

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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May 23, 2025, 4:45 pm ET

Click <u>here</u> 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 interactive map of Ukraine's offensive in Kursk Oblast.

Click <u>here</u> 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 <u>here</u> 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 11:30 am ET on May 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov demanded that any future peace agreement in Ukraine include conditions to prevent the election and establishment of future pro-Western governments in Ukraine. Lavrov insisted on May 23 that any peace agreement must include conditions preventing the "repetition of what brought putschists to power through a bloody revolution," referring to Ukraine's 2014 Euromaidan protests and the Revolution of Dignity, which drove out Ukraine's former pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych.[1] Lavrov also reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin's repeated claim that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is not the legitimate leader of Ukraine and claimed that Russia could negotiate with the leadership of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada (parliament) instead of Zelensky.

Russian officials often deliberately misread the Ukrainian Constitution to claim that Zelensky's government is illegitimate since Ukraine did not hold presidential elections in 2024, although the Ukrainian Constitution and law prohibit the government from holding elections during times of martial law and external aggression.[2] Russian officials have repeatedly characterized Ukraine's Euromaidan protests and Revolution of Dignity as a "coup," and leverage this narrative to reinforce Russia's claims that the current Ukrainian government is not legitimate and thus cannot negotiate with Russia.[3] Lavrov's statement is also an explicit demand for regime change in Ukraine as a condition of any future peace agreement — a demand that Russian officials routinely make under the guise of demands for "denazification" in Ukraine.[4] Russian officials will likely falsely frame any future pro-Western

government in Ukraine as inheriting the illegitimacy of all Ukrainian governments since 2014 and set conditions to claim that any agreement that Russia concludes with Ukraine is non-binding.

Lavrov also rejected US President Donald Trump's recent suggestion that the Vatican could host negotiations on Russia's war against Ukraine.[5] Lavrov claimed that negotiations in the Vatican would be "unrealistic" and that it would be "uncomfortable" for the representatives of "two Orthodox countries" to meet in the Vatican.[6]

Ukraine and Russia conducted a 390-for-390 prisoner-of-war (POW) and civilian exchange on May 23 as part of a larger 1,000-for-1,000 exchange agreed upon during recent bilateral negotiations in Istanbul. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukraine and Russia exchanged 390 Ukrainians for 390 Russians in the first stage of the 1,000-for-1,000 exchange and that Ukraine expects the swaps to continue on May 24 and 25.[7] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russia and Ukraine conducted a 270-for-270 POW exchange and a 120-for-120 civilian exchange.[8]

Russian forces reportedly recently executed more Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the battlefield. The Donetsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office stated on May 23 that it launched an investigation into reports of Russian forces executing two POWs in the Pokrovsk direction on May 22.[9] The prosecutor's office reported that Russian forces captured, disarmed, and executed two of four Ukrainian soldiers conducting a combat operation near Udachne (southwest of Pokrovsk). The prosecutor's office reported that the status of the other two Ukrainian soldiers is unknown. There has been a sharp increase in credible reports and footage of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout 2024 and 2025.[10] ISW continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling their subordinates to conduct systemic executions in direct violation of international law.[11]

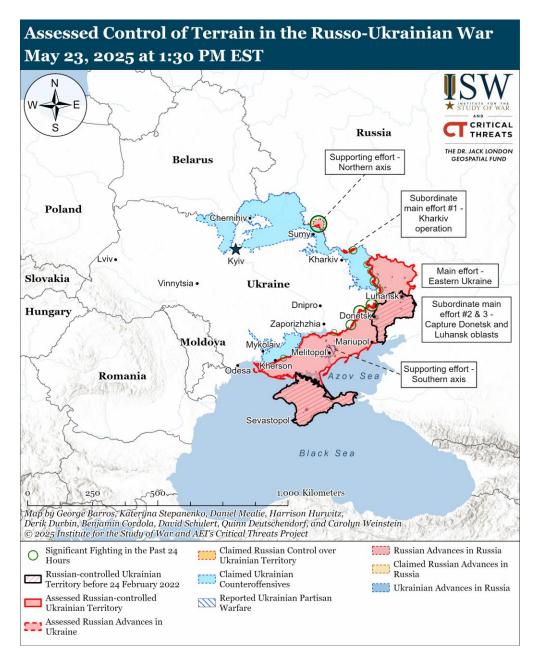
Russian President Vladimir Putin approved an experimental application to monitor migrants, likely in an effort to placate Russian ultranationalist demands while continuing to leverage migrants to support force generation and mitigate labor shortages. Putin signed a law on May 23 allowing Moscow City and Oblast authorities to introduce an experimental mobile application to register and track migrants.[12] The law forces some populations of migrants to register with Russian authorities and provide their location to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) through a mobile application. Russian state outlets reported that Russian authorities may deport migrants who attempt to conceal their location.[13] This experimental application system will begin on September 1 and will last until September 1, 2029. The official Russian government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* suggested that Russia would extend these registration and tracking systems throughout Russia should the test in Moscow City and Oblast prove successful.[14] Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin stated on May 20 at the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum that the Investigative Committee recently created a new division for investigating crimes that migrants commit in Russia.[15]

