



## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

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**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:00pm ET on May 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Russian President Vladimir Putin used his May 9 Victory Day speech to relitigate his belief that the West is attempting to erase the Soviet Union's contributions to defeating Nazi Germany during the Great Patriotic War (Second World War), a grievance that is at the core of Russia's adversarial perceptions of the West.** Putin claimed during the Victory Day parade, which is held to commemorate the Soviet Union's victory and sacrifices during the Second World War, that "they," referring to the West, are attempting to "distort" the truth about the Second World War and "demolish" the memory of Soviet heroism and sacrifice.[1] Putin claimed that perceived Western efforts to rewrite the history of the Second World War and the West's supposed support of "Nazism" in Ukraine, another long-standing Kremlin narrative, are part of a wider Western effort to incite interethnic and interreligious conflict throughout the world. Putin claimed that while the West would like to forget the lessons of the Second World War, Russia remembers that the Soviet Union decided the "fate of humanity" during battles "from Murmansk to the Caucasus and Crimea." Putin similarly used his 2023 and 2022 Victory Day speeches to reiterate existing narratives about the West's war against Russia and absurdly to equate the threat of Nazi Germany with that of Ukraine.[2] Putin's willingness to repeatedly re-emphasize imagined Western efforts to discount the Soviet Union's contribution in defeating Nazi Germany suggests that Putin wholeheartedly believes that this is a genuine threat to the Soviet Union's legacy, and by extension the modern Russian state.[3] This belief is in line with Putin's repeated efforts to rewrite and rehabilitate the Soviet Union's aggression towards Poland, its brief alliance with Nazi Germany, and crimes committed against its own people before, during, and after the Second World War.[4]

Putin simultaneously used his Victory Day speech to present a picture of Russia as a bastion in the fight against Nazism. Putin claimed that Russia has never belittled the contributions of the other Allied powers in the Second World War and highlighted the courage of Allied servicemen, resistance fighters, and the people of China who fought against Japan's aggression.[5] Putin claimed that Russia will do everything possible to prevent a global conflict, but at the same time will not allow anyone to threaten the country. Putin framed Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine as a "difficult transitional period" that Russia must get through and as part of Russia's greater historical fight against Nazism.[6] The Kremlin routinely invokes the myths of the Second World War to generate domestic support for its invasion of Ukraine and frame its conquest of Ukraine as part of a wider existential conflict with the West.[7] Putin's rhetorical efforts to frame Russia as both a victim of Nazi aggression and the leader of its imagined anti-Nazi coalition tread a thin line that Putin likely hopes will appeal to both his ultranationalist constituency and the wider Russian population.

**Putin seized on a recent meeting with the commanders of several frontline Russian formations to portray himself as an informed and effective Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armed Forces, aware of the intricacies of the frontline situation and involved in finding solutions to issues that plague Russian forces.** Putin met with the commanders of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), 24th Spetsnaz Brigade (Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff [GRU]), and 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) on May 7, and the commanders made several requests of Putin based on their combat experience.[8] The Kremlin and Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) publicized the meeting on May 9, likely to capitalize on the emotions surrounding Victory Day. Putin responded to the 24th Spetsnaz Brigade commander's question about increasing Russia's domestic drone production and claimed that "modern means of armed struggle" are changing at a very high speed. Putin claimed that Russia must always be one step ahead of its enemies if it wants to be successful in combat but conceded that Russia does not always succeed in this because Russia is fighting against modernized, Western equipment in Ukraine, admitting that it is difficult for Russian servicemen to operate while Ukrainian drones are constantly flying overhead. Putin noted that increased and improved drone production is critical to the Russian war effort and stated that the Russian MoD and defense industry is working on the issue, but that it is not an easy task. Putin

is likely engaging in such tactical-level details for reputational effect. Putin then interrupted the commander of the 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade, who was attempting to ask about increasing domestic production of unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs), and claimed that he is aware that it was difficult for Russian forces to seize Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka) but that Russian forces "finally got it." Putin appears to have seized on comments by both commanders to present himself as more in tune with the battlefield situation than his own commanders. Putin bragged about the seizure of a frontline settlement with a pre-war population of 267 as part of a Kremlin effort to oversell the seizure of tiny frontline settlements to the general Russian population who have no concept of where or how big these settlements are.

Putin also attempted to present the previously ordered expansion of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade into a division as his own extemporaneous problem-solving. The commander of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade asked Putin to consider reorganizing the brigade into several groupings due to the fact that the brigade is "overstaffed."<sup>[9]</sup> The commander implausibly claimed that the brigade currently has over 11,000 troops (a brigade would normally have around 3,000 troops), to which Putin responded that the Russian military command will reorganize and expand the brigade into a division. Ukrainian forces have reportedly defeated and destroyed significant elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade in southern Ukraine several times during the war thus far, forcing the Russian military command to repeatedly reconstitute the formation.<sup>[10]</sup> It is highly unlikely that the 810th is staffed by over 11,000 troops unless as part of a reformation into a division already underway, and Putin's seemingly spontaneous decision to reorganize the brigade into a division is likely part of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) previously announced plan to reorganize seven motorized rifle brigades into motorized rifle divisions.<sup>[11]</sup> Putin has previously attempted to present himself as an effective Supreme Commander-in-Chief by engaging in minute tactical undertakings, such as seemingly spontaneously granting Russian military personnel leave in the presence of Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov during a December 2023 meeting and during his December 2023 Direct Line.<sup>[12]</sup> ISW assessed that the December 2023 interaction was likely staged in order to bolster Putin's reputation, and Putin's recent meeting with Russian commanders was likely also highly staged and publicized on May 9 to link Putin's involvement with tactical battlefield affairs to the reputations of Soviet military commanders during the Second World War.<sup>[13]</sup>

**Putin surrounded himself with a number of foreign officials at the Victory Day parade, likely in order to posture himself as an effective statesman capable of galvanizing an alternative coalition to the power structures of the collective West.** Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedov, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Mokhtar Sissoco Embaló, and Laotian President Thongloun Sisoulith stood with Putin on the podium at the Victory Day parade.<sup>[14]</sup> It is customary for Putin to invite foreign officials to Victory Day celebrations, although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has decreased the number of willing participants. In 2023, for example, a number of heads of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) partners, including Lukashenko, Tokayev, Japarov, Rahmon, Berdimuhamedov, and Mirziyoyev, were present on the podium alongside Putin.<sup>[15]</sup> Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was notably absent after attending last year, as Pashinyan has recently engaged in a concerted effort to distance Armenia from the Russian sphere of influence.<sup>[16]</sup> The presence of a tiny but relatively diverse set of heads of state from Central Asia, Southeast Asia, west Africa, and the Caribbean suggests that Putin is continuing to cast himself as an effective diplomat at the helm of a coalition of Russia-friendly states that ideologically oppose, or do not see a place for themselves within, Western-led alliance systems and political-economic blocs.<sup>[17]</sup> Putin sees Russia at the center of his envisioned new "multipolar world" and is likely trying to align himself with foreign heads of state whom he sees as receptive to this vision for the international system.<sup>[18]</sup> Representatives from Iran, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) were notably not on the podium alongside Putin, however, which may suggest that Putin desires to reach past the leading states Russia has explicitly affiliated itself with in order to strengthen the image of an internationally popular Russian-led multipolar world order.

**Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that the Moldovan government is engaged in a Nazi-like "genocide" in Moldova — a notable inflection in Kremlin officials' rhetoric about Moldova that is likely meant set conditions for a Russian effort to secure control over Moldova and not just some of its regions.** Zakharova gave a Victory Day interview to Kremlin newswire TASS in which she absurdly claimed that Moldovan President Maia Sandu and her administration are engaging in "eugenic" practices comparable to those of the Nazi Third Reich.<sup>[19]</sup> Zakharova focused heavily on the Moldovan government's policies towards Moldovan language, claiming that the Sandu government is replacing the Moldovan language with Romanian and that this constitutes "elements of genocide against an entire people." Zakharova claimed that Moldovan language, culture, and identity will remain after Sandu leaves office and that Sandu will leave "a dark spot in the history of Moldova," suggesting that the Kremlin expects a new administration that is unlike Sandu's Western-oriented government to come to power in the

future. Zakharova notably did not lambast the Sandu government for its policies towards Russian speakers in Moldova as other Russian and pro-Kremlin Moldovan officials have done recently, focusing instead on the Moldovan language.[20] The Kremlin has repeatedly invoked its self-proclaimed need to protect Russia's "compatriots," particularly Russian speakers allegedly facing discrimination, to justify Russian aggression abroad, including in Ukraine and Moldova.[21] Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, however, have recently promoted the narrative that Russia is in an existential geopolitical conflict with an alleged modern Nazi movement that is purportedly prolific in the West.[22] ISW previously assessed that many people may not identify with Kremlin narratives about Russian "compatriots abroad" and that the Kremlin may have decided that claims of Western "neo-Nazism" may be more effective with a wider audience.[23] **Moldova's two pro-Russian regions, the autonomous region of Gagauzia and the breakaway republic of Transnistria, are home to large Russian speaking populations, and the Kremlin's shift from allegations about persecution of Russian speakers to that of Moldovan speakers indicates that the Kremlin is likely trying to justify future Russian aggression in all of Moldova.**

**The leaders of the pro-Kremlin Moldovan Victory opposition electoral bloc attended the Victory Day parade in Moscow, further indicating that the Kremlin intends to use these actors to destabilize all of Moldova and attack Moldova's democracy and EU accession process.** US-sanctioned Moldovan politician Ilan Shor, Governor of Gagauzia Yevgenia Gutsul, and US-sanctioned and close Shor affiliate Moldovan member of parliament Marina Tauber attended the May 9 Victory Day in Moscow reportedly at Russian President Vladimir Putin's invitation.[24] Shor, Gutsul, and Tauber are the principal leaders of the recently created Moldovan Victory electoral bloc, which will reportedly run a candidate in the October 2024 Moldovan presidential election.[25] Shor's, Gutsul's, and Tauber's attendance of the Victory Day parade is a notable public demonstration of the importance of these three Moldovan actors — and consequently the Victory electoral bloc — to Kremlin efforts in Moldova. Although Gutsul has personally met with Putin and other Kremlin officials recently and Russian-Gagauzian bilateral ties have notably increased in recent months, the inclusion of Shor and Tauber in the Moscow celebrations further indicates that the Kremlin's efforts in Moldova are not limited to Gagauzia.[26] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is engaged in efforts to destabilize all of Moldova and prevent Moldova's EU accession and is likely trying to exploit Gagauzia's and Transnistria's Kremlin ties and opposition to the Moldovan federal authorities as part of these wider efforts.[27]

**Russian forces have markedly increased the rate of ground attacks in eastern Ukraine over the past month, likely reflecting current battlefield conditions and the intent of the Russian military command to secure gains before the arrival of Western military aid to the frontlines.** Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated on May 9 that the number of combat engagements increased significantly from 84 on May 8 to 146 on May 9 and noted that most of the fighting occurred in the area of responsibility of the Khortytsia Group (the area from Kharkiv Oblast down to the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area).[28] The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that the rate of Russian attacks increased by 17 percent between March and April 2024 and that over 75 percent of reported ground attacks took place in the Chasiv Yar, Avdiivka, and Marinka directions.[29] UK MoD noted that the number of Russian attacks near Chasiv Yar increased by 200 percent between March and April. Voloshyn suggested that the current intensification of Russian attacks is a result of the fact that the soil has dried out after the spring mud season, which facilitates more rapid mechanized maneuver, and that Russian forces are trying to take advantage of Ukraine's relative weakness while it awaits the arrival of Western aid.[30] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces will maintain the high rate of attacks across eastern Ukraine in order to make gains before the arrival of Western aid in Ukraine, which will likely stymie Russia forces' ability to maintain the high rate of attacks and tactical gains that they are currently able to pursue.[31] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky similarly stated on May 9 during a meeting with European Parliament Head Roberta Metsola that the arrival of Western aid to Ukrainian frontline units will allow Ukrainian forces to blunt Russia's initiative in eastern Ukraine.[32]

**Russian border guards are withdrawing from much of Armenia as Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan continues to face domestic backlash for decisions regarding Nagorno-Karabakh.** Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on May 9 that Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed during a meeting on May 8 to stop Russian border guard operations in a number of Armenian regions due to "changed conditions," likely referring to Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh.[33] Peskov noted that Russian border guards will remain stationed on the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Iranian international borders.[34] Meanwhile, thousands of protestors have completed a multi-day march to Yerevan, Armenia, where they are currently protesting in Yerevan's Republic Square against Pashinyan's decision to transfer control over four border villages in Tavush Province to Azerbaijan in the wake of Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh.[35] Armenian Apostolic Church Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, who serves as the Primate of the Tavush Diocese, has emerged as a leader of these protests and issued a public call on May 9 for Pashinyan to either resign within the hour or face a vote of no confidence in the parliament.[36] Galstanyan met with Armenian opposition

parliamentarians after the deadline elapsed to discuss initiating a vote of no confidence to oust Pashinyan.[37] Armenia's constitution stipulates that at least a third of parliamentarians or the president must support a draft resolution of no confidence to bring a vote, and at least half of parliamentarians must then vote in favor of the final no confidence resolution.[38] The constitution also stipulates that the final vote of no confidence occur between 48 and 72 hours of the draft's initial submission. Pashinyan's ruling Civil Contract party holds roughly 54 percent of the seats in Armenian parliament, so it is unlikely that a vote of no confidence would oust Pashinyan without defectors from the Civil Contract party voting for the opposition.[39]

**The Kremlin may seek to capitalize on opposition outrage in Armenia to punish Pashinyan for increasingly pulling away from Russia.** Russian state media has closely followed the protests and is widely amplifying Galstanyan's calls for Pashinyan's resignation or a vote of no confidence.[40] A prominent, Kremlin-awarded Russian milblogger has tracked the protest march from Kirash, Tavush Province to Yerevan and expressed support for the protestors.[41] This milblogger and other Russian officials and pro-Kremlin voices have frequently spread information operations accusing Pashinyan of "weakness" and incompetence for ceding territory to Azerbaijan after Russia failed to prevent the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh.[42] Pro-Kremlin actors may amplify reports of discontent or perpetuate ongoing Kremlin information operations in the wake of Armenian opposition protests to further pressure Pashinyan into mending relations with Russia.

**Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) conducted long-range drone strikes against Russian oil depots and refinery infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai and the Republic of Bashkortostan on May 9.** The Krasnodar Krai operational headquarters claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to attack an oil depot in Yurovka (near Anapa) with at least seven drones, and that Russian air defense suppressed six drones but at least one fell on the depot itself, causing a fire.[43] Some Russian sources reported that the strike damaged several oil tanks.[44] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)* reported that an "informed source" stated that this was an SBU operation targeting oil shipment points through which the Russian military supplies oil to troops in occupied Crimea.[45] Geolocated footage published on May 9 additionally shows a drone attack against the Gazprom Neftekhim Salavat oil refinery in Salavat, Republic of Bashkortostan.[46] The Republic of Bashkortostan's Ministry of Emergency Situations reported that the strike damaged the building housing a pumping station at the refinery.[47] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* stated that its SBU sources took responsibility for the drone strike and reported that it damaged a catalytic cracking unit, which is used to refine crude oil into gasoline and other petroleum products.[48] *Suspilne* noted that this is a "record" distance for a Ukrainian strike on Russia, as Salavat is 1,500 kilometers from the Ukrainian border. Ukraine recently conducted a long-range drone strike against the Republic of Tatarstan, which is 1,200 kilometers from the Ukrainian border, and the Bashkortostan strike therefore represents an inflection in Ukraine's long-range strike capability.[49]

#### Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin used his May 9 Victory Day speech to relitigate his belief that the West is attempting to erase the Soviet Union's contributions to defeating Nazi Germany during the Great Patriotic War (Second World War), a grievance that is at the core of Russia's adversarial perceptions of the West.**
- **Putin seized on a recent meeting with the commanders of several frontline Russian formations to portray himself as an informed and effective Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armed Forces, aware of the intricacies of the frontline situation and involved in finding solutions to issues that plague Russian forces.**
- **Putin surrounded himself with a number of foreign officials at the Victory Day parade, likely in order to posture himself as an effective statesman capable of galvanizing an alternative coalition to the power structures of the collective West.**
- **Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that the Moldovan government is engaged in a Nazi-like "genocide" in Moldova — a notable inflection in Kremlin officials' rhetoric about Moldova that is likely meant set conditions for a Russian effort to secure control over Moldova and not just some of its regions.**
- **The leaders of the pro-Kremlin Moldovan Victory opposition electoral bloc attended the Victory Day parade in Moscow, further indicating that the Kremlin intends to use these actors to destabilize all of Moldova and attack Moldova's democracy and EU accession process.**
- **Russian forces have markedly increased the rate of ground attacks in eastern Ukraine over the past month, likely reflecting current battlefield conditions and the intent of the Russian military command to secure gains before the arrival of Western military aid to the frontlines.**

- Russian border guards are withdrawing from much of Armenia as Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan continues to face domestic backlash for decisions regarding Nagorno-Karabakh.
- The Kremlin may seek to capitalize on opposition outrage in Armenia to punish Pashinyan for increasingly pulling away from Russia.
- Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) conducted long-range drone strikes against Russian oil depots and refinery infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai and the Republic of Bashkortostan on May 9.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka and Donetsk City.
- Russian forces continue to struggle with discipline in their ranks, with some Russian soldiers reportedly killing other members of their units.



***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.***

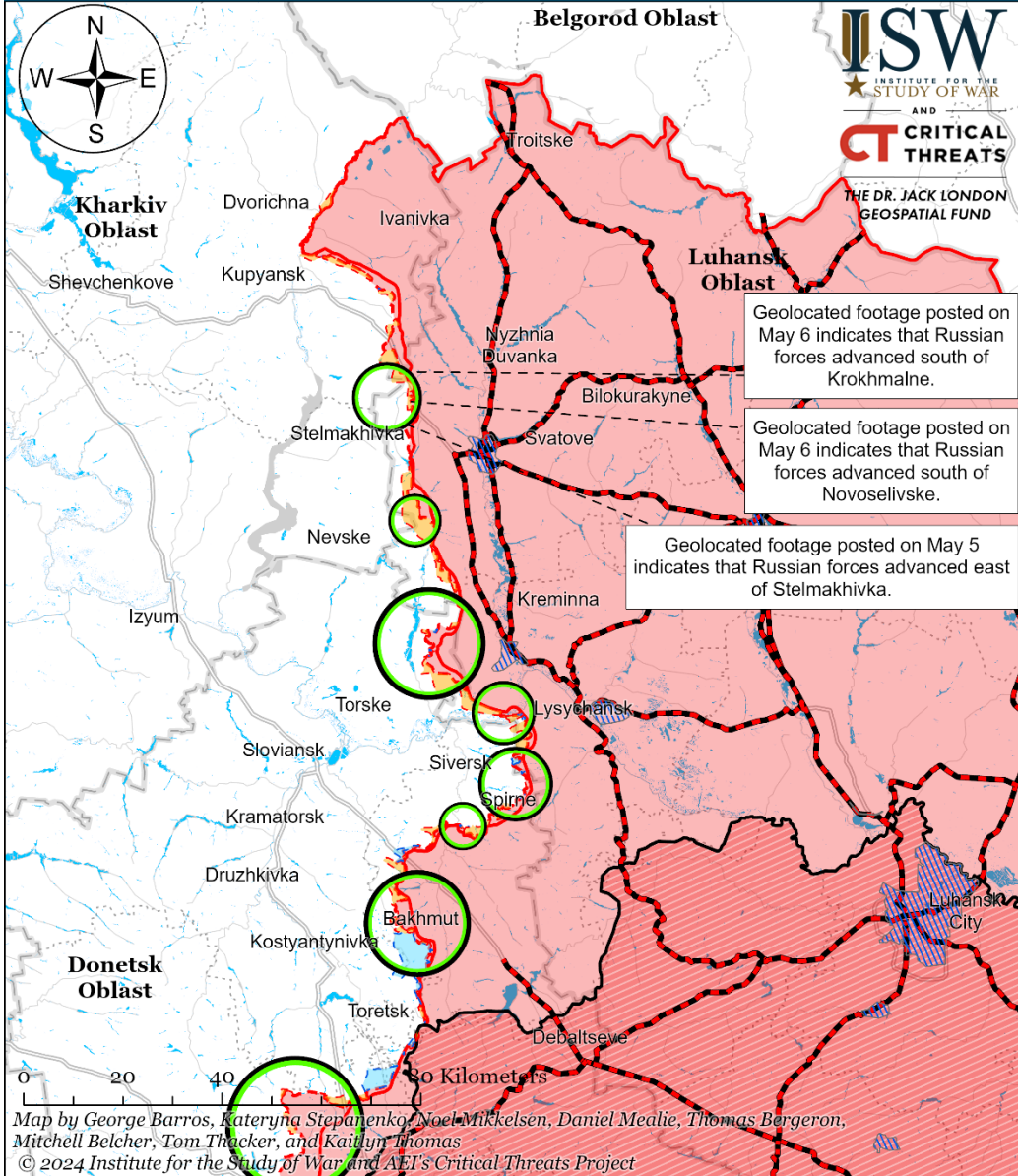
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety 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-Kreminna line on May 9, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced northeast of Synkivka (northeast of Kupyansk), towards Berestove (southeast of Kupyansk), and 300 meters near Novoselivske (northwest of Svatove), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[50] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that fighting continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; east of Kupyansk near Petropavlivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Ivanivka and Berestove; northwest of Svatove near Stelmakhivka; southwest of Svatove near Tverdokhlibove; northwest of Kreminna near Makiivka, Nevske, Novosadove, and Novolyubivka; west of Kreminna near Torske; southwest of Kreminna near the Serebryanske forest area; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.[51]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of May 9, 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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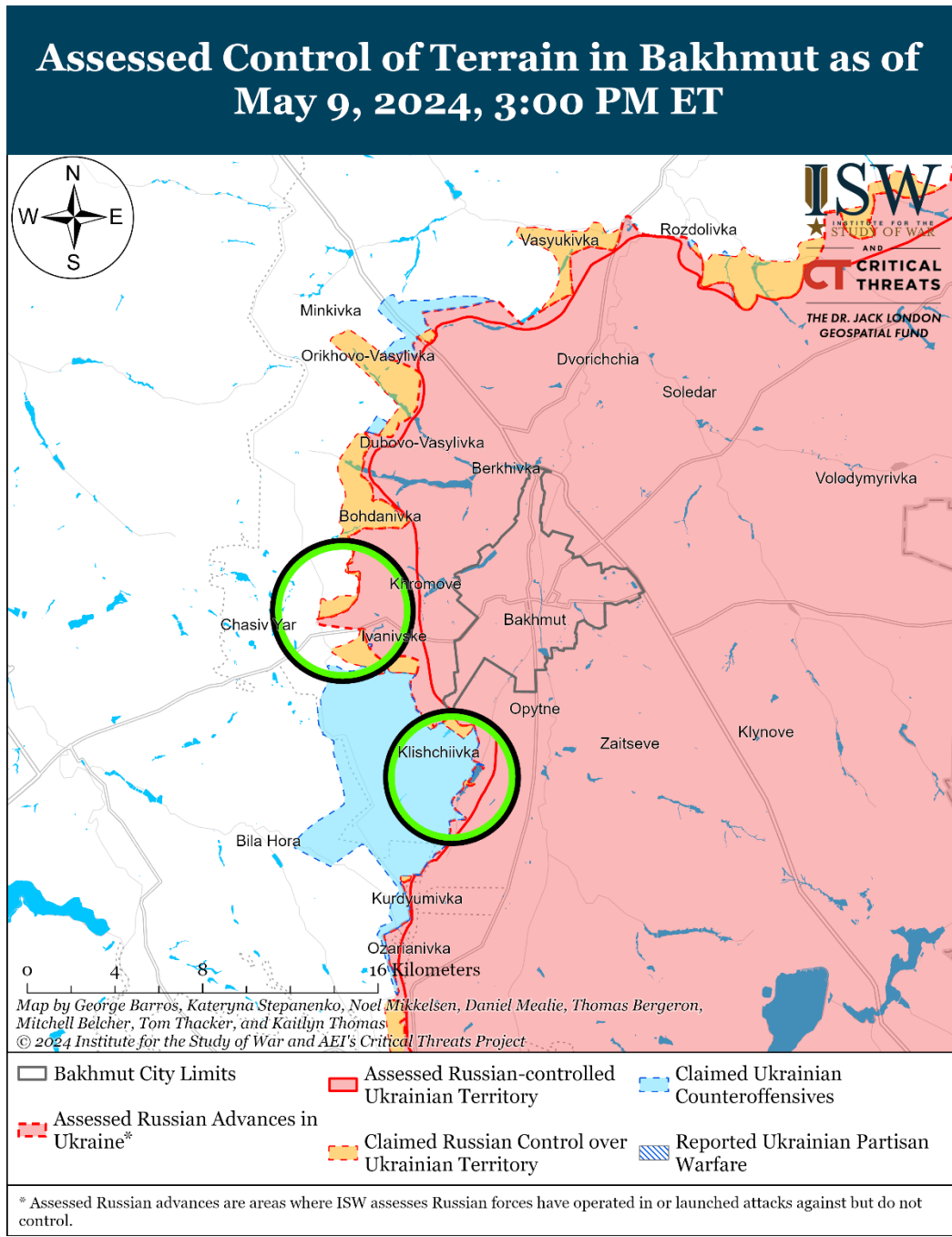
Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Russian Ground Lines of Communication	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24	Claimed 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 8 that Russian forces advanced one and one-half kilometers near Novosadove. 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.

