

Ukraine

INVASION UPDATE

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with AEI's Critical Threats Project

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The Ukraine Invasion Update is a weekly synthetic product covering key political and rhetorical events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. This update covers events from April 22 to May 4. All of the ISW Russia's team's coverage of the war in Ukraine—including daily military assessments and maps, past Conflict Updates, and several supplemental assessments—are available on our [Ukraine Crisis Coverage](#) landing page.

Key Takeaways April 22-May 4

- **The Kremlin is establishing economic, governmental, and informational control over occupied Ukrainian territory, indicating that Russia may be preparing to create a series of Russian proxy “people’s republics” and/or to directly annex some occupied Ukrainian territory.**
- **The Kremlin continues to falsely claim that Ukraine is stalling negotiations that the Kremlin is also not seriously pursuing.**
- **Ukraine may suspend negotiations entirely in the coming weeks in response to Russian-sponsored “independence referendums” in occupied Ukrainian territory.**
- **Russian forces are likely considering the use of chemical weapons to achieve battlefield advantages in the battle for Donbas.**
- **Russian false-flag attacks in Transnistria and missile attacks in Odesa likely do not indicate an imminent Russian escalation in Transnistria or Moldova. The Kremlin likely intends to pin Ukrainian forces in the south to prevent them from reinforcing eastern Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin is likely attempting to consolidate control over and surveillance of Russian government officials.**

- **The Kremlin continues to project economic confidence to its domestic audience despite a Russian Central Bank report that Russia’s economy will constrict by 8-10% in 2022**
- **The Kremlin made an example out of Poland and Bulgaria by cutting off natural gas shipments in an attempt to coerce Germany, Italy, and other EU consumers of Russian natural gas to pay for their Russian gas imports in rubles, thereby propping up Russia’s sanctions-battered economy.**
- **NATO and EU countries continued supplying Ukraine with military assistance, including high-end capabilities to counter Russian aggression, as Sweden and Finland consider NATO membership.**
- **The Kremlin’s antisemitism may drive Israel away from its current neutral position on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.**

Key Events April 22-May 4

Russian Occupation:

The Kremlin is establishing economic, governmental, and informational control over occupied Ukrainian territory, indicating that Russia may be preparing to create a series of Russian proxy “people’s republics” and/or to directly annex some occupied Ukrainian territory. Russian forces are transitioning occupied territories to use the Russian ruble. Occupying military forces do not typically replace local currencies, but Russia’s proxies in occupied Ukrainian territory, the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR), have used rubles in some capacity since 2015. Russian forces are also likely planning to falsify “independence referendums” to create new proxy republics or to annex occupied territories into the DNR, LNR, or Russia itself. To that end, Russian forces are supplanting local governance and beginning to establish greater control over Ukrainian communications and culture in occupied areas.

- **Switching to Russian Currency:** Russian occupying forces in Kherson implemented a four-month transition period to switch the city’s currency to Russian rubles rather than Ukrainian hryvnias as of May 1.¹ Russian sources reported that stores in Russian-occupied Melitopol and Volnovakha are beginning to transition to the Russian ruble as of May 1.² The Ukrainian GUR separately reported on April 24 that Russian forces are introducing ruble payments in occupied parts of Kharkiv Oblast and are encouraging residents to buy products and medicines from Russia.³ Permanent Crimean Representative to Russia Georgy Muradov had previously claimed on April 6 that Crimea and Russian-occupied southern Ukrainian territories had “restored a single economic complex” and replaced the hryvnia with the ruble.⁴
- **Falsifying Referendums:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on April 22 that Russian forces are collecting the personal data of Ukrainians in southern oblasts to help falsify planned referendums.⁵ Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command reported on April 26 that Russian forces collected the personal information of residents of Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts to falsify the results of future Russian-rigged referendums.⁶ Ukraine’s General Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 30 that the Kremlin is planning an independence referendum to create a new proxy republic in Kherson and, eventually, in Zaporizhia and Odesa oblasts.⁷ The US Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Michael

