

# Conflict Update # 51

May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

### Key Takeaways

The **Ukrainian counteroffensive** along a broad arc north and east of Kharkiv city took further terrain and will likely push Russian forces out of tube artillery range of the city in the coming days. The ability—and willingness—of the Ukrainian military to concentrate the forces in Kharkiv necessary to conduct this operation indicates Ukrainian confidence in repelling ongoing Russian attacks with their existing forces in the region.

**Russian forces did not make** any progress on the Izyum axis.

**Russian forces likely secured** small gains on the outskirts of Severodonetsk in the last 24 hours but are unlikely to successfully surround the town.

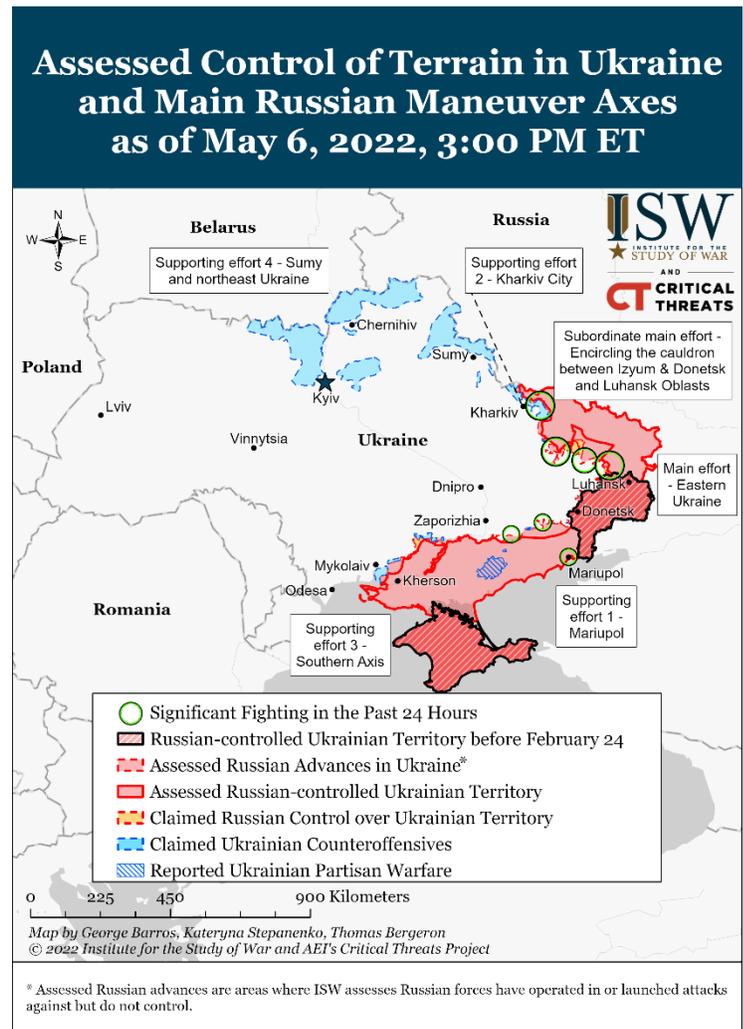
**Russian forces continued assaults** on the Azovstal plant, but ISW cannot confirm any specific advances. Likely widespread civilian resistance to the Russian occupation may additionally be disrupting previously announced Russian plans to conduct a Victory Day exhibition in Mariupol.

**There were no significant changes** on the southern axis in the last 24 hours and Russian forces continued to reinforce their forward positions.

**ISW cannot confirm** reports of a Ukrainian anti-ship missile strike on the Admiral Makarov at this time.

**Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts** - Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian attacks on the Izyum axis in the last 24 hours, with Kharkiv Oblast civilian leadership reporting that they inflicted heavy casualties on Russian forces on the outskirts of Barinkove. Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces prioritized aerial reconnaissance of Ukrainian positions and are deploying unspecified Eastern Military District units to the Izyum axis. Russian forces around Izyum remain stalled and additional scattered reinforcements are unlikely to enable renewed advances.

