



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on May 6. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 7 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin appears to be re-intensifying a reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-making using nuclear threats and diplomatic manipulation. Reflexive control is a key element of Russia’s hybrid warfare toolkit – it is a tactic that relies on shaping an adversary with targeted rhetoric and information operations in such a way that the adversary voluntarily takes actions that are advantageous to Russia.[1] Soviet mathematician Vladimir Lefebvre defined reflexive control as “the process of transferring the reasons of making a decision” to an adversary via “provocations, intrigues, disguises, creation of false objects, and lies of any type.”[2] Russia has frequently used nuclear saber-rattling throughout the course of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine to cause the West (Russia’s self-defined adversary) to stop providing military support for Ukraine, and this nuclear saber-rattling has become a frequently used form of Russian reflexive control.[3]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported on May 6 that Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the Russian General Staff to prepare to conduct non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons exercises to “practice the preparation and use” of tactical nuclear weapons.[4] The Russian MoD stated that these exercises will involve missile formations of Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD) as well as Russian aviation and naval forces. The Russian MoD and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) both notably claimed that Russia will conduct nuclear exercises in response to “provocative statements and threats” made by Western officials against Russia.[5] The Russian MFA accused the US of deploying ground-based intermediate and short-range missiles “in various regions around the world,” which the Russian MFA claimed allows Russia to reciprocate in kind.[6] The Russian MFA also claimed that it will consider the arrival of F-16s to Ukraine as a provocation because Russia will consider F-16s carriers of nuclear weapons, a boilerplate threat that Russian officials have been making since Western states first committed to sending F-16s to Ukraine in summer 2023.[7] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev accused US, French, and British officials of considering sending their troops to Ukraine and claimed that this justifies Russia testing its tactical nuclear weapons.[8] Medvedev also directly threatened a “world catastrophe” as a result of Western involvement in Ukraine and warned of Russian strikes against Washington, Paris, and London.

Russian officials, particularly Medvedev, are critical elements of Russia’s efforts to use nuclear rhetoric as a form of reflexive control, as ISW has frequently reported.[9] Russian officials consistently time nuclear readiness exercises and vague threats of nuclear retaliation with important Western policy decisions regarding the war in Ukraine to force Western decision-makers to self-deter and temper their support for Ukraine. The current apparent resurgence of nuclear rhetoric, this time in the form of planned tactical nuclear weapons exercises, coincides with the imminent arrival of Western weapons in Ukraine. Russian officials are likely using the nuclear weapons information operation to discourage Ukraine’s Western partners from providing additional military support and to scare Western decision-makers out of allowing Ukrainian forces to use Western-provided systems to attack legitimate military targets in Russia. 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.[10]

The Russian MFA also summoned the British and French ambassadors to Russia as part of the wider ongoing reflexive control campaign aimed at discouraging Western governments from supporting Ukraine.[11] The Russian MFA claimed that it summoned British Ambassador to Russia Nigel Casey in connection with recent statements by British Foreign Minister David Cameron asserting that Ukraine has the right to strike military targets inside of Russia.[12] The Russian MFA accused Cameron of “escalating” the conflict by stating that Ukraine has the right to strike within Russia and warned that Russia can respond by striking “any British military facilities and equipment on the territory of Ukraine and beyond its borders.”[13] Russian MFA Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova and Kremlin newswire TASS also reported that Russia

summoned the French Ambassador to Russia due to French leadership’s “belligerent statements and the growing involvement of France in the conflict in Ukraine,” in response to French President Emmanuel Macron’s recent calls for expanded Western security assistance to Ukraine.[14] Russia likely summoned these ambassadors to discourage France and the UK, and by extension the rest of the West, from providing further support for Ukraine.

Russian elites and Kremlin officials are reportedly vying for influential positions in the Russian government ahead of the Russian presidential inauguration on May 7 to prematurely secure powerful roles in the event that Russian President Vladimir Putin leaves power around the end of his new term. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on May 6 that its sources in the Kremlin claimed that the Russian elites began actively speculating about who would join the new Russian government after Putin’s inauguration and noted that some elites are “tense” hoping for promotions and worrying about demotions.[15] Another source close to the Russian government told *Meduza* that Kremlin officials and Russian elites are currently trying to occupy the “highest possible position” in case Putin’s upcoming six-year presidential term is his last due to his age. ISW has not observed any indications that Putin intends to leave power after the conclusion of his upcoming presidential term. Putin’s possible efforts to position elites to succeed him and elites’ efforts to position themselves within the government are likely therefore premature. One source claimed that Russian elites are speculating that Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin or Russian Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko could become the next Russian Prime Minister, while other sources expressed doubt that current Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin would resign. A source close to the Russian Federal Assembly told *Meduza* that Russian Duma deputies are already prepared to re-approve Mishustin as Prime Minister. Two sources close to the Russian Presidential Administration and government stated that Russian Deputy Prime Minister and Presidential Envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District Yury Trutnev and Kemerovo Oblast Governor Sergei Tsivilev want new positions in the Russian government and suggested that Trutnev could head an unspecified government ministry and Trutnev could take a leading job in the Presidential Administration. *Meduza*’s sources close to the Kremlin stated that they have no information regarding Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu’s potential resignation in the wake of Russian Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov’s April 24 arrest and claimed that Shoigu “still has the opportunity to work on his job, at least until the completion of this phase of the [war in Ukraine].” Position changes among Russian elites are unlikely to have major effects on in Russia’s domestic and international decision-making and policy planning, however. A source close to the Russian Presidential Administration claimed that Putin is focused on conservatism, removing all dissenters, victory in the war in Ukraine, and “turning to the East,” likely referencing deepening Russian relations with China, Iran, and North Korea. Putin appears to be attempting to create ideological homogeneity among the Russian elite, which is consistent with ISW’s continued assessment that Putin values personal loyalty (and, by extension, the sharing of his worldview) over professional achievement.[16]

A Russian insider source, who has routinely been accurate about past Russian military command changes, claimed that the Russian military command appointed the commanders and chiefs of staff of the newly formed Leningrad and Moscow military districts (LMD and MMD). The insider source claimed that Russian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Alexander Lapin became the commander of the LMD, echoing claims from a Russian regional outlet from March 31.[17] The insider source claimed that the former commander of the 36th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Eastern Military District), Lieutenant General Valery Solodchuk, became the LMD Chief of Staff.[18] The insider source claimed that Solodchuk commanded an unspecified Russian group of forces responsible for the Russian state border in February 2024, during which he “quickly found a common language” with Lapin, resulting in Solodchuk’s appointment to LMD Chief of Staff. Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) Colonel General Sergei Kuzovlev reportedly became the commander of the Moscow Military District (MMD). Lieutenant General Mikhail Zusko, who commanded the 58th CAA (SMD) in 2022, reportedly became the MMD Chief of Staff.[19] ISW cannot confirm the insider source’s claims but notes that the source has been highly accurate about past military command changes.[20]

The Kremlin continues tightening the restrictions on individuals it designates as “foreign agents,” restricting their ability to serve in government roles, likely in a disguised purge of officials who do not adequately align with the Kremlin. The Russian State Duma unanimously passed a bill in its second and third readings on May 6 that prohibits individuals designated as “foreign agents” from running in Russian elections for or serving at any level of government.[21] The bill stipulates that any government officials who are also designated as foreign agents have 180 days to somehow remove themselves from the list of foreign agents before Russian authorities strip the officials of their office.[22] The bill also prohibits foreign agents from serving as election observers or election proxies — individuals appointed to campaign on behalf of high-level candidates.[23] The bill notably prevents the Russian authorities from designating election candidates as foreign agents during the course of the election.[24] It is unclear how many incumbent Russian officials this bill will affect. Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin stated that foreign agents can participate in Russian elections after authorities remove the foreign agent designation.[25] The Kremlin has recently been

cracking down on foreign agents and expanding the legally prosecutable definition of extremism — both labels that deprive Russians of certain rights and increasingly portray Russians who gain these designations for expressing anti-war sentiment as directly opposing the Kremlin itself.[26] The Kremlin may be pushing this bill through now to coincide with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s May 8 inauguration and subsequent new cabinet.[27]