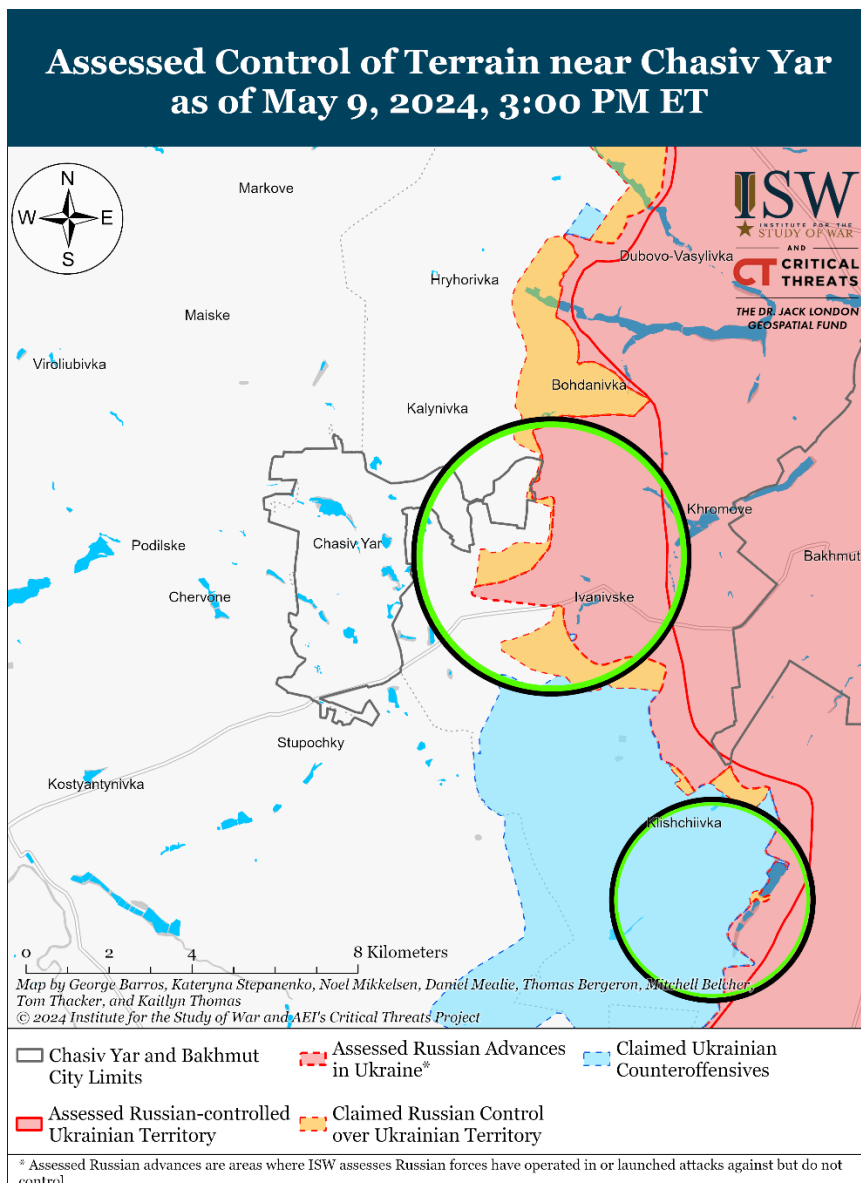
**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Siversk direction (northeast of Bakhmut) on May 9 but did not make any confirmed advances. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are advancing south and southeast of Siversk near Rozdolivka and Vesele, but ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Russian gains in this area.[52] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks east of Siversk near Verkhokamyanske and southeast of Siversk near Vyimka.[53] Elements of the "GORB" detachment of the 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps (LNR AC) reportedly continue operating near Spirne (southeast of Siversk), and unspecified airborne (VDV) elements are reportedly operating near Vesele.[54] A milblogger posted footage on May 9 purportedly showing 2nd LNR AC elements conducting TOS-1A thermobaric artillery strikes on Ukrainian positions in the Siversk direction.[55]