Russian forces today likely secured small gains on the outskirts of Severodonetsk, and continued attacks on Rubizhne and Voevodivka (just north of Severodonetsk), likely capturing Voronove (southeast of Severodonetsk). Local Ukrainian and Russian sources both reported that Russian forces are attacking other unspecified villages on the outskirts of



Severodonetsk in a likely attempt to surround the town. Ukrainian forces repelled continuing Russian assaults around Popasna, and Russian forces did not launch any attacks against Avdiivka or Lyman. Ukrainian General Staff today reported that Russian shelling along the line of contact in eastern Ukraine is intended to interdict Ukrainian movements.

**Supporting Effort #1—Mariupol** - Russian forces today continued assaults on the Azovstal plant, but ISW cannot confirm any specific advances. Pro-Russian Telegram channels claimed Russian forces captured 100 Ukrainian servicemen attempting to escape Azovstal, though ISW cannot confirm this claim. The Ukrainian Presidential Office announced a new humanitarian corridor opened today, but Russian forces reportedly violated a local ceasefire and launched anti-tank missiles at civilian vehicles evacuating from Azovstal.

Russian forces continued occupation measures but likely face widespread civilian resistance and may not be able to fully secure the city on their intended timetable. They were yesterday observed changing road signs in Mariupol from Ukrainian to Russian, and Ukrainian officials reported today that Russian forces are disseminating false information on Ukrainian losses to lower civilian morale.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov declined to state if Russian forces would hold a parade in Mariupol on May 9, saying a wide celebration is currently impossible and claiming he could not say “on the behalf of the military if there are any plans” regarding a parade. The continued resistance of Ukrainian forces in the Azovstal plant and likely widespread civilian resistance to the Russian occupation may be disrupting previously announced Russian plans to conduct a Victory Day exhibition in Mariupol.

**Supporting Effort #2—Kharkiv City** - The Ukrainian counteroffensive north and east of Kharkiv made substantial progress in the last 24 hours and Ukrainian forces may be able to drive Russian forces out of tube artillery range of Kharkiv city itself in the coming days.

Ukrainian General Staff and independent sources reported that Ukrainian forces recaptured Oleksandrivka, Fedorivka, Ukrainka, Shestakovo, Peremoha, Tsirkuny, and part of Cherkasy Tishki from May 5-6. Russian forces continued to shell Ukrainian positions, build up air defenses, and regroup damaged units on the Kharkiv axis. Russian forces likely face the choice of sending additional reinforcements intended for eastern Ukraine to support defensive positions on the outskirts of Kharkiv or lose their ability to both shell the city and screen lines of communication through Kharkiv Oblast.

**Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis** - Russian forces in the entire southern axis did not conduct any active operations (halting recent attacks toward Kryvyi Rih and Zaporizhia) in the last 24 hours and continued to reinforce their frontline positions. They continued to shell Ukrainian positions along the entire southern axis. Ukrainian General Staff specified that Russian forces are strengthening their air defenses and electronic warfare capabilities in the southern direction and may be concentrating on reconnoitering Ukrainian positions and preparing for further offensive operations, as local Ukrainian authorities reported yesterday. Ukrainian forces did not conduct any reported counterattacks toward Kherson in the past 24 hours, and ISW did not collect any additional data to verify claimed Ukrainian advances since May 4.

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

### **Immediate items to watch**

- Russian forces will likely continue to merge offensive efforts southward of Izyum with westward advances from Donetsk in order to encircle Ukrainian troops in southern Kharkiv Oblast and Western Donetsk.
- Russia may change the status of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, possibly by merging them into a single “Donbas Republic” and/or by annexing them directly to Russia.

- Russian forces have apparently decided to seize the Azovstal plant through ground assault and will likely continue operations accordingly.
- Ukrainian counteroffensives around Kharkiv City may unhinge Russian positions northeast of the city, possibly forcing the Russians to choose between reinforcing those positions or abandoning them if the Ukrainians continue to press their counter-attack.
- Russian forces may be preparing to conduct renewed offensive operations to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in the coming days.

**Russian warship Admiral Makarov ‘on fire after being hit by Ukrainian missile’** - Vladimir Putin's new flagship the Admiral Makarov has reportedly been hit by Ukrainian missiles causing it to burst into flames.

The Admiral Grigorovich-class frigate was on fire this morning in what would be a fresh blow for warmonger Vladimir Putin, a number of reports have said.

It was said to be close to Snake Island in the Black Sea, where a rescue operation was underway involving multiple aircrafts and rescue boats. Ukrainian MP Oleksiy Goncharenko took to his Telegram channel to report the ship had been hit by Ukrainian Neptune missiles.