Ukraine’s Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted a successful maritime drone strike against a Russian patrol boat in occupied Crimea on May 6, and Ukrainian forces are reportedly adapting their maritime drones to combat Russian defensive measures. The GUR-published footage on May 6 of a GUR Magura V5 maritime drone striking a Russian Project 12150 Mangust-class patrol boat in Vuzka Bay near occupied Chornomorske, Crimea.[28] The GUR stated that the destroyed Mangust-class patrol boat was likely worth \$3 million. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) destroyed five Ukrainian maritime drones near the northwestern Crimean coast and published footage purportedly of a Russian helicopter striking one of the drones.[29] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces had adapted the drones to defend against Russian strikes, particularly from helicopters, with heat-seeking missiles and to break through containment booms.[30] Several prominent Russian milbloggers expressed anger that the Russian military bureaucracy is causing Russian forces to respond too slowly to Ukrainian maritime drone adaptations.[31]

Russia may be switching sides in the Sudanese civil war to support the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in pursuit of a Red Sea naval base for Russia, which would align Iranian and Russian Sudanese policy and create opportunities for increased Iranian-Russian cooperation in Sudan and the broader Red Sea area. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Representative for the Russian President in Africa and the Middle East Mikhail Bogdanov met with SAF head Abdel Fattah al Burhan and several other Sudanese officials during a two-day visit to Sudan on April 28 and 29.[32] Bogdanov stated that his visit could lead to increased cooperation and expressed support for “the existing legitimacy in the country represented by the [SAF-backed] Sovereign Council.”[33] France-based Sudanese news outlet *Sudan Tribune* reported that Russia offered “unrestricted qualitative military aid” during the meetings and also enquired about its longstanding but unimplemented agreement to establish a naval base in Port Sudan.[34]

Bogdanov’s discussions indicate that the Kremlin is willing to risk the gold it had been getting from supporting the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which are fighting a civil war against the SAF, to advance its longstanding Red Sea basing ambitions. The Wagner Group had been arming and training the RSF since the outbreak of the civil war in April 2023 due to preexisting ties owing to the RSF’s control of Sudan’s gold mines.[35] However, the civil war has halted some Wagner-linked gold operations, and it is unclear if this support has continued to the same extent after the death of Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in August 2023.[36] US officials and an independent report from non-profit groups claimed that Wagner smuggled out an estimated 32.7 tons of gold worth \$1.9 billion during the first year of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.[37]

Russia has pursued a Red Sea port since 2008 to protect its economic interests in the area and improve its military posture by increasing its ability to challenge the West in the broader region, including in the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean.[38] Russian President Vladimir Putin had previously made an agreement with Sudan’s longtime dictator Omar al Bashir in 2017 for a Red Sea base capable of stationing 300 Russian servicemembers and four ships in exchange for various kinds of military and regime security support.[39] The Kremlin subsequently supported both the RSF and SAF after Bashir’s ouster in 2019 to pursue an implementation of the deal.[40] RSF Commander General Hemedti led these negotiations after the RSF and SAF overthrew Sudan’s civilian-led transitional government in 2021, but the civil war that broke out between the RSF and the SAF once again put the deal on hold.[41] The SAF controls Sudan’s coast, making it the key gatekeeper for any naval base.[42]

Russia backing the SAF would greatly benefit Iran by aligning Iranian and Russian policy and strategy in the region, which would advance Iran’s own aims of securing a Red Sea base in Sudan. Iran strengthened its bilateral relations with the SAF throughout 2023 and started sending drones to the SAF in late 2023 and early 2024.[43] The *Wall Street Journal* reported in March 2024 that Iran unsuccessfully attempted to use these ties and promises of a helicopter-carrier ship to secure a permanent naval base in Port Sudan.[44] Iran seeks a Red Sea naval base for reasons similar to Russia’s—to project power further westward. Iran would use a Red Sea base to support out-of-area naval operations and attacks on international shipping. This power projection includes threatening Red Sea shipping traffic and creating opportunities to launch attacks into Israel with systems fired from surface combatants.

The Kremlin may also align its Sudan policy with Iran to lighten its own military commitments. Russian insider sources reported in mid-April that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MOD) was redeploying Russian soldiers from unspecified MOD-affiliated Africa Corps units to the Ukrainian border.[45] These demands from the Ukraine war compound ongoing capacity

issues stemming from Africa Corps' recruitment struggles.^[46] Russia aligning with Iran would enable the Kremlin to coordinate aid with Iran and potentially free the resources and soldiers that it had devoted to supporting the RSF.^[47] Bogdanov met with Iranian Deputy PM Ali Bagheri Kani two days before leaving for Sudan when they discussed "the importance of bilateral ties and regional issues," indicating they are already coordinating on the issue.^[48]

The Kremlin is additionally pursuing secondary objectives, including sidelining Ukrainian and US influence in Sudan, through its outreach to the SAF. The *Sudan Tribune* reported that Bogdanov enquired about Sudanese military cooperation with Ukraine during his visit.^[49] Ukraine has provided military support to the SAF as one of its many initiatives to boost support in Africa as many African countries have been ambivalent about or supportive of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.^[50] The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Ukraine sent nearly 100 Ukrainian special forces soldiers to Sudan at Burhan's request in August 2023 that have supported the SAF through occasional combat, drone support, training, and supplies provision.^[51] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed on April 17 that the Kremlin planned to launch an information operation accusing Ukrainian forces of illegally using Western weapons in Sudan to discredit Ukraine and undermine Western support for Ukraine.^[52]

Russia's backing of the SAF also risks undermining impending US-backed peace talks.^[53] The US has been urging a resumption of peace talks after US-Saudi efforts failed throughout 2023.^[54] Other foreign intervention contributed to these failures by emboldening actors to take hardline negotiating stances.^[55]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin appears to be re-intensifying a reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-making using nuclear threats and diplomatic manipulation.**
- **Russian elites and Kremlin officials are reportedly vying for influential positions in the Russian government ahead of the Russian presidential inauguration on May 7 to prematurely secure powerful roles in the event that Russian President Vladimir Putin leaves power around the end of his new term.**
- **A Russian insider source, who has routinely been accurate about past Russian military command changes, claimed that the Russian military command appointed the commanders and chiefs of staff of the newly formed Leningrad and Moscow military districts (LMD and MMD).**
- **The Kremlin continues tightening the restrictions on individuals it designates as "foreign agents," restricting their ability to serve in government roles, likely in a disguised purge of officials who do not adequately align with the Kremlin.**
- **Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted a successful maritime drone strike against a Russian patrol boat in occupied Crimea on May 6, and Ukrainian forces are reportedly adapting their maritime drones to combat Russian defensive measures.**
- **Russia may be switching sides in the Sudanese civil war to support the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in pursuit of a Red Sea naval base for Russia, which would align Iranian and Russian Sudanese policy and create opportunities for increased Iranian-Russian cooperation in Sudan and the broader Red Sea area.**
- **Russia has pursued a Red Sea port since 2008 to protect its economic interests in the area and improve its military posture by increasing its ability to challenge the West in the broader region, including in the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean.**
- **Russia backing the SAF would greatly benefit Iran by aligning Iranian and Russian policy and strategy in the region, which would advance Iran's own aims of securing a Red Sea base in Sudan.**
- **The Kremlin is additionally pursuing secondary objectives, including sidelining Ukrainian and US influence in Sudan, through its outreach to the SAF.**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances northwest of Svatove, near Avdiivka, in western Zaporizhia Oblast, and in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast.**
- **Ukrainian Zaporizhia Oblast Head Ivan Fedorov stated that Russian authorities have created the infrastructure necessary to conscript Ukrainians in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast and plan to conscript more than 150,000 Ukrainians into the Russian army in an unspecified time period.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 6, 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.