ISW continues to assess that Putin is prioritizing leveraging migrants to mitigate ongoing labor shortages and to support force generation efforts, despite ongoing complaints from Russian ultranationalists advocating for the Kremlin to impose harsher restrictions on migrants.[16] Putin may

be attempting to placate Russian ultranationalists by approving select harsher restrictions that ultimately allow Russia to better monitor migrants to leverage them for labor and force generation.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov demanded that any future peace agreement in Ukraine include conditions to prevent the election and establishment of future pro-Western governments in Ukraine.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted a 390-for-390 prisoner-of-war (POW) and civilian exchange on May 23 as part of a larger 1,000-for-1,000 exchange agreed upon during recent bilateral negotiations in Istanbul.
- Russian forces reportedly recently executed more Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the battlefield.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin approved an experimental application to monitor migrants, likely in an effort to placate Russian ultranationalist demands while continuing to leverage migrants to support force generation and mitigate labor shortages.
- Ukrainian forces advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces advanced near Novopavlivka and Kurakhove.



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.

- Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation
- Russian Supporting Effort Northern Axis

- 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, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas, and possibly advance into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Significant Activity in Belarus

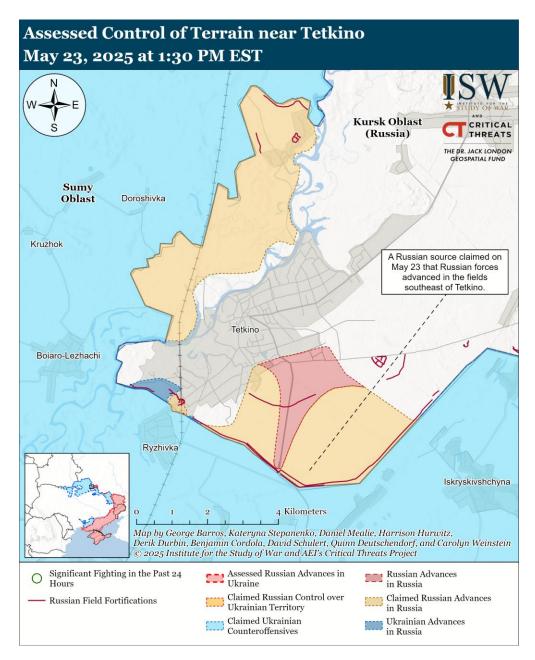
<u>Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation</u>

Limited fighting continued in Kursk Oblast on May 23.

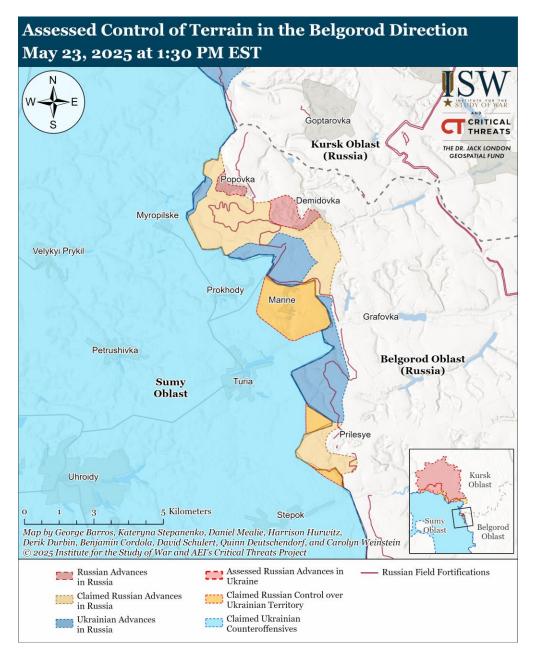
Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced southeast of Tetkino (southwest of Glushkovo).[17]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued attacks near Tetkino and in unspecified areas in the Glushkovo (west of Sudzha) direction.[18]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 217th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th VDV Division) are reportedly operating near Tetkino.[19]



