

Conflict Update # 52

May 7th, 2022

Conflict Assessment

Key Takeaways

Russian forces destroyed several bridges to slow Ukrainian forces and may be conducting a limited withdrawal northeast of Kharkiv city in the face of the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Ukrainian forces are making significant progress around Kharkiv and will likely advance to the Russian border in the coming days.

Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian advances toward Barvinvoke and Russian forces have likely abandoned efforts to drive directly southeast toward Slovyansk. ISW cannot confirm claims of a Ukrainian counteroffensive toward Izyum at this time.

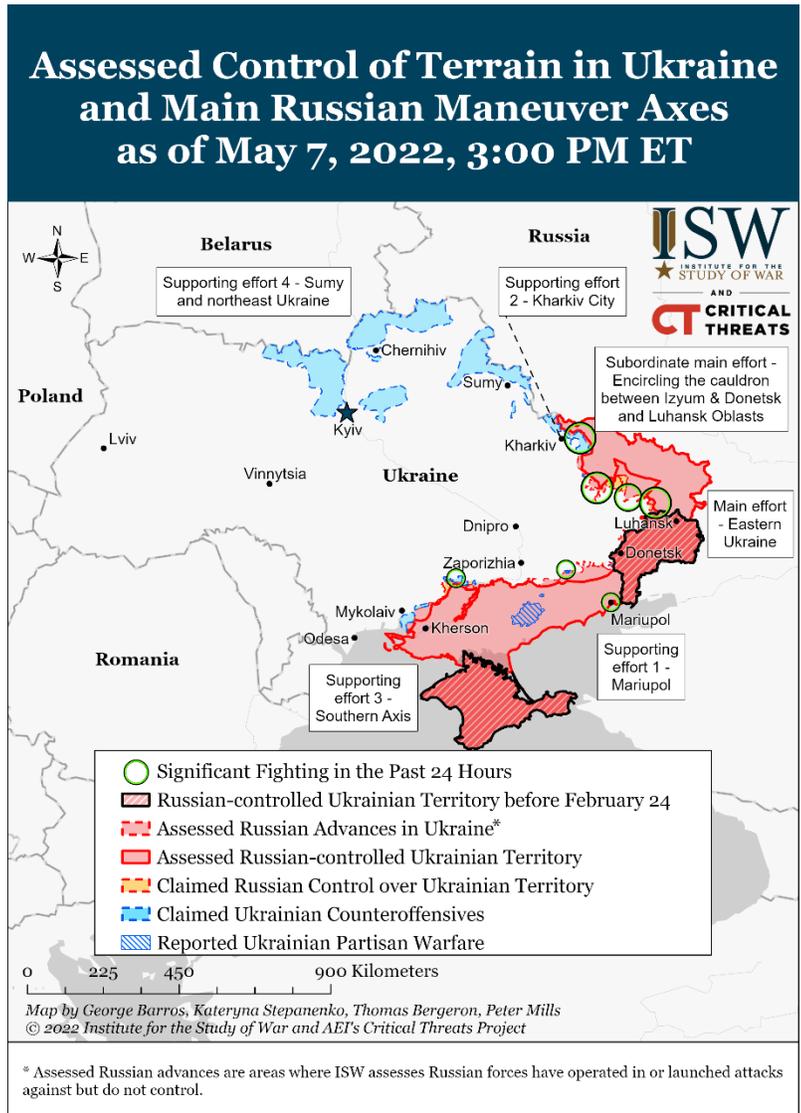
Russian forces claimed to capture Popasna on May 7 but remain largely stalled in eastern Ukraine.

The Ukrainian government confirmed the last remaining civilians trapped in the Azovstal plant evacuated on May 7, though the remaining Ukrainian defenders appear unlikely to surrender. ISW will likely be unable to report any discrete changes in control of terrain until Russian forces capture the plant as a whole due to the poor information environment in Mariupol.

By all indications, Russian forces will announce the creation of a Kherson People's Republic or possibly forcibly annex Kherson Oblast in the coming weeks to cement its occupation administration and attempt to permanently strip these territories from Ukraine.

Russian forces continued to target Odesa with cruise missile strikes and conduct false-flag attacks in Transnistria over the past several days.

Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts - Ukrainian forces today continued to repel Russian advances toward Barvinvoke (southwest of Izyum), and Russian forces have likely abandoned efforts to drive directly southeast toward Slovyansk. Ukrainian General Staff today reported that Russian forces launched an unsuccessful attack on Virnopillya (approximately 25 km southwest of Izyum) and images on social media depicted



several destroyed Russian armored vehicles and tanks. Ukrainian forces likely repelled further Russian attacks directly west of Izyum in the villages of Zavody and Velyka Komyshevka, as evidenced by drone footage released by Ukrainian forces. Satellite imagery yesterday depicted fires just northwest of Izyum that may indicate ongoing shelling. However, ISW has not observed any footage or imagery of Ukrainian advances, Ukrainian General Staff has not claimed any Ukrainian attack toward Izyum, and we cannot confirm at this time if Ukrainian forces are conducting an offensive toward Izyum concurrent with the ongoing offensive around Kharkiv, as discussed below. ISW will continue to monitor the area and provide updates if we obtain concrete indicators of a Ukrainian counteroffensive in this area.

