

# Conflict Update # 71

May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

### Key Takeaways

**Russian forces unsuccessfully** attempted to advance southeast of Izyum near the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border.

**Russian forces continued steady advances** around Severodonetsk and likely seek to completely encircle the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area in the coming days.

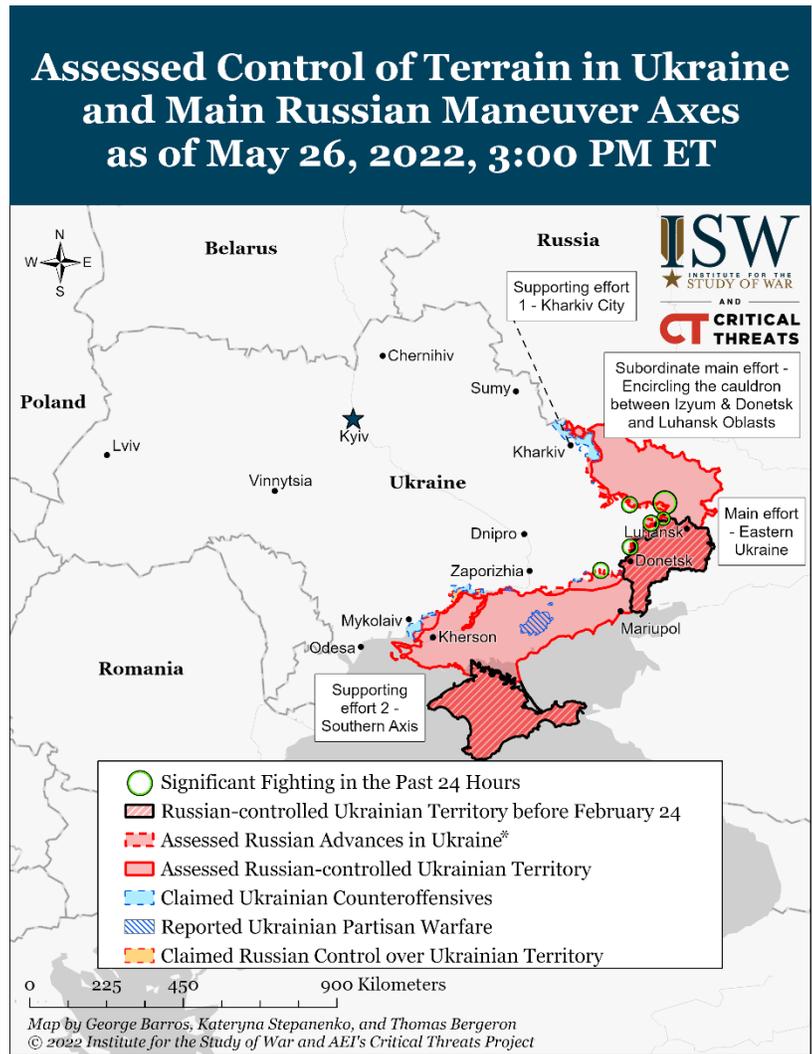
**Russian forces continued to make persistent** advances south and west of Popasna toward Bakhmut, but the Russian pace of advance will likely slow as they approach the town itself.

**Russian forces in occupied areas** of the Southern Axis are reportedly preparing a “third line of defense” to consolidate long-term control over the region and in preparation to repel likely future Ukrainian counteroffensives.

**Advancing Russian forces came closer** to surrounding Ukrainian troops in the east, briefly seizing positions on the last highway out of a crucial pair of Ukrainian-held cities before being beaten back, a Ukrainian official said.

**Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts** - Russian forces continued to attempt advances southeast of Izyum toward Slovyansk. Ukrainian General Staff (UGS) reported that Russian troops attempted to attack Bohorodychne, about 30 km southeast of Izyum. They additionally conducted artillery, rocket, mortar, and tank attacks against Chepil, Dovehenke, Kurulka, and Studenok, all settlements to the southeast of Izyum in the direction of Slovyansk. Such offensive actions indicate that they hope to continue their advance toward the borders of Donetsk Oblast and merge with operations around Lyman, which Russian forces fully captured on May 26.

Their forces continued efforts to encircle Severodonetsk today and reportedly attempted to take control of Ustynivka, about 15 km southeast of Severodonetsk. Russian sources additionally report that Russian troops are approaching Severodonetsk from Vojevodivka and Schedryshcheve (northeast of Severodonetsk) and that the northeast portion of the city is under Russian control. A Russian military reporter claimed that as many as 10,000 people may be trapped in



the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk cauldron. Ukrainian troops have reportedly fortified their positions in the Zolote-Orikhiv area, where Russian troops have encircled them.

Russian forces continued persistent advances in Donetsk Oblast south and west of Popasna on May 26. Troops from the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) claimed to have taken full control of Svitlodarsk and Midna Ruda, settlements off the M03 highway and within 30 km southeast of Bakhmut. Russian troops are reportedly fighting around Komyshevakha, Nirkove, Berestove, Belohorivka, Pokrovske, Klynove, Lypove, and Nahirne and using these areas to advance toward Bakhmut. They conducted unsuccessful operations around Donetsk City in the vicinity of Avdiivka and continued to shell north and northwest of Avdiivka.

