

# Conflict Update # 50

May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022

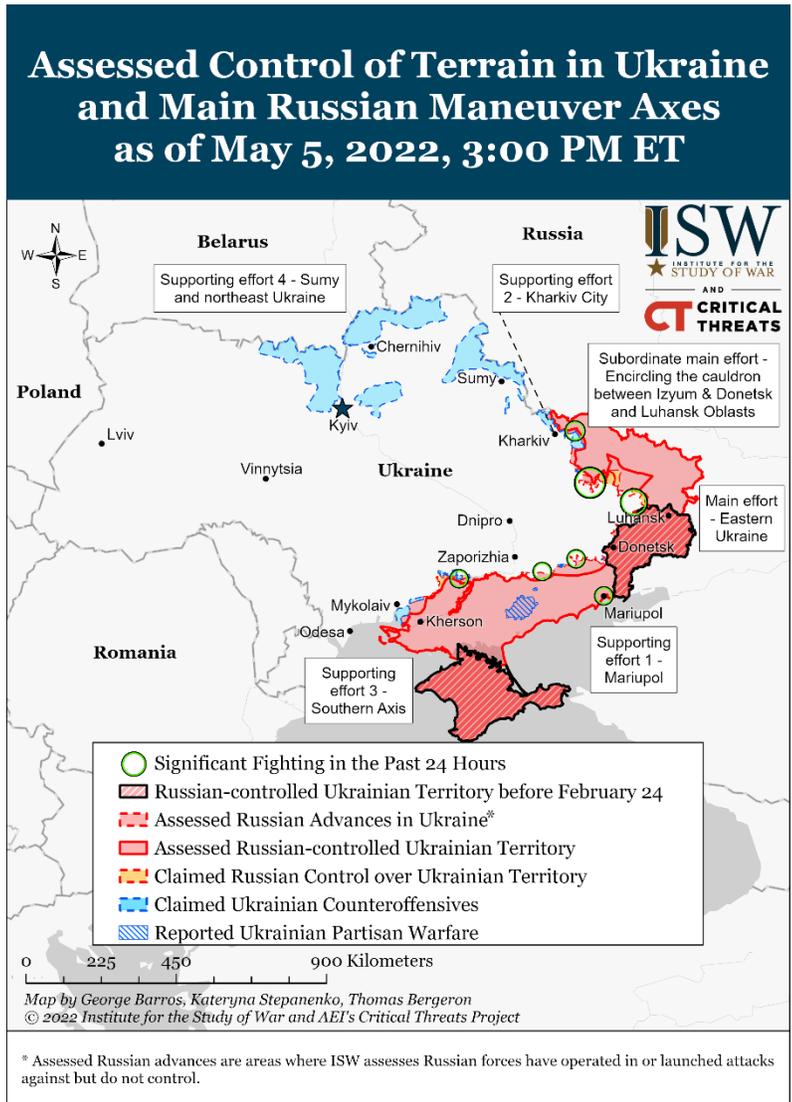
## Conflict Assessment

### Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued** ineffectual offensive operations in southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts without securing any significant territorial gains in the past 24 hours.
- **Ukrainian officials and military officers confirmed** that Russian forces have breached the Azovstal facility itself and confirmed that Ukrainian forces are losing ground. Russian forces will likely capture the facility in the coming days.
- **Ukrainian offensive operations around Kharkiv** likely intend to push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv city, force Russian units to redeploy from the Izyum axis, and potentially threaten Russian lines of communication.
- **Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations** toward Zaporizhia City but did not conduct any attacks in Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts in the last 24 hours. Ukrainian forces claimed to recapture additional territory west of Kherson, but ISW cannot independently confirm any advances.

### Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts

Russian forces continued ineffectual offensive operations in southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk Oblasts without securing any significant territorial gains in the past 24 hours. The Pentagon assessed that they have not been able to make further advances due to their inability to conduct offensive operations far from their ground lines of communication (GLOCs) along highways, as ISW previously assessed, and muddy terrain. Russian GLOCs supporting the Izyum axis likely run from the Russian border to Kupyansk and Vovchansk, and local Kharkiv civilian authorities reported additional Russian reinforcements moving through these settlements towards the front line as of May 5. They are reportedly suffering losses in stalled attacks along the Izyum axis, with the Ukrainian General Staff reporting that elements of the 4th Tank Division and the 106th Airborne Division withdrew to Russia after sustaining heavy losses in the past several days.



Their forces conducted unsuccessful attacks in Lyman, Severodonetsk, and Popasna, and maintained shelling along the line of contact in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. They also used thermobaric munitions against Ukrainian positions in Lyman and are unsuccessfully attempting to leverage massed artillery fire to break through Ukrainian defenses. Russian forces targeted grain facilities in Rubizhne and Soledar, a settlement located approximately 30 kilometers from Popasna, likely to deprive Ukrainian forces and civilians of supplies. The Donetsk People's Republic claimed to have seized Troitske (a village approximately 25 kilometers from occupied Horlivka) today, but social media imagery confirmed that Ukrainian artillery inflicted heavy damage on Russian munitions depots, tanks, and armored personnel carriers in the area.

**Supporting Effort #1—Mariupol** - Russian forces today continued assaults on the Azovstal Steel Plant with supporting airstrikes and naval artillery. Ukrainian officials and military officers confirmed that Russian forces have breached the Azovstal facility itself and that Ukrainian forces are losing ground. Azov Regiment Deputy Commander Svyatoslav Palamar released a video on Telegram reporting the current Russian assault began on May 3 and confirmed that Russian forces are inside the facility. Palamar said the remaining defenders and civilians were unable to evacuate today, despite reports from the Ukrainian government that Russian and Ukrainian forces agreed to a ceasefire in Mariupol between May 5 and May 7. Ukrainian President Zelensky announced that 344 Mariupol residents, including over 150 evacuees from Azovstal, evacuated on May 4. Russian forces will likely completely capture the Azovstal facility in the coming days, but Ukrainian forces have successfully tied down and degraded large numbers of Russian forces in Mariupol for several months.

**Supporting Effort #2—Kharkiv City** - Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi stated today that Ukrainian forces are transitioning to counteroffensive operations around Kharkiv and Izyum, the first direct Ukrainian military statement of a shift to offensive operations. Ukrainian forces likely intend to push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv city, force Russian units to redeploy from the Izyum axis, and potentially threaten Russian lines of communication. Their forces did not make any confirmed advances in the last 24 hours but repelled Russian attempts to regain lost positions. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces today conducted an unsuccessful assault on Strykiv (approximately 40 kilometers east of Kharkiv City) on May 5, after Ukrainian forces liberated the settlement. Russian forces also reconnoitered Ukrainian positions and continued to shell Ukrainian positions in the northeastern outskirts of Kharkiv City. Pro-Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces blew up a bridge near the occupied settlement of Cherkaski Tishki, approximately 25 kilometers northeast of Kharkiv City, which could indicate an ongoing Ukrainian counterattack in the area targeting the bridge to interdict Russian movements.

**Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis** - Russian forces continued offensive operations toward Zaporizhia City but did not conduct any attacks in Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts today. Ukraine's Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian forces attacked Hulyaipole, near the Donetsk Oblast border, throughout the day. The Administration additionally stated up to 13 battalion tactical groups are concentrated on this line of advance toward Zaporizhia City or the Donetsk Oblast administrative borders from the west, though these battalion tactical groups (BTGs) are almost certainly understrength. Zaporizhia authorities noted that Russian forces operating in the region are more cautious than during the initial stage of the war and are increasing their use of reconnaissance assets.

Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in Kherson or Mykolaiv oblasts. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that their forces liberated unspecified villages along the border between Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts on May 5, but ISW cannot independently verify these claims. They also reported that their forces successfully pushed Russian forces around 20 kilometers away from Mykolaiv City, possibly indicating that these liberated villages are in northwestern Kherson Oblast, though we have previously assessed that Ukrainian forces have taken most territory within this 20km arc and have not updated our maps with this Ukrainian claim. Russian authorities in occupied Crimea claimed on May 5 that Russian forces restored railway connections between Crimea and Kherson Oblast for cargo and passenger trains, likely to improve logistics on the southern front.

Transnistrian media reported unspecified indiscriminate shooting near the Kuchurhan-Pervomaisc border checkpoint with Ukraine today, two days after Ukraine blocked the crossing. They also claimed that Ukrainian forces are conducting military exercises in Pavlivka, a village on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border. Transnistrian Foreign Minister Vitaliy Ignatiev also claimed that Transnistrian forces today neutralized another Ukrainian drone. ISW cannot independently verify any of these Transnistrian claims. Ukraine's Operational Command South reported that the Transnistrian border is stable and that Ukrainian forces are taking counter-sabotage measures. Russian forces and their Transnistrian proxy will likely continue to stage provocations to threaten Ukrainian forces with the possibility of a military operation out of Transnistria to fix Ukrainian forces in Odesa in place.

**Supporting Effort #4—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine** - Ukrainian General Staff reported that some unidentified Belarusian units increased their combat readiness amid ongoing snap exercises on May 5. Belarusian social media users spotted Belarusian forces deploying military equipment in the direction of Pinsk, a settlement near western Ukraine and on the way to Brest. Their forces remain highly unlikely to enter the war in Ukraine and likely aim to pin Ukrainian forces in place by threatening further action.

### 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 forces may be preparing to conduct renewed offensive operations to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in the coming days.

**Ukraine Uses Obsolete Soviet Grenades To Destroy Russian Tanks From Above** - Ukrainian fighters have found a new use for outdated grenades that is proving spectacularly effective at destroying Russian tanks and other armored vehicles. Videos recently released by Aerorozvidka show what appears to be tail-finned explosives being dropped by drone before destroying armored vehicles with catastrophic explosions.

Weapons trackers following the conflict in Ukraine have identified the bomblets as modified Soviet-era RKG-3 anti-tank grenades with 3D-printed tail fins attached to stabilize their fall from drones.

On impact, the RKG-3 detonates a shaped charge (demonstrated in yellow this cutout) that fires a hypersonic slug of copper with enough force to penetrate more than 20 centimeters of armor.

The burst of superheated metal into the interior of tanks can sometimes lead to "catastrophic" explosions of the ammunition inside.



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**Russia Just Lost Its Most Advanced Operational Tank In Ukraine** - The war in Ukraine has had its fair share of embarrassments for the Kremlin. From the sinking of the Slava class cruiser Moskva in April to the infamous 40-mile-long Russian military convoy holdup near Kyiv seen earlier in the conflict, Moscow has had little to cheer about in terms of projecting competent military strength. The latest hit comes via visual evidence that a Russian T-90M Proryv-3 (Breakthrough-3) — a modern and rare main battle tank — has been destroyed on the battlefield by Ukrainian forces.



Shared on Twitter by The Kyiv Independent’s defense reporter Illia Ponomarenko, the image, dated May 4, shows what appears to be the remnants of a T-90M tank, still smoldering after a direct hit somewhere within Ukraine’s northeastern Kharkiv Oblast. Andriy Tsaplienko is seen reporting in the foreground.

Boasting an improved 2A46M-4 125mm smoothbore main gun in a modernized turret, the T-90M is encased with advanced armor-protection and countermeasures capabilities. Relikt built-in explosive reactive armor (ERA) is designed to protect against shaped charges and minimizes the impact of armor-piercing fin-stabilized discarding sabot (APFSDS) rounds.

**Tapped Calls Expose Russia’s Heinous Treatment of Own Dead Troops** - Russian authorities are transporting the dead bodies of Russia’s fallen soldiers from Ukraine back to Russia in “small batches” in the dead of night in an attempt to conceal just how many Russian troops are dying in Ukraine, according to intelligence shared by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU).

