

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 4

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May 4, 7:15pm ET

Ukrainian defenses have largely stalled Russian advances in Eastern Ukraine. Russian troops conducted a number of unsuccessful attacks in Eastern Ukraine on May 4 and were unable to make any confirmed advances. Russian forces attacking south of Izyum appear increasingly unlikely to successfully encircle Ukrainian forces in the Rubizhne area. Ukrainian forces have so far prevented Russian forces from merging their offensives to the southeast of Izyum and the west of Lyman, Slovyansk, and Kramatorsk, as Russian forces likely intended.

Russian forces reportedly entered the Azovstal Steel Plant – rather than its outskirts – for the first time on May 4. The extent of this Russian advance remains unclear, and Russian forces likely face further costly fighting if they intend to clear the entire facility. The Kremlin likely hopes that the successful capture of Azovstal through a ground assault will cement the Kremlin’s growing effort to claim complete control of Mariupol by May 9, with Russian propagandists recently arriving in the city to set conditions for further claims of a Russian victory. The Kremlin likely intends to claim some sort of victory in Mariupol to present a success to the Russian people, though Russian forces are highly unlikely to halt offensive operations across Ukraine on this date.

Russian forces intensified airstrikes against transportation infrastructure in Western Ukraine on May 4 but remain unable to interdict Western aid shipments to Ukraine. Six Russian cruise missiles hit electrical substations near railway stations in Lviv and Transcarpathia (the southwestern Oblast of Ukraine) on May 4.¹ A senior US defense official reported that Russian aircraft conducted 200 to 300 airstrikes largely targeting transportation infrastructure in the last 24 hours.² The US official added that these Russian strikes are likely intended disrupt Ukrainian transportation capabilities and slow down weapon re-supply efforts but have been unable to do so.³

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces engaged in several unsuccessful ground offensives to the south of Izyum and did not significantly advance efforts to encircle Ukrainian troops in the cauldron to the southeast of Izyum and west of the Donetsk-Luhansk frontline.**
- **Russian forces reportedly stormed the Azovstal Steel Plant on May 4 and are likely operating inside the plant’s facilities.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian sources confirmed that a Ukrainian counteroffensive pushed Russian troops back 40 kilometers from Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces conducted a number of unsuccessful counteroffensives on the southern axis.**

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

ISW has updated the structure of its discussion of the primary efforts Russian forces are currently engaging in. The main Russian effort is concentrated in Eastern Ukraine and includes one subordinate main effort and four supporting efforts. The subordinate main effort is the encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron formed between the Izyum-Sloviansk highway and the Kreminna-Rubizhne-Popasna frontline in Luhansk. The four supporting efforts are: completing the seizure of Mariupol, Kharkiv City, the Southern Axis, and threatening northeastern Ukraine from Russian and Belarusian territory.

ISW has updated its assessment of the five primary efforts Russian forces are engaged in at this time:

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

Main effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate Main Effort— Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