Neither Russian nor Ukrainian sources reported ground activity in northwesternmost Belgorod Oblast on May 23.



Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against Russia on May 22 and 23.

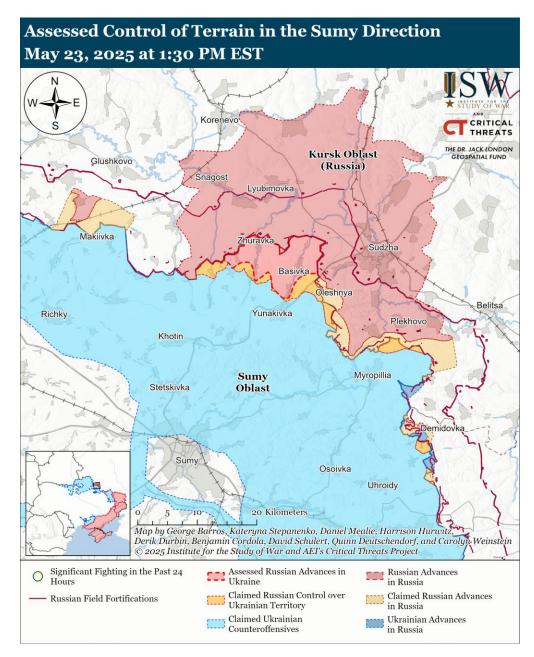
The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 23 that Ukrainian forces struck the Energiya enterprise in Yelets, Lipetsk Oblast.[20] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported that the Energiya plant produces chemical power sources, batteries, and other components for Russian drones, electronic warfare (EW) systems, tanks, missiles and missile systems, and other products for the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).[21] Lipetsk Oblast Governor Igor Artamonov claimed that drone debris fell on an industrial zone in Yelets.[22] Geolocated footage published on May 22 shows a fire at the Energiya plant in Yelets, and Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that the fire destroyed a workshop at the plant.[23] *Astra* assessed on May 22, citing data from NASA FIRMS showing heat anomalies, that there was likely a fire at the Ryazan Oil Refinery following reports of Russian forces downing Ukrainian drones in Ryazan Oblast.[24] Geolocated footage

published on May 22 shows a Ukrainian drone striking the Patriot Expo center near Zelenaya Roshcha, Moscow Oblast.[25] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces intercepted 24 drones over Moscow Oblast, six drones over Ryazan Oblast, and one drone over Lipetsk Oblast on the night of May 22 to 23.[26]

<u>Russian Supporting Effort – Northern Axis</u> (Russian objective: Create defensible buffer zones in northern Ukraine along the international border and approach to within tube artillery range of Sumy City)

Russian forces continued limited offensive operations in northern Sumy Oblast on May 23 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in fields east of Loknya (northeast of Sumy City).[27]



Russian Main Effort - Eastern Ukraine

<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Kharkiv Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City)

Russian forces continued limited offensive operations northeast of Kharkiv City near Vovchansk on May 23 but did not advance.[28]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian 72nd Motorized Rifle Division (44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are reportedly operating in Kharkiv Oblast.[29]

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

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kupyansk direction on May 23 but did not make any confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces seized Radkivka (immediately north of Kupyansk).[30] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced into eastern Kindrashivka (immediately northwest of Radkivka) and near Dvorichna (further north of Kupyansk) and Kamyanka (near the international border northeast of Kupyansk).[31]

Russian forces attacked north of Kupyansk near Kindrashivka, Dovhenke, and Holubivka and toward Mala Shapkivka; east of Kupyansk near Petropavlivka; and southeast of Kupyansk toward Pishchane on May 22 and 23.[32]

The spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Kupyansk direction reported on May 23 that Russian forces are prioritizing efforts to establish pontoon bridges and ad hoc crossings to the west bank of the Oskil River.[33]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Borova direction on May 23 but did not advance.