He said that the ship had been hit by Ukrainian attacks and was "badly damaged" but remained afloat for now. In his post, he wrote: "There is new information about another failure of the Russian fleet near our shores."

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

“Unofficial Russian sources report that the newest missile frigate Admiral Makarov is in trouble. “It is equipped with modern air defence systems and is armed with Kalibr cruise missiles. Or was.

“According to preliminary information, the frigate was unable to dodge the Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missile.

“The ship is badly damaged, but remains afloat. For now. We wait.” His reports were backed up by Ukrainian official Anton Gerashchenko who said: “Admiral Makarov frigate is on fire off the coast of Snake Island.



Reports are still to be confirmed and if so, this will be a huge setback for Putin ahead of MayDay Parade next Monday. He endured serious criticism from multiple Russian sources and public outcries, with a formal listing of casualties still awaited.

Seeing another large warship severely damaged and in danger of sinking is not something he will be able to sell as “damaged by fire” as Russian military and naval reports reflected after the Moskva sinking.

Ukraine has at its disposal significant shore-based anti-ship missiles in addition to its domestically developed Neptune strike ability.

Watch this space.

## Putin

**Victory Day Mobilization Call Unlikely, But Putin Will Seek To Mobilize Russian Society** - "That's nonsense," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on May 4 when asked whether Putin planned to announce a military mobilization during Russia's May 9 Victory Day celebrations.

When asked whether he would formally declare war on Ukraine, Peskov's answer was the same: "That's nonsense."

Speculation has been rife that Putin could use the highly charged commemoration of the Soviet contribution to victory over Nazi Germany in World War II to set a new direction for Russia's war in Ukraine, which is in its third month and has clearly not proceeded the way Kremlin planners anticipated ahead of the February 24 invasion.

**Putin sends his men to their deaths** at Azovstal steelworks in desperate bid to secure the giant complex for a symbolic victory in Mariupol in time for May 9 Victory Day parade.

Desperate Vladimir Putin has ordered his troops on a bloody mission to seize the Azovstal steel works in Mariupol so he can have a victory to gloat over during celebrations in Russia next week, British intelligence believes.

Heavy fighting has now been going on inside the sprawling industrial complex - the last holdout of Ukrainian defenders in the key Black Sea port city - for three days, despite Putin going on Russian state TV just two weeks ago to publicly call off the operation to 'preserve the lives and health of our soldiers and officers.'

The assault is thought to be linked to May 9 Victory Day celebrations in Russia, when the country marks the surrender of Nazi Germany at the end of the Second World War and which Putin typically uses for a chest-beating display of Russian patriotism and military might complete with parades and flag-waving crowds.

**Gymnast rumored to be Putin's mistress may be hit by new EU sanctions** - The European Union is considering imposing sanctions against an Olympic gold-winning gymnast who is rumored to have once been engaged to Vladimir Putin.

A preliminary sanctions list that still must be approved by the European governing bodies names Alina Kabaeva, chair of Russia's National Media Group, as "closely associated with President Vladimir Putin," Bloomberg reported Thursday, citing a document with details on the potential EU sanctions.

Kabaeva is one of the most decorated gymnasts in Rhythmic Gymnastics history, with 2 Olympic medals, 14 World Championship medals, and 25 European Championship medals.



**Putin faces cancer surgery; his temporary fill in won't 'do anything rash'** – Putin's anticipated surgery and recovery are expected to incapacitate him for "a short time," according to unconfirmed report.

Patrushev, who Putin has nominated to deputize for him, will probably not end the war in Ukraine nor launch any nuclear weapons.

# Nuclear

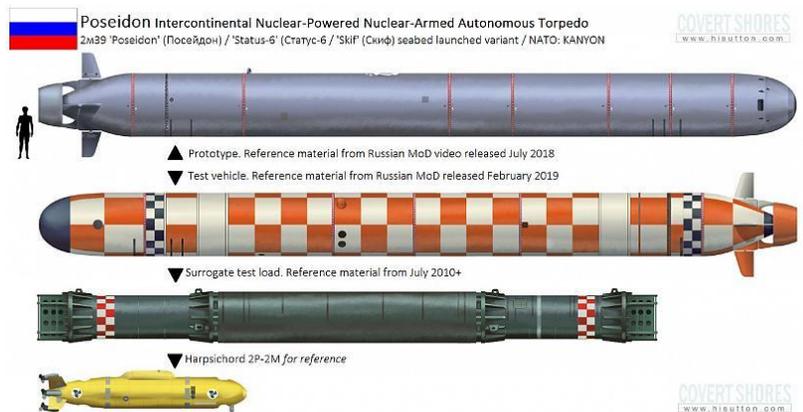
**What is Russia's Poseidon nuclear drone, and could it wipe out the UK in a radioactive tsunami?** - A popular Russian state TV anchor has warned that Moscow could wipe Britain off the map with a nuclear tsunami in retaliation for supporting Ukraine.

