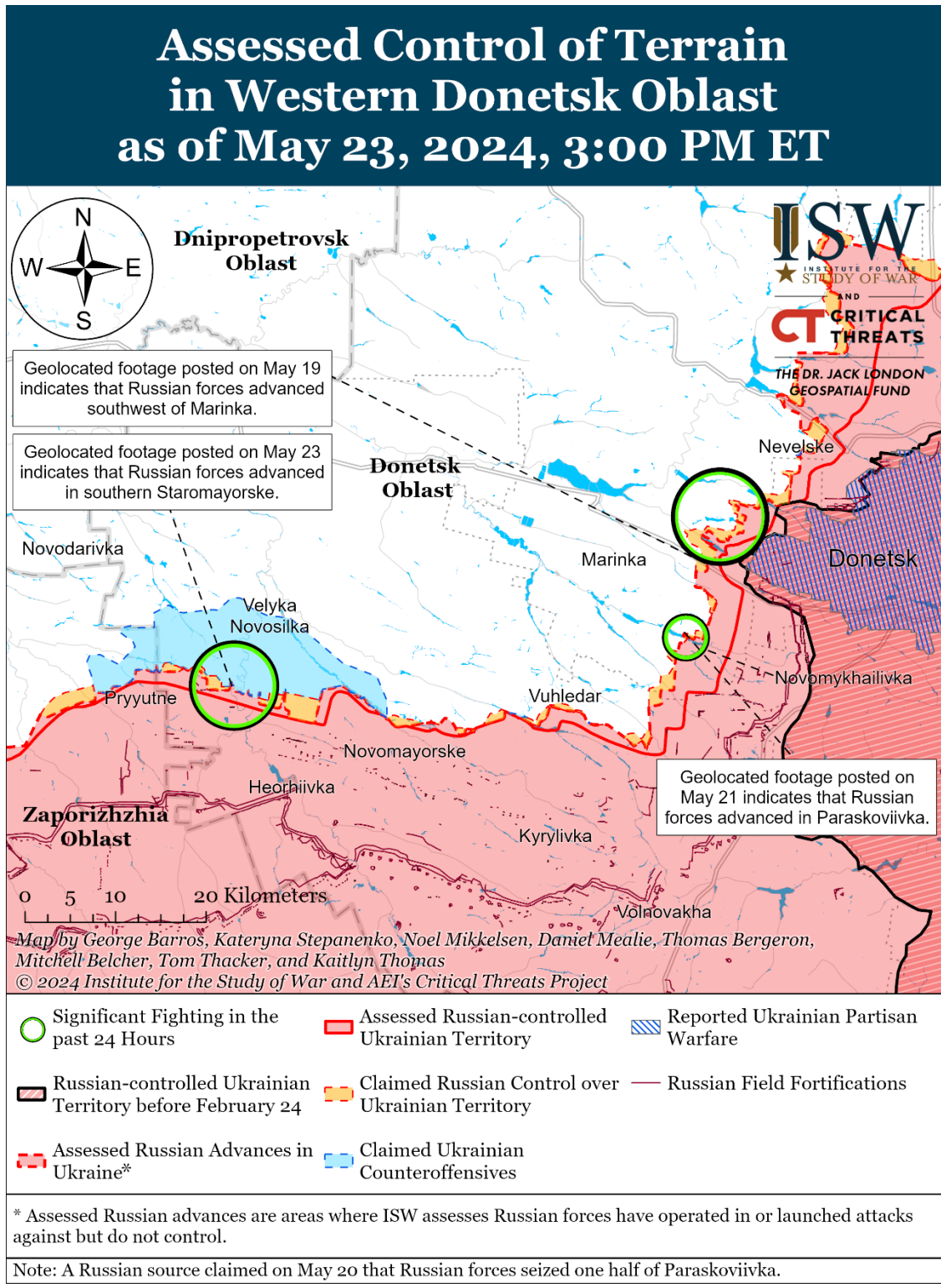
Russian forces recently advanced west and northwest of Avdiivka amid continued Russian offensive operations in the area on May 23. Geolocated footage published on May 22 showing Ukrainian forces striking a Russian ammunition supply point in northwestern Umanske likely indicates that Russian forces recently seized Umanske (west of Avdiivka).[63] Russian forces would likely only establish an ammunition supply point in a frontline settlement under Russian control. Additional geolocated footage published on May 22 indicates that Russian forces advanced west of Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka).[64] Fighting also continued north of Avdiivka near Kalynove; northwest of Avdiivka near Ocheretyne, Novooleksandriivka, Arkhanhelske, Sokil, Novopokrovske, and Solovyvove; and west of Avdiivka near Netaylove.[65] Syrskyi stated that the most intense fighting is ongoing in the Pokrovsk (Avdiivka) and Kurakhove (west and southwest of Donetsk City) directions and that the most prepared Russian units are attempting to break through between Berdychi and Staromykhailivka (west of Donetsk City).[66] Syrskyi stated that Russian forces are conducting mechanized and infantry-led assaults and sometimes use motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in assaults. Elements of the Russian 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC) are reportedly operating near Umanske, and elements of the 27th Motorized Rifle Division (2nd CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) are reportedly operating near Sokil.[67]