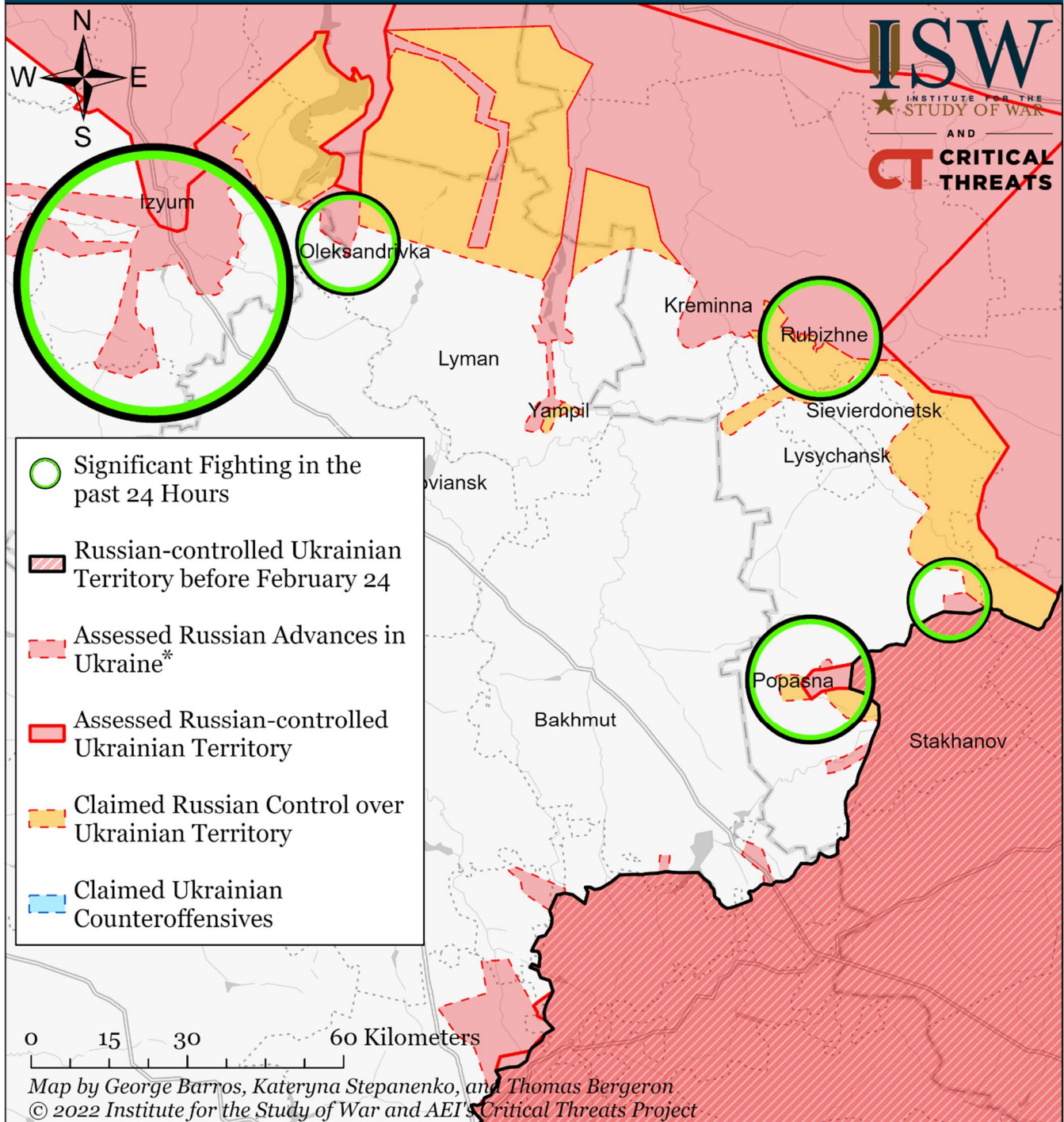
Russian forces launched several unsuccessful assaults in eastern Ukraine in the last 24 hours but did not advance overall efforts to encircle Ukrainian forces along the frontline around Rubizhne.⁴ An unnamed senior US defense official stated that Russian forces are attempting to advance in the Izyum area southeastward towards Lyman, Slovyansk, and Kramatorsk and in an effort to encircle Ukrainian defenses from the south.⁵ The official noted that Ukrainian resistance has “stalled” Russian advances in this area and that Russian operations remain uneven.⁶

Ukrainian forces continued to threaten Russian ground lines of communication to Izyum along the E40 highway, destroying a Russian supply convoy in Vesele on May 3.⁷ Russian forces heavily shelled Ukrainian positions south and west of Izyum and likely targeted a Ukrainian pontoon bridge across the Siverskyi Donets in Protopoivka.⁸ The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that Russian forces destroyed the bridge on May 4, but ISW cannot independently confirm this claim.⁹

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces are attacking south towards Lyman from northeastern Luhansk Oblast alongside the Izyum effort.¹⁰ Russian forces reportedly made unspecified advances in the direction of Shandryholove, about 15 kilometers north of Lyman.¹¹ Russian forces are unlikely to have seized Yampil (roughly 10 kilometers southeast of Lyman) as of May 4 based on satellite images of large fires in the area following Russian artillery and missile strikes.¹²