The intelligence—intercepted calls between Russian troops the SBU said it picked up in the Zaporozhye region—suggests that Russia is also transporting the corpses back to Russia in small groups in order to avoid suspicion that Russia’s invasion is sustaining massive losses or faltering in Ukraine, the SBU said. “They are bringing them in small packs, so that people don’t freak out,” one of the callers said.

But the process is delaying the transport of the dead, forcing the parents and families of the troops to grieve over “half-decomposed cargo of 200” that are sometimes unrecognizable by the time they arrive, the SBU said.

The two soldiers allegedly caught on the call mention that the body of one of their dead comrades, Makeyevich, was in the process of getting transported back for approximately six days, and that his wife was getting worried.

“Did you send Makeyevich?” “They brought him today, according to preliminary information,” one of the callers said. “They are supposed to identify him today.”

Many Russian troops and their families weren’t even aware they were headed into war in the last several months, a step that has likely left families already in the dark about the fate of their family members serving in the military as Russia has invaded Ukraine. The Daily Beast has not independently verified the intercept or its claims.

But it wouldn’t be Russia’s first rodeo running sketchy operations to cover up war losses back home. Russia has long sought to cover up casualties of its service members. During the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Russia had its dead soldiers transported back to Russia in the middle of the night. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, families of Russian troops killed there were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements to avoid discussing how the soldiers died, according to a Kavkazsky Uzel report.

In other cases, the Russian government claimed soldiers that are suspected to have died in Ukraine were actually killed during training, or that they entered Ukraine in a volunteer capacity. In still more cases, Russian soldiers' dead bodies were delivered to their families with simple notes stating they succumbed to their injuries, but without details about where or why they were injured.

The invasion in Ukraine now seems no different. Just in recent weeks Moscow has shared Russian casualty numbers that U.S. authorities say vastly undershoot the reality of the human toll of Putin's war.

Russia's casualties in the war in Ukraine continue to mount. Russia has so far lost more than 28,000 troops, with the greatest losses in recent days in Izyum, according to an analysis the General Staff of the Armed Services of Ukraine shared Monday. Ukrainian forces claimed in recent hours they had destroyed Russia's command center in Izyum, along with a Russian general, Gen. Andrei Simonov.

### **Dozens of Russian servicemen go to court to challenge 'illegal' order to send them to fight in Putin's invasion of Ukraine in rare show of open dissent.**

- Soldiers are suing the army after they were fired for refusing to fight in Ukraine
- The 25 servicemen are taking their region commander to court at a military base
- Hundreds of guards from 17+ cities and regions are mulling the same move
- True number of Russian army 'refuseniks' could be as high as 40 per cent
- The trial, which is a rare public spat among Putin's forces, begins tomorrow

A group of Russian soldiers are suing the army after they were fired for refusing to fight in Ukraine. In a rare public spat involving the Kremlin, 25 National Guard 'refuseniks' defied their commanders' orders to invade Ukraine.

The servicemen are taking North Caucasian District commander Lt-Gen Sergey Zakharov to court at the Vladikavkaz military base in south-western Russia. The test case aims to declare their dismissal order 'illegal' since it was based on their refusal to go to Ukraine.

Hundreds of guards from at least 17 cities and regions have sought legal advice and aim to follow the Vladikavkaz 25 in launching legal cases. The true number of 'refuseniks' may be far higher, with some estimating that between 20 and 40 per cent of conscripted soldiers refused to join Putin's war.

Many Russian fighters have complained about having to kill their Slavic neighbours. Vicious fighting in the eastern Donbas region has also reportedly put many off.

Russia's National Guard is an 'internal' security force reporting directly to Putin.

They were sent into Ukraine early in the war when the Kremlin believed that locals would rapidly surrender to Russian troops. The aim was that the guards would keep order in Ukrainian cities. Many died although figures have not been disclosed.