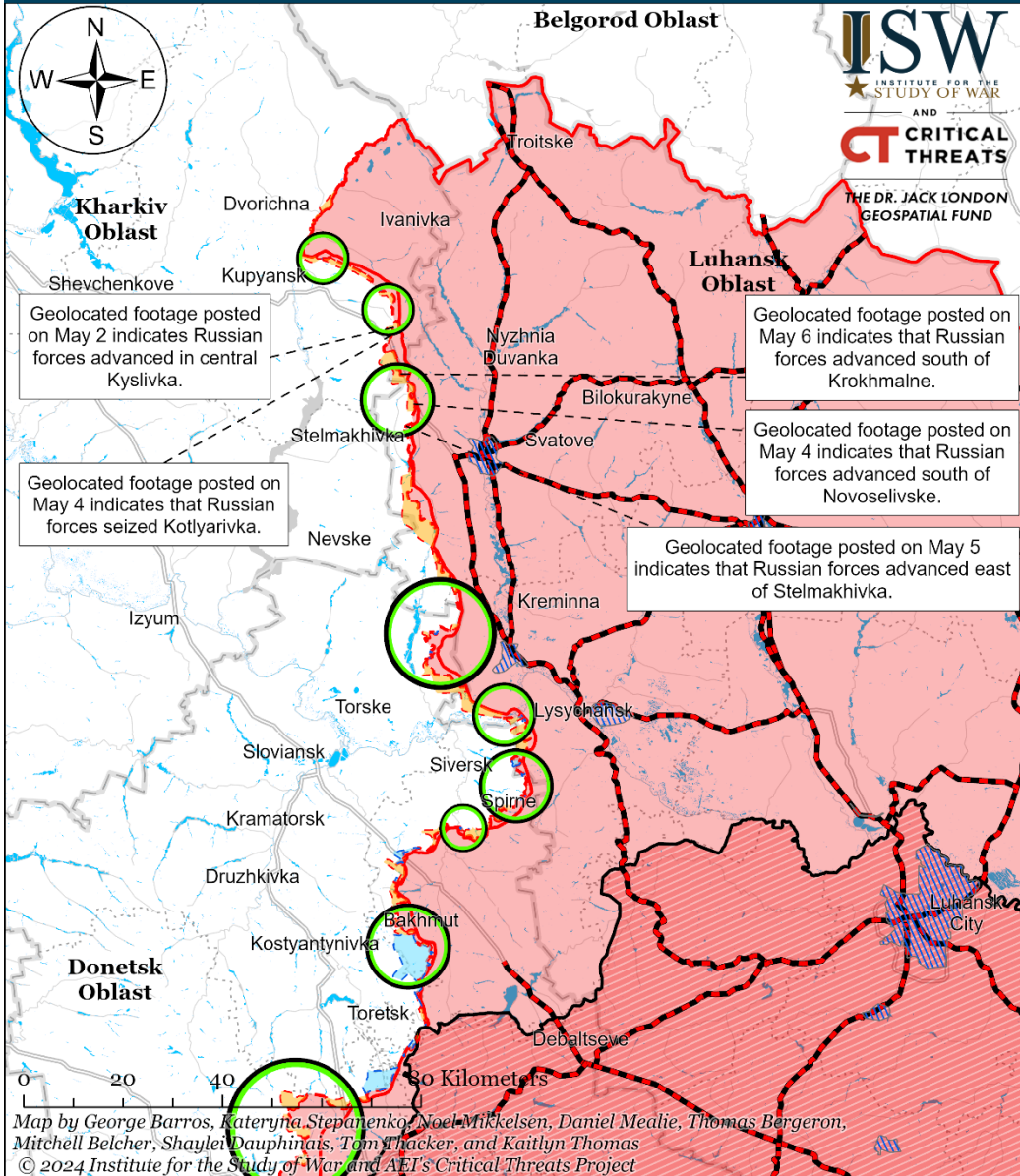
- Russian Main Effort — Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 — Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 — Capture the entirety 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 recently marginally advanced northwest of Svatove amid continued ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on May 6. Geolocated footage published on May 5 and 6 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced east of Stelmakhivka and south of Krokmalne (both northwest of Svatove), respectively, and a Russian milblogger reported that Russian forces advanced 300 meters on the eastern outskirts of Stelmakhivka.[56] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on May 6 that Russian forces captured Kotlyarivka (northwest of Svatove), and Russian milbloggers subsequently claimed that the capture of Kotlyarivka allowed elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army (Moscow Military District [MMD]) to completely seize Kyslivka (northwest of Svatove), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[57] Russian milbloggers previously claimed that Russian forces captured Kyslivka on April 27.[58] Russian forces continued assaults northwest of Svatove near Pishchane and Berestove; northwest of Kreminna near Nevske and Novosadove; west of Kreminna near Torske; and south of Kreminna near the Serebryanske forest area and Bilohorivka.[59] Elements of the Russian 204th “Akhmat” Spetsnaz Regiment are reportedly operating in forests near Kreminna.[60]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of May 6, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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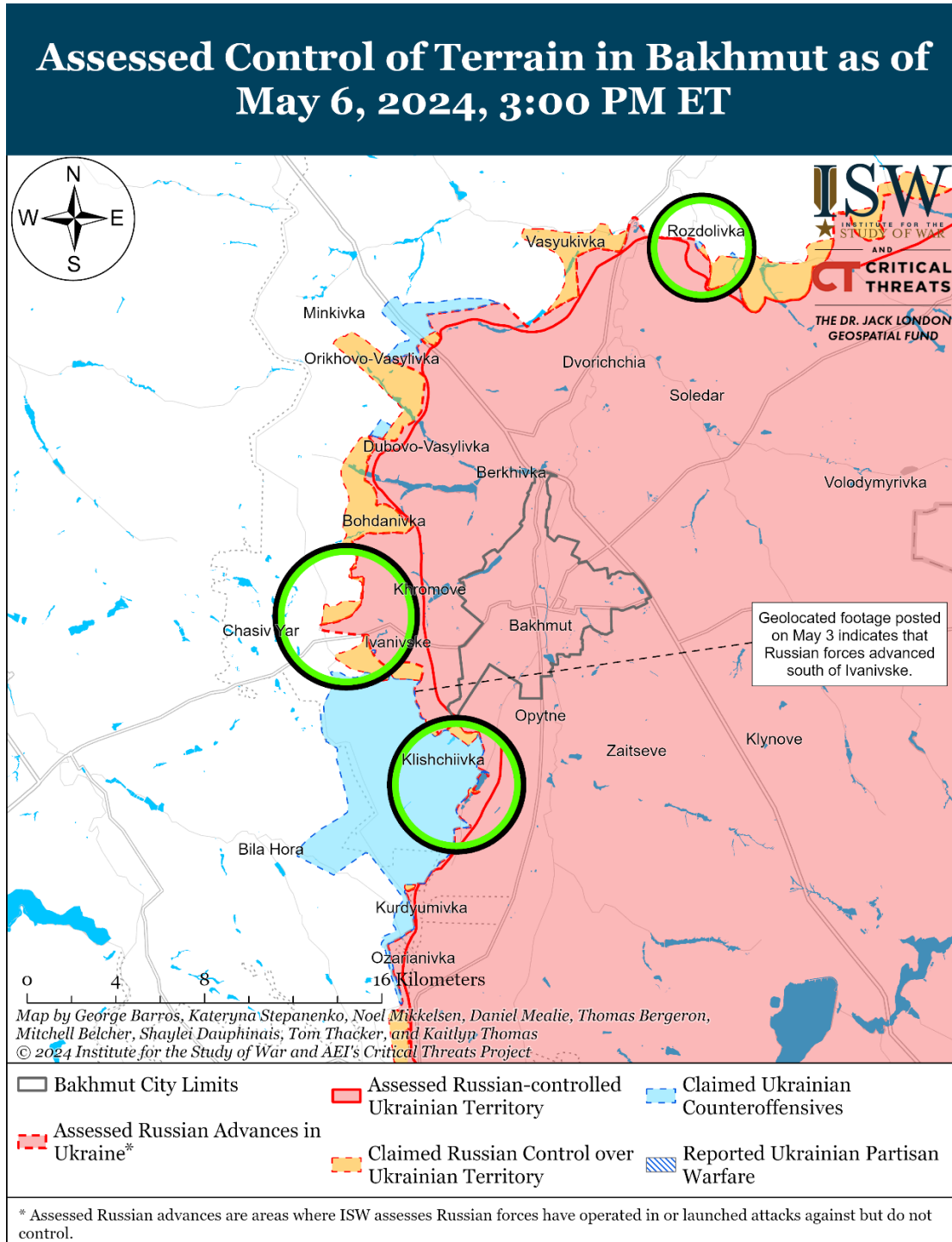
Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Russian Ground Lines of Communication	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24	Claimed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

