

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

Nicole Wolkov, Daria Novikov, Angelica Evans, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

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Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11 am ET on May 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian officials appear to be setting conditions for Russian President Vladimir Putin to reject Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's invitation to meet on May 15 in Istanbul for bilateral ceasefire negotiations. Russian Federation Council Deputy Speaker Konstantin Kosachev responded to Zelensky on May 12 and claimed that Zelensky's invitation is "pure spectacle" and "comedy."[1] Kosachev claimed that high-level meetings are not organized in "such a difficult situation" and accused Zelensky of trying to blame Russia for what he claimed was Ukraine's disinterest in negotiations. Russian Ambassador-at-Large Rodion Miroshnik questioned the intentions behind Zelensky's invitation to Putin to meet in Istanbul.[2] Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs Deputy Chairperson Alexei Chepa expressed doubt on May 12 that Putin will travel to Istanbul to meet with Zelensky.[3] Chepa insinuated that Russia cannot trust Ukraine in any negotiations because Ukraine has violated previous agreements and unilaterally imposed Russian ceasefires. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov claimed on May 12 that Zelensky is trying to co-opt the ongoing discussion around negotiations by inviting Putin to Istanbul and making Putin seem intransigent if he does not attend.[4] Kremlin-level officials have not formally responded to Zelensky's invitation as of this report, although statements from lower-level Russian officials indicate that Putin will likely not travel to Istanbul and meet with Zelensky.

Putin has engaged in significant rhetorical efforts to prepare the Russian public for a long-term war effort — and not a near-term peace agreement — including by promoting the false narrative that Zelensky and the Ukrainian government are illegitimate.[5] Putin and Russian officials often use this narrative to justify Russia's refusal to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine and to further Russia's strategic war goal of establishing a pro-Russian puppet government in Kyiv. Putin may assess that the Kremlin would need to adjust or completely retract this narrative in order to rhetorically prepare the Russian public for direct negotiations with Zelensky before such meetings. Putin notably referred to the "Kyiv authorities" rather than Zelensky or the Ukrainian government in his invitation to negotiate in Istanbul.[6] Senior Kremlin officials most recently reiterated this false narrative in late April, and Russian media continues to reiterate this narrative in publications as of May 12.[7] ISW has not observed any indications that the Kremlin will alter or abandon this rhetoric. Putin may instead choose to let this narrative lie dormant for now and intensify this rhetoric should Russia and Ukraine sign a peace agreement in order to set conditions for Russia to justify reneging on any future peace agreement and relaunching the war at the time of Russia's choosing. **Any long-term peace**

agreement between Russia and Ukraine must include Russia's explicit recognition of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and the Ukrainian Constitution.

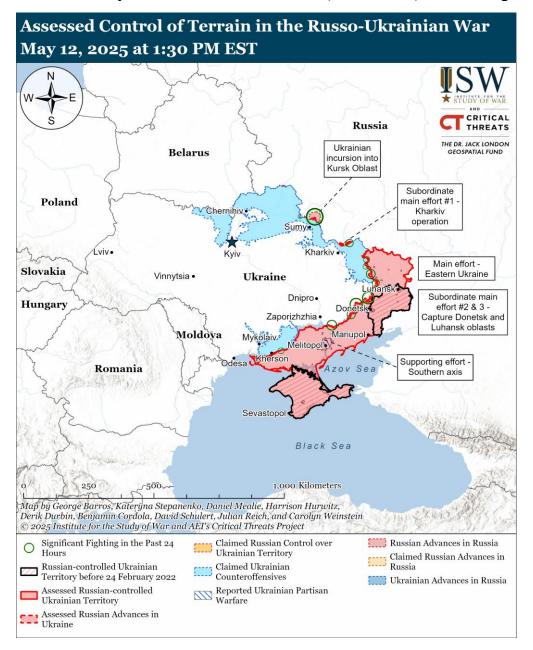
Russia has reportedly deployed a largely ceremonial regiment of the Federal Security Service (FSB) to the frontline in Donetsk Oblast, likely in an effort to generate fear of more rapid future Russian advances. The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Chasiv Yar direction reported on May 12 that elements of the elite Russian FSB Presidential Regiment are reinforcing Russian forces attempting to seize Chasiv Yar.[8] This regiment reports directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin and is primarily responsible for fulfilling honor guard duties at state functions and guarding Russian officials, the Kremlin, and the Eternal Flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier near the Kremlin Wall.[9] ISW has not previously observed the regiment operating in Ukraine. Russian state media reported in 2014 and 2016 that the unit is approximately the size of a motorized rifle brigade and is composed of conscripts and contract soldiers.[10] Putin and other Russian officials have repeatedly promised the Russian population that conscripts, whose military service is mandated by Russian law, will not be deployed to fight in Ukraine after utilizing conscripts in operations during the initial months of combat the war.[11]

