

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

May 29, 5:30 pm ET

**New reports confirmed that Ukrainian forces conducted a successful limited counterattack near the Kherson-Mykolaiv oblast border on May 28, forcing Russian forces onto the defensive.** This Ukrainian counterattack is likely intended to disrupt Russian efforts to establish strong defensive positions along the Southern Axis. While the Ukrainian counterattack does not appear likely to retake substantial territory in the near term, it will likely disrupt Russian operations and potentially force Russia to deploy reinforcements to the Kherson region, which is predominantly held by sub-standard units. Ukrainian counterattacks may additionally slow Russian efforts to consolidate administrative control of occupied southern Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

**Russian forces continued to assault Severodonetsk on May 29 but did not make any confirmed advances; Russian progress in intense urban combat will likely be slow.** The Russian campaign in eastern Ukraine—which previously aimed to capture the entirety of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts—is now focused almost entirely on Severodonetsk. Russian troops are unlikely to be able to conduct multiple simultaneous operations and will likely further deprioritize advances southeast of Izyum and west of Lyman in favor of concentrating available forces on Severodonetsk in the coming days.

## Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued attempts to take full control of Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensives southeast of Izyum but did not make any confirmed advances toward Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations to cut Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) northeast of Bakhmut and appear unlikely to attempt to directly assault the city.**
- **The Ukrainian counteroffensive in northwestern Kherson Oblast has forced Russian troops to take up defensive positions and will likely disrupt Russian efforts to effectively dig in and consolidate control of occupied areas along the Southern Axis.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 29, 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 had added a new section on activities in Russian-occupied areas:**

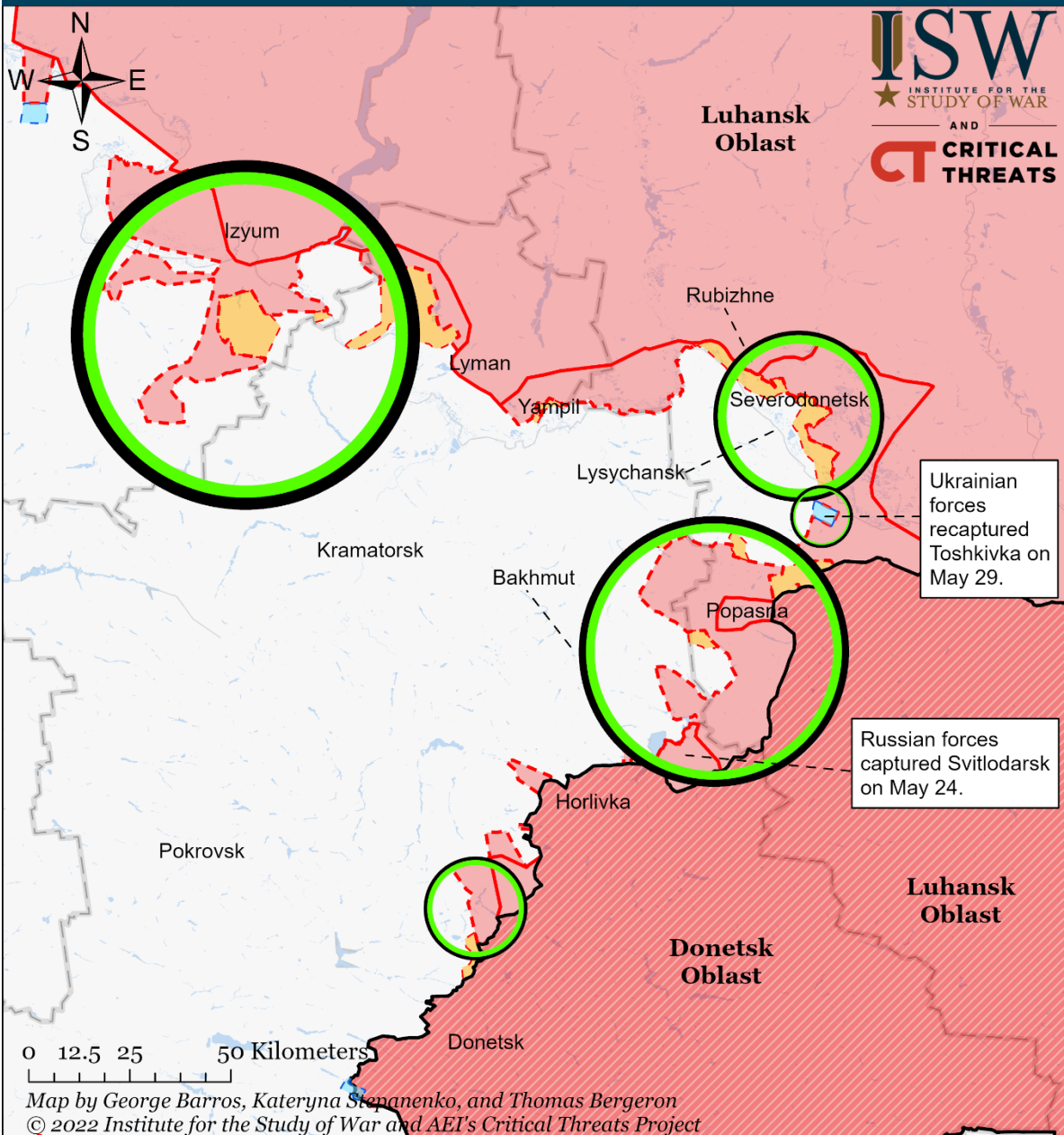
- Main effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and three supporting efforts);
- Subordinate Main Effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts
- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv City;
- Supporting effort 2—Southern axis;
- Activities in 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 offensive operations southeast of Izyum toward Slovyansk but did not make any confirmed advances on May 29. Russian troops unsuccessfully attacked Bohorodychne, about 30 km southeast of Izyum.<sup>2</sup> Russian forces additionally shelled Ukrainian positions southwest of Izyum around Husarivka, Velyka Komyshevakha, and Virnopillya, and to the southeast of Izyum around Dovehenke and Raihorodok.<sup>3</sup> Russian efforts south of Izyum have likely shifted from being a key effort to a subordinate action increasingly intended to support offensive operations around Lyman. Advances in both southeastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast are now subordinate to the dominant Russian effort in the Donbas, the encirclement of Severodonetsk.<sup>4</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of May 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

