



## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

**Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward,  
Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan**

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Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:00pm ET on May 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 25 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Western media continues to report that Russian President Vladimir Putin is interested in a negotiated ceasefire in Ukraine, although Kremlin rhetoric and Russian military actions illustrate that Putin remains uninterested in meaningful negotiations and any settlement that would prevent him from pursuing the destruction of an independent Ukrainian state.** *Reuters* reported on May 24 that four Russian sources who currently work or have worked with Putin stated that Putin is ready to negotiate a ceasefire that recognizes the current frontlines and that Putin is prepared to present the current amount of occupied Ukrainian territory as a Russian military victory to the Russian public.[1] Western media reported similar interest from Putin in a negotiated ceasefire or settlement based on statements from unspecified Russian sources with some level of alleged connection to Putin or the Kremlin in December 2023 and January and February 2024.[2] Western media has cited limited unspecified US and international officials as confirming that Putin has expressed interest in a ceasefire, although other Western media has reported that US sources have denied that there has been any official Russian outreach to the US on the matter.[3]

The Kremlin routinely feigns interest in meaningful negotiations as part of a longstanding information operation that aims to persuade the West to make concessions on Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty, and it is unclear if the unspecified Russian sources talking to Western media are advancing these efforts or accurately portraying Putin's interests and viewpoints.[4] ISW cannot determine the veracity of the Russian sources' claims about Putin's intentions, and these private anonymous statements contrast sharply with Russian official public rhetoric and action. Putin and the Kremlin have notably intensified their expansionist rhetoric about Ukraine since December 2023 and have increasingly indicated that Russia intends to conquer more territory in Ukraine and is committed to destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity completely.[5] Russian forces have conducted offensive

operations in recent months that aim to make operationally significant advances and collapse the frontline, have opened a new front in Kharkiv Oblast (which Russia has not claimed through illegal annexation), and have sought to cause long-term damage to Ukrainian warfighting capabilities and economic potential in regular large-scale missile and drone strikes.[6] These military operations suggest that the Kremlin is more interested in achieving its long-term goal of maximalist victory in Ukraine than in any settlement that would immediately freeze the frontline where it is currently located.

**Russian sources that have spoken to Western media have also offered mutually contradictory characterizations of Putin's stance on negotiations.** *Reuters* reported that a Russian source stated that Putin aims to take as much territory as possible in order to compel Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to negotiate, but another Russian source assessed that Putin is unwilling to negotiate with Zelensky.[7] Russian sources also told *Reuters* that Putin believes that the West will not give Ukraine enough weapons but understands that making any "dramatic" Russian advances would require another Russian nationwide mobilization.[8] Delays in Western security assistance have severely constrained Ukrainian defensive capabilities in recent months, and if Putin believes that there are limits to Western support for Ukraine, then he would logically conclude that such constraints could reemerge in the medium term and allow Russian forces with their current capabilities to make "dramatic" gains without conducting a wider mobilization of manpower or the Russian economy.[9] A Russian source stated that Putin is concerned that a longer war will generate more dissatisfied veterans with poor job prospects and economic situations that could generate domestic tensions, although this assessment is at odds with Russia's ongoing chronic labor shortages and the Kremlin's effort to prepare Russian society for a long war effort.[10] These contradictions cast further doubt on the accuracy with which these Russian sources are reflecting Putin's actual thinking.

**These Russian sources notably highlighted territorial concessions as part of Putin's alleged envisioned ceasefire but have sparsely addressed the wider strategic objectives of Putin's war in Ukraine.** *Reuters* reported that its Russian sources stated that Putin views Russia maintaining control over currently occupied Ukrainian territory as a non-negotiable basis for negotiations, and previous Western reporting about Putin's openness to negotiations has similarly highlighted Russian territorial desires.[11] *Bloomberg* reported in January that two unspecified sources close to the Kremlin stated that Putin signaled to senior US officials that he may be willing to drop demands for Ukraine's "neutral status" and even may ultimately abandon his opposition to Ukraine's NATO accession.[12] Russian demands for Ukrainian "neutrality" and a moratorium on NATO expansion have always been and continue to be one of Putin's central justifications for his invasion of Ukraine and any hypothetical concession on these demands would represent a major strategic and rhetorical retreat on Putin's behalf that Putin is extremely unlikely to be considering at this time.[13] Putin also launched his invasion of Ukraine to replace the Ukrainian government with one he determined appropriate and to "demilitarize" the Ukrainian military so that Russia could unilaterally impose its will on Ukraine in the future without facing significant Ukrainian resistance.[14] Russian sources that have talked about a ceasefire to Western media have not mentioned these two goals, which Kremlin officials regularly reiterate.[15] The repeated focus on the recognition of occupied Ukrainian territory as Russian territory does not indicate that Russia would drop these wider strategic objectives, however. A ceasefire that cedes currently occupied territory would concretize the idea that Ukrainian territorial integrity is negotiable, a precedent that the Kremlin would most certainly revisit to push for further territorial concessions and contest the idea of Ukrainian statehood altogether.[16]

**A ceasefire does not preclude Russia from resuming its offensive campaign to destroy Ukrainian statehood, and Russia would use any ceasefire to prepare for future offensive operations within Ukraine.** Russia's military intervention in Crimea and the Donbas in 2014 violated numerous Russian international commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Russia's recognition of Ukraine as an independent state in 1991 and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum in which Russia specifically committed not to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty or territorial integrity.[17] There is no reason to assess that the Kremlin will respect any new agreement obliging Russia to not violate Ukrainian sovereignty or territorial integrity. A ceasefire would provide Russia with the opportunity to reconstitute degraded forces, divert manpower to large-scale expansion and reform efforts instead of ongoing fighting in Ukraine, and allow Russia to further mobilize its defense industrial base (DIB) without the constraints of immediate operational requirements in Ukraine.[18] Russia could use a ceasefire to prepare a force more suitable to pursue a subsequent series of offensive operations in pursuit of regime change, demilitarization, and conquest in Ukraine. A ceasefire would provide Ukraine opportunities of its own to address force generation and defense industrial capacity, to be sure, but the Kremlin may not unreasonably expect that a frozen frontline will make support for Ukraine less urgent and salient for the West and allow Russia to outpace Ukraine in preparing for a resumption of hostilities.

**Russia is currently preparing for the possibility of a conventional war with NATO, and the Kremlin will likely view anything short of Ukrainian capitulation as an existential threat to Russia's ability to fight such a war.**[19] Russian military leaders planning a war against NATO will have to assume that Ukraine might enter such a war on NATO's behalf regardless of Ukraine's membership status.[20] A front with NATO along Russia's entire western border with Europe presents the Russian military with serious challenges, as ISW has previously assessed, whereas a Ukrainian defeat would give Russia the ability to deploy its forces along Europe's entire eastern flank from the Black Sea to Finland.[21] Russian victory in Ukraine would not only remove the threat of Ukraine as a potential adversary during a possible conventional war with NATO but would also provide Russia with further resources and people to commit to a large-scale confrontation with NATO. Regardless of how Russian victory would partition Ukraine between Russian annexation and the Kremlin-controlled puppet state that would follow Putin's desired regime change, Russia would have access to millions more people it could impress into military service and the majority of Ukraine's resources and industrial capacity. Putin and the Kremlin therefore likely view victory in Ukraine as a prerequisite to being able to fight a war with NATO and any ceasefire or negotiated settlement short of full Ukrainian capitulation as a temporary pause in their effort to destroy an independent Ukrainian state.

**The Kremlin will continue to feign interest in negotiations at critical moments in the war to influence Western decision-making on support for Ukraine and to continue efforts to extract preemptive concessions from the West.** The Kremlin has repeatedly engaged in a large-scale reflexive control campaign that aims to influence Western decision-making.[22] Reflexive control is a key element in Russia's hybrid warfare toolkit and relies on shaping an adversary with targeted rhetoric and information operations in such a way that the adversary voluntarily takes actions that are advantageous to Russia.[23] Kremlin officials claimed that Russia was open to negotiations in December 2022, likely to delay the provision of Western tanks and other equipment essential for the continuation of Ukrainian mechanized counteroffensives.[24] Western reporting on Putin's alleged interest in negotiations in Winter 2023-2024 coincided with prolonged debates in the US about security assistance for Ukraine, and the Kremlin may have feigned interest in a ceasefire at this time to convince

Western policymakers to pressure Ukraine to negotiate from a weakened position and agree to what would have very likely been a settlement that heavily favored Russia.[25] The Kremlin may again be feigning interest in negotiations in order to influence the ongoing Western debate about lifting restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia and convince Western policymakers that changes in these restrictions may lead to Russian unwillingness to negotiate in the future. The Kremlin may also be feigning interest in negotiations again to preemptively influence any future Western discussions about the provision of the additional aid that Ukrainian forces will need to contest the initiative and launch their own counteroffensive operations in the medium term. ISW continues to assess that the consistent provision of key Western systems will play a crucial role in Ukraine's ability to contest the theater-wide initiative and conduct future counteroffensive operations.[26] US officials have recently stated that the resumption of US security assistance will help Ukrainian forces withstand Russian assaults throughout the rest of 2024 and that Ukrainian forces will look to conduct counteroffensive operations to recapture territory in 2025.[27]

**Putin directly rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy as president on May 24, the latest in a series of efforts to dismiss Zelensky's authority to engage in or reject negotiations with Russia and undermine Ukrainians' trust in Zelensky.** Putin stated during a press conference with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in Minsk, Belarus on May 24 that Russia is willing to negotiate with Ukraine but that the "legitimacy of the current [Ukrainian] head of state has ended," referring to a Russian information operation falsely claiming that Zelensky is no longer the legitimate president of Ukraine after his term was set to expire on May 20.[28] Putin claimed that the Ukrainian parliament and constitutional court need to examine the Ukrainian constitution to determine the legality of officials remaining in office past their stated terms, which Putin described as an internal Ukrainian matter (about which he nevertheless chose to opine).[29] **Putin's invocation of the Ukrainian constitution while explicitly denying Zelensky's legitimacy is odd because the Ukrainian constitution explicitly allows a sitting president to postpone elections and remain in office past the end of his term during times of martial law.**[30] Zelensky's decision to postpone the March 2024 elections is in full accordance with the Ukrainian constitution. While Putin seems to lack an understanding of Ukrainian law, his statements advance a broader Russian information operation that aims to degrade Ukrainians' trust in Zelensky by portraying him as the sole obstacle to a negotiated peace in Ukraine.