Russian state media reporting suggests that elements of the Presidential Regiment likely lack the training and combat experience necessary to successfully reinforce Russian operations near Chasiv Yar and the longer-term Russian effort to seize the Ukrainian fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast. The Russian military command's decision to deploy the Presidential Regiment to fight in Ukraine is likely part of a larger Russian effort to intimidate Ukraine and the West through intensified battlefield activity and portray Russian forces as elite and fully capable of achieving significant successes in Ukraine in the near future. The Russian military command may also be trying to feed any manpower available into the Chasiv Yar area due to its apparent effort to prioritize offensive operations against Kostyantynivka in recent months.[12] Russian forces are currently prioritizing quickly replenishing frontline units with new recruits to maintain the battlefield initiative in Ukraine over building up a pool of well-trained operations and penetrate Ukrainian defenses.[13] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces lack the capacity to make significant battlefield advances in the near future, however, and that Russian officials are leveraging Russia's retention of the battlefield initiative to strengthen their negotiating position.[14]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials appear to be setting conditions for Russian President Vladimir Putin to reject Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's invitation to meet on May 15 in Istanbul for bilateral ceasefire negotiations.
- Russia has reportedly deployed a largely ceremonial regiment of the Federal Security Service (FSB) to the frontline in Donetsk Oblast, likely in an effort to generate fear of more rapid future Russian advances.

• Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk direction. Russian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Novopavlivka directions.



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.

• Alleged Ceasefire Violation

- 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 Kharkiy 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

Alleged Ceasefire Violations

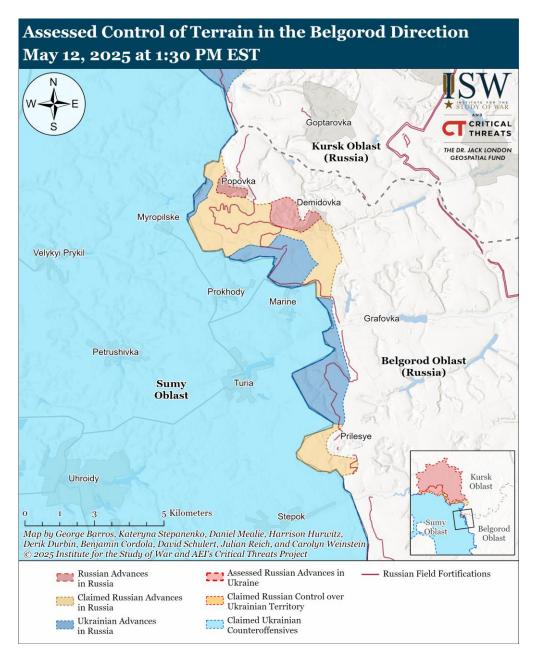
There are no active ceasefires in Ukraine.

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

Fighting continued in Kursk Oblast on May 12.

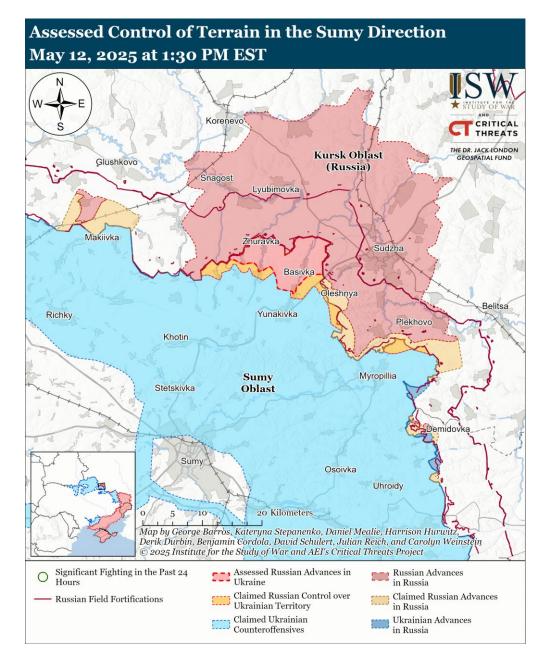
The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 12 that Russian forces conducted ground attacks in unspecified areas of Kursk Oblast. [15] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked near Tetkino and Novvi Put (both southwest of Glushkovo) on May 12. [16]

A Russian milblogger claimed on May 12 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Popovka (northwest of Belgorod City).[17]



<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)

Fighting continued along the international border in Sumy Oblast near Bilovody (north of Sumy City) on May 12.[18]



Order of Battle: Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that elements of the Russian "Zapad-Akhmat" Battalion and Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) forces are operating in the Sumy direction.[19]

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 offensive operations northeast of Kharkiv City on May 12 but did not advance.