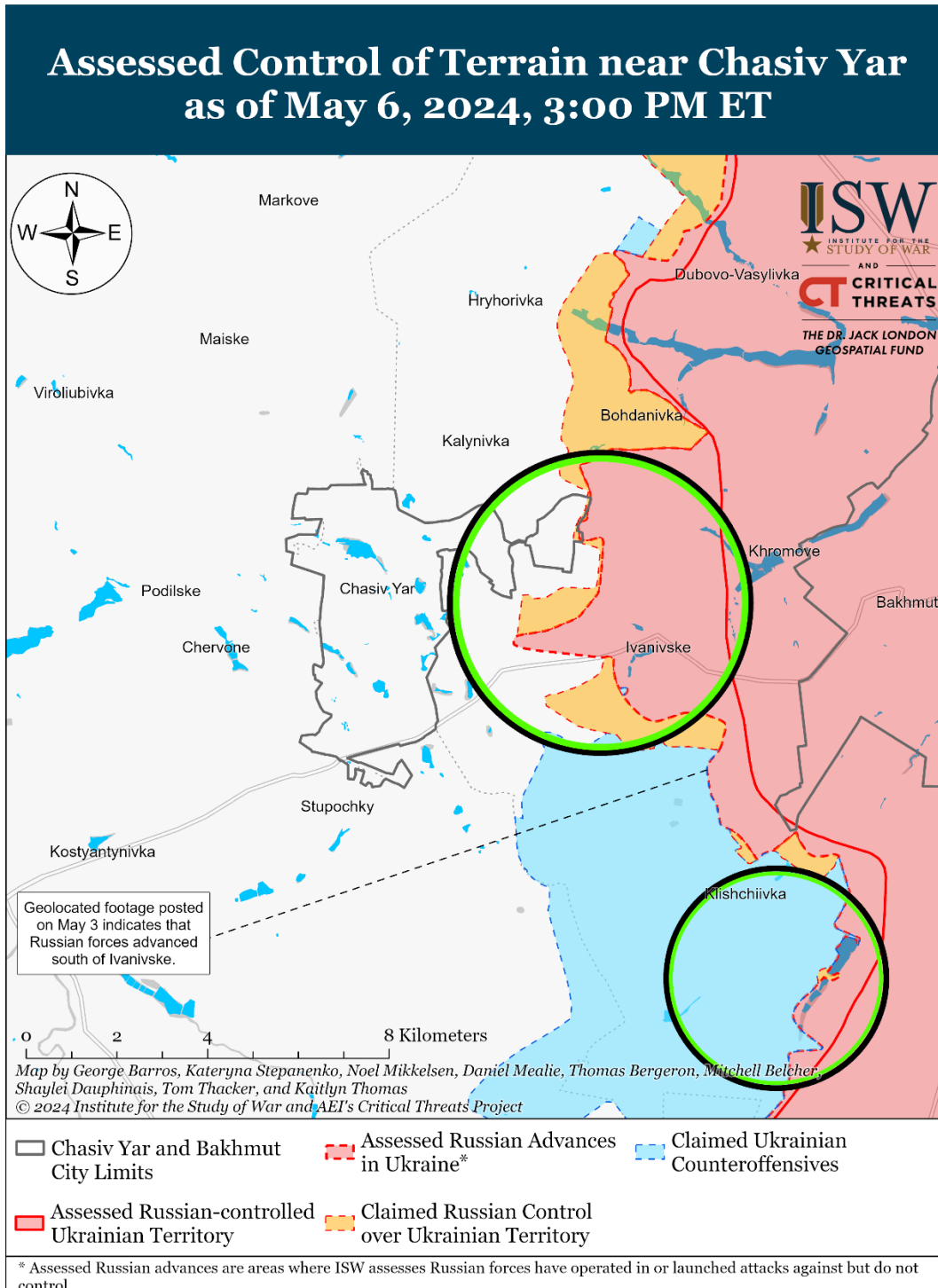
Note: A Russian source claimed on May 6 that Russian forces 1.32 kilometers wide and 1.15 kilometers deep near Kyslivka. A Russian source claimed on May 6 that Russian forces advanced 300 meters on the eastern outskirts of Stelmakhivka.

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

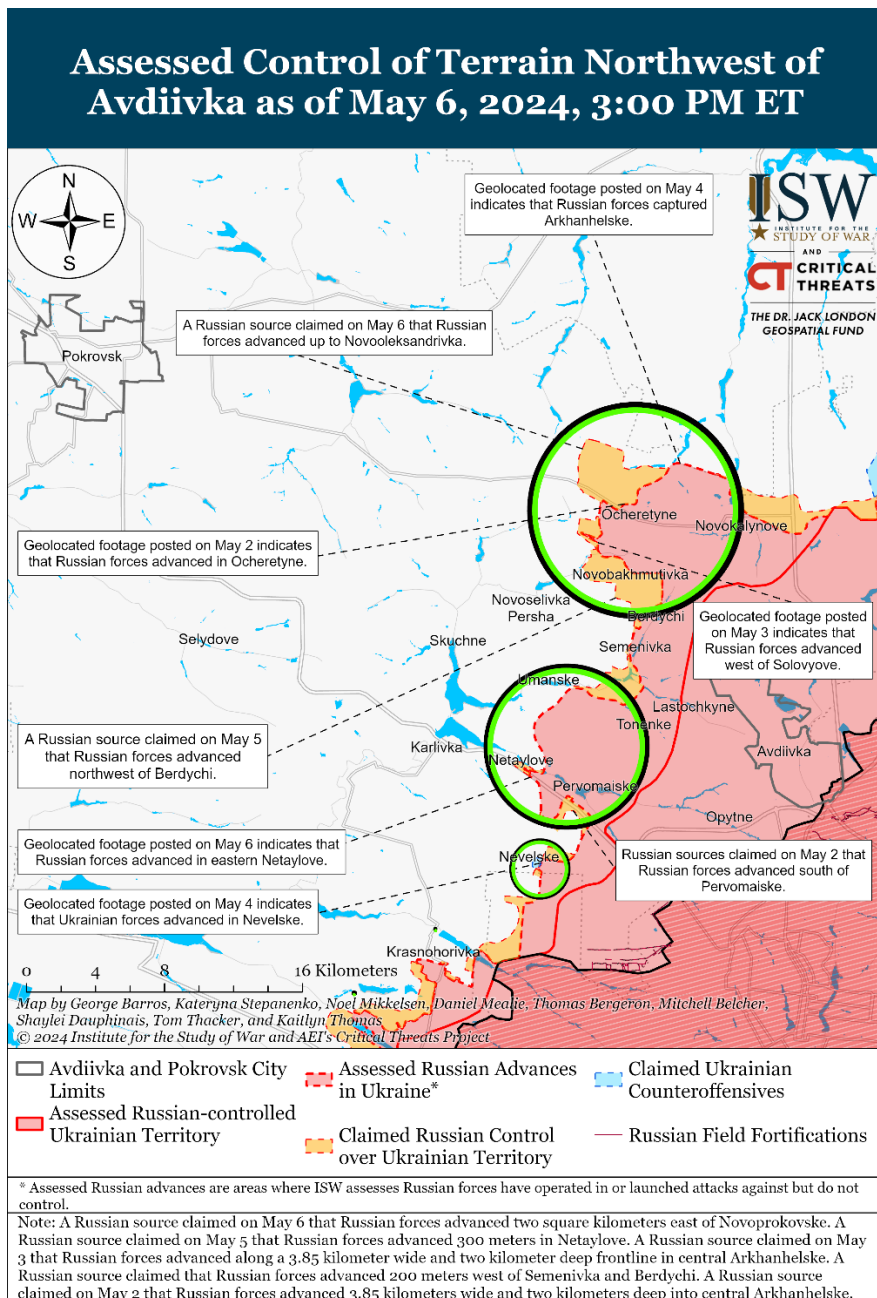
Russian forces continued limited offensive operations in the Siversk direction northeast of Bakhmut on May 6, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks east of Siversk near Verkhokamyanske; southeast of Siversk near Spirne and Vyimka; and south of Siversk near Rozdolivka.[61] Elements of the “GORB” detachment of the 2nd Luhansk People’s Republic Army Corps (LNR AC) are reportedly operating near Spirne.[62]