The Kremlin is trying to foment domestic unrest in Ukraine centered around distrust in the Ukrainian government under Zelensky. The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) warned on February 27 that Russia is running an information operation entitled "Maidan 3" that uses multiple rhetorical lines to undermine domestic trust and international support for the Ukrainian government, undermine Zelensky's legitimacy, sow panic, and incite conflict.[31] GUR Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov warned on April 27 that "Maidan 3" has "advanced" and aims to disguise pro-Russian actors, ideals, and movements as social tensions and other issues to influence Ukrainian society.[32] The GUR warned that the "Maidan 3" operation will peak in March-May 2024, and GUR Spokesperson Andriy Yusov similarly warned on May 23 that Russia will continue to intensify the "Maidan-3" operation through July 2024.[33] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)* reported on May 20 that anonymous online accounts called on groups of hundreds of Ukrainian Telegram users to participate in "Maidan-3" demonstrations in Kyiv's Independence Square on May 21, including some offering payments of 1,000 hryvnia (just under \$25) per hour.[34] *RFE/RL* noted that all these Telegram groups chose the May 21 date to coincide with the end of Zelensky's first presidential term had Ukraine held elections in March 2024.[35] *RFE/RL* reported that a similar information operation

is occurring on TikTok, both calling on users to demonstrate against Zelensky and spreading propaganda claiming that Zelensky is no longer a legitimate president.[36]

The Kremlin may be setting informational conditions to eventually declare a Kremlin-backed actor as Ukrainian president instead of Zelensky. Putin stated on May 24 that Russia seeks to understand who the "legitimate [Ukrainian] authorities" are before engaging in negotiations, implying that the Kremlin could declare a figure of its choice as "legitimate" at some point in the future.[37] Independent monitoring project Belarusian Hajun reported that the plane of former pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich--who fled Ukraine to Russia during the 2014 EuroMaidan protests against his rule--notably arrived in Minsk on May 24, coinciding with Putin's and Russian Defense Minister Andrey Belousov's visit to Minsk for extensive Union State negotiations.[38] It is unclear why Yanukovich would be in Minsk or with whom he met. Western and Ukrainian media have floated Yanukovich as a possible Kremlin-picked replacement for Zelensky had the initial days of the Russian invasion forced Ukraine to capitulate.[39] Yanukovich last visited Minsk in March 2022, and Ukrainian intelligence told *Ukrainska Pravda* that the trip was for the Kremlin to prepare Yanukovich for a "special operation" to be reinstated as president of Ukraine.[40]

**Unnamed Russian government officials and sources within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Kremlin told the independent Russian outlet *The Moscow Times* that the ongoing effort to remove senior Russian defense officials and uniformed commanding officers will likely continue in the coming weeks and months.[41]** *The Moscow Times*, citing unnamed sources, reported on May 24 that the Russian Federal Security Service's (FSB) recent arrests of five high-ranking defense officials are likely the first of dozens or hundreds of anticipated arrests. Russian authorities have notably arrested five senior Russian MoD officials and former military commanders since April 24, including Russian Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov, Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Yuri Kuznetsov, former commander of the 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Major General Ivan Popov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Head of the Main Communications Directorate Lieutenant General Vadim Shamarin, and Head of the Russian MoD's Department for State Procurement Vladimir Verteletsky.[42] A source told *The Moscow Times* that the FSB is "mopping up" defense officials associated with former Defense Minister and recently appointed Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu and that the FSB could only conduct this type of operation with Russian President Vladimir Putin's approval. The source claimed that "more arrests await us," and an unnamed acting Russian government official claimed that these arrests could spiral into the largest effort to remove Russian military officials in modern Russian history. The official suggested that Russian authorities will arrest up to hundreds of defense officials of various unspecified ranks this year. Another acting Russian government official claimed that the FSB hopes to install FSB-affiliated officials in the Russian MoD and take control of the MoD's budget.

A source close to the Kremlin claimed that these arrests indicate that the FSB is "triumphing" over the Russian MoD and that the arrests are part of the FSB's effort to convince Putin that the Russian MoD is responsible for the failures during the initial weeks of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Kremlin has undoubtedly debated which department deserves the blame for the Russian military's initial failures in Ukraine, but it is unclear if Putin remains interested in assigning blame for the initial months of the invasion over two years later.[43] Moreover, the FSB is one of the most logical arms of the Russian government to conduct these arrests as it is tasked with addressing domestic security issues, counterintelligence, economic crimes, and surveillance of the Russian military.[44] While Putin has been known to balance his favor between *siloviki* (Russian strongmen

with political influence) and encourage infighting, it is at least as likely that the FSB's involvement in the ongoing removal of high-ranking Russian defense officials and military officers is due to its mandated responsibilities as guided by the Kremlin and not as part of a wider FSB conspiracy to gain control of or divert blame to the MoD.[45]

**Ukrainian forces conducted a series of successful missile strikes against military targets in Russian-occupied Ukraine on May 23 and 24.** Geolocated footage published on May 24 shows that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian S-400 air defense system, destroying four of its missile launchers and its radar station in occupied Odrizne, Donetsk Oblast.[46] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that Ukrainian forces used ATACMS missiles in the strike.[47] Geolocated footage published on May 23 shows a strike near occupied Alushta, Crimea, and Ukrainian Crimean-based "Atesh" partisan group stated that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian military communications center.[48] "Atesh" stated that the strike likely significantly damaged equipment and possibly destroyed the control center. Crimean occupation administration head Sergei Aksyonov claimed that Ukrainian forces struck an unspecified target in Simferopol and an empty commercial property near Alushta.[49] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces launched up to 16 missiles toward Crimea, including ATACMS, and that some missiles penetrated Russian air defense systems.[50] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed three ATACMS missiles over Crimea and three naval drones in the Black Sea overnight.[51]

**Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a drone strike against a Russian early warning radar system in Krasnodar Krai, Russia on the morning of May 23.** Ukrainian and Russian sources posted photos of the aftermath of a Ukrainian drone strike on a Voronezh-DM ground-based early warning radar station on the territory of the Russian 818th Radio Technical Center near Armavir, Krasnodar Krai.[52] The sources noted that Russian forces used the radar to detect intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) at a range of up to 6,000 kilometers.[53] *Radio Svoboda* published satellite imagery from shortly after the strike showing damage to the radar system.[54]

**The Ukrainian military command continues to address Ukraine's manpower challenges.** Head of the Ukrainian General Staff's Main Department of Defense Planning Brigadier General Yevgeny Ostryanskyi stated on May 24 that the Ukrainian military command plans to reduce the General Staff's personnel by 60 percent and reallocate the personnel following a functional survey of the General Staff in February and March 2024.[55] Ostryanskyi stated that the General Staff will disband 25 percent of its elements and will transfer the other 35 percent to other branches of the Ukrainian military. Ostryanskyi stated that the Ukrainian military command plans to re-staff operational and tactical level management bodies and combat military units, presumably by reallocating these personnel, in order to conduct rotations on the frontline. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on March 22 that the Ukrainian military was optimizing its military organization structures to simplify and maximize the quality and efficiency of Ukraine's force management.[56] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on May 17 that consistent rotations for frontline units are an important step in improving Ukrainian morale and noted that Ukraine must sufficiently staff its units in order to conduct counteroffensive operations in the future.[57]

**The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced a military assistance package worth \$275 million on May 24 to help Ukrainian forces repel Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[58]** The package includes HIMARS ammunition; 155mm and 105mm

artillery ammunition, Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles; anti-tank systems, precision aerial munitions, mines, and other parts and equipment.

**NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated on May 24 that NATO member states should consider lifting restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia.**[59] Stoltenberg stated that these restrictions make it difficult for Ukrainian forces to defend against the Russian offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast. ISW continues to assess that Western limitations on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets in Russia have created a sanctuary in Russia's border area from which Russian aircraft can conduct glide bomb and missile strikes against Ukrainian positions and where Russian forces and equipment can freely assemble before entering combat.[60]

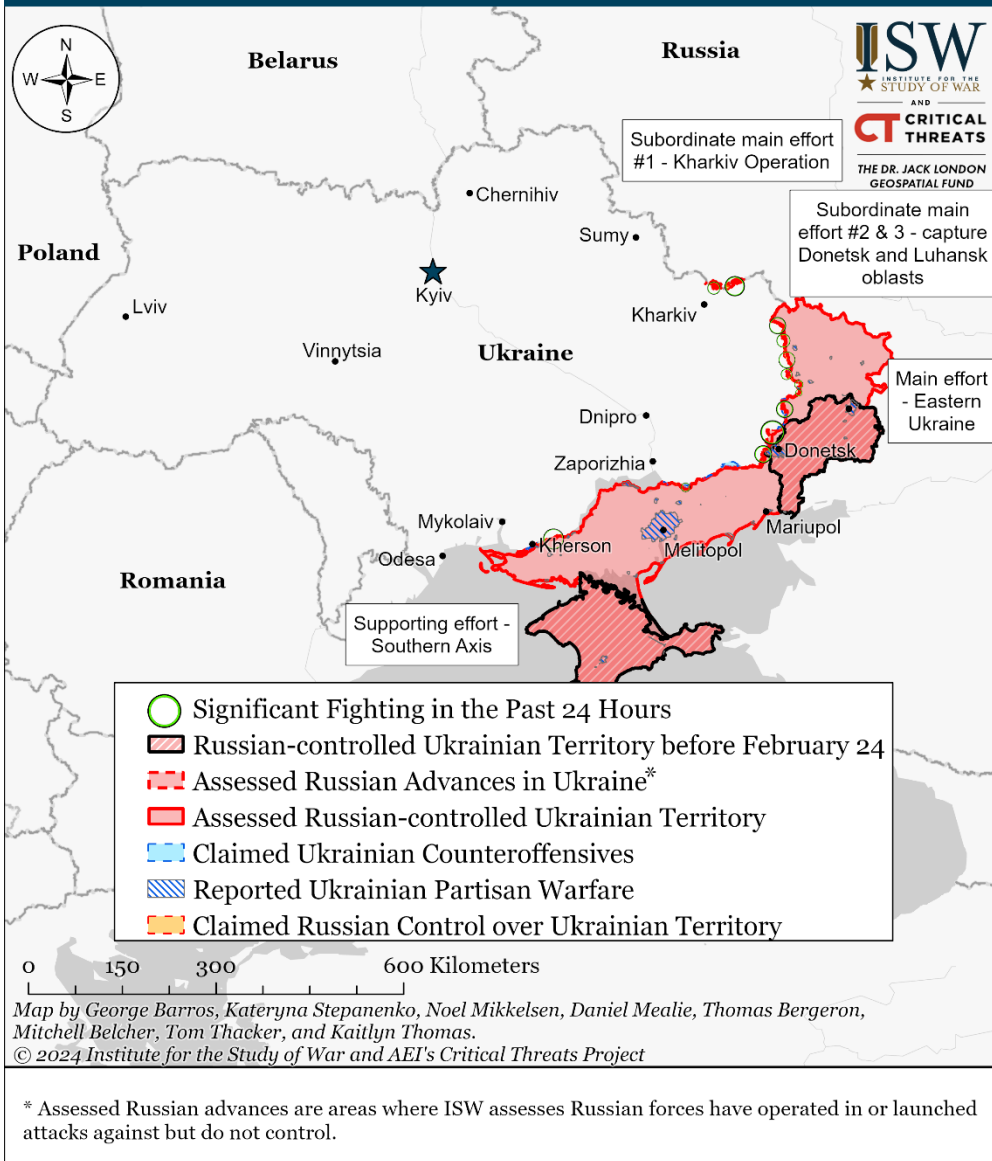
### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Western media continues to report that Russian President Vladimir Putin is interested in a negotiated ceasefire in Ukraine, although Kremlin rhetoric and Russian military actions illustrate that Putin remains uninterested in meaningful negotiations and any settlement that would prevent him from pursuing the destruction of an independent Ukrainian state.**
- **Russian sources that have spoken to Western media have also offered mutually contradictory characterizations of Putin's stance on negotiations.**
- **These Russian sources notably highlighted territorial concessions as part of Putin's alleged envisioned ceasefire but have sparsely addressed the wider strategic objectives of Putin's war in Ukraine.**
- **A ceasefire does not preclude Russia from resuming its offensive campaign to destroy Ukrainian statehood, and Russia would use any ceasefire to prepare for future offensive operations within Ukraine.**
- **Russia is currently preparing for the possibility of a conventional war with NATO, and the Kremlin will likely view anything short of Ukrainian capitulation as an existential threat to Russia's ability to fight such a war.**
- **The Kremlin will continue to feign interest in negotiations at critical moments in the war to influence Western decision-making on support for Ukraine and to continue efforts to extract preemptive concessions from the West.**
- **Putin directly rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy as president on May 24, the latest in a series of efforts to dismiss Zelensky's authority to engage in or reject negotiations with Russia and undermine Ukrainians' trust in Zelensky.**
- **Unnamed Russian government officials and sources within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Kremlin told the independent Russian outlet *The Moscow Times* that the ongoing effort to remove senior Russian defense officials and uniformed commanding officers will likely continue in the coming weeks and months.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted a series of successful missile strikes against military targets in Russian-occupied Ukraine on May 23 and 24.**
- **Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a drone strike against a Russian early warning radar system in Krasnodar Krai, Russia on the morning of May 23.**
- **The Ukrainian military command continues to address Ukraine's manpower challenges.**

- **The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced a military assistance package worth \$275 million on May 24 to help Ukrainian forces repel Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast.**
- **NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated on May 24 that NATO member states should consider lifting restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Svatove, Kreminna, and Donetsk City.**
- **The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on May 23 that Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksandr Lytvynenko stated that Russia recruited more than 385,000 military personnel in 2023.**



# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 24, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



***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 three subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – 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 – Kharkiv Oblast (Russian objective: Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City)**

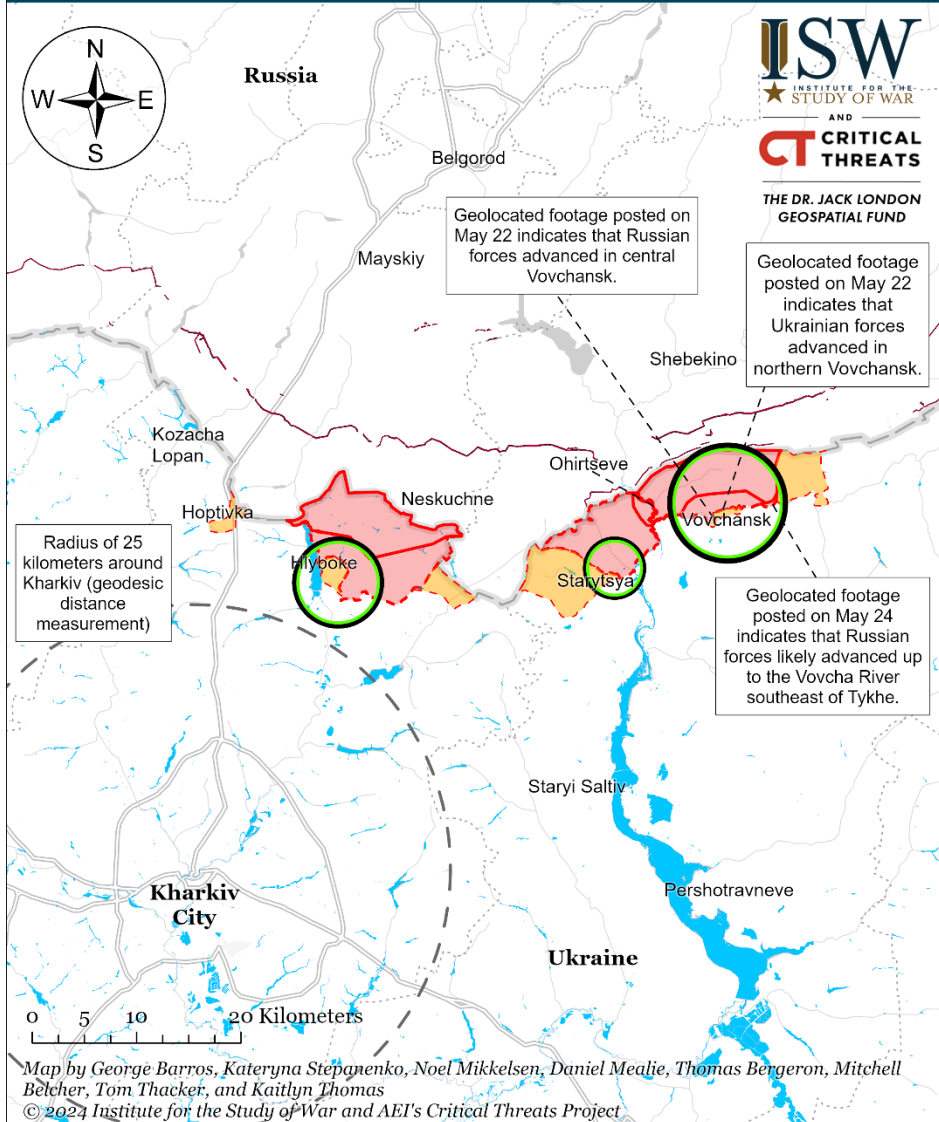
Ukrainian officials continue to monitor the Russian force grouping deployed near the border with Sumy and Chernihiv oblasts. Ukrainian General Staff Main Operational Directorate Representative Colonel Ihor Prokhorenko stated on May 24 that the situation is stable in Sumy Oblast and that Ukrainian forces are allocating reserves and equipment to the area in response to unspecified Russian plans.[61] Prokhorenko stated that Russian forces are increasing the size of their grouping along the border with Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts but did not provide any specific figures.[62] Sumy Oblast Military Administration Head Volodymyr Artyukh stated that Russia currently does not have sufficient forces near the border to conduct offensive actions into Sumy Oblast.[63]