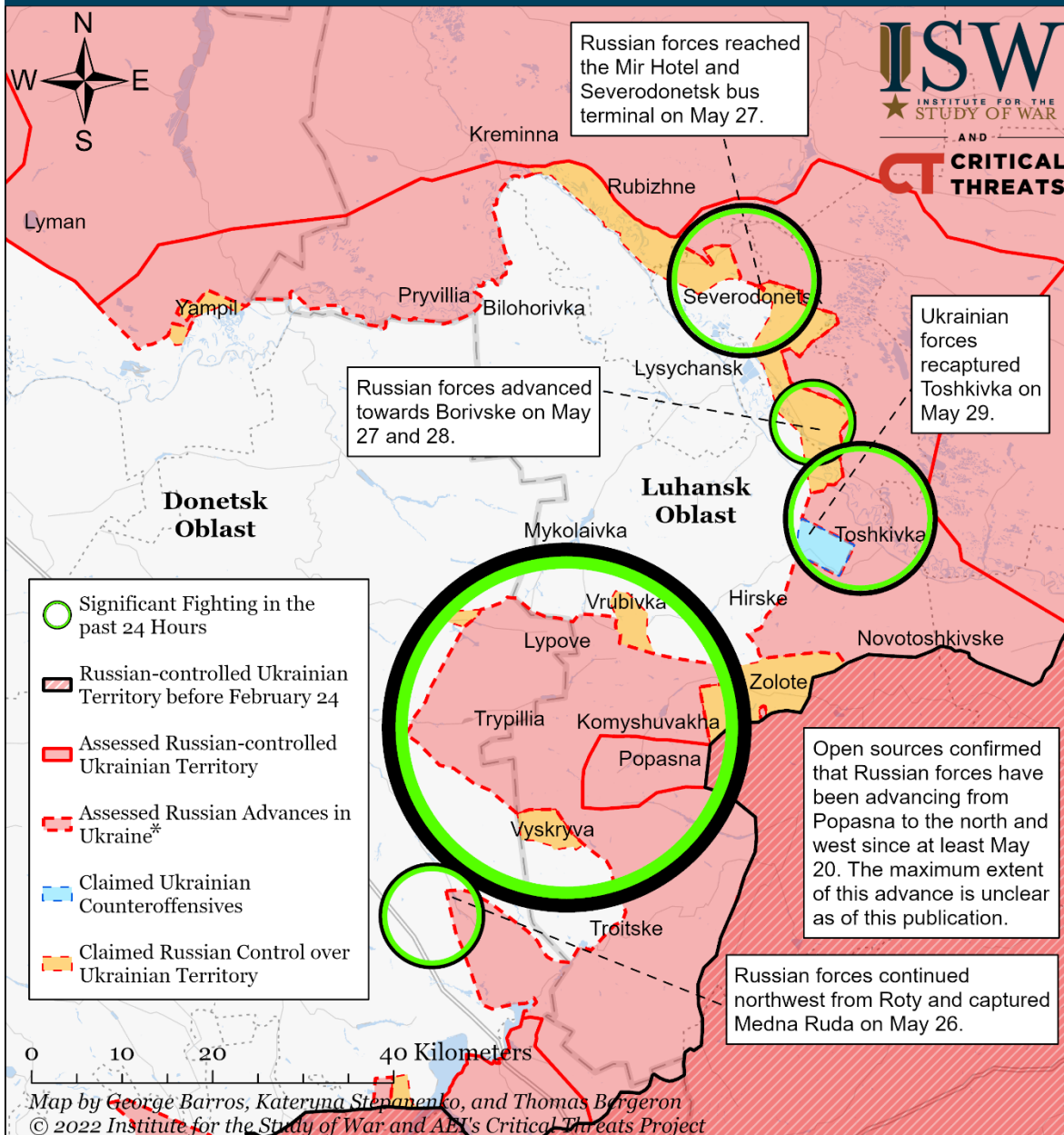
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: ISW expanded Russian assessed advances over the northern outskirts of Severodonetsk based on geolocated videos of Russian forces conducting ground assaults in the area on May 27.