In his Sunday evening primetime show on Channel One, one of the most-watched in Russia, Dmitry Kiselyov claimed on May 1 that a strike by the country's Poseidon nuclear underwater drone could drown the UK under a 500-metre tidal wave of radioactive seawater.

Euronews Next checked his claims with three experts on nuclear weapons, submarines and drones. Here's what we know - and don't know - about Russia's new nuclear torpedo and the damage it could inflict.

**What is Russia's Poseidon nuclear drone?** - The Poseidon underwater drone - also known as Status-6 and in the United States as "Kanyon" - is basically a very large, nuclear-powered autonomous torpedo armed with a nuclear warhead.

What we know of it mostly stems from a 2015 leak on Russian TV of a government project for an underwater nuclear drone. According to its mission statement, the project was focused on "damaging the important components of the adversary's economy in a coastal area and inflicting unacceptable damage to a country's territory by creating areas of wide radioactive contamination that would be unsuitable for military, economic, or other activity for long periods of time."



In 2018, a leaked draft of the Pentagon's Nuclear Posture Review acknowledged Russia was developing a "new intercontinental, nuclear-armed, nuclear-powered, undersea autonomous torpedo".

The torpedo, which Russia named Poseidon, is about 20 m long, can go 1,000 m deep and has a range of at least 10,000 km, Sidharth Kaushal, a research fellow for sea power and missile defense at the UK defense and security think tank RUSI, told Euronews Next.

Much of its actual capabilities remain shrouded in mystery, but its key strengths are thought to be its ability to operate very deep and very fast underwater, making it hard to intercept.

"It's a torpedo which has an extremely long-range, can travel at high speed and then packs that nuclear punch," said David Hambling, a technology journalist specializing in defense who has authored a book about drones.

What motivated its development was Russia's ambition to display a range of weapons that can evade the US missile defense system, said Pavel Podvig, an expert on Russian nuclear forces and senior researcher at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

**Poseidon: An 'unstoppable' underwater drone?** - Poseidon is referred to as a drone because it can navigate autonomously and may even have the ability to be remotely redirected, or have its mission aborted after it's launched.

It's believed to have a titanium hull, which allows it to withstand pressure at extreme depths, and could potentially be used as a seabed weapon, meaning "you don't have to risk a pretty large, very expensive and possibly quite noisy submarine in order to launch it," said Kaushal.

In other words, the idea would be to pre-position the torpedo on the seabed and activate it from there rather than launching it from submarines, which would make these an obvious target for preemptive strikes.

It is estimated to have a top speed of over 50 nautical mph, or over 90 km/h - which would make it twice as fast as a conventional submarine, and that much harder to detect. "It's more difficult to intercept because, you know, while missile defences exist, very few countries are prepared to defend against a nuclear torpedo, particularly one that moves very fast," Kaushal said.

But in the grand scheme of things, he said, it's not that different from any other nuclear weapon. "In truth, intercepting a nuclear strike, whether it's a torpedo at sea or an ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile), is an inherently difficult task against any sophisticated attacking body. I don't know if this particular capability changes much in that respect," he said.

**How powerful is Poseidon?** - Defense experts say that based on what's known about the weapon and its dimensions, the yield of Poseidon's nuclear warhead could be as high as 2 megatons - a figure repeatedly reported by the Russian TASS news agency in recent years.

That's huge - more than 100 times the force packed by the Hiroshima bomb, which was about 15 kilotons, and more than 10 times that of the latest version of the B61 nuclear bomb developed by the US.

"Atomic torpedoes have existed way, way back, certainly since about the 1950s. And your normal torpedo is about half a metre in diameter and weighs a few tons," said Hambling.