Russian forces have likely partially encircled several frontline settlements in Luhansk Oblast. Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai reported that Rubizhne and Popasna residents have one more week worth of water and food supplies as of May 4.¹³ Drone footage also showed Russian Wagner mercenaries fighting a Ukrainian soldier in Popasna, indicating that Russian forces are continuing grinding block-by-block advances within the city.¹⁴

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of May 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

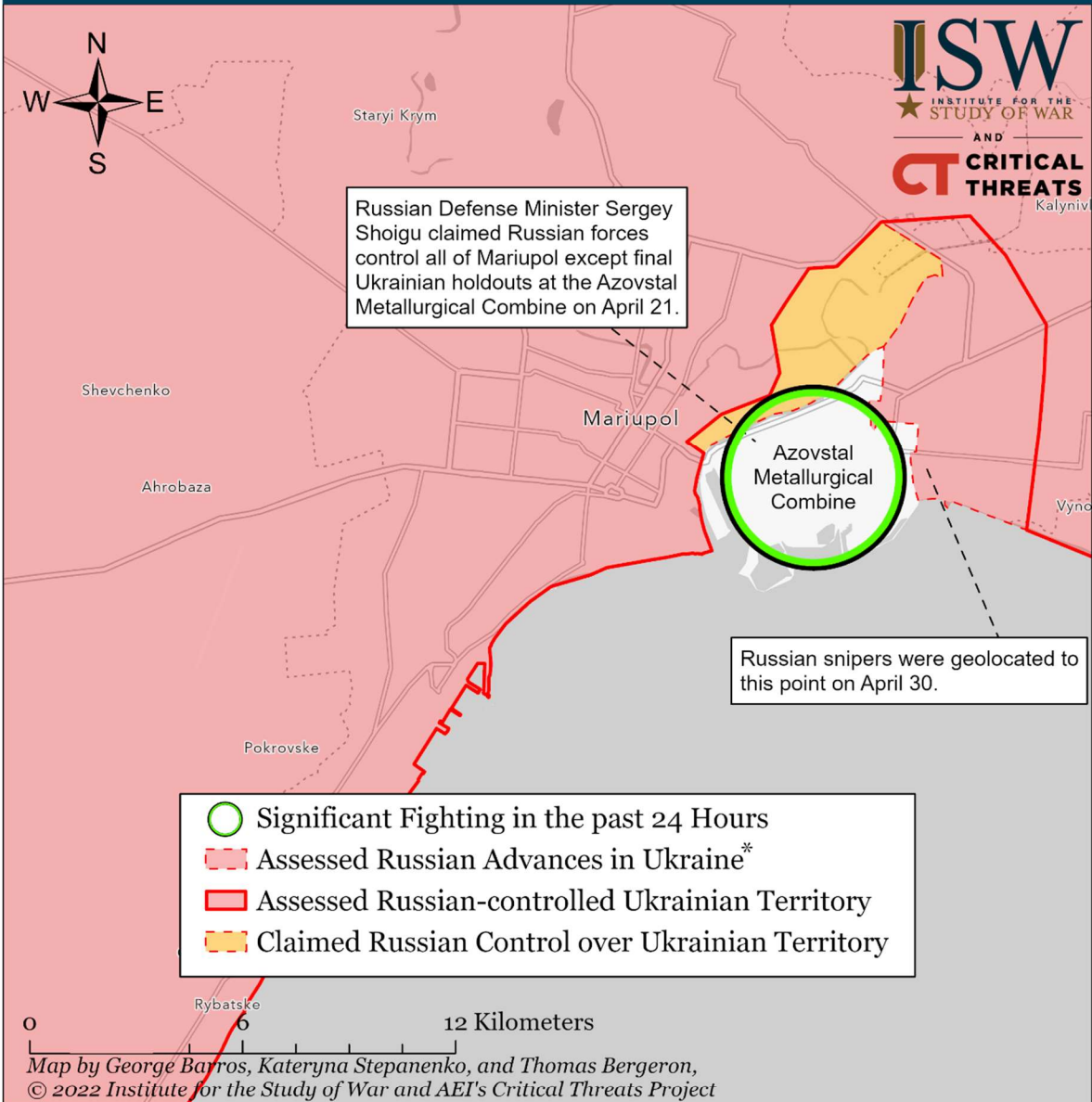
Supporting Effort #1—Mariupol (Russian objective: Capture Mariupol and reduce the Ukrainian defenders)

Russian forces reportedly entered the Azovstal Steel Plant for the first time – rather than its outskirts, which they have contested for several weeks – on May 4.¹⁵ Multiple Ukrainian sources stated that Russian troops successfully "broke into" Azovstal and that the Ukrainian government has lost communications with Ukrainian defenders within the plant as a result.¹⁶ ISW cannot confirm the extent of Russian advances within Azovstal at this time but will continue to provide updates as the situation unfolds.