Russian forces attacked northeast of Borova near Kolisnykivka, Nova Kruhlyakivka, and Zahryzove and southeast of Borova near Hrekivka on May 22 and 23.[34]

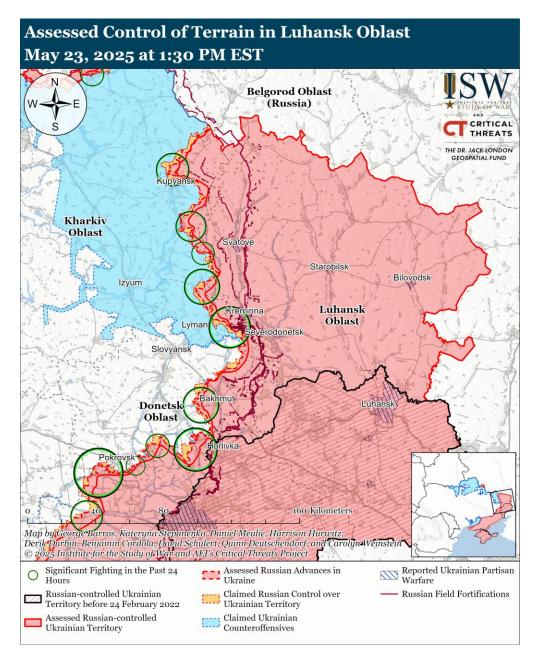
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Lyman direction on May 23 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) advanced in Ridkodub (north of Lyman).[35]

Russian forces attacked north of Lyman near Ridkodub, Novyi Mir, Novomykhailivka, Lypove, and Zelena Dolyna; northeast of Lyman near Nove and Myrne; and east of Lyman near Torske on May 22 and 23.[36]

A deputy head of a Ukrainian unit operating in the Lyman direction reported on May 23 that Russian forces have intensified ground assaults, taking advantage of foliage growth and weather conditions.[37]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian "Rubikon" Center for Advanced Unmanned Technologies and 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th CAA) are reportedly striking Ukrainian positions near Zarichne (east of Lyman).[38]



<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas, and possibly advance into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast)

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Siversk direction on May 23 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC], Southern Military District [SMD]) advanced near Hryhorivka (northeast of Siversk).[39]

Russian forces attacked northeast of Siversk near Bilohorivka and Hryhorivka and southeast of Siversk near Vyimka on May 22 and 23.[40]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian "Avangard" reconnaissance unit of the 123rd Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd CAA) are reportedly operating near Siversk.[41]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Chasiv Yar direction on May 23 but did not advance.

Russian forces continued ground assaults near Chasiv Yar itself and south of Chasiv Yar near Bila Hora on May 22 and 23.[42]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 23 that Ukrainian forces struck a forward command-and-control (C2) post of the Russian 3rd Army Corps (AC) in Bakhmut (east of Chasiv Yar) on May 21, damaging the command post.[43]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian 331st Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th VDV Division) are reportedly operating in the Kostyantynivka direction.[44]

Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk direction.

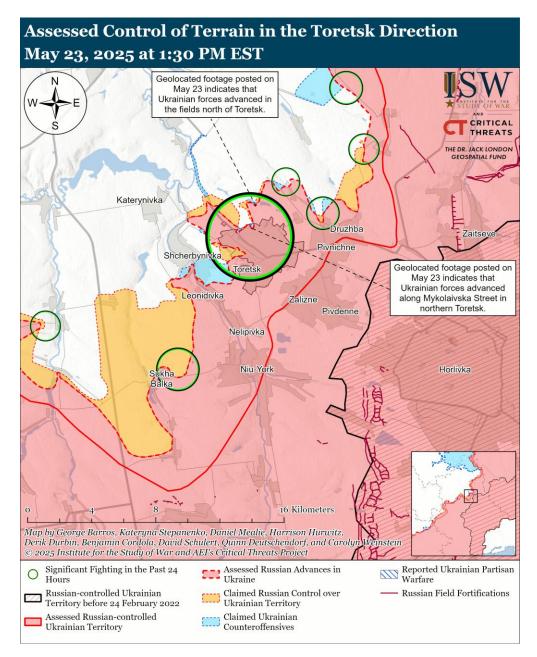
Assessed Ukrainian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 23 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced in northern Toretsk and north of Toretsk.[45]

