

As war enters year three, Russian offensive continues in the east



UK Defence Intelligence update on battlefield situation in Ukraine as of Friday.

Last week, as Russia's war against Ukraine entered its third year, the Russian forces continued their offensive operations at a number of points along the "contact line" between the forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. As Friday's British Defense Intelligence map of the battlefield situation, above, indicates, the Russian forces continue to attack in the direction of Kupiansk in Kharkiv region in northeastern Ukraine, toward the area around the largely destroyed city of Bakhmut, toward the area around Avdiivka, a small city about ten miles north of Donetsk city from which the Ukrainians withdrew on Feb. 17, and toward the area south of Orikhiv in which the Ukrainian forces had previously taken several small towns and villages. But, as in recent weeks, the Russian forces continued to attack at other points along the "contact line" as well – most notably, toward Lyman in northern Donetsk region near the industrial cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk; in the area to the west and south of Marinka, a small city about ten miles west of Donetsk city; and toward the area in Kherson region in southern Ukraine in which the Ukrainian forces have established a beachhead on the east bank of the Dnipro River.

Based on the daily updates on the previous day's combat engagements issued each morning by the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, last week, from Sunday through Saturday, the Russian forces conducted more than 600 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending those points along the contact line – a total of 49 in the direction of Kupiansk, 68 in the direction of Lyman, 62 in the direction of the area around Bakhmut, 157 toward the area around Avdiivka, 228 toward the area to the west and south of Marinka, 27 toward several villages and

small towns taken by the Ukrainian forces south of Orikhiv, and 17 toward the Ukrainian forces just east of Kherson city in southern Ukraine. The fact that the most frequently-attacked areas, by far, were those held by Ukrainian forces in the area around Avdiivka and to the west and south of Marinka, reinforces the view already evident from the frequency of the Russian attacks against the Ukrainian forces in both areas in recent weeks, that the immediate and most pressing priority for the Russians in eastern Ukraine is to secure the area around Donetsk city, after which they will presumably attempt to continue pushing back the Ukrainian forces and taking most if not all of the territory in Donetsk region they don't already hold.

On Saturday, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskiy, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, made some surprisingly candid comments on Telegram, subsequently quoted in the Kyiv Independent and Kyiv Post (and also, it should be said, in TASS) regarding his experience since taking over as Commander-in-Chief from Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi on Feb. 6: "I continue to work on the eastern front. Within three days, it became completely clear why...some brigades manage to hold back enemy attacks and maintain their positions, while others do not. First of all, it depends on the brigade's commander, his training, experience, and his ability to make adequate and balanced decisions.... In some cases, when the commander does not control the situation, and their actions and commands directly threaten the lives and health of their subordinates, I am forced to make personnel decisions." He said he had sent specialists to brigades facing problems to assist and provide expertise and that, based on reports from commanders, he had made whatever decisions were necessary regarding reserves and supplies of ammunition, drones, and other equipment.

But Syrskiy also highlighted the performance of several units, including the 54th Mechanized Brigade, which eliminated two columns of Russian armored vehicles with artillery and mines; the 25th Airborne Brigade and 47th Mechanized Brigade for having driven back the Russian forces at Orlivka and Berdychi; and the 79th Air Assault Brigade, which did the same in the area near Novomykhailivka. He also said he had moved an unnamed brigade that had been fighting for two years to the back to restore its combat capability. And he noted that a week after his appointment as commander-in-chief, he had withdrawn the Ukrainian forces from Avdiivka, where they had been facing many weeks of Russian attacks "in order to avoid encirclement and preserve the lives and health of servicemen."

In a video address soon thereafter, President Zelenskyy made it clear that he supports what Syrskiy said: "The commander-in-chief has a carte blanche to make personnel changes in the army, in any of the headquarters, anywhere. All Ukrainian commanders have to know the front, to feel the front and its real needs, to really be close to the soldiers and the officers, and to be exactly the right people for achieving Ukraine's goals. Early next week, after Colonel General Syrskiy returns from the front, I expect to hear a detailed report from him, as well as

proposals on further changes we should make and how we should act in the future."

David R. Cameron

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