An unnamed senior US defense official estimated that 2 Russian battalion tactical groups (BTGs) "cobbled together" from various damaged units and unspecified Chechen units, amounting to about 2,000 personnel, remain in Mariupol as of May 4.¹⁷ The 10 damaged BTGs that have previously redeployed from Mariupol are reportedly still undergoing rest and refit and have not been committed to offensive operations in eastern Ukraine.¹⁸ This report is consistent with ISW's previous assessment that most Russian forces have left Mariupol, leaving smaller elements to finish capturing Azovstal.¹⁹

Russian forces continue to consolidate their administrative control of Mariupol. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russian preparations for a "Victory Day" parade in Mariupol on May 9 are ongoing. These preparations reportedly include forcing residents to clear damaged streets in return for food and preparing materials to portray a Russian "liberation" of Mariupol.²⁰ The GUR noted that First Deputy Head of the Russian Presidential Administration Sergey Kiriyenko arrived in Mariupol on an unspecified date to oversee preparations in his new position as Kremlin-appointed curator for Donbas issues. Kiriyenko's activities in Mariupol are consistent with previous assessments that the Kremlin intends to make Mariupol the focal point of a possible Russian declaration of some sort of victory on May 9, though Russian forces will continue offensive operations beyond this date regardless of any Kremlin claims.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of May 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



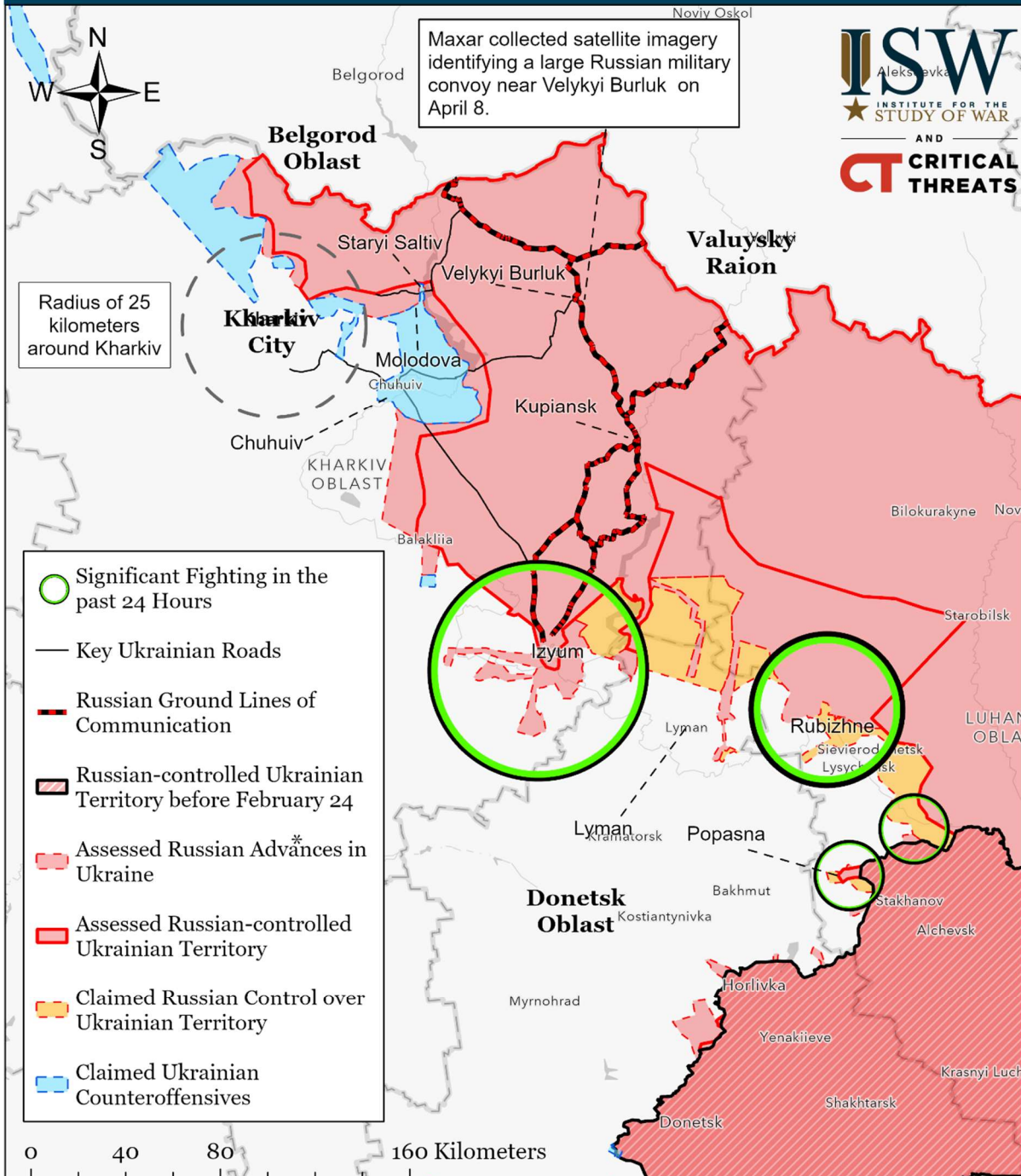
The Kremlin declared victory in Mariupol on April 21 after capturing the city besides Ukrainian holdouts in the encircled Azovstal Metallurgical Combine. Russian forces reportedly conducted an assault on remaining Ukrainian defenders at Azovstal on May 4. Ukrainian forces engaged in small-scale street fights in the Left Bank District outside Azovstal on April 27. Russian war reporters filmed some Russian elements redeploying from Mariupol northward on April 24 and April 25. The Ukrainian General Staff notably did not mention Ukrainian defensive activity near the port of Mariupol or Primorsky District on April 22, indicating Russian clearing efforts. The Kremlin will spin the (still incomplete) capture of Mariupol into a major victory in Ukraine to compensate for stalled or failed Russian offensives elsewhere.