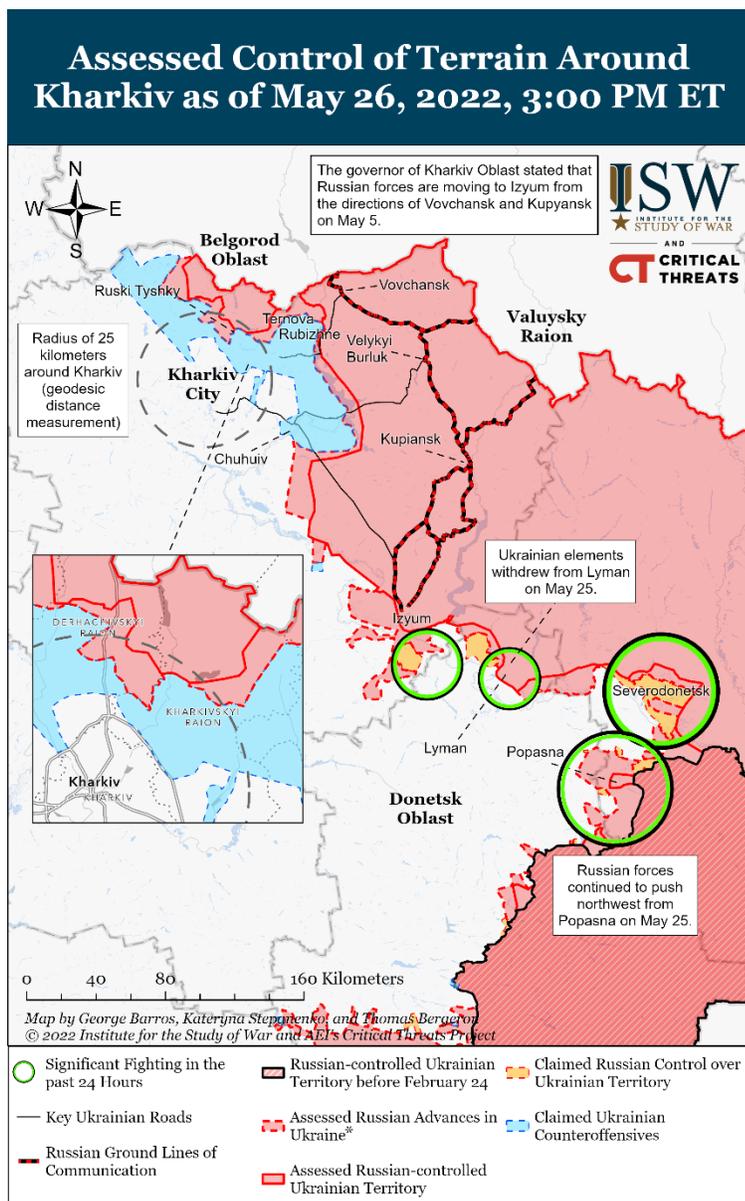
**Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City** - Russian forces today focused on maintaining their positions around Kharkiv City. UGS stated that Russian troops north of Kharkiv City reconnoitered and fired on Ukrainian positions to prevent any further Ukrainian advances in this area. Russian forces shelled the center of Kharkiv City and surrounding settlements.

**Supporting Effort #2 - Southern Axis** - Russian forces focused on improving their tactical positions and strengthening defensive lines on the southern axis on May 26. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command stated that the Russians are creating a "third line of defense" in occupied Kherson Oblast, indicating they are preparing for protracted conflict in this area and digging in to repel likely anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensives.

This assessment is consistent with statements made by the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) that Russian forces are strengthening their defenses in occupied areas in order to hold those territories over the long term.

Russian forces are reportedly attempting to advance to the Mykolaiv-Kherson administrative border and today conducted unsuccessful assault operations around Tavriyske and Mykolaivka. They heavily shelled areas of Zaporizhia Oblast and strengthened their grouping of forces around Vasylivka and Polohy to renew offensives in the directions of Kamyanske, Orikhiv, and Huliapole. UGS noted that the Russian grouping in Zaporizhia, specifically around Melitopol, has been reinforced by a battalion using outdated T-62 tanks, confirming earlier Ukrainian reports that Russian forces are cobbling together battalions with obsolete T-62 tanks to compensate for equipment losses.

**Activity in Russian-occupied areas** - Russian occupation authorities continued actions to strengthen their administrative control of occupied areas on May 26. Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations deployed three broadcast trucks to Mariupol to transmit state-controlled programming to residents of the city. Advisor to the Mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushchenko claimed that occupation elements are taking control of schools in Mariupol and have extended



the school year through September in order to ensure children spend the summer learning according to strictly Russian curricula. Russian-backed occupation authorities in Kherson stated that Russian mobile phone operators will be available in occupied areas and that pensions will be paid in rubles starting in June. Residents of Kherson and Zaporizhia will additionally be able to obtain Russian passports at newly established passport points in accordance with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s May 25 decree simplifying the process to obtain Russian passports in these occupied areas.

### Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces are likely reinforcing their grouping north of Kharkiv City to prevent further advances of the Ukrainian counteroffensive toward the Russian border. Russian forces may commit elements of the 1st Tank Army to Northern Kharkiv in the near future.
- Russian forces are prioritizing cutting off two major highways to Severodonetsk but may start to storm the city before they successfully cut GLOCs.
- Occupation forces in Mariupol will continue to strengthen administrative control of the city but are likely unsure of what the ultimate annexation policy will be.
- Russian forces are likely preparing for Ukrainian counteroffensives and settling in for protracted operations in Southern Ukraine.

### Russia Deploys 50-Year-Old T-62 Tanks To Ukraine

Numerous Cold-War era Russian T-62 tanks have been photographed at Melitopol railway station in southeastern Ukraine near the current front lines of the three-month-old conflict in the country. Whether the tanks will be used by Russian forces or turned over to local separatist groups is currently unclear, but their presence can only raise questions about Russia’s depleting armor reserves after months of significant losses.

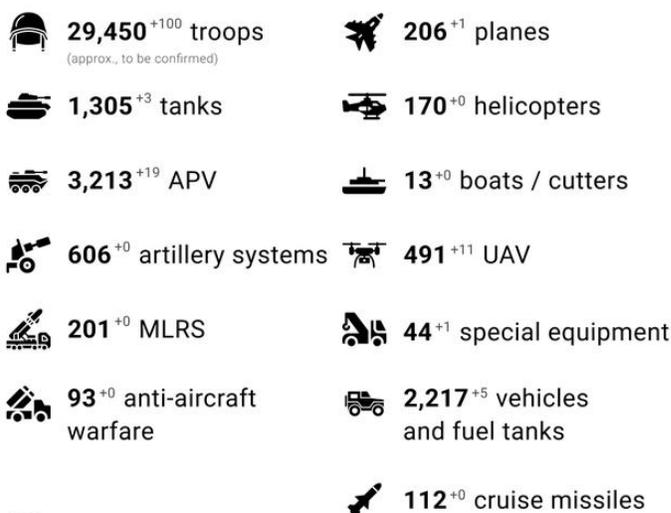
The new development comes after rumors had spread that the Russians were pulling a number of the T-62s out of long-term storage. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Russians have 10,000 tanks and 8,500 armored vehicles in storage — although that number doesn’t take into account their material condition — with about 2,500 of those being T-62s as estimated by a Stratfor analysis. Being that we’ve already seen Russian forces using older T-72A/B variants in Ukraine and that some of the purported 10,000 tanks in storage are likely to be more modern than T-62s, the choice to move these specific vehicles to the front is undoubtedly intriguing.

Above are indicative estimates of Russia’s combat losses as of May 25, according to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. 29,450 at a ratio of 3:1 implies 88,350 injured totaling 117,800 casualties in three months.

**Russians push to encircle Ukrainian troops, Pentagon says** - Russia could soon make a direct assault on Severodonetsk, one of the largest eastern cities still under Ukrainian control. Russia has poured thousands of troops into its assault in the eastern Donbas region, attacking from three sides in an attempt to encircle Ukrainian forces in Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk. The cities' fall would bring nearly the whole of Luhansk province under Russian control, a key Kremlin war aim.