Russian forces recently advanced west of Donetsk City amid continued Russian offensive operations in the area on May 23. Geolocated footage published on May 22 and 23 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in southwestern and eastern Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City).[68] Fighting also continued west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka, Paraskoviivka, Kostyantynivka, and Vodyane.[69]

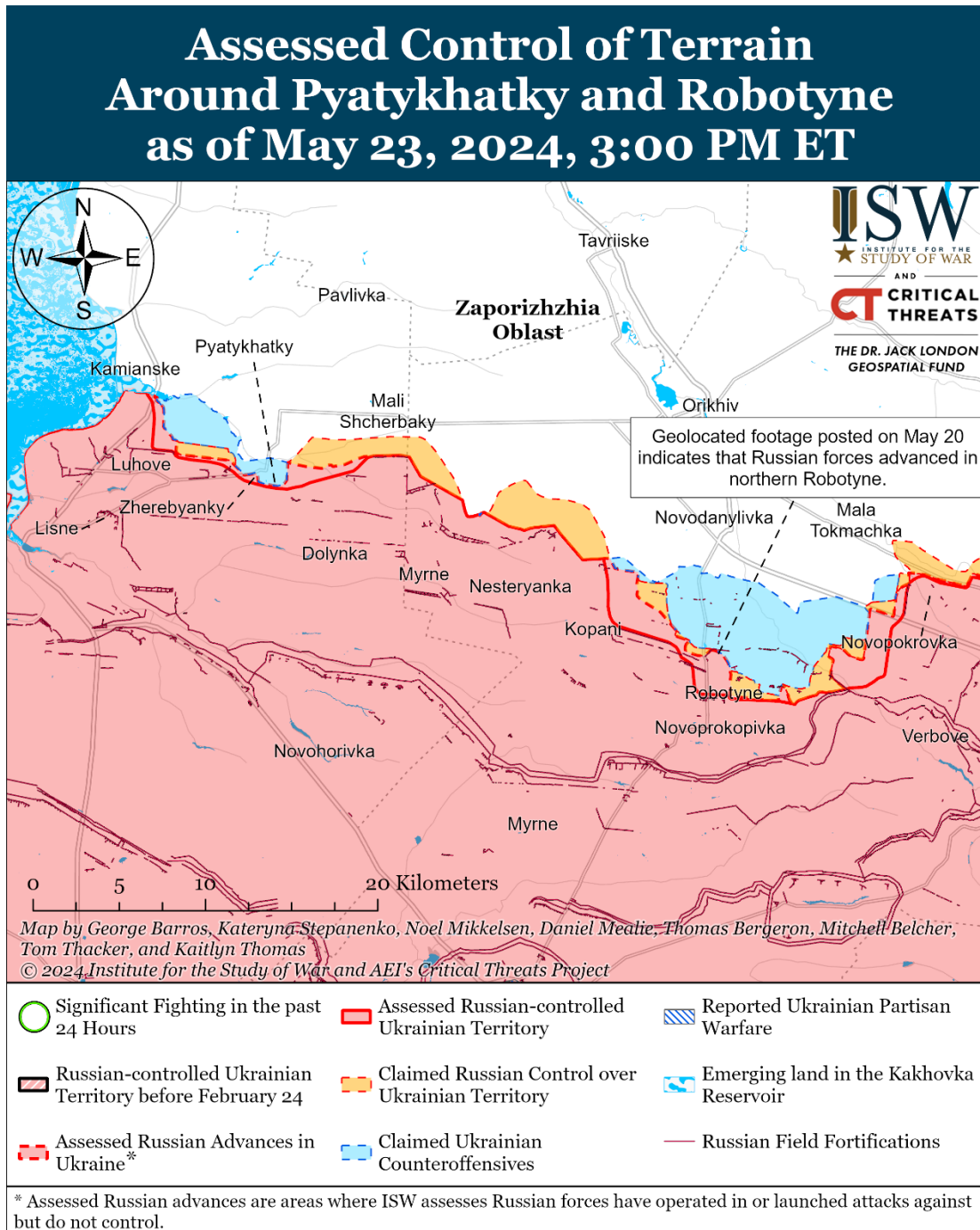


Russian forces recently advanced in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area. Geolocated footage published on May 23 indicates that Russian forces on motorcycles recently advanced into central Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka).[70] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian assault groups are using motorcycles near Staromayorske because they can more effectively evade Ukrainian artillery and FPV drone strikes than armored vehicles.[71] Fighting also continued south of Velyka Novosilka near Urozhaine.[72]

