

Conflict Update # 73

May 28th, 2022

Conflict Assessment

Key Takeaways

Russian forces pressed the ground assault on Severodonetsk and its environs, making limited gains.

Russian forces in Kharkiv continue to focus efforts on preventing a Ukrainian counteroffensive from reaching the international border between Kharkiv and Belgorod.

Ukrainian forces began a counteroffensive near the Kherson-Mykolaiv oblast border approximately 70 km to the northeast of Kherson City that may have crossed the Inhulets River.

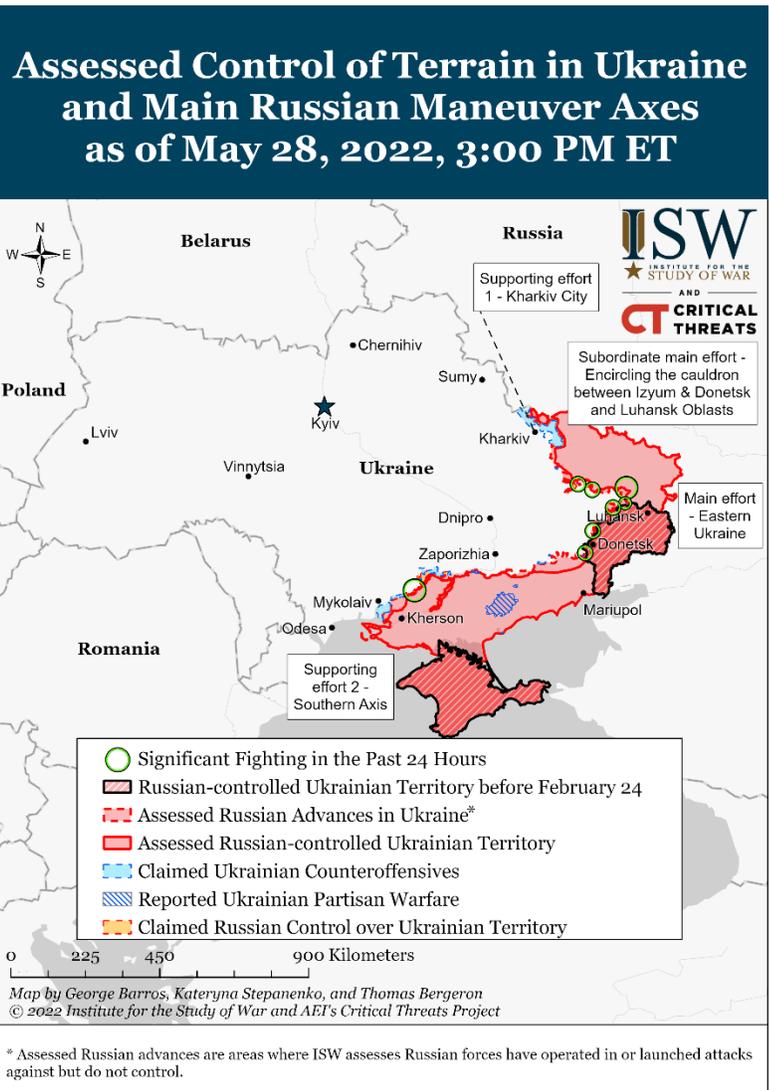
Russia's use of stored T-62 tanks in the southern axis indicates Russia's continued materiel and force generation problems.

Ukrainian partisan activity continues to impose costs on Russian occupation forces in Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts.

Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts - Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted an offensive operation southeast of Izyum, likely in an effort to advance toward Slovyansk or Siversk. Ukrainian General Staff (UGS) reported that Russian forces retreated after attempting to advance to Pasika, approximately 20 km southeast of Izyum. Russian Telegram channels