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Supporting Effort #2—Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Continue to pressure Kharkiv City to fix Ukrainian defenders there and prevent their movement to reinforce defenders on other axes.)

Russian forces continued to reconnoiter and conduct air and artillery strikes on Ukrainian positions in Kharkiv City and surrounding settlements on May 4.²¹ Ukrainian forces did not conduct any confirmed counterattacks in the last 24 hours. However, additional Russian and Ukrainian sources notably confirmed the extent of the previously-reported Ukrainian counteroffensive that pushed Russian forces 40 kilometers east of Kharkiv to Staryi Saltiv.²²

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of May 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Thomas Bergeron
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* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

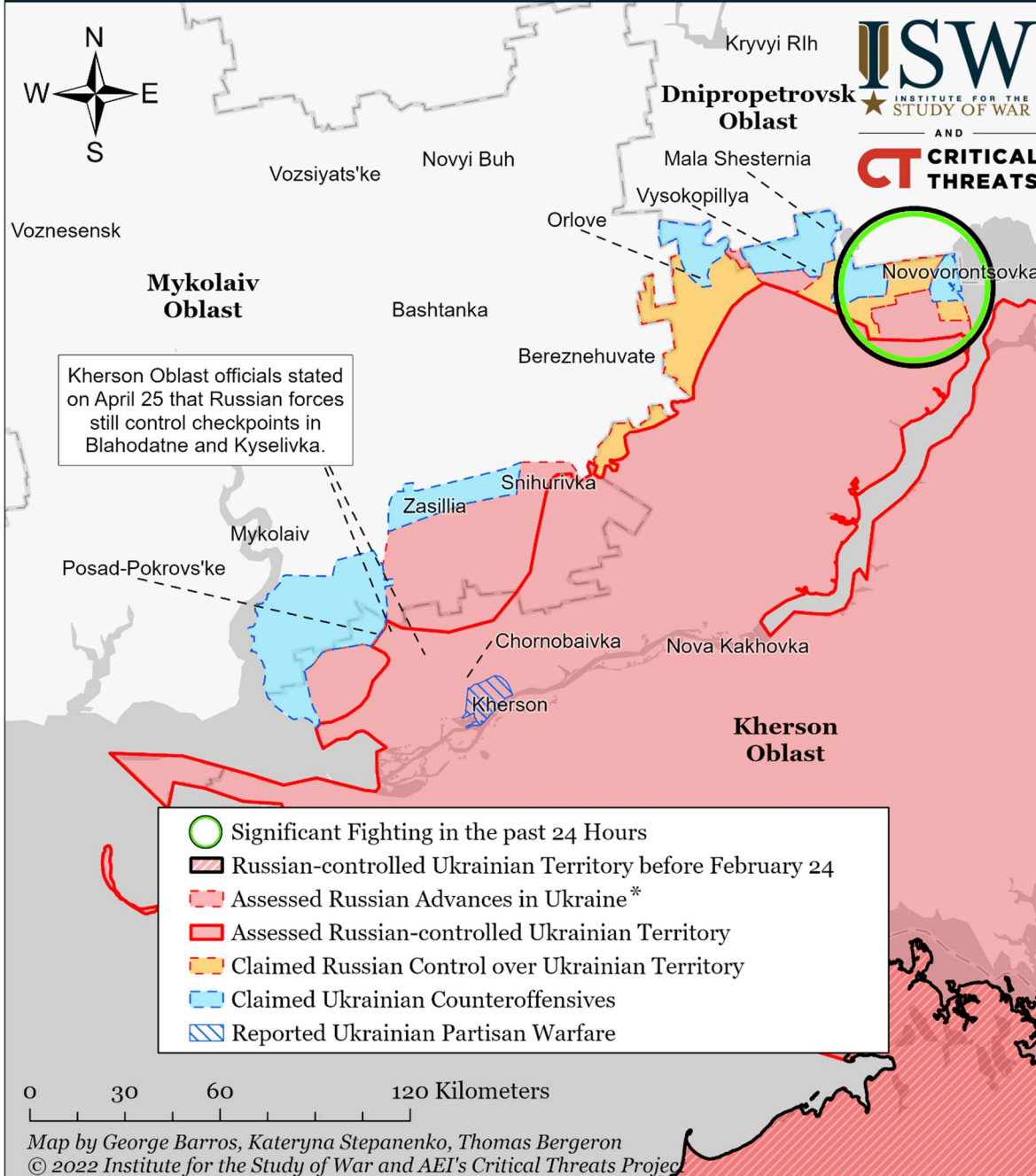
Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces conducted an unsuccessful ground offensive in the direction of Zaporizhia City and intensified shelling in Kherson Oblast on May 4.²³ The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian forces may intend to conduct additional offensives in Zaporizhia and Kryvyi Rih areas while continuing operations in Donbas.²⁴ Russian forces attempted unsuccessful assaults on Novosilka, Donetsk Oblast, and Orihiv, Zaporizhia Oblast, likely to push towards the N15 highway running from Donetsk to Zaporizhia City.²⁵ Ukrainian artillery continued to target Russian supply lines running to occupied Zaporizhia Oblast settlements from Donbas, destroying a Russian convoy on May 4.²⁶

Russian forces intensified shelling in southwest and northeast Kherson Oblast on May 4.²⁷ The Kherson Oblast Administration reported that Russian forces are attempting to launch offensives on Knyazivka, Mala Shestirnya, and Novovoznesenske to gain a foothold in Mykolaiv and Dnepropetrovsk Oblasts.²⁸ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command South reported reestablishing control over four unspecified villages on the Kherson-Mykolaiv Oblast border likely in the Snihurvika area, but ISW cannot confirm Ukrainian claims or the location of the reportedly liberated villages.²⁹

The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) said that Russia seeks to use Transnistria to achieve psychological effects pinning Ukrainian forces to keep them from deploying to Donbas.³⁰ The GUR noted that there are only 300 able-bodied servicemen in the Russian Special Task Force in Transnistria and that they are equipped with old ammunition. The three Russian missile attacks on Odesa on May 3 were likely part of this psychological campaign in addition to targeting unspecified infrastructure.³¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Kherson Oblast officials stated on April 25 that Russian forces still control checkpoints in Blahodatne and Kyselivka.