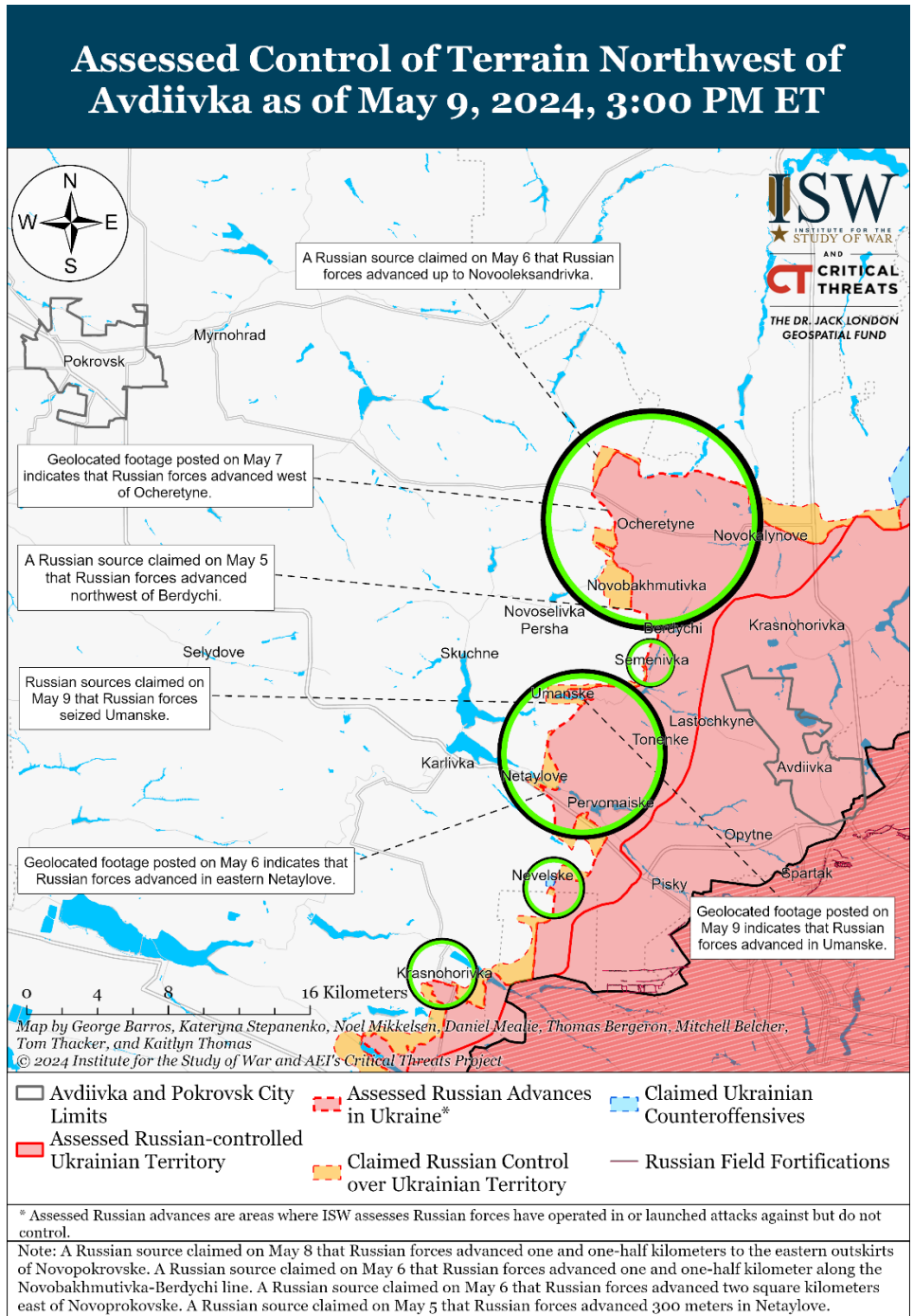




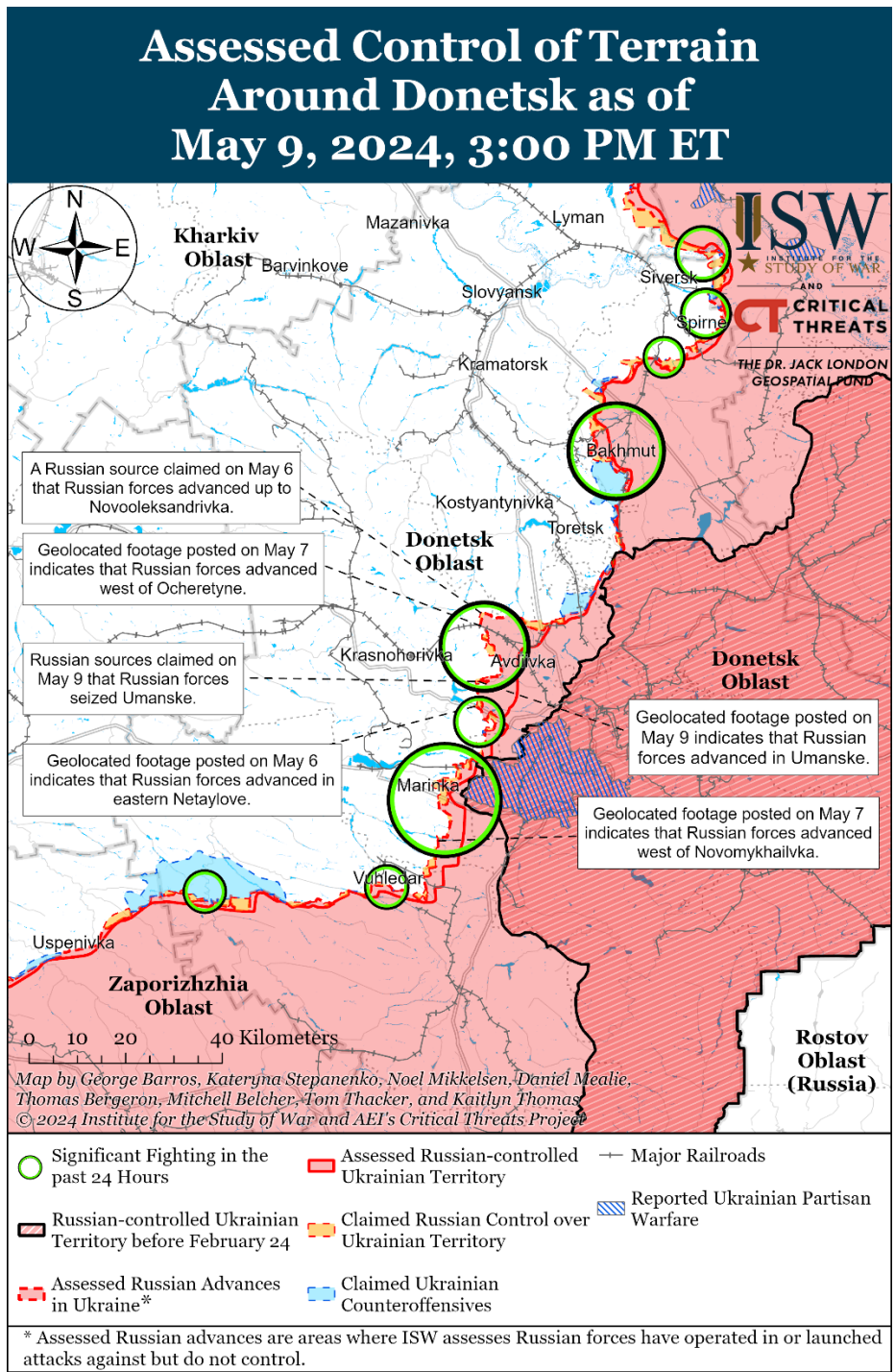
Russian forces continued offensive operations near Chasiv Yar on May 9, but did not make any confirmed advances. Russian forces conducted ground attacks in the Novyi Microraion (eastern Chasiv Yar); east of Chasiv Yar near Ivanivske; southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka; and south of Chasiv Yar near Stupochky.[56] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are expanding their control of eastern parts of Chasiv Yar and increasing offensive pressure on the southern and eastern flanks of the settlement.[57] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets warned on May 9 that the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces (currently deployed between Siversk and the Marinka area) is regrouping to prepare for renewed attempts to break through to Chasiv Yar, which Mashovets noted explains the slight decrease in Russian attacks in this area over the past few days.[58] Mashovets suggested that the Russian command may be trying to push south of Chasiv Yar in the Stupochky-Bila Hora area in order to reach the eastern flanks of Kostyantynivka (just west of Chasiv Yar) via Chasiv Yar's southern flank, thereby presumably avoiding having to take Chasiv Yar itself. Mashovets stated that elements of the 331st Guards Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th VDV Division) and 11th VDV Brigade are operating in the forest area between the T0504 Chasiv Yar-Kostyantynivka highway and the Novyi Microraion; that elements of the 88th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd LNR AC) and the 6th Motorized Rifle Division (3rd AC) are fighting near Klishchiivka; and elements of the 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are operating near Ivanivske. Mashovets estimated that the Southern Grouping of Forces has as many as 15 motorized rifle brigades operating in the Chasiv Yar direction but noted that most of these brigades are comprised of no more than two combat-ready battalions.