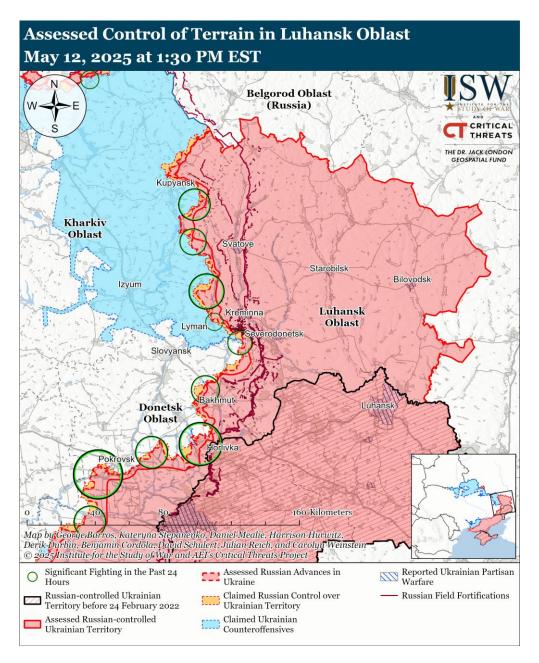
Russian forces attacked northeast of Kharkiv City near Vovchansk on May 11 and 12.[20]

The commander of a Ukrainian battalion operating in northern Kharkiv oblast reported on May 12 that intensified Ukrainian and Russian drone operations in the Kharkiv direction have resulted in a two-to-three-kilometer-wide gray zone along this sector of the frontline. [21] A Ukrainian servicemember operating in the Vovchansk direction reported that Russian forces are mainly using armored vehicles to transport infantry rather than to conduct mechanized assaults in the area. [22]

Order of Battle: Drone elements of the Russian "Anvar" Spetsnaz detachment (possibly referring to the BARS-25 "Anvar" volunteer detachment) are reportedly striking Ukrainian positions near Vovchansk.[23]

<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 12 but did not advance.



Russian forces attacked southeast of Kupyansk toward Pishchane and Novoosynove on May 11 and 12.[24]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 27th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Guards Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) are reportedly operating in the Kupyansk direction. [25]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Borova direction on May 12 but did not advance.

Russian forces attacked northeast of Borova near Zahryzove and Nova Kruhlyakivka; east of Borova near Shyykivka, Kopanky, and Zelenyi Hai; and southeast of Borova near Hrekivka and toward Olhivka on May 11 and 12.[26]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian "Chernyi Voron" drone detachment are reportedly striking Ukrainian forces near Hrekivka.[27]

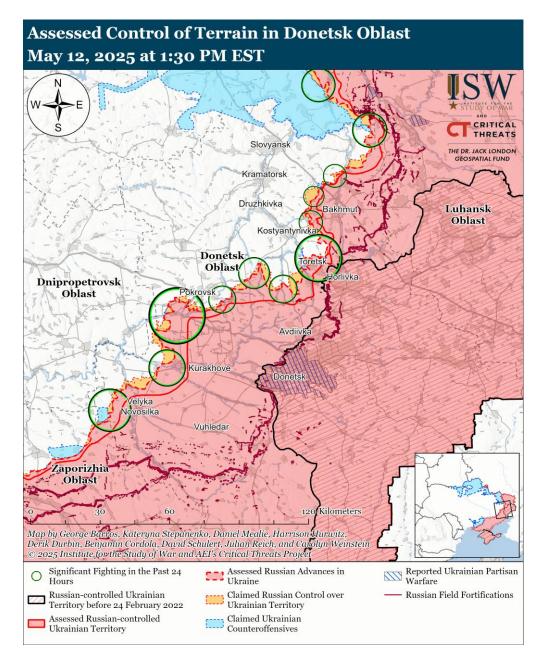
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Lyman direction on May 12 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces recently advanced in the hills north of Kolodyazi (northeast of Lyman).[28]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations north of Lyman near Ridkodub, Novyi Mir, Lypove, Nove, and Zelena Dolyna; northeast of Lyman near Kolodyazi, Nove, and Novomykhailivka; east of Lyman near Torske; and southeast of Lyman in the Serebryanske forest area on May 11 and 12.[29]

<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 12 but did not advance.



