

As the NATO leaders meet, the war continues with no end in sight



British Defence Intelligence update on the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of July 5.

As last Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in eastern Ukraine, above, indicated, the war in eastern Ukraine continued last week, as it has in recent weeks, with the Russian forces continuing to attack in the area just over the border north of the city of Kharkiv, in the direction of Kupiansk in the eastern portion of Kharkiv region, in the area west of the destroyed city of Bakhmut, in the area to the west and northwest of Avdiivka, a small city north of Donetsk from which the Ukrainian forces withdrew in February, and toward the area south of Orikhiv in Zaporizhzhia region taken by Ukrainian forces last year. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported in its daily updates that the Russian forces attacked as well at a number of other points along the contact line between the forces in addition to those indicated on the map – toward Lyman in northern Donetsk region which, if taken, would provide a pathway southward toward the large cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk; toward the area to the west and southwest of Donetsk city; 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.

While the attention of the world was focused this week on the NATO Summit in Washington, the war continued without interruption or respite in eastern Ukraine. The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported that, over the past week from last Friday through yesterday, there were a total of 984 Russian attacks on Ukrainian positions, averaging about 140 attacks a day with little variation in the total number of attacks from day to day. From last Friday through yesterday, there were 56 Russian attacks in the border area to the north of Kharkiv and 59

Russian attacks toward Kupiansk in eastern Kharkiv region. There were 114 attacks over the seven days between last Friday and yesterday in the direction of Lyman, which if taken would open a pathway to the important cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. And over those seven days, there were 54 attacks in the Siverskyi sector between Sievierodonetsk and Sloviansk, 60 attacks in the Kramatorsk sector, and 122 attacks in the Toretsk sector, which is a few miles northwest of Horlivka. But the greatest number of Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine over the past seven days were the 315 attacks toward Pokrovsk, a city with a pre-war population of about 60,000 that's about 25-30 miles northwest of Donetsk city. The Russians also launched 85 attacks over the seven days toward Kurakhove, 15 miles west of Donetsk city, and in the Vremivka sector, also west of Donetsk city, the Russians launched 59 attacks. They also launched 29 attacks in the Orikhiv sector in Zaporizhzhia region and 23 attacks on Ukrainian forces in Kherson region in an effort to drive them back from their foothold on the left bank of the Dnipro River. As usual, the General Staff reported that all of the 980 Russian attacks over the past seven days were repelled.

Judging from the number of Russian attacks over the past week and in recent weeks, the highest priority for the Russian forces has been to advance toward Pokrovsk, Toretsk, Lyman, and Kurakhove, and take the major cities – most notably, Sloviansk and Kramatorsk – in Donetsk region which they don't already hold. President Putin has never said under what circumstances Russia might contemplate a ceasefire and the start of talks that might, if successful, produce a peace treaty. But it seems quite clear, not only from the developments that led to Putin's decision to undertake the "special military operation" more than two years ago but also from the direction and frequency of the Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine in the last several months, that the necessary pre-condition for any Russian acceptance of a ceasefire is Russian control of most if not all of Donetsk region. Until that happens – and, of course, it may never happen – the war will continue.

The leaders of the NATO member states met in Washington this week and agreed to establish a NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine to coordinate the provision of military equipment and training for Ukraine by Allies and partners, announced a pledge of long-term security assistance for Ukraine for the provision of military equipment, assistance, and training to support Ukraine in building a force capable of defeating Russian aggression with a minimum baseline funding of €40 billion within the next year, announced the establishment of a NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training, and Education Center, and agreed on the appointment of a NATO Senior Representative in Ukraine. Importantly, the leaders also made it clear they are committed to Ukraine becoming a member state of NATO "when Allies agree and conditions are met."

In the meantime, the war continues, with no end in sight.

David R. Cameron
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