

Russian offensive continues in east as drones attack nuclear plant



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

Last week the Russian forces continued their offensive operations against the Ukrainian forces 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 indicates, the Russian forces continued to attack in the area around the destroyed city of Bakhmut from which the Ukrainian forces withdrew after a prolonged siege last spring, toward the area around Avdiivka, a small city north of Donetsk city from which the Ukrainian forces withdrew in February after another prolonged siege, and toward the area south of Orikhiv in Zaporizhzhia region taken by Ukrainian forces last year.

The map also indicates the Russian forces continued to attack in the direction of Kupiansk in Kharkiv region, although the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which reports each day on the Russian attacks the previous day at various points along the contact line, did not report any attacks in the direction of Kupiansk last week. (The British Defence Intelligence map, above, has remained unchanged for more than a month.) However, the Ukrainian General Staff reported, as it has for several months, a number of Russian attacks last week at other points along the contact line in addition to those identified in the British map – toward Lyman in northern Donetsk region which, if taken, would provide the Russians a pathway to the large industrial cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk; toward the area to the west and south of Marinka, a small city west of Donetsk city the Russians took in December, and toward the area in Kherson in southern Ukraine where the Ukrainian forces established a beachhead on the east bank of the Dnipro River.

Based on the daily reports of the General Staff, last week the Russian forces conducted 392 attacks against the Ukrainian forces at various points along the contact line – as noted above, none in the direction of Kupiansk compared with 3 the week before, 37 in the direction of Lyman compared with 69 the week before; 92 in the direction of the area around Bakhmut compared with 47 the week before; 66 toward the area west of Avdiivka and northwest of Donetsk city compared with 84 the week before; 132 toward the area south of Marinka and southwest of Donetsk city compared with 183 the week before; 24 toward several villages and small towns south of Orikhiv held by the Ukrainian forces compared with 35 the week before; and 41 against the Ukrainian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro River compared with 12 the week before. The General Staff said that all of the Russian attacks were repelled.

Thus far this week, the Russian attacks have continued to focus on the areas south of Marinka and southwest of Donetsk city and the area around Bakhmut. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that on Sunday, Monday, and yesterday, the Russian forces conducted 70 attacks in the area south of Marinka and southwest of Donetsk city and 68 attacks in the area around Bakhmut. In addition, there were 24 attacks toward the area west of Avdiivka and northwest of Donetsk city, 12 toward the villages and towns south of Orikhiv, 12 against the Ukrainian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro, 6 in the direction of Lyman, and yesterday, for the first time in more than a week, 3 attacks toward Kupiansk. Although they cover only three days, those figures suggest the priority for the Russian forces in eastern Ukraine continues to be pushing forward in the area south of Marinka and southwest of Donetsk city and in the area around Bakhmut.

Meanwhile, as the war on the ground continues in eastern Ukraine, Europe, and indeed the world, got unsettling news Monday when Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear corporation, said Ukraine had attacked the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station with drones three times on Sunday and once on Monday. Ukraine said it had nothing to do with the attacks and said the damage was done by Russian troops. The Zaporizhzhia plant has six water-cooled Soviet-era reactors. But the water-cooling system requires electricity – which means that if the electrical system is damaged there could be a meltdown. Whether the plant was in fact attacked by Ukrainian drones or was instead hit accidentally by Russian troops shooting at drones headed for other targets remains to be seen. What can't be denied is what Yuri Chernichuk, the Russian director of the plant, said: "It is dangerous, dangerous for the station, dangerous for the surrounding territory, and potentially dangerous for all of humanity. No nuclear reactor was made to be in the center of fighting." Rafael Grossi, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), likewise said, "This is a major escalation of the nuclear safety and security dangers facing the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Such reckless attacks significantly increase the risk of a major nuclear accident

and must cease immediately. Attacking a nuclear power plant is an absolute no go.” The IAEA didn’t assign blame for the attack but it did say Russian troops had engaged an approaching drone on Sunday.

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