**Could Poseidon really cause a radioactive tsunami?** - "The explosion of this torpedo near the British coast will cause a giant tsunami wave up to 500 metres high," Kiselyov warned in his May 1 primetime show.

He added that "the wave would also carry extreme doses of radiation and after its passage over Great Britain leave a radioactive desert, unfit for anything for a long time".

Kiselyov's comments were illustrated by an animation of the giant torpedo, a massive menacing wave, and of the UK and Ireland being wiped off the map.

**Is it ready for use?** - "Reportedly, there were tests - but how successful those tests were, what is exactly the status of this programme at this point? Frankly, we don't know yet," said Podvig. "I strongly believe that it is not yet anywhere ready for deployment," he added.

Kaushal said Poseidon probably is ready, but its delivery system may not be.

"The special-purpose Belgorod submarine, though it's undergone sea trials in 2021, is still not operational, to the best of our knowledge," Kaushal said, noting that the sub had to be elongated to serve its purpose as a mothership for the giant torpedo.

**So why is Russia waving this threat now?** - They have been quite vocal about its nuclear capabilities since they began their invasion of Ukraine, warning the West it had the right to use nuclear weapons to counter an "existential threat."

"The destruction of conventional capabilities in the first months of this campaign means that Russia's conventional deterrent is now far less threatening than perhaps it was on February 24 to many countries," Kaushal said.

Brandishing its nuclear arsenal is a way for Moscow to discourage any possible direct intervention from NATO in the conflict, he added. (Euronews).

**Putin may launch nuclear attack, but it would end Russian civilization, experts say** - Any "tactical" nuclear attacks executed by Vladimir Putin would result in the end of Russian civilization, a historian has warned.

Putin has an estimated 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons at his disposal, and some have the power to kill tens of thousands at a time. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine being met with unexpectedly fierce resistance, there are fears that Putin could resort to using his nuclear arsenal to turn the tide of the conflict.

Dominic Sandbrook, an expert in modern history, has said one plausible scenario that could spark a tactical nuclear strike is if the Ukrainians launch a counterattack in the Donbass - a region Putin is desperate to hang on to. Sandbrook wrote in the Daily Mail : "One plausible scenario is that if the Ukrainians mount a counterattack in the Donbas — and especially if they threaten his grip on Crimea — Mr Putin might authorize a 'tactical' nuclear strike, using short-range weapons devised for use on the battlefield.

"And even somebody as drunk on his own nationalist resentments as Vladimir Putin must realize that a nuclear war would mean the end of Russian civilization — the end of Moscow, St Petersburg and everything he and his cronies claim to revere." Using a tactical nuclear weapon would "cause all horror of Hiroshima" on a "smaller scale", according to the journal Scientific American.

"It would also cause all the horrors of Hiroshima, albeit on a smaller scale," the journal added, according to the Mirror. "A tactical nuclear weapon would produce a fireball, shock waves, and deadly radiation that would cause long-term health damage in survivors. Radioactive fallout would contaminate air, soil, water and the food supply.

"No one knows if using a tactical nuclear weapon would trigger a full-scale nuclear war. Nevertheless, the risk of escalation is very real. Those on the receiving end of a nuclear strike are not likely to ask whether it was tactical or strategic." The warning comes after Russian state media propagandists called on Putin to unleash his nuclear arsenal on Ukraine.

## Sanctions

**Western sanctions forced Russia to draw down its valuable dollar reserves to pay its debts, US Treasury says** - Western sanctions have forced Russia to deplete its own reserves of dollars to pay its debts, meaning the money can't go towards funding its invasion of Ukraine, the US Treasury has said.

Russia avoided default at the last minute Tuesday as payments on dollar-denominated bonds started to find their way into investors' accounts.

"Russia has made their debt payment using funds located outside the US or other partner jurisdictions," a US Treasury official told Insider in a statement. "These valuable reserves have permanently left Russia and can no longer go towards funding their invasion of Ukraine."

**EU says Russia's biggest bank Sberbank will be banned from SWIFT** - Russia's largest bank will be excluded from the SWIFT payments messaging system, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen announced on Wednesday.

Sberbank is among three Russian banks to be sanctioned as part of the European Union's sixth package of sanctions against Russia after it invaded Ukraine in February.

They join VTB Bank, Bank Otkritie, Novikombank, Promsvyazbank, Rossiya Bank, and Sovcombank, as well as VEB - Russia's development bank - on the list of institutions blocked from SWIFT, a system that facilitates cross-border payments.