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed on May 22 and 23 that Russian forces advanced toward the western outskirts of Novospaske (west of Toretsk) and north of Nova Poltavka (southwest of Toretsk) and that Russian forces occupy most of Hnativka (southwest of Toretsk).[46] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in an area up to 3.4 kilometers wide north and east of Romanivka (southwest of Toretsk).[47]

Russian forces attacked near Toretsk itself; northeast of Toretsk near Ozarynivka; east of Toretsk near Druzhba; north of Toretsk near Dyliivka, Dachne, and Krymske; west of Toretsk near Novospaske; and southwest of Toretsk near Romanivka, Oleksandropil, Hnativka, Zorya, Yablunivka, and Nova Poltavka and toward Poltavka, Rusyn Yar, and Popiv Yar on May 22 and 23.[48] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near the Poltavka-Popiv Yar area.[49]

The deputy commander of a Ukrainian mechanized battalion operating in the Toretsk direction reported that Russian forces are attempting to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) with drone strikes and that Russian forces continue to conduct infantry assaults with light vehicles, including motorcycles and buggies.[50] The commander of a Ukrainian unmanned system battalion operating in the Toretsk direction reported that Russian forces have concentrated a significant number of drone units in the area that use various types of drones, including fiber-optic drones.[51]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 102nd and 103rd motorized rifle regiments (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, SMD), 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA), and 174th Separate Reconnaissance Battalion (150th Motorized Rifle Division) are reportedly operating near Shcherbynivka (west of Toretsk).[52] Drone operators of the 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment are reportedly also striking Ukrainian targets near Popiv Yar.[53] Elements of the Russian 20th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA) are reportedly operating near Yablunivka (southwest of Toretsk).[54]



Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction on May 23 but did not advance.

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed on May 22 and 23 that Russian forces advanced north of Myrne and southeast of Shevchenko Pershe (both east of Pokrosk).[55]

Russian forces attacked east of Pokrovsk near Promin, Yelyzavetivka, Malynivka, Novotoretske, and Myrolyubivka and toward Shevchenko Pershe; southeast of Pokrovsk near Lysivka; south of Pokrovsk near Dachenske; and southwest of Pokrovsk near Shevchenko, Zvirove, and Udachne on May 22 and 23.[56] A Russian milblogger claimed on May 22 that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Myrne.[57]

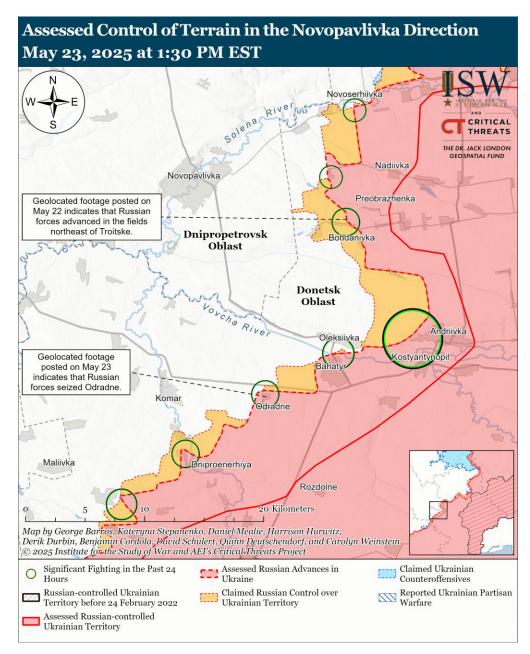
Russian forces recently advanced in the Novopavlivka direction.

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 23 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced northeast of Troitske (southeast of Novopavlivka).[58]

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed on May 22 that Russian forces advanced northeast and south of Novoserhiivka (northeast of Novopavlivka).[59]

Russian forces attacked northeast of Novopavlivka near Novomykolaivka, east of Novopavlivka near Kotlyarivka, and southeast of Novopavlivka near Troitske on May 22 and 23.[60]

A Ukrainian officer in a detachment operating in the Novopavlivka direction reported that fighting is intensifying in the area and that Russian forces are not using armored vehicles or motorcycles during assaults.[61] The officer noted that Russian forces are using motorcycles and civilian vehicles to transport infantry.