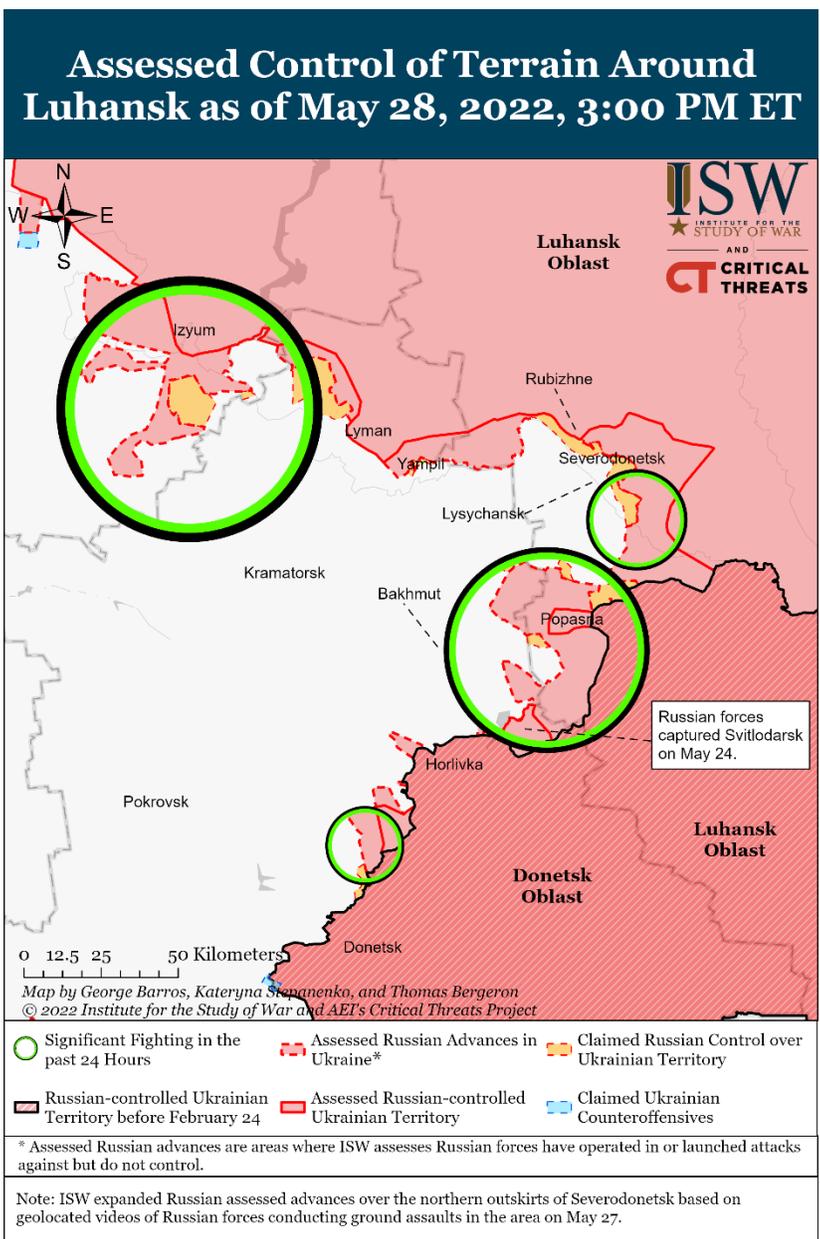
reported that Russian forces successfully seized Pasika on May 28, but ISW cannot independently confirm this claim. Russian forces did not attempt to advance directly south of Izyum and are likely prioritizing an advance north of Lyman. UGS also noted that Russian forces continued launching air and artillery strikes on settlements near Siversk, approximately 30 km west of Severodonetsk. Russian forces from Izyum may join units in Lyman to conduct an offensive on Siversk or pursue a separate drive on Slovyansk. Russian forces are also reportedly transferring additional artillery and military equipment via Kupyansk, approximately 40 km west of the Russia-Kharkiv Oblast border.

Russian forces continued ground assaults on Severodonetsk's northern neighborhoods and have not fully encircled the city from the west. Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai reported that Russian forces seized a hotel and advanced to Severodonetsk's bus terminal on May 27 and continued fighting with Ukrainian defenders in the area on



May 28. Haidai stressed that Russian forces have not isolated the city, despite damaging a bridge along the Lysychansk-Severodonetsk road. He indicated that Ukrainian forces may withdraw from the area to avoid getting surrounded. Pro-Russian milblogger Alexander Sladkov (who has 850,000 followers) criticized Russian military commanders for beginning the Battle of Severodonetsk before fully encircling Ukrainian troops. Sladkov also criticized the lack of coherent offensive tactics among Russian commanders, despite their successes around Lyman.

Russian forces launched ground assaults west and east of Popasna but did not gain access to the Lysychansk-Bakhmut nor the Lysychansk-Hirske highway. Russian Telegram channels reported that fighting continued over Komyushuvakha, approximately 8 km east of Popasna, with the aim of allowing the Russians to launch an offensive on Zolote and secure the T1303 highway to Lysychansk. Haidai reported that Ukrainian forces secured positions in a settlement along the T1303 highway, likely to hinder the Russian drive on Severodonetsk. Haidai also noted that Russian forces have yet to seize the T1302 highway from Bakhmut to Lysychansk despite repeated attempts to secure the road from positions northeast of Popasna. UGS reported that Russian forces attempted to advance toward Bakhmut from settlements approximately 25 km southwest of Popasna. Their forces will likely continue offensive operations on Bakhmut as well as the T1302 and T1303 highways to isolate Ukrainian forces in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area.



Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast on May 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued shelling near Avdiivka. The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) claimed to have advanced by 1.5 km in the Avdiivka area, but ISW cannot independently confirm this claim.

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City - Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations north of Kharkiv City but continued to maintain their positions along the Ukrainian-Russian border on May 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian engineering elements improved their positions near Kozacha Lopan, approximately 36 km northwest of Kharkiv City. They continued to shell Kharkiv City and settlements to its north and are likely maintaining their positions in the area to defend Belgorod City from Ukrainian artillery. Russian milblogger and former Russian proxy commander Igor Girkin (also known as Igor Strelkov) noted that Russian forces rely on "old-fashioned methods" such as artillery to defend the Ukrainian-Russian border instead of more-effective drones.

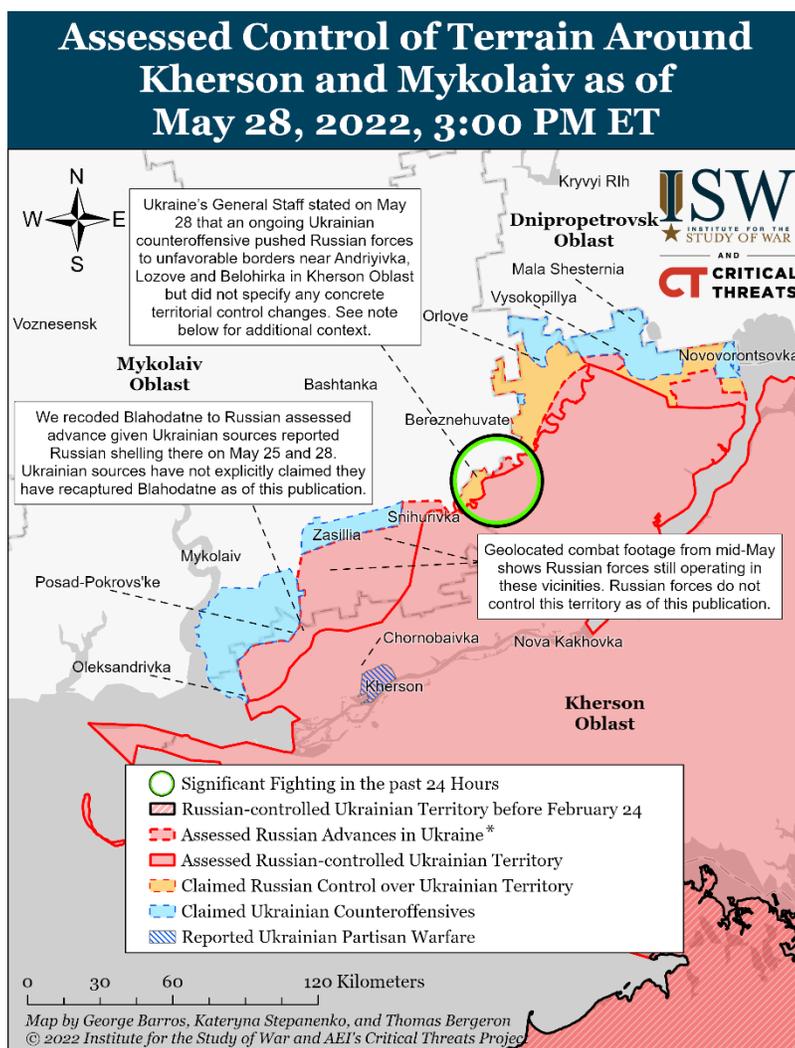
Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis

Ukrainian forces today reportedly launched a counteroffensive in northern Kherson Oblast, with the UGS issuing a vague report that Ukrainian defenders pushed Russian forces to “unfavorable borders” in three settlements along the Mykolaiv-Kherson Oblast border, approximately 70 km northeast of Kherson City. Ukrainian military sources did not specify if Ukrainian forces liberated any occupied settlements. The UGS report may support unconfirmed social media reports that Ukrainian forces crossed the Inhulets River on May 27, as the three villages are located on the eastern bank of the river.

Russian forces continued to fortify and equip their positions throughout southern Ukraine in an effort to retain permanent control over the territory. Zaporizhia Oblast Administration Head Oleksandr Starukh reported that Russian forces have accumulated a large number of old T-62 tanks in Melitopol since withdrawing them from storage on May 25. Starukh noted that Russian forces will commit the tanks to stationary firing points in Zaporizhia Oblast, rather than committing the obsolescent tanks to combat in the oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces are replenishing equipment losses with T-62s in northern Kherson Oblast, however, despite the tank’s vulnerabilities in modern warfare. Russian forces continued to increase air defense systems in southern Ukraine.