Russian forces continued ground attacks against the same towns they have focused offensive operations on for several weeks—Rubizhne, Avdiivke, Oleksandrivka, Kreminna, and Shandryholove—and today possibly captured Popasna. They continued to shell along the entire line of contact in eastern Ukraine, reportedly attempting to interdict Ukrainian movements. The LNR and pro-Russian Telegram channels today claimed that Russian forces captured Popasna, though ISW cannot independently verify this claim. Social media users previously reported likely elements of the 68th Tank Regiment (of the 150th Motor Rifle Division) amassing east of Popasna on May 6. If Russian forces have successfully captured Popasna (or do so in the coming days), they will likely attempt to advance further west toward Bakhmut before pivoting north toward Siversk or Slovyansk, though Russian forces are unlikely to rapidly take these settlements.

Supporting Effort #1—Mariupol - The Ukrainian government confirmed that the last remaining civilians trapped in the Azovstal plant evacuated today, though an unknown number of Ukrainian defenders remain in the facility. The DNR and Russian media falsely claimed that some Ukrainian defenders surrendered to Russian forces under white flags, but Ukrainian units inside the plant denied the claim and stated both sides raised white flags to mark the evacuation route for civilians. The remaining Ukrainian units in Azovstal appear unlikely to surrender, and Russian forces continued assaults on the facility. We will likely be unable to report any discrete changes in control of terrain until Russian forces capture the plant as a whole due to the poor information environment in Mariupol and lack of direct imagery or video of fighting inside the facility.

Ukrainian sources reported further Russian preparations for a Victory Day celebration in Mariupol, including increased security. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) today reported that Russian commanders are removing officers from combat, including reportedly the command staff of the 71st Motor Rifle Regiment, to protect Kremlin officials and propagandists in Mariupol. The GUR also claimed to have intercepted communications between Russian servicemen complaining of the stupidity of their commanders and the humiliation of being withdrawn for guard duty, but ISW cannot verify either of these claims.

Advisor to the Mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushchenko separately claimed today that Russian occupation forces in Mariupol are distributing ribbons and invitations for a May 9 parade in the city center and Primorsky Park. Andryushchenko further reported Mariupol residents are being forced to clear bodies and rubble in order to receive food from Russian forces.

Supporting Effort #2—Kharkiv City - Russian forces destroyed several bridges to slow Ukrainian forces and may be conducting a limited withdrawal northeast of Kharkiv city in the face of the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive today. Ukrainian General Staff reported that they recaptured Tsyrkuny, 22km northeast of the Kharkiv city center, and additionally reported that Russian forces destroyed three road bridges in Tsyrkuny and Rusky Tyshky (the next town to the northeast that Ukrainian forces are advancing toward) to slow Ukrainian forces. ISW cannot independently confirm Russian forces destroyed these bridges and withdrew, though Russian forces destroyed several bridges during the withdrawal from Chernihiv Oblast and are likely doing so around Kharkiv.

Ukrainian forces are making significant progress and will likely advance to the Russian border in the coming days, though some reports of advances 40km north of Kharkiv appear overstated. The Russian Ministry of Defense abnormally acknowledged that Ukrainian forces recaptured Tsyrkuny (as Russian military sources rarely acknowledge any setbacks), but falsely claimed that Ukrainian forces used civilians as human shields to advance to the outskirts of Borshchivka—possibly in an attempt to justify Russian setbacks. Pro-Russian Telegram channels additionally reported

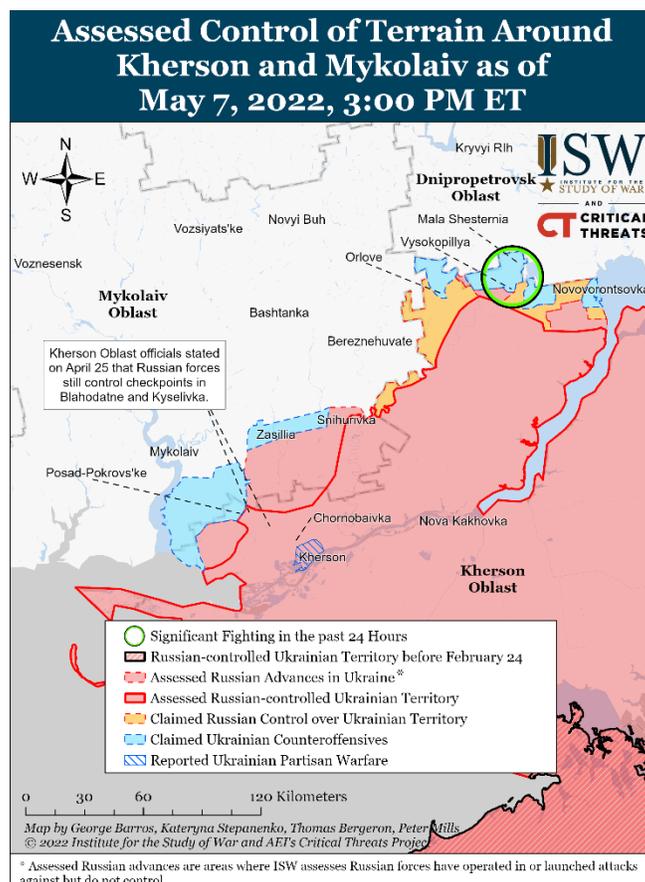
that Russian forces withdrew to Lyptsi, past Borshchva and 40km from central Kharkiv, but ISW cannot confirm that Ukrainian forces have advanced this far and the Kharkiv Military Administration reported that Russian forces still control Ruski Tyshky, on the road to Lyptsi.

