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May 20, 2025, 5:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15 am ET on May 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Senior Russian officials continue to deny the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and constitution and Ukraine's sovereignty despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent efforts to feign interest in peace negotiations to end the war.

Russian Security Council Secretary Dmitry Medvedev claimed during the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum on May 20 that there are currently no Ukrainian officials with the authority to conclude a peace treaty with Russia and that Russia may need to consult Ukraine's Constitution to identify authorized negotiation partners.[1] Medvedev questioned Ukraine's sovereignty and claimed that Ukraine is a "failed state" whose leaders' lack of legitimacy raises "serious questions" about who Russia can negotiate with during future peace negotiations.[2] Medvedev's claims directly contradict Putin's reported agreement with US President Donald Trump to immediately begin bilateral negotiations with Ukraine.[3] Medvedev's statements indicate that Russia is, in fact, not interested in engaging with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other senior Ukrainian government officials who are key to bilateral negotiations to end the war.

Russian officials have repeatedly promoted the false narrative that Zelensky and the Ukrainian government are illegitimate to justify Russia's refusal to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine and further Russia's long-standing war goal of establishing a pro-Russian puppet government in Kyiv.[4] Ukraine's Constitution and Ukrainian law explicitly state that Ukraine cannot hold elections while martial law is in place and that Ukrainian authorities cannot lift martial law while "the threat of attack or danger to the state independence of Ukraine and its territorial integrity" remains.[5] Zelensky also recently clarified that a September 2022 presidential decree does not preclude him from negotiating with Putin.[6] Chairperson of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada Foreign Affairs Committee Oleksandr Merezhko recently stated that Ukraine's Constitution "clearly" specifies Zelensky as Ukraine's chief negotiator and noted that Zelensky's constitutional powers allow him to override past decrees.[7] **ISW continues to assess that 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.[8]**

Medvedev also reiterated long-standing Russian demands tantamount to Ukraine's complete capitulation. Medvedev falsely claimed that Russia's illegal annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and Crimea was legitimate under international law, underscoring Russia's unwillingness to make any concessions in peace negotiations to end the war in

Ukraine.[9] Medvedev also demanded that Ukraine demilitarize the current frontline, refuse foreign military aid, and reject European peacekeeping deployments to Ukraine.[10] Medvedev stated that Russia would consider the deployment of European forces to be a military threat and categorize future deployments of European forces in Ukraine as legitimate military targets.[11] Medvedev's statements indicate that Russia has not abandoned its original goals in Ukraine, which include the "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine, securing international recognition of large parts of southern and eastern Ukraine as Russian territory, and a permanent non-aligned status for Ukraine.[12] Medvedev's threats against future European peacekeepers are also part of an ongoing effort to frame the current war in Ukraine as an existential conflict between Russia and the West.[13] Medvedev's statements indicate that Putin has not ordered Russian officials to abandon ongoing narrative efforts to discredit Ukraine in response to promises that Putin allegedly made to Trump and that Putin likely does not intend to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine.

Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine and support Ukraine's defense industry. Italian media reported in mid-May 2025 that Italian Defense Minister Guido Crosetto announced that Italy approved an eleventh military aid package for Ukraine, which will include one SAMP/T air and missile defense system, 400 M-113 armored personnel carriers, and ammunition.[14] Ukrainian state-owned defense enterprise manager Ukroboronprom reported on May 20 that it signed a memorandum of cooperation with Belgian ammunition manufacturer KNDS Belgium to coordinate the joint assembly of medium-caliber ammunition for automatic cannons.[15]

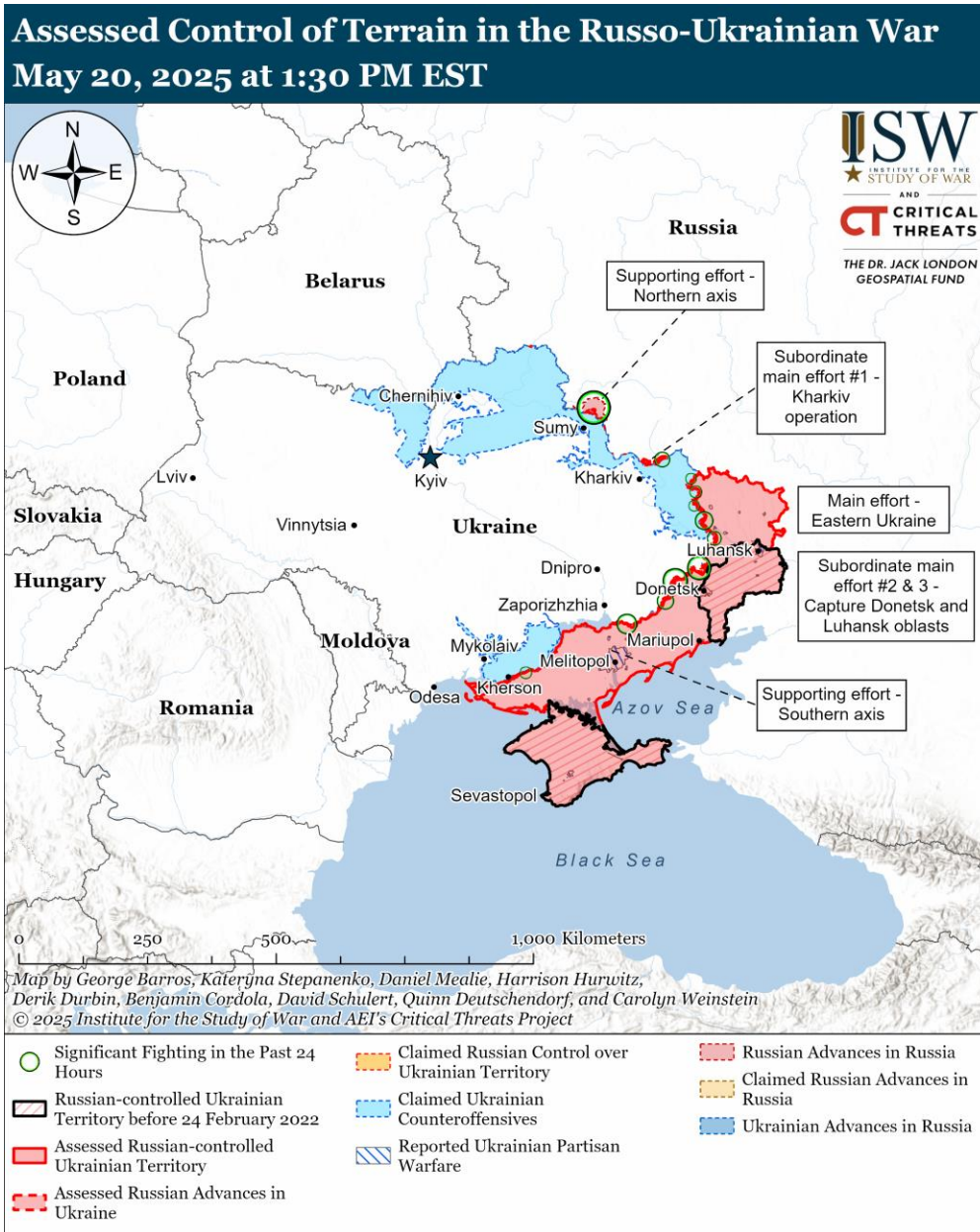
The European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) announced several sanctions packages against Russia on May 20.[16] The package is the EU's largest targeting Russia's shadow fleet and the Russian energy and military-industrial sector.[17] The EU also sanctioned the Russian Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops; the 27th Scientific Center; and the Russian Ministry of Defense's 33rd Central Scientific Research and Testing Institute for Russia's use of chemical weapons in Ukraine.[18] The UK also announced new sanctions against Russia's military, energy, and financial sectors on May 20.[19]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed Colonel General Valery Solodchuk's recent appointment as Central Military District (CMD) commander on May 20.[20] Solodchuk most recently served as commander of the Kursk Grouping of Forces and led Russia's efforts to eliminate the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast.[21] Solodchuk is replacing Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev, who reportedly recently replaced General Oleg Salyukov as Russian Ground Forces Commander.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- **Senior Russian officials continue to deny the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and constitution and Ukraine's sovereignty despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent efforts to feign interest in peace negotiations to end the war.**
- **Medvedev also reiterated long-standing Russian demands tantamount to Ukraine's complete capitulation.**