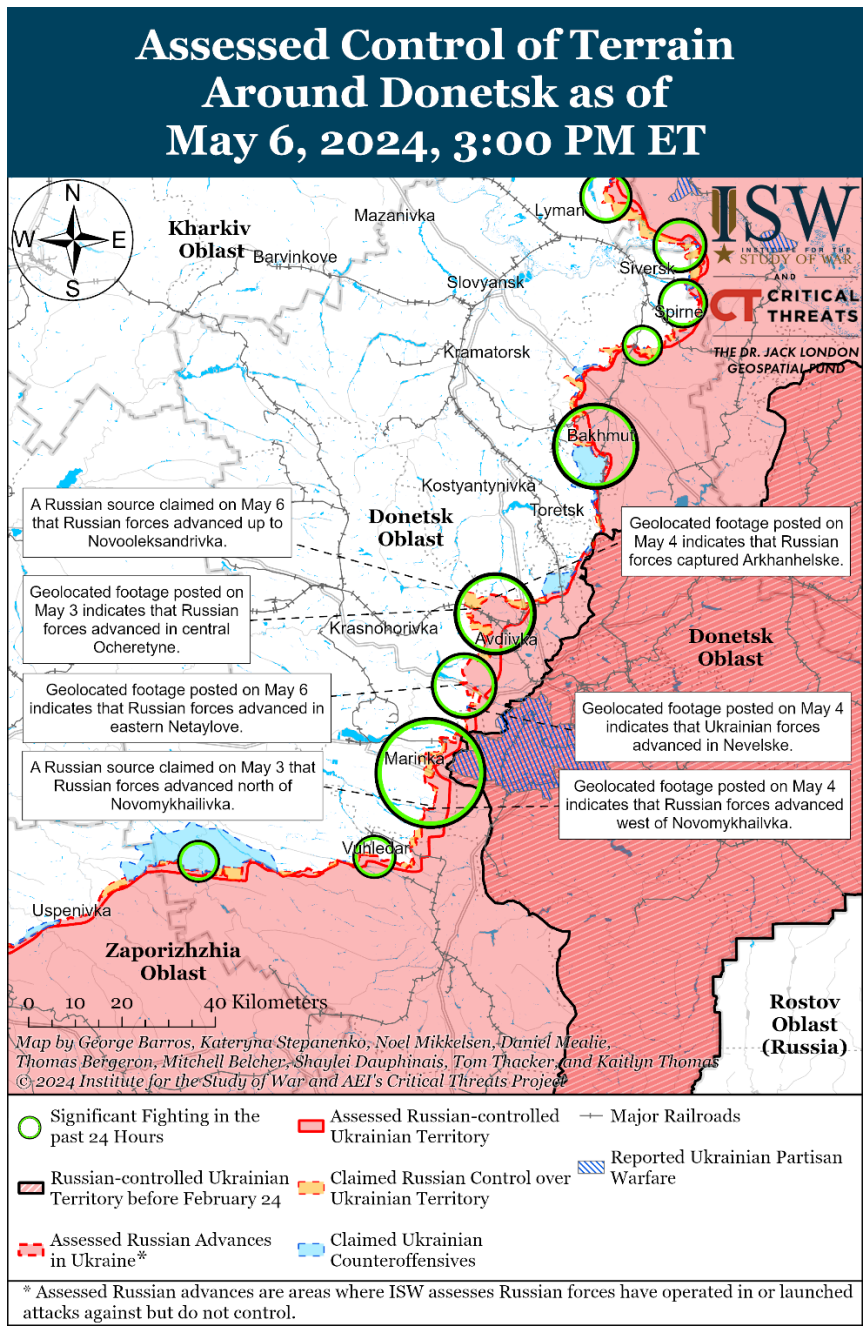
Russian forces continued offensive operations towards Chasiv Yar on May 6, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian milbloggers claimed that intense fighting continued on the eastern flanks of Chasiv Yar near Bohdanivka (northeast of Chasiv Yar) and Ivanivske (east of Chasiv Yar).[63] The Ukrainian 5th Assault Brigade posted footage of Russian “turtle tanks” with constructed metal anti-drone covers operating under the cover of a smokescreen near Bakhmut.[64] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces struck a Ukrainian bridge across the Siversky-Donets Donbas canal east of Chasiv Yar.[65] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled attacks near Ivanivske and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[66] Elements of the Russian 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are reportedly operating in the Chasiv Yar direction.[67]