Russian forces continued offensive operations north of Kharkiv City on May 24, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Prokhorenko reported that although the battlefield situation in northern Kharkiv Oblast is "difficult," Ukrainian forces have "halted" Russian offensive operations and are counterattacking in the area.[64] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced between 100 and 500 meters in the Lyptsi direction (north of Kharkiv City), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[65] Russian forces continued assaults near Hlyboke (north of Lyptsi) and on the eastern side of the Travvanske Reservoir (north of Lyptsi).[66] Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksandr Lytvynenko told the *Financial Times* in an article published on May 24 that Russia has deployed 50,000 Russian troops "across the border" (likely referring to Belgorod Oblast) and that Ukraine cannot fully rule out that Putin may attempt to seize Kharkiv City in the future even though Russia is currently pursuing more limited goals in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[67] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi reported on May 2 that Russia had deployed roughly 35,000 troops to the border area in Kursk, Bryansk, and Belgorod oblasts and that Russian forces intend to establish a grouping between 50,000 to 75,000 troops in size in the area.[68] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on May 5 that the Russian military has gathered about 50,000 troops in the Northern Grouping of Forces in Kursk, Belgorod, and Bryansk oblasts, with 31,000 troops in Belgorod

Oblast.[69] Elements of the Russian 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian Main Military Intelligence Directorate [GRU]) are reportedly operating in Kharkiv Oblast.[70] ISW previously observed reports of the 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade defending against cross-border raids into Belgorod and Kursk oblasts in March 2023.[71]

Russian forces recently advanced northeast of Kharkiv City, although the situation in Vovchansk has reportedly stabilized as of May 24. Geolocated footage published on May 24 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced up to a destroyed bridge that crosses the Vovcha River southeast of Tykhe (just east of Vovchansk).[72] Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated that Russian forces are "tied up" in street battles within Vovchansk.[73] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced between 200 and 350 meters in the Vovchansk direction, but ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[74] Russian milbloggers noted that the frontline has recently become stagnant within Vovchansk, and one milblogger claimed that Russian forces failed to cross the Vovcha River during a reconnaissance-in-force operation near the bridge connecting Yuriya Haharina and Pryvokzalna streets in western Vovchansk.[75] The milblogger noted there are competing claims regarding the situation around the Vovchansk Aggregate Plant in central Vovchansk and that it is currently unclear who controls the plant. Russian forces continued assaults near Starytsya (southwest of Vovchansk) and Tykhe.[76]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 24, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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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
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian Field Fortifications

\* 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 23 that Russian forces were advancing 500 meters per day in the Lyptsi direction. A Russian source claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced up to 280 meters in Starytsya. A Russian source claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced two kilometers near Tykhe. A Russian source claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced between 100 and 300 meters deep in the direction of Vovchansk. A Russian source claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced between 200 meters and 1.2 kilometers in the direction of Lyptsi. A Russian source claimed on May 21 that Russian forces advanced between 300 and 450 meters near Lyptsi. A Russian source claimed on May 21 that Russian forces advanced between 100 and 350 meters in Vovchansk.

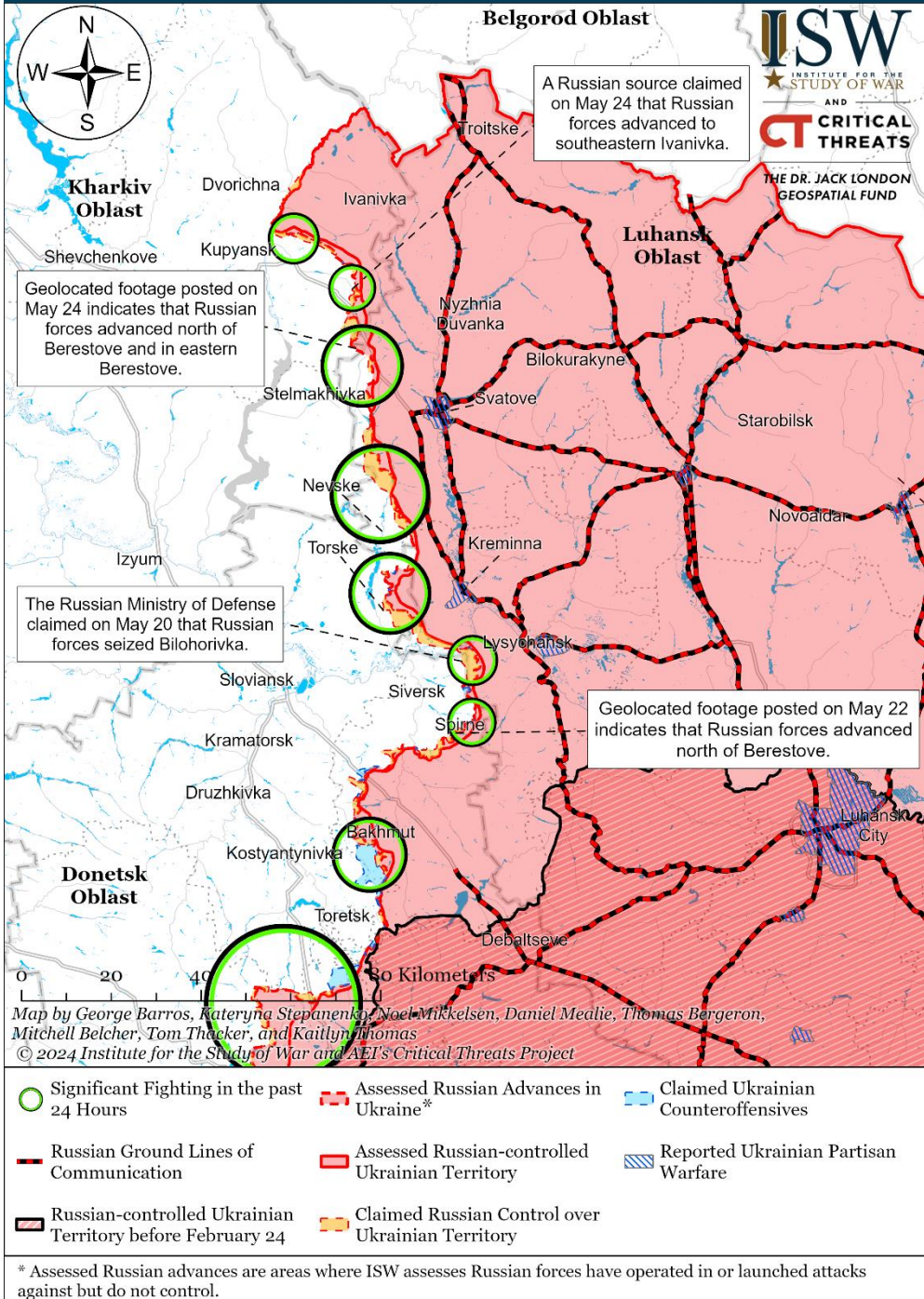
## **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Svatove and continued offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove line on May 24. Geolocated footage published on May 24 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced within eastern Berestove (northwest of Svatove) and north of the settlement.[77] Additional geolocated footage published on May 24 indicates that Russian forces recently made marginal gains along a windbreak east of Stelmakhivka (northwest of Svatove).[78] The Ukrainian General Staff acknowledged that Russian forces achieved partial tactical success near Ivanivka (northwest of Svatove) and that the Kupyansk direction was the most active sector of the front.[79] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced southeast of Ivanivka and gained a foothold on the eastern outskirts of the settlement, although ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[80] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 15th Motorized Rifle Regiment (2nd Motorized Rifle Division, 1st Guards Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) recently gained a foothold in northern Berestove and that elements of the 423rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (4th Tank Division, 1st GTA, MMD) have been unsuccessfully attacking towards Stelmakhivka from Kolomychikha (northwest of Svatove and immediately southeast of Stelmakhivka).[81] Mashovets assessed that Russian forces are currently attempting to reach the northern outskirts of Stelmakhivka from the direction of Berestove and the southern outskirts of Stelmakhivka from Kolomychikha simultaneously.[82] Russian forces also continued offensive operations east of Kupyansk near Petropavlivka; northwest of Svatove near Kyslivka; west of Svatove near Druzhelyubivka; and southwest of Svatove near Novovodyane, Novoyehorivka, and Kovalivka.[83]