Russian forces recently advanced in the Kurakhove direction.

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 23 indicates that Russian forces recently seized Odradne (southwest of Kurakhove).[62] Russian milbloggers credited elements of the Russian 36th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (29th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) with seizing Odradne.[63]

Russian forces attacked west of Kurakhove near Kostyantynopil, Andriivka, Oleksiivka, and Bahatyr and southwest of Kurakhove near Odradne on May 22 and 23.[64] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Bahatyr and Odradne.[65]

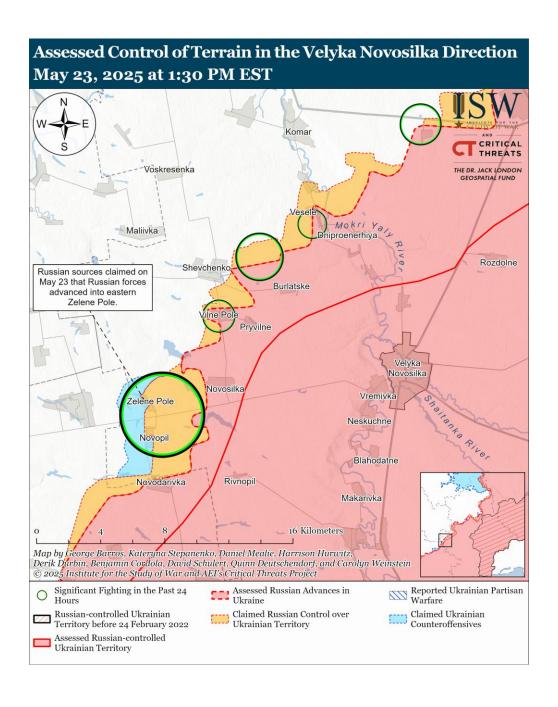
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Velyka Novosilka direction on May 23 but did not make any confirmed advances.

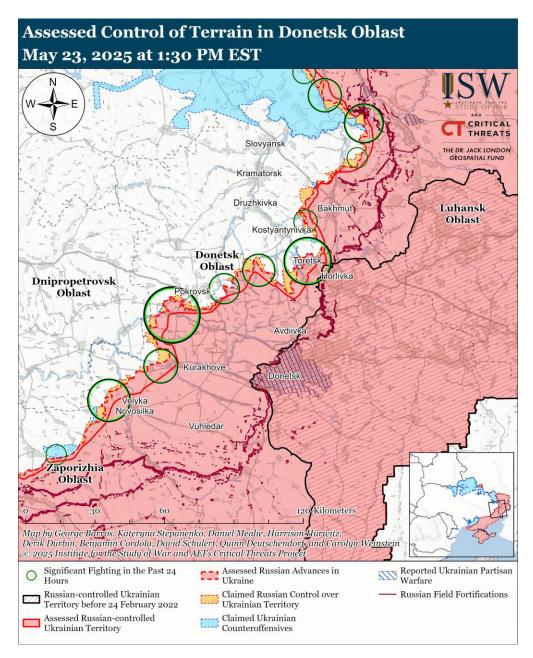
Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces seized Zelene Pole and advanced west of Zelene Pole and in southern Novopil (both southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[66]

Russian forces attacked northwest of Velyka Novosilka near Burlatske and Vesele and toward Komar, west of Velyka Novosilka near Shevchenko, and southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Zelene Pole and Novopil on May 22 and 23.[67] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked south of Komar, east of Vesele, and near Burlatske and Novopil.[68]

Ukrainian Southern Defense Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn reported that Russian forces are conducting artillery and drone strikes ahead of ground attacks and that Russian forces are most active west of Velyka Novosilka near Vilne Pole and southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Novosilka and Zelene Pole.[69]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, EMD) are reportedly operating in Zelene Pole, and elements of the 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA, formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] AC, SMD) are operating in Novopil.[70]



