

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

May 8, 4:00 pm ET

Russian forces did not make any significant advances on any axis of advance on May 8. The Ukrainian counteroffensive northeast of Kharkiv City has likely forced Russian troops to redeploy to Kharkiv instead of reinforcing stalled Russian offensive operations elsewhere in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces are continuing their attempt to reach the administrative borders of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts but have not made substantial territorial gains since securing Popasna on May 7.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are likely amassing in Belgorod to reinforce Russian efforts in northern Kharkiv to prevent the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive from pushing closer to the Ukraine-Russia border.**
- **Russian forces near Izyum focused on regrouping, replenishing, and reconnoitering Ukrainian positions in order to continue advances to the southwest and southeast of Izyum.**
- **Russian forces continued their ground attacks to drive to the borders of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts but did not make any territorial gains**
- **Russian troops continued to assault the Azovstal Steel Plant and advanced efforts to economically integrate occupied Mariupol into the wider Russian economy.**
- **Russian troops may be preparing for a renewed offensive on the Southern Axis but are unlikely to be successful in this endeavor.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 8, 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 five primary efforts Russian forces are engaged in at this time:

- Main effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and four supporting efforts);
- Subordinate main effort- Encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts
- Supporting effort 1—Mariupol;
- Supporting effort 2—Kharkiv City;
- Supporting effort 3—Southern axis;
- Supporting effort 4—Sumy and northeastern Ukraine.

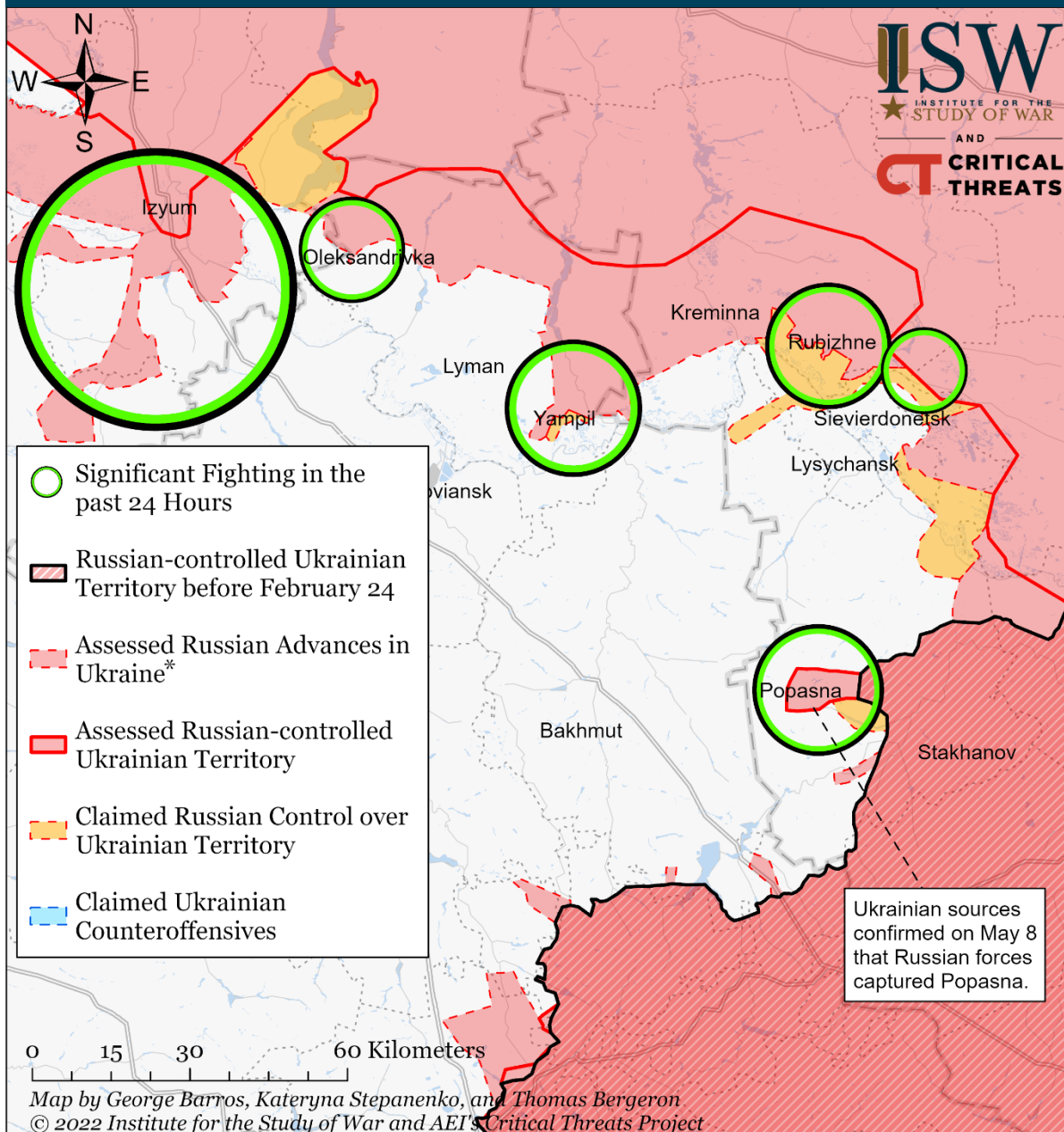
Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