Lawyers from a number of other cities and regions are working on more cases, including Krasnodar, Nalchik, Cherkessk, Samara, Moscow region, Veliky Novgorod, Simferopol, Novochoerkassk, Vladivostok, Stavropol, Abakan, Pskov, Orenburg, Ulan-Ude, Petersburg, and Smolensk.

# Putin

**Putin 'apologizes' to Israeli PM over Russia's Holocaust remarks** - Russia's President Vladimir Putin discussed the war in Ukraine with Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett after his foreign minister infuriated Israel with comments about Hitler.

**Ukraine Spy Boss Declares War Will End in Putin's Death** - The only way Russia's war in Ukraine ends is with Russian President Vladimir Putin dead, Kyrlo Budanov, Ukraine's top military spy, said Monday.

"Leaving him a way to retreat is one of the strategies, but it is almost unrealistic," Budanov said when asked if Putin could end this war alive. "He is a war criminal for the whole world. This is his end, he drove himself into a dead end."

Once Putin is dead—and Budanov does not offer up any potential details of how an ouster or assassination may happen—the future of Russia could go one of two paths. First, Russia could be divided into multiple parts, Budanov opined. The other option, however, could lead to the "relative preservation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation when changing the country's leadership," he said.

## Russian Occupation

The Kremlin is establishing economic, governmental, and informational control over occupied Ukrainian territory, indicating that Russia may be preparing to create a series of Russian proxy "people's republics" and/or to directly annex some occupied Ukrainian territory. Russian forces are transitioning occupied territories to use the Russian ruble.

Occupying military forces do not typically replace local currencies, but Russia's proxies in occupied Ukrainian territory, the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR), have used rubles in some capacity since 2015. Russian forces are also likely planning to falsify "independence referendums" to create new proxy republics or to annex occupied territories into the DNR, LNR, or Russia itself. To that end, Russian forces are supplanting local governance and beginning to establish greater control over Ukrainian communications and culture in occupied areas.

- **Switching to Russian Currency:** Russian occupying forces in Kherson implemented a four-month transition period to switch the city's currency to Russian rubles rather than Ukrainian hryvnias as of May 1. Russian sources reported that stores in Russian-occupied Melitopol and Volnovakha are beginning to transition to the Russian ruble as of May 1. The Ukrainian GUR separately reported on April 24 that Russian forces are introducing ruble payments in occupied parts of Kharkiv Oblast and are encouraging residents to buy products and medicines from Russia. Permanent Crimean Representative to Russia Georgy Muradov had previously claimed on April 6 that Crimea and Russian-occupied southern Ukrainian territories had "restored a single economic complex" and replaced the hryvnia with the ruble.
- **Falsifying Referendums:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on April 22 that Russian forces are collecting the personal data of Ukrainians in southern oblasts to help falsify planned referendums. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported on April 26 that Russian forces collected the personal information of residents of Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts to falsify the results of future Russian-rigged referendums. Ukraine's General Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 30 that the Kremlin is planning an independence referendum to create a new proxy republic in Kherson and, eventually, in Zaporizhia and Odesa oblasts. The US Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Michael Carpenter, said on May 2 that US intelligence has "highly credible" reports that Russia will try to annex Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts by mid-May and may attempt to create a similar proxy republic in Russian-occupied Kherson.
- **Replacing Local Governance:** The Ukrainian mayor of Kherson City reported that Russian occupation forces replaced the mayor and the regional governor on April 26 with Russian proxies. Russian forces have repeatedly replaced Ukrainian officials with Russian proxies after occupying Ukrainian territory. Separately, the head of the

Russian proxy Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), Denis Pushilin, said on April 28 that the DNR is working to distribute DNR passports to residents of the "newly liberated" territories. The DNR claims to control Mariupol and other Russian-occupied cities in Donetsk Oblast and will likely adopt greater administrative control of newly captured areas.