Activity in Russian-occupied areas - The Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian forces converted a Melitopol police station into an office of “People’s Militia” with 35 collaborators. They also reported that fully-armed Russian servicemen broke into two universities in Melitopol and demanded that professors reapply for their positions under the occupation regime or resign. Russian forces are likely aware of their lack of control over occupied Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts and fear Ukrainian civil resistance. Russian forces closed all Kherson Oblast borders near Ukrainian-controlled territories on May 28, possibly in anticipation of Ukrainian counterattacks or partisan activity. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that a new Russian collaborator and mayor of Enerhodar, Ruslan Kirpichev, fortified the entrance to his apartment due to rising partisan activity. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russian commanders stationed their personnel in a penal colony in Kherson Oblast.

Russian forces likely intend to loot occupied industrial sectors in Mariupol and Zaporizhia Oblast. Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin reported that occupation forces will not repair Azovstal Steel Plant for ecological reasons on May 28. Russian forces began exporting metal from Mariupol Port to Russia. Pushilin noted that the Azovmash machine-building plant will resume its operations, even though the plant has faced severe financial problems for over ten years and is unlikely to generate profit. The Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian forces just began to operate the spare tractor parts plant in Melitopol after confiscating it from the rightful owner.



What Ukraine And The West Need To Do To Beat Russia - Wesley Clark led NATO's Kosovo campaign as the alliance's supreme allied commander in Europe to end Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic's bloody crackdown on the region's ethnic Albanian community in 1998. Clark, a senior fellow at UCLA's Burkle Center for International Relations, talked to RFE/RL's Georgian Service about what Ukraine needs from the West in order to have a chance of beating Russia.

In Donbas, if the Russians can get across a couple of these big rivers, then maybe they will hit more open terrain where [the] maneuver warfare that was characteristic of World War II [will] come in handy. The Russian method of advance is to break through the Ukrainian defense by destroying villages. They know these villages provide the hard points for Ukrainian anti-tank and antiair defense, so they're just going to pulverize them with artillery. And at some point, as I said, when the ground dries out, they may be able to bypass these villages and move around them across the open fields.

For the Ukrainians, they've got to be reinforced to fight this kind of warfare. They still don't have the tanks they need; they don't have enough artillery; they don't have fighter aircraft; they don't have ground attack aircraft; they don't have attack helicopters. And so, you can imagine, if there was a Russian breakthrough, and an armored column went 50 kilometers deep, someone has to find it, control it, and attack it, maneuver against it. And that means you need a different type of force than what's been successful thus far.

Ukraine needs to be further reinforced. It has the fighting capacity, and the determination to force the Russians out; it does not have the means.

What Ukraine needs is;

- First you have to defeat the Russian artillery. Defeat the Russian artillery right now, they'll never make a breakthrough. If, when they're pounding cities, you can pound the Russian artillery and destroy it, the cities won't be destroyed.
- Second is intelligence support. Maybe they get that for themselves through counterbattery radars; they probably don't have enough of them.
- Artillery - lots and lots and lots of artillery, with the ammunition; hundreds of rounds of artillery fired per artillery tube per day.
- Air capability - Why? Because they need the rapid immediate response that comes from attack helicopters and air-to-ground assets.
- Anti-ship missiles. There are numerous Russian ships able to fire Caliber missiles from 125 to 100 miles offshore.
- An off-shore NATO zone, if necessary, for humanitarian purposes.

We need to show to Putin is that he's not going to succeed militarily on the ground in Ukraine. And then these other pressures come in on him and convince him he's got to find a way out.

Battles In Ukraine's East 'Very Difficult;' Governor Says Troops May Have To Retreat To Defend Themselves - Ukrainian President Zelenskiy called the current situation in the Donbas region "very difficult" as Russian forces and Moscow-backed separatists attacked the last Ukrainian strongholds in the eastern Luhansk region.

Russian forces have concentrated their efforts in the Donbas, Zelenskiy said, using maximum artillery fire and missile strikes as Ukrainian forces "protect our land in the way that our current defense resources allow."

The fighting on May 27 focused on the cities of Syevyerodonetsk and Lysychansk -- the last areas under Ukrainian control in Luhansk.