Ukrainian General Staff today reported that Russian forces are deploying additional reserves to support the elements of the 20th Combined Arms Army and 1st Guards Tank Army fighting around Kharkiv. ISW previously forecasted that the Ukrainian counteroffensive would force Russian forces to redirect units intended for the Izyum axis to defend the outskirts of Kharkiv. Given the current rate of Ukrainian advances, Russian forces may not be able to prevent Ukrainian forces from reaching the Russian border, even with additional Russian reinforcements.

Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis - By all indications, Russian forces will announce the creation of a Kherson People’s Republic or possibly directly forcibly annex Kherson Oblast in the coming weeks and possibly as soon as May 9, though the Kremlin is not bound to this date. Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces are taking a number of unspecified measures to strengthen the Russian occupation regime in Kherson and increased the number of checkpoints and foot patrols throughout the city.

DNR leader Denis Pushilin arrived in Kherson on May 6. ISW cannot confirm what he did during his visit, though it likely concerned establishing some form of Russian proxy republic. Ukrainian Ombudsperson Lyudmyla Denisova today reported that the Kremlin plans to grant Kherson residents possible Russian citizenship, as the Kremlin has previously done in the DNR and LNR.

Finally, Occupation Deputy Head of the Kherson Region Stremousov reportedly stated that occupied Kherson intends to “live as part of the Russian Federation and will resemble something close to Crimea in terms of the pace of development” and that the region will “strive to become a subject of Russia,” echoing longstanding rhetoric by the DNR and LNR on desired ties with Russia. As ISW has previously assessed, the Kremlin will likely form illegal proxy republics or directly annex occupied areas of southern and eastern Ukraine to cement its occupation administration and attempt to permanently strip these territories from Ukraine.



Supporting Effort #4—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine - There were no significant events on this axis in the past 24 hours.

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 counterattack.

Russian warship Admiral Makarov ‘on fire after being hit by Ukrainian missile’ - Russia’s Admiral Makarov warship has been hit by Ukrainian missiles and burst into flames, according to Ukrainian officials.

The frigate would be Russia’s latest high-profile naval loss in a troubled campaign, coming after reports that US intelligence helped Ukraine locate and sink the Russian warship Moskva weeks ago.

The Makarov was said to have been sailing close to Snake Island in the Black Sea south of Odesa.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Anton Gerashchenko reported on his Telegram page that the Admiral Makarov was hit by a Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missile. He cited Russian sources.

Russian navy ships stationed in Crimea were sent to help Admiral Makarov, he added.

We reported in yesterday’s Update that reports were unconfirmed but more notices of the ships being hit are coming through.

Another vessel sunk - Kyiv said Saturday it has destroyed another Russian warship near the Black Sea’s Snake Island, where Ukrainian forces were awarded for heroism after rebuffing Russian demands to surrender.

Ukraine’s defense ministry said in a statement an armed drone had destroyed a Serna-class landing craft and a missile defense system at the small island under Russian control.

The military said in a separate statement on social media that the Bayraktar drone strike had also destroyed Tor-M2 anti-aircraft system being delivered to the island.

Over 25,000 Russian troops killed in war - A total of 25,100 Russian soldiers have so far been killed in Ukraine, the Ukrainian military said today.

Ukrainian forces have destroyed 199 Russian aircraft, 155 helicopters, 341 unmanned aerial vehicles, 1,122 tanks, 2,713 armored vehicles, and 509 artillery systems, according to the Ukrainian General Staff’s latest update.

Russia has also lost 172 multiple rocket launcher systems, 1,934 vehicles and fuel tanks, 84 anti-aircraft systems, 11 boats, and 90 cruise missiles, it added.

Russia’s offensive in Donbas bogs down - The Battle of Donbas is raging high, but it’s not going the way Russia wanted it to. Almost 20 days in, the much-anticipated and feared grand offensive falls short of expectations.