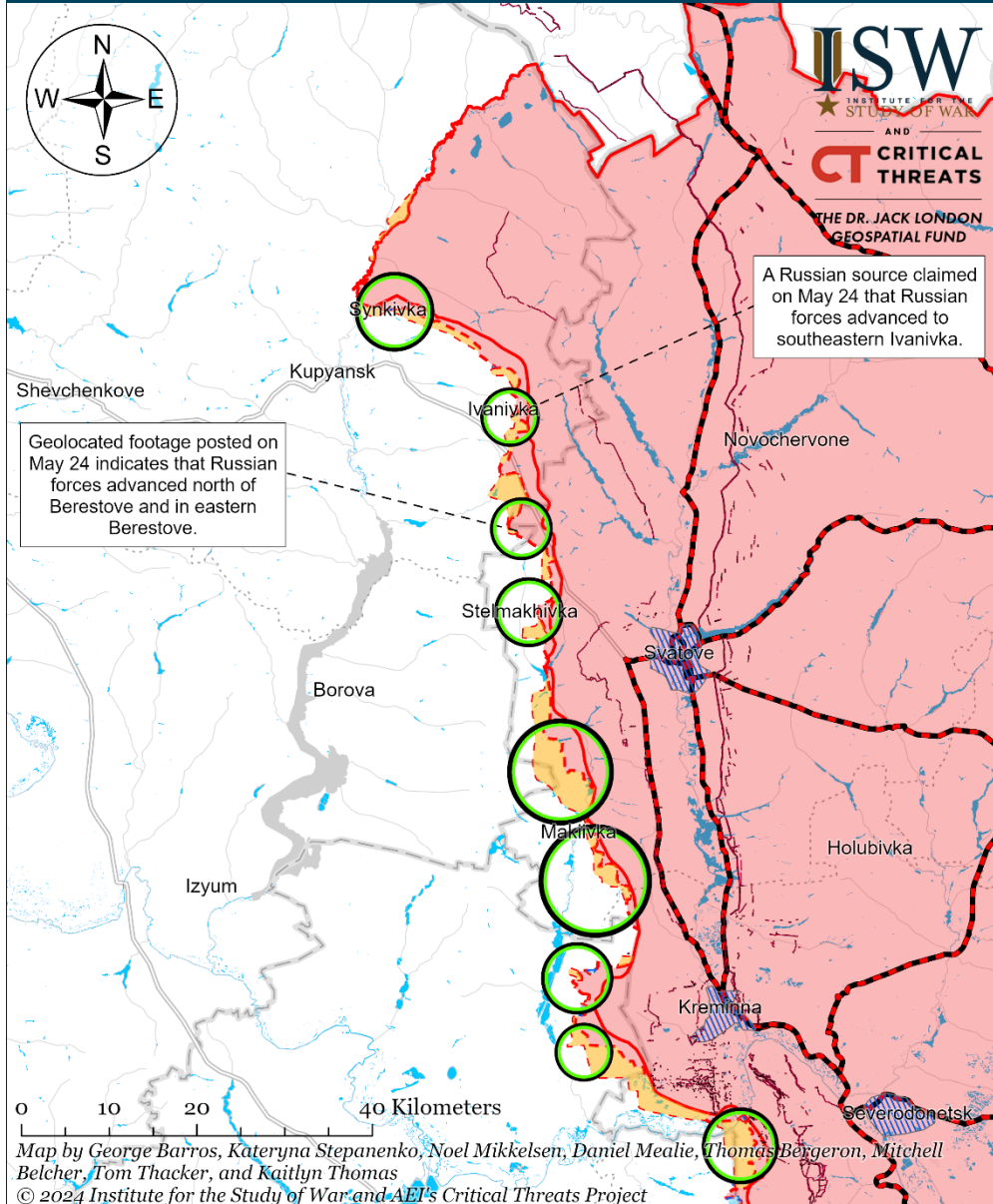
Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Kreminna and continued offensive operations in the Kreminna area on May 24. Geolocated footage published on May 23 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced to windbreaks east of Makiivka (northwest of Kreminna).[84] Russian forces continued offensive operations northwest of Kreminna near Nevske; west of Kreminna near Torske and Terny; and south of Kreminna near the Serebryanske forest area and Bilohorivka.[85] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], MMD) are attacking Ukrainian positions east of Terny and southeast of Novosadove (northwest of Kreminna) and that elements of the 3rd Motorized Rifle Division (20th CAA, MMD) are trying to break through Ukrainian defenses near Makiivka.[86]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of May 24, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kupyansk as of May 24, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

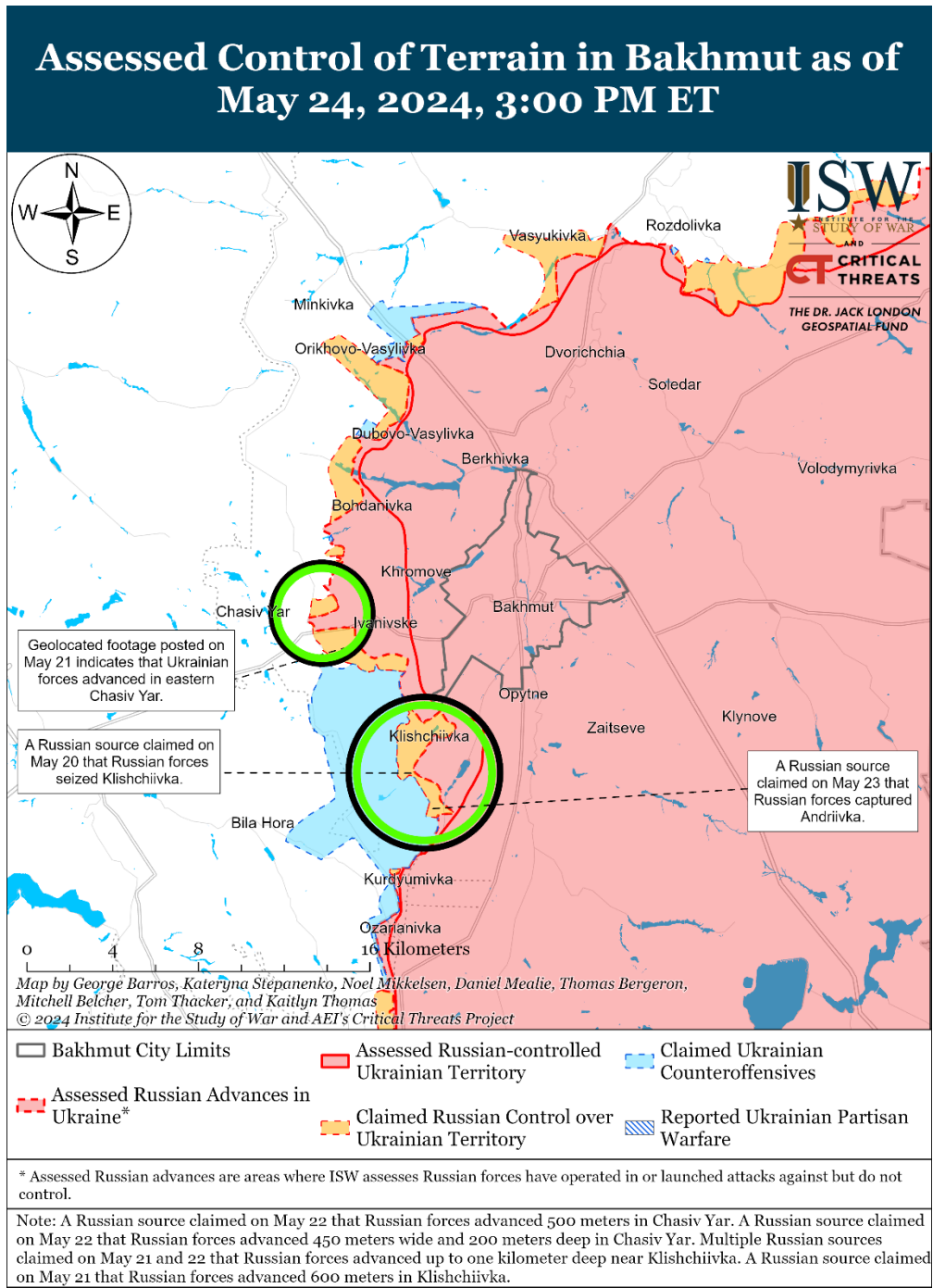


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine \*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Russian Field Fortifications

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

**Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

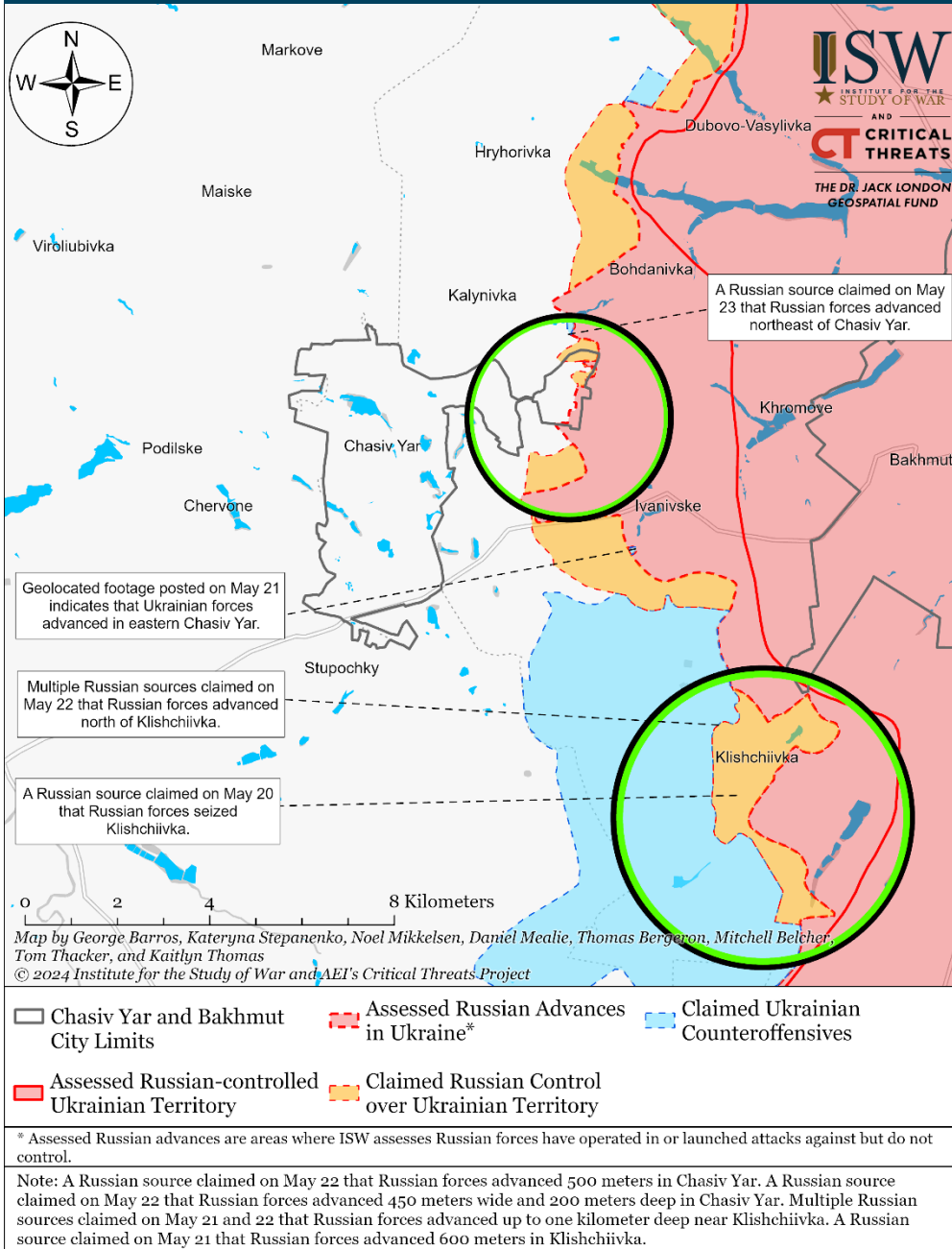
Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Siversk direction on May 24 near Vyimka (south of Siversk) and near Spirne and Ivano-Darivka (both southeast of Siversk).[87] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces seized a Ukrainian fortified area and advanced along a railway line south of Spirne, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[88]