### Russia’s losses as of May 25

Source: Indicative estimates by Ukraine’s Armed Forces as of 11 a.m. EET



THE KYIV INDEPENDENT

**Russian navy wants to appropriate commercial vessels to support war aims** - Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov announced that Moscow is revising its naval doctrine and will be calling for a dramatic expansion in the use of the country's civilian fleet to support Russian military actions abroad in wartime situations.

Like other states, Russia has long planned to use commercial vessels for military purposes, but Borisov's announcement suggests Russian military planners have concluded that the only way to overcome current problems in the navy is to ensure that all Russian-flagged vessels, regardless of their ostensible purposes, are available for military tasks in the event of war. Clearly this decision stems from the Russian VMF's long-running difficulties in supporting the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine.

He further specified that the changes would focus, in the first instance, on ensuring that all commercial ships under a Russian flag be constructed or rebuilt so that they will be dual-use vessels, capable of civilian trade when possible yet be of military utility when necessary.

Maksim Klimov, a retired Russian captain who often comments for the domestic media on naval issues, said that the revisions being proposed by the government are needed because it has now become obvious that Russia's conflict with the West will be lengthy.

Yet according to Klimov, "one of the most critical issues" in this area, as far as the Russian fleet is concerned, is the lack of container vessels. Moscow must quickly address this shortage. And it must also be sensitive to another problem: many Russian ships are currently operating under the flags of other countries. Moscow needs to reduce their number and also be willing to compel Russian companies to obey mobilization orders even if their ships are operating under foreign flags. This voiced argument indicates the Kremlin may plan to ignore international maritime law in the name of Russian national security. All these steps are necessary, the retired naval officer declared, to ensure that the Russian navy can operate effectively.

Another retired VMF captain, Konstantin Sivkov, agrees. He noted that in the event of a military conflict, container ships will have to be commandeered to ensure Russian forces are adequately supplied. The value of such vessels he argued, was demonstrated most compellingly by the British experience in the Falklands War in 1982, and the importance of container ships has only increased in more recent decades. In addition, the military specialist said, Russian naval commanders will want to mobilize ships capable of carrying oil and natural gas as well as bulk cargo of various kinds.

They will also require that passenger vessels be put under naval control in order to move military personnel. All these measures should be included in the revised military doctrine. Taken together, such actions mean that Moscow views most of the 296 Russian civilian ships as part of its military reserve.

**Russia's airforce is failing** - The UK Ministry of Defence tweeted on Thursday, saying: "Russia's airborne forces - the VDV - have been heavily involved in several notable tactical failures since the start of Russia's invasion. This includes the attempted advance on Kyiv via Hostomel Airfield in March, the stalled progress on the Izium axis since April, and the recent failed and costly crossings of the Siversky Donets River.

"Russian doctrine anticipates assigning the VDV to some of the most demanding operations. The 45,000-strong VDV is mostly comprised of professional contract soldiers. its members enjoy elite status and attract additional pay.

The VDV has been employed on missions better suited to heavier armoured infantry and has sustained heavy casualties during the campaign. Its mixed performance likely reflects and strategic mismanagement of this capability and Russia's failure to secure air superiority."

## Peace Talks

**Ceding territory** - For Ukraine, giving the invading Russians any territory in exchange for peace is simply out of the question. "Children are dying here, soldiers are stopping shrapnel with their own bodies, and they're telling us to sacrifice territory. It will never happen," said Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych on Wednesday.

The suggestion was floated this week in Davos by 98-year-old former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. "In my view, movement towards negotiations and negotiations on peace need to begin in the next two months so that the outcome of the war should be outlined," Kissinger said Monday. "Ideally, the dividing line should return the status quo ante."

"I get the sense that instead of the year 2022, Mr. Kissinger has 1938 on his calendar, and that he thought he was addressing an audience not in Davos, but in erstwhile Munich," Ukrainian President Zelenskyy said Wednesday evening in a video address. A Ukrainian parliamentarian said much the same thing Tuesday morning. "It's a pity that the former US Secretary of State believes that giving up on part of the sovereign territory is a way to peace for any country!" Inna Sovsun tweeted, and added, "Truly shameful!"

But it's not just Ukraine's leaders who feel this way. "A poll released Tuesday by the Kyiv Institute of Sociology showed that 82 percent of Ukrainians say they don't want to give up territory to Russia," the New York Times reported this week.

Germany's chancellor seemed to agree on Thursday. "Putin must not win his war, and I am convinced he will not win," said Olaf Scholz in Davos. "There will be no dictated peace," he added. "Ukraine will not accept this, and neither will we."

**U.K.'s Truss To Caution On 'Appeasing' Russia In Speech During Bosnia Visit** - British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss is expected to warn against the "appeasement" of Russian President Vladimir Putin in a speech during a visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina on May 26 and tell Western allies and partners there must be no "backsliding" in support for Ukraine.

"Russia's aggression cannot be appeased. It must be met with strength," Truss will say, according to excerpts of the speech to be delivered to Bosnian armed forces at Sarajevo's Army Hall.

**Kremlin's expectations for peace talks** - The Kremlin said on Thursday that Moscow expected Kyiv to meet its demands, adding that Ukraine needed to have an awareness of the situation for peace talks to take place.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was reacting to comments by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who this week suggested at the World Economic Forum in Davos that Ukraine should let Russia keep Crimea, which it annexed in 2014.

Moscow is demanding that Ukraine acknowledge Crimea as Russian territory and recognize breakaway Russian-backed parts of eastern Ukraine as independent states, among other demands. Ukraine categorically disagrees with Russia's claims.

## Putin

**Russian mum's fight to save sons from Putin's war** - A Russian soldier's mother called for her country's war against Ukraine to stop during an anti-war protest in Moscow. She yearned for the safe return of her 22-year-old son, who was conscripted to fight in Ukraine. Around 14,000 Russian personnel have been lost in the ongoing war, according to Ukrainian authorities.

When Marina's two sons were conscripted last winter to the Russian army she welcomed the idea of her children doing a year's military service. "I told them that they had to serve," Marina tells me, "it was their duty to the motherland."

But a few weeks later she began to worry. Her sons had been deployed to an area close to the border with Ukraine.

On 24 February President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to invade Ukraine. That day Marina (not her real name) lost contact with her sons. "Time stopped for me. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep," she told me. "I exchanged messages with the mothers of other conscripts from the same unit. It turned out that many of them had lost contact with their children, too."

The Kremlin promised that Russian conscripts would not be sent to Ukraine.