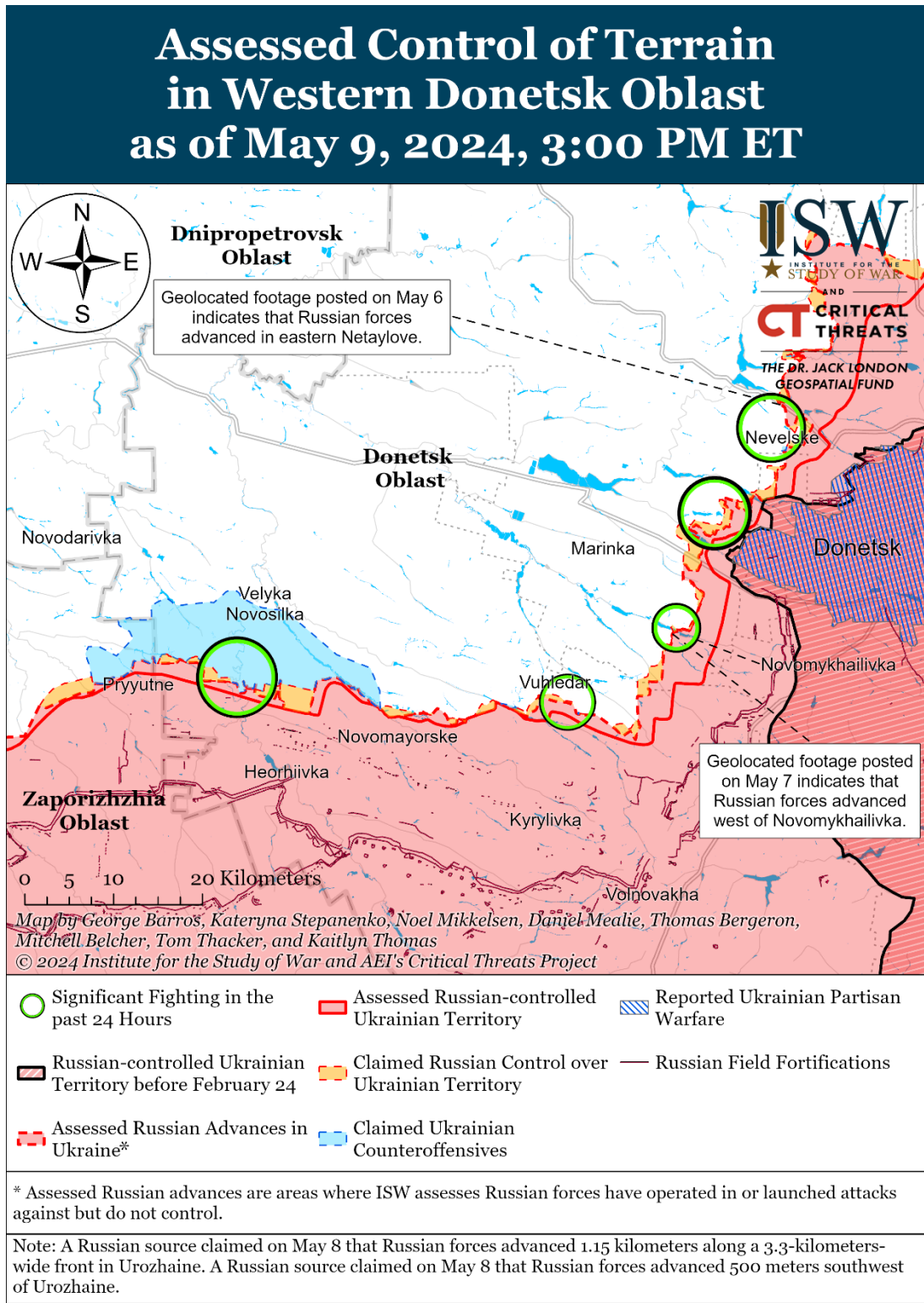
Russian forces recently advanced west of Avdiivka amid continued offensive operations near the settlement on May 9. Geolocated footage published on May 9 shows that elements of the Russian 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] AC) advanced into central Umanske (west of Avdiivka) north of Sonyachna Street.[59] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have seized the entirety of Umanske, although one milblogger disputed these claims and ISW has not observed evidence of further Russian advances into western or northern Umanske.[60] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced towards the outskirts of Novopokrovske (northwest of Avdiivka) and in field areas near Netaylove and Pervomaiske (both southwest of Avdiivka).[61] The Ukrainian Land Forces posted footage of Ukrainian forces destroying three tanks, one BMP-3, and one MT-LB in the Avdiivka direction on a recent unspecified date.[62] Elements of the Russian 80th "Sparta" Reconnaissance Battalion (1st DNR AC) are reportedly operating near Yasnobrodivka (west of Avdiivka).[63]



Russian forces recently advanced west of Donetsk City and reportedly secured additional gains in this area on May 9. Geolocated footage published on May 9 shows that Russian forces have advanced in eastern Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City) along Tchaikovsky Street.[64] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced in eastern Krasnohorivka along 1st of May Street and towards the Solnechnyi Microraion and Zapadna Street.[65] Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn reiterated that Ukrainian forces still control the situation in Krasnohorivka and noted that Russian forces are using small infantry groups to attack the eastern outskirts of the settlement.[66] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported continued fighting west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka; southwest of Donetsk City near Kostyantynivka and Paraskoviivka; and northeast of Vuhledar near Vodyane.[67] Elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC) reportedly continue operating in Krasnohorivka.[68]