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 did not conduct confirmed attacks in any direction from Izyum on May 8. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces continued to regroup units, replenish reserves, and reconnoiter Ukrainian positions to continue offensives in the Izyum-Barvinkove and Izyum-Slovyansk directions.¹

Russian forces intensified ground, air, and artillery attacks in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts on May 8. Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian forces withdrew from Popasna, confirming that Russian forces established full control of the city in the last few days.² The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces are attempting to reach the administrative borders of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, which is confirmed by social media footage of ongoing fighting along existing Russian lines of advance.³ Ukrainian sources reported active fighting in Bilohorivka, Vojevodivka, and Lysychansk, indicating that Russian forces may intend to encircle Severodonetsk from the south (in support of ongoing operations in Rubizhne, north of Severodonetsk) and push west toward the Luhansk Oblast border.⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff additionally reported that elements of the Russian 90th Tank Division are operating around Lyman in the vicinity of Shandryholove and Oleksandrivka, which both lie less than 20 kilometers from the Donetsk Oblast border.⁵

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of May 8, 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.

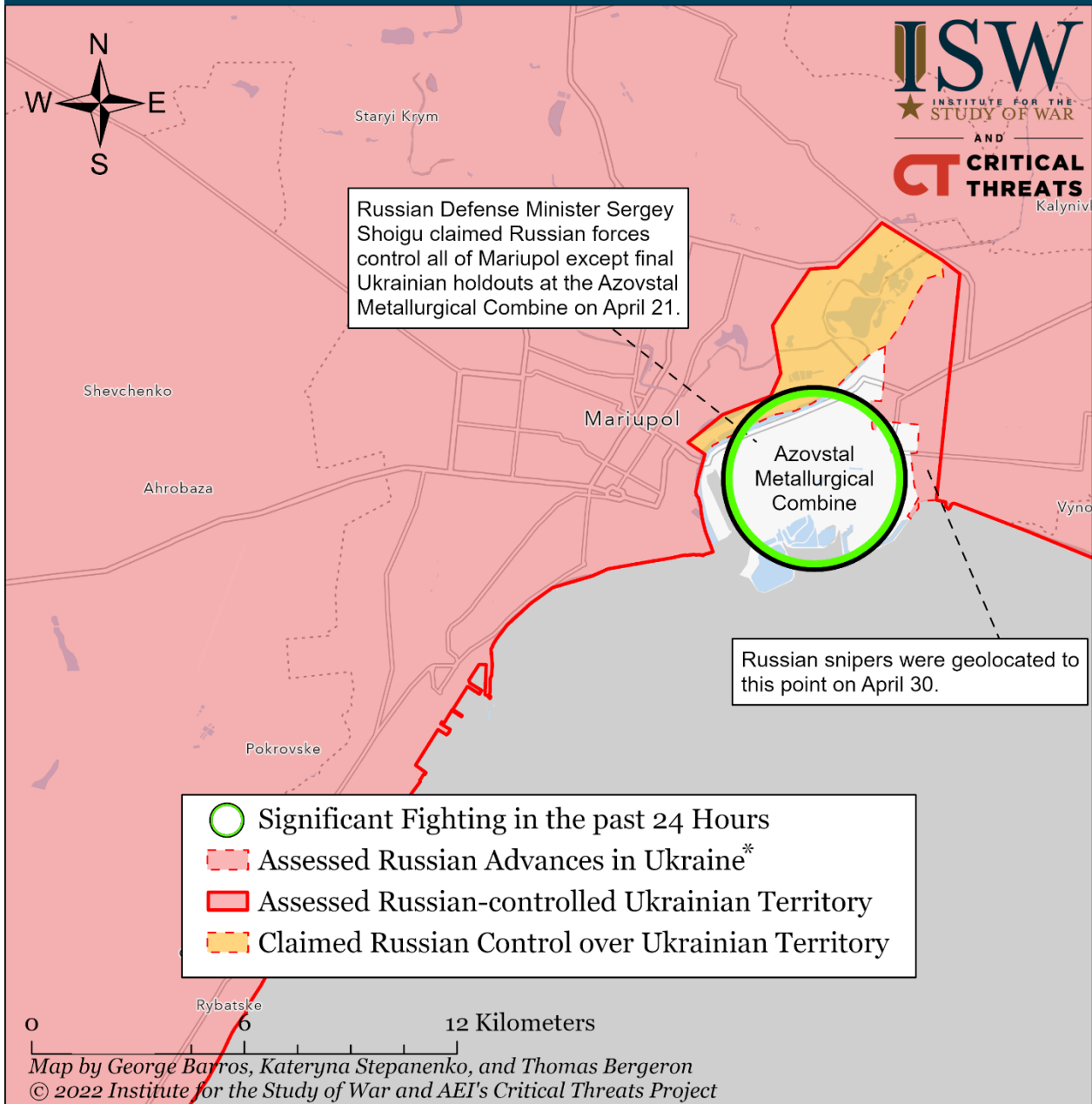
