

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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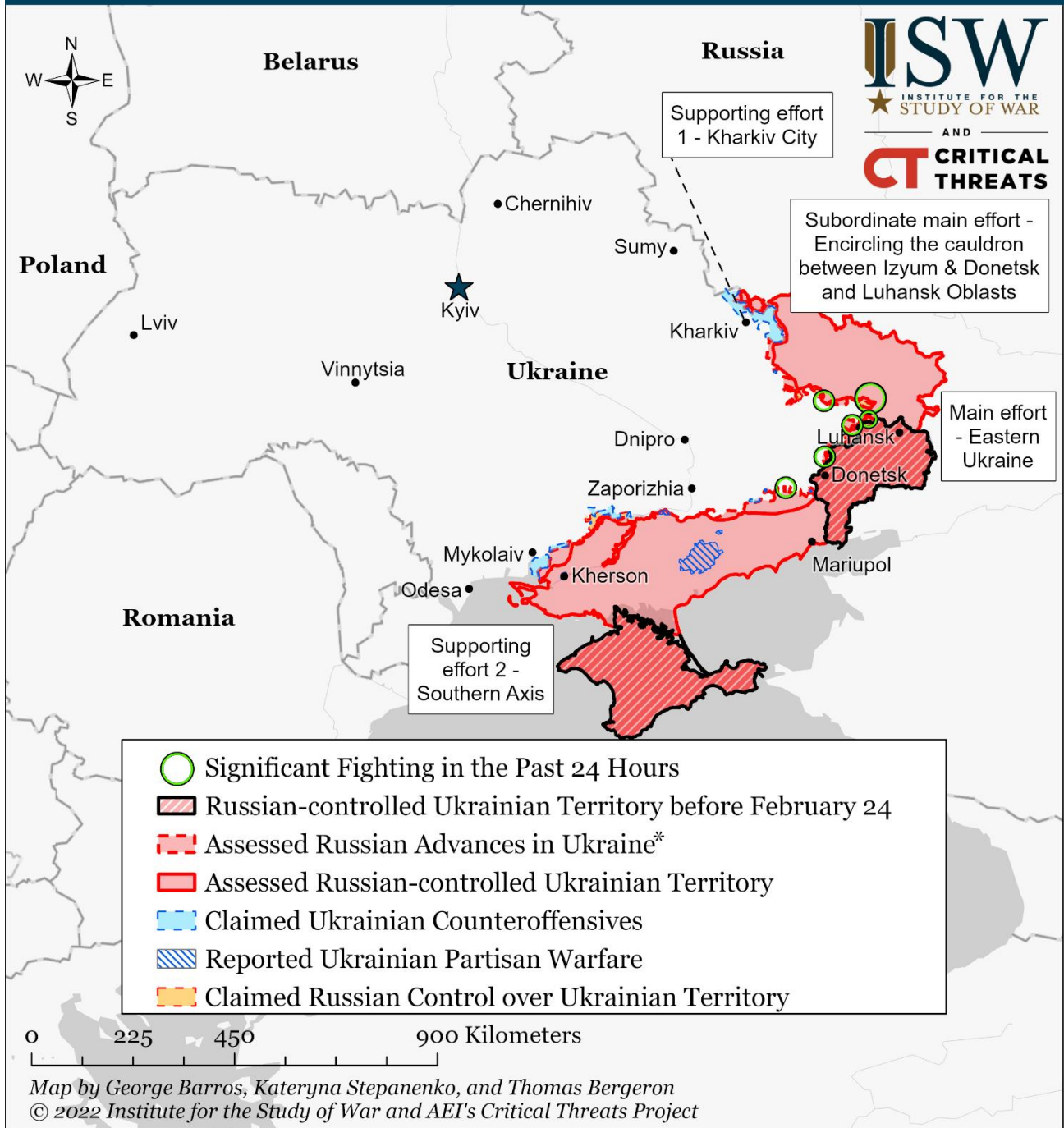
May 26, 6:30pm ET