Russian forces continued ground assaults against Severodonetsk itself on May 29, though ISW cannot confirm any specific advances. The Ukrainian General Staff stated on May 29 that Russian troops intend to encircle Severodonetsk and Lysychansk and cut the main Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in the area, as ISW has previously assessed.<sup>5</sup> Russian forces additionally attempted to advance northward toward Severodonetsk from Bobrove and Ustynivka.<sup>6</sup> Head of Luhansk Regional State Administration Serhiy Haidai emphasized that Ukrainian troops are still in control of Severodonetsk, denying Chechen Leader Ramzan Kadyrov's false claims that Severodonetsk is under full Russian control as of May 28.<sup>7</sup> Haidai additionally claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a limited counterattack and drove a Russian grouping out of Toshkivka, which may put pressure on Russian operations in the vicinity of Popasna.<sup>8</sup>

Russian forces continued offensive operations to push westward of the Luhansk Oblast administrative border and cut Ukrainian GLOCs northeast of Bakhmut, rather than advancing toward Bakhmut itself, on May 29. The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian troops are fighting around Volodymyrivka, Vasylivka, Komyshuvakha, and Myronivka those troops likely intend to reach and block the Bakhmut-Lysychansk T1302 highway.<sup>9</sup> Russian forces around Donetsk City continued unsuccessful assaults around Avdiivka.<sup>10</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian troops intensified air, mortar, artillery, and rocket strikes in western Donetsk Oblast around Kurakhove on May 29.<sup>11</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff has not reported any Russian offensive operations around Kurakhove since May 16, and this report may indicate Russian efforts to renew offensive operations in this sector to support stalled Russian operations towards Zaporizhia.<sup>12</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Severodonetsk as of May 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