- **Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine and support Ukraine's defense industry.**
- **The European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) announced several sanctions packages against Russia on May 20.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed Colonel General Valery Solodchuk's recent appointment as Central Military District (CMD) commander on May 20.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts, near Chasiv Yar and Toretsk, and in the Zaporizhzhia direction.**



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 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

Alleged Ceasefire Violations

There are no active ceasefires in Ukraine.

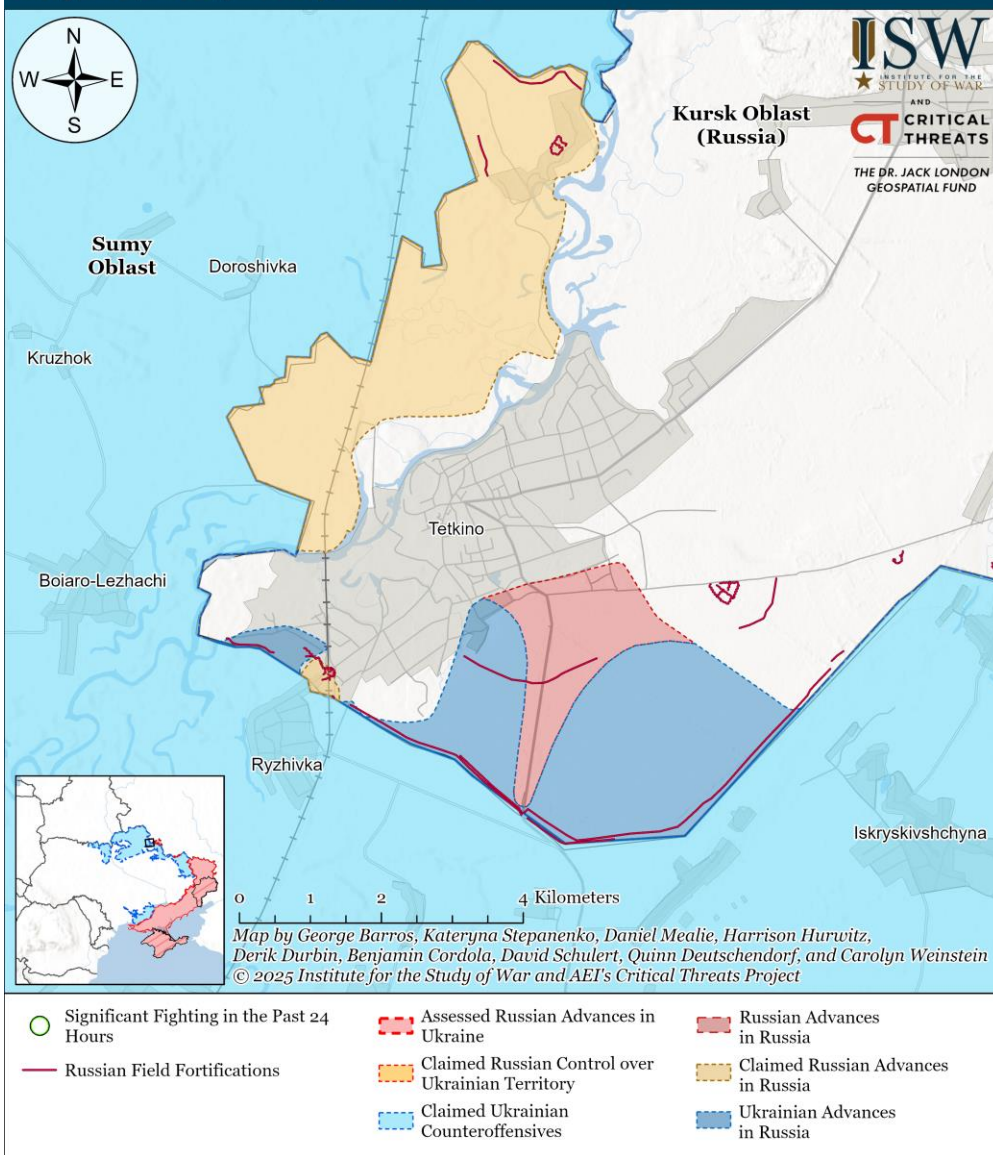
Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation

Ukrainian forces reportedly continued limited ground attacks in Kursk Oblast on May 20 but did not advance.

Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted limited attacks near Tetkino and Volfino (east of Tetkino).[23]

A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces remain unable to consolidate positions within Tetkino and that the situation near Gornal (southwest of Sudzha) is covered in the "fog of war." [24]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Tetkino May 20, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST

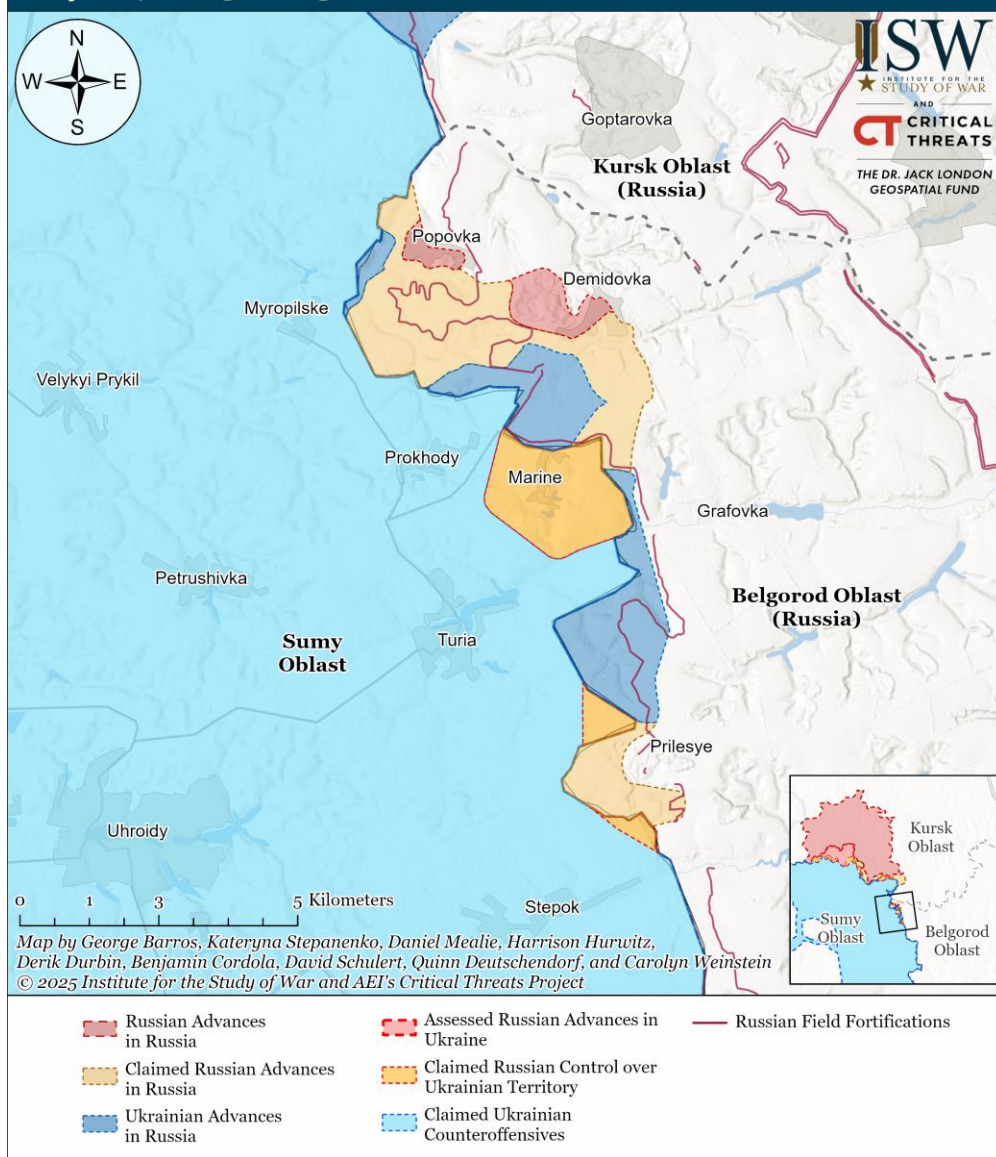


Fighting continued in the northwesternmost Belgorod Oblast on May 20.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed on May 19 that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from Demidovka and Popovka (both northwest of Belgorod City) and advanced west of Prilesye (south of Demidovka).[25]

A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked near Demidovka and Popovka.[26]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Belgorod Direction May 20, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



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

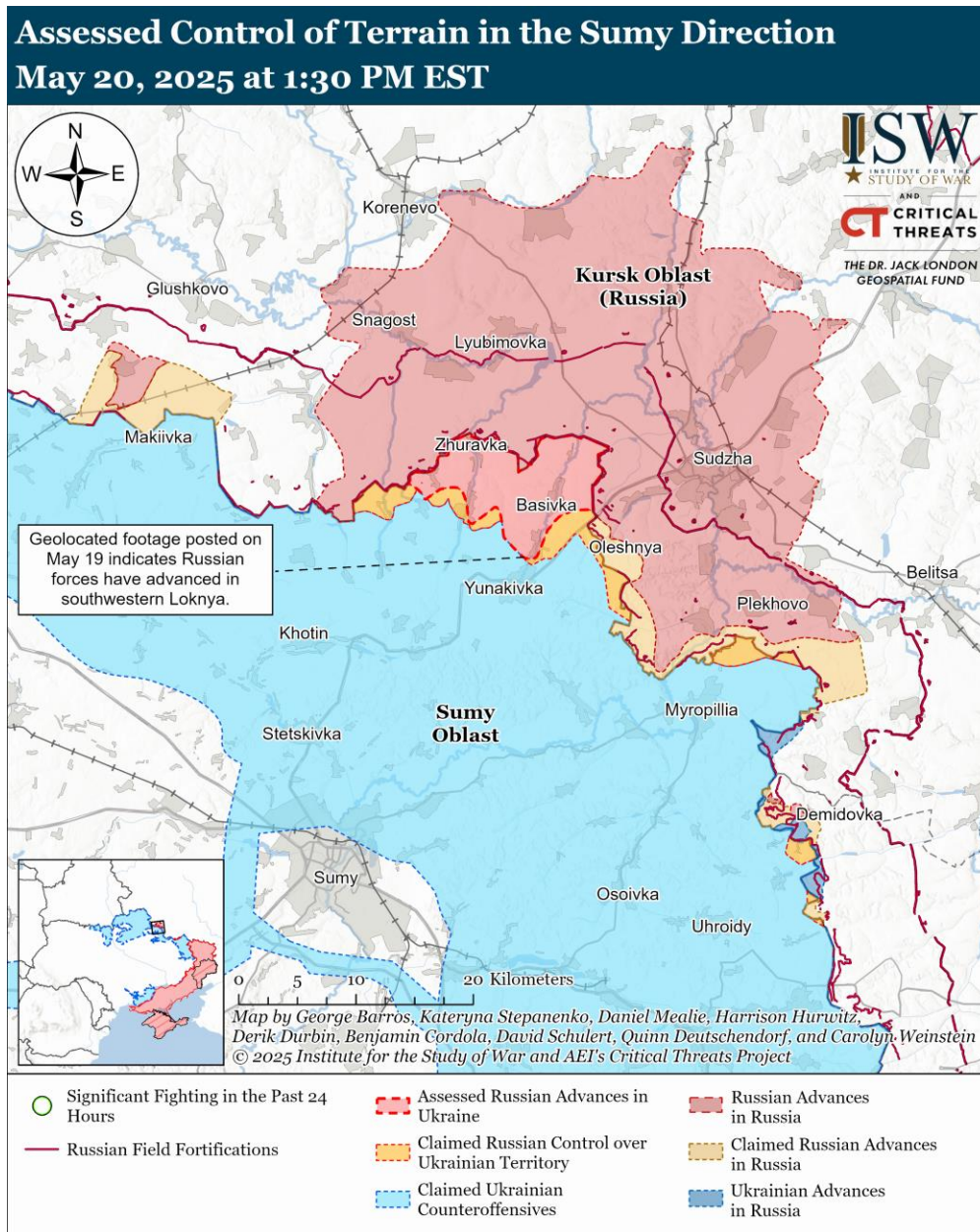
Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast.

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 19 shows that Russian forces advanced within southwestern Loknya (northeast of Sumy City) and seized the fields west of the settlement.[27]

Unconfirmed claims: Russian sources claimed that Russian forces seized all of Loknya and advanced across the international border near Turia (east of Sumy City).[28]

Russian forces continued attacks within Loknya and near Bilovody (northwest of Loknya) and Vodolahy (west of Loknya) on May 19 and 20.[29]

Order of Battle: A reconnaissance company of the Russian 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) is reportedly operating near Bilovody and Vodolahy.[30]