Russian forces have made steady, incremental gains in heavy fighting in eastern Ukraine in the past several days, though Ukrainian defenses remain effective overall. Deputy Ukrainian Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that the fighting is currently at its "maximum intensity" compared to previous Russian assaults and will likely continue to escalate.¹ Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Defense Ministry Oleksandr Motuzyanyk characterized Russian gains as "temporary success" and stated that Ukrainian forces are using a maneuver defense to put pressure on Russian advances in key areas.² Russian forces have now taken control of over 95% of Luhansk Oblast and will likely continue efforts to complete the capture of Severodonetsk in the coming days.³ Russian forces have made several gains in the past week, but their offensive operations remain slow. Russian forces are heavily degraded and will struggle to replace further losses.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to advance southeast of Izyum near the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border.**
- **Russian forces continued steady advances around Severodonetsk and likely seek to completely encircle the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area in the coming days.**
- **Russian forces continued to make persistent advances south and west of Popasna toward Bakhmut, but the Russian pace of advance will likely slow as they approach the town itself.**
- **Russian forces in occupied areas of the Southern Axis are reportedly preparing a "third line of defense" to consolidate long-term control over the region and in preparation to repel likely future Ukrainian counteroffensives.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 26, 2022, 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 those 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 population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

ISW has updated its assessment of the four primary efforts Russian forces are engaged in at this time. We have stopped coverage of Mariupol as a separate effort since the city's fall. We have added a new section on activities in Russian-occupied areas:

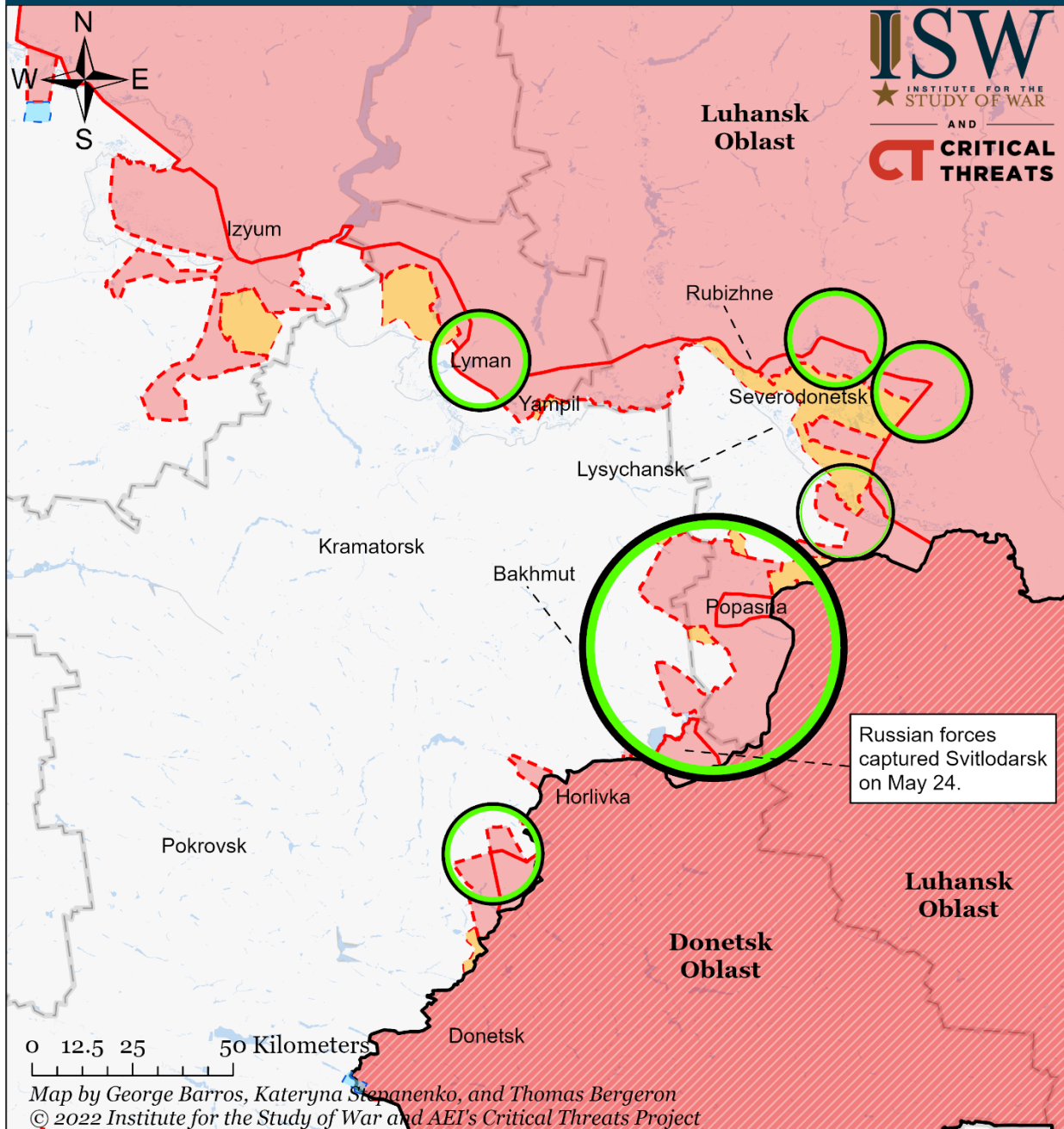
- Main effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and three supporting efforts);
- Subordinate main effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts
- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv City
- Supporting effort 2—Southern axis
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued to attempt advances southeast of Izyum toward Slovyansk on May 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted to attack Bohorodychne, about 30 km southeast of Izyum.⁴ Russian forces additionally conducted artillery, rocket, mortar, and tank attacks against Chepil, Dovehenke, Kurulka, and Studenok, all settlements to the southeast of Izyum in the direction of Slovyansk.⁵ Such offensive actions indicate that Russian troops hope to continue their advance toward the borders of Donetsk Oblast and merge with operations around Lyman, which Russian forces fully captured on May 26.⁶