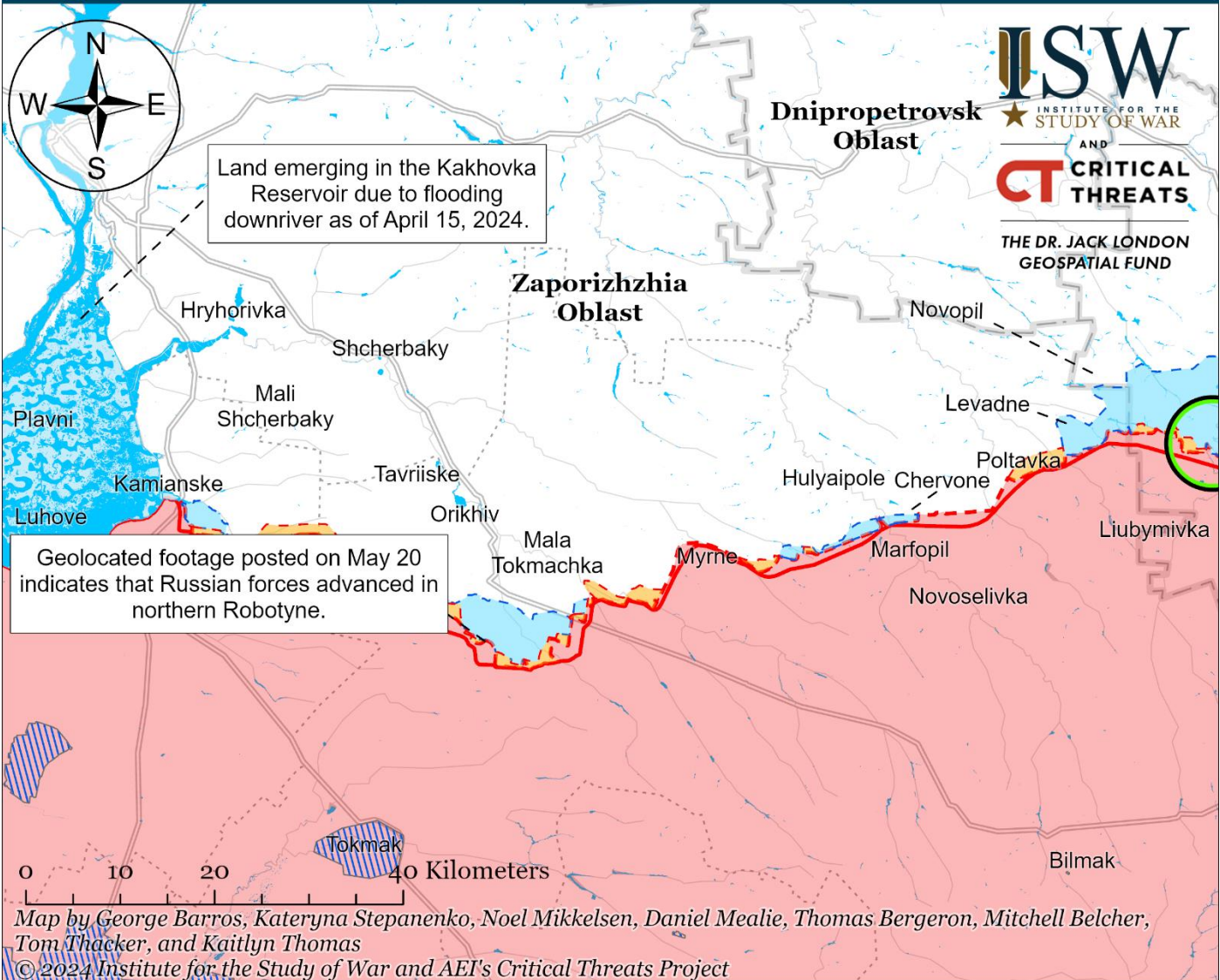


Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

The spokesperson for a Ukrainian unit operating near Robotyne stated on May 22 that Ukrainian forces control Robotyne, refuting the Russian Ministry of Defense’s (MoD) recent claim that Russian forces seized the settlement.[73] The spokesperson stated that Russian servicemen riding dirt bikes and small groups conducting reconnaissance-in-force are operating on the outskirts of Robotyne. Russian milbloggers claimed on May 23 that Russian forces seized two unspecified positions while advancing northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne), although ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[74] Elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Robotyne.[75]



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of May 23, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 23 that Russian forces continued assaults against Ukrainian positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast, including near Krynky.[76] Elements of the Russian 76th Airborne (VDV) Division are reportedly operating near Nestryha Island in the Dnipro River Delta.[77] Select Russian and Ukrainian sources have recently speculated that the Russian military may be redeploying elements of the 7th and 76th VDV divisions from the Robotyne area to Luhansk Oblast, Kherson Oblast, or Kursk Oblast.[78] A Russian milblogger with an avowed bias against VDV and "Dnepr" Grouping of Forces Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky claimed on April 29 that the Russian military command transferred elements of the 76th VDV Division to Krynky, Kherson Oblast to relieve elements of the 104th VDV Division, and reports of the 76th VDV Division operating in the Kherson direction support the milblogger's claim.[79]



Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on May 22 that Ukraine's May 19 strike against Sevastopol damaged the Russian *Tsyklon* Karakurt-class (project 22800) small missile ship and that Ukrainian forces are still clarifying information about damage to the Russian *Kovrovets* Natya-class minesweeper.[80] The United Kingdom's Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) assessed on May 23 that the May 19 strike "almost certainly" sunk the *Tsyklon* small missile ship.[81] Satellite imagery published on May 23 shows damage to Russian port infrastructure in Sevastopol as a result of the May 19 strike.[82]

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

Russian forces struck Kharkiv City and Lyubotyn, Kharkiv Oblast with 15 S-300/400 air defense missiles on May 23, mainly damaging transportation infrastructure.[83] Kharkiv Oblast Prosecutor's Office Spokesperson Dmytro Chubenko stated that Russian missiles struck a railway station in Lyubotyn and damaged transportation infrastructure in the area.[84] Kharkiv City Mayor Ihor Terekhov stated that Russian forces also struck transportation infrastructure and a utilities facility in the city.[85] Ukrainian state-owned railway company Ukrzaliznytsia stated that Russian missiles struck several railway facilities in Kharkiv Oblast but that trains continued to run according to schedule.[86] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted that Russian forces are taking advantage of Ukraine's limited air defense capabilities.[87] ISW has observed Russian forces increase strikes against Ukrainian transportation infrastructure in recent weeks in an apparent effort to disrupt Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) and constrain the flow of expected US security assistance to the frontline.[88]

