

As the Russian attacks continue in eastern Ukraine, House finally approves \$61.8 billion for military assistance



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 above indicates, the Russian forces continued to attack in the direction of Kupiansk in Kharkiv region, in the area west of the destroyed city of Bakhmut from which the Ukrainian forces withdrew after a prolonged siege last spring, in the area north and west of 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.

But the Ukrainian General Staff also reported last week, as it has for several months, a number of Russian attacks 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 Russian forces a pathway toward 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 region in southern Ukraine where the Ukrainian forces established a beachhead on the east bank of the Dniipro River.

Based on the daily reports of the General Staff, last week the Russian forces conducted 580 attacks against the Ukrainian forces at various points along the contact line – 6 in the direction of Kupiansk compared with 3 the previous week, 47 in the direction of Lyman compared with 10 the week before, 162 in the

direction of Chasiv Yar, a city about 20 kilometers west of Bakhmut, compared with 195 the week before, 132 toward the area west of Avdiivka and northwest of Donetsk city compared with 68 the week before, 157 toward the area south of Marinka and southwest of Donetsk city compared with 169 the week before, 38 toward several villages and small towns south of Orikhiv held by the Ukrainian forces compared with 31 the week before, and 38 against the Ukrainian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro River compared with 37 the week before. The total number of Russian attacks against the Ukrainian forces at those locations last week, 580, compares with the totals of 513 in the week of April 7-13 and 392 in the week of March 31-April 6.

The large number of Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine last week – on average, more than 80 each day – with almost 500 of them in the direction of Lyman, the areas west of Bakhmut and Avdiivka, and the area south of Marinka and southwest of Donetsk city – makes it clear that the priority for the Russian forces at this point in the war is to take the central portion of Donetsk region from Lyman, Sloviansk, and Kramatorsk in the north to Vuhledar in the south while continuing to hold the broad “land bridge” it now holds between the Donbas and Crimea.

In order to hold the territory it now holds in the Donbas and take back the territory the Russian forces hold there, Ukraine needs more troops. Toward that end, three weeks ago, President Zelenskyy signed into law a bill that lowered the draft age from 27 to 25. He also signed into law a bill that required those who had been given a waiver from some types of military duty including combat because they were judged to be “partially fit” to undergo another medical assessment. And he signed into law a third bill approving creation of an online database of all those eligible for military service that will enable draft notices to be delivered electronically to all draft-eligible persons, including those who have been displaced or have otherwise relocated. On Tuesday, Zelenskyy signed into law another bill that requires all men aged 18 to 60 to update their personal data, including location and contact information, with the military authorities and to carry their registration documents with them at all times. It also prohibits persons who have not registered with the military authorities from driving. And it prohibits anyone living abroad from obtaining service at a consulate, including for passport renewal, who does not have up-to-date documentation of their registration with the military authorities.

But Ukraine doesn’t just need more troops; it needs urgently, indeed desperately, more military hardware – air defense systems, tanks, fighter jets, artillery, ammunition, drones, and other weapons. It needs, in particular, more military assistance from the U.S. In October, President Biden proposed a \$106 billion package of international assistance, the largest portion of which – \$61.4 billion – would involve military assistance for Ukraine. The package also included \$14.3 billion for Israel, \$13.6 billion to secure the border with Mexico, \$9.2 billion in humanitarian aid for Ukraine and Israel, and \$7.5 billion for several countries in

the Indo-Pacific region. In retrospect, it should have been obvious that the worst possible way to get the military assistance Ukraine desperately needs approved as quickly as possible was to include it as part of a larger bill with a number of other components about each of which there would be controversy and disagreement. But unfortunately for Ukraine, that apparently wasn't obvious to the administration, and the entirely predictable result was that the legislation, including the much-needed \$61 billion for Ukraine, was stalled by legislative disputes in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives over the appropriations for the various components.

On Feb. 13, the Senate approved a \$95.3 billion bill that would provide military and humanitarian assistance for Ukraine as well as assistance for Israel, humanitarian assistance for the Gaza, and assistance for other areas as well. The appropriation was approved by a vote of 70-29. 46 Democrats, 22 Republicans, and 2 Independents voted for the appropriation while 2 Democrats, 26 Republicans, and 1 independent voted against the appropriation. After the Senate vote, the bill – and with it the likely future of Ukraine – went to the House of Representatives, where it was discussed, debated, and eventually split up into four separate bills – one for Ukraine, another for Israel, a third for the Indo-Pacific area, and a fourth that involved sanctions on Iran as well as the sale of frozen Russian financial assets.