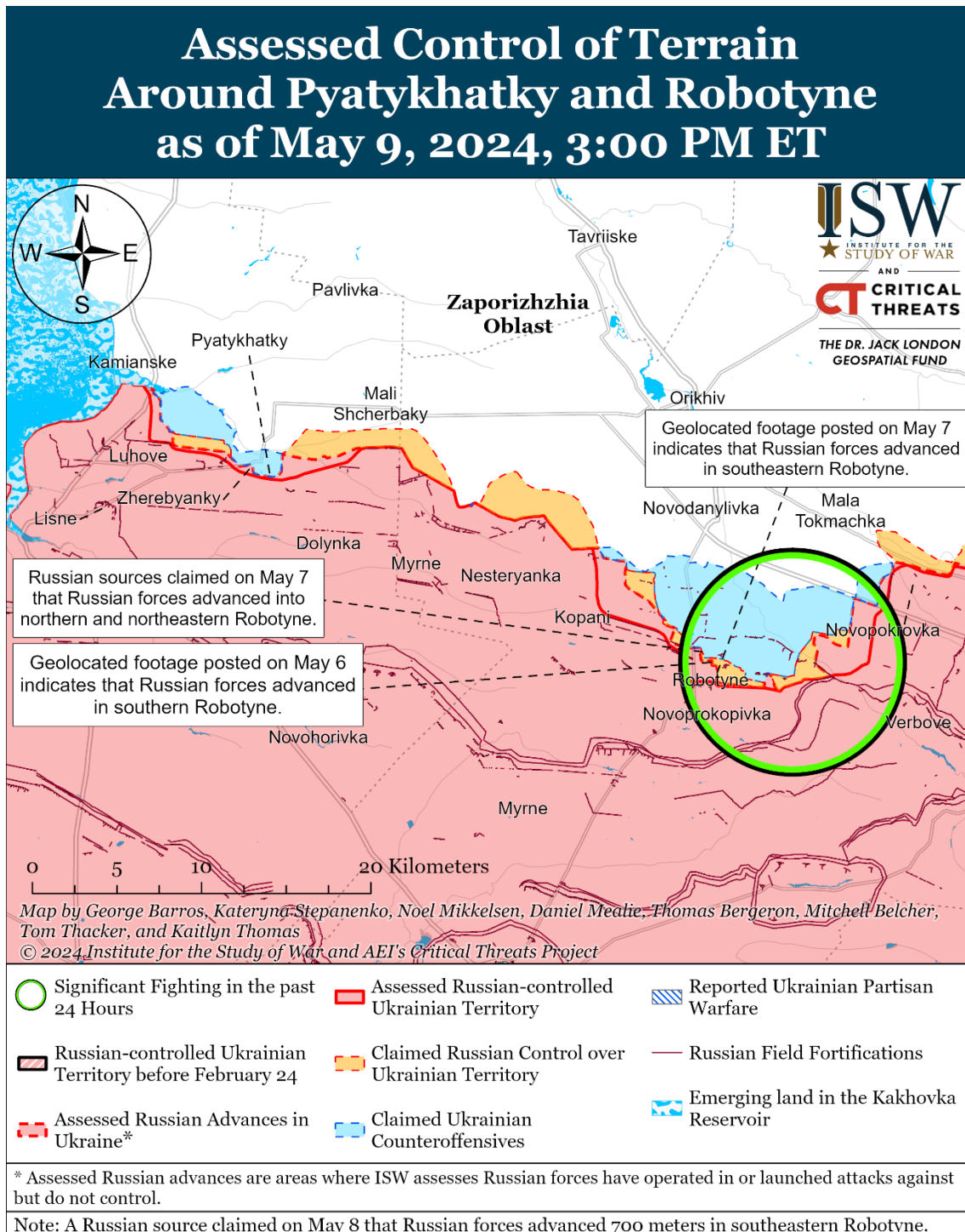


Russian sources claimed that Russian forces are advancing in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area amid heavy ground attacks. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced 1.15 kilometers along a 3.3-kilometer-wide front near Urozhaine and reached the southern outskirts of Staromayorske (both south of Velyka Novosilka) after heavy fighting.[69] ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Russian forces on the southern outskirts of Staromayorske but has recently confirmed Russian advances into Urozhaine along the T0518 route.[70]

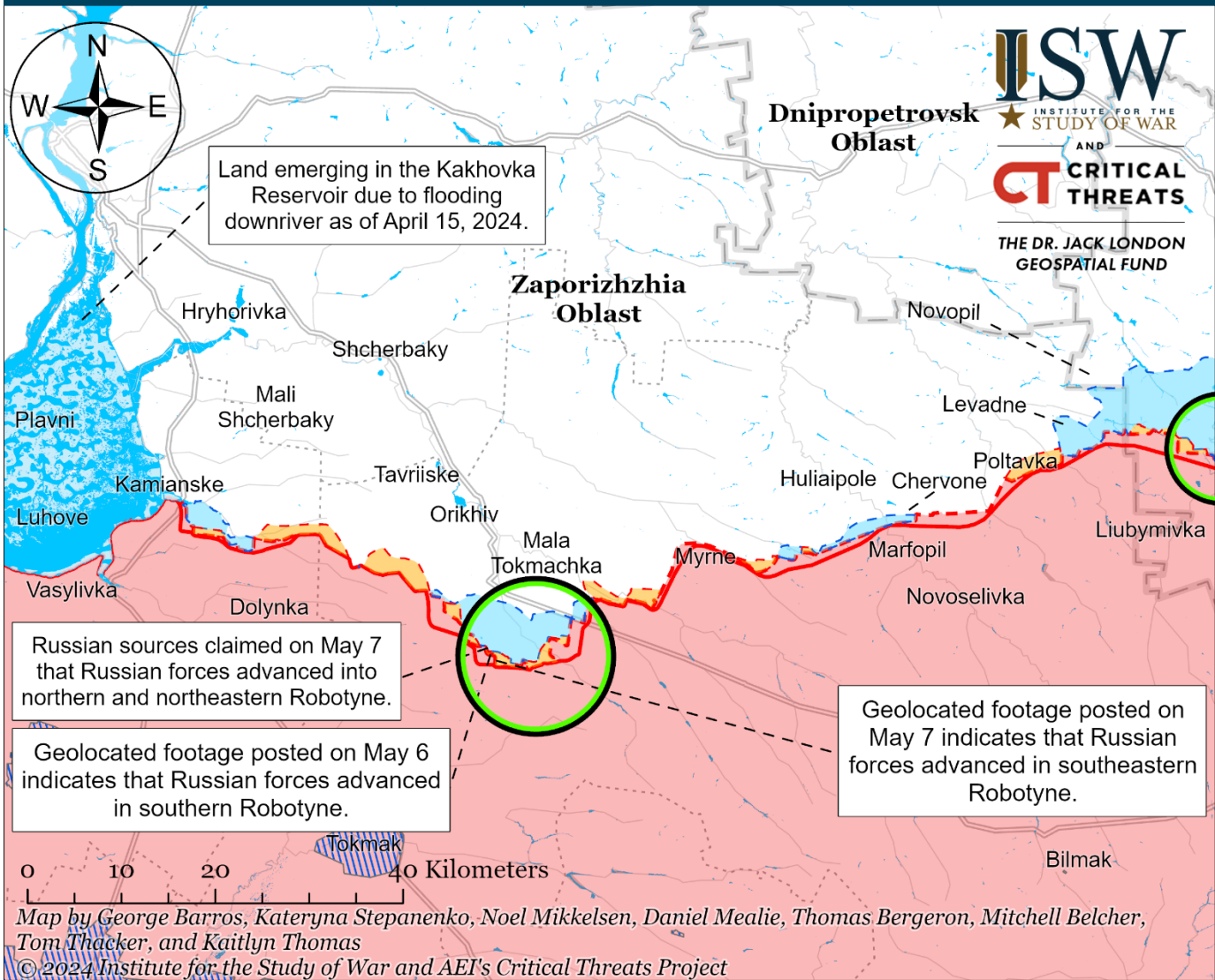


**Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Russian forces reportedly advanced in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on May 9, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in central Robotyne and north of the settlement.[71] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are using motorcycles to transport infantry in Robotyne.[72] Positional engagements continued northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[73] Elements of the Russian 392nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (likely a mobilized unit) are reportedly operating in the western Zaporizhzhia direction.[74]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of May 9, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