Carpenter, said on May 2 that US intelligence has “highly credible” reports that Russia will try to annex Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts by mid-May and may attempt to create a similar proxy republic in Russian-occupied Kherson.⁸

- **Replacing Local Governance:** The Ukrainian mayor of Kherson City reported that Russian occupation forces replaced the mayor and the regional governor on April 26 with Russian proxies.⁹ Russian forces have repeatedly replaced Ukrainian officials with Russian proxies after occupying Ukrainian territory.¹⁰ Separately, the head of the Russian proxy Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR), Denis Pushilin, said on April 28 that the DNR is working to distribute DNR passports to residents of the “newly liberated” territories.¹¹ The DNR claims to control Mariupol and other Russian-occupied cities in Donetsk Oblast and will likely adopt greater administrative control of newly captured areas.
- **Controlling Communications:** Russian forces in Kherson and parts of Zaporizhia likely imposed an internet blackout around May 2 and reportedly cut fiber optic cables in the area, likely to limit freedom of information.¹² Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 24 that Russian occupiers are installing Russian-operated MegaFon equipment in Kharkiv Oblast, likely to tighten control over telephone and internet networks in areas that Russian forces currently occupy or intend to occupy after planned offensive operations.¹³ The Kremlin also likely intends to sever cultural ties between Russian-occupied territories and the Ukrainian state in the long term; the only school that has remained open in Mariupol was likely forced to stop teaching the Ukrainian language and will only teach Russian as of April 28.¹⁴

Kremlin Narratives

The Kremlin may be setting conditions for the partition of Ukraine if Russian forces can capture and hold larger parts of eastern and southern Ukraine. Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Head Sergey Naryshkin began promoting a new narrative on April 28: that NATO is planning to use “peacekeepers” to invade Western Ukraine and eventually annex part of the country into Poland.¹⁵ Naryshkin was often at the forefront of pre-invasion Kremlin propaganda narratives but has been largely sidelined since the invasion began, possibly due to Russian intelligence failures. Naryshkin’s re-emergence at the forefront of a new Kremlin information campaign indicates that the Kremlin may be shifting its rhetorical efforts to justify annexing captured Ukrainian territory by claiming that NATO intends to annex parts of Ukraine as well.

Former Ukrainian MP and longtime Russian propagandist Alexei Zhuravko claimed on May 4 that Ukraine’s Southern provinces have “always” historically gravitated toward Russia and will not return to Ukraine.¹⁶ He claimed that Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa will also leave Ukraine, setting conditions for a possible Russian annexation of those regions, either directly into Russia or as proxy states. Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin claimed on May 3 that Kherson and other regions do not want to be part of Ukraine, which he framed as fractious.¹⁷ Volodin claimed that many western Ukrainians had accepted Hungarian and Polish citizenship. Former Ukrainian MP Ilya Kiva, who defected to Russia at the start of the invasion, claimed on May 3 that a new, pro-Western Ukraine would form with its capital in Lviv and would then hold a referendum to accede to Poland.¹⁸ Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on May 4 that Ukraine must “recognize the territorial realities” in eastern Ukraine and should respect “the legitimate and conscious choice of peoples and the right of nations to self-determination.”¹⁹ Russian media also amplified a May 4 claim by Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary (NSDC) Oleksiy Danilov that Hungary believed it could annex part of Ukraine during the conflict.²⁰ State media linked Danilov’s claims to Naryshkin’s claims of a

Western plot to partition the country. The Hungarian Embassy in Ukraine condemned and denied Danilov's claims.²¹

Russian forces are likely considering the use of chemical weapons to achieve battlefield advantages in the battle for Donbas. The Kremlin increased its condition-setting for the use of chemical weapons in a false-flag attack in eastern Ukraine between April 22 and May 4. ISW assessed on March 9 that the Kremlin had set rhetorical conditions to conduct a chemical or biochemical false-flag attack within Ukraine for which it would blame the Ukrainian military or NATO.²²