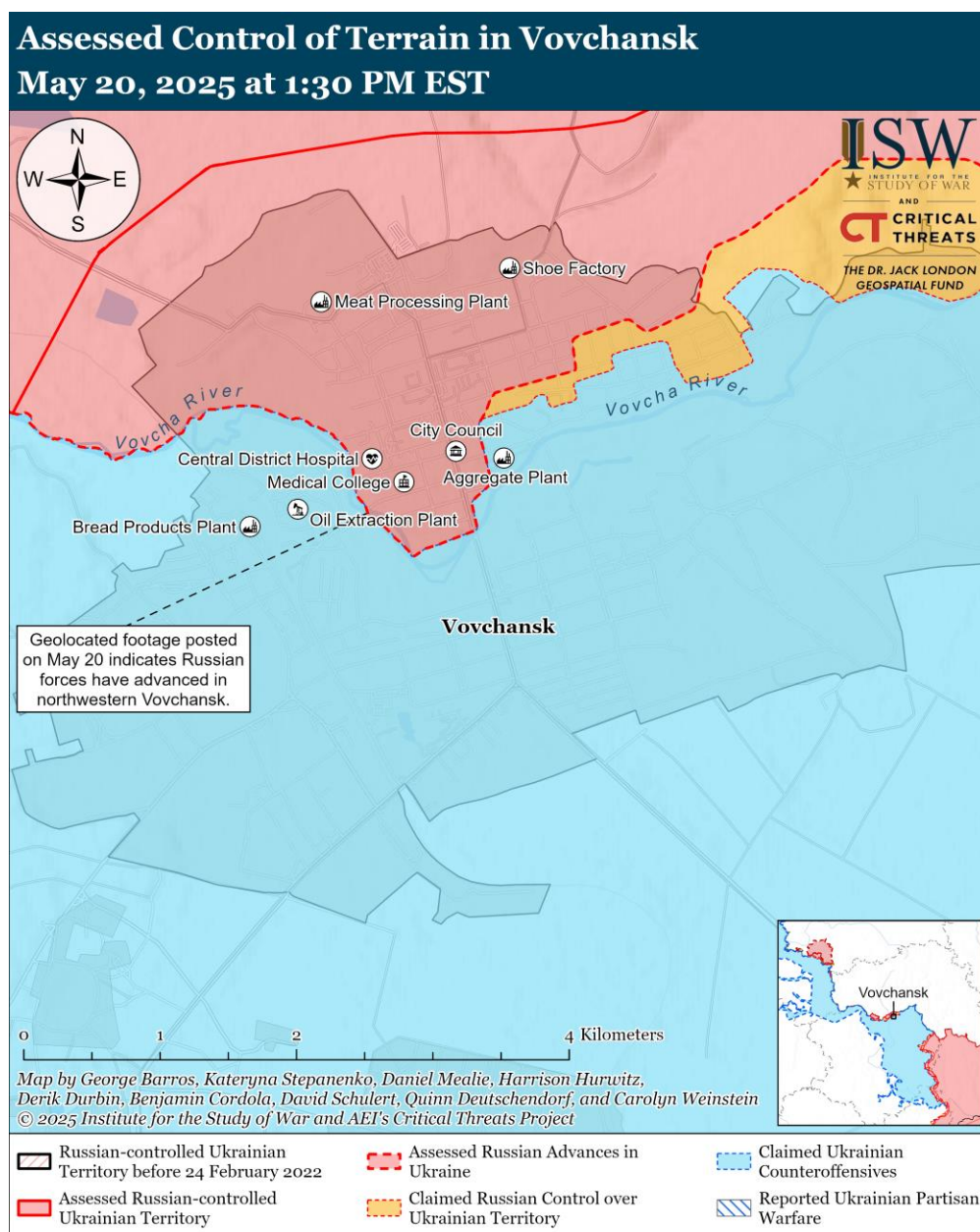
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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)

Russian forces recently advanced in northern Kharkiv Oblast.

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 20 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced across the Vovcha River in northwestern Vovchansk (northeast of Kharkiv City), but it is unclear if Russian forces maintain positions in this area.[31]

Russian forces continued assaults near Vovchansk on May 19 and 20.[32]



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 continued offensive operations in the Kupyansk direction on May 20 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian source claimed on May 20 that Russian forces advanced in the forest and along the railroad line near Kolisnykivka (southeast of Kupyansk).[33]

Russian forces attacked north of Kupyansk toward Kutkivka and along the international border near Stroivka and southwest of Kupyansk toward Pishchane on May 19 and 20.[34]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Chechen "Sheikh Mansur" volunteer battalion are reportedly operating in the international border area near Stroivka.[35]

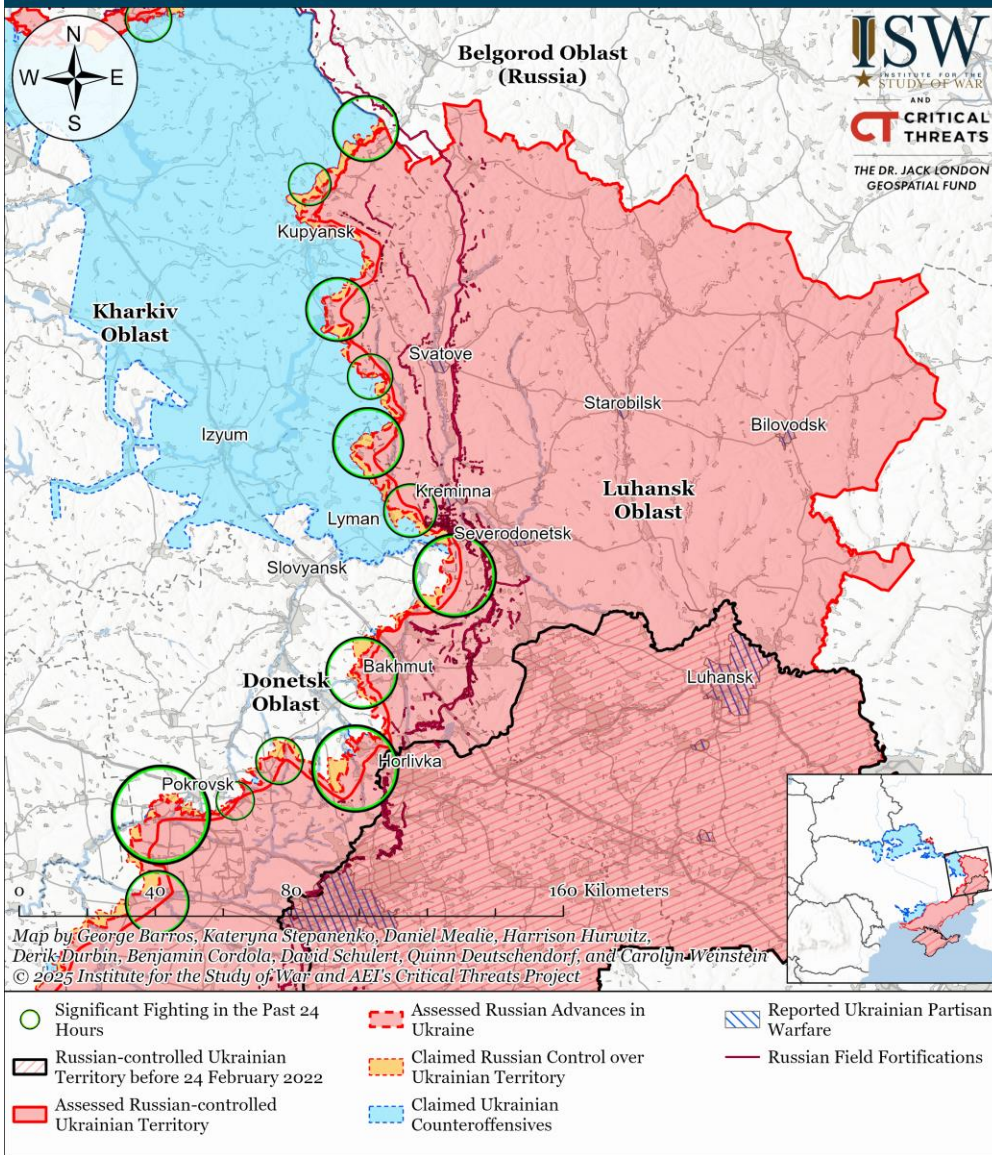
Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations in the Borova direction on May 20.

Russian forces attacked northeast of Borova near Zahryzove, east of Borova near Kopanky, and southeast of Borova near Hrekivka on May 19 and 20.[36]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Lyman direction on May 20 but did not advance.