Note: We have recoded Russian-claimed areas between known Russian advances between Lozove, Zelena Dolyna, and Yampil to be assessed Russian advances due to an absence of observed Ukrainian defense activity in these areas. We assessed part of these areas to be Russian-controlled and have recoded the areas as such; we advanced Russian control in this area given the lack of evidence of Ukrainian attacks north of the front lines in Oleksandrivka and Novoselivka. We have not recoded the Russian-claimed area northeast of Oskil given the ambiguity of the situation in this area. We will update our map when we can confirm more information. We also advanced assessed Russian control north of Rubizhne closer to Rubizhne given the lack of organized Ukrainian indirect fire attacks on forward Russian positions north of Rubizhne. We previously had not moved the assessed Russian control line closer to Rubizhne due to the area being within the range of hypothetical Ukrainian rocket artillery near the frontline, however, we have not seen evidence of such Ukrainian strikes against these areas.

Supporting Effort #1—Mariupol (Russian objective: Capture Mariupol and reduce the Ukrainian defenders)

Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations in the Azovstal Steel Plant on May 8. Commander of the Azov Regiment Denis Prokopenko stated that the Ukrainian defense remains in Azovstal after the evacuation of all civilians and that fighting is ongoing within parts of the plant itself.⁶

Russian authorities are advancing efforts to integrate Mariupol into Russian economic systems. Head of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Denis Pushilin visited Mariupol's commercial port alongside Russian Deputy Prime Minister for Construction and Regional Development Marat Khusnullin on May 8 and claimed that products will start moving through the port later this month.⁷ Khusnullin's visit to Mariupol is likely indicative of the Kremlin's broader desire to capitalize on Mariupol's port access and integrate the city's transport capabilities into Russia's regional economic agenda.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of May 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