- First Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyansky claimed on April 26 that the White Helmets, a Syrian humanitarian aid group that has been the subject of a sustained Kremlin disinformation campaign, are already present in Ukraine and are preparing false-flag chemical provocations for which they will blame Russian forces.²³ The Kremlin and the Russian-backed regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad have repeatedly used chemical weapons against civilians in Syria and blamed opposition and aid groups, particularly the White Helmets, for either conducting or fabricating the attacks and may be preparing to make similar claims in Ukraine.
- Polyansky additionally claimed on April 26 that Ukraine may covertly use chemical weapons to gain a tactical advantage in certain areas and claimed that Ukraine had planned to do so at the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol before Russian leadership called off their direct assault.²⁴ He claimed that Ukraine may overtly use weapons of mass destruction on a larger scale to turn the tide of the war.
- Russian Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Protection Forces Chief Igor Kirillov falsely claimed on April 23 that Ukrainian forces used a drone to conduct a chemical weapon attack on Russian forces on April 21, and additionally blamed the United States for encouraging the attack.²⁵ Kirillov claimed the United States is preparing additional provocations to accuse Russia of using chemical, biological, or tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine.²⁶

The Kremlin continues to falsely blame Ukrainian forces for planning or conducting “provocations” in areas where Russian forces intend to commit or have already committed atrocities. The Kremlin likely seeks to introduce doubt into future attributions of war crimes and to diminish global support for Ukraine by blaming Ukrainian forces for crimes already committed by Russian forces. The Kremlin likely also intends to negatively portray Ukrainian forces to the Russian population to maintain domestic support for the invasion.

- Kremlin officials and media outlets reiterated their claims on April 26 that Ukrainian forces might stage nuclear incidents at Ukrainian nuclear power plants and that alleged US biolabs are developing new biological weapons on Ukrainian territory.²⁷ Russian Investigative Committee Chairman Alexander Bastrykin falsely claimed on May 3 that the United States has provided \$225 million to fund Ukrainian bioweapons programs since 2005.²⁸
- Russian National Defense Management Center Head Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev claimed on April 22 that Ukrainian forces staged a video “provocation” in the village of Voskresenskoye near Mykolaiv to accuse Russian forces of looting in the area.²⁹

The Kremlin continued to reframe its invasion of Ukraine as a NATO-led proxy war of Western aggression against Russia, likely to build domestic support for Russia’s invasion and to coerce Western states into reducing their support to Ukraine by threatening international escalation. Kremlin Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on April 22 that the United States is not interested in peace in Ukraine and that the West is doing everything it can to escalate the war.³⁰ Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the United States and its allies of trying to “split Russian society” on April 25.³¹ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov argued on April 26 that NATO is conducting a proxy war against Russia in Ukrainian territory and warned that the risk of World War III is “considerable.”³² The Kremlin is increasingly framing its war in Ukraine as one with NATO to justify Russian battlefield failures and likely to intimidate Ukraine’s international partners by threatening escalation.

The Kremlin is also falsely framing itself as a mediator and a de-escalatory party in the war of Russia’s own making. Russian Foreign Deputy Minister Yevgeny Ivanov said on April 25 that Russia’s current task is to prevent major military conflict in the world and framed the war in Ukraine as an opportunity for Russia to rebalance the global balance of power.³³ Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov claimed on April 25 that Russia seeks to stabilize its relationship with the United States.³⁴ Lavrov said on April 29 that the West has “encouraged the aggressive anti-Russian course pursued by the Kyiv authorities” and pushed Ukraine to use force to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine.³⁵ Lavrov added that Russia does not believe that it is at war with NATO, but that NATO and the European Union believe they are at war with Russia (contradicting statements by other key Kremlin figures).³⁶ Lavrov claimed that Russia does not threaten any state with nuclear weapons but that a war between Russia and NATO would increase the risk of a nuclear escalation, framing NATO and the EU as aggressors.³⁷ Russia’s chief delegate to military security and arms control negotiations in Vienna, Konstantin Gavrillov, claimed on May 4 that the West could conduct nuclear or biological “provocations” in Ukraine because the divide between Russia and the West is “existential” and “a clash between good and evil.”³⁸

