After brief ceasefire, war on the ground resumes and Russia's war in the air continues with drones and cruise & ballistic missiles.

Latest UK Defence Intelligence update on the battlefield situation in Ukraine.

On Monday, May 4, Russia's Defense Ministry announced a unilateral two-day ceasefire in Ukraine to mark May 9, Victory Day, when Nazi Germany surrendered to the Soviet Union and the other Allies in World War II. Since 2023, Ukraine has celebrated May 8 as its Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism in World War II 1939-1945, and on May 8, President Trump announced that Russia and Ukraine had agreed to a three-day ceasefire on May 9-11. He said the ceasefire included an agreement to carry out, during the ceasefire, an exchange of 1,000 prisoners-of-war from each side. He said he had made his request "directly" to the two presidents: "Hopefully, it is the beginning of the end of a very long, deadly, and hard-fought War." He added that talks continue over ending the war "and we are getting closer and closer every day."

But to no one's surprise, following the conclusion of the three-day ceasefire, the war resumed on May 12 and, as that day's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation indicates, the Russian forces resumed their attack against the forces defending Ukraine – attacking toward the city of Sumy in northeastern Ukraine and at a number of points along the contact line between the forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine from the area south of Kupiansk to the area south of Lyman and Siversk toward Sloviansk and Kramatorsk in the northern portion of Donetsk region, toward the area in the easternmost portion of Dnipropetrovsk region south of Pokrovsk, and in the area near the junction of Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions in southeastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian forces continued to attack the Russian forces at the southeastern corner of Dnipropetrovsk region as well as at a number of other locations along the contact line.

As the war on the ground resumed, Russia's war in the air continued as it had throughout the three-day ceasefire on the ground. In a statement on April 30, the Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russia had fired 6,663 drones and 141 missiles at Ukraine in April in what was the most intense month of aerial attacks in the war. The largest attack in the month, and in all of 2026, took place on April 15, when 659 drones and 44 missiles targeted several Ukrainian cities and killed at least 19 Ukrainians. And the drone and missile attacks have increased this month; in a statement last Wednesday, President Zelenskyy reported that since the start of the day Russia had fired 1567 drones and 56 missiles at Kyiv and other cities and that 24 people had been killed, including three children.

On May 23, Russia fired an Oreshnik intermediate range hypersonic ballistic missile at Ukraine for the third time during the war. Part of an attack that included more than 600 drones and 90 air, sea, and ground-based cruise and ballistic missiles, and was the largest such attack since December 2024, it may have been used as retaliation for a Ukrainian attack that hit a dormitory in Luhansk region the night before that reportedly killed 21 and wounded 42. The Oreshnik, which reaches a speed of Mach 10 (over 7500 mph) and had been used only twice previously, in attacks on Dnipro in 2024 and Lviv in January, is obviously exceptionally difficult if not impossible to intercept.

Since then, the Russian drone and missile attacks have continued in large numbers against Kyiv and other cities. On Friday, Romanian officials reported that a Russian drone hit an apartment building in the city of Galaţi, which is about 15 miles from Ukraine. Romania is a member of NATO and the Romanian foreign minister called for a formal discussion under Article 4 of the NATO Treaty about a threat to the security of a member state. NATO subsequently confirmed the drone was of Russian origin and some NATO members have offered to provide Romania with additional air defense equipment. Mark Rutte, NATO's Secretary General, spoke with Romanian President Dan, after which he said, "I just spoke with President Dan of Romania about the Russian drone that hit a residential building in Galati. I assured him of NATO's absolute solidarity with Romania and expressed sympathy for those injured in the incident. I affirmed that NATO stands ready to defend every inch of Allied territory. We will continue to enhance our readiness to deter and defend against any threat, including from drones. Russia's reckless behavior is a danger to us all. They continue to target civilians and civilian infrastructure across Ukraine. And last night showed yet again that the implications of their illegal war of aggression don't stop at the border. Russia's war needs to end, as does Russia's disregard for civilian safety. For our part, we will continue to strengthen our deterrence and defense at home and continue our support for Ukraine as they defend against Russia's aggression." Strong words. But strong words alone aren't enough. For one thing, Ukraine clearly needs more U.S. Patriot anti-missile defense systems.

David R. Cameron
June 1, 2026