

 BRIEF

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Situational Updates

ZEROFOX INTELLIGENCE

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Intelligence Requirements: Geopolitical & Physical

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Scope Note

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Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Situational Updates

Executive Summary

Russia is unlikely to announce a general military mobilization during the May 9, 2022 Victory Day celebrations, as it would risk losing public support for the conflict and incur high military and economic costs. The sixth European Union sanctions package includes phasing out imports of Russian petroleum products by the end of 2022, but the proposed sanctions face opposition from multiple member states. Russian forces entered the besieged Azovstal metallurgical complex for the first time on May 4, 2022; one day after Ukraine completed an evacuation of 156 people trapped in the complex.

Analyst Commentary

The head of the Main Directorate of Intelligence for Ukraine's Defense Ministry (GUR), Kyrylo Budanov, told the Ukrainian media outlet *NV* on May 2, 2022, that Russia is preparing to announce a general mobilization of its armed forces during Victory Day celebrations on May 9.¹ Since Russia withdrew its military from Kyiv oblast in late March, Western observers have viewed May 9 as an important date for the Russian "special military operation" in Ukraine. If Russia were to achieve rapid success in its Donbas offensive, it was believed that President Vladimir Putin could use the holiday to declare victory based on his revised war aims: the "liberation" of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, as well as victory over Ukrainian "Nazism" represented by the seizure of Mariupol. Conversely, as U.S. intelligence has suggested, he would use the date to announce the annexation of the Donbas and the creation of the new "Kherson People's Republic."

Last week British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace suggested that President Putin was "laying the groundwork" to declare war, and Budanov's unequivocal assertion has

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<https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/politics/gur-minoboroni-shcho-vidomo-pro-herson-i-donbas-interv-yu-nv-novini-ukrajini-50238690.html>



heightened speculation that a general mobilization would be announced on May 9.² However, the announcement of a general mobilization is unlikely, as it would require a significant deviation from Russia's current political and military strategy toward the Ukrainian conflict and entail immense risks. The invasion of Ukraine has failed to achieve its political goals thus far, but the success of Russian propaganda has limited the extent to which that failure is understood by the Russian public. Even without taking Kyiv or conquering the Donbas, Putin can declare victory over Nazism and the liberation of Russian-speaking peoples in Ukraine. If he were to declare war, it would drastically broaden the war's aims and require the conscription of a huge number of Russian men for the expanded army. War would also create the risk of a catastrophic military failure that could not be sold to the public as a victory. In addition, the Russian public has been mostly supportive of the military operation as explained by the government, with its limited aims and a clear target. It is less likely that they would support a massive war effort with a much higher number of casualties and a much larger toll on the economy. Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov also called reports of a general mobilization "nonsense."³

In the current circumstances, Victory Day will likely celebrate the Russian military's victories in Mariupol and southern Ukraine, and decry Western sanctions and NATO's continued opposition. Russian forces have suffered an unexpectedly high number of casualties, and President Putin may also use the occasion to encourage patriotic volunteers to join the Russian military. However, a declaration of war or call for a general mobilization are much riskier and more distant prospects that would signal President Putin is prepared to wager the stability of his regime on the total conquest of Ukraine.

International Response

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the European Union's (EU's) sixth round of sanctions against Russia on May 4, 2022. The sanctions package will require a unanimous approval by EU members to pass, but it would include ending imports of Russian crude oil in the next six months and ending imports of Russian refined petroleum products by the end of 2022. The draft sanctions proposal also includes removal of Sberbank, Russia's largest bank, from the SWIFT financial transaction system, as well as Credit Bank of Moscow and the Russian Agricultural Bank. Following von der Leyen's announcement, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said that his government would block the sanctions from passing unless an exemption for pipeline imports of crude oil is added, citing fears about Hungary's energy security. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia are also reportedly pursuing an exemption from a full embargo of Russia petroleum.⁴

² <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/03/europe/russia-ukraine-declaration-of-war-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

³ https://twitter.com/nexta_tv/status/1521809062190583808

⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/b859a4b0-65ed-49ff-ba6d-6bd9569d04ff>