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of May 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Thomas Bergeron
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24

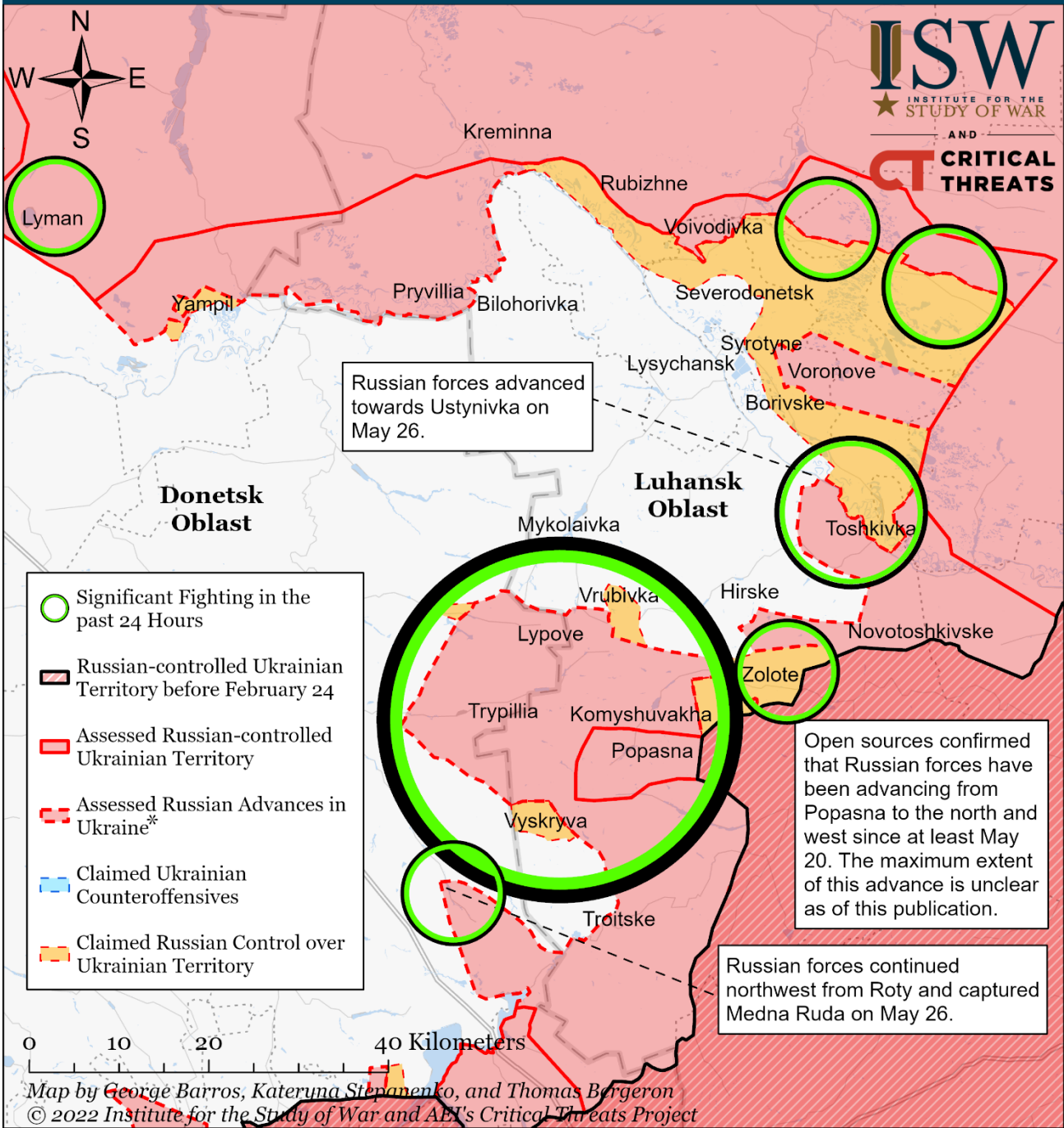
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: Russian forces captured Lyman on May 25. The full extent of Russian advances in this area is unclear.