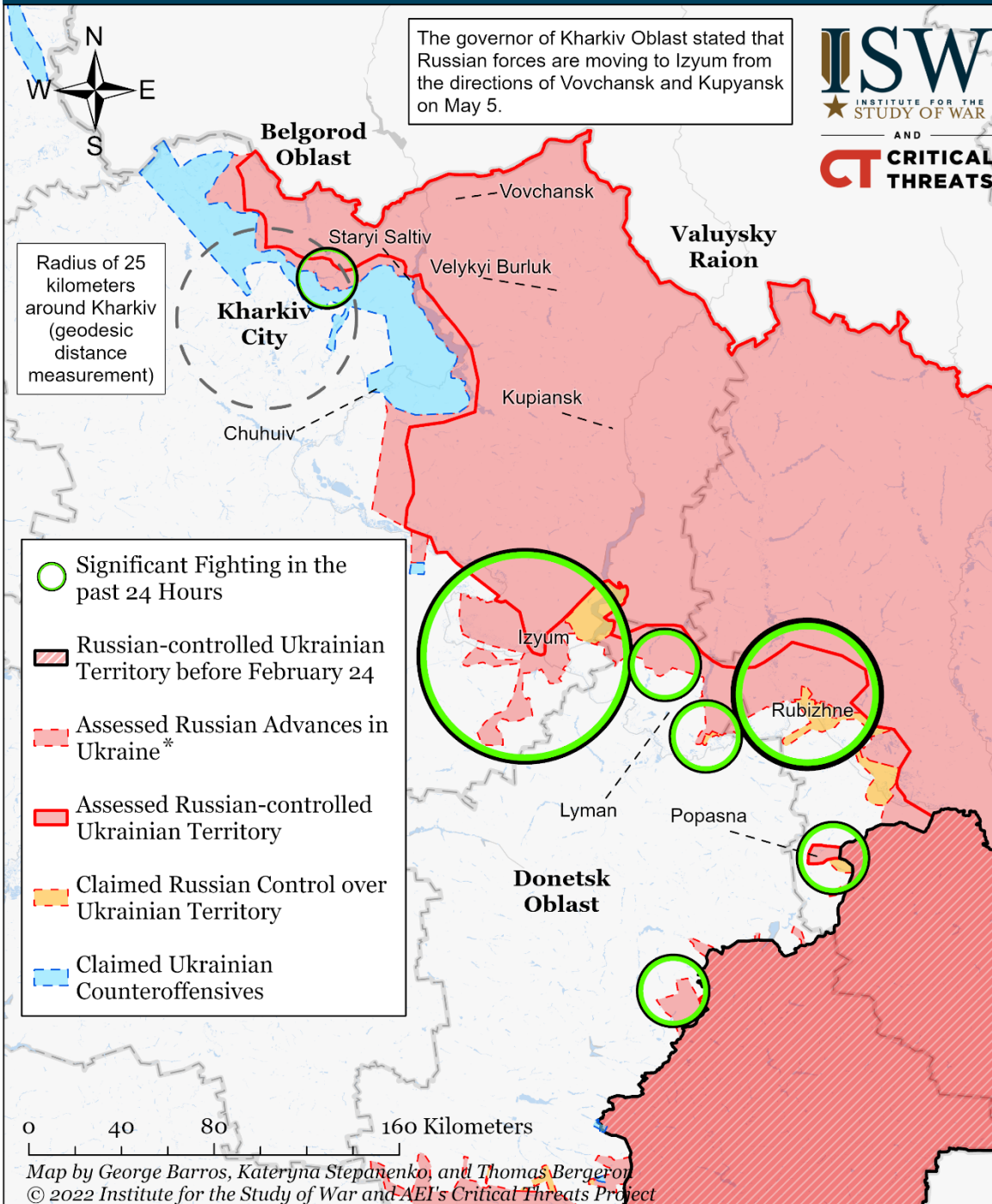
The Kremlin declared victory in Mariupol on April 21 after capturing the city besides Ukrainian holdouts in the encircled Azovstal Metallurgical Combine. Russian forces reportedly conducted an assault on the remaining Ukrainian defenders at Azovstal on May 4. Russian war reporters filmed some Russian elements redeploying from Mariupol northward on April 24 and April 25. The Kremlin will spin the (still incomplete) capture of Mariupol into a major victory in Ukraine to compensate for stalled or failed Russian offensives elsewhere.