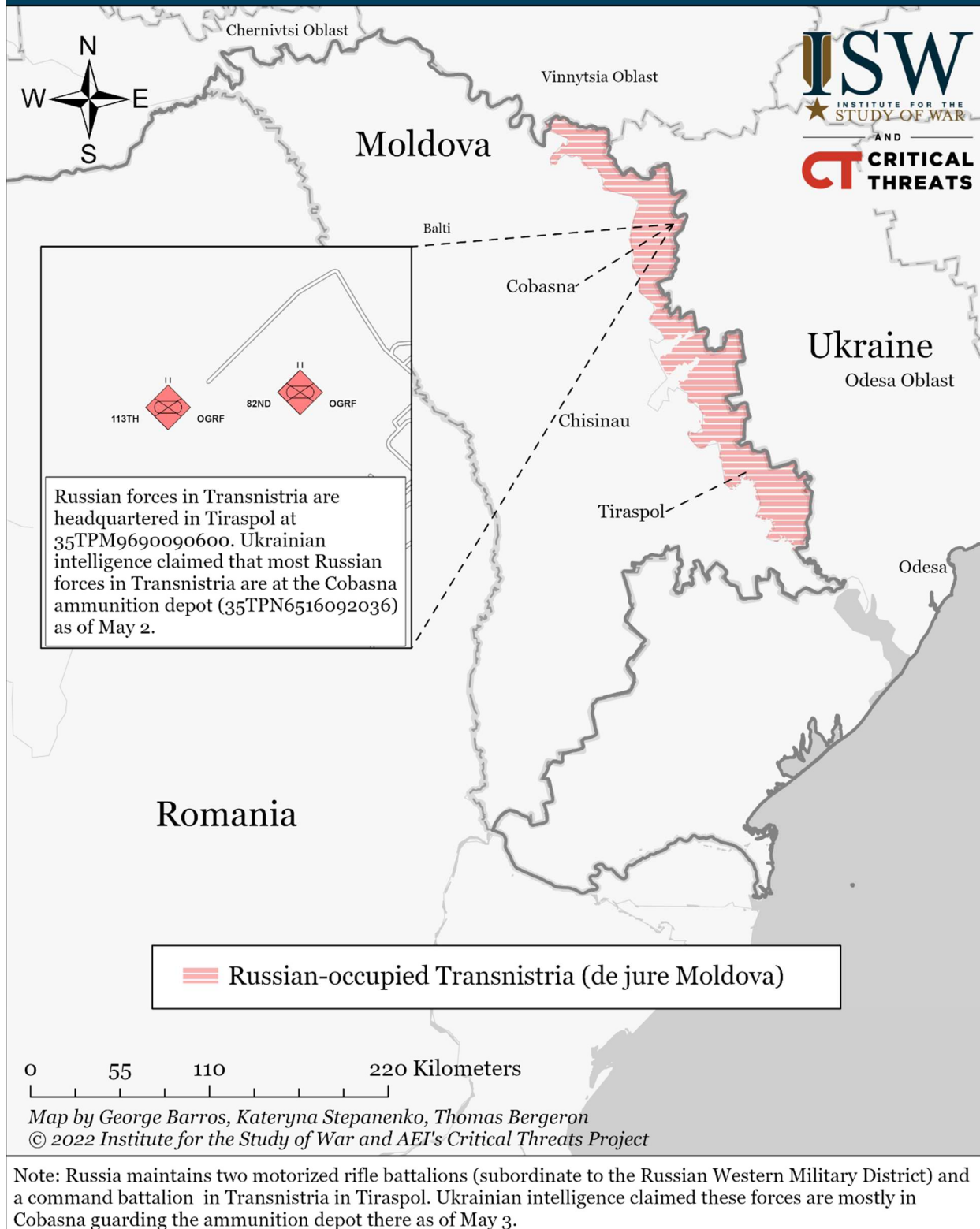
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine *
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

0 30 60 120 Kilometers

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

Note: We recoded Russian control over Zolota Balka and Shevchenkivka, Kherson Oblast, to Russian assessed advances based on the Kherson Oblast Administration report of Russian artillery fire in the area on May 4. Ukrainian forces also announced regaining control over four unspecified villages along the Kherson-Mykolaiv border on May 3. ISW will update our map once open sources name the liberated settlements.