So where were Marina's sons? "I got in the car and started searching. On the phone one of the commanders insisted that they were on military exercises out in the fields. I said: 'I've driven round all the fields near here where there had been exercises. They're not there. Please don't lie to me.' He hung up."

"Once, out of desperation, I tried to drive into Ukraine. Of course, they didn't let me through. There were check-points everywhere." "Then the casualties started arriving. I got a call from someone telling me there were dead and wounded. I rushed to the military hospital."

Marina's sons were not there, but she was shocked by what she saw. "In the military hospital there wasn't enough medicine or bandages. Local residents supplied everything. The soldiers were cold and hungry. Local people with a big heart were bringing food and drink to the hospital."

Eventually someone at her sons' military unit admitted that they were, indeed, in Ukraine. "I was told the terrifying news: 'Your children have signed military contracts to be professional soldiers. They're taking part in the special military operation [in Ukraine]. They will return as heroes'."

"What on earth are you talking about? They had no plans to sign a contract," was her response. "They've been in the army for three months. They've only held a gun once. They've only been to a firing range once. Most of the time they've been shoveling snow."

"I wrote to the prosecutor-general's office asking to investigate. I told them there was no way my sons could have signed military contracts. I was certain. Other mothers wrote, too. They all knew their children."

Marina's official complaint was upheld. The Russian authorities confirmed that her sons had not signed military contracts. Both sons were returned to Russia. "They allowed me to come and take my younger son home for the day," Marina says. "While I was driving to collect him, I called and asked him if there was anything he needed. 'Mum, I don't need anything,' he replied, 'just you'."

"When I saw him he looked a total mess. The lads that came back from there were so thin, dirty and exhausted. Their clothes were torn. My son said: 'It's better that you don't know what happened there.' But all that mattered to me was that he had come back alive."

Marina is angry about what happened.

**Russian veterans group calls Putin's special military operation a 'failure' and demands mobilization for 'full-blooded war'** - The devastating defeat of a large Russian force trying to cross a river in eastern Ukraine, along with other serious Russian losses, has sparked increasing criticism among pro-Russia military bloggers and commentators, including a Russian veterans group that is now urging Russian President Vladimir Putin to declare war on Ukraine and mobilize additional forces.

The All-Russian Officers Assembly said in a letter on May 19 that Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine had failed to achieve its objectives and called on Putin to recognize that the invasion of Ukraine was no longer about "denazifying" the country but about fighting for Russia's existence and place in the world order, according to a recent analysis from the Institute for the Study of War, a research organization in Washington, DC.

The pro-Russia veterans group said that the "special military operation," as Putin calls his large-scale invasion of Ukraine, had been a "failure" and was over and that Russia must prepare for a "full-blooded war."

**Russia's dead soldiers abandoned** - Russia has a proud slogan: "we don't abandon our own". It is used to help justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where, according to Putin, Russian speakers need protection from a neo-Nazi regime.

But it is Ukrainian authorities, not Russian, who are trying to identify the bodies of Russian soldiers who died on the battlefields near Kyiv. Ukraine says Russia shows little interest in getting them back.

"The bodies we've found show they treat people as rubbish, as cannon fodder," Col Volodymyr Liamzin told the BBC. "They don't need their soldiers. They throw them here, retreat - and leave the bodies."

But the delay in collecting bodies isn't unique to Russia, and the BBC has heard from several Ukrainian families who say their own government has been less than helpful in recovering the remains of Ukrainian soldiers from the battlefield.

**How Putin's war has erased Russia's past—and endangered its future** - This war is full of paradoxes. Russian President Vladimir Putin insists he is fighting against a country that is overrun by Nazis, yet among the millions of Ukrainians who have fled the Russian advance were 78 Holocaust survivors who were evacuated—to Germany. Ninety-one-year-old Vanda Obyedkova survived the German occupation of Mariupol in World War II only to die during the Russian siege of the city in 2022. In Kharkiv, 96-year-old Boris Romanchenko, a survivor of the Buchenwald concentration camp, was killed when a Russian shell hit his apartment building. During World War II, the Ukrainian soldier Ivan Lisun was one of the Soviet soldiers who helped liberate Belarus and Poland from the Nazis. Now his own home in the Kharkiv region has been destroyed by the Russian army.

After three months of deadly violence, the Russian regime has struggled to find coherent, positive symbols for its "special operation" in Ukraine. It has not captured any Nazis (although the Duma would like to present captured fighters of Ukraine's Azov Battalion as such) and has also failed to come up with a clear reason for what it is doing. Instead, it has plunged an entire country into a fantasy realm, where words and deeds have opposite meanings: Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia's Security Council, for example, invented the concept of "liberal fascism;" Maria Zakharova, the legendary Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, now reports that George Orwell's 1984 was written about Western civilization. And now the Putin regime faces a more daunting challenge still: how to imagine a victory out of a war that has brought the country to the brink of disaster.

The annual May 9 holiday, when Russia commemorates the Soviet victory of 1945, was once a day of solemn remembrance. It is also the only holiday that unites nearly all Russians. After Putin came to power, the May 9 celebrations began to take on a more pompous character, but he kept them open to the rest of the world. On the sixtieth anniversary in 2005, for example, he invited U.S. President George W. Bush to attend in person. In recent years, however, as Putin has increasingly built his legitimacy around the idea that he alone is heir to the Great Victory, the celebrations have been transformed into a bombastic military show. It is an infallible tactic for a dictator: by equating his own actions with the Soviet triumph over Nazism, he implied that any criticism of him amounted to criticism of the sacred victory in 1945.

By the time it rolled around this year, the holiday had evolved to the point where a significant proportion of Russians anticipated it with unconcealed dread. In Moscow, there were rumors that Putin would finally declare the "special military operation" an actual war, and that he would announce a general mobilization at the celebrations themselves, just as Stalin sent soldiers off to the front directly from the Revolution Day parade on November 7, 1941.

Russians have gotten used to raising their voices. On the Kremlin-controlled TV channels that are now one of the main methods for shaping public opinion, talk show hosts shout instead of talking. Quarrels with friends and relatives are fought using decibels rather than facts. The propaganda, meanwhile, is as primitive as could be through its own aggression, Russia is defending Ukrainians from neo-Nazi enemies and it is liberating territory from the “Banderites,” supporters of the WW II-era Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera. There is also now a new argument: the West is waging a war against Russia using “Slav” hands. The most fervent Putinists now call Ukraine a “secessionist entity” and openly talk of “de-Ukrainianization” of the Russian World.

In March, 81 percent of Russians in a Levada Center poll said they supported the “special operation.” By April, that figure had dropped to 74 percent. Putin’s approval rating has also plateaued, and his trust rating—how many Russians say they trust him—has also fallen slightly. But although no one is quite sure what might define victory, 73 percent of respondents say they believe Russia will achieve it. Not many respondents believe Ukraine could win, although 15 percent say that “neither side could prevail.”