- **Controlling Communications:** Russian forces in Kherson and parts of Zaporizhia likely imposed an internet blackout around May 2 and reportedly cut fiber optic cables in the area, likely to limit freedom of information. Ukraine's Ministry of Defense Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 24 that Russian occupiers are installing Russian-operated MegaFon equipment in Kharkiv Oblast, likely to tighten control over telephone and internet networks in areas that Russian forces currently occupy or intend to occupy after planned offensive operations. The Kremlin also likely intends to sever cultural ties between Russian-occupied territories and the Ukrainian state in the long term; the only school that has remained open in Mariupol was likely forced to stop teaching the Ukrainian language and will only teach Russian as of April 28.

## Sanctions

**EU to unveil Russian oil sanctions as evacuees recall Azovstal horror** - The European Union is expected to outline oil sanctions against Moscow as Russia continued its attacks on eastern Ukraine and unleashed rockets on a steel plant that is the last redoubt for resistance in the port city of Mariupol.

**Russia Has Just Over a Day to Pay Two Foreign Bonds and Dodge Default** - A grace period to transfer \$650 million in coupon and principal payments expires on May 4 after the funds were initially blocked in early April. Russia's first foreign debt default in more than a century had looked all but certain until a shock announcement late last week by the Russian Finance Ministry that the cash was finally moving through the financial system.

However, the dollars have still to complete the final steps. Payment was yet to be received by at least one of the clearing houses as of Monday afternoon in Europe, according to a person familiar with the matter who asked not to be named as they are not authorized to discuss it publicly.

The complications are the result of wide-ranging financial and economic penalties imposed on Russia after it invaded Ukraine. They include sanctions on some of the nation's biggest lenders, asset seizures, and a freeze on the country's foreign reserves.

## Humanitarian

**Russian Forces Looted More Than 2,000 Artworks from Mariupol's Museums, City Council Says** – Russian troops have looted more 2,000 artworks from museums in the devastated Ukrainian port city Mariupol, according to local officials.

The Washington Post shared Telegram messages from the Mariupol City Council detailing how Russian forces systematically plundered three local museums, including the Kuindzhi Art Museum, since the invasion began in February. The collection has reportedly been transported to Donetsk, an industrial city in eastern Ukraine's separatist region backed by Russia.

"The occupiers 'liberated' Mariupol from its historical and cultural heritage," the city council wrote. "They stole and moved more than 2,000 unique exhibits from museums in Mariupol to Donetsk."

## Containment

**Poland to Provide Air Policing Capability to Slovakia, As The Slovak Air Force Phases Out The MiG-29** - Polish Vipers would temporarily replace the capabilities of the Slovak Fulcrums. According to Polish defense journalist

Marek Świerczynski, quoting the head of the Slovak MoD via his Twitter account, Poland would provide air policing to Slovakia, as its southern neighbour is getting ready to phase out its Fulcrums.

**Vermont Air National Guard's F-35s On Their Way To Germany To Support NATO In Eastern Europe** - At least eight F-35A stealth aircraft, belonging to the 158th Fighter Wing of the U.S. Air Force are currently deploying to Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, to support Enhanced Air Policing mission on NATO's Eastern Flank. The aircraft launched from their base at Burlington ANGB, Vermont, early on May 2, 2022.

Supported by at least four tankers, the "Green Mountain Boys" of the 158th FW are due replace the F-35A jets belonging to the 388th FW and 419th FW from Hill Air Force Base, Utah, that have been operating out of Spangdahlem since Feb. 16, 2022. In the beginning, the VT ANG will not completely replace the Hill AFB's F-35s, but they will complement the Hill AFB F-35s as the Lightning II jets of the various active, ANG and Reserve's jets are expected to operate together from the German base for some weeks.

**Air Force B-52, B-1B Lancer And B-2 Bombers Are Watching Russia** - As the Russian military continues to fail in Ukraine, U.S. strategic bombers have been flying around Europe. The missions have been ongoing for four years, but the war in Ukraine has put them in the spotlight.

Even before the first Russian troops attacked Ukraine, the U.S. military was flying long-range bomber missions above Europe to reinforce cooperation and interoperability with NATO allies and partners and deter Russia—the latter aspect of the missions clearly failed.