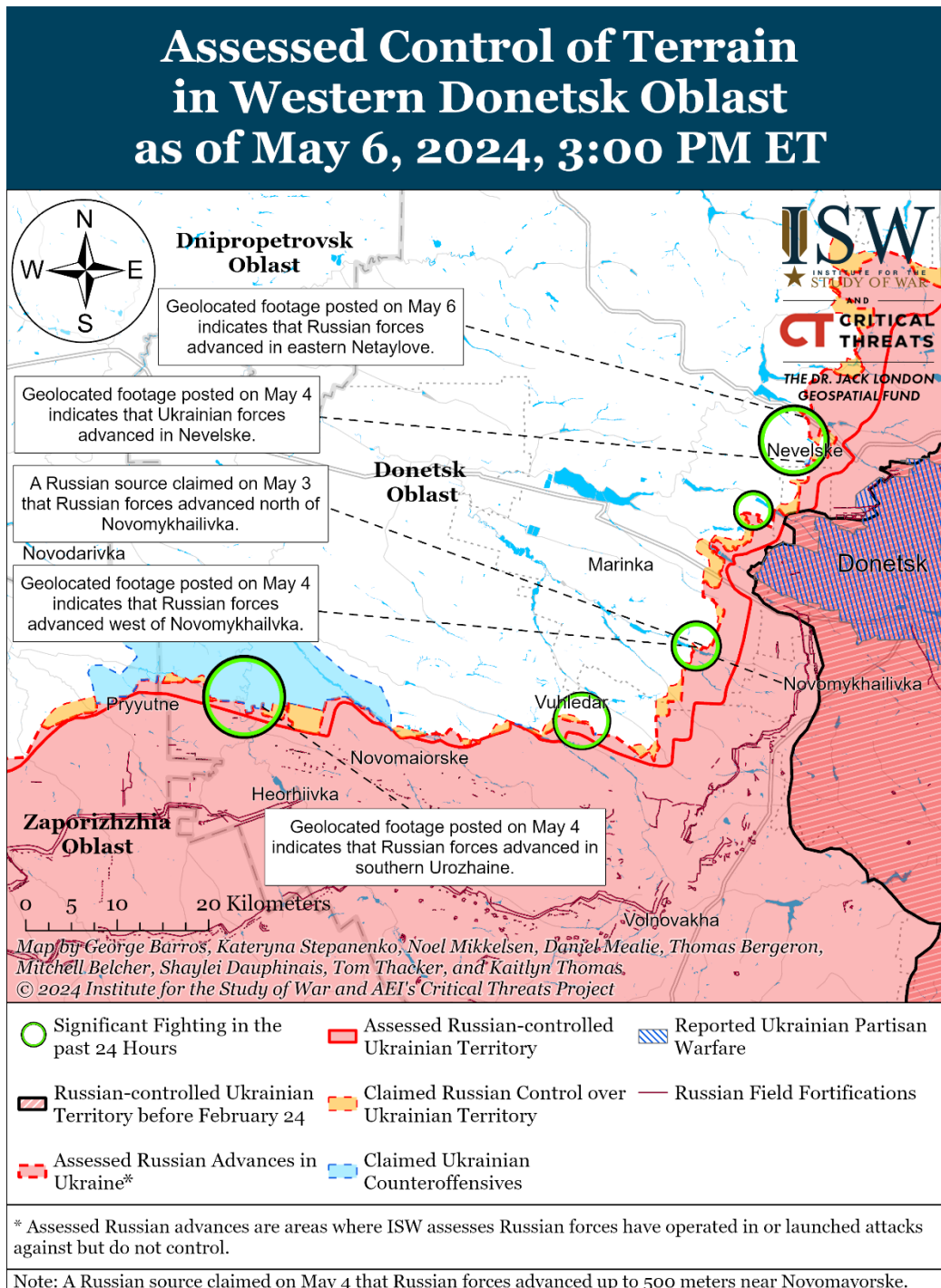
Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Avdiivka amid continued offensive operations west of the settlement on May 6. Geolocated footage published on May 6 shows that Russian forces advanced along the E50 highway in eastern Netaylove (southwest of Avdiivka).[68] Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that fighting continued in Netaylove.[69] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced east of Novopokrovske (northwest of Avdiivka) up to two kilometers and that Russian forces reached the outskirts of Novooleksandrivka (northwest of Ocheretyne and about 15km northwest of Avdiivka), although ISW has not yet observed confirmed Russian advances in these areas.[70] One milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in the residential area in eastern Umanske (west of Avdiivka).[71] Russian milbloggers additionally claimed that Russian forces are attacking towards Kalynove from positions in Arkhanhelske (both north of Avdiivka).[72] The Ukrainian General Staff reported continued Russian attacks northwest of Avdiivka near Novooleksandrivka and Novoprokovske; west of Avdiivka near Umanske and Yasnobrodivka; and southwest of Avdiivka near Netaylove and Nevelske.[73] Elements of the Russian “Lavina” Battalion (132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade, 1st Donetsk People’s Republic [DNR] AC) are reportedly operating north of Avdiivka in the Keramik-Novokalynove-Arkhanhelske area, and elements of the 24th Guards Spetsnaz Brigade are reportedly operating near Pervomaiske (southwest of Avdiivka).[74]



Russian sources claimed that Russian forces continued to advance west of Donetsk City, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline on May 6. Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have advanced towards western Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City) and that there is heavy fighting in the area of the industrial zone west of the recently-seized brick factory.[75] Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn reported that small individual Russian groups (likely around squad-size) are trying to storm Krasnohorivka, but that heavy Ukrainian artillery fire is preventing them from consolidating gains and conducting further attacks.[76] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have captured “most” of Paraskoviivka (southwest of Donetsk City), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of Russian control over the settlement and another milblogger claimed that fighting is still only ongoing on the eastern outskirts.[77] Ukrainian and Russian sources reported continued Russian attacks west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Kostyantynivka and Paraskoviivka.[78] Elements of the Russian 14th Artillery Brigade and 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (both of the 1st DNR AC) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka.[79]

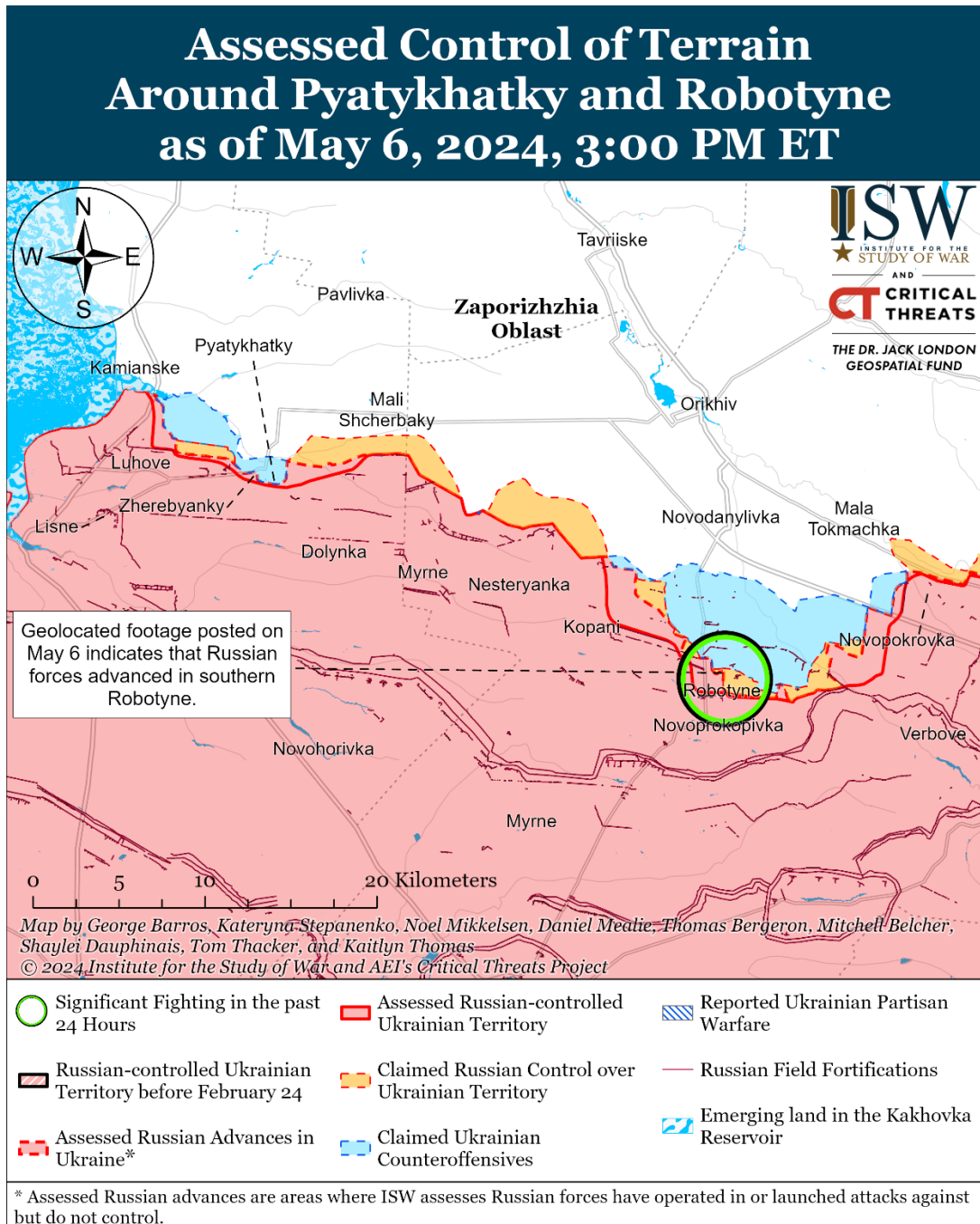


Russian forces continued limited and unsuccessful ground attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on May 6. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported Russian attacks northeast of Vuhledar near Vodyane and south of Velyka Novosilka near Urozhaine and Staromayorske.[80] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced northwards up to one kilometer east of Urozhaine, and another milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced southeast of Urozhaine, although ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims.[81] Elements of the 36th Motorized Rifle Brigade (29th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating near Vuhledar; elements of the 11th Air Force and Air Defense Army (Russian Aerospace Forces and EMD) are reportedly operating near Prechystivka (southeast of Velyka Novosilka); and elements of the 38th Motorized Rifle Brigade (35th CAA, EMD) are operating near Hulyaipole (southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[82]