It is still not even close to achieving its ultimate goal — the encircling and crippling of the core Ukrainian military group in the region. Amid fierce hostilities, Russia has only managed to achieve limited territorial gains at significant cost. Slow and painful, the offensive has gradually stalled amid weak Russian reserves and strong Ukrainian defenses.



The assault appears destined to fall short of the symbolic success that Russia likely wished to achieve prior to Victory Day on May 9, the day on which Russia commemorates its role in the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

Russian Forces May Soon Be Forced Out of Artillery Range of Kharkiv - Ukrainian forces may soon force Russian troops out of artillery range of Kharkiv, according to an assessment that says the fight in the Donbass region is entering a decisive phase.

U.S. thinktank the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) said Friday that over the previous 24 hours, Ukrainian forces had captured several settlements north-east of Ukraine's second largest city in an operation which has developed into a "successful, broader counteroffensive."

It said that Ukrainian forces are "notably retaking territory along a broad arc around Kharkiv rather than focusing on a narrow thrust" and this showed they were able to launch larger-scale offensive operations than they have been previously able to. Ukraine's forces "may successfully push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv in the coming days," the ISW said, adding they may be able to "relieve Russian pressure on Kharkiv and possibly threaten to make further advances to the Russian border."

It comes as the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces said Russian forces have started to blow up bridges to slow a Ukrainian offensive in the area of Tsyrkuny and Rusky Tyshky east of Kharkiv. "Russian occupiers blew up three road bridges in order to slow down the counter-offensive actions of the Defense Forces of Ukraine," Ukraine's military said in its update on Facebook, although this has not been independently verified. Newsweek has contacted the Russian defense ministry for comment.

Putin Losing Ukraine Amid Reports of Russians Sabotaging Own Tanks - The war in Ukraine is unfolding in ways Russian President Putin may have not anticipated—not only with the growing resistance of the Ukrainian people but now also with reports that his troops are sabotaging Russian equipment.

Yesterday the Armed Forces of Ukraine said it had reclaimed five areas in the Kharkiv region—Oleksandrivka, Fedorivka, Ukrainka, Shestakovo, and Peremoha—in addition to part of the Cherkaski Tyshky village.

A day earlier, Jeremy Fleming, who heads Britain's GCHQ, the U.K.'s intelligence, cyber, and security agency, said that Russian soldiers sabotaged their equipment and shot down one of their aircraft as part of their refusals to take orders from the Kremlin.

Russia Spending an Estimated \$900 Million a Day on Ukraine War - As Russia continues its invasion in Ukraine, the heavy toll taken by Russia's economy could be felt for years to come.

Now in its third month, and sustaining the military offensive requires approximately \$900 million a day, Sean Spoons, editor-in-chief of SOFREP, a media outlet focused on military news, told Newsweek.

Several factors play into that heavy price, according to SOFREP's estimate. That includes paying the Russian soldiers who are fighting in Ukraine; providing them with munitions, bullets and rockets; and the cost to repair lost or damaged military equipment. Russia also must pay for the thousands of critical weapons and cruise missiles that have been fired during the war, which run about \$1.5 million apiece, according to Spoons.

Putin

Russian Coup Rumors Grow in Moscow, Are the FSB and Generals Looking For Ways to Oust Putin? - According to reports, dissent over Russian President Vladimir Putin's leadership is slowly gaining steam within the Kremlin. From normal citizens all the way to high-ranking generals, many are extremely dissatisfied with the invasion of

Ukraine. The public does not want an invasion, while generals are frustrated about the lack of progress. As a result, reports have surfaced that a number of former generals and members of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) are planning to oust Putin from the presidency.

Russia's intelligence branch, the FSB, has been reported to be very frustrated with Putin, who was once part of both the KGB and later FSB. Many see the war in Ukraine as a widescale mistake and an economic disaster. This is the reason why members of the FSB had reached out to former Russian generals and military officials to plan a coup.

The "Siloviki" is a group of Russian politicians who came from military service, with many of these politicians coming from the KGB, GRU, FSB, SVR, FSO, the Federal Drug Control Service. This term refers to "people of force" or, quite literally, "strongmen" in political science terms. These individuals often have a "military-style" of leadership and are very pragmatic law-and-order focus.

Certain members of this group, mostly from the FSB, are supposedly working together with former generals and other military (or security branches) to oust Putin from power and reform the government.

Protests in Russia take interesting twists - The manifestations of protests in Russia are becoming more and more creative.

Banksy-like drawings on asphalt in Akademgorodok, the educational and scientific center of Siberia, appear to represent bodies from Bucha, Ukraine, where massacres of civilians recently took place.

The figures drawn by a stealth graffiti artist have their hands tied behind their backs as many of the dead in Bucha did. There have been Molotov cocktail attacks on recruiting stations and police cars.