The Kremlin directly threatened NATO with retaliation for Ukrainian counterattacks into Russia to deter continued Western support to Ukraine. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on April 28 that “the West openly calls on Kyiv to attack Russia using ... weapons received from NATO countries” and that Western encouragement has led Ukraine to conduct attacks against Russia itself.³⁹ Zakharova warned that “further provoking Ukraine to strike at Russian targets will certainly lead to a harsh response from Russia.” Russian state television programs mapped out the time it would allegedly take Russian missiles to reach London, Berlin, and Paris on April 29 in a likely attempt to deter additional European military aid to Ukraine.⁴⁰ The Kremlin continues to falsely claim that Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory—during an unprovoked war of Russian aggression against Ukraine—are somehow escalatory or a war crime, rather than a legal Ukrainian response under the laws of war.

Russian false-flag attacks in Transnistria and missile attacks in Odesa likely do not indicate an imminent Russian escalation in Transnistria or Moldova. The Kremlin likely intended to pin Ukrainian forces in the south to prevent them from reinforcing eastern Ukraine.⁴¹ Likely Russian forces began false-flag attacks in the Russian-occupied Transnistria region of Moldova on April 25, as ISW has chronicled in its daily military campaign updates.⁴² Russian state media also set rhetorical conditions for Russian intervention or escalation in Transnistria, which borders southern Ukraine. The Kremlin likely intended this psychological campaign to keep Ukrainian

forces deployed to southern Ukraine in case of a Russian attack through Transnistria, which would almost certainly fail.

Negotiations:

The Kremlin will blame Ukraine and the West for stalling peace negotiations, but likely has no intention of halting combat operations unless Russian forces can take additional territory in Ukraine’s east and south. Three people briefed on conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin told the *Financial Times* on April 24 that Putin “has lost interest in diplomatic efforts to end his war with Ukraine and instead appears set on seizing as much territory as possible.”⁴³ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on April 26 that the war will eventually end with a treaty, but that “the parameters of this treaty will be determined by the stage of hostilities at which this treaty will become a reality,” implying that the Kremlin intends to make territorial gains in order to impose harsher terms on Ukraine in an eventual peace settlement.⁴⁴ Lavrov additionally claimed Ukraine is uninterested in negotiations and is being pushed by the West to continue its war with Russia.⁴⁵ Lavrov told Chinese media on April 29 that NATO countries are doing “everything they can” to prevent a political solution to the conflict.⁴⁶ Lavrov warned that NATO “should come to their senses and stop supplying weapons and ammunition to Kyiv” if NATO countries want to end the war. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on May 4 that negotiations had made no progress and that Ukrainian “inconsistency” in the negotiations process had caused Moscow to doubt whether a deal can be reached.⁴⁷

Ukraine may suspend negotiations entirely in the coming weeks in response to Russian-sponsored “independence referendums” in occupied Ukrainian territory. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on April 23 that Ukraine would pull out of negotiations if Russian forces “destroy” the civilian population of Mariupol or hold “pseudo-referendums” in occupied territories.⁴⁸ Russian forces are likely scheduling a rigged independence referendum in the Russian-occupied Ukrainian city of Kherson to take place in early May.⁴⁹ The implementation of the planned Kherson referendum or widescale Russian atrocities against civilians in Mariupol would likely prompt the Ukrainian government to formally suspend negotiations. However, this will likely have little tangible effect, as negotiations are already largely stalled and Kyiv is highly unlikely to accept an outcome less than a Ukrainian military victory.

Russian Domestic Opposition and Censorship

The Kremlin is likely attempting to consolidate its control and surveillance of Russian government officials. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on April 25 establishing the use of a new information system, Poseidon, to collect and analyze activities to “prevent corruption” and “other offenses” in government and government-adjacent agencies.⁵⁰ The Kremlin will likely use Poseidon to increase its control over the outer rungs of the Russian government.

The Kremlin continued its crackdown on Russian journalists and domestic freedom of information to ensure continued domestic acceptance of its invasion of Ukraine.