Serhiy Hayday, the governor of Luhansk region, said that Ukrainian forces are engaged in a "fierce defense" of Syevyerodonetsk, which is two-thirds surrounded by Russian forces.

"The Russians will not be able to capture Luhansk region in the coming days as analysts have predicted," Hayday said on Telegram, referring to Syevyerodonetsk and Lysychansk, which lies across the Siverskiy Donets River.

"We will have enough strength and resources to defend ourselves. However, it is possible that in order not to be surrounded we will have to retreat," he said.

He said earlier that "very strong" shelling has destroyed 90 percent of the housing in the city.

Steel Graveyard: Russia Has Lost Over 1,000 Tanks In Ukraine - Ukraine has become the graveyard of Russian tanks, and according to a senior U.S. defense official, it is believed that almost 1,350 main battle tanks (MBTs) have been destroyed or otherwise rendered inoperable. Additional Russian losses in Ukraine reportedly include at least 50 helicopters, three dozen fighter-bomber aircraft, and at least 350 artillery pieces. Russia has also lost more personnel in the three months of the war than the Soviet Union lost during the 10-year-long conflict in Afghanistan.

Those numbers are more conservative than figures from the Ukrainian General Staff, which claimed that its forces had destroyed 187 aircraft, 155 helicopters, 71 air defense systems, 1,688 vehicles, eight ships, a light speedboat, 76 fuel vehicles, and 215 unmanned aerial vehicles – along with 970 Russian tanks, 2,389 armored personnel vehicles, 431 artillery systems, and 151 multiple launch rocket systems.

The fact remains that a lot of Russian tanks have been destroyed in the three-month-long war, and the Kremlin is far from seeing victory. The problem has gotten so great in fact that the days of the tank could be coming to an end.

"This transition is most evident with the tank, the king of the land battlefield since World War II," O'Brien wrote in a feature this month for The Atlantic.

He argued that at the time of its invasion in February, Russia held not just a significant numerical advantage over Ukraine in terms of the number of tanks in its arsenal, but a qualitative edge as well. Russia's tanks were judged to be among the very best in the world.

Yet, instead of rolling over Ukrainian positions, the tanks proved to be easy targets, and now the destroyed hulks of Russian MBTs – many with their turrets blown off thanks to the well-known "jack-in-the-box" flaw – litter fields around the country.

"The tank's vulnerabilities—it is ill-suited to many types of terrain, inflexible in its movements, and the opposite of stealthy—have been known for years, but until this war, they had not been exposed so clearly," O'Brien added.

The losses of tanks are so great that Moscow is literally scraping the bottom of the barrel, as 60-year-old T-62s are now being deployed to bolster the numbers, Forbes.com reported. The Kremlin has maintained stockpiles of thousands of the older armored vehicles, and whilst many were considered barely usable, Russia is working around the clock to get as many as possible into working order.

It is hard to imagine how those obsolete machines will do when more modern tanks, such as the T-90M, are failing to turn the tide of battle. At this rate, Russia may need to call up its few dozen T-34s, the iconic World War II tank that helped drive the Nazis out of Ukraine 80 years ago. Russia acquired those surplus T-34s from Laos in 2019, and the plan was to use them in films, and museum displays, but soon it wouldn't be surprising to see them rolling across Ukraine again.

Peace Talks

Zelenskyy said in an address on May 27 to an Indonesian think tank that Ukraine was not longing to talk to Putin, but that it has to face the reality that this will likely be necessary to end the war that Moscow launched against it on February 24.

"There are things to discuss with the Russian leader. I'm not telling you that our people are eager to talk to him, but we have to face the reality of what we are living through," Zelenskyy said.

"What do we want from this meeting?...We want our lives back...We want to reclaim the life of a sovereign country within its own territory," he said, adding that Russia did not appear to be ready yet for serious peace talks.

Putin

Biden slams Putin at Annapolis commencement - CNBC's Kayla Tausche reports that President Biden slammed Russia and Vladimir Putin today during a commencement speech at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., even as Russia continues to batter eastern Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is inflicting unspeakable suffering on Ukrainians and demanding horrible sacrifices of his own people in an effort to seize a city that does not merit the cost, even for him.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine that aimed to seize and occupy the entire country has become a desperate and bloody offensive to capture a single city in the east while defending important but limited gains in the south and east. Ukraine has twice forced Putin to define down his military objectives.

Ukraine defeated Russia in the Battle of Kyiv, forcing Putin to reduce his subsequent military objectives to seizing Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine stopped him from achieving that aim as well, forcing him to focus on completing the seizure of Luhansk Oblast alone.