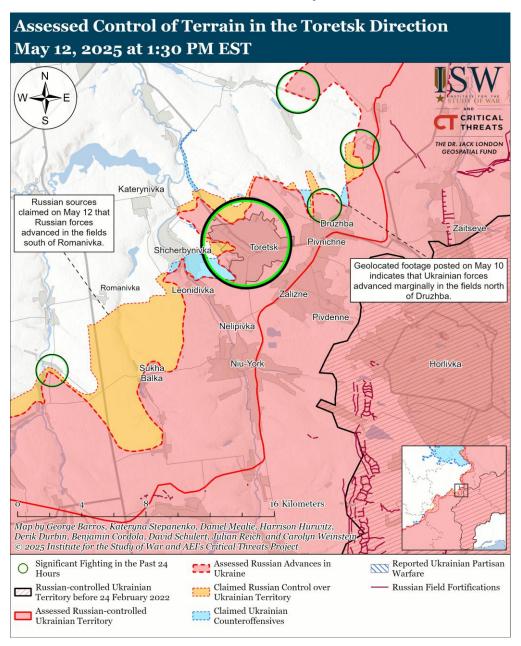
Russian forces attacked northeast of Siversk near Bilohorivka and Hryhorivka, east of Siversk near Verkhnokamyanske, and southwest of Siversk near Vasyukivka and Pazeno on May 11 and 12.[30]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Chasiv Yar direction on May 11 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed on May 11 that Russian forces advanced near Ozaryanivka and Kurdyumivka (both southeast of Chasiv Yar).[31]

Russian forces attacked near Chasiv Yar itself, north of Chasiv Yar near Novomarkove, southeast of Chasiv Yar near Andriivka, south of Chasiv Yar near Dyliivka and Bila Hora, and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Ozaryanivka on May 11 and 12.[32] A Russian milblogger claimed on May 11 that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Stupochky (south of Chasiv Yar).[33]

Ukrainian and Russian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk direction.



Assessed Ukrainian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 10 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced northeast of Druzhba (east of Toretsk).[34]

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 12 indicates that Russian forces recently seized positions along the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway and advanced northwest of Berezivka (southwest of Toretsk).[35]

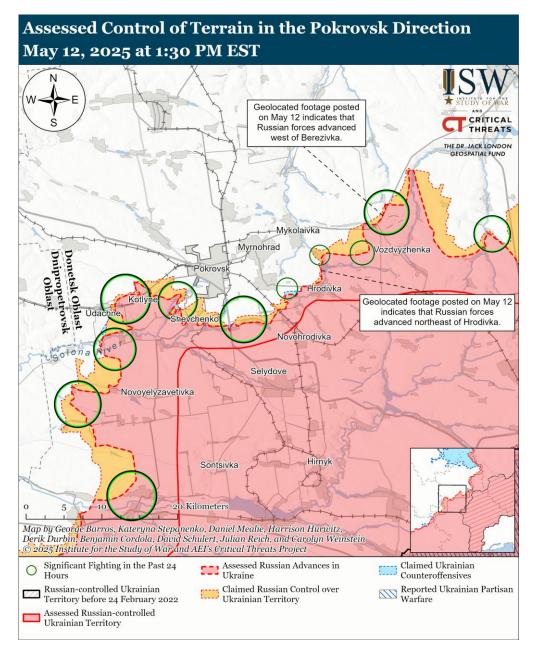
Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed on May 11 and 12 that Russian forces advanced northwest of Toretsk itself, into the southern outskirts of Romanivka (southwest of Toretsk), southeast of Zelene Pole (southwest of Toretsk), near Oleksandropil (southwest of Toretsk), southeast and southwest of Novoolenivka (west of Toretsk), and near Yablunivka (west of Toretsk).[36] A Russian milblogger claimed on May 11 that elements of the Russian 68th Tank Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) advanced into the outskirts

of Romanivka.[37]

Russian forces attacked Toretsk itself; northwest of Toretsk toward Katerynivka; southwest of Toretsk near Vodyane Druhe, Stara Mykolaivka, Yelyzavetivka, Malynivka, and Oleksandropil and toward Zorya; and west of Toretsk near Leonidivka, Nova Poltavka, Popiv Yar, and Romanivka. [38] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked in Toretsk and near Romanivka (southwest of Toretsk). [39]