On Friday, Speaker Mike Johnson put forward a rule that, if approved, would require separate votes in the House on the four bills. In what was undoubtedly the key vote in the long-running saga, the House approved the rule by 316-94. 151 Republicans and 165 Democrats voted in favor while 55 Republicans and 39 Democrats voted against it. With the rule approved, on Saturday the House voted on the four bills. H.R. 8035 – The Ukraine Security Supplemental Appropriation Act – was approved by a vote of 311-112. 210 Democrats and 101 Republicans voted in favor, while 112 Republicans voted against. The bill provides for \$60.8 billion in supplemental appropriations in Fiscal Year 2024. The Department of Defense is of course the largest recipient, receiving \$48.4 billion. State and Foreign operations will receive an additional \$11.6 billion, and other departments will receive an additional \$800 million. The funding is provided for purposes such as supporting current U.S. military operations in the region, replacing defense articles that were provided to Ukraine, reimbursing Defense for services and training provided to Ukraine, for economic support for Ukraine. The bill includes provisions expanding the authority of the President to transfer defense articles and services from Defense to other countries and organizations and requires the President to transfer long-range ATACMS (Army Tactical Missile Systems) to Ukraine. The bill also requires the President to enter into an agreement with Ukraine regarding repayment for the economic assistance the U.S. has provided to Ukraine. The House also approved the three other bills, approving \$26.4 billion

for Israel by a vote of 366 to 58, \$8.1 billion for the Indo-Pacific allies by a vote of 385 to 54, and for the sale of frozen Russian financial assets and the forced sale of Tik Tok by a vote of 360 to 58.

Saturday evening, after the vote in the House, President Zelenskyy addressed the Ukrainian people: “Dear Ukrainians! From early morning today, various regions of our country have been experiencing air alerts and Russian strikes.... Missiles, drone strikes, artillery. There is a lot of destruction – houses, port infrastructure, and energy facilities. There are casualties and, unfortunately, fatalities.... But this day is still a little different. Today, we received the long-awaited decision: the American support package we’ve been fighting for so hard. And it is a very significant package that will be felt by both our warriors on the frontline and our cities and villages suffering from Russian terror. The U.S. House of Representatives voted today. I thank everyone who supported our package – this is a life-saving decision. I am grateful personally to Speaker Mike Johnson, to all American hearts who, like us in Ukraine, feel that Russian evil definitely should not prevail. I hope that the package will be considered in the U.S. Senate and submitted to President Biden’s desk quickly enough. We appreciate every manifestation of support for our state and independence, for our people, and for our lives that Russia wants to bury in ruins. America has shown its leadership from the very first days of this war. And this kind of American leadership is crucial for the maintenance of an international order in the world based on rules and predictability of life for all nations.”

Yesterday, in an interview on NBC’s “Meet the Press,” Zelenskyy reiterated his gratitude and that of Ukraine to the House of Representatives, the Speaker and the members of both parties who voted for the bill. He said that, thanks to that aid, Ukraine will have a chance at victory. But he made it clear that, in order for Ukraine to win, the assistance needs to include what Ukraine needs most: “This includes artillery, strategic long-range weapons, ATACMS – all of this is important to avoid losing people at the front. The reason we are losing them is because we don’t have the appropriate long-range weapons. This, as well as air defense, which is so important, is certainly a priority today...After stabilization, we have every chance to regain the initiative. To do this, we must have the appropriate weapons.”

On Saturday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced, “The Senate stands ready to take the next step on the national security supplemental. The House at long last approved funding for Ukraine, Israel, Indo-Pacific, and humanitarian assistance. And the Senate locked in an agreement to finish the work with the first vote on Tuesday,” Hopefully, the Senate will quickly approve H.R. 8035 so Ukraine can get the military assistance it desperately needs – air defense systems, fighter jets, tanks, artillery, ammunition – before Russia launches its widely-expected late spring-early summer offensive.

David R. Cameron
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