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

Supporting Effort #2—Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Retain positions on the outskirts of Kharkiv within artillery range of the city and prevent further Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces are likely amassing in Belgorod to deploy to the Kharkiv City region to prevent the Ukrainian counteroffensive in the area from reaching the international border. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that units of the 1st Tank Army are concentrating in Belgorod, Russia, for deployment to areas near the Ukraine-Russia border.⁸ The Ukrainian General Staff noted that the main Russian effort around Kharkiv City is oriented around preventing Ukrainian counteroffensives from pushing Russian forces to the international border.⁹ ISW previously assessed that the Ukrainian counteroffensive northeast of Kharkiv City has forced Russian forces to deploy reinforcements to the Kharkiv city area instead of deploying them to Russian axes of advance.¹⁰ The Ukrainian counteroffensive did not make any confirmed advances on May 8.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



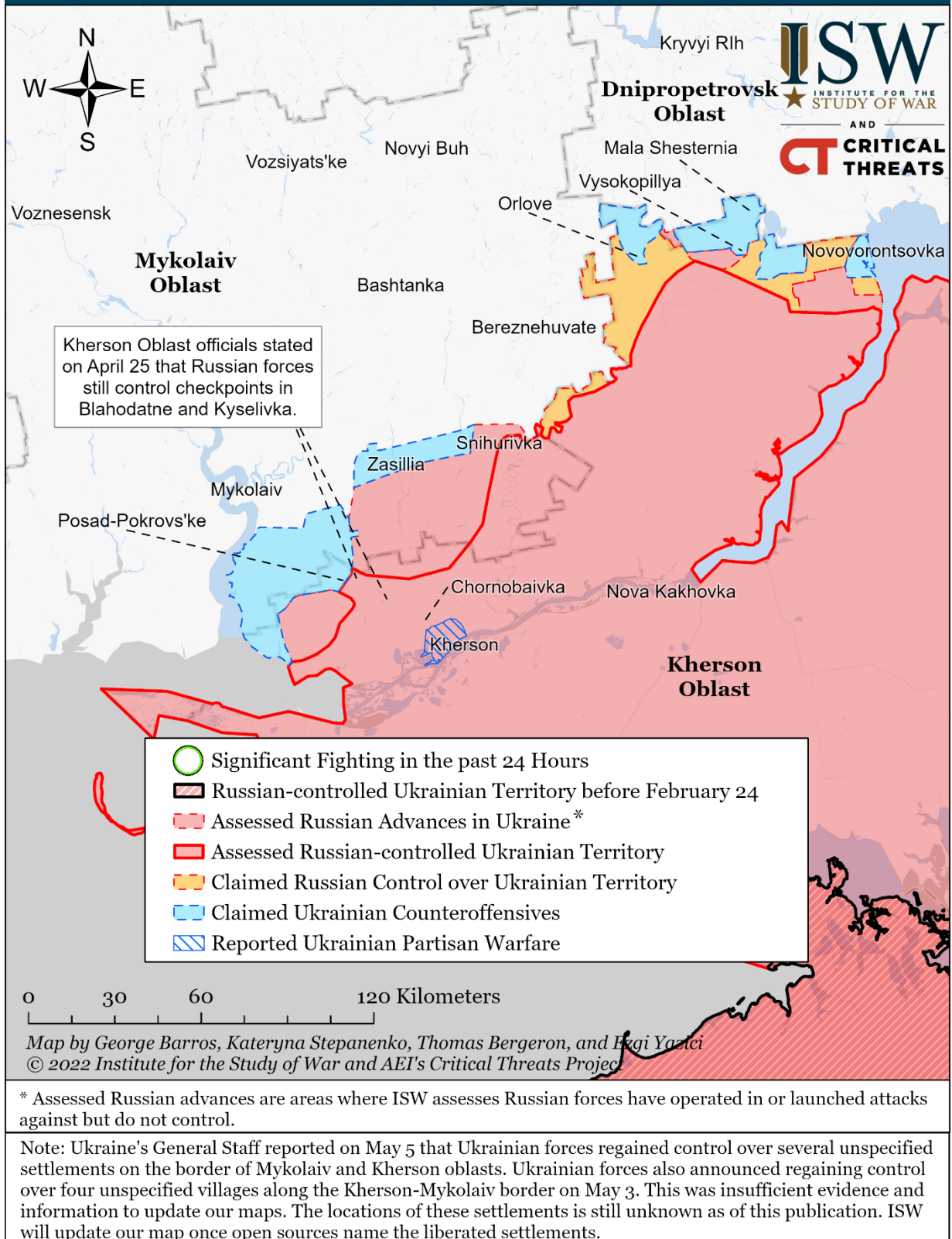
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