Russian forces continued efforts to encircle Severodonetsk on May 26. Russian forces reportedly attempted to take control of Ustynivka, about 15 km southeast of Severodonetsk.⁷ Russian sources additionally reported that Russian troops are approaching Severodonetsk from Vojevodiivka and Schedryshcheve (northeast of Severodonetsk) and that the northeast portion of the city is under Russian control.⁸ A Russian military reporter claimed that as many as 10,000 people may be trapped in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk cauldron.⁹ Ukrainian troops have reportedly fortified their positions in the Zolote-Orikhiv area, where Russian troops have encircled them.¹⁰

Russian forces continued persistent advances in Donetsk Oblast south and west of Popasna on May 26. Troops from the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) claimed to have taken full control of Svitlodarsk and Midna Ruda, settlements off the M03 highway and within 30 km southeast of Bakhmut.¹¹ Russian troops are reportedly fighting around Komyshevakha, Nirkove, Berestove, Belohorivka, Pokrovske, Klynove, Lypove, and Nahirne and using these areas to advance toward Bakhmut.¹² Russian forces conducted unsuccessful operations around Donetsk City in the vicinity of Avdiivka and continued to shell north and northwest of Avdiivka.¹³

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Severodonetsk as of May 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



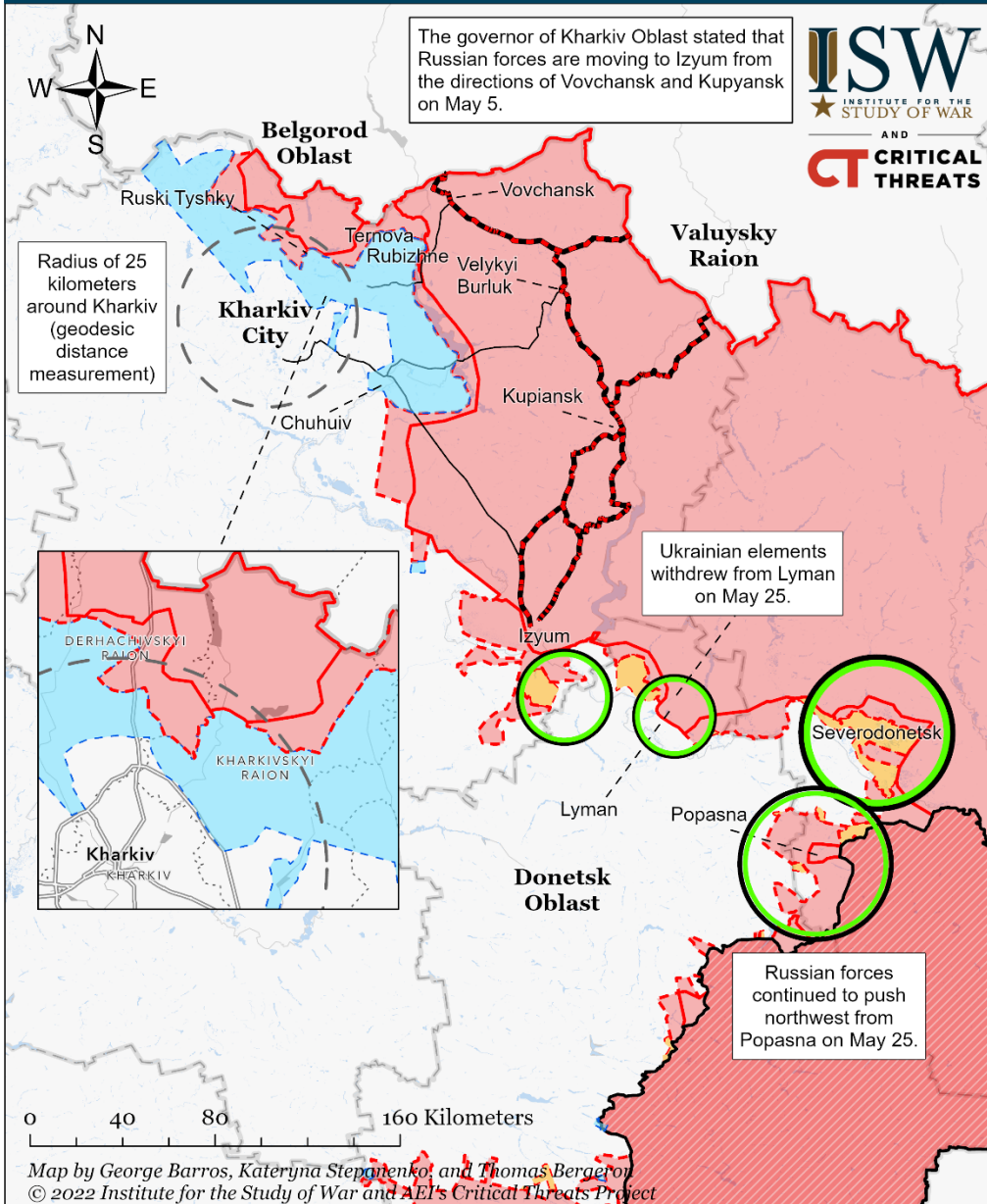
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: ISW is unable to verify Russian Telegram channel Swodki's May 26 claim that Russian forces gained control over the north and eastern part of Severodonetsk and that Ukrainian forces are operating in the city's southwest, with fighting is occurring in the city center. We have coded this new information as Russian claims until we observe more evidence to corroborate. Russian forces captured Lyman on May 25. The full extent of Russian advances in this area is unclear.

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Withdraw forces to the north and defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum)

Russian forces focused on maintaining their positions around Kharkiv City on May 26. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian troops north of Kharkiv City reconnoitered and fired on Ukrainian positions to prevent any further Ukrainian advances in this area.¹⁴ Russian forces shelled the center of Kharkiv City and surrounding settlements.¹⁵

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Key Ukrainian Roads
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory

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

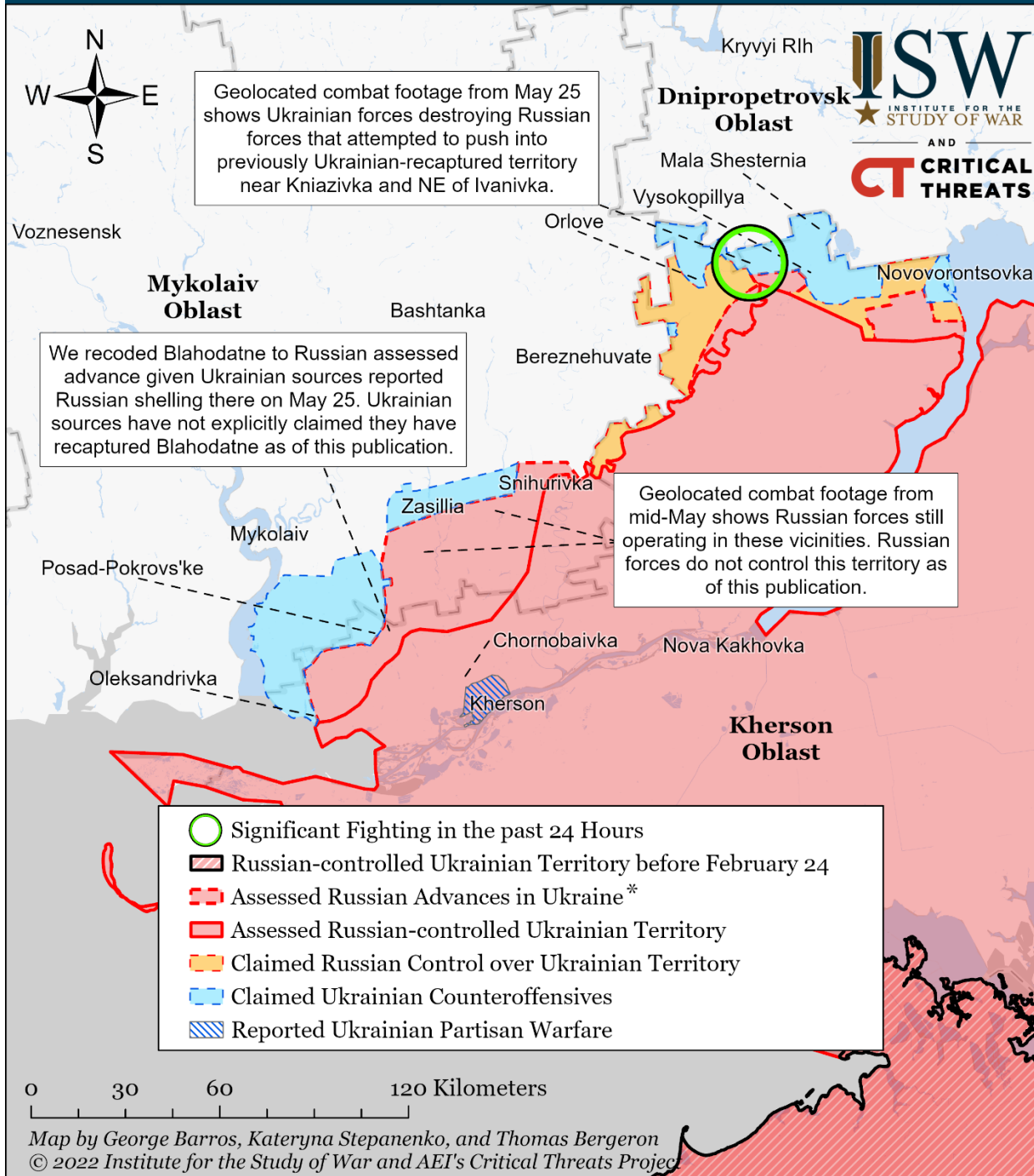
Note: ISW is unable to verify Russian Telegram channel Swodki's May 26 claim that Russian forces gained control over the north and eastern part of Severodonetsk and that Ukrainian forces are operating in the city's southwest, with fighting is occurring in the city center. We have coded this new information as Russian claims until we observe more evidence to corroborate. Russian forces likely captured Lyman on May 25. The full extent of Russian advances in this area is unclear.

Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces focused on improving their tactical positions and strengthening defensive lines on the southern axis on May 26.¹⁶ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command stated that Russian forces are creating a "third line of defense" in occupied Kherson Oblast, indicating they are preparing for protracted conflict in this area and digging in to repel likely anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensives.¹⁷ This assessment is consistent with statements made by the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) that Russian forces are strengthening their defenses in occupied areas in order to hold those territories over the long term.¹⁸

Russian forces are reportedly attempting to advance to the Mykolaiv-Kherson administrative border and conducted unsuccessful assault operations around Tavriyske and Mykolaivka on May 26.¹⁹ Russian forces heavily shelled areas of Zaporizhia Oblast and strengthened their grouping of forces around Vasylivka and Polohy to renew offensives in the directions of Kamyanske, Orikhiv, and Huliapole.²⁰ The Ukrainian General Staff noted that the Russian grouping in Zaporizhia, specifically around Melitopol, has been reinforced by a battalion using outdated T-62 tanks, confirming earlier Ukrainian reports that Russian forces are cobbling together battalions with obsolete T-62 tanks to compensate for equipment losses.²¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: We recoded Novopavlivka in northern Kherson Oblast to Ukrainian counteroffensives given the Ukrainian General Staff stated on May 25 that Russian forces fired upon Novopavlivka, indicating that Russian forces are not present there.

Activity in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of occupied areas; set conditions for potential annexation into the Russian Federation or some other future political arrangement of Moscow's choosing)

Russian occupation authorities continued actions to strengthen their administrative control of occupied areas on May 26. Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations deployed three broadcast trucks to Mariupol to transmit state-controlled programming to residents of the city.²² Advisor to the Mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushchenko claimed that occupation elements are taking control of schools in Mariupol and have extended the school year through September in order to ensure children spend the summer learning according to strictly Russian curricula.²³ Russian-backed occupation authorities in Kherson stated that Russian mobile phone operators will be available in occupied areas and that pensions will be paid in rubles starting in June.²⁴ Residents of Kherson and Zaporizhia will additionally be able to obtain Russian passports at newly established passport points in accordance with Russian President Vladimir Putin's May 25 decree simplifying the process to obtain Russian passports in these occupied areas.²⁵

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces are likely reinforcing their grouping north of Kharkiv City to prevent further advances of the Ukrainian counteroffensive toward the Russian border. Russian forces may commit elements of the 1st Tank Army to Northern Kharkiv in the near future.
- Russian forces are prioritizing cutting off two major highways to Severodonetsk but may start to storm the city before they successfully cut GLOCs.
- Occupation forces in Mariupol will continue to strengthen administrative control of the city but are likely unsure of what the ultimate annexation policy will be.
- Russian forces are likely preparing for Ukrainian counteroffensives and settling in for protracted operations in Southern Ukraine.



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¹ <https://t.me/stranaua/44113>

² <https://t.me/spravdi/9131>

³ <https://regnum dot ru/news/polit/3602011.html>; <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=595922954918641>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/325726553073763>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/325370633109355>; <https://t.me/synegubov/3287>;

<https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1529839934739296256>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CssCrrOI-I>; <https://t.me/sashakots/33093>;
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- ⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/325726553073763>;
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- ⁸ <https://t.me/swodki/103842>; <https://t.me/swodki/103941>
- ⁹ <https://t.me/epoddubny/10912>; <https://t.me/epoddubny/10902>
- ¹⁰ <https://t.me/strelkovii/2599>
- ¹¹ https://t.me/nm_dnr/8078; https://t.me/nm_dnr/8081; <https://t.me/milinfo/83980>;
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- ¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=550938303251904>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=550938303251904>; <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-rosia-tretia-linia-oborony-pivden-ukrainy/31867079.html>
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- ²² https://t.me/tass_agency/137036; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/1073>;
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- ²³ <https://t.me/andriyshTime/1072>
- ²⁴ <https://ria dot ru/20220526/zarplata-1790768207.html>; <https://t.me/swodki/103743>
- ²⁵ <https://t.me/stranaua/44056>; https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/8278; https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/8280; <https://ria dot ru/20220525/grazhdanstvo-1790612394.html>; <https://hromadske dot ua/posts/v-op-vidpovili-na-sproshennya-vidachi-pasportiv-rf-dlya-zhiteliv-hersonskoyi-ta-zaporizkoyi-oblastej>