A forty-year-old woman in Yekaterinburg who said she had never before been interested in or active in politics sewed her mouth shut and stood out on the street in a busy shopping district with a sign that said, "We cannot remain silent."

Nadezhda Sayfutdinova lasted an hour before she was carted off. Before that, she said, many approached and hugged her. Police tried to get Sayfutdinova committed to a psychiatric hospital. Perhaps the fact she is a single mother got her off the hook — for now. She wonders and worries about what will happen next.

Russian entrepreneur Evgeny Chichvarkin was one of the country's richest young men and feted for his business savvy years ago before he escaped face down on the floor of a car.

The state had put the squeeze on him and apparently tried to shake Chichvarkin down. He now owns a deluxe wine store called Hedonism in London but is active in the opposition politics of Russia.

He helped fund Alexei Navalny during his post-poisoning convalescence in Germany and is currently organizing shipments of medical aid to Ukraine. I asked Chichvarkin if these single-person demonstrations like Sayfutdinova's happening in lieu of mass protests are making a difference in Russia. He is rather pessimistic about the prospects for change.

Ukraine said it destroyed the ship with a missile. The Russian military says there was simply a fire on board. Dozens are believed to have been killed. One father just shared the cold message he got from his son's military commanders online that referred to a "ship that died" but a sailor who was just inexplicably missing. Human rights groups are working to compile lists of the dead.

Meanwhile, acts of sabotage on the railways of both Russia and Belarus are being carried out by shadowy groups. One called "Stop the Wagons" recently posted a map on social media of the regions in Russia it is targeting for action to

impede the movement of fuel and materials to Ukraine via railroad. The chat group involves tips on ways to disable trains.

Russia Prepares to Mark Victory Day as Ukraine War Rages - Russia will mark Monday the Soviet Union's victory over Nazism amid expectations that ongoing fighting in Ukraine will cast a long shadow over the popular event.

In particular, the set piece military parade on Moscow's Red Square will see significantly fewer soldiers and equipment compared to last year, which experts have linked to significant losses sustained by Russia in its ongoing war in neighboring Ukraine.

"Nothing will affect Putin. We can see what he's afraid of," Chichvarkin told Fox News. "He's really afraid of an oil and gas embargo. But he believes it will never happen. And we know from yesterday he is a bit worried about upsetting Israel."

Part of the ongoing discussion about what could make Russian President Vladimir Putin stop this war is the issue of fallen soldiers and how society will eventually react to a rising death toll that is likely now well into the thousands. There has been a rising anger about Moscow's refusal to admit to casualties on the battleship Moscow that sank in the Black Sea last month.

Putin's Dream Of Rebuilding The Russian Empire Died In Ukraine - Russian President Putin's attempts to recreate the Russian empire have failed in Ukraine. Russia's full-scale invasion dealt a serious blow to Russia's global standing, leaving it weakened economically, isolated politically, and broken militarily while consolidating democracies and strengthening the collective West. In the span of a month, Putin's strategic blunder and Ukrainian fierce resistance have conspired to reverse the gains that Russia had made over the much of the past three decades.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine accomplished exactly the opposite Moscow had intended. It strengthened Ukrainian identity, consolidated NATO, unified the EU, and united all democracies worldwide to stand up to Russian aggression. The international community must use all the tools at its disposal to defend Ukraine, strengthen European democracies and liberate Russian citizens from Putin's brutal and oppressive regime.

Russia's blatant act of war against Ukraine has strengthened loose alliance and coordination among democracies across the world, isolating Russia and punishing it for its misdeeds. In the span of days and weeks, Australia, South Korea, and Taiwan, along with the G7- Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, the UK, and the United States-isolated and sanctioned Russia while providing a wide range of political, military, economic, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

The Ukrainians destroyed the myth of Russian invincibility. The war laid bare the deep structural deficiencies in Russian command, control, and communication systems and the gaps in its logistics. Russia's centralized command and control system proved ineffective against Western-trained Ukrainians who have been operating with more flexible rules of engagement, encouraging junior officers to make decisions on the spot, in the heat of the moment.

Putin's Long Game in Ukraine: The Kremlin Perspective - Russian President Vladimir Putin is widely expected to announce a new phase in his war against Ukraine on May 9, a national holiday known as Victory Day because it marks the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. With Russian forces making slow progress in Ukraine, some analysts believe Putin will threaten military escalation and call for mass mobilization; others envision formal annexation of Ukrainian territory; still others, a declaration of victory with scaled-down aims.

Whatever Putin announces in this speech, the choices that he and his senior advisors make concerning Russia's global position in the long term—and the policies needed to sustain it—will be just as important, perhaps more so.

Nikolai Patrushev, the head of Putin's Security Council and considered by many to be his most influential advisor, explored Moscow's options in a major interview last week with the primary government news outlet Rossiyskaya Gazeta. Patrushev had little to say about the war itself—beyond predicting “the disintegration of Ukraine into several states”—but he provided a clear portrait of the world beyond May 9, as seen from the Kremlin.