An unconfirmed Russian social media report claimed that Russian forces retreated past Liptsy on May 7, but ISW did not map this report due to the lack of evidence of any withdrawals from villages southwest of Liptsy. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces destroyed three bridges near Tsirkuny and Ruski Tyshky on May 7 to slow further Ukrainian counteroffensives. The Ukrainian counteroffensive north and east of Kharkiv made substantial progress in the last 24 hours and Ukrainian forces may be able to drive Russian forces out of tube artillery range of Kharkiv city itself in the coming days.

Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

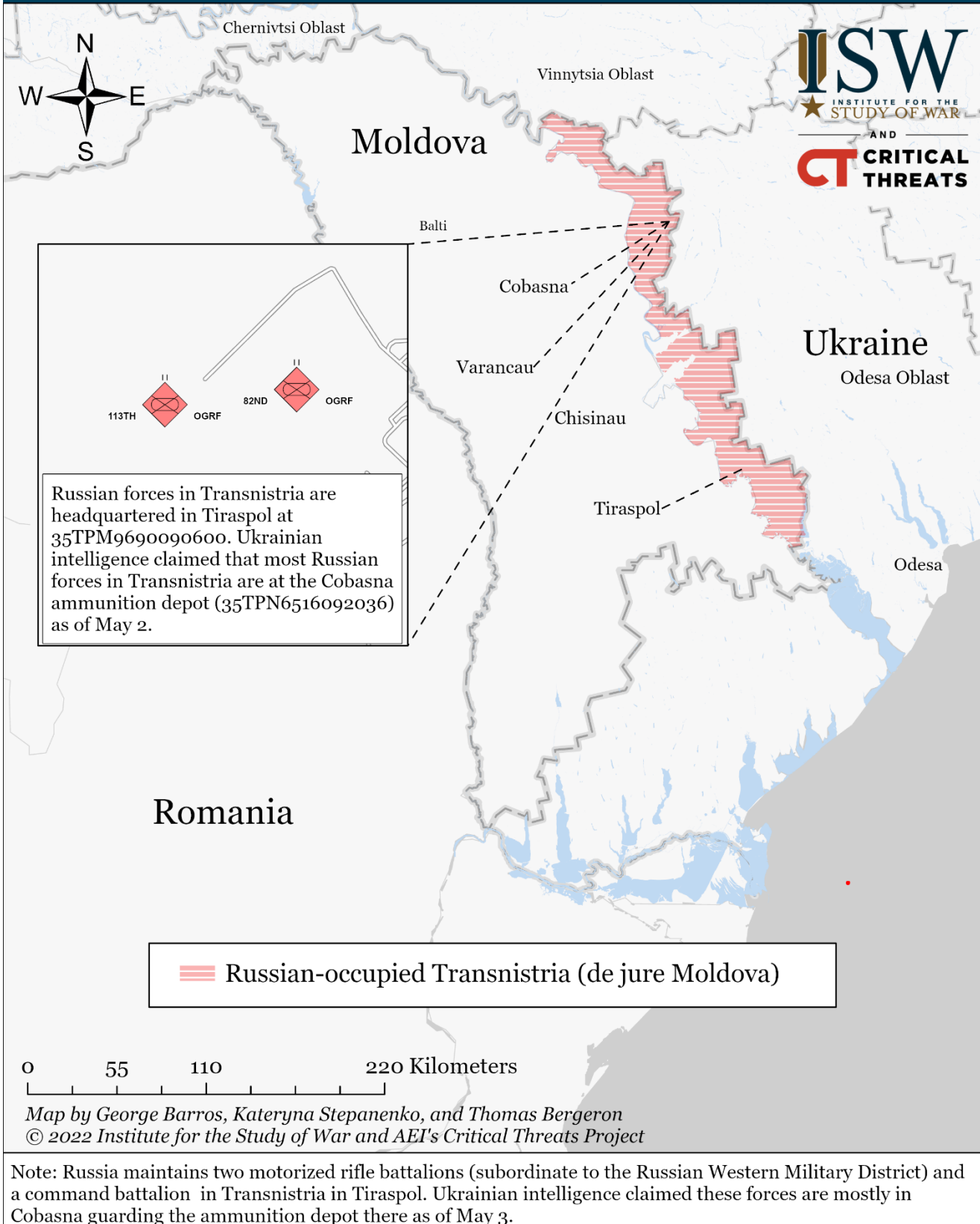
Russian forces did not make any confirmed ground attacks on the Southern Axis on May 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces may be preparing for a potential offensive in order to improve their tactical positions and fix Ukrainian forces in place.¹¹ Russian forces focused on reconnaissance and regrouping frontline units in likely preparation to renew offensive operations on the Southern Axis, although the likelihood of their ability to do so successfully is doubtful.¹² Satellite imagery notably showed Russian forces concentrating anti-aircraft missile forces and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) in Filatovka, northern Crimea, between April 27 and May 5.¹³ Such reconnaissance and renewal measures indicate that Russian troops are preparing to restart offensive operations, likely in the direction of Zaporizhia and Kryvyi Rih, in the coming days.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces additionally continued to target Odesa with missile strikes on May 8.¹⁴ The situation in Transnistria remains tense but unchanged.¹⁵