Russian forces continued ground attacks east of Chasiv Yar on May 24, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced further into Kanal Microraion (easternmost Chasiv Yar).[89] Ukraine-based open-source organization Frontelligence Insight reported that Russian forces have identified weak points in Kanal Microraion and failed to establish a foothold but that additional available Russian forces may achieve success in the area in the future.[90] Ukrainian journalist Yuriy Butusov posted footage on May 24 of Ukrainian forces repelling an at least reinforced platoon-sized Russian mechanized attack near Chasiv Yar and reported that Ukrainian forces recently destroyed 10 Russian armored vehicles in the area.[91] Another Ukrainian source reported on May 24 that Russian forces are recovering after conducting mechanized and infantry attacks near Chasiv Yar on May 22 and 23.[92] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian sources are circulating old footage of Russian mechanized assaults, however, and no other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted a mechanized attack near Chasiv Yar in the past day.[93] Russian forces also continued attacks southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[94] A Russian milblogger reiterated claims that Russian forces seized Andriivka but complained that Russian forces are unable to consolidate positions inside the settlement without also seizing Klishchiivka.[95] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported that elements of the Russian 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are fighting near Ivanivske (east of Chasiv Yar); elements of the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and 217th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th VDV Division) are fighting near Bohdanivka and Kalynivka (both northeast of Chasiv Yar); elements of the 6th Motorized Rifle Division (3rd AC) reinforced by elements of the 72nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd AC), 88th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] AC), and 83rd VDV Brigade are fighting near Klishchiivka; and elements of the 98th VDV Division reinforced with elements of the Russian Volunteer Corps are fighting near Kanal Microraion.[96] Elements of the Russian 331st VDV Regiment (98th VDV Division) and 58th Spetsnaz Battalion (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] AC) reportedly continue to fight near Chasiv Yar.[97]

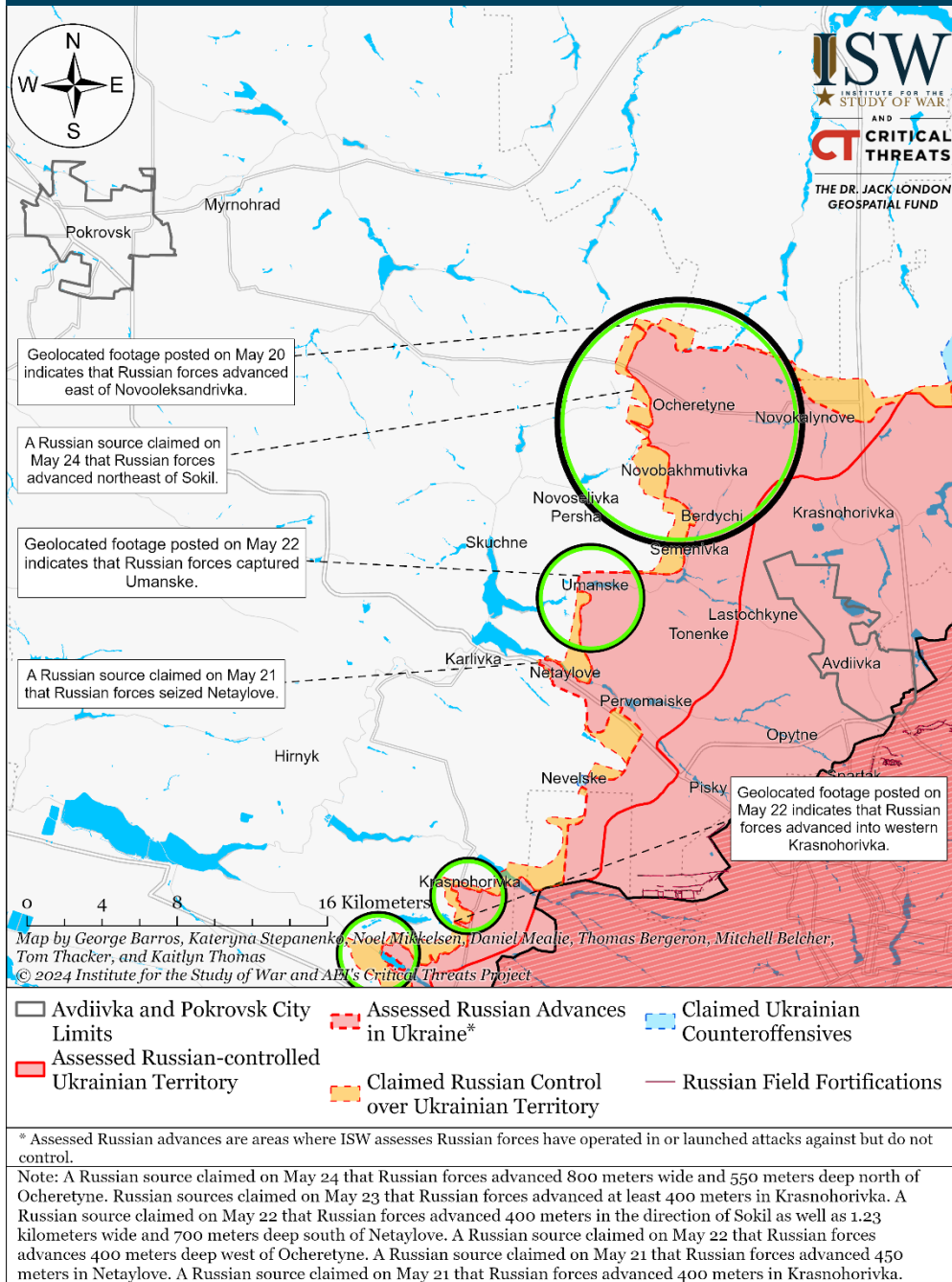
# Assessed Control of Terrain near Chasiv Yar as of May 24, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces reportedly continued to advance northwest and west of Avdiivka on May 24, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced 550 meters deep along an 800-meter-wide front north of Ocheretyne (northwest of Avdiivka) and pushed Ukrainian forces from the ponds immediately north of the settlement.[98] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced northeast of Sokil (northwest of Avdiivka and southwest of Ochertyne) and southwest of Umanske (west of Avdiivka). ISW has not observed confirmation of these

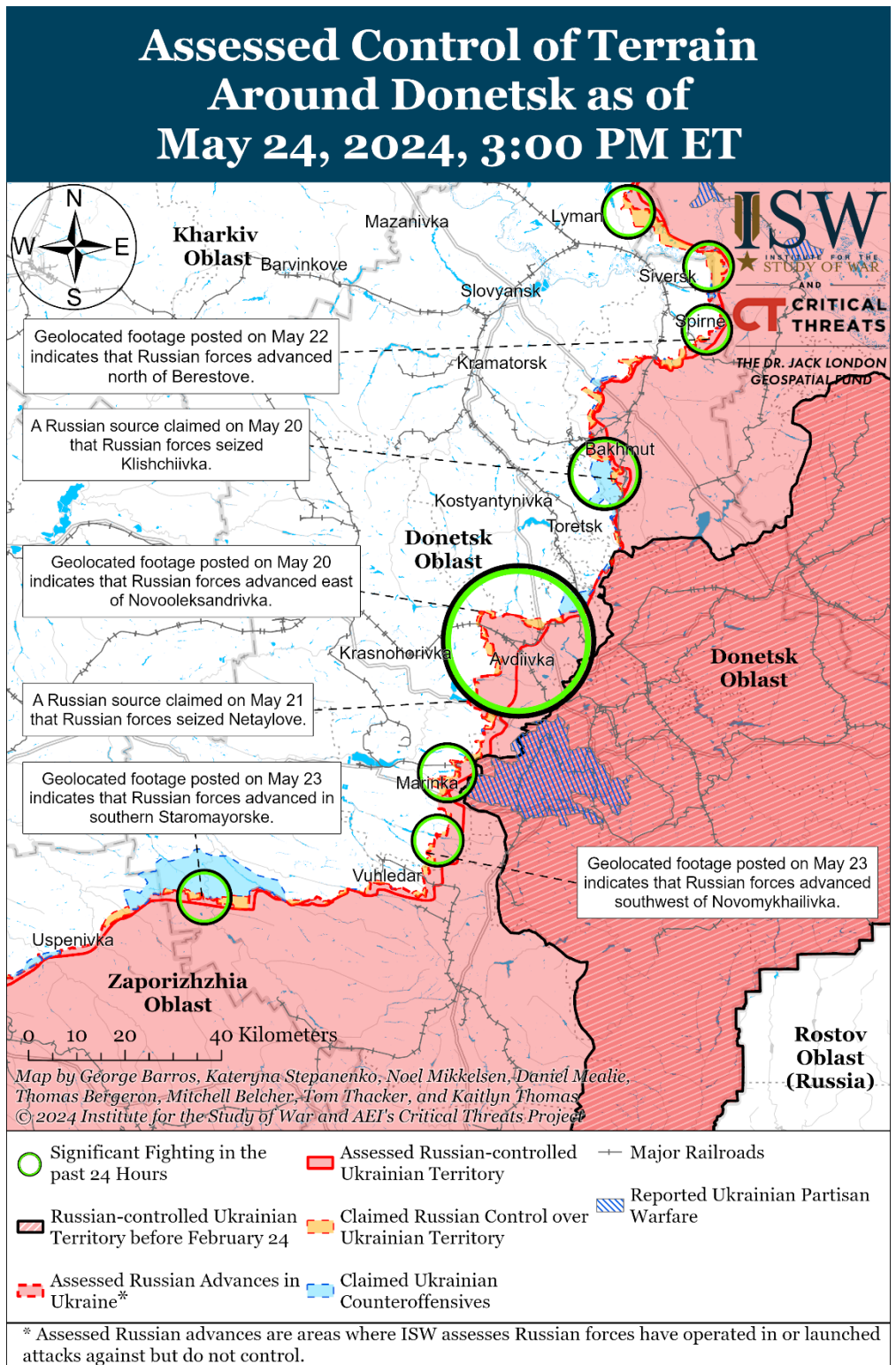
Russian claims, however.[99] Russian forces also continued attacks northwest of Avdiivka near Novoselivka Persha, Kalynove, Novooleksandrivka, Prohres, and Novopokrovske and west of Avdiivka near Netaylove.[100] Ukraine-based open-source organization Frontelligence Insight warned that Ocheretyne remains a dangerous area for Ukrainian forces as Russian forces have massed to advance either north of the settlement or northwest to Vozdyzhenka.[101] Mashovets and a Russian milblogger stated that elements of the 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade and 27th Motorized Rifle Division (both of the 2nd CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) and the 35th, 55th, and 74th motorized rifle brigades (all of the 41st CAA, CMD) are operating near Ocheretyne.[102]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Northwest of Avdiivka as of May 24, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