These numbers indicate a kind of equilibrium taking hold: aggressive Putin supporters still want to see a stepped-up campaign by the Russian army and the takeover of Ukraine, completely disregarding the stated goals of the operation, which, however, change all the time. On the other hand, Russians who are more skeptical or concerned about the direction of the war would settle at this point for a peace treaty. Still, more than two-thirds of respondents in Levada Center poll believed that the operation is proceeding successfully, although 50 percent chose the more evasive answer “largely successful.” When asked to define success, most respondents dutifully indicate the same dreary mantras about everything going to plan and territories being liberated from fascists and Banderites. Among the 17 percent of respondents who do not consider the operation a success, many cite the drawn-out nature of the military campaign and the fact that large numbers of civilians and children in Ukraine and Russian soldiers are getting killed.

Whether they think it is a success or not, however, Russians overwhelmingly blame the war on the United States and NATO; just seven percent of Russians blame their own country. Yet even this deliberate blindness is no salvation from creeping doubt: 82 percent of respondents say they are worried about events in Ukraine, and in most cases the reason for that worry is not the “Banderites,” but the death, suffering, and destruction the has taken place (46 percent) and even the fact of the war itself (26 percent). In other words, an indirect question reveals how great Russians’ emotional and psychological concerns are about what has happened to their country since February. This is despite relentless indoctrination by the official Russian media and the state.

It’s unlikely that Putin understands the extent to which he has pulled the rug out from under his own most fervent supporters, who are looking for ways to justify the unfolding nightmare. Russian psychologists have already noticed a precipitous increase in patients suffering from chronic anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. Increasingly frequent clashes with reality are starting to force Russians out of the comfort zone of Putin’s propaganda.

In daily life, the war has become a familiar backdrop, but a depressing one that people wish would disappear. Many yearn for the old normal, but the new normal is here to stay. Nor do people realize that the new normal is abnormal and will remain so for years to come. No one seems to doubt victory, but it is conviction based more on self-hypnosis than actual facts.

Putin has turned everything upside down. He has destroyed all the achievements of recent decades, including his own. He has accomplished the exact opposite of his stated goals: instead of demilitarizing Ukraine, he has caused the country to arm as never before; instead of keeping NATO away, he has brought it right up to Russia’s borders; instead of making Russia great again, he has managed to transform it, and his people, into a pariah nation. Trying to impose his version of the nation’s history, he deprived it of its history. And by depriving it of history, he amputated the future. Russia is now at a dead end, a historical dead end.

## Sanctions

**Russia's central bank slashes interest rates to 11% as it tries to tame the rampant ruble** - Russia's central bank slashed interest rates sharply Thursday in an effort to reduce the value of the ruble, which has soared against the dollar in recent weeks.

The Central Bank of Russia (CBR) cut the benchmark rate to 11%, from 14% previously, in an emergency meeting called two weeks early. It was the third rate cut in just over a month.

The ruble was little changed after the central bank's rate hike and was last 0.25% lower at 60.37 to the dollar.

**WHO members condemn Russia, warn its voting rights could be stripped** - Ukraine's successful resolution raises the possibility that Russia could be suspended from the assembly if attacks on hospitals and clinics continue.

**Russians face prospect of Soviet-style shortages as sanctions bite** - Stung by Western sanctions, Russia is starting to devolve into a secondhand economy dependent on poor substitutes, where shortages are stirring memories of the consumer wasteland that was the Soviet Union.

While it may be able to find new purveyors for some Western-made goods and components in friendly countries such as China and India, Russia is increasingly determined to make its own — returning to policies of import substitution that yielded a vast, if globally uncompetitive, industrial complex before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Already, Moscow is facing serious challenges.

Unable to secure spare parts from Western airplane manufacturers, for instance, the Russian aviation sector is facing a crisis. About 80 percent of Russia's commercial fleet consists of foreign-made planes, predominantly from Airbus and Boeing, both of which have stopped doing business with Moscow.

Ural Airlines, which has over 50 Airbus planes, has projected that it can safely fly them for only a few months before it will need to start "cannibalizing" from other aircraft — permanently grounding some planes to strip them for parts. The low-cost airline Pobeda, part of the state-run Aeroflot group, has already reduced its fleet from 41 to 25 planes, using its grounded aircraft for "cannibalized" parts.

The decision by Ericsson and Nokia to freeze business with Russia, meantime, has left cellular providers there suddenly scouring the world for used towers and parts to maintain and expand a network that had more or less kept pace with the United States and Europe. Even China's Huawei appears reluctant to fill the gap, indefinitely delaying a Russian rollout of next-generation 5G technology, a service that providers had been testing before the Ukraine invasion.

"Within five years, there will be a huge gap between Russia and in the rest of the world" on cellular service, said Grigory Bakunov, an expert on Russian technology.

Following the recent exit of French automaker Renault, Russia is moving to restart production of the Moskvich — a Soviet-era make that went bankrupt two decades ago after failing to achieve foreign quality standards. Its resurrection, potentially with Chinese assistance, could either jump-start the production of domestic alternatives or see a new generation of clunkers clogging Russian roads.

Supply disruptions, however, have hit not only assembly lines that rely on advanced technology but also those using imported materials. Sanctions "on the Russian Federation have practically broken all the logistics in our country," Russian Transport Minister Vitaly Savelyev, conceded to journalists last weekend during a visit to Russia's Astrakhan region.

**Insurance sector exodus could serve major hit to Russia's energy exports** - Efforts on the part of insurers to cut their links to Russia could put a stranglehold on Russian energy exports, unless the Kremlin fills the void, analysts have said.

The push amongst Western insurance companies to distance themselves from Russian clients, to ensure they are not in breach of Western sanctions, could severely impact the Federation's oil and gas exports, if Russian tankers are unable to get insured elsewhere.

The sanctions could undermine the Kremlin's efforts to send oil and gas – in the form of LNG – to Asia, due to the core role Lloyds of London and other UK, US and EU insurers play in the marine insurance market.

As ships are required to be covered under protection & indemnity (P&I) insurance policies, the insurance sector's exodus could hasten the downfall of the export industry that plays a vital role in the Russian economy, in providing around 40 per cent of total government revenue.

Last month, insurance expert Neil Roberts told MPs that insurers have been erring on the side of "extreme caution" in their dealings with Russian linked clients, amid fear of the "extreme" penalties they could face.

The Lloyds exec said the UK's sanctions rules are having a "profound" impact on London insurers, as he warned that many underwriters are refusing to work with any Russian clients at all.