Putin is now hurling men and munitions at the last remaining major population center in that oblast, Severodonetsk, as if taking it would win the war for the Kremlin. He is wrong. When the Battle of Severodonetsk ends, regardless of which side holds the city, the Russian offensive at the operational and strategic levels will likely have culminated, giving Ukraine the chance to restart its operational-level counteroffensives to push Russian forces back.

Russian forces are assaulting Severodonetsk even though they have not yet encircled it. They are making territorial gains and may succeed in taking the city and areas further west. The Ukrainian military is facing the most serious challenge it has encountered since the isolation of the Azovstal Plant in Mariupol and may well suffer a significant tactical defeat in the coming days if Severodonetsk falls, although such an outcome is by no means certain, and the Russian attacks may well stall again.

The Russians are paying a price for their current tactical success that is out of proportion to any real operational or strategic benefit they can hope to receive. Severodonetsk itself is important at this stage in the war primarily because it is the last significant population center in Luhansk Oblast that the Russians do not control.

Seizing it will let Moscow declare that it has secured Luhansk Oblast fully but will give Russia no other significant military or economic benefit. This is especially true because Russian forces are destroying the city as they assault it and will control its rubble if they capture it. Taking Severodonetsk can open a Russian ground line of communication (GLOC) to support operations to the west, but the Russians have failed to secure much more advantageous GLOCs from Izyum partly because they have concentrated so much on Severodonetsk.

The Russians continue to make extremely limited progress in their efforts to gain control of the unoccupied areas of Donetsk Oblast, meanwhile. Russian troops have struggled to penetrate the pre-February 24 line of contact for weeks, while Russian offensive operations from Izyum to the south remain largely stalled. The seizure of Severodonetsk could only assist in the conquest of the rest of Donetsk Oblast if it gave the Russians momentum on which to build successive operations, but the Battle of Severodonetsk will most likely preclude continued large-scale Russian offensive operations.

Russian progress around Severodonetsk results largely from the fact that Moscow has concentrated forces, equipment, and materiel drawn from all other axes on this one objective. Russian troops have been unable to make progress on any other axes for weeks and have largely not even tried to do so.

Ukrainian defenders have inflicted fearful casualties on the Russian attackers around Severodonetsk. Moscow will not be able to recoup large amounts of effective combat power even if it seizes Severodonetsk, because it is expending that combat power frivolously on taking the city.

Ukrainian forces are also suffering serious losses in the Battle of Severodonetsk, as are Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure. The Russians have concentrated a much higher proportion of their available offensive combat power to take Severodonetsk than the Ukrainians, however, shaping the attrition gradient generally in Kyiv's favor.

The Ukrainians continue to receive supplies and materiel from their allies as well, however slow and limited that flow may be. The Russians, in contrast, continue to manifest clear signs that they are burning through their available reserves of manpower and materiel with no reason to expect relief in the coming months.

Evidence of eroding military professionalism in the Russian officer corps is mounting. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russian commanders are attempting to preserve military equipment by forbidding drivers from evacuating wounded servicemen or providing supplies to units that have advanced too far. Refusing to risk equipment to evacuate wounded personnel on the battlefield—other than in extraordinary circumstances—is a remarkable violation of core principles of military professionalism.

Such behavior can have serious impacts on morale and the willingness of soldiers to fight and risk getting injured beyond their own defensive lines. ISW cannot independently confirm the GUR's report, but commentary by Russian milbloggers offers some circumstantial support for it. Russian milblogger Alexander Zhychkovskiy criticized the Russian military command's disregard for reservists on the deprioritized Zaporizhia Oblast front. Zhychkovskiy reported that Russian commanders trapped lightly-equipped infantry units in areas of intense Ukrainian artillery fire without significant artillery support and did not rotate other units through those areas to relieve them. Zhychkovskiy noted that Russian commanders are responsible for high losses and cases of insanity among servicemen. Another milblogger, Alexander Khodarkovsky, said that Russian commanders are not sending reinforcements in a timely matter, preventing Russian forces from resting between ground assaults.

Waning professionalism among Russia's officers could present Ukrainian forces with opportunities. Russian morale, already low, may drop further if such behavior is widespread and continues.

If Russian troops stuck on secondary axes lose their will to fight as the Battle for Severodonetsk consumes much of the available Russian offensive combat power, Ukraine may have a chance to launch significant counteroffensives with good prospects for success. That prospect is uncertain, and Ukraine may not have the ability to take advantage of an opportunity even if it presents itself, but the current pattern of Russian operations is generating serious vulnerabilities that Kyiv will likely attempt to exploit.