How will Russia respond to this international environment of unremitting economic sanctions, military campaigns, political hostility, and ideological subversion? For Patrushev, the answer is clear: the country needs new internal controls designed to insulate it against external contacts and influences. The implicit (and sometimes explicit) model for this tightening up is Soviet-style autarky, an attempt at national self-sufficiency that affects many areas, including trade and monetary policy, education, support for science, and regulation of the internet.

The adjustments sketched out in Patrushev's interview begin with a shift (made necessary by Western sanctions) away from European markets to those in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But they also involve a radical embrace of import substitution, a protectionist model that replaces imported goods with domestically produced ones to eliminate dependence on foreign partners. The high-tech goods that support a modern economy will have to be produced at home; food imports will be minimized. Political adjustments are needed as well, Patrushev emphasizes: to work, import substitution requires that everyone “follow the instructions of the head of state.” To protect the value of the ruble, and avoid the calamity of default, a new monetary system (with an important but unspecified role for gold) is also necessary.

Economic restructuring is only the beginning of the changes Patrushev envisions. Successful development, he insists, depends on protecting an educational system that Russia's enemies are determined to destroy. Introducing “progressive” models of education, he charges, is “as strategic a task for Westerners as bringing [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)] closer to our borders.” What Russia needs, it seems to Patrushev, is a system that produces both scientific advances and obedient citizens—who understand from early childhood “what we all live and work for as a single people.” It has to “develop logical thinking” without too much individualism, too much contact with the outside world, and too much reliance on digital connectivity. (The internet, he reminds readers, can be “a source of misinformation.”) Given these imperatives, where Patrushev ends up—with a nostalgic endorsement of “the Soviet school of education”—is hardly a surprise.

Putin's choices filled with peril on eve of Victory Day parade - After repeated military setbacks, the Russian president will have to repackage the conflict to keep his people on-side.

On the brink of its May 9 Victory Day celebrations, Russia looks very far from triumph in its war in Ukraine. And all of its options going forward are fraught with danger.

After a disastrous assault on Kyiv, Russia is engaged in an attempt to take territory in Ukraine's east, as its military nears exhaustion and sanctions continue to escalate.

“With the current force that they have, the push that they're attempting now is all that they have left,” said Jeffrey Edmonds, former director for Russia on the US national security council and senior analyst at the CNA thinktank.

“Military just don't recover that quickly from such a devastating loss. And given how effective the Ukrainians have been with our support, I just don't think they're going to be able to achieve their objectives within the coming weeks. And the coming weeks are going to be the telltale of where this is going.”

Facing setbacks, officials have suggested that Vladimir Putin may use the May 9 holiday to repackage the war in Ukraine. Dramatic options include escalation through a formal declaration of war or general mobilization – or de-escalating by proclaiming victory.

Ukrainian officials in particular have warned that Putin is planning to announce a mass mobilization, or even to declare war against Ukraine, calling up personnel and resources that were untapped under Russia's so-called "special operation" that began on 24 February.

"Russia has already moved to covert mobilization and is preparing to announce open mobilization in the near future," said Kyrylo Budanov, the head of Ukraine's military intelligence, in an interview this week with the Ukrainian news outlet New Times. "I'm quite curious: how will they explain this to their own people?"

The Kremlin has denied it is planning a mobilization, although some Russians have leaked call-up papers and state orders relating to a potential mobilization online. A number of enlistment offices have been targeted in arson attacks since March, including one in remote Nizhnevartovsk last week as rumors of a coming mobilization grew.

But a formal mobilization, which could see tens of thousands of reservists pulled from their jobs, and borders closed to fighting-age men, is something that Russia has never managed before. It would be highly disruptive to the economy and would further raise the stakes in a war where Russia has already disappointed on the battlefield.

"Proclaiming mobilization will make this war highly unpopular," said Pavel Luzin, a Russian military expert. He also questioned whether it would be "technically possible" – "What can you do with the mobilized people? Which officers and military units can deal with them?"

"This is no magic pill for them, it's not a get-out-of-jail free card for Putin," Edmonds said, noting that by the time new troops were brought up, the "Russians could be falling apart."

Fearing defeat, Russia may threaten to raise the stakes even further. Top propagandist Dmitry Kiselyov showed a simulation of a nuclear strike against the UK on national television this week. "Just one launch, Boris, and England is gone," he said. "Once and for all. Why play with us?"

Putin may also hint at the potential for nuclear conflict as he stands before the heavy weaponry, including intercontinental ballistic missiles, that he returned to the Red Square parade in 2008.

Seeing the limited potential for victory, Putin could also seek to de-escalate the conflict. Standing before his military and the country on Monday, Putin could announce that Russia has achieved its major war aims in Ukraine by allegedly destroying Ukrainian military capacity, and by taking near control of several mid-sized cities such as Mariupol and Kherson. But that may also be a tough sell, as the Ukrainian military could try to retake lost ground, leading to further losses even if Russia stakes a defensive position.

