

As Russia prepares new offensive, attacks intensify in the Donbas



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

Last week, as Russia prepared its much-anticipated impending offensive, its forces intensified their attacks 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 reported last week, as it has for several months, that the Russians also attacked at a number of 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 nearby 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 Dnipro River.

Based on the daily reports of the General Staff of the Armed Services of Ukraine last week, from Sunday, April 21, through Saturday, April 27, the Russian forces conducted 639 attacks against the Ukrainian forces at various points along the contact line – 39 in the direction of Kupiansk compared with 6 the previous week,

122 in the direction of Lyman compared with 47 the week before, 120 in the direction of Chasiv Yar, a city about 12 miles west of Bakhmut, compared with 162 the week before, 176 toward the area west of Avdiivka and northwest of Donetsk city compared with 132 the week before, 137 in the area south of Marinka and southwest of Donetsk city compared with 157 the week before, 20 toward several villages and small towns south of Orikhiv held by the Ukrainian forces compared with 38 the week before, and 25 against the Ukrainian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro River compared with 38 the week before. The total number of Russian attacks against the Ukrainian forces at those locations last week, 639, exceeded the number of attacks in the weeks of March 31-April 6 (392); April 7-13 (513), and April 14-20 (580).

The fact that Russia launched, on average, more than 90 attacks against the Ukrainian forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine every day last week, and the fact that so many of them – more than 500 – were focused in the direction of Lyman, the areas west of Bakhmut and Avdiivka, and the area south and west of Marinka and Donetsk city makes it clear that the priority for the Russian forces now is to take the central portion of Donetsk region from Lyman, Sloviansk, and Kramatorsk in the north through the area west of Bakhmut, Horlivka, and Avdiivka to Vuhledar in the south while continuing to hold its “land bridge” in southeastern Ukraine between the Donbas and Crimea. Indeed, given that Russia formally incorporated the regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson into the Russian Federation in 2022 – Crimea was, of course, annexed in 2014 – Russia may not stop pushing westward until it controls **all** of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

Two weeks ago, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, issued a statement on Facebook that the situation was becoming more difficult for the Ukrainian forces in some areas in eastern Ukraine: “The situation on the eastern front has deteriorated significantly in recent days. This is primarily due to a significant intensification of the enemy’s offensive after the presidential elections in the Russian Federation.” He said the situation around the city of Chasiv Yar was “difficult and tense” with the area under “constant fire.” (He noted that “the higher Russian military leadership has set its troops the task of capturing Chasiv Yar by May 9,” which Russia, like the U.S.S.R. before it, celebrates as Victory Day in World War II.) And he said, “The enemy is actively attacking our positions in the Lyman and Bakhmut sectors with assault groups supported by armored vehicles. In the Pokrovsk sector [about 25 miles northwest of Donetsk city and Avdiivka], they are trying to break through our defense using dozens of tanks and armored personnel carriers. This is facilitated by the warm dry weather, which has made most of the open areas accessible to tanks. Despite significant losses, the enemy is increasing his efforts by using new units on armored vehicles, thanks to which he periodically achieves tactical gains.”

Yesterday, writing on Facebook and Telegram, Syrskyi said bluntly, “The situation at the front has worsened. The enemy has concentrated its main efforts in several sectors, creating a significant advantage in forces and means. The most difficult situation is in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions, where fierce battles continue.” [Kurakhove is a small city 20 miles south of Pokrovsk and 10 miles west of Marinka.] “The enemy has engaged up to four brigades in these directions, is trying to develop an offensive west of Avdiivka and Marinka, making its way to Pokrovsk and Kurakhove. Units of the Defense Forces of Ukraine, preserving the lives and health of our defenders, moved to new frontiers west of Berdycki, Semenivka, and Novomykhailivka.” [Three villages in the Pokrovsk district.] “In general, the enemy has succeeded tactically in these directions but has failed to achieve an operational advantage, and in some areas our troops managed to improve the tactical position.”

But the fact remains that the Russian forces nevertheless continue to push westward, slowly but steadily, at a number of points along the contact line between the forces in eastern Ukraine. And the new Russian offensive, which may be announced on or soon after May 9, will no doubt continue that effort along the contact line that stretches from Kupiansk in the north to Kherson in the south.

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