Russian forces attacked north of Lyman near Novomykhailivka, Ridkodub, Novyi Myr, Hlushchenkove, and Zelena Dolyna, and toward Olhivka and Karpivka, and northeast of Lyman near Yampolivka and Torske on May 19 and 20.[37] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked in Torske.[38]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Luhansk Oblast May 20, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



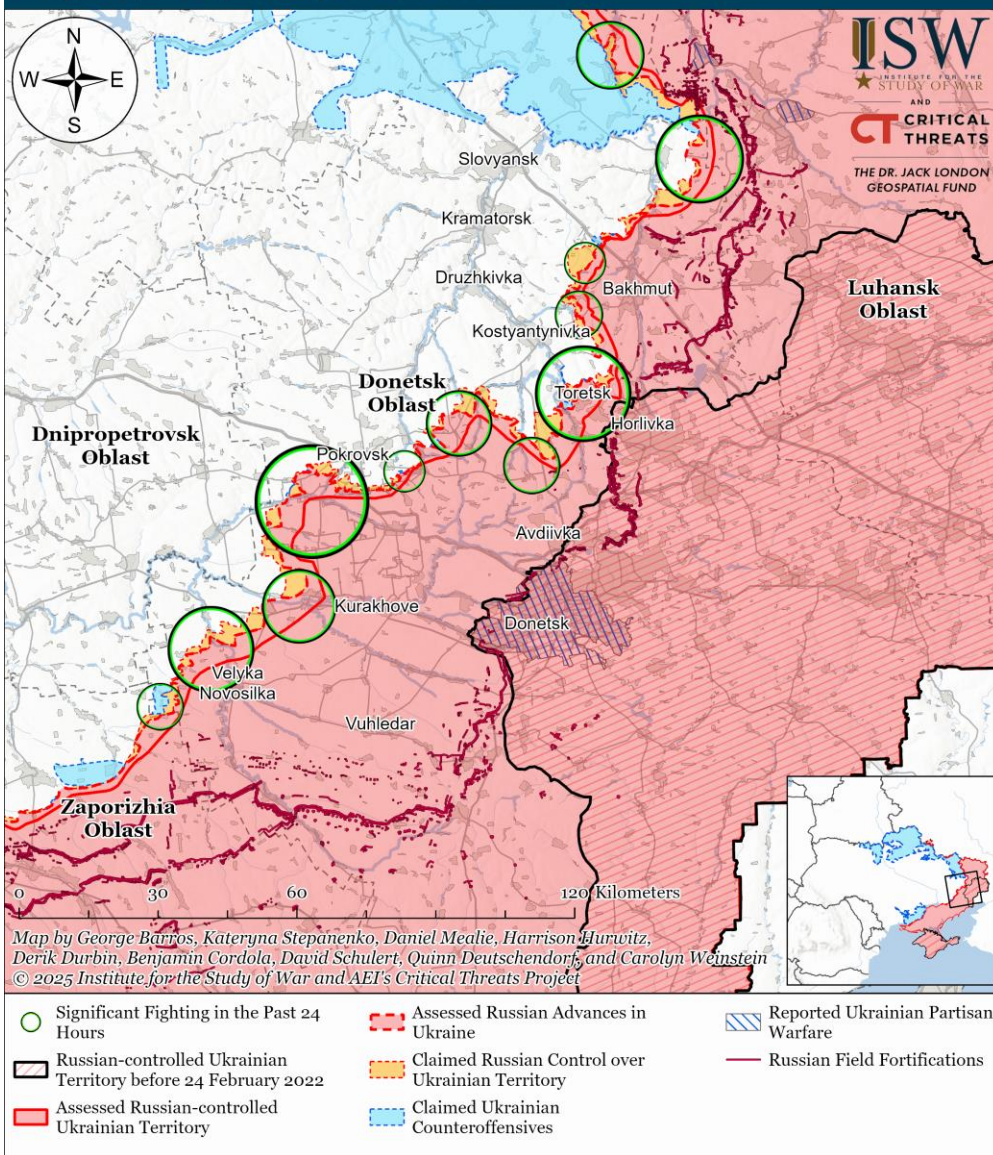
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas, and possibly advance into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast)

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Siversk direction on May 20 but did not advance.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 600 meters deep along windbreaks southeast of Hryhorivka (northeast of Siversk) and north of Verkhokamyanske (east of Siversk).[39]

Russian forces continued ground attacks northeast of Siversk near Serebryanka, Hryhorivka, and Bilohorivka and east of Siversk near Verkhokamyanske on May 19 and 20.[40]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Donetsk Oblast May 20, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



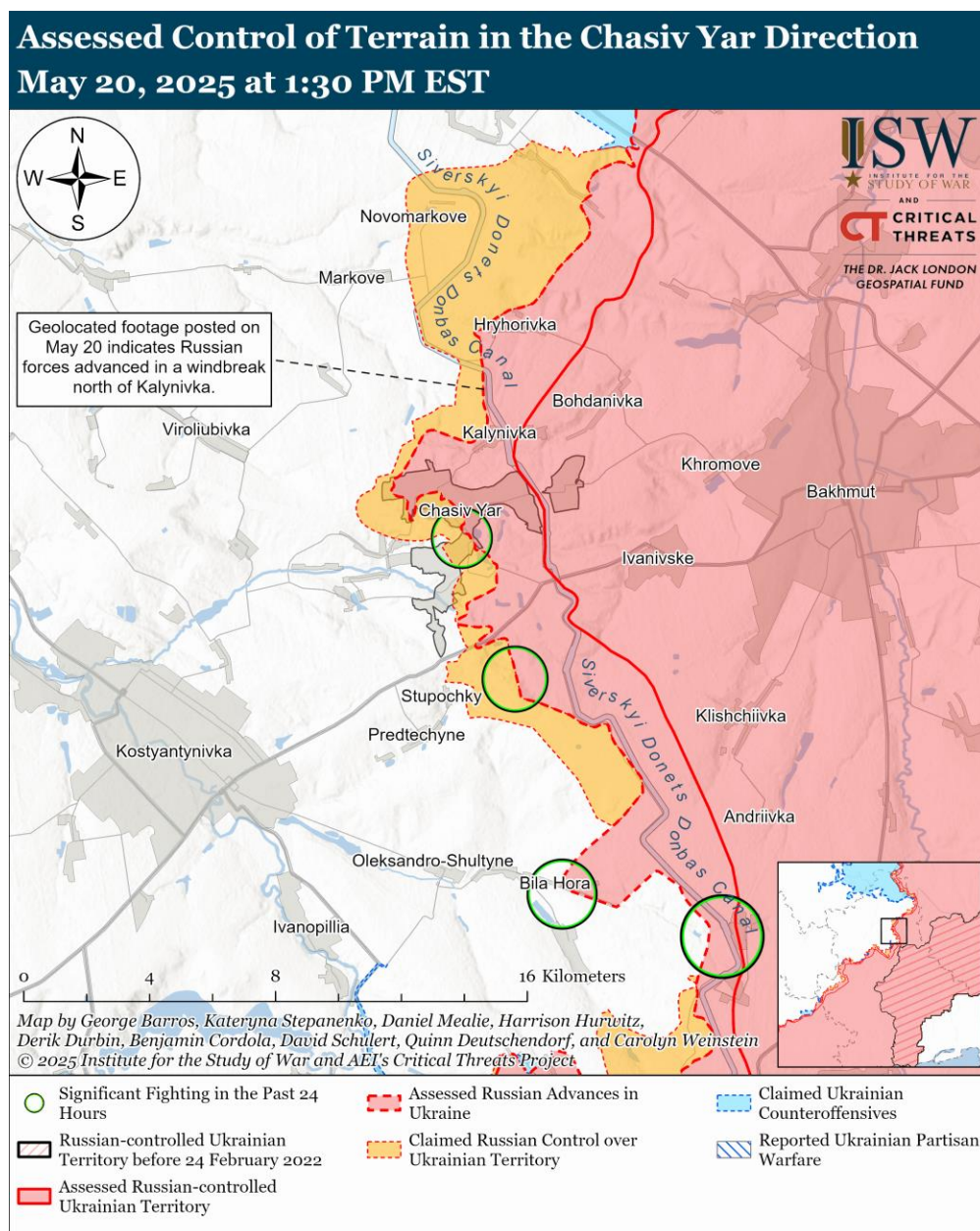
Russian forces recently advanced in the Chasiv Yar direction.