Moldova Situational Map as of May 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced a “sudden test” of the reaction forces of the Belarusian Armed Forces on May 4.³² The Belarusian MoD stated that the inspection will test the readiness and overall ability of troops to respond to “crisis situations” and will involve simulated land and air threats. The inspection will reportedly entail significant movement of military vehicles and equipment. The readiness test is unlikely to impact the situation on the northeastern axis in Ukraine, and Belarusian forces remain unlikely to enter the war in Ukraine, but ISW will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as necessary.

Immediate items to watch

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

¹ https://t.me/kozytskyy_maksym_official/2402; https://t.me/kozytskyy_maksym_official/2396; https://t.me/mod_russia/15152; <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1521591971575472135>; <https://twitter.com/AndriySadovyi/status/1521568004093456386>; <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/05/04/bombarduvalnyky-tu-160-rosarmiyi-zdijsnyly-18-puskiv-krylatyh-raket-po-obyektah-na-terytoriyi-ukrayiny/>; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/308875351425550>; <https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/840>

² <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521883550810787840>

³ <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521877939033452545>;

<https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521877342368501760>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/308875351425550>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/309269478052804>;

⁵ <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521883162619650053>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521876703504654336>; <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521883162619650053>;

<https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521876856877821953>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1521561520408350726>;

https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1521582981537804288; <https://t.me/romandonik/2866>;

<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1521644176160477185>; <https://t.me/mysiagin/8184>;

<https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1521559040308002817>;

https://twitter.com/Blue_Sauron/status/1521557829970235392

⁸ <https://twitter.com/DefMon3/status/1521559361541263363>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/308875351425550>;
<https://twitter.com/DefMon3/status/1521559361541263363>

⁹ https://t.me/mod_russia/15152

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/308875351425550>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/308875351425550>

¹² <https://twitter.com/bradyafr/status/1521557753273241601>;
<https://twitter.com/bradyafr/status/1521557753273241601>

¹³ <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/2303>

¹⁴ https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1521814402047127552;
<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1521608241213579265>;
<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1521610014431002624>; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/46703

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1521825660645355520>;
https://twitter.com/MarQs_/status/1521830798013440000; <https://www.ppravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/05/4/7343969/>; <https://t.me/mariupolnow/9120>; <https://meduza.io/news/2022/05/04/vlasti-ukrainy-zayavili-chto-rossiyskie-voennye-popali-na-territoriyu-azovstali>; https://military.ppravda.ru/news/1705445-kiev_poterjal_svjaz/

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1521825660645355520>;
https://twitter.com/MarQs_/status/1521830798013440000; <https://www.ppravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/05/4/7343969/>; <https://t.me/mariupolnow/9120>; <https://meduza.io/news/2022/05/04/vlasti-ukrainy-zayavili-chto-rossiyskie-voennye-popali-na-territoriyu-azovstali>; https://military.ppravda.ru/news/1705445-kiev_poterjal_svjaz/

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521878163479015424>;
<https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521883986959777800>

¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521877149266886657>

¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1521878163479015424>

²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/DefenceIntelligenceofUkraine/posts/304843568493737>; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/637>

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/308875351425550>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/309269478052804>; <https://t.me/synegubov/3080>; <https://t.me/synegubov/3084>

²² <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1521582011286274048>; https://t.me/rian_ru/161649; <https://t.me/epoddubny/10333>

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/100064555155257/posts/360774159417753/?d=n>;

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/309269478052804>

²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/309269478052804>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/308875351425550>

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/markito0171/status/1521746317705371650>;
<https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1521762783045595144>

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/100064555155257/posts/360774159417753/?d=n>;
<https://www.facebook.com/100064555155257/posts/360774159417753/?d=n>

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/100064555155257/posts/360774159417753/?d=n>

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=517591600041611>

³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/DefenceIntelligenceofUkraine/posts/304867625157998>

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=517591600041611>

³² <https://t.me/modmilby/13660>