United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to the Ukrainian parliament via video on May 3, becoming the first foreign leader to speak to the Verkhovna Rada since the start of the war. Prime Minister Johnson used the address to announce a new military support package totalling GBP 300 million that will include Stormer anti-aircraft systems, Brimstone anti-ship missiles, radar systems, and night vision devices.⁵ The U.S. Congress also elected to increase its contributions to the Ukrainian military. On April 28, the House of Representatives passed the Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act that would revive the World War II-era legislation that waives restrictions on loaning military equipment to U.S. security partners. The bill was unanimously passed by the Senate and will go to President Joseph Biden for his signature.⁶

According to the office of Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennet, Russia President Putin apologized to the prime minister for Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's comments comparing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Adolf Hitler. Lavrov gave an interview to the Italian media outlet *Mediaset*, released on May 1, 2022, in which he claimed that even as a Jewish man President Zelensky could be a Nazi because Hitler also had "Jewish blood." The Israeli government summoned the Russian ambassador for "clarification" of Lavrov's remarks.⁷

Physical Security Impacts

Russia continues its assaults on Ukrainian positions in the Donbas with limited gains. Russian forces advancing from Borova, north of Slovyansk, reportedly occupied as many as 20 villages that were not defended by the Ukrainian military. However, the Russian advance is uneven and has not achieved significant breakthroughs. A Ukrainian counteroffensive pushed Russian forces as many as 40 kilometers east of Kharkiv to Stryi Saltiv and recaptured the town of Molodova.⁸ Ukrainian officials also reported recapturing territory northeast of Kherson.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on May 1, 2022, that the evacuation of civilians from Mariupol's Azovstal metallurgical complex had begun. A group of 156 evacuees, including 20 children and several employees of the Azovstal plant, arrived in Zaporizhzhia on May 3, after reportedly spending multiple days in a Russian filtration camp in Bezmyenne.⁹ According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Russia and Ukraine agreed to evacuate civilians

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-minister-boris-johnsons-address-to-the-ukrainian-parliament-3-may-2022>

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<https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2022/04/28/congress-passes-bill-to-loan-us-military-equipment-to-ukraine-and-allies/>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61339749>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/zcjbrooker/status/1521524633585033222>

⁹ <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/31833812.html>



from Azovstal after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' late-April meetings with Presidents Putin and Zelensky. However, more civilians and several thousand soldiers are believed to still be trapped inside the facility.¹⁰

Mariupol's mayor said that Russia resumed bombardment of Azovstal on May 4 after evacuation efforts were completed. Ukrainian news outlet *Ukrainskaya Pravda* later reported that Russian forces successfully entered the Azovstal complex for the first time on May 4, and the Ukrainian military lost communication with the fighters still in the complex.¹¹ U.S. Defense Department officials report that approximately 2,000 Russian forces remain in Mariupol and the rest have moved north of the city in preparation for deployment to the Donbas frontlines. The Ukrainian GUR also claims that Russia is preparing Mariupol for a military parade on May 9.¹²

Russia continues to target railway lines in central and western Ukraine to disrupt the flow of supplies to the Ukrainian military. Ukrainian authorities in Lviv reported that Russian cruise missiles struck three electricity substations that power the city's rail network on May 3. On May 4, a Russian cruise missile destroyed a railway bridge in Dnipro. The Ukrainian military said that Russian missiles hit targets in Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, Lviv, Vinnytsia, Kyiv, Odesa, and Donetsk oblasts in the past week. For the first time, Russia also hit targets in Zakarpattia region, on Ukraine's borders with Hungary and Slovakia.¹³

¹⁰ <https://www.unocha.org/story/ukraine-un-and-partners-evacuate-civilians-azovstal-steel-plant-mariupol>

¹¹ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/05/4/7343969/>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/DefenceIntelligenceofUkraine/posts/304843568493737>

¹³ <https://www.ft.com/content/2dd5de23-7681-446c-87a4-c03027258f38>



Appendix: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

Red

WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?

Sources may use TLP:

RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.

HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?

Recipients may NOT share TLP:

RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.

Amber

Sources may use TLP:

AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.

Recipients may ONLY share TLP:

AMBER information with members of their own organization and only as widely as necessary to act on that information.

Green

WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?

Sources may use TLP:

GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.

HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?

Recipients may share TLP:

GREEN information with peers & partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.

White

Sources may use TLP:

WHITE when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.

Recipients may share TLP:

WHITE information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.