Sanctions

Ukraine Calls On Germany To Cut Natural Gas Flows Through Nord Stream 1 Pipeline - Ukraine has demanded that Germany either halt or severely curtail natural gas flows through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, the head of Ukraine's gas system operator said on May 27.

Serhiy Makogon said the Ukrainian gas transmission system and Ukraine's state energy company Naftogaz have sent an appeal to the German Economy Ministry and the German regulator on the suspension of gas from Nord Stream 1.

Ukraine is willing and able to provide an alternative transport route to the pipeline, which runs under the Baltic Sea, Makogon said on Ukrainian television.

Germany has already halted the Nord Stream 2 gas project as punishment for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Construction on Nord Stream 2, half owned by Russia's state-owned Gazprom in a consortium with European energy companies, was designed to double shipments of Russian gas to Germany.

Russia Expels Five Croatian Diplomats Over 'Unfriendly Actions' - Russia says it is expelling five Croatian diplomats over "unfriendly actions" taken by Zagreb against Moscow, including the expulsion of 24 Russian diplomats from Croatia in April.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement on May 27 that it had summoned Croatia's ambassador to Moscow to inform him of the move, taken "in connection with the groundless attempts of the Croatian authorities to blame Russia for war crimes in Ukraine and the provision of military assistance by the Croatian side to the neo-Nazi Kyiv regime."

The statement did not say how long the diplomats had to leave Russia.

Croatia expelled the Russian diplomats in April in response to Moscow's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

Containment

NATO Is Planning A Big Military Drill To Train For A War With Russia - NATO's next training operation will be in Sweden – and Russia will be watching: With the Russian military invested in Ukraine, NATO is preparing for one of its biggest exercises in Scandinavia. In June, more than a dozen NATO members and partners will be joining forces in northern Europe for Baltic Operations 22, a large-scale maritime exercise.

The location of this year's iteration of the annual Baltic Operations Exercise was a special meaning. The exercise will take place in Sweden as the Nordic country is preparing alongside Finland to apply for membership in NATO.

This will be the 51st iteration of the Baltic Operations exercise, and it will take place between June 5 and June 17, a little more than 100 days after the Russian military invaded Ukraine.

The Baltic Operations exercise will focus on NATO's naval strike and support capabilities. As far as the participants go, 14 NATO members and two partner nations (Sweden and Finland) will deploy more than 45 surface warships and submarines, about 75 aircraft, and approximately 7,000 troops.

From the NATO side of the house, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Turkey, the U.K. and the U.S. will be sending forces to the exercise.

"Unique to BALTOPS 22 is Sweden's role in hosting the exercise, which coincidentally occurs during the Swedish Navy's 500th anniversary so we're grateful for their ability to lead and to host this year. Just to level set, this year's BALTOPS will include forces from Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and of course the United States. So, big exercise lots to get done and I know they're looking forward to it," Kirby added.

In addition, during the Baltic Operations exercise, NATO maritime and air forces will drill together medical evacuation, joint personnel recovery, air defense, maritime interdiction operations, anti-submarine warfare, mine countermeasures, and amphibious operations in order to build interoperability.

The participation of the Turkish forces is bound to offer some awkward moments. Turkey is the only NATO member that has vetoed the membership of Sweden and Finland in the transatlantic military alliance. For domestic consumption purposes and narrow strategic goals, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly said that Ankara will be blocking

the applications of Sweden and Finland because of their condemnation thru words and actions of Turkey's abhorrent human rights policies and illegal invasion of northern Syria.

Humanitarian

Serious risk of genocide in Ukraine as Russia breaches international treaty, report says - There is a serious risk of genocide in Ukraine amid evidence that Russia has committed atrocities intended to destroy the Ukrainian people, according to a new independent report into allegations of genocide in the war zone. The 47-page report was led by the Montreal-based Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, founded by human-rights lawyer and former Liberal justice minister Irwin Cotler, and the New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, a Washington-based foreign policy think tank.

Kremlin mulls Nuremberg-style trials based on second world war tribunals - As Russia holds hundreds of prisoners from the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol, its proxies in east Ukraine have floated the idea of holding a "military tribunal" inspired by Nuremberg that observers say would reflect a mass show trial meant to justify Russia's invasion to the world.

"We are planning to organize an international tribunal on the republic's territory," said Denis Pushilin, the leader of a Russian-controlled territory in the Donetsk region. A model could be the Kharkiv trial of 1943, he said, when the Soviet military tried, convicted and executed three Germans and one Ukrainian by hanging.

Ukraine gathers Russian dead in chilled train for prisoner exchange - Ukraine is gathering the bodies of dead Russian soldiers strewn among the rubble of formerly occupied towns and using everything from DNA to tattoos to verify their identities in the hope of exchanging them for prisoners of war.