Moldova Situational Map as of May 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Supporting Effort #4—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine: (Russian objective: Withdraw combat power in good order for redeployment to eastern Ukraine)

There were no significant events on this axis in the past 24 hours.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces will likely continue to merge offensive efforts southward of Izyum with westward advances from Donetsk in order to encircle Ukrainian troops in southern Kharkiv Oblast and Western Donetsk.
- Russia may change the status of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, possibly by merging them into a single “Donbas Republic” and/or by annexing them directly to Russia.
- Russian forces have apparently decided to seize the Azovstal plant through ground assault and will likely continue operations accordingly.
- Ukrainian counteroffensives around Kharkiv City are pushing back Russian positions northeast of the city and will likely continue to force the Russians to reinforce those positions at the cost of reinforcing Russian offensive operations elsewhere.
- Russian forces may be preparing to conduct renewed offensive operations to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in the coming days.



ISW CELEBRATES 15 YEARS
Centered on Leadership and Intelligence Analysis
Focused on Securing America

 www.UnderstandingWar.org  [@InstituteForTheStudyOfWar](https://www.facebook.com/InstituteForTheStudyOfWar)  [@TheStudyOfWar](https://twitter.com/TheStudyOfWar)  [TheStudyOfWar](https://www.youtube.com/TheStudyOfWar)  [UnderstandingWarOrg](https://www.understandingwar.org/podcast)

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/312377534408665>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/311957571117328>

² <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2417>; https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2055; https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2054;
<https://t.me/istorijaoruzija/61770>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/312377534408665>

⁴ <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2417>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/312377534408665>

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/312377534408665>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/311957571117328>;

<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1523221514711093249> <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/11248>;

<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1523217625106771968> <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/11248>

⁶ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2022/05/8/7344860/>

⁷ <https://t.me/pushilindenis/2194>; <https://t.me/stranaua/40916>

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/312377534408665>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/311957571117328>;

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/311957571117328>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/312377534408665>

¹⁰ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-7>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/312377534408665>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/312377534408665>;

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1113935402498056>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/311957571117328>

¹³ <https://t.me/stranaua/40896>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1523048350073110528>; <https://t.me/stranaua/40926>; <https://t.me/istorijaoruzija/61926>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/311957571117328>; <https://t.me/stranaua/40908>