Earlier this month, the EU also set out plans to ban European insurers from covering ships carrying Russian oil, in line with efforts to undermine Russia's energy exports. The EU's plans come as research shows Chinese and Indian buyers have begun picking up cheap cargoes of Russian oil that have been turned away by the West.

**Rare Ship-to-Ship Transfers Keep Oil Moving From Russia to China** - A logistically risky and costly transfer of crude between tankers at sea highlights the steps at least one Chinese buyer is willing to take to ensure the smooth flow of oil from eastern Russia to Asia.

Buyers are using creative ways to maintain flows as more shipowners shun Russian oil due to the potential fallout from financial sanctions, according to shipbrokers. Small vessels are being used to shuttle between Russia's Kozmino port and the waters off Yeosu in South Korea, where cargoes undergo ship-to-ship transfer to supertankers for the next leg of the journey to China.

The number of shipowners and insurers willing to handle Russian crude is dwindling, said shipbrokers, created a logistical challenge for producers and buyers working with fewer tankers. The new approach isn't to dodge sanctions but to more effectively deploy the available fleet, they added.

This process is unusual for ESPO crude, a type of Russian oil that's typically loaded onto smaller tankers for a direct, five-day journey to China. While it adds to overall sailing time and costs, the brokers said the practice is becoming more common as shipowners and buyers prioritize a ready supply of small vessels to ferry oil out of Kozmino in short runs.

## Humanitarian

**U.S. Envoy TO OSCE Condemns 'Barbarity' Of Russia's War In Ukraine** - The U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has condemned the "sheer barbarity, sadistic cruelty, and lawlessness" of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Ambassador Michael Carpenter also warned in a speech to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on May 26 against allowing Russia to achieve "success" in Ukraine.

If it did, he said there would be "more horrific reports from filtration camps, more forcibly displaced people, more summary executions, more torture, more rape, and more looting. There would be many more damaged or destroyed cultural objects, hospitals, schools, and apartment buildings. More death and destruction," Carpenter said, according to a copy of his speech posted on the U.S. mission's website.

**Two Russian soldiers plead guilty in the second war crimes trial in Ukraine** - In the second war crimes trial since Russian troops invaded Ukraine, two captured Russian soldiers pleaded guilty to bombarding a town in eastern Ukraine, the Guardian reported on May 26. Alexander Bobikin and Alexander Ivanov admitted to being members of an artillery regiment that fired at targets in Kharkiv from Russia's Belgorod area.

**EU, US and UK establish the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group (ACA) for Ukraine** – The EU, US and UK announced the creation of the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group (ACA), a mechanism aimed at ensuring efficient coordination of their respective support to accountability efforts on the ground. The ACA will reinforce current EU, US and UK efforts to further accountability for atrocity crimes in the context of Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine. It advances commitments made by the European Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom to demonstrate international support and solidarity at this crucial historical moment for Ukraine.

The overarching mission of the ACA is to support the War Crimes Units of the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine (OPG) in its investigation and prosecution of conflict-related crimes. The ACA seeks to streamline coordination and communication efforts to ensure best practices, avoid duplication of efforts, and encourage the expeditious deployment of financial resources and skilled personnel to respond to the needs of the OPG as the legally constituted authority in Ukraine responsible for dealing with the prosecution of war crimes on its own territory.

## Chinese economy

**Top Chinese official sounds alarm over economy** - Li Keqiang issued the stark warning as the economy stalled under pressure from multiplying covid restrictions and shrinking demand.

Offering a grim view of the world's second-biggest economy, Premier Li Keqiang said on Wednesday that economic difficulties in some aspects were even bigger than in 2020 when the country was first hit by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Chinese policymakers are in greater urgency to support the economy after the very weak activity growth in April, anemic recovery month-to-date in May, and continued increases in unemployment rates.

## Containment

**Hellenic Support To Ukraine's Army Of Resistance** - By now, nearly all EU and NATO member countries have provided varying degrees of military support to aid Ukraine in its fight against the Russian Army. While the transfer of a S-300PMU SAM battery by Slovakia and the supply of Javelin and NLAW ATGMs by the U.S. and UK have garnered much public attention, many more countries have contributed in their own respective ways. One of these countries is Greece, which pledged to provide military aid to Ukraine as early as February 27. This consisted of 20,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 815 RPG-18 disposable rocket launchers and an undisclosed number of 122mm unguided rockets. At least two plane loads worth of armament and munitions were dispatched to Ukraine shortly thereafter, where this armament is currently used in action against Russian forces.

Since then, Greece has been mentioned as a possible source for additional weapons systems on numerous occasions. Most notably, they operate a vast arsenal of Soviet-made weaponry, with which Ukrainian forces are already familiar (contrary to most Western types of armament currently being delivered). This includes S-300PMU-1, Tor-M1 and 9K33 Osa SAM systems in addition to multiple rocket launchers (MRLs), armored fighting vehicles (AFVs) and other equipment.

It is certain that the U.S. for this reason looked at Greece as a potential source for Soviet-made armament that could directly enter service, with similar efforts undertaken with Cyprus for the supply of Buk-M1 and Tor-M1 SAM systems. Nonetheless, in early April the Greek government formally rejected the supply of such equipment on the grounds that it would not compromise its own defense capabilities, later confirming that it had no plans of sending additional military equipment to Ukraine.

### Evidence Of US-supplied Switchblade Loitering Munitions Targeting Russian Troops In Ukraine Emerges

- As expected, the first video evidence of the Switchblade loitering munitions being used in Ukraine just emerged online. The video shows the US-made “suicide drone” as it descends toward the target during an attack against a Russian T-72 tank, which was seemingly parked beside a road and with its crew standing on the turret.



The description of the video says that the attack was performed by SSO operators, the Ukrainian special forces. While the accuracy of the description of the video can't be verified, it mentions that the Russian soldiers “were drinking alcohol while sitting on the armor of their tank,” when the drone flew straight into the tank and caused “irreparable damage.”

The loitering munition used in the video is said to be the Switchblade 300, designed for pinpoint strikes on personnel. These loitering munitions are part of an aid package from the United States which includes both the Switchblade 300 and the 600, with the latter meant to destroy primarily tanks and other armored vehicles.



The Switchblade 300 has a range of 10 km and an endurance of just 10/15 minutes, but it has the advantage of being easily transported by a soldier in a backpack, weighting just 2.5 kg. On the other hand, the Switchblade 600 is much larger, weighting more than 22 kg, but it also offers improved performance with a range of more than 90 km and an endurance of more than 40 minutes.

**Sea blockade** - Ukraine needs to acquire somewhere around 100 anti-ship missiles to deter the Russian surface fleet involved in the sea blockade. Recent news about Denmark’s intention to provide Ukraine with a Harpoon coastal missile battery, if it happens, would help in this regard.