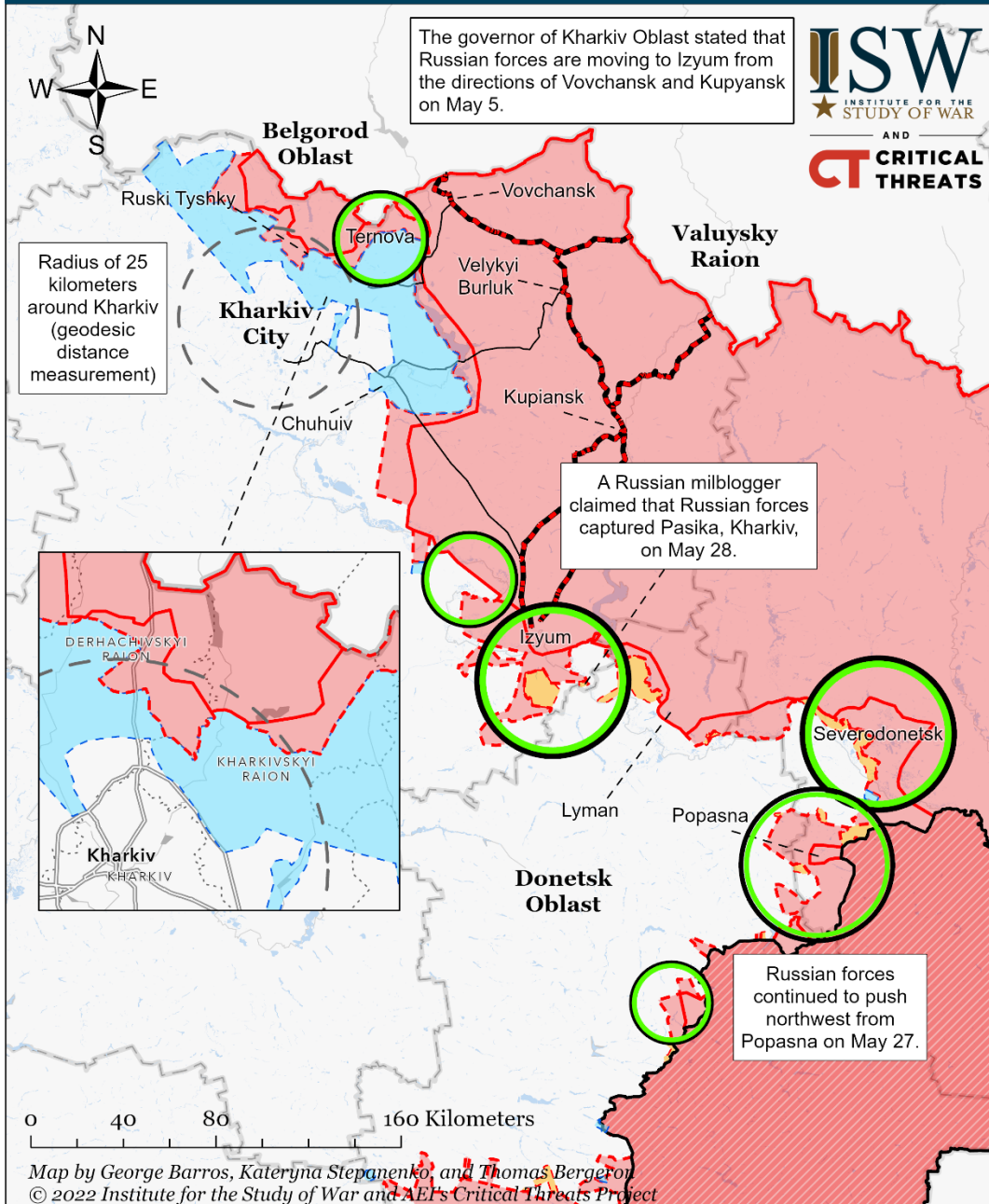
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: We reshaped our assessment of the Severodonetsk eastern frontline after observing new information on May 28. We expanded Russian assessed advances from the east to Osklonivka given that Luhansk Governor Serhiy Haidai stated on May 28 that Russian forces retreated in the area of Osklonivka. The Ukrainian General Staff Report of 1800 May 28 stated that Russian forces conducted assaults against Borivske, indicating that Russian forces were likely west of Osklonivka. We also expanded assessed Russian advances from the north from Oleksandrivka and Smolianynove. We have not observed direct evidence for Russian forces overrunning Ukrainian positions in Oleksandrivka nor Smolianynove, but an advance from this direction would make sense given the reported fighting near Metolkine, which was unlikely to have been from an unsupported salient from Voronove. We will update our map when we collect more information.

