

As Ukraine's allies meet at Ramstein, Russians advance in Bakhmut



UK Defence Intelligence update on Russian attacks and troop locations as of yesterday.

Representatives of the 46 countries – the 31 members of NATO and 15 other countries – that make up the Ukraine Defense Contact Group met at Ramstein Air Base in Germany yesterday to discuss the additional military assistance Ukraine will need in its spring counteroffensive. They met a day after NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg met in Kyiv with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who urged him to assist Ukraine in overcoming the reticence of some NATO members to providing Ukraine the long-range weapons, planes, artillery, and armored vehicles it will need in order to drive Russia out of Ukraine. Zelenskyy also urged that NATO agree to membership for Ukraine – something Stoltenberg said would indeed happen at some point: “Let me be clear,” he said, “Ukraine’s rightful place is in the Euro-Atlantic family. Ukraine’s rightful place is in NATO.”

But the focus at Ramstein yesterday was not on Ukraine’s future membership in NATO but, rather, on the more immediate need to ensure that it will have the equipment it needs for its spring offensive. Ukraine Defense Minister Oleksi Reznikov made it clear prior to the meeting that Ukraine needs, in addition to more tanks and armored vehicles, additional air defense systems, more artillery ammunition, and more training for its forces. Prior to the meeting, the U.S. announced it will provide an additional \$325 million in military assistance, including more ammunition for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) it gave Ukraine that have proven to be so effective as well as advanced missiles and anti-tank mines. And at the meeting, the U.S. said that by the end of May it will deliver 31 Abrams battle tanks to Germany to be used in training the Ukrainian troops who will eventually operate the 31 Abrams M1A1 tanks

that are now being refurbished in the U.S. and will be delivered to Ukraine when they are ready for use.

There was also an effort at the meeting to resolve a dispute among some of the NATO allies, most notably between France on one side and Poland and several others on the other side, over implementation of a recent EU decision to support the production and delivery to Ukraine of artillery ammunition. France has insisted that the EU funds be limited to paying suppliers located in the EU, thereby preventing them from being used to pay American and British suppliers. Poland and other EU and NATO member states made it clear that Ukraine has an urgent need for the ammunition and that the EU funds should be used to pay whatever suppliers can meet the need, regardless of whether they are located in a member state of the EU.

Meanwhile, back in the war, the battle for Bakhmut continues, with the Russian forces, which over the past two weeks have taken the eastern portion and then the central portion of the largely-destroyed city, continuing their push into the western portion of the city while also continuing their effort to encircle the city and in so doing cut it off from the remaining supply lines from Ukrainian-held territory west of the city. Yesterday, in the Russian defense ministry's daily briefing, Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said, "In the Donetsk direction, the assault teams continued battles in the western part of the city of Artyomovsk [i.e., Bakhmut]. Airborne forces are thwarting the enemy's attempts to counter-attack on the flanks and are rendering support to the assault teams in capturing the city." Also yesterday, the military adviser to the head of the Donetsk People's Republic (the pseudo-state created by pro-Russian separatists in that region) said, "Wagner PMC [i.e., the Wagner Group, the private military company of Yevgeny Prigozhin] fighters have reached the Artyomovsk-Chasiv Yar highway that was used to supply the Ukrainian battlegroup. [Chasiv Yar is a small city just west of Bakhmut.] They have several hundred meters under control, which makes supplies to the garrison impossible." In today's briefing, Konashenkov said, "In the Donetsk direction, the assault detachments have liberated three quarters in the west part of the city of Artyomovsk. Airborne troops have been blocking the enemy on the flanks and supporting the assault detachments to take control over the city."

If one compares yesterday's British Defence Intelligence map of Russian attacks and troop locations in Ukraine (above) with the map from a week ago, there is one significant change: Some of the territory immediately to the north and northeast of Bakhmut that was contested by the two forces a week ago is now controlled by Russian forces and territory immediately to the south of Bakhmut that was controlled by Ukrainian forces a week ago is now contested. And if the map were detailed enough to show the territory in the city of Bakhmut, it would show that Russia now controls the eastern and central areas of the city and some of the western area as well. Clearly, the vise is tightening both in and around Bakhmut.

David R. Cameron
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