- A Russian court arrested Kremlin critic and opposition journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza in Moscow on April 22 for spreading “false information” about the Russian Armed Forces.⁵¹
- A Moscow court fined the Wikimedia Foundation, which owns Russian Wikipedia, 5 million rubles on April 26 for refusing to remove information about Russian war crimes and civilian targeting in Ukraine, as well as information on how to produce gunpowder, from Wikipedia.⁵²
- A Saint Petersburg court sentenced Russian journalist Maria Ponomarenko to pre-trial detention on April 27 after she shared a social media post about the Russian bombing of a theater in Mariupol that contained Ukrainian civilians. Russian authorities charged Ponomarenko with spreading “fake news about the Russian military.”⁵³
- US intelligence agencies reported on April 28 that Russian intelligence orchestrated the April 7 attack on Dmitri Muratov, the editor of the independent Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta. Russian intelligence is likely conducting an intimidation campaign against Russian journalists to deter coverage of the war in Ukraine.⁵⁴

Russian Reactions to Sanctions:

The Kremlin continues to project economic confidence to its domestic audience despite a Russian Central Bank report that Russia’s economy will constrict by 8-10% in 2022.⁵⁵ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed on April 29 that Russia has “withstood the pressure” of anti-Russian sanctions and that the financial situation in Russia “is already stabilizing.”⁵⁶ The Russian Central Bank predicted 18-23% inflation in 2022 but reported that it expects economic recovery in 2023 as the Russian economy restructures. The Kremlin released additional sanctions measures on May 3 that retaliate against “unfriendly” states and foreign officials, likely to portray Russian sanctions to a domestic audience as effective against the West.⁵⁷ The Kremlin also likely seeks to negotiate additional economic ties with Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member states, both to produce military components for Russia and to launder Russian exports through CSTO markets to avoid international sanctions.⁵⁸

The United States and its allies are attempting to force Russia to use up its foreign currency reserves as part of Western sanctions to weaken Russia’s ability to economically sustain its invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin made a last-minute bond payment in dollars on April 29 to avoid default after failing to force foreign creditors to accept payments in rubles.⁵⁹ The European Commission said on April 22 that some companies may be able to pay Gazprom in euros and then convert the payments into rubles to avoid a complete cutoff of Russian natural gas imports to Europe.⁶⁰

The Kremlin made an example out of Poland and Bulgaria by cutting off natural gas shipments in an attempt to coerce Germany, Italy, and other EU consumers of Russian natural gas to pay for their Russian gas imports in rubles, thereby propping up Russia’s sanctions-battered economy.⁶¹ Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom announced that it would cut off natural gas shipments to Poland and Bulgaria on April 27 after both countries refused to pay for the gas in rubles. Other EU member states supplied gas to the countries to make up for the shortage. However, a complete Russian natural gas shutoff to the EU (which receives approximately 40% of its natural gas from Russia) would severely damage the European economy without further measures to substitute Russian gas supplies with other sources.

Europe is meanwhile attempting to wean itself off of its reliance on Russian energy; European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on May 4 that EU member states are considering a phased ban on Russian oil.⁶² Particularly oil-reliant states like Hungary and Slovakia are likely seeking exceptions or prolonged timelines for the phased ban.⁶³ Greece began construction on its second natural gas terminal on May 3.⁶⁴ Such terminals empower Europe to receive natural gas imports from abroad and will help limit long-term reliance on Russian natural gas.

Belarus:

N/A

Drivers of Russian Threat Perceptions:

NATO and EU countries continued supplying Ukraine with military assistance, including high-end capabilities to counter Russian aggression, as Sweden and Finland consider NATO membership. The Kremlin continued to frame this aid as an escalation against Russia; Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 28 that Western military supplies to Ukraine threaten the security of the entire European continent.⁶⁵ The Kremlin continues to reiterate that Western military aid shipments are legitimate military targets in a likely attempt to deter additional military aid shipments, but Russian forces have not demonstrated the capability to consistently interdict Western aid shipments.⁶⁶ The Kremlin also attempted to tap into US partisan divides that thus far have not affected US support to Ukraine, likely to manufacture a US political dispute over additional US military and economic aid to Ukraine. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev claimed on April 28 that US President Joe Biden's \$33 billion aid package to Ukraine will be "sewed" among corrupt Ukrainian oligarchs and the US Democratic Party, including Biden's son Hunter Biden.⁶⁷