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

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed applying regular military punishments to volunteers, likely as part of the MoD's continued formalization efforts. The Russian federal portal of draft regulations published a proposal from the Russian MoD on May 23 that would amend the law on volunteer formations to extend criminal liabilities for military service crimes to volunteers, including for leaving one's unit without permission and for refusing to comply with an order.[89] Russian volunteers have routinely presented serious command and control issues to Russian forces, and the Russian military command likely hopes that extending punishments to these personnel will allow Russian forces to more easily integrate volunteer formations into the Russian military.

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

Nothing significant to report.

Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)

ISW is not publishing coverage of Ukrainian defense industrial efforts today.

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

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

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze amplified recent Russian information operations depicting the West as a destabilizing actor, and the ruling Georgian Dream party will likely continue to closely follow Kremlin rhetoric. Kobakhidze stated on May 23 that special services of an unspecified country closely related to the "Global War Party" organized the assassination attempt against Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico.[90] The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) claimed on May 22 that the assassination attempt against Fico shows that "adherents of the globalist sect" in the West are "moving towards open political terror against opponents." [91] Kobakhidze accused unspecified EU officials of threatening

him with "Fico's fate" if Georgia Dream overrules Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili's veto of Georgia Dream's Russian-style "foreign agents" bill.[92] Kobakhidze claimed that the "Global War Party" intends to bring chaos to Georgia, a continuation of Georgia's Dreams Kremlin-inspired rhetoric about the threat of alleged Western intervention and destabilization in Georgia.[93] Georgian Dream actors likely intend to purposefully derail long-term Georgian efforts for Euro-Atlantic integration, which plays into continued Russian hybrid operations to divide, destabilize, and weaken Georgia.[94]

Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov warned that Russian actors will continue longstanding information operations. Yusov stated that Russian officials will continue to use the January 24 crash of a Russian Il-76 military transport aircraft in Belgorod Oblast allegedly transporting Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) to discredit the Ukrainian government and that the Russian Investigative Committee plans to intensify this information operation in July 2024.[95] Yusov stated that Russian actors continue an existing information operation called "Maidan 3" aimed at generating tensions within Ukrainian society and creating doubt about the legitimacy of Zelensky's presidency among Ukrainians.[96] Yusov also added that Russian actors will continue efforts to baselessly tie Ukraine to the March 22 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack.[97] ISW remains confident that the Islamic State (IS) conducted the Crocus City Hall attack and has yet to observe independent reporting or evidence to suggest that an actor other than IS was responsible for or aided the attack.[98]

Russian officials immediately characterized a Norwegian protective measure against actual Russian threats as escalatory. The Norwegian Government announced on May 23 that from May 29 the country will deny entry to Russian citizens for tourism or other non-essential travel purposes.[99] Norway has increasingly warned that there is a high threat of Russian security services conducting sabotage against Norwegian infrastructure and defense enterprises.[100] Russian Ambassador to Norway Teimuraz Ramishvili and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova described the Norwegian travel measure as discriminatory against Russians.[101] Ramishvili added that Russia had ceded unspecified territory more than once to Norway but claimed that Russia will not make any new demands, an unrelated aside likely meant to raise the specter of confrontation between Norway and Russia.[102]

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)

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko appointed Major General Pavel Muraveiko as the new Belarusian Chief of the General Staff on May 23.[103] Muraveiko served as the Belarusian Security Council's First Deputy Secretary of state prior to this appointment, and previously served as the Belarusian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate from 2013 to 2022.[104] Lukashenko dismissed the prior Chief of the General Staff, Major General Viktor Gulevich, on May 10 because he reached mandatory retirement age.[105]

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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