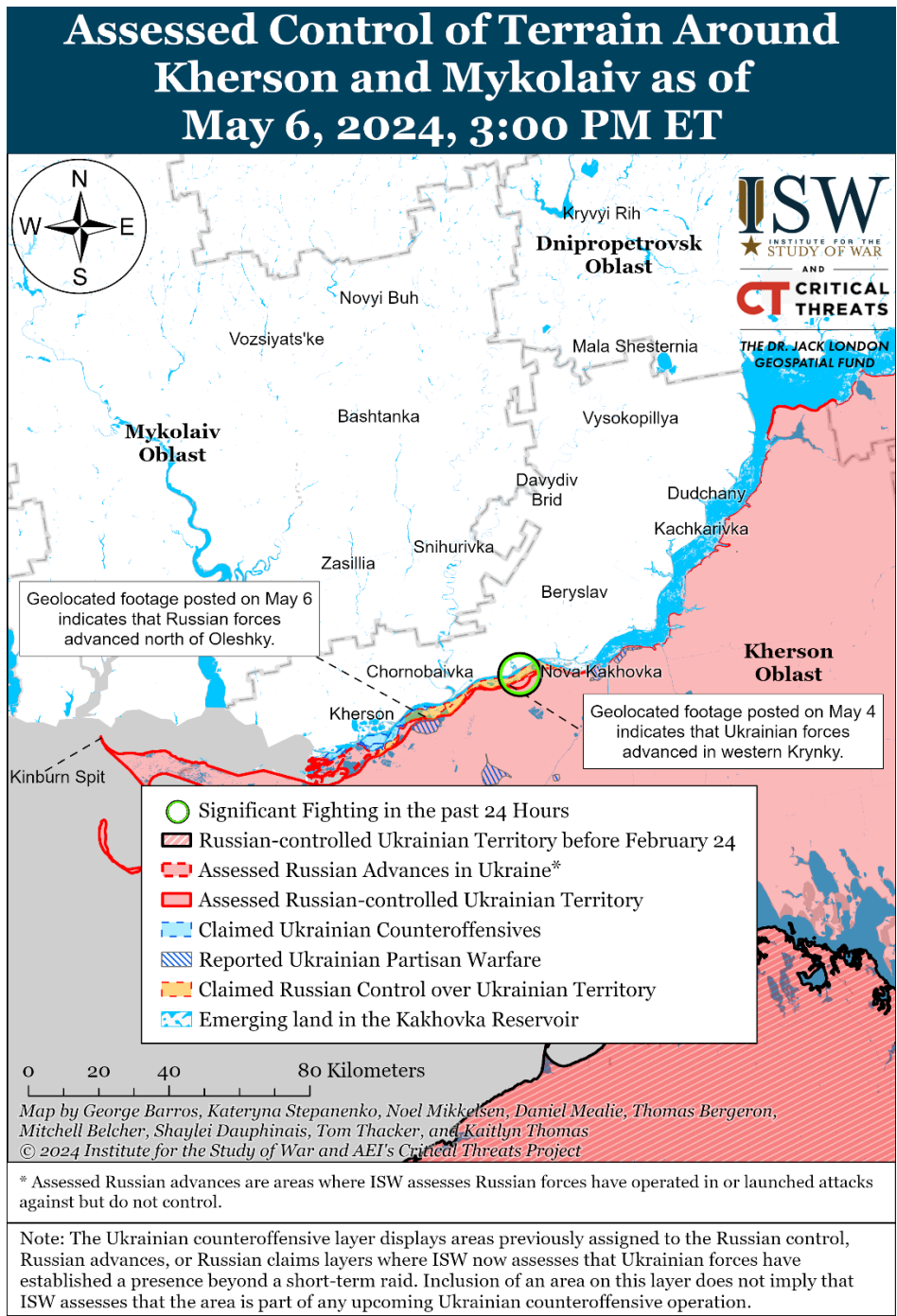


Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces recently made confirmed advances in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast amid continued positional engagements in the area on May 6. Geolocated footage published on May 6 indicates that Russian forces advanced in southern Robotyne.[83] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued in Robotyne.[84] A Russian milblogger claimed that part of Robotyne is a contested “gray zone.”[85] Elements of the Russian 19th Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District) and 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhzhia direction.[86] Elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Brigade) and drone operators of the 108th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) are reportedly operating near Robotyne.[87]



Russian forces recently made confirmed advances in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast amid continued positional engagements in the area on May 6. Geolocated footage published on May 6 indicates that Russian forces advanced north of Oleshky (southeast of Kherson City).[88] Positional engagements continued near Krynyky.[89] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated that Russian forces are using up to 300 strike drones per day against Ukrainian positions throughout southern Ukraine.[90] Pletenchuk also stated that Russian forces are trying to gain control over Nestryha Island in the Dnipro River Delta (southwest of Kherson City) and are suffering significant losses. A Russian source claimed that Nestryha Island is a contested “gray zone” and that high water levels are complicating any offensive operations to establish control over the islands in the Dnipro River Delta.[91] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are increasingly conducting guided glide bomb strikes against west (right) bank Kherson Oblast.[92]



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

Russian forces conducted drone strikes against northeastern Ukraine on the night of May 5 to 6. The Ukrainian Air Force reported on May 6 that Russian forces launched 13 Shahed-136/131 drones from Kursk Oblast and that Ukrainian forces downed 12 Shaheds over Sumy Oblast on the night of May 5 to 6.[93] Sumy Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian forces targeted energy infrastructure in Sumy Oblast.[94] Poltava Oblast Military Administration Head Filip Pronin reported that falling Shahed debris fell onto a house in Myrhorod Raion, Poltava Oblast.[95]

Russian forces conducted limited missile and glide bomb strikes against Ukraine during the day on May 6. Ukraine's Eastern Air Command reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed a Kh-59/69 missile over Synelnykivskiy Raion, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[96] Kharkiv Oblast Police Head Serhii Bolvinov stated that Russian forces struck Monchynivka, Kharkiv Oblast with a FAB-1500 with a unified planning and correction modules (UMPC), noting that this was the first time Russian forces used such a FAB-1500 against Kharkiv Oblast.[97] Ukraine's State Emergency Service reported that it found and destroyed the remnants of a new Russian Kh-69 cruise missile that landed in the Hosiiv National Nature Park in Kyiv City on a previous, unspecified date.[98]

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

Ukrainian Zaporizhia Oblast Head Ivan Fedorov stated that Russian authorities have created the infrastructure necessary to conscript Ukrainians in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast and plan to conscript more than 150,000 Ukrainians into the Russian army in an unspecified time period.[99] The Geneva Convention forbids any occupying power to force civilians in occupied territories to serve in the occupying power's military or auxiliary services.[100]

The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) stated that it is likely that mostly Chechen special forces are fighting at the frontlines in Ukraine while other regular Chechen forces continue to operate in rear areas.[101] The UK MoD noted that Chechen forces have been redeploying to frontline areas from rear areas following the withdrawal of Wagner Group soldiers from Ukraine in May 2023. The UK MoD reported that about 42,000 Russian military personnel have undergone training at the Russian Special Forces University in Chechnya but that training only lasts up to 10 days. Chechen Head Ramzan Kadyrov recently claimed that there are currently over 9,000 Chechen servicemen fighting in Ukraine and that 41,722 Chechen servicemen have deployed to Ukraine during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[102]

Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets suggested that the war in Ukraine is negatively affecting the quantity and reputation of Russian arms exports. Mashovets stated that Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport prepared a report for Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu about exports of Russian-produced weapons and military equipment.[103] Mashovets stated that the report indicated that Russia will export about \$4.5 billion worth of arms and equipment in 2024, compared to the \$6 billion dollars in 2023 and \$12 billion in 2021. Mashovets noted that this sharp decline is due to Russia's own domestic needs for arms and equipment for the war in Ukraine and that competitors, particularly the US, South Korea, Turkey, and France, are actively working to replace Russian exports in foreign markets. Rosoboronexport reportedly stated that arms exports of the People's Republic of China (PRC) "somewhat intersect" with Russian exports. Mashovets stated that the report noted that Russian revenues are suffering as about a third of buyers of Russian arms and equipment have never paid or are in the process of paying for the goods.

