

Russian attacks continue toward Pokrovsk, other cities in the east as Ukraine receives first of the pledged F-16s



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

As Friday’s British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in eastern Ukraine, above, indicates, 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 Kharkiv, westward toward the city 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. However, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported in its daily updates last week that the Russian forces also attacked 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 northwest, west, and southwest of Donetsk city; and toward the area in Kherson region in southern Ukraine where the Ukrainian forces hold some territory on the east bank of the Dnipro River.

In its daily updates last week, the General Staff reported a total of 967 Russian attacks from last Sunday through Saturday, an average of roughly 140 attacks a day, at various points along the contact line. It reported a total over the seven days of 42 Russian attacks in the border area to the north of Kharkiv; 52 attacks toward Kupiansk in eastern Kharkiv region; 88 attacks in the direction of Lyman; 52 attacks in the Siversk sector between Sieverodonestsk and Sloviansk; 68 attacks in the Kramatorsk sector; 153

attacks in the Toretsk sector a few miles northwest of Horlivka; 76 attacks toward Kurakhove, which is 15 miles west of Donetsk city; 45 attacks in the Vremivka sector west of Donetsk city; 25 attacks in the Orikhiv sector in Zaporizhzhia region, and 7 attacks against the Ukrainian forces attempting to hold a thin slice of territory on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson region.

But the largest number of Russian attacks by far last week, as in the past several weeks, were directed toward Pokrovsk, a city with a pre-war population of about 60,000 that is about 25 miles northwest of Donetsk city; over the seven days last week, the Russian forces launched 341 attacks – on average, almost 50 a day – toward that city. Indeed, in four of the seven days last week, the Russian forces launched between 52 and 55 attacks toward Pokrovsk. While all of the targets are obviously high priorities for the Russian forces, judging from the number of attacks last week the highest priority for the Russian forces in eastern Ukraine last week, as it has been for the past several weeks, was Pokrovsk, followed by Toretsk. Lyman, Kramatorsk, and Kurakhove, all of which are located in the central portion of Donetsk region.

On Thursday, in an update on the situation in the Donbas, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, reported that he had worked for three days with the brigades that are defending against the Russian attacks in the Kharkiv and Toretsk direction. He said the main tasks when working with the brigades was to assess the situation in the combat zone, analyze the efficiency of the combat actions, solve the issues connected with supplying the units with ammunition, UAVs and radio-electronic warfare systems, and assisting the commanders in the organization of combat action. He noted that in some areas, the Russians achieved minor successes at the cost of “considerable losses.” He said, “The enemy keeps concentrating their efforts on the Pokrovsk front, deploying their most experienced assault units in an attempt to breach Ukrainian defenses” and noted that “heavy fighting” is also taking place on the Kupiansk front, “but we hold our positions.” He added that the situation on the Siversk front “is complicated and difficult. The Russians are actively using artillery and conducting assaults but to no avail.” He said, “Heavy fighting is also ongoing near a canal on the approaches to the settlement of Chasiv Yar,” a small city 10 kilometers to the west of Bakhmut, “without either of the sides changing their positions.” He said that “heavy fighting is ongoing on the Kupiansk front...but we hold our positions” and that the situation on the Siversk front is “complicated. The Russians are actively using artillery and conducting assaults, but to no avail.” And he noted that there was heavy fighting on the Kharkiv front but the Russian forces “have no success there and suffer significant losses.” All in all, he reported the Russians have made some “minor gains” in some areas but are suffering heavy losses.

While the war on the ground continued in the east, yesterday Ukrainian President Zelenskyy made an important announcement. At an undisclosed airfield, standing with several pilots near two F-16s while two other F-16s flew overhead, Zelenskyy announced that Ukraine had received the first of the U.S.-made F-16s and that

Ukrainian pilots who had been trained to fly them were flying them in operations in the country: “F-16s are in Ukraine,” he said. “We did it. I am proud of our guys who are mastering these jets and have already started using them for our country... The positive thing is that we are expecting additional F-16s... Many guys are now training.”

The F-16 is an old plane. It was introduced in 1978 and many countries are currently replacing, or planning to replace, their F-16s with F-35s, which were introduced in 2015. But with its 20 mm cannon and ability to carry and deliver bombs, rockets and missiles, the F-16, although old, is obviously of great value to the Ukrainian forces, which until now have had to rely on the aging fleet of MiG 29s inherited when the USSR ceased to exist in 1991. About 65 F-16s were pledged to Ukraine by NATO allies after President Biden authorized the allies in August 2023 to send F-16s to Ukraine, but upgrades of facilities and, most importantly, the training of Ukrainian pilots delayed the actual arrival of the planes. But finally, nearly a year after the U.S. authorized the allies to provide Ukraine with some of their F-16s, the planes have arrived.

Syrskiy, like Zelenskyy, welcomed the arrival of the F-16s and thanked Zelenskyy and other officials for working “24/7” to obtain them. On Facebook, he said, “F-16s are in Ukraine. Their arrival will save the lives of Ukrainian soldiers. This means that more of the occupiers will be destroyed. It means a greater number of downed missiles and aircraft used by the Russian criminals to attack Ukrainian cities. I thank the president, the minister of defense and everyone who worked 24/7 so that F-16s could appear in our skies. This is another important step towards our victory.” Whether they will change the eventual outcome of the war remains to be seen.

David R. Cameron
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