Order of Battle: Elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating near Stara Mykolaivka (southwest of Toretsk). [40] Elements of the 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating in Toretsk. [41] Elements of the 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps [AC], Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating in Malynivka (southwest of Toretsk). [42] Elements of the 1st "Prizrak" Territorial Defense Battalion (4th Motorized Rifle Brigade, 3rd CAA, formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] AC) are reportedly operating near Druzhba (east of Toretsk). [43]

Russian forces recently advanced in the Pokrovsk direction.



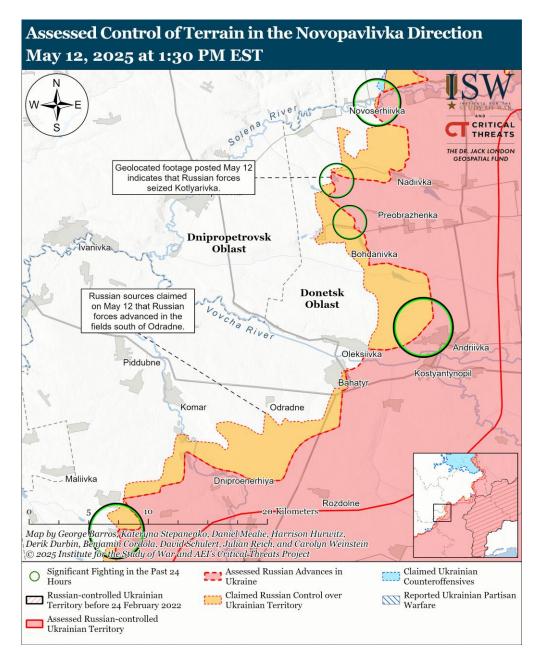
Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 12 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Myrolyubivka (east of Pokrovsk) and seized the reservoir south of the settlement.[44]

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced further southwest of Myrolyubivka and north of Shevchenko and Pishchane (both south of Pokrovsk).[45]

Russian forces continued assaults east of Pokrovsk near Myrolyubivka, Promin, and Myrnohrad; southeast of Pokrovsk near Lysivka and Sukhyi Yar; south of Pokrovsk near Novoukrainka and Dachenske; and southwest of Pokrovsk near Udachne and Kotlyne on May 11 and 12.[46] Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces reported that Ukrainian forces recently repelled a Russian assault with two armored vehicles and eight motorcycles near Novotoretske (east of Pokrovsk).[47] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces recently counterattacked near Udachne and Kotlyne.[48]

Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov stated on May 12 that Russian motorcycles assaults are becoming increasingly frequent in the Pokrovsk direction.[49]

Russian forces recently advanced in the Novopavlivka direction.



Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 12 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in northern Kotlyarivka (east of Novopavlivka) and likely seized the settlement. [50] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) also claimed that Russian forces seized the settlement. [51] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 35th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) participated in the seizure of Kotlyarivka. [52]

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Horikhove (southeast of Novopavlivka).[53] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced into Novomykolaivka and Novoserhiivka (both northeast of Novopavlivka) and are between 700 and 800

meters from the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary.[54] ISW previously assessed that Russian officials will likely overemphasize the military significance of future Russian advances into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast when Russian forces cross the administrative boundary.[55]

Russian forces continued assaults northeast of Novopavlivka near Novoserhiivka and Novooleksandrivka and east of Novopavlivka near Kotlyarivka and Troitske on May 11 and 12.[56]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kurakhove direction on May 12 but did not make any confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in central Bahatyr (west of Kurakhove) and south of Odradne (southwest of Kurakhove).[57]

Russian forces continued attacking west of Kurakhove near Kostyantynivka, Andriivka, Bahatyr, and Oleksiivka and southwest of Kurakhove near Odradne and Rozdolne on May 11 and 12.[58]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 43rd Spetsnaz Company (reportedly under the operational control of the 29th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating near Bahatyr.[59]