For Ukraine to neutralize Russian coastal missile systems based in Crimea it will require proper weaponry. And the most appropriate Western weapons complexes for this task are the interoperable High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and ML270 Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS). When armed with the MGM-140 Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), a HIMARS or ML270 launcher would be able to destroy the enemy’s shore-based targets within a range of 300 kilometers. Ukrainian civilian and military officials are vigorously requesting these systems from the United States and other Western partners. When located along the shore, these mobile surface-to-surface missile complexes would significantly boost Ukraine’s ability to deter Russian naval forces, unblock Ukrainian seaports and, at least partially, ensure the security of sovereign Ukrainian waters in the Black Sea. This would be a minimum prerequisite for vessels loaded up with grain exports to navigate out from Ukrainian ports or for supply ships to come in.

A much-discussed idea at present is participation by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in “de-blockading” Ukrainian ports, but the likelihood that non-littoral Alliance ships would become involved is extremely low. NATO as a collective organization continues to be extremely cautious about militarily intervening in Russia’s war against Ukraine (Liga.net, May 25). Perhaps, impetus for creating a naval coalition to escort Ukrainian grain convoys could be

strengthened by giving it the status of a UN humanitarian mission, which might even encourage NATO forces to join this operation. But Russia, as a veto-wielding permanent UN Security Council member, would likely block such an initiative.

Ukraine's own ability to secure and control its sovereign waters and ports is, thus, the initial priority and the key to breaking Russia's naval blockade. Ukraine needs a convincing sea denial capability, which will require assistance from its strategic international partners to develop. But time is running critically low.

## Geopolitics

**Playing games in NATO, Turkey eyes its role in a new world order** - NATO's spat over Turkish opposition to Swedish and Finnish membership is about more than expanding the North Atlantic military alliance. It's as much about Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's immediate political goals as Turkey's positioning itself in a new 21st-century world order.

On its surface, the spat is about Turkish efforts to hinder support for Kurdish ethnic, cultural, and national aspirations in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq and a crackdown on alleged supporters of a preacher who lives in exile in the United States. Turkey accuses the preacher, Fethullah Gulen, of instigating a failed military coup in 2016.

The spat may also be a play by NATO's second-largest standing military to regain access to US arms sales, particularly upgrades for Turkey's aging fleet of F-16 fighter jets as well as more advanced newer models of the F-16 and the top-of-the-line F-35.

Finally, playing the Kurdish card benefits Mr. Erdogan domestically, potentially at a time that the Turkish economy is in the doldrums with a 70 per cent inflation rate.

"Erdogan always benefits politically when he takes on the Kurdistan Workers Party (the PKK) and groups linked to it, like the YPG in Syria... In fact, attacking the PKK and the YPG is a two-for-one. Erdogan is seen to take on genuine terrorists and separatists, and at the same time, he gets to take a swipe at the United States, which taps into the vast reservoir of anti-Americanism in Turkey," said Middle East scholar Steven A. Cook.

While important issues in and of themselves, they are also likely to influence where Turkey will rank as the world moves towards a bi-polar or multi-polar power structure.

Turkey asserts that the US-backed People's Protection Units (YPG), a Syrian militia that helped defeat the Islamic State, is an extension of the PKK. The PKK has waged a decades-long insurgency against Turkey, home to some 16 million Kurds. Turkey, the United States, and the European Union have designated the PKK as a terrorist organization.

Mr. Erdogan charges that Sweden and Finland give the PKK sanctuary and is demanding that the two countries extradite the group's operatives. Turkey has not officially released the names of 33 people it wants to see extradited, but some were reported in Turkish media close to the government.

Revived US arms sales would go a long way to cement improved relations and downplay the significance of Turkey's acquisition of Russia's S-400 anti-missile system, even if Turkey's opposition to Scandinavian membership will have a lingering effect on trust. The United States expelled Turkey from its F-35 program in response to the acquisition.

This week, Mr. Erdogan appeared to widen the dispute in NATO after Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis lobbied the US Congress against military sales to Turkey. "Mitsotakis no longer exists for me. I will never agree to meet him," Mr. Erdogan said. He said that Mr. Mitsotakis' lobbying violated an agreement between the two men "not to involve third countries in our bilateral issues."

Turkey's NATO gamble is a game of high-stakes poker, given that Russia is as much a partner of Turkey as it is a threat.

NATO is Turkey's ultimate shield against Russian civilizationalist expansionism. Russian support in 2008 for irredentist regions of Georgia and annexation of Crimea in 2014 created a buffer between Turkey and Ukraine and complicated arrangements between Turkey and Russia in the Black Sea.

Nevertheless, Mr. Erdogan risks fueling a debate about Turkey's membership in NATO, much like Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's opposition to a European embargo of Russian energy has raised questions about Hungary's place in the EU.

## Impacts

**Orban Imposes New State Of Emergency In Hungary, Saying Ukraine War Poses 'Constant Danger'** - Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has imposed a new state of emergency in the country, citing the war in Ukraine, which he said "poses a threat to our physical security."

Speaking in a video message posted on Facebook on May 24, Orbán said no one can see an end to the war, which began three months ago when Russia invaded Ukraine.

"This war means a constant danger to Hungary. It poses a threat to our physical security. It threatens our economy and our families in terms of energy supplies and material security," Orbán said.

The war and the sanctions imposed by the European Union have led to huge economic turbulence and drastic price increases, he said.

"The world is on the brink of an economic crisis. Hungary must stay outside of this war and must protect the families' material security," he added.

**Russia's Defense Industry 'Will Feel' Pain of Ukraine War** - Russia's vaunted defense modernization depends on precisely the Western gear it can no longer acquire.

U.S. and international economic sanctions and export controls are likely to significantly hamper Russia's ability to produce advanced fighter jets, naval platforms, and space capabilities essential to the Kremlin's efforts to modernize its military, the U.S. Defense Department's No. 2 official said.

The Pentagon and Western governments have indicated for weeks that Russia is struggling to restock precision-guided munitions that use foreign-made computer chips and guidance systems to help them hit targets, which has an immediate impact on Russia's war in Ukraine. But U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks, who is in Europe on her first international trip after a year on the job, told reporters on Tuesday that the Kremlin's deep reliance on foreign-produced microelectronics that are now under harsh economic controls is expected to hamper a much wider range of platforms.

Russia's current military modernization plan, set to conclude in 2027, is focused on backing up the Kremlin's ground forces with a bevy of long-range weapons systems that could hold NATO nations at bay, including two varieties of hypersonic missiles, sea- and air-launched Kalibr cruise missiles, and short- and intermediate-range Iskander missiles—all of which have been used in combat in Ukraine.