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 20 shows that Russian forces recently advanced north of Kalynivka (north of Chasiv Yar).[41]

Russian forces continued ground attacks near Chasiv Yar, south of Chasiv Yar near Bila Hora, and toward Predtechyne, and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Kurdyumivka on May 19 and 20.[42]

The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Chasiv Yar direction reported that Russian forces have been accumulating forces in Chasiv Yar for an unspecified period of time and are now leveraging this larger force grouping to attempt to break out of the settlement.[43] The spokesperson reported that Russian forces are actively attempting to raze buildings in central Chasiv Yar in order to facilitate further advances.

Ukrainian Slovyansk City Military Administration Head Vadym Lyakh reported that Russian forces struck central Slovyansk with a long-range Geran-2 (Shahed variant) drone, which Russian forces typically use against targets in deep rear areas of Ukraine.[44]



Russian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk direction.

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 19 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in western Toretsk and east of Nova Poltavka (west of Toretsk) along the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway.[45] Additional geolocated footage published on May 20 indicates that Russian forces recently marginally advanced north of Toretsk.[46]

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced further north of Toretsk and near Romanivka (west of Toretsk), reached the southern outskirts of Stara Mykolaivka

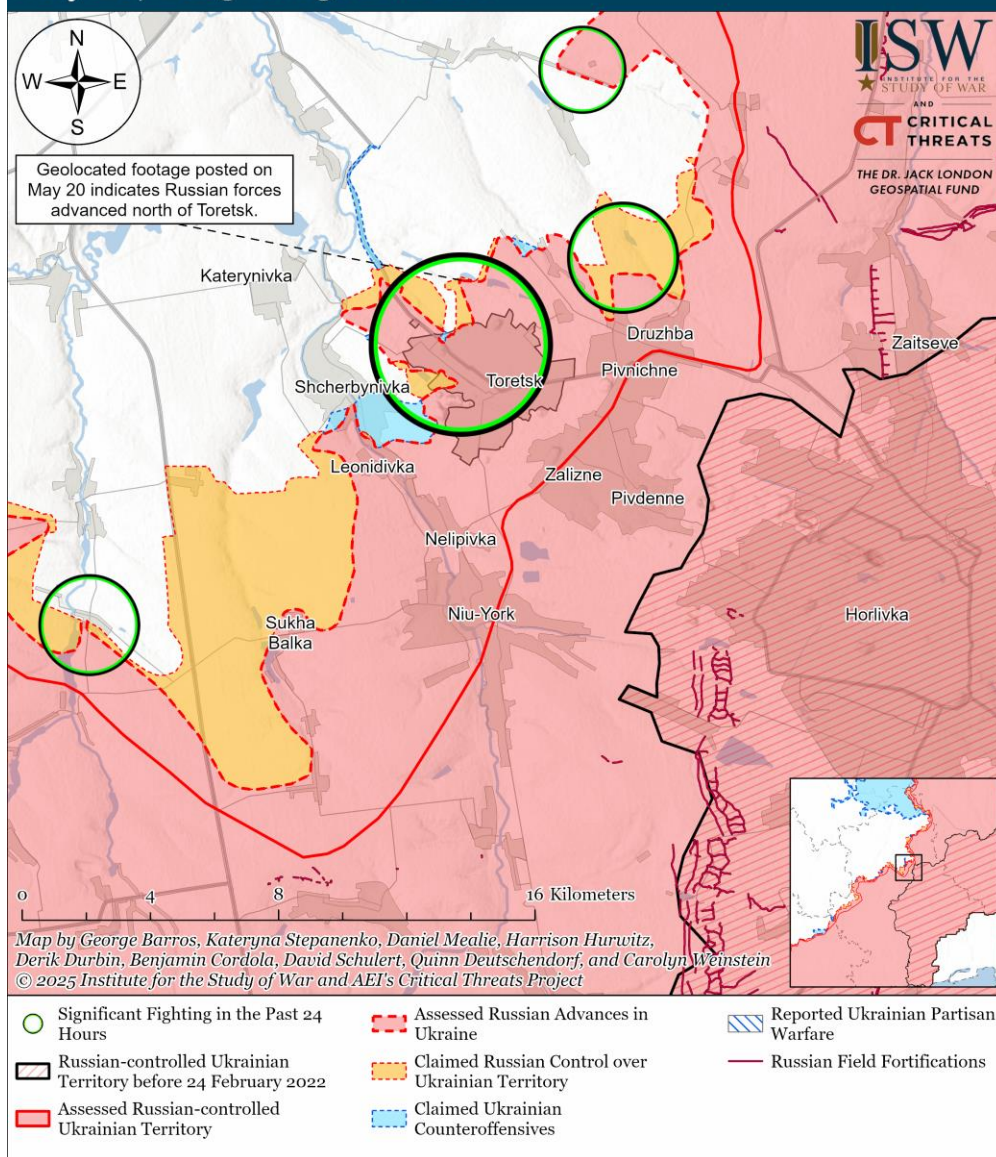
(southwest of Toretsk) and Poltavka (west of Toretsk), and entered eastern Yablunivka (west of Toretsk).[47]

Russian forces continued ground attacks near Toretsk itself; north of Toretsk toward Ivanopillya and Pleshchiivka; northeast of Toretsk near Druzhba and Dachne and toward Dyliivka; southwest of Toretsk near Stara Mykolaivka, Nova Poltavka, and toward Zorya; and west of Toretsk near Yablunivka and toward Popiv Yar on May 19 and 20.[48]

Ukrainian Luhansk Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Dmytro Zaporozhets reported that Russian forces are attempting to advance near Dyliivka and Dachne and toward Romanivka on the flanks of Toretsk to bypass more urban areas in the Toretsk direction.[49]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 255th and 33rd motorized rifle regiments (both 20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating in the Kostyantynivka direction.[50] Elements of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division are also reportedly fighting near Nova Poltavka.[51]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Toretsk Direction May 20, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