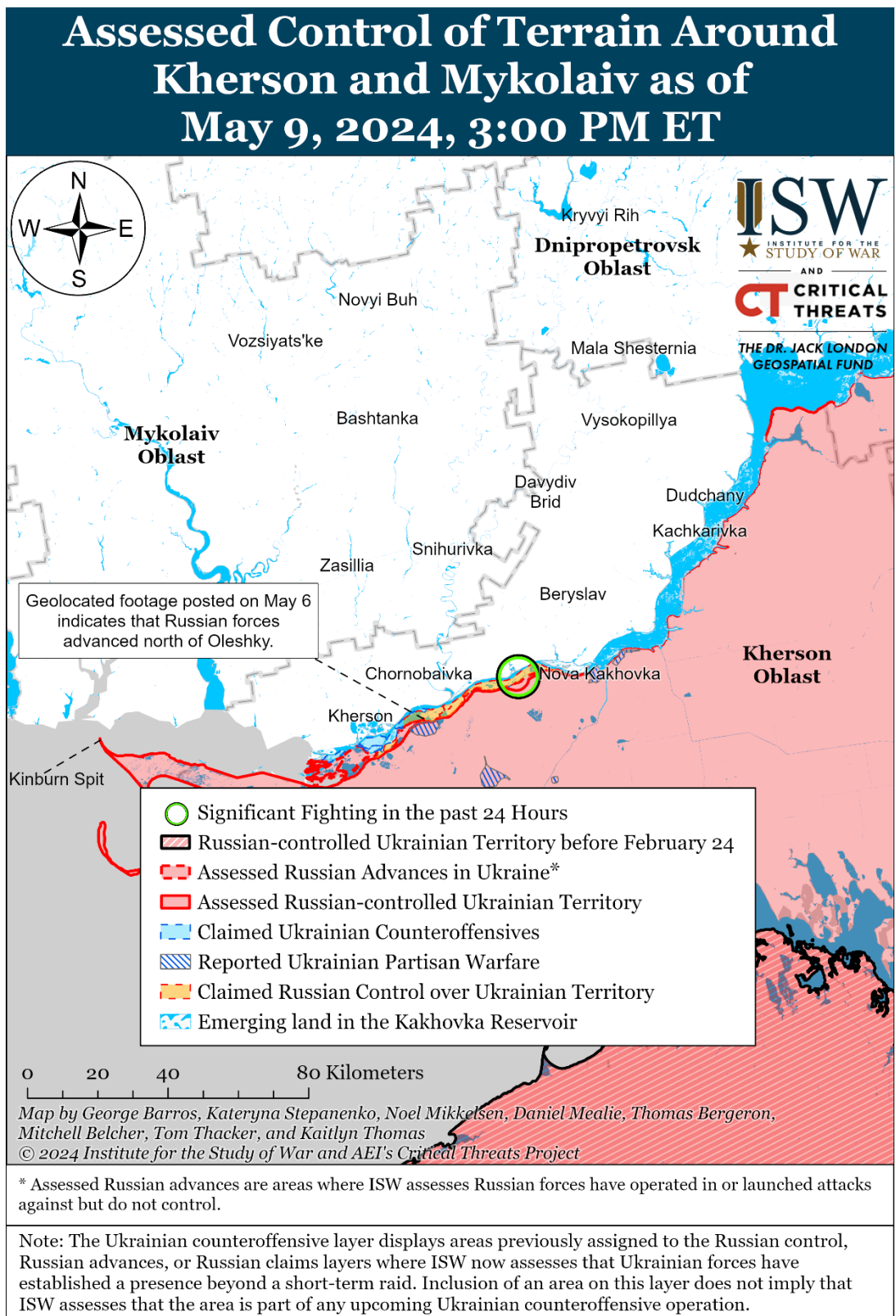


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- 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 8 that Russian forces advanced 700 meters in southeastern Robotyne.

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 9 that Ukrainian forces repelled several Russian attacks near Krynky in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast.[75] Elements of the Russian 80th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD], formerly Northern Fleet) are reportedly operating in the Kherson direction.[76]



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

Russian forces conducted a mid-sized Shahed-136/131 strike against Ukraine on the night of May 8-9. Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces launched 20 Shaheds from occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea, 17 of which Ukrainian forces destroyed over Odesa Oblast.[77] One drone struck and destroyed a cultural institution in Mykolaiv Oblast.[78]

Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Major Ilya Yevlash noted that Russia's modifications to their Kh-101/102 cruise missiles, which Russian forces launched at Kyiv City on May 8, do not make the missiles harder for Ukrainian forces to shoot down, but rather are intended to inflict maximum damage on targets.[79]

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

Russian forces continue to struggle with discipline in their ranks, with some Russian soldiers reportedly killing other members of their units. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on May 9 that the relatives of a Russian soldier reported that they had not heard from the soldier since April 10 and that Russian authorities have since informed the family that the soldier is accused of killing his commander and is detained in occupied Zaitseve, Luhansk Oblast.[80] Russian authorities have previously tortured detainees in a basement prison for Russian military personnel in occupied Zaitseve.[81] A Russian insider source claimed that another Russian soldier is accused of murdering six other military personnel near Oleksandrivka, Donetsk Oblast on May 4 in the area of responsibility of the 10th Tank Regiment (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]).[82] The insider source noted that the 10th Tank Regiment has many penal recruits and also has two regional volunteer battalions attached, and a Russian opposition source recently reported that the accused murderer was a Russian penal recruit.[83]

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

Dutch open-source group Oryx reported that it has visually confirmed that Russian forces have lost at least 15,724 vehicles and weapons systems in Ukraine between February 24, 2022, and May 8, 2024.[84] Oryx assessed that Russian forces are visually confirmed to have lost at least 3,000 tanks, including 2,001 destroyed, 514 captured, 329 abandoned, and 156 damaged. Oryx assessed that Russia has also lost at least 1,321 armored combat vehicles, almost 4,000 infantry fighting vehicles, 431 armored personnel carriers, 56 vehicles with mine protection, 137 helicopters, and 24 ships and submarines. The extent of Russian military vehicles and weapons losses is likely higher than what Oryx has visually confirmed in the open source.

### **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**

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev published an article for Victory Day on May 9 in which he promoted Kremlin narratives about "neo-Nazism" in Ukraine and the West as part of Kremlin efforts to justify its war in Ukraine and its larger geopolitical confrontation with the West. Medvedev claimed that Russia's war in Ukraine is only the "first step" in Russia's alleged mission to "finally" eradicate Nazism from the world and restructure the system of international relations.[85] Medvedev also claimed that Western countries are "feeding" and "inciting" "neo-Nazis" in Ukraine who want to "erase Russia from the map." Medvedev claimed that the US and United Kingdom (UK) were responsible for the rise of Nazism in the 1930s and notably ignored the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that briefly allied the



Soviet Union with Nazi Germany to partition Poland and allow the USSR to seize the Baltic States, as Kremlin officials often do in their claims of the West's relations with Nazi Germany and supposed support for Nazism.[86]

A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger promoted similar Kremlin narratives that the Georgian State Security Service (SUS) employed on May 8.[87] The milblogger claimed that Ukrainian citizens living in Georgia will use statements that the Georgian "foreign agents" law is a Kremlin initiative in order to incite provocations similar to "color revolutions" in Georgia.[88] The milblogger claimed that most Georgians are satisfied with current Russian-Georgian economic relations, and these alleged provocations will thus fail.

Kremlin officials employed Kremlin narratives about historical revisionism and provocations on Russia's borders with Japan, likely as part of efforts to paint Russia as a Pacific power and support China against the US-led alliance system in the Indo-Pacific. Russian Ambassador to Japan Nikolai Nozdrev claimed on May 9 that Japan is engaging in "historical revisionism and revanchism" by "distorting history." [89] Nozdrev claimed that Russia is monitoring Japanese-American maneuvers on Russia's eastern borders and regularly warns Japan that Russia will have to take countermeasures to prevent any military threats to Russia should such maneuvers continue. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has previously objected to military exercises in Japan involving the Japanese military that are highly likely aimed at China, not Russia.[90]

### **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)**

The Kremlin is continuing its reflexive control campaign using nuclear threats via Belarus to target Western decision-makers. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko announced on May 9 that Belarusian forces will participate in the second stage of Russia's ongoing nuclear exercises.[91] Lukashenko ordered Russian and Belarusian forces to conduct a joint inspection of non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapon carriers, forces, and means under the Union State framework on May 7, and 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 on May 6.[92] ISW continues to assess that Russia and Belarus are highly unlikely to use a tactical nuclear weapon on the battlefield in Ukraine or anywhere else.[93]

**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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