

Russian forces continue advancing west of Bakhmut & Avdiivka



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

Last week, as Russia continues to prepare its much-anticipated new offensive in eastern Ukraine, the Russian forces continued their attacks against the Ukrainian forces at a number of points along the 1200-kilometer “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, 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 – toward Lyman in northern Donetsk region which, if taken, would provide a pathway southward to the nearby 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 28 through Saturday, May 4, the Russian forces conducted 796 attacks against the Ukrainian forces at various points along the

contact line – 68 in the direction of Kupiansk compared with 39 the previous week, 97 in the direction of Lyman compared with 122 the week before, 176 in the direction of Chasiv Yar, a city about 12 miles west of Bakhmut, compared with 120 the week before, 255 toward the area west of Avdiivka and northwest of Donetsk city compared with 176 the week before, 122 in the area south of Marinka and southwest of Donetsk city compared with 137 the week before, 30 toward several villages and small towns south of Orikhiv held by the Ukrainian forces compared with 20 the week before, and 48 against the Ukrainian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro River compared with 25 the week before. The total number of Russian attacks against the Ukrainian forces at those locations last week, 796, substantially exceeded the number of attacks at those points along the contact line in previous weeks: 513 in the week of April 7-13, 580 in the week of April 14-20, and 639 in the week of April 21-27.

The fact that Russia launched, on average, more than 100 attacks a day against the Ukrainian forces at those areas in eastern and southeastern Ukraine last week, and the fact that so many of them were focused in the direction of Lyman and the areas west of Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Marinka, and Donetsk city, makes it clear that the priority for the Russian forces is to take, if not all of Donetsk region, at least the central portion of the region from Lyman in the north through Sloviansk and Kramatorsk to Vuhledar in the south, while retaining control of much of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions in southeastern Ukraine, including, in particular, the “land bridge” that now connects the territory it holds in Donetsk region to Crimea.

It’s worth noting that, when compared with the previous map issued by British Defense Intelligence on April 26, the map above suggests the Russian forces have made small advances westward in the area east and northeast of Kupiansk, north and west of Bakhmut, and, most noticeably, in the area north, west, and southwest of Avdiivka as well as the area east of Vuhledar between it and Donetsk city. Indeed, on Sunday, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced its forces had taken the village of Ocheretyne, which is about 10 miles northwest of Avdiivka. And a spokesman for the Ukrainian military said, “From Ocheretyne, the occupiers are rushing to the Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway. Fierce fighting continues in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions. The enemy has deployed up to four brigades of the Russian Amed Forces there and plans to develop an offensive west of Avdiivka and Marinka, making its way to Pokrovsk and Kurakhove.”

Attention, both in Ukraine and Russia, is likely to be focused this week also on the small city of Chasiv Yar a few miles west of Bakhmut. Chasiv Yar, which had a pre-war population of about 12,000, is, despite its small size, important for the Russians because it is only about 10 kilometers from the city of Kostyantynivka, which had a pre-war population of about 70,000 and is mid-way on the main highway between Horlivka, which the Russians hold, and Kramatorsk, an

important industrial center that had a pre-war population of about 150,000. Three weeks ago, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, issued a statement on Facebook in which he said the situation was becoming more difficult for the Ukrainian forces in some parts of eastern Ukraine. He noted, in particular, that the situation around Chasiv Yar was “difficult and tense,” with the area under “constant fire.” And he noted that “the higher Russian military leadership has set its troops the task of capturing Chasiv Yar by May 9.”

Russia, like the U.S.S.R. before it, celebrates May 9 as Victory Day in World War II. (The German surrender took effect late in the evening of May 8, 1945, by which time it was already May 9 in the U.S.S.R.) In Moscow, there will be the usual celebration in Red Square, featuring the Russian military and its latest weapons, and President Putin is likely to speak, as he did at last year’s celebration, about the “special military operation” in Ukraine. One hypothesis is that the Russian forces have been directed to take Chasiv Yar by that date so that Putin can refer to it in his May 9 speech as the latest evidence that Russia will prevail in its “special military operation” in Ukraine.

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