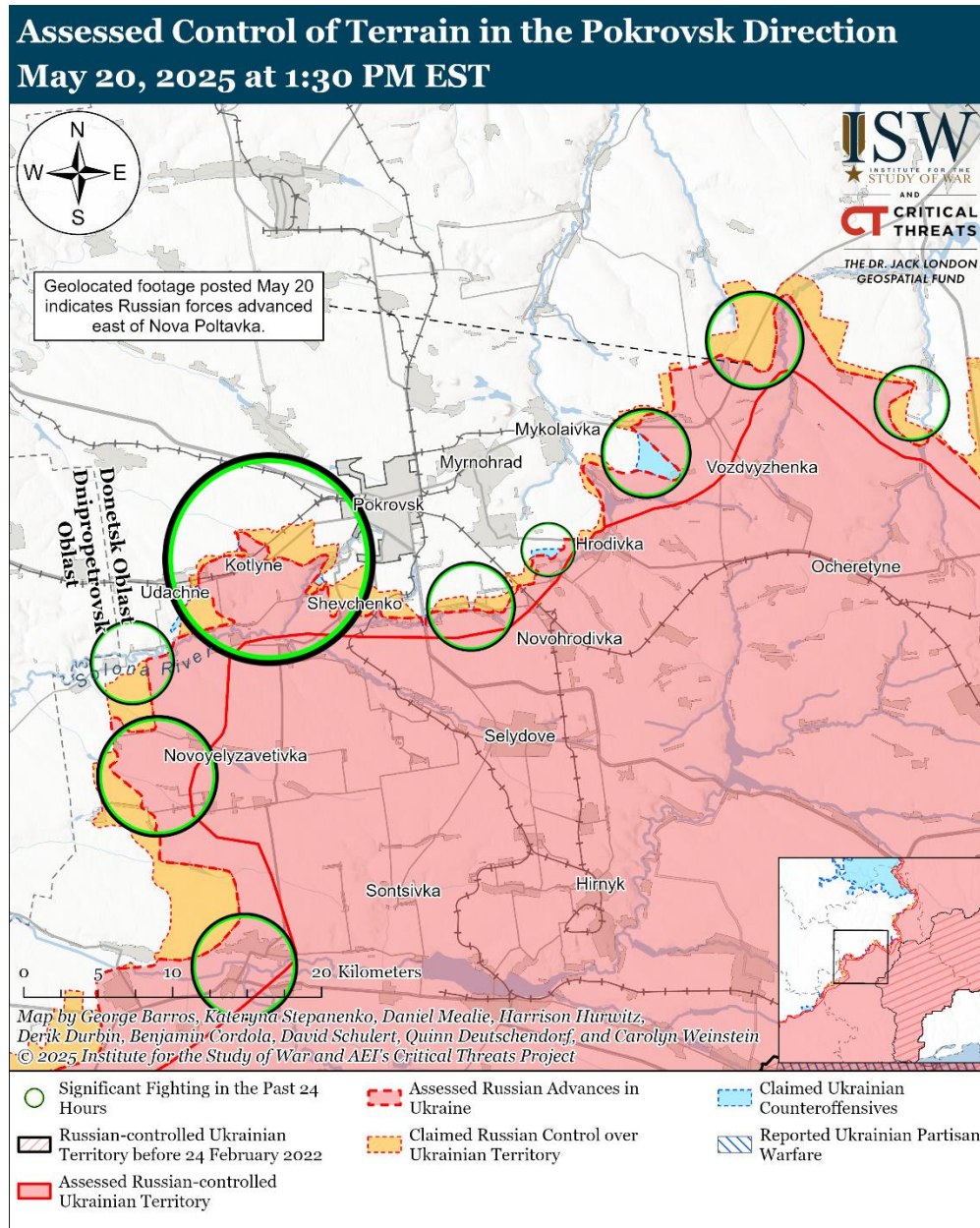
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction on May 20 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 68th Army Corps (Eastern Military District [EMD]) recently advanced to the outskirts of Shevchenko Pershe (northeast of Pokrovsk) and are trying to advance further north of Malynivka (northeast of Pokrovsk).[52]

Russian forces continued assaults northeast of Pokrovsk near Malynivka and Yelyzavetivka and toward Shevchenko Pershe; east of Pokrovsk near Myrolyubivka, Hrodivka, Myrnohrad, and Promin; southeast of Pokrovsk near Lysivka; south of Pokrovsk near Novoukrainka, Dachenske, Shevchenko, and Zvirove and toward Chunyshyne; and southwest of Pokrovsk near Udachne and toward Zelenivka and Pershe Travnaya on May 19 and 20.[53]

A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces in the Pokrovsk direction are leveraging poor weather conditions to attack this part of the front.[54]

Order of Battle: First-person view (FPV) drone operators of the Russian "Maxim Krivonos" volunteer detachment are reportedly striking Ukrainian positions near Novoukrainka and Udachne.[55]



Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Novopavlivka direction on May 20 but did not advance.

Russian forces attacked northeast of Novopavlivka near Novoserhiivka and towards Novomykolaivka, and east of Novopavlivka near Troitske and Kotlyarivka on May 19 and 20.[56]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kurakhove direction on May 20 but did not make confirmed advances.

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

Russian forces attacked west of Kurakhove near Kostyantynopil, Andriivka, Oleksiivka, and Bahatyr, and southwest of Kurakhove toward Odradne on May 19 and 20.[58] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked north of Odradne.[59]

Order of Battle: First-person view (FPV) drone operators of the Russian "Maxim Krivonos" volunteer detachment are reportedly striking Ukrainian positions near Oleksiivka.[60]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Velyka Novosilka direction on May 20 but did not make confirmed advances.

Unconfirmed claims: Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced near Fedorivka (northwest of Velyka Novosilka).[61]

Russian forces attacked northwest of Velyka Novosilka near Zelene Pole, Privilne, Burlatske, and Vesele, and southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Novopil and Rivnopil.[62] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Zelene Pole, Novopil, and Komar (northwest of Velyka Novosilka).[63]

Order of Battle: Elements of the Russian 5th Tank Brigade (36th CAA, EMD) and 336th Naval Infantry Brigade (Baltic Fleet) are reportedly operating in the Shakhtarske (Velyka Novosilka) direction.[64]

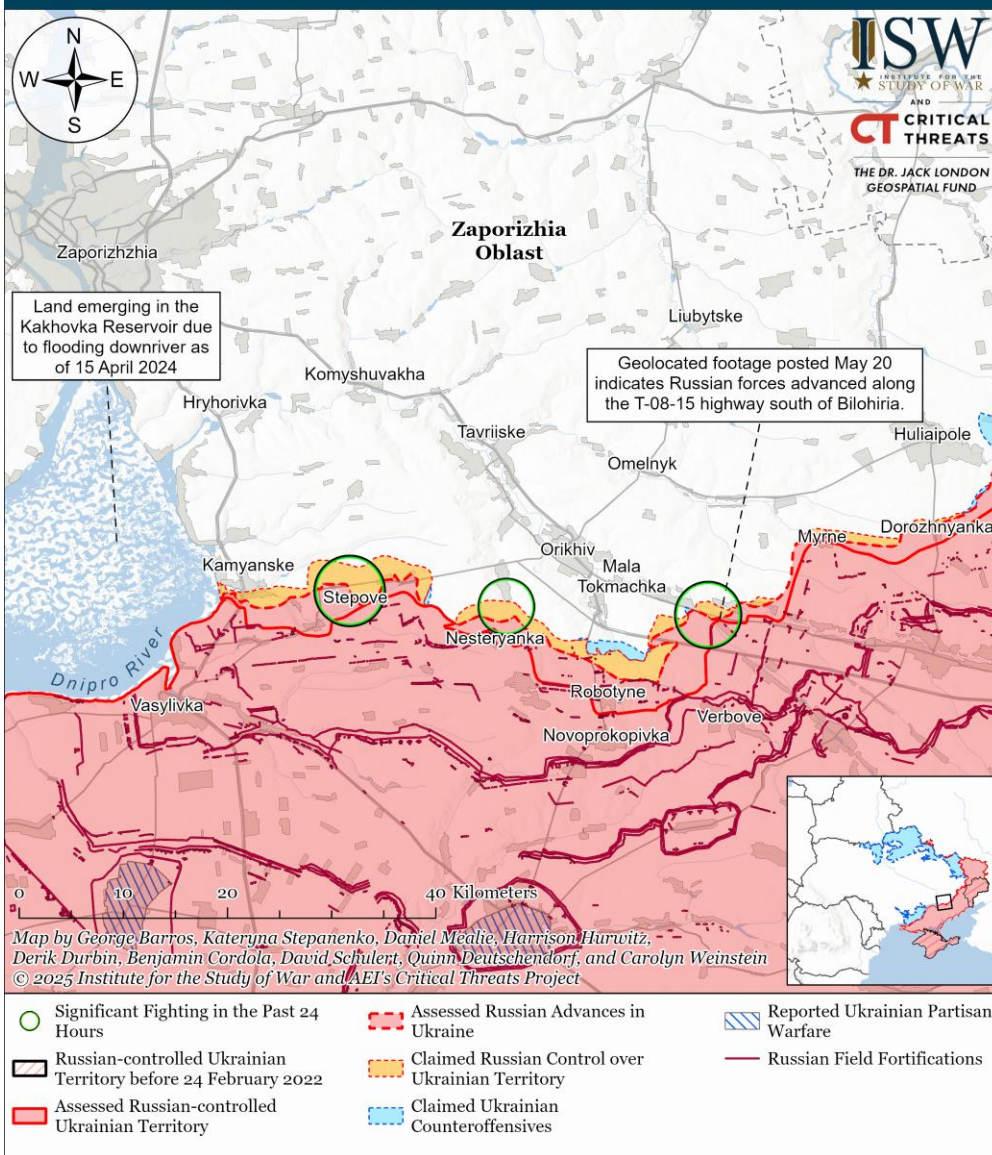
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions, secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes, and advance within tube artillery range of Zaporizhzhia City)

Russian forces recently advanced in the Zaporizhia direction.