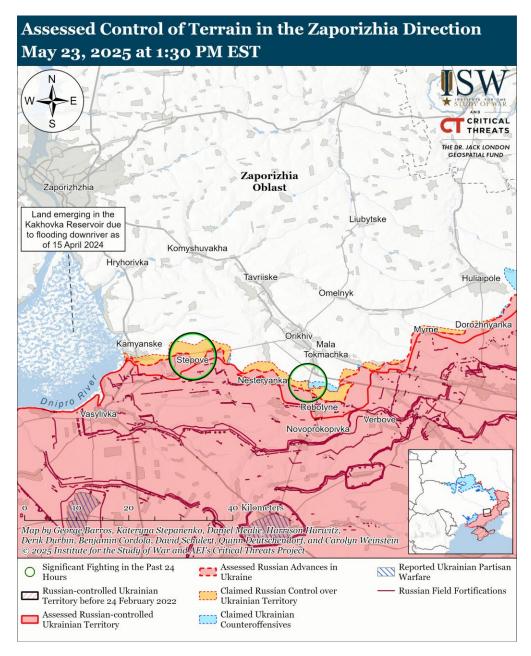


<u>Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis</u> (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions, secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes, and advance within tube artillery range of Zaporizhzhia City)

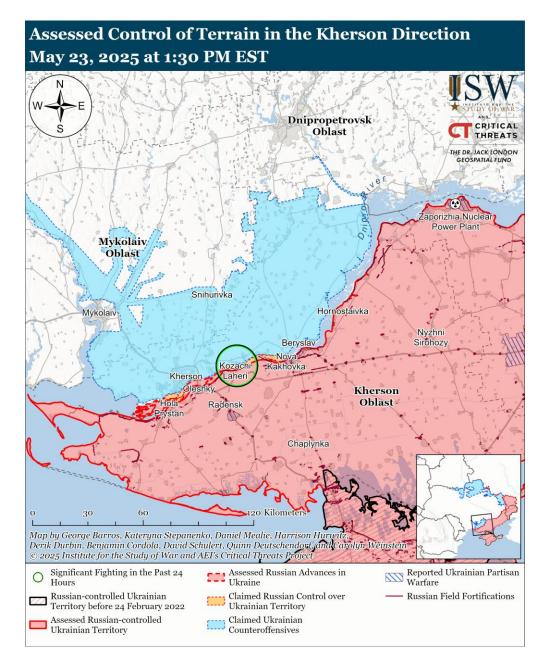
Russian forces continued assaults east of Hulyaipole near Vysoke on May 22 and 23 but did not advance.[71]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Zaporizhia direction on May 23 but did not advance.

Russian forces attacked south of Orikhiv near Novodanylivka and southwest of Orikhiv near Stepove on May 22 and 23.[72]



Russian forces conducted assaults in the Kherson direction on May 23 but did not advance.[73]



<u>Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign</u> (Russian Objective: Target Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure in the rear and on the frontline)

Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of May 22 to 23 and during the day on May 23. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched an Iskander-M ballistic missile from Rostov Oblast and 175 Shahed and decoy drones from the directions of Kursk City; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai.[74] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 91 drones over eastern, western, northern, southern, and central Ukraine and that 59 drones were "lost" or suppressed by Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) systems. Ukrainian officials stated that the Russian strikes affected Sumy, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Odesa, Chernivtsi, Chernihiv, Poltava, and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts.[75]

Odesa Oblast Head Oleh Kiper reported on May 23 that two Russian ballistic missiles struck port infrastructure in Odesa City and killed one civilian.[76]

<u>Significant activity in Belarus</u> (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks)

Nothing significant to report.

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.



- [1] https://mid dot ru/en/foreign_policy/news/2019492/?lang=ru
- [2] https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-28-2024; https://www.president dot gov.ua/ua/documents/constitution/konstituciya-ukrayini-rozdil-v; https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/prgm/cph/experts/ukraine/ukr.constitution.e.pdf
- [3] https://isw.pub/UkrWar051425; https://isw.pub/UkrWar043025; https://isw.pub/UkrWar042925; https://isw.pub/UkrWar042425; https://isw.pub/UkrWar060724; https://isw.pub/UkrWar052824
- [4] https://isw.pub/UkrWar041525
- [5] https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114535693441367601; https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-19-2025
- [6] https://www.rbc dot ru/politics/23/05/2025/68303c239a7947041c64b039
- [7] https://x.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1925915314719523266
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- [16] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-force-generation-and-technological-adaptations-update-may-21-2025
- [17] https://t.me/wargonzo/26709
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