- Sweden and Finland will likely submit simultaneous applications for NATO membership the week of May 15-22, according to Swedish and Finnish media reports on April 25.⁶⁸ Finland Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto stated on April 29 that Sweden and Finland could increase their military cooperation in the Baltic Sea if security deteriorates generally or is triggered by the two countries' application to join NATO.⁶⁹ Neither state is likely to make a final decision before a planned May 13 Swedish parliamentary report. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova warned on May 4 that Finnish and Swedish admittance to NATO would "turn into a space of confrontation" between NATO and Russia.⁷⁰
- The Biden Administration requested \$33 billion from Congress in supplemental funding aimed at supporting Ukraine on April 28. The funding includes \$20.4 billion in military and security aid, \$8.5 billion in economic aid, and \$3 billion in humanitarian aid.⁷¹
- US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated on April 28 that the Pentagon is trying to find ways to send additional artillery and air defense weapons to Ukraine since the Pentagon has predicted that long-range weapons capabilities will be decisive in winning the war.⁷²
- The United States gathered military and defense leaders from 40 countries in a meeting in Germany on April 26 to discuss accelerating the supply of weapons and aid to Ukraine.⁷³ US

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated that a US-led international group like this one will meet monthly to focus on aiding Ukraine and coined it the Ukraine Contact Group. The group will include defense ministers and military chiefs, meeting either virtually or in person.

- The US State Department approved the sale of \$165 million in legacy Warsaw Pact ammunition and other non-standard ammunition to Ukraine on April 25.⁷⁴
- Australian officials stated on April 27 that Australia has committed to providing \$19 million in military assistance to Ukraine.⁷⁵ The assistance includes ammunition, six 155mm howitzers, 20 Bushmaster mobility vehicles, and additional military supplies.
- German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht stated on April 26 that Germany will send 50 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns to Ukraine.⁷⁶
- Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki stated on April 26 that Poland will send an unknown number of tanks to Ukraine after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to backfill Poland's supplies.⁷⁷ Polish media reported on April 30 that Poland has sent over 200 T-72 tanks to Ukraine in the past few weeks.⁷⁸
- Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand stated on April 26 that Canada would send an undetermined number of M777 155-mm howitzers to Ukraine.⁷⁹
- The South Korean Foreign Ministry announced on April 29 that South Korea will provide an additional \$50 million in non-combat support to Ukraine.⁸⁰
- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a \$375 million security aid package to Ukraine during an address to Ukraine's Parliament on May 3. The package includes heavy drones, electronic warfare equipment, night vision devices, and 13 upgraded 4x4 armored vehicles.⁸¹

Foreign Involvement:

The Kremlin's antisemitism may drive Israel away from its current neutral position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov bizarrely claimed on May 2 that Hitler, like Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, was Jewish, and that "the most ardent antisemites are usually Jews."⁸² Hitler was not Jewish. Israel's foreign ministry summoned the Russian ambassador on May 2 to condemn Lavrov's comments.⁸³ The Russian Foreign Ministry accused Israel on May 3 of supporting the "neo-Nazi" regime in Kyiv.⁸⁴ Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on May 4 that Israeli mercenaries are fighting alongside the far-right Azov Battalion in Ukraine and that Israel has long ignored Ukrainian neo-Nazism.⁸⁵ The diplomatic spat may put political pressure on Israel to more directly oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Israel has so far attempted to frame itself as a mediator in the conflict. At least one pro-Kremlin media outlet amplified experts who refuted the often-debunked claim that Hitler had Jewish ancestry but justified Lavrov's claims as well-intentioned, likely in an attempt to mend the Russo-Israeli rift.⁸⁶



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- ¹ <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1520635733760950273?s=20&t=xVyooNp-TA2NEoVI2FDQOw>; <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/14503199>; <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/28/world/ukraine-russia-war-news/russia-introduces-the-ruble-in-a-ukrainian-city-it-is-struggling-to-subdue?smid=url-copy>
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