Over the past few years, the U.S. Strategic Command has been deploying B-1 Lancer, B-2 Spirit, and B-52 Stratofortress strategic, nuclear-capable bombers over Europe and parts of Africa.

**Israel reportedly leaning toward sending defensive military aid to Ukraine** - Israeli officials are set to discuss expanding aid to Ukraine, including supplies of defensive military equipment so far withheld by Jerusalem, according to a report Tuesday.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, Israel has rejected requests from Kyiv and the West for military equipment such as anti-missile batteries, and only recently agreed to send helmets and flak jackets to civilian rescue and medical forces, part of a policy meant to preserve ties with Russia. Instead, it has sent some 100 tons of humanitarian aid and set up a field hospital in western Ukraine for six weeks.

However, Israeli officials are now expected to support sending Ukraine military aid, albeit at symbolic levels, and still with hopes of keeping its relationship with Russia intact, Haaretz reported Tuesday, citing officials with knowledge of the matter.

According to a diplomatic official, Israel will not consider sending offensive arms or advanced defensive technology, such as the Iron Dome anti-missile system, but will attempt to find equipment that can be donated without sparking a crisis with Moscow.

**How US artillery in the hands of Ukrainians may reshape the war with Russia** - The 90 M777 howitzers that the United States is providing to Ukraine will not only make it more difficult for the Russians to move out in the open, but the guns could also support a future Ukrainian offensive to reclaim Russian-occupied parts of their country, experts told Task & Purpose.

About 70 of the 155 mm guns along with roughly 70,000 artillery rounds have been transferred to Ukraine so far, a senior defense official told reporters on Monday. More than 200 Ukrainian troops are expected to be trained on how to operate the howitzers by the end of Monday with another 50 Ukrainian service members scheduled to begin training later this week.



The first Ukrainian artillerymen were trained by Canadian troops and other Ukrainians were taught how to operate the howitzers by Florida

National Guardsmen, the senior defense official said at a Pentagon news briefing. Those guardsmen had been on a training mission inside Ukraine before the Russian invasion and now they are continuing their mission in Germany.

**U.S. provided intelligence that helped Ukraine sink Russian warship** - When Ukraine successfully targeted Russia's prized warship last month with anti-ship cruise missiles, it had some help from the United States.

Ukrainian forces, having spotted the Russian warship in the Black Sea, called their American contacts for confirmation that it was in fact the Moskva, sources familiar with the events told CNN. The US responded that it was and provided intelligence about its location. It is not clear whether the US knew Ukraine would move to strike the ship, however, and the US was not involved in that decision, the sources said.

The ship sank after it was struck by two Ukrainian cruise missiles on April 14, dealing a huge blow to the Russian military.

The episode, first reported by NBC News, reflects the Biden administration's increasingly forward-leaning posture when it comes to sharing intelligence with Ukraine, part of a broader policy shift toward helping Ukraine defeat Russia decisively on the battlefield and significantly weaken its military.

The US Military is distancing itself from the comments.

## Impacts

**'Running Out Of Spare Parts': Plenty Of Pain Ahead For Russia's Economy** - At first glance, Russia may seem to be adapting to the tough new sanctions imposed by Western countries over its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

The ruble, which tumbled in the first days of the war to a record low, rebounded to its highest level since early 2020 this week. Grocery stores in Moscow are still filled with food, albeit at much higher prices, and revenue from the sale of oil and gas continues to flow into the budget.

But Russia's economy is anything but out of the woods, Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Washington-based Institute of International Finance (IIF), told RFE/RL's Russian Service in an interview. The country is entering what is likely to be a very tough period as the impact of the sanctions gradually sets in, she says.

"Everyone is running out of spare parts, export markets have disappeared, many [companies] cannot continue production," Ribakova said, citing evidence from a recent Russian central bank report.