Sanctions

Italy Seizes \$700M Megayacht With Links to Putin - Italy has seized the megayacht Scheherazade in connection with EU sanctions on Russia, bringing an end to months of speculation about the vessel's fate.

Scheherazade has long been rumored to be the property of Russian President Vladimir Putin, though no definitive proof has been released. Her majority-Russian crew drew local attention in Marina di Carrara, where she is moored, and even more attention when they all left following the invasion of Ukraine. Researchers working for Russian politician Alexei Navalny claim to have obtained records that suggest that half of Scheherazade's crew were employed by Putin's personal security service, the FSO.

Cryptocurrencies Won't Save Russia From Dodging Sanctions, Moody's Says - During Russia's invasion on Ukraine, the imposition of sanctions, and the accompanying financial market upheaval, the role of cryptocurrencies like bitcoin has been a major topic of discussion.

According to the agency's researchers, despite their anonymity, crypto assets are not very useful for dodging monetary penalties. Fear of hyperinflation first prompted Russians to invest in cryptocurrencies, but their investments have since remained stagnant.

"Moving significant sums of crypto and converting it to useful currency is quite difficult," Ari Redbord of TRM labs, a blockchain intelligence company, told Al Jazeera. "Russia cannot utilize cryptocurrency to replace the hundreds of billions of money that may be restricted or frozen," he said.

While illicit activities of bad personalities that occur off centralized crypto exchanges or on unregulated digital asset platforms could remain undetected and unreported to authorities, Moody's stated that such activities are not large enough to allow sanctioned countries such as Russia to circumvent the restrictions.

Humanitarian

Ukraine says all women, children, elderly evacuated from Mariupol plant – All women, children, and the elderly have been evacuated from the besieged Azovstal steel plant in the city of Mariupol, a Ukrainian official said Saturday.

"This part of the Mariupol humanitarian operation has been completed," Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk wrote on Telegram about the evacuation, which took place amid a long, devastating siege of the port city.

Men of fighting age were not included in the evacuation, meaning that many of those allowed to leave had to leave husbands, fathers, and sons behind.

Containment

Intel leaks show US success in Ukraine — but comes with risks - The Biden administration's decision to step up aid to Ukraine is paying real-world dividends, providing not only the weapons to battle Russian forces but also the intelligence that's helped Ukraine kill a stunning number of Russian generals and sink Moscow's flagship vessel in the Baltic Sea.

While U.S. military and intelligence officials have denied their direct involvement in those deadly strikes, the assistance has been crucial to Ukraine's recent battlefield successes.

The developments highlight the delicate dance being attempted by the Biden administration and its NATO allies, as they intensify the fight against Russian President Vladimir Putin while being careful not to provoke an escalatory response from a figure who controls the world's largest nuclear arsenal.

"I think what it says is that the United States is involved in this war in virtually every way except direct fighting against the Russians," Richard Fontaine, CEO of the Center for a New American Security, said of the intelligence sharing with the Ukrainians.

Ukraine has fought back the Russian assault for 70 days and counting, bolstered by billions of dollars in weaponry from the U.S. and its allies that include light missile launchers, assault drones and, more recently, heavy artillery like Howitzers and tanks.

NLAW: How Russia's Tanks In Ukraine Are Getting Destroyed - NLAW: Britain and Sweden's Anti-Tank Weapon – The Next generation Light Anti-tank Weapon, colloquially known by its acronym NLAW, is one of the West's most common anti-tank weapons in service today. While the Javelin system has received much international attention for its role in practically halting Russia's advance into Ukraine, the NLAW system has also been used to great success by Ukrainian forces.

After opening for competition, the Swedish defense firm Saab Bofors Dynamics received their contract, and ultimately made use of a variety of Western subcontractors such as Thales Air Defence, BAE Systems, NP Aerospace, FR HiTemp, and Skeldings, among others.



Production on the NLAW anti-tank missile system began in full in 2009, which is when the system was first delivered to customers. It weighs about 12.5 kilograms and has an effective combat range of 20 to 800 meters and is a particularly effective weapon in relatively close combat, where its versatility and easy deployment makes it a nimble weapon for one-man crews, as demonstrated in Ukraine.

The missile is capable of making Overfly Top Attacks against armored targets and Direct Attacks against non-armored targets, which contributes to its variability in effective range, and does not rely on an active target seeking system to acquire targets, instead using “predicted line of sight” targeting.

By allowing the user to fire effectively after tracking the target for only a few seconds, the operator may remain mobile on the battlefield and does not need to maintain a visual lock for the system to work, and the disposable nature of NLAW also allows flexibility for infantry users.