Assessed Russian advances: Geolocated footage published on May 19 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Bilohirya (southeast of Orikhiv).[65]

Russian forces attacked southeast of Orikhiv near Mala Tokmachka and southwest of Orikhiv near Mali Shcherbaky, Novoandriivka, and Stepove on May 19 and 20.[66] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Robotyne (south of Orikhiv).[67]

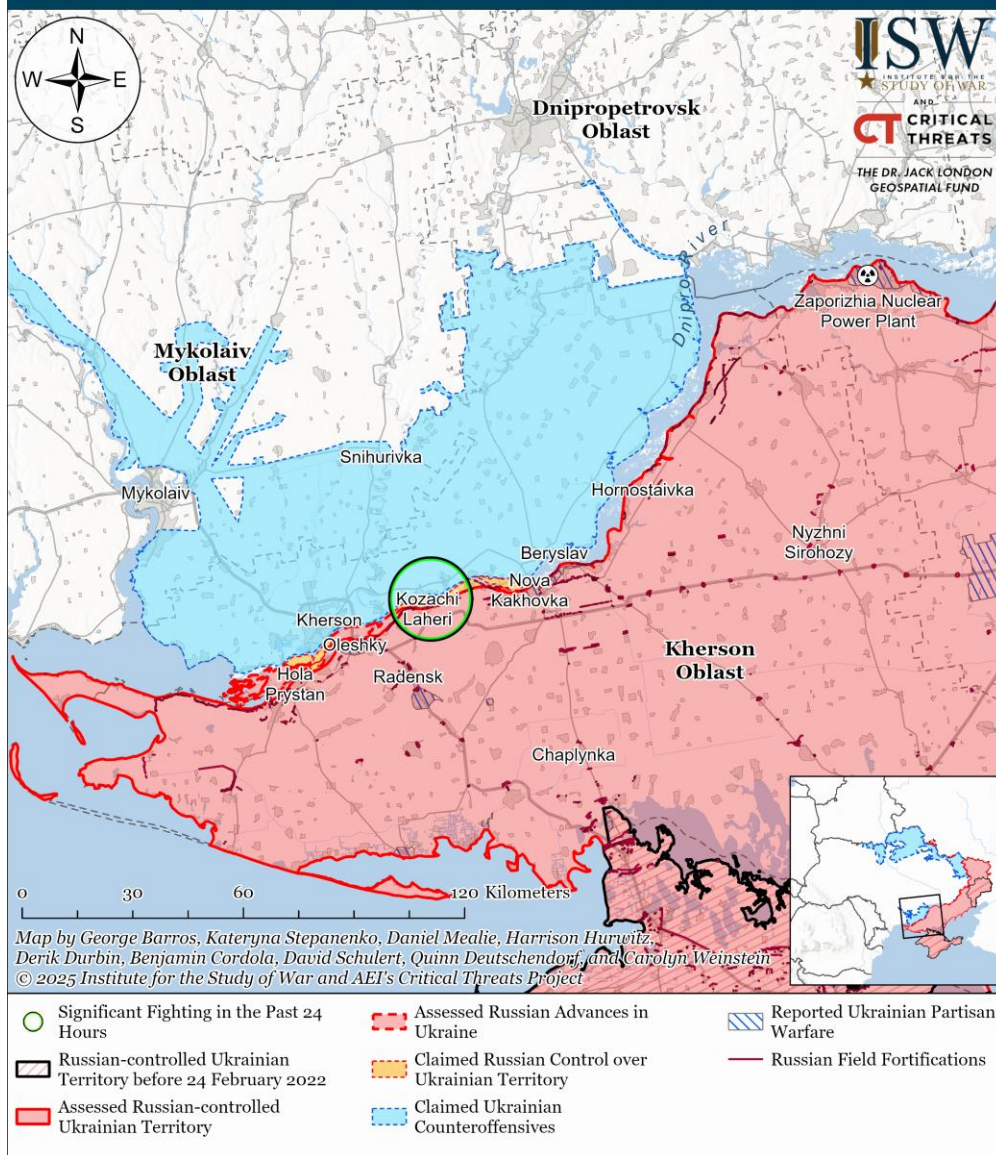
Assessed Control of Terrain in the Zaporizhia Direction May 20, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations in the Kherson direction on May 19 and 20 but did not advance.[68]

A Russian milblogger claimed on May 20 that Russian forces are only able to resupply units operating on the islands of the Dniro River Delta using daily drone drops.[69]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Kherson Direction May 20, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign (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 overnight on May 19 and 20. 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; and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai.[70] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 35 Shahed drones over eastern, northern, and central Ukraine and that 58 drones were "lost." Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones struck civilian infrastructure and commercial infrastructure objects in Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Sumy, and Zhytomyr oblasts.[71]

Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat reported on May 19 that Russian forces are continuing to innovate their long-range strike tactics and recently began massing Shahed strike drones at high altitudes before striking targets in Ukraine, complicating Ukraine's ability to intercept the drones.[72] Ihnat reported that Russian forces are also complicating the work of Ukrainian mobile air defense units by using decoy drones in combination with Shahed drones during strikes.[73]

Significant activity in Belarus (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://t.me/tass_agency/315911 ; <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2025/05/20/1111411-ne-upolnomochen> ; <https://ria.ru/20250520/medvedev-2018088039.html>; <https://ria.ru/20250520/medvedev-2018104972.html>; <https://ria.ru/20250520/medvedev-2018109226.html>

[2] <https://ria.ru/20250520/medvedev-2018104972.html>; <https://riadot.ru/20250520/medvedev-2018108209.html>; <https://ria.ru/20250520/medvedev-2018109226.html>

[3] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar051925>

[4] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar051225>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar043025>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar042925>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar042425>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar040725>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar032825>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021625>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021425>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar012925>

[5] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-28-2024>

[6] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-13-2025>

[7] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-13-2025>

[8] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar051225>

- [9] <https://ria dot ru/20250520/medvedev-2018100151.html>; <https://ria dot ru/20250520/medvedev-2018101709.html>
- [10] <https://ria dot ru/20250520/medvedev-2018096051.html>; <https://ria dot ru/20250520/medvedev-2018098030.html>
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- [12] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar051125>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar050425>
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- [16] <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/05/20/russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-eu-agrees-17th-package-of-sanctions/>
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- [22] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-16-2025>

- [23] <https://t.me/rybar/70529>; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/64414>;
https://t.me/dva_majors/71527; <https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/28904>;
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- [24] <https://t.me/rybar/70529>
- [25] <https://t.me/rybar/70535>
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