**Can Azerbaijan Help Europe Kick Its Russian Gas Habit As Kremlin Threatens To Shut The Taps?** - Russia may be using missiles and bombs in its invasion of Ukraine, but it has another weapon, less lethal but nevertheless threatening, pointed at the rest of Europe -- energy.

Amid international outrage over its unprovoked aggression, Moscow finds itself facing a raft of rising sanctions. As it supplies the EU with 40 percent of its natural gas, Russia has fired back. President Vladimir Putin announced that "unfriendly" countries would have to pay for such deliveries in rubles.

The Russian state-owned energy company Gazprom on April 26 announced it had suspended gas deliveries to Poland and Bulgaria and would not restart them until payments were made in the Russian currency, triggering outrage in the EU and accusations of "blackmail."

Warsaw, which imports some 45 percent of its natural gas from Russia, said it could "manage" with the Russian taps shut. But Sofia, which imports about 73 percent of its gas from Russia, indicated it would face problems.

In an interview with the French daily Le Monde published on April 28, Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov disclosed where his country hoped to get some of the missing gas -- Azerbaijan. "Very concretely, we hope for help to obtain Azerbaijani gas as quickly as possible," he said.

Officially, Baku did not comment on Petkov's remark. At present, Azerbaijan supplies up to 300 million cubic meters of gas a year to Bulgaria, not a significant amount.

For close to two decades, Azerbaijan has been maneuvering to become a significant gas exporter to Europe, culminating in late 2020 with the commissioning of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) carrying Azerbaijani gas through Greece and Albania and across the Adriatic Sea to Italy.

The Southern Gas Corridor was built to diversify the European Union's gas supply and reduce the number of EU countries that have a single supply source. In 2021, the EU imported a total of 155 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas from Russia, the world's largest gas exporter.

Most of Azerbaijan's proven gas reserves, which were estimated at about 60 trillion cubic feet (1,700 bcm) in January 2021, are located in the Shah Deniz field. While gas from Azerbaijan may help EU states wean themselves off Russian gas, the volumes simply aren't enough to fully replace it.

Note – Two additional sources are being prepared, aside from effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, these being

- i. **Australia** – underwater gas deposits were long identified to the north-west of Australia but deemed too expensive to extract. This is currently under review.
- ii. **West Texas** – the US has been upgrading its Gulf port liquified natural gas (LNG) loading terminals for some years now, looking to elevate its global position to #2 behind Australia and ahead of Qatar which is presently occupying the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest slot. Russia is #4 in the world.

**Hungary Holds Up EU Deal to Sanction Russian Oil** - Prime Minister Viktor Orban is insisting on more time and European Union money if Hungary is to join the rest of the bloc in transitioning away from Russian energy, diplomats say.

**Europe's Farmers Stir up Biogas to Offset Russian Energy** - In lush fields southwest of Paris, farmers are joining Europe's fight to free itself from Russian gas.

They'll soon turn on the tap of a new facility where crops and agricultural waste are mashed up and fermented to produce "biogas." It's among energy solutions being promoted on the continent that wants to choke off funding for Russia's war in Ukraine by no longer paying billions for Russian fossil fuels.

Small rural gas plants that provide energy for hundreds or thousands of nearby homes aren't — at least anytime soon — going to supplant the huge flows to Europe of Russian gas that powers economies, factories, business and homes. And critics of using crops to make gas argue that farmers should be concentrating on growing food — especially when prices are soaring amid the fallout of the war in Ukraine, one of the world's breadbaskets.

Still, biogas is part of the puzzle of how to reduce Europe's energy dependence.

The European Biogas Association says the European Union could quickly scale up the production of bio-methane, which is pumped into natural gas networks. An investment of 83 billion euros (\$87.5 billion) — which, at current market prices, is less than the EU's 27 nations pay per year to Russia for piped natural gas — would produce a tenfold increase in bio-methane production by 2030 and could replace about a fifth of what the bloc imported from Russia last year, the group says.

## Humanitarian

**Dozens Evacuated From Mariupol Plant Amid Reports That Russia Fired On Transport Vehicles** – At least 50 Ukrainian civilians were evacuated from the besieged Azovstal steel plant amid the ruins of Mariupol, even as Russia continued to batter the strategic port city, Ukrainian officials said.