Former Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko says America’s Howitzers are a “Game Changer” - Ukraine’s former President Petro Poroshenko has just returned from the eastern frontlines in his country’s war with Russia, where he says howitzers from the U.S. – part of \$3.8 Billion in already provided aid – are about to be “the real game changer” in the war with Russia. “They are extremely accurate, they are extremely efficient, and they definitely create new opportunities” for Ukraine’s forces. Poroshenko is pleading with the rest of the global community to “follow the positive example” of the U.S. to “demonstrate global solidarity with Ukraine.”

Impacts

Almost 70 vessels stuck at Ukrainian ports - Nearly 70 vessels are stuck at Ukrainian ports, with six foreign-flagged ships blocked in Mariupol, Ukrainian officials said on Friday.

“Currently, almost 70 vessels are blocked in ports from which it is impossible to navigate. The worst situation with the crews was in Mariupol, because in other ports the crews had the opportunity to evacuate by land,” Ukraine’s Deputy Minister of Infrastructure Yuriy Vaskov said at a news briefing.

Igor Barsky, director of the Mariupol port, said some of the six foreign-flagged ships stuck in Mariupol will “not be able to leave without proper repairs.”

The repairs, however, are very difficult because the Mariupol shipyard itself has also been “practically destroyed,” he added.

Ukrainian Hackers Allegedly Cut Off Russian Soldiers’ Beloved Vodka Supply - Something really weird is going on with Russian soldiers and their ability to drink vodka.

Tech blog Bleeping Computer spotted reports yesterday that multiple distributed denial of service — a type of attack that overwhelm a server by flooding it with junk traffic — had disrupted alcohol sellers’ access to a portal used by the Russian government to coordinate distribution of alcohol.

The tech site pointed to Russian news outlet Vedomosti, which is reporting major problems with alcohol sales and purchases.

“Due to a large-scale failure, factories cannot accept tanks with alcohol, and customers, stores, and distributors, cannot receive finished products that have already been delivered to them,” reads the Vedomosti report.

Pending Presidential Election in the Philippines May Bring the Country Closer to China - In the Philippines, Filipinos are faced with a critical juncture in their history as the son of the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., is currently leading the Philippine presidential polls against top incumbent opposition bet Philippine Vice President Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo ahead of a historical May 9 election day.

Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., a former Philippine senator who had disappeared from the public eye following his Vice-Presidential loss to Robredo in 2016, is now gunning for the seat of power in Manila to avenge his father. His critics claim that the Marcos campaign marks decades’ worth of authoritarian nostalgia, a frustration with democratic ideals and processes, and a massive disinformation campaign had led the Marcos scion to potentially revise history and clear his family name of their criminal past.

The Philippines is the oldest democracy in Asia, a form of government inherited from the Americans. In fact, many would say that democracy and freedom are the most important things the Americans taught Filipinos.

Peace Talks

Zelensky outlines Ukraine's peace-talk demands for Russia - Ukraine will only reenter peace talks with Russia if the Kremlin guarantees the restoration of preinvasion borders and returns thousands of Ukrainians who were forcefully evacuated to Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Friday.

Zelensky left open the possibility of a peace settlement and said "not all the bridges are destroyed" between Russia and Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin has previously promised to continue Russia's unprovoked invasion "until its full completion."

Widening of conflict and war

Russia To Stay in Southern Ukraine ‘Forever’ – Senior Lawmaker - A senior official from the Russian parliament said Friday that Russia will remain in southern Ukraine "forever," speaking on a visit to the Moscow-controlled city of Kherson.

"Russia is here forever. There should be no doubt about this. There will be no return to the past," Andrey Turchak said, according to a statement from the ruling United Russia party.

"We will live together, develop this rich region, rich in historical heritage, rich in the people who live here," Turchak added. Turchak also announced the opening of humanitarian aid center in Kherson, for the delivery of food, medicine and essentials. It was the first time a senior Russian official indicated Moscow's intentions to remain present on Ukrainian territory.

Fears of False Flag Operation Grow as Russia Claims Ukraine Poised for Chemical Weapons Attack - Russia on Friday followed through on one of Western analysts’ gravest fears in recent days with its Ministry of Defense claiming that forces loyal to Kyiv are preparing a chemical attack in the embattled regions of Ukraine’s east.

The claims align with troubling conclusions late this week that Russia has finalized setting the conditions for staging a false flag chemical attack it will blame on Ukraine as a pretext for its own use of chemical weapons.

Russian Colonel-General Mikhail Mizintsev, known as the “Butcher of Mariupol” for the brutally indiscriminate tactics against civilians he employed as commander of the ongoing siege of Mariupol, detailed the claims in a briefing on Friday but offered no proof to support the statements. He asserted that Ukrainian forces along with allied neo-Nazis

were fortifying chemical facilities in the Donbas – the embattled region of eastern Ukraine on which Russian forces have recently focused – protecting them with human shields, provoking Russian encampments with shelling and were preparing to detonate chemical weapons if Russia responds.

He said the supposed preparations are “reliably established,” according to a translation of his remarks, and that they come at the direction of the governments of the United States and United Kingdom.