**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 north of Kharkiv City and fired on surrounding settlements on May 29.<sup>13</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces fired on Cherkasy Tyshky, Ruski Tyshky, Petrivka, and Ternova to deter further Ukrainian advances toward the international border.<sup>14</sup> A Russian Telegram channel claimed that Ukrainian forces took heavy losses during fighting in Ternova and that Russian troops have subsequently stopped Ukrainian pushes toward the international border.<sup>15</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 29, 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

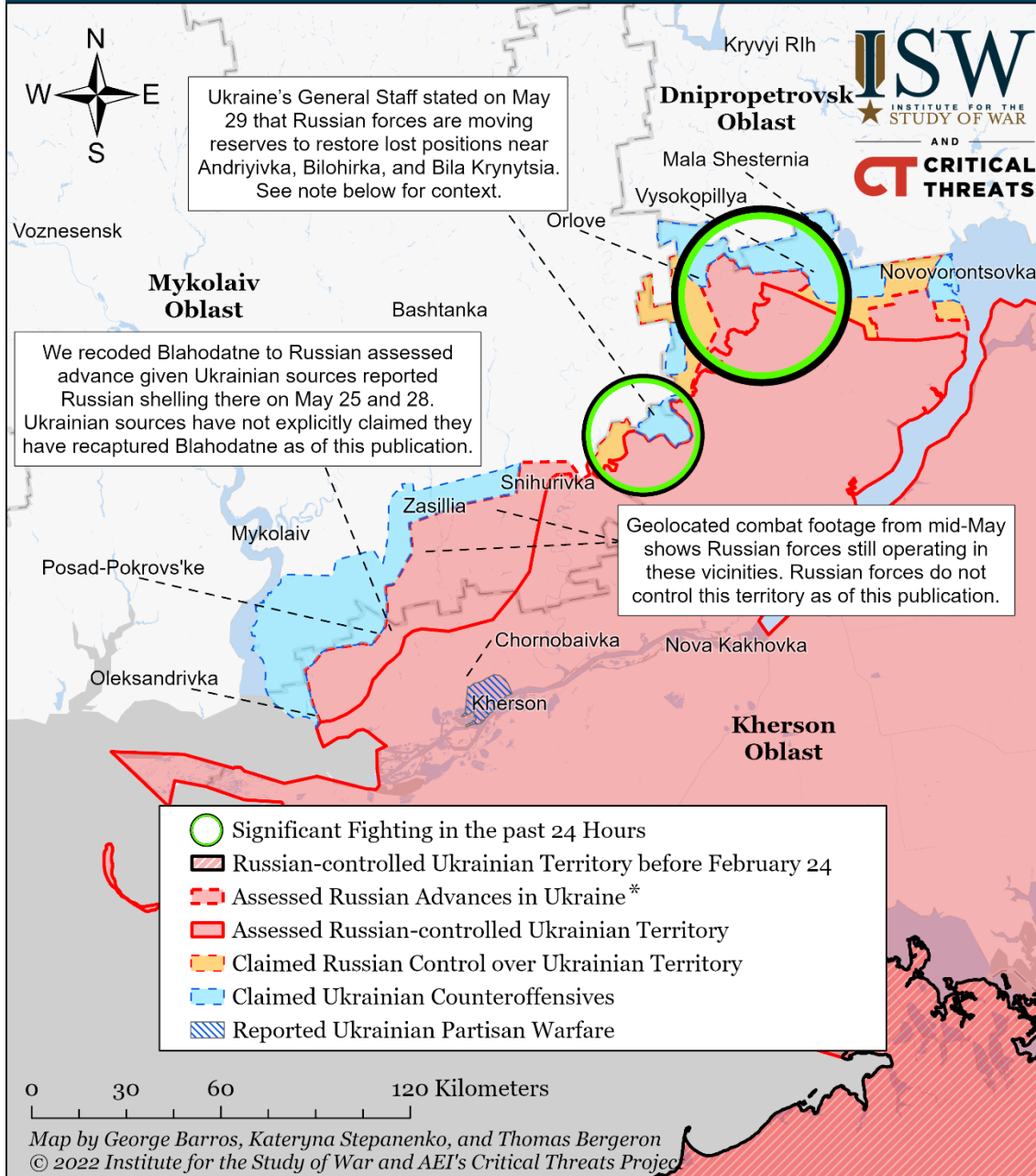
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.