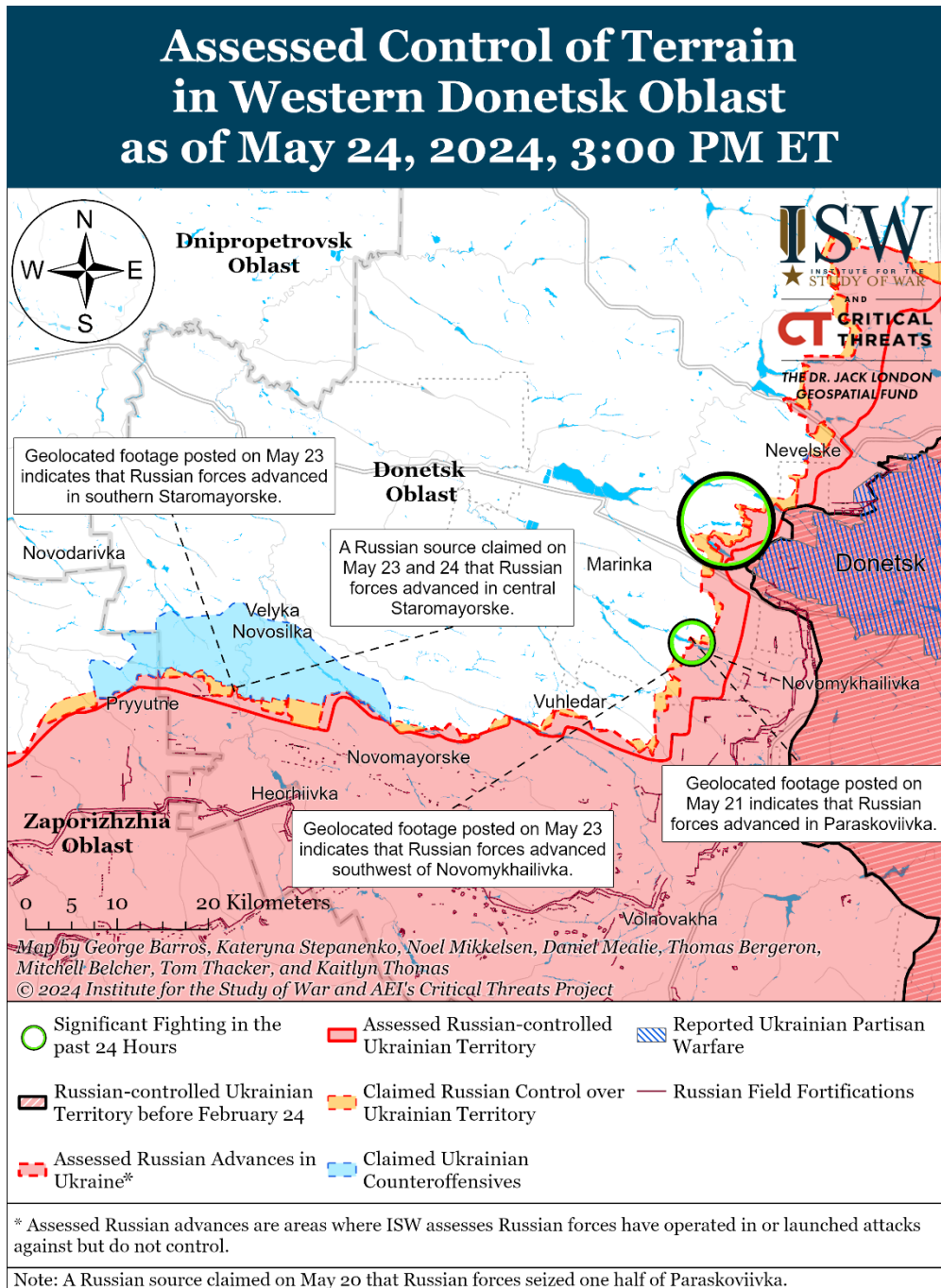
Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Donetsk City. Geolocated footage published on May 23 shows that Russian forces advanced southwest of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[103] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced further southwest of Novomykhailivka, but ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[104] Russian forces continued ground attacks west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Paraskoviivka

and Kostyantynivka.[105] Elements of the Russian 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) and the 110th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC) reportedly continue to operate near Krasnohorivka.[106]



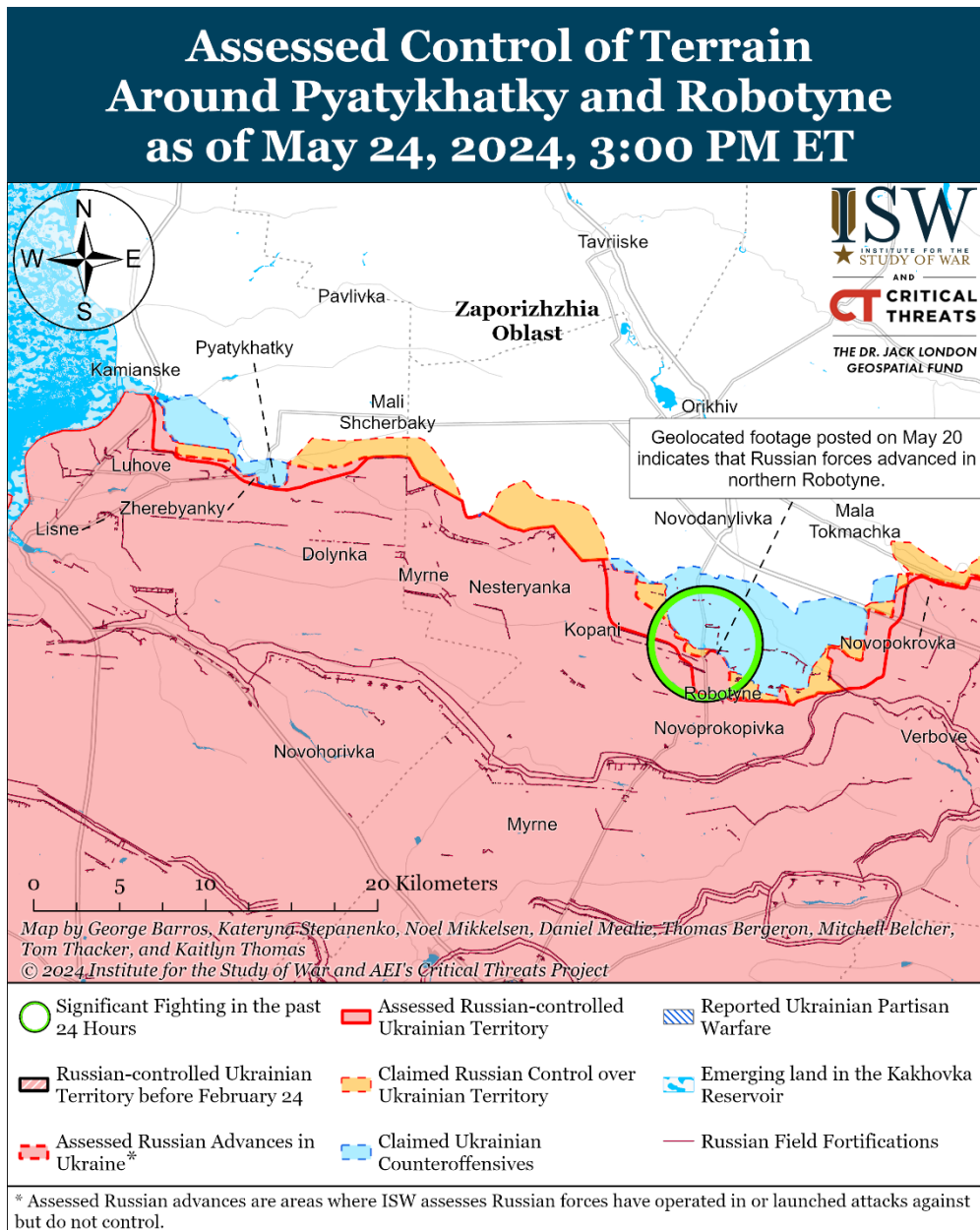


Russian forces reportedly advanced in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on May 24. Russian milbloggers claimed that small Russian groups on motorcycles advanced within Staromayorske and Urozhaine (both south of Velyka Novosilka), where fighting continues.[107] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims. Elements of the Russian 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly fighting in Staromayorske.[108]