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

Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that the Russian military command has been trying to systematize its reconnaissance fire complex (RFC) into a single online three-level system for the past several months.[104] Mashovets stated that Russian forces' RFC previously relied on individual commanders issuing separate orders and that Russian forces have already successfully used this new systematized system to strike Ukrainian Patriot air defense systems and HIMARS MLRS. Mashovets stated that the first level of the new system consists of Russian division and brigade-level commanders, whose zone of responsibility is up to 10 to 12 kilometers. Mashovets stated that Russian army corps-level commanders' zone of responsibility is 12 to 100 kilometers and that Russian grouping of forces-level commanders' zone of responsibility is 100 or more kilometers. Mashovets stated that each level is responsible for specific types of reconnaissance and monitoring strike means and weapons. Division and brigade-level commanders are reportedly responsible for anti-tank guided missiles

(ATGMs), anti-tank guns, tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, thermobaric artillery systems, fire support helicopters, and Su-25 aircraft. Army-corps level commanders are reportedly responsible for loitering munitions, multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), and Su-24M and Su-24 aircraft. Grouping of forces-level commanders are reportedly responsible for Iskander missile systems; Tu-22M3, MiG-31K/I, Su-24, and Su-34 aircraft; Shahed-136/131 drones; and S-300/400 air defense systems. Mashovets noted that Russian forces need to develop the ability to connect reconnaissance and strike weapons online at all three levels and minimize the number of “links” between reconnoitering and striking a target. Russian milbloggers have recently complained about bureaucratic issues constraining Russian units’ ability to conduct strikes on Ukrainian targets.[105]

Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec subsidiary Shvabe Holding reportedly developed a reconnaissance thermal imaging system that can detect objects up to 300 meters away and allows users to drive cars without headlights and in low visibility conditions.[106] Shvabe stated that users can attach the system to the roof of a vehicle for reconnaissance, guarding and patrolling facilities, and conducting search and rescue operations.

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

Ukraine continues efforts to expand its domestic defense industry. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced on April 30 that the Ukrainian government allocated an additional 15.5 billion hryvnias (about \$400 million) to purchase drones, in addition to the 43.3 billion hryvnias (about \$1.1 billion) that Ukraine already allocated to purchase drones in 2024.[107] Shmyhal noted that these funds will allow Ukraine to purchase an additional 300,000 drones in 2024. The Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers published a decree on May 3 that will provide grants to cover up to 80 percent of the cost for Ukrainian enterprises that produce drones.[108] The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense’s (MoD) Defense Procurement Agency (DPA) Director Maryna Bezrukova stated on May 4 that 70 percent of Ukraine’s defense procurement agreements will be made with domestic manufacturers in 2024.[109] Bezrukova reported that the Ukrainian DPA concluded more contracts in the first quarter of 2024 than in all of 2023.

Ukraine’s Western allies continue to promise and provide additional military assistance to Ukraine. Canadian Defense Minister William Blair announced on April 26 that the first 10 of 50 armored combat support vehicles will arrive in Europe in summer 2024 and will go to Ukraine in fall 2024 after Ukrainian forces train on them.[110] The Estonian MoD announced on April 26 that Estonia delivered two NAVY 18 WP-class patrol boats to Ukraine.[111] Norway announced on April 30 that it allocated over 7 billion Norwegian kroner (about \$645 million) to support Ukraine and noted that most funding will go toward Ukrainian air defense.[112] Latvian Prime Minister Evika Silina announced on April 30 that Latvia will transfer an unspecified number of MANTIS short-range air defense systems, tactical drone surveillance systems, and other materiel to improve Ukrainian air defense and reconnaissance capabilities.[113] German defense company Hensolt announced on May 3 that it will send an additional six TRML-4D radar systems to Ukraine to help build out Ukraine’s air defense umbrella.[114] German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall’s Head Armin Papperger stated that Rheinmetall will deliver “hundreds of thousands” of ammunition rounds to Ukraine in 2024, including prototypes of artillery shells that have a range of 100 kilometers.[115]

European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton announced on May 6 at the EU–Ukraine Defense Industries Forum that the European Union (EU) has started preparations to open a Defense Innovation Office in Kyiv that will support European and Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB) relations.[116] European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen previously announced in February 2024 that the EU planned to open a Defense Innovation Office in Ukraine.[117]

Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh stated on May 1 that the US “pre-positioned” some weapons and capabilities to ensure that the US could start sending aid to Ukraine as soon as US President Joe Biden signed a bill providing roughly \$60 billion in military assistance to Ukraine.[118] Singh stated that the US almost immediately provided “air defense and artillery ammunition” to Ukraine. Singh’s statement is consistent with a May 3 *New York Times* (NYT) report that the first installment of US military assistance comprised of anti-armor rockets, missiles, and 155-mm artillery shells arrived in Ukraine on April 28 and that a second installment of unspecified aid arrived on April 29.[119]

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 Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine today.

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian ultranationalist milbloggers have seized on protests in Armenia to forward a longstanding information operation aimed at discrediting the current Armenian government, particularly Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, for pulling away from Russia. A prominent, Kremlin-awarded milblogger claimed that ongoing protests in Armenia will not result in any meaningful policy change because the protests are allegedly “unorganized,” lack leadership, and the majority of Armenians are ambivalent about the issue.[120] Other milbloggers responded to the first milblogger largely accusing Western countries of “corrupting” Armenian youth with democratic values so they do not feel “craving or nostalgia for the Soviet past” and similarly influencing youth in other countries, including those not previously part of the Soviet Union.[121] Russian-Armenian relations have been deteriorating since Russian peacekeepers failed to prevent the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, and the Kremlin recently explicitly threatened Armenia if Armenia does not resume active engagement in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and resume its pro-Kremlin alignment.[122]

The Kremlin continues information operations aimed at dividing Ukraine from its Western allies and baselessly undermining the legitimacy of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) issued statements forwarding a number of information operations aimed at portraying the United States as attempting to oust Zelensky due to his decision not to hold presidential elections in 2024.[123] As ISW has previously noted, Ukraine’s constitution permits postponing elections and allows a sitting president to continue to serve after the designated end of his term under martial law, and Zelensky’s decision not to hold elections given Ukraine’s ongoing existential defensive war is fully in accord with the Ukrainian constitution.[124]

The Kremlin continued placing former senior Ukrainian officials on its wanted list as part of continued efforts to falsely portray the war in Ukraine as anything other than a war of conquest and to assert the jurisdiction of Russian federal law over sovereign states. The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) added more former senior Ukrainian officials to its wanted list on May 6, including former Ukrainian National Security Council Head Oleksii Danilov, former Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin, former Internal Affairs Minister Arsen Avakov; former Information Policy Minister Yuri Stets, former Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Ruslan Khomchak, and former Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) Head Vasyl Krutov.[125] The MVD added Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavlyuk, and former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on Russia’s wanted list on May 4, and all these additions are likely part of the Kremlin’s wider efforts to discredit the current and previous pro-Western Ukrainian governments that followed Ukraine’s Euromaidan Revolution in 2014 as well as to isolate Ukraine diplomatically.[126]

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)

Russia and Belarus announced on May 6 that the Union State budget will increase 38 percent in 2024.[127] Union State Secretary Dmitry Mezentsev praised the budget increase as a sign of increased Union State integration work and emphasized that it will primarily go into the space, software, electronics, medical, and defense spheres.

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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