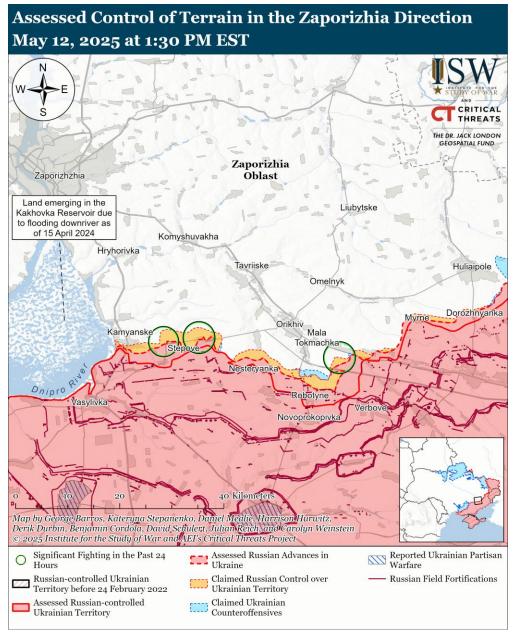
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Velyka Novosilka direction on May 12 but did not make any confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced southeast of Komar, north of Dniproenerhiya and south of Vilne Pole (all northwest of Velyka Novosilka).[60]

Russian forces attacked northwest of Velyka Novosilka near Vilne Pole, west of Velyka Novosilka near Novosilka, and southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Novopil on May 11 and 12.[61] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Vilne Pole.[62]

<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 offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on May 12 but did not advance.

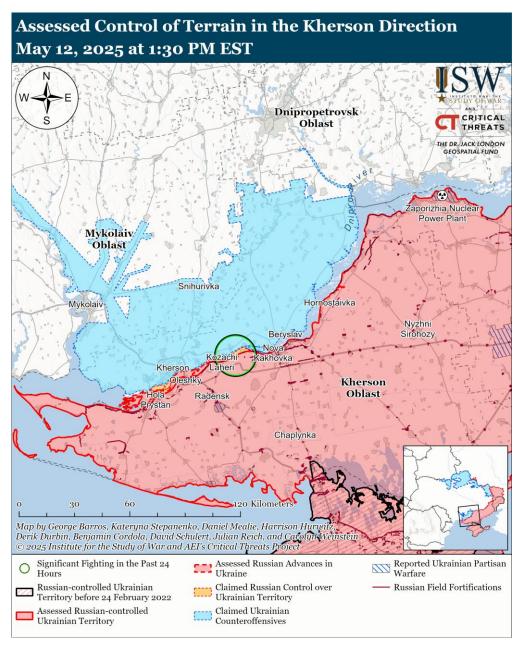


Russian forces conducted ground attacks southeast of Orikhiv near Mala Tokmachka and southwest of Orikhiv near Stepove and Mali Shcherbaky on May 11 and 12.[63]

The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command posted footage on May 11 of Ukrainian forces destroying a Russian Buk-M1 air defense system near occupied Verkhnyi Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast (in the Russian rear northeast of Melitopol).[64]

Order of Battle: Drone operators of the Russian "Shaman" detachment of the 1455th Motorized Rifle Regiment (reportedly of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhia direction. [65]

Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations in the Kherson direction on May 11 and 12 but did not advance.[66]



Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Colonel Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on May 11 that Russian forces are moving air defense systems, including water-based air defense systems, from other areas to occupied Crimea since Crimea remains a key logistical area for Russia. [67] Pletenchuk noted that a shortage of

microelectronics due to sanctions has prevented Russia from building new air defense systems and that Russia cannot effectively defend the Kerch Strait Bridge.

<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 drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of May 11 to 12. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 108 Shahed and decoy drones from the directions of Bryansk and Oryol cities; Shatalovo, Smolensk Oblast; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea. [68] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 55 Shahed and other drones over northern, eastern, southern, and central Ukraine and that Ukrainian forces lost sight of 30 decoy drones during the strike. The Russian drone strikes affected Odesa, Mykolaiv, Donetsk, Zhytomyr, and Sumy oblasts. [69]

<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.



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- [2] https://www.gazeta dot ru/politics/news/2025/05/12/25762220.shtml
- [3] https://www.gazeta dot ru/politics/news/2025/05/12/25758878.shtml
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Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project 2025

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         https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/64182
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https://t.me/GeneralStaffZSU/24139; https://t.me/Khortytsky_wind/9834
[57] https://t.me/z arhiv/31527; https://t.me/rybar/70320; https://t.me/dva_majors/71023;
https://t.me/rybar/70328; https://t.me/wargonzo/26474; https://t.me/yurasumy/22911
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[58]
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https://t.me/GeneralStaffZSU/24139
                                                   https://t.me/voin_dv/14898
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            https://t.me/GeneralStaffZSU/24181;
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