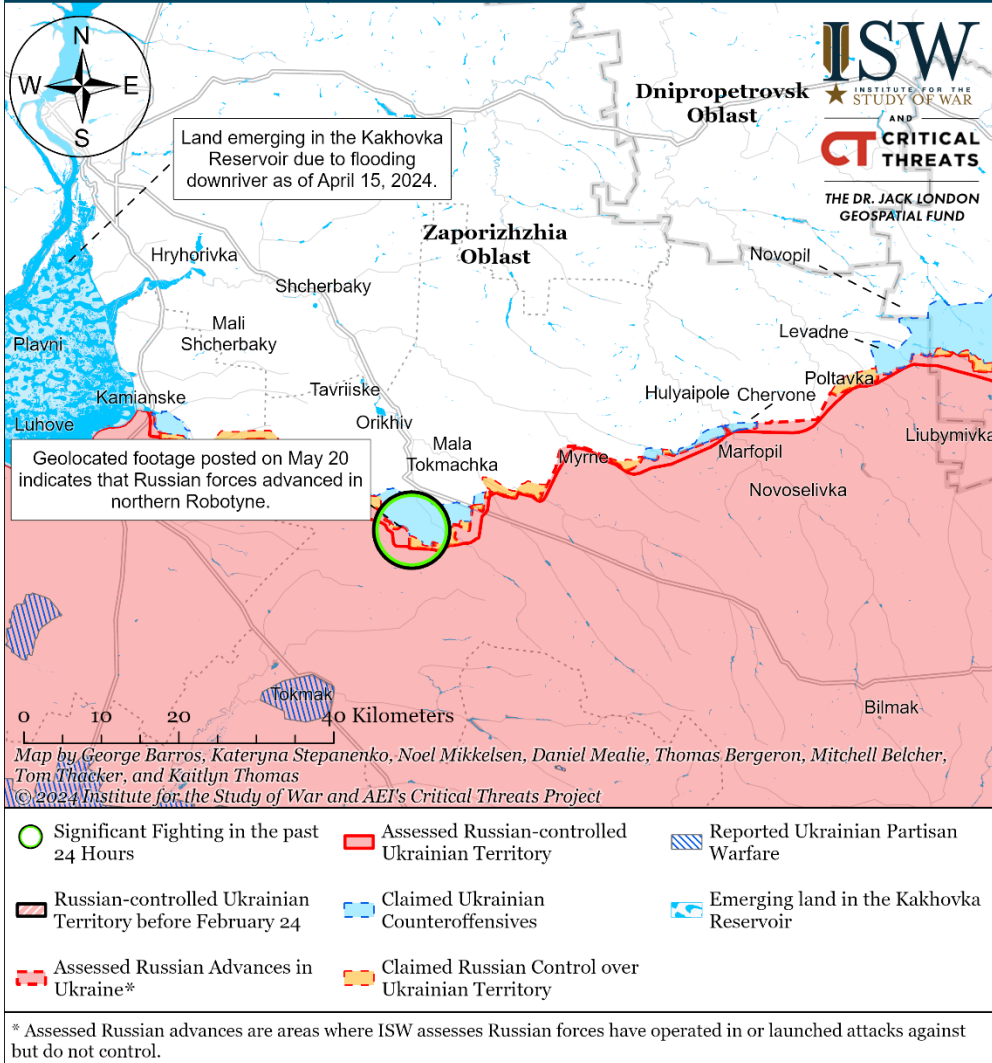


**Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Positional fighting continued in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on May 24, but there were no changes to the frontline in the area. Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Robotyne, northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne), and towards Novodanylivka (north of Robotyne).[109] Elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Robotyne.[110]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of May 24, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Positional fighting continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast, including near Krynky, on May 24.[111] Russian and Ukrainian sources speculated that Ukrainian forces withdrew from Krynky to establish positions elsewhere in east bank Kherson Oblast, although ISW has not yet observed confirmation that Ukrainian forces have left positions in and near the settlement.[112] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated that Ukrainian forces maintain their limited tactical bridgehead in Krynky.[113]



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

Russian forces conducted limited missile strikes against Kharkiv Oblast on the night of May 23 to 24. Kharkiv Oblast Military Administration Head Oleh Synehubov reported that Russian forces struck Kharkiv City with an S-300 missile, and Ukrainian state railway operator Ukrzaliznytsia reported that Russian forces struck railway infrastructure in Kharkiv Oblast with an unspecified number and type of munitions.[114] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Major Ilya Yevlash noted that Russian forces have paused Shahed-136/131 strikes in Ukraine in recent days but are operating a large number of reconnaissance drones over Kharkiv, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts to support ballistic missile strikes.[115]

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

The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on May 23 that Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksandr Lytvynenko stated that Russia recruited more than 385,000 military personnel in 2023.[116] Russian open-source platform *To Be Precise* reported on May 23 that the number of prisoners in Russia decreased by about 58,000 between 2022 and 2023, likely due to Russian force generation efforts to recruit prisoners to fight in Ukraine.[117] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi reported on January 15 that Russia recruits about 30,000 military personnel per month.[118]

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

Nothing significant to report.

### **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)**

Ukrainian authorities continue efforts to return children whom Russian authorities have illegally deported to Russia back to Ukrainian-controlled territory. Ukrainian Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets stated on May 23 that Ukrainian authorities returned seven Ukrainian children from Russian-occupied areas to Ukrainian-controlled territory.[119] Founder of the Save Ukraine charitable organization Mykola Kuleba stated on May 24 that Ukrainian authorities returned 10 more Ukrainian children from occupied areas.[120] Kuleba stated that the youngest child in the group is nine months old. Kuleba stated that the Save Ukraine organization has returned 345 children to Ukrainian-controlled territory. Kremlin-appointed Russian Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova attempted to deny on May 22 Russia's role in forcibly deporting Ukrainian children to Russia,

claiming that six Ukrainian children aged six to 17 years old returned from Russia to Ukraine due to Russian efforts and a Qatari-brokered deal.[121]

Kremlin officials continue to implement programs aimed at Russifying occupied Ukraine and erasing Ukrainian culture and identity. Russian Minister of Culture Olga Lyubimova claimed on May 24 that Russian authorities need to create exhibitions in occupied Ukraine about these territories' "recent history" and open children's centers in occupied Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts.[122]

### **Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

Kremlin security officials continued to falsely claim that Ukraine was directly involved in the March 22 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack.[123] ISW remains confident that the Islamic State (IS) conducted the Crocus City Hall attack and has yet to observe independent reporting or evidence to suggest that an actor other than IS was responsible for or aided the attack.[124]

Kremlin officials continue to promote information operations targeting Moldova. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Alexander Bortnikov claimed that "instruments of external governance" control Moldovan authorities and that Moldova is losing its national identity and statehood.[125] Bortnikov claimed that NATO is "dragging" Moldova into a military confrontation with Russia and Belarus. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova similarly claimed that NATO is trying to "pull" Moldova into the alliance and that Moldova is abandoning its language and nationality.[126] Zakharova also promoted boilerplate Kremlin narratives targeting Moldovan President Maia Sandu's alleged repressive administration. The Kremlin has intensified information operations against Moldova in recent months while simultaneously increasing its ties to pro-Russian opposition Moldovan politicians, such as US-sanctioned Ilan Shor and Gagauzia Governor Yevgenia Gutsul.[127] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is attempting to destabilize Moldovan democracy and society, prevent Moldova's accession to the EU, and justify future hybrid or conventional military operations against Moldova.[128]

A Kremlin-awarded Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian-style "foreign agents" law in Georgia is not pro-Russian and is necessary for Georgian security and independent governance.[129] Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili stated on May 18 that the bill is "fundamentally Russian" and contradicts both Georgia's constitution and all European standards.[130] Kremlin officials and officials from the Georgian ruling Georgia Dream party have recently promoted established Kremlin information operations related to the "foreign agents" law.[131]

Kremlin officials criticized the approval of a resolution in the United Nations (UN) on May 23 establishing an annual day to commemorate the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica. Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vasily Nebenzya claimed that the resolution will push the region towards confrontation.[132] Zakharova made similar claims and alleged that the resolution is a Western attempt to rewrite history.[133] Russian milbloggers also denied the Srebrenica genocide.[134] The 1995 genocide of Muslim Bosniaks by the Bosnian Serb Army in Srebrenica during the Bosnian War is well-documented.[135] Serbia has denied that the Srebrenica genocide occurred.[136] Russia has cultivated ties with Serbia since the early 2000s.[137]

## **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)**

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met in Minsk on May 24 and discussed bilateral cooperation and efforts to expand the Union State framework.[138] Putin and Lukashenko emphasized the importance of bilateral technological, economic, energy, and defense cooperation, particularly in the wake of Western sanctions and perceived Western "hostility" towards Russia and Belarus.[139] Lukashenko claimed during a press conference that this year will "determine a lot" in Ukraine and that Russia and Belarus are "in no hurry" to resolve the situation in Ukraine.[140] Recently appointed Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov also met with Belarusian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin to discuss bilateral defense and military-technical cooperation.[141]

**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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BABEL STREET

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