Volunteers have helped the military gather 60 bodies in the northeastern region of Kharkiv where Russian forces have retreated in recent weeks, stacking them up in a refrigerated rail carriage.

Bodies are sometimes used as part of prisoner exchanges and other times in exchanges for Ukrainian bodies, said Anton Ivannikov, captain of military-civil cooperation branch, Ukrainian Armed Forces, which is coordinating the effort. The bodies of those related to high ranking officials can be especially valuable to an exchange.

"We are gathering all the documents, all the credit cards. Anything which would help us identify the body" including tattoos and DNA, Ivannikov said.

"In the future this will tell us which soldier, which brigade was in this region, for further exchange," he said.

The bodies will travel on the train to Kyiv where the team negotiating exchanges is based, he said.

Geopolitics

Cooperation is vital for defending Europe's borders - The Russian invasion of Ukraine has ushered in a new age of conflict and violence on Europe's borders. For the past three months, we have woken up every day to the reality of warfare, inflicted on a country of 44 million people.

The invasion has brought rapid geopolitical change. Within Europe, it has triggered a collective awakening. Europeans are standing shoulder to shoulder like never before. Many more people now realize that peace and stability are fragile and must be defended.

Meanwhile, we see once again that governments, businesses and civil society must address global crises together. This has been the lesson of COVID-19, the climate emergency and the economic crisis of 2007-8. The era of unilateralism is over, hopefully never to return.

Our armed forces play an indispensable role in guaranteeing the security and stability we all depend on. But they have suffered from a lack of funding and coordination, calling into question their readiness for the kind of high-intensity conflict unfolding in Ukraine.

In recent weeks, Europe's leaders have moved quickly to put this right. In doing so, they have the opportunity to shape the European defense landscape for decades to come.

The signs are encouraging. In March, the EU Council endorsed the first-ever EU Strategic Compass on defense, following an assessment of the risks of the future.

Proposals include equipping European defense with new capabilities, such as a rapid deployment force, increased funding, improved cyber security and the strengthening of partnerships with critical allies like NATO and the UK. All of which would leave the EU better placed to respond to current and future threats to its borders.

In the same month, the Versailles summit of Europe's leaders called for the Commission to propose urgent measures to strengthen Europe's defense industrial base. The Commission has answered with concrete, innovative suggestions to encourage the joint procurement and funding of military equipment in Europe – something that has been frustrated by legal or budgetary technicalities for too long.

To understand why cooperation matters, you only have to look at the next generation of defense systems.

The Future Combat Air System, a partnership between France, Germany and Spain – and one that must be informed by a true spirit of cooperation – will encompass new combat and unmanned aircraft, satellite technology, artificial intelligence, cloud computing and much more. It's an integrated defense system on a scale unimaginable even 20 years ago.

Such a project cannot be developed by one European country alone. We need to pool our expertise and financial resources to bring it to fruition.

In Europe, we are stronger together – not when we fall back behind national borders and interests. The Commission's latest proposals would foster this cooperation.

Europe's defense industry needs access to finance. Some people have called for defense businesses to be excluded from financial services on the grounds that, by the very nature of their activities, they are socially irresponsible businesses. But recent events have proven otherwise.

European democracy must be defended with hard military power. And the threats to our way of life are real. The financial sector should be encouraged to support security and defense.

Europe has responded to the invasion of Ukraine with a startling unity of purpose: it should now extend this to European defense policy. There is so much at stake, today in Ukraine and tomorrow for us all. Peace and stability are the foundation of European democracy, the rule of law, prosperity and human progress.

By embracing the Strategic Compass and endorsing the commission's new proposals, Europe can strengthen its defense capabilities at a time of uncertainty. To those hostile to our values, we can send a powerful message about our shared commitment to defend them.

Serbia signs declaration on unjustified Russian aggression - The states of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, including Serbia, passed a declaration describing Russia's invasion of Ukraine as "illegal and unjustified," and expressing a commitment to "the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine," at an annual conference in Tirana.

Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, and San Marino gathered at the EU Strategy for Adriatic-Ionian Region form (EUSAIR).

They listed 25 points in a joint declaration on their future cooperation under the auspices of the European Commission, the first of which was about the war in Ukraine.

“We, representatives of the governments of (...) regret in the strongest terms Russia’s illegal and unjustified aggression against Ukraine (...). We confirm our commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders (...),” the participants said in the document.

The declaration is not a legally binding document and only expresses the joint political position of the signatories.