A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity based on ground rules set by the Pentagon, said Russia has aimed to perfect "non-contact" warfare against the NATO alliance, using standoff strikes if it were to come to blows with European nations in a wider regional war—areas of military modernization where Russia could now face significant headwinds.

But even before Putin ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, eight years of fighting in the country's Donbas region had helped sever vital links with Ukrainian aerospace industries and shipbuilders, delaying the rollout of new ships and

submarines and forcing the Kremlin to turn to Soviet-era designs for some aircraft. Dating back to the 2002 U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, Putin has sought to concentrate the Kremlin's focus on developing the nuclear triad and emerging technologies, highlighted by six novel nuclear weapons systems unveiled in 2018 that are not covered by arms control treaties.

And Russia has long struggled to get its fifth-generation Sukhoi Su-57 fighter jet program running, with just four aircraft entering service since the program was inaugurated in 2020. The modern fighter was missing in action during Russia's "Victory Day" parade in Moscow at the beginning of the month, and three months into the war, Russian forces still have not achieved air superiority.

The microelectronics that Russia is struggling to get ahold of "form the backbone of modern military capabilities," said Jesse Salazar, who was the Pentagon's top official for industrial policy until earlier this year. He said the coronavirus pandemic has also stressed the defense industry, forcing some product lead times from six months to two years with digitization moving forward rapidly.

"The sanctions on Russia will likely exacerbate this supply chain challenge and make production of advanced technology systems much harder and longer, especially in defense," he said.

## Widening of Conflict

**Amid Rising Russian Threat, Moldova Mulls Scrapping Neutrality** - Russia's invasion of Ukraine has left nearby Moldova feeling vulnerable and threatened.

With a small military of its own and a decades-long frozen conflict in breakaway Transdniestria fueled in large part by Moscow, impoverished Moldova is worried it could be the Kremlin's next target.

The United States and Britain, as well as the EU, have recently come forward with proposals to beef up Moldova's modest military.

That has sparked a debate in this country of some 2.6 million people about abolishing its neutral status, with many arguing it no longer serves the country's best interests. Moldova's neutrality is enshrined in the country's post-Soviet constitution.

Chisinau needs to be roused from its "slumber and inertia" to resolve its security challenges given Russia's "relentless war in Ukraine," said Igor Munteanu, a recent Moldovan ambassador to the United States.

"Everything is related to this paradigm of neutrality which was, as I said in a certain way, a geopolitical rape...by imposing a poisonous peace and limits of external action by accepting neutrality since 1994," Munteanu recently told RFE/RL's Moldovan Service.

The debate on whether Moldova should scrap neutrality and move closer to NATO intensified after British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss told The Daily Telegraph on May 20 that Moldova should be "equipped to NATO standard" to help protect it against the threat of a Russian invasion.

She said it was clear that, despite limited success in Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin retained "ambitions to create a greater Russia."

Moldova, once a Soviet republic, sits on Ukraine's southwestern border. It does not share a border with Russia but is close to some of the regions currently occupied by Russian forces in Ukraine's south. Moldova is not a member of NATO, although it did apply to join the European Union less than two weeks after the invasion of Ukraine. The country's pro-Russian opposition has not welcomed Western proposals of military help.

## **Russia's Reaction**

Following the offer of military aid to Moldova by Truss, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko said Moscow was watching Chisinau's reaction, but that the supply of NATO weapons to a neutral state "raised questions."

Since Russia launched its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine on February 24, Chisinau has watched warily, concerned that the Kremlin may have its territory in its sights next.

Those fears were further fueled on April 22, when a senior Russian general, Rustam Minnekayev, spoke about Russia occupying southern Ukraine and the possibility of securing a "road out" to the breakaway region of Transdniester, where he said -- without offering any evidence -- that Russian speakers faced persecution.

Russia has around 2,000 troops in Transdniester, most of them guarding an ammunition depot at Cobasna, the largest such facility in Eastern Europe.

Separatist Transdniester also has its own armed forces, which number between 4,000 and 7,500, although little is known of their fighting capabilities or equipment.

While most military analysts believe Russia does not have the military resources to launch a fresh offensive toward Transdniester, the region witnessed a flare-up in unrest last month.

In late April, the de facto Transdniester authorities said that explosions had targeted their state security headquarters in the main city of Tiraspol, Soviet-era radio towers used to broadcast Russian news, and a military unit in a village outside the city. Separatists in Transdniester blamed Ukrainian "infiltrators," while Kyiv said Russian special services were responsible.

**Pro-Russian ex-president of Moldova placed under house arrest** - A court in Moldova has placed the country's former President Igor Dodon under 30-day house arrest as he faces an investigation into suspected treason, corruption, illicit enrichment, and illegal party financing.

Moldova has firmly backed Kyiv since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine, and the arrest of pro-Russia Dodon comes at a time when relations between Moscow and Chisinau are increasingly strained.

**Marcos says Philippines to uphold South China Sea ruling** - President-elect Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said Thursday he would uphold an international ruling against Beijing over the disputed territories on the South China Sea, insisting he would not let China trample on Manila's maritime rights.

"We have a very important ruling in our favor, and we will use it to continue to assert our territorial rights. It is not a claim. It is already our territorial right," Marcos said in an interview with selected local media.

**UK foreign secretary visits Bosnia to pledge support** - British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss is visiting Sarajevo on Thursday to reaffirm the U.K.'s commitment to peace and stability in Bosnia amid growing fears of malign influence from Russia in the ethnically-divided Balkan country.

During her one-day trip, Truss will meet with top Bosnian officials and announce plans to deepen "security and economic partnership with (the country) in the face of secessionists and Russian attempts to influence and destabilize" it, the U.K. Foreign Office said in a statement.

Truss will also address Bosnia's multi-ethnic armed forces to urge support for Ukraine with a message that "Russia's aggression cannot be appeased. It must be met with strength," it added.

Bosnia has been divided along ethnic lines since the 1992-95 war between its Bosniak, Croat and Serb ethnic communities that killed around 100,000 people.

The country condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the United Nations but failed to agree on imposing sanctions against the Kremlin because of opposition from Serb officials.

**Putin Ally Ready to Attack Poland: Better 'Take Back Your Weapons'** - Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen leader and an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, said that he is ready to attack Poland and that the European country "better take back your weapons."

In a video shared Wednesday on Twitter by BBC journalist Francis Scarr, Kadyrov says that the "issue of Ukraine is closed" and that he is "interested in Poland," according to a translation of his comments.

"After Ukraine, if we're given the command, in six seconds we'll show you what we're capable of," Kadyrov said.