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

The ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive in northwestern Kherson Oblast did not make any confirmed advances on May 29, and Russian forces focused on maintaining their defensive positions and launching limited attacks to regain lost ground.<sup>16</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces took up defensive positions in Kostromka, a settlement in northwestern Kherson Oblast within 10 km of the Kherson-Mykolaiv oblast border.<sup>17</sup> Reporting by Russian and Ukrainian sources indicates that Ukrainian troops likely conducted a counter-offensive south of the village of Davydiv Brid and east of the Inhulets River on May 28.<sup>18</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian forces are attempting to recapture positions in Andriivka, Bilohirka, and Bila Krynysia, indicating the Ukrainian counteroffensive south of Davydiv Brid recaptured these positions on the Kherson-Mykolaiv border on May 28.<sup>19</sup> Russian forces are reportedly fighting around Vysokopillya, Dobryanka, and Kochubeivka, all settlements in northern Kherson Oblast.<sup>20</sup> Russian forces conducted artillery strikes against Mykolaiv and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts and a missile strike against Kryvyi Rih.<sup>21</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 29, 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 coded a new Ukrainian counteroffensive south of Davydiv Brid east of the Inuhlets River near Bilohirka, Bila Krynytsia, Lozove, and Andriyivka based off observing new information between May 27 and May 29. Ukrainian Presidential Adviser Oleksiy Arestovich stated on May 28 that Ukrainian forces conducted a successful counteroffensive near the village of Davydiv Brid and stated that if this counteroffensive is successful, then Ukraine will cut off the Russian group operating in northern Kherson closer to Kryvyi Rih. Arestovich said that Ukrainian forces did not cross the Inuhlets river at Davydiv Brid directly, but a little down the river, supporting an assessment that a Ukrainian crossing of the Inuhlets River likely occurred around the Bilohirka-Lozove area. The Ukrainian General Staff report of 0600 May 29 states that Russian forces in this area suffered losses took up defense on unfavorable borders near the village of Kostromka. The General Staff's report of 1800 May 29 specified additional Russian territorial losses and stated that Russian forces are moving reserves to restore lost positions near Andriyivka, Bilohirka, and Bila Krynytsia.

## **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 forces continued to consolidate their administrative control of occupied regions on May 29. Russian occupation forces are reportedly shipping looted rolled steel and metal to Russia through the Port of Mariupol.<sup>22</sup> The Russian-backed head of Kherson's civil-military administration, Kirill Stremousov, told *Reuters* that the decision for Kherson to join Russia will likely occur next year and walked back his previous statements that Kherson would join Russia automatically by stating there will be a "referendum."<sup>23</sup> Stremousov said that the occupation administration is focusing on restoring order in Kherson before making decisions on a potential referendum to join the Russian Federation, indicating that Ukrainian partisan activities may be disrupting ongoing efforts to consolidate full Russian administrative control of Kherson Oblast.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pro-moscow-kherson-official-sees-decision-towards-next-year-joining-russia-2022-05-28/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>; <https://t.me/swodki/105539>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/328041022842316>; <https://t.me/swodki/105539>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/328041022842316>; <https://t.me/strelkovii/2618>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/328041022842316>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>

<sup>7</sup> <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/3015>; [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/2215](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2215)

<sup>8</sup> <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/3015>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/328041022842316>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>; <https://t.me/strelkovii/2618>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/328041022842316>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-16>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/328041022842316>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://t.me/swodki/105539>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/328041022842316>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>;  
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=685558229176861>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/327663802880038>

<sup>18</sup>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPUihl8mTus&ab\\_channel=%D0%A4%D0%95%D0%99%D0%93%D0%98%D0%9D%D0%9E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPUihl8mTus&ab_channel=%D0%A4%D0%95%D0%99%D0%93%D0%98%D0%9D%D0%9E); <https://www.mk dot ru/politics/2022/05/28/stali-izvestny-detali-neudachnoy-kontrataki-vsu-v-nikolaevskoy-oblasti.html>; <https://t.me/rybar/33221>; <https://real-vin dot com/vsu-osvobodili-tri-naselennyh-punkta-v-hersonskoj-oblasti-2>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/328041022842316>

<sup>20</sup>

<https://www.facebook.com/100064555155257/posts/pfbid029noy2gyck2jNHjomzh4oVx7WpnydNeGbAUCfp51eTMsigzajzHibAWtPPiQHe5I/?d=n>

<sup>21</sup> [https://t.me/zoda\\_gov\\_ua/8391](https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/8391); [https://t.me/zoda\\_gov\\_ua/8390](https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/8390); <https://t.me/stranaua/44583>;  
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<sup>22</sup> <https://t.me/andriyshTime/1136>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pro-moscow-kherson-official-sees-decision-towards-next-year-joining-russia-2022-05-28/>