The United States, the European Union, and other allies have barred exports to Russia of key technology, such as microprocessors -- or chips -- used in the production of many manufactured goods, including cars and planes.

**When Will It End?** - Russia's long-term economic outlook will depend in part on how long its invasion of Ukraine lasts, Ribakova told RFE/RL. If the war doesn't end soon, the West will not only move ahead with plans to end energy dependence on Russia, it could also deploy the roughly \$300 billion in frozen Russian central-bank funds to rebuild Ukraine's economy.

The United States and Europe imposed a freeze on those central-bank holdings in the first days of the war and have continued to pile more sanctions as the war continues. Ribakova calls sanctions a "stigma" that is "much worse" for a country's image than a debt default.

She points out that because of the reputational risk, most foreign companies did not return to Iran even after some years-old sanctions were removed -- and that the same may happen with Russia.

"I think that in our lifetime Russia may never return to global markets in the same way," she said.

**How Russia's invasion of Ukraine will reshape Eastern Europe's cultural scene** - Amid the death and devastation caused by the war, it has strengthened cultural connections and collaborations between Ukraine and the rest of the world.

The recent totalitarian turn in Russian international policy brings back bad memories of the Cold War, of the Iron Curtain and of cultures divided along ideological lines. The Pan-Slavism underpinning the Putin regime's policies reflects a tribal nationalism, an idea of Russian supremacy in the region (if not in the world). If it takes the toll of more than 11 million Ukrainian refugees and unspeakable crimes against human lives, the Russian government's attitude seems to be, so be it. How this impacts art and culture in the region is a complex issue for every country in Eastern Europe.

What is important to understand about the region is its disunity. Each country here experienced its own trauma before, during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now each nation in the region will experience its own type of re-traumatization based on its long historical memory.

The balance of the region is being reset yet again. From an enormous inflow of Ukrainian refugees mainly into Poland, which is bound to disrupt social, economic and cultural ecosystems in the country, to immigration of Russians into Georgia and Armenia, significant changes of macro- and microeconomic scale in all Russian-bordering countries are taking place. Art, being a pulse of society, will reflect this shift.

## **Widening of conflict and war**

**Russia preparing to evacuate families of officers from Transnistria** - The situation in Transnistria itself remains tense following attacks that Russia has attributed to Ukraine, units of the operational group of Russian troops remain in full combat readiness.

Russia is preparing to evacuate the families of Russian officers from Transnistria, according to a report by a report by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

"Armed formations of the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova are serving in an intensified mode. Preparations are underway for the evacuation of the families of officers of the operational group of Russian troops," the report said.

The situation in Transnistria itself remains tense following attacks that Russia has attributed to Ukraine, units of the operational group of Russian troops remain in full combat readiness.

**Moscow Deputy Says Besides Ukraine, Russia Must 'De-Nazify' Six More Countries** - Last week, Sergey Savostyanov, a KPRF deputy in the Moscow city дума, said that after Ukraine, Russia must "de-Nazify" six additional

countries: **Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Moldova and Kazakhstan**, an “enemies” or target list that appears to reflect more than just his personal opinion.

Savostyanov’s remark might be dismissed as the hyperbolic expression of one individual in the overheated atmosphere of Russia today, but it is clearly more than that judging from the attention it has now been given by Vladimir Vinokurov, a professor at the Foreign Ministry’s Diplomatic Academy.

In a lengthy article for *Novoye voennoye obozreniye*, the scholar says that if one considers the pasts of these countries and their current situation, one is forced to conclude that “the chauvinist and nationalist trash which set these countries apart in the past has not disappeared up to now.”

And because the West won’t do anything about this, Vinokurov says, it has been left to Russia to de-Nazify these countries lest they spread their poison across the world once again. He says that Putin’s decision to recognize the LNR and DNR and to launch his “special military operation” allows one to hope that “this time,” there will be no recrudescence of Nazism.

Indeed, he concludes, “today it is Russia that has the mission to block someone else’s global scenario and thus save humanity from the repetition of a bloody world war.”