"Today we were able to evacuate from Azovstal 50 women, children, and elderly people," Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said on May 6 on her Telegram channel.

Vereshchuk added that, in the face of Russian attacks, "the evacuation was extremely slow...tomorrow morning we will continue the evacuation operation."

The United Nations has scrambled to broker a deal to help evacuate some of the 200 civilians who are holed up along with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian fighters in the massive Azovstal steel plant, one of the largest in Europe.

**Mass Graves in Ukraine Reveal Mounting Death Toll** - Analysis of satellite imagery shows expanding mass burial sites outside of Kyiv and Mariupol.

## Containment

**Transfer of US-Procured Afghan Helicopters to Ukraine Underway** - The US is giving Ukraine 16 Mi-17 helicopters that Washington had procured for Afghanistan, a U.S. government agency charged with monitoring Afghan events said Wednesday.

The Department of Defense notified Congress in January that it intended to give the Ukrainian government five of the Russian-built helicopters, which had been undergoing maintenance at a Ukrainian facility.

"Ukraine accepted these excess defense articles on March 11," the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) noted in its quarterly report submitted to U.S. lawmakers this week.

The report added: "In mid-April, President (Joe) Biden announced a military assistance package to Ukraine that included an additional 11 Mi-17 helicopters that had been scheduled for Afghanistan."

Mi-17s are mostly used to carry troops and military equipment. Ukraine is one of the former Soviet Union republics which hosts production and repair facilities for the helicopters.

**DOD Leaders Say Training Ukrainian Forces Is Paying Dividends** - Defense Department leaders said today that the training of Ukrainian forces by Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine has paid off as Ukrainians defend their country against Russian forces.

Ukrainian service members trained at the Yavoriv Combat Training Center in the Lviv region of western Ukraine right up until the Russian invasion in February. The most recent trainers were part of Task Force Gator, composed of the Florida Army National Guard's 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

From the beginning of that training mission until January 2022, the 7th Army Training Command had trained a total of 23,000 Ukrainians in Yavoriv, said Army Brig. Gen. Joseph Hilbert, commander of the 7th Army Training Command.

In February, the U.S. European Command repositioned Task Force Gator to Grafenwoehr, Germany, where the unit continues to train Ukrainians on a variety of U.S. and NATO weaponry to enable them to defend their nation.

Training included antitank weapons systems, doctrine, operations and, importantly, the development of a competent noncommissioned officer corps, he said. He noted that NCOs who have been through the training can take the initiative and make tactical decisions based on their commanders' intentions.

"The biggest mistake that the Russians made was giving us eight years to prepare for this [war]," Hopkins mentioned.

**For first time, France talks openly about sending weapons to Ukraine** - France has been tight-lipped about what it is sending to Ukraine, until a few days after President Emmanuel Macron won a second term.

It is perhaps not coincidence that France is being open, for the first time, about its weapon shipments to Ukraine now that Macron is now longer fending off a political challenge from euro-skeptic Marine Le Pen. After the French election Macron said that during his second mandate he would "actively work to re-establishing Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity through close coordination with our European partners and allies."

French media reports have previously revealed that France has sent satellite imagery and Milan, Mistral and Javelin missiles, the latter acquired in the United States for operations in Afghanistan. But Paris had been tight-lipped about what they were sending, so as not to antagonize Moscow and keep diplomatic channels open.

## Impacts

**Russians wreak havoc on Ukrainian farms, mining fields and stealing equipment** - For Ukrainian farmer Anatolii Kulibaba, this year's planting season comes with anguish. Kulibaba is among many who were forced to flee their land as Russian forces moved in with their tanks.

In the first few days of the war, Russian soldiers delivered an even crueler blow: They killed Kulibaba's son, Oleksandr, as he was traveling to their village of Bilka, 25 miles from the Russian border.

"He was just 45. He had his whole life ahead of him," Kulibaba says. Two months later, Kulibaba, 70, is still trying to work through the pain, but it's a struggle. He desperately misses his son, who also led most of the farm duties.

Kulibaba says he could really use Oleksandr's help right now, trying to restart production after Russian forces took over and destroyed parts of their farm.

Ukraine is one of the biggest producers of wheat, corn and sunflower oil, and the war has wreaked havoc on the so-called "breadbasket of Europe." Ukraine and Russia together account for over a quarter of the world's wheat exports. Ukraine's Ministry of Agriculture now says that 30% of the country's farmland is occupied or unsafe.

Kulibaba says Russian troops slept in his barn, slaughtered and cooked his pigs and parked their tanks in his cornfields.

"My fields were destroyed by the shelling," Kulibaba says.

By the time he returned to the farm in April, about four weeks after he fled, the Russians had used his tractors to dig trenches and ripped up much of his 494 acres with their heavy tanks. They stole more than 2,600 gallons of his fuel and grabbed the batteries from his combines.

He thinks maybe he can farm half of his land now, but he doesn't really know. There's no safe way for him to assess.

"We're afraid to go out there," he says. "We don't know where the mines are."

**'Embassy of the Terrorist Country of Russia' – Google users change Russian Embassy name in SA** - It seems people have been having fun on Google Maps with the Russian embassy in South Africa.

As Russia's war on Ukraine rages on, the Embassy of the Russian Federation has been changed on Google Maps to reflect the atrocities being committed by Russia and President Vladimir Putin.

A search for 316 Brooks Street, Menlo Park, Pretoria the address of the Russian Embassy in Pretoria reveals a red marker with a different name for the embassy.

"Embassy of the Terrorist Country of Russia."

**Russians to dress Ukrainian POWs in uniforms for Mariupol parade: official** - Russian forces are planning to dress up thousands of Ukrainian prisoners of war in military uniforms during next week's Victory Day parade in Mariupol, a Ukrainian official claimed Thursday.

Petro Andryushchenko, an aide to the mayor of the besieged port city, wrote on his Telegram channel that officials have learned that nearly 2,000 Ukrainians are being housed in three filtration camps in the hamlet of Bezimenne, which he likened to "ghettos."

"These men are held there, and they are told that they will be made to wear the Ukrainian [military] uniform and to participate in a so-called 'war prisoners parade' in Mariupol because they [the Russians] lack actual prisoners of war," the adviser said on a national newscast, Ukrainian media reported.

**Western Allies Pressure African Countries to Condemn Russia** - Western countries are putting extreme pressure on African states to condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine, even resorting to threats, which is immoral, Russian Ambassador to Angola Vladimir Tararov told Sputnik.

"I know that they [Angola] are under extreme pressure from Western countries, who call on them to condemn Russia. But they expressly behave in this way, saying that we will contribute to the establishment of peace, we will contribute with all our might so that agreements are reached between the parties," he said.

The ambassador stressed that in its demands the West sometimes resorts to threats and blackmail, which is immoral. According to Tararov, the West is "threatening, blackmailing" the countries of Africa.

And under this extraordinary pressure, African countries are "barely able to resist." He also underscored that during the General Assembly vote to exclude Russia from the UN Human Rights Council on April 7, many African countries "voted neutrally, that is, they abstained."

**Russia, Israel tensions will continue to mount: Russian experts** - 'Moscow might activate Iran, Syria or Hamas – without considering the outcome,' former Putin speechwriter tells The Media Line.

## Widening of conflict and war

**EU Pledges To 'Significantly' Step Up Defense Support For Moldova** - European Council President Charles Michel has promised to boost military aid to Moldova, whose Moscow-backed separatist region of Transdniestria has reported

several incidents that led to accusations Russia is seeking to destabilize the former Soviet republic and possibly involve it in its war against Ukraine.

"This year we plan to significantly increase our support to Moldova by providing its armed forces with additional military equipment," Michel told a press conference with Moldova's President Maia Sandu during a visit to Chisinau on May 4. He gave no further details. Michel also pledged support for Moldova against cyberattacks and disinformation, adding that avoiding escalation in Transdniester is of critical importance.

"We need to maintain stability," Michel said, adding that the 27-member bloc has a responsibility to come to Moldova's aid during the war in neighboring Ukraine. "The EU stands in full solidarity with you, with Moldova. It is our European duty to help and to support your country," Michel said.

Moldova has seen an influx of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees since the start of Moscow's unprovoked invasion on February 24, and Michel said the EU will help Chisinau "cope with the consequences of the spillover from the Russian aggression in Ukraine."

"We will continue to deepen our partnership with you to bring your country closer to the EU," Michel said. Sandu, in turn, said that Moldova has plans in place for "pessimistic scenarios" but added that "we see no imminent risk right now."