

## As Russian attacks continue in east, Ukraine sends troops into Russia



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 attacking 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 Bakhmut, which the Russians took last year after a prolonged battle, 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, unlike the maps issued by the British agency for the past several weeks which remained unchanged from week to week, Friday's map shows some small increases in the territory controlled by the Russian forces west and southwest of Bakhmut and in the area west and northwest of Avdiivka in the direction of Pokrovsk.

In its daily updates on the war last week, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported that, as in previous weeks, 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 – specifically, 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 a narrow band of territory on the east bank of the Dnipro River.

In last week's updates, the General Staff reported a total of 721 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line over the seven days last week from Sunday through

Saturday. It reported a total of 38 Russian attacks in the border area to the north of Kharkiv; 29 attacks toward Kupiansk in eastern Kharkiv region; 89 attacks in the direction of Lyman; 75 attacks in the Siversk sector between Sieverodonetsk and Sloviansk; 68 attacks in the Kramatorsk sector west of Bakhmut; 101 attacks in the Toretsk sector a few miles northwest of Horlivka; 214 attacks toward Pokrovsk, a city with a pre-war population of about 60,000 that is about 25 miles northwest of Donetsk city, 46 attacks toward Kurakhove and Kostiantynivka, which are 15-20 miles west of Donetsk city; 19 attacks in the Vremivka sector west of Donetsk city; 8 attacks in the Orikhiv sector in Zaporizhzhia region, and 20 attacks against the Ukrainian forces attempting to hold the territory on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson region.

The large number of Russian attacks last week directed toward Lyman (89), Siversk (75) and Kramatorsk (68) in the northern portion of Donetsk region and toward Toretsk (101) and Pokrovsk (214) in the central portion of the region underscores the fact that the priority for the Russian forces at this point in the war is to take the cities that form the core of the Donetsk region, stretching from Lyman, Sloviansk, and Kramatorsk in the northern portion of the region through Pokrovsk to the area west of Donetsk city and the area to the north and west of Vuhledar. The broader aim is clearly to take control of most if not all of Donetsk region, which, like Luhansk, its Donbas neighbor to the north, was formally incorporated into the Russian Federation on Sept. 30, 2022.

As the war continued in eastern Ukraine last week, Ukraine surprised many observers, no doubt including many Ukrainians and Russians, by launching last Tuesday's incursion into Russia. In a meeting with President Putin and other officials last Wednesday, Chief of the Russian General Staff and First Deputy Defense Minister Gerasimov reported that at 5:30 a.m. last Tuesday up to 1,000 Ukrainian soldiers, accompanied by tanks and other armored vehicles, crossed the border from Ukraine's Sumy region, northwest of Kharkiv region, into the Sudzha district of Russia's Kursk region. In a subsequent meeting with members of the Russian government, Putin said "the Kiev regime attempted another major provocation, launching an indiscriminate attack with a variety of weapons, including missiles, against civilian facilities, residential buildings and ambulance vehicles."

Putin elaborated on his view of Ukraine's reasons for the attack in another meeting yesterday with government officials, including the governor of the region of Kursk and the governors of two adjacent regions: "It is now becoming increasingly clear why the Kiev regime rejected our proposals for a peaceful settlement, as well as those from interested and neutral mediators. It appears that the enemy, with the support from their Western backers, is executing their directives, and the West is using Ukrainians as proxies in this conflict. It seems the opponent is aiming to strengthen their negotiating position for the future. However, what kind of negotiations can we have with those who indiscriminately attack civilians and civilian infrastructure, or pose threats to nuclear power facilities? What is there to discuss with such parties? Second, these actions

clearly aim to achieve a primary military objective: to halt the advance of our forces in their effort to fully liberate the territories of the Lugansk and Donetsk people's republics, the Novorossiia region. So what is the current situation on the front lines, and what are the results? The pace of offensive operations by the Russian Armed Forces, volunteers, and veterans has not only remained steady but has actually increased by fifty percent. Our troops are advancing along the entire front."

On Saturday, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy acknowledged what Russia had announced several days earlier – that Ukraine had conducted an offensive operation into Kursk. He said, "Ukraine is proving that it can indeed restore justice and ensure the necessary pressure on the aggressor." A Ukrainian official said, "We are on the offensive. The aim is to stretch the position of the enemy, to inflict maximum losses and to destabilize the situation as they are unable to protect their own border." Yesterday, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, briefed Zelenskyy on the Kursk operation and said in a video posted on Zelenskyy's Telegram channel, "The troops are fulfilling their tasks. Fighting continues actually along the entire front line. The situation is under our control." He said the Ukrainian forces controlled 1,000 square kilometers (almost 400 square miles) of territory in Kursk region.

Yesterday, in a meeting with Putin and a number of government officials discussing the situation in the Kursk region, Aleksey Smirnov, the acting governor of the region, said the Ukrainian forces had advanced 12 kilometers into the region across a 40 kilometer-wide front and currently controlled 28 settlements which have a total of about 2,000 people. Putin interrupted him, saying, "Listen, Mr. Smirnov, the military will update us on the specifics of the frontline width and depth. What we need from you is an update on the socioeconomic situation and report on the assistance provided to the people." Smirnov said 12 civilians had been killed, 121 had been injured, 121,000 had already been evacuated, another 59,000 were being evacuated, there were approximately 2,000 in the area occupied by the Ukrainian forces whose whereabouts remained unknown, and the regional government was working to provide new accommodations and assist in the relocation of those forced to leave their homes.

Whether the Kursk incursion was initiated in the belief that it would force Russia to deploy some of the forces that would otherwise be used to reinforce its troops in eastern Ukraine or simply in order to embarrass Russia and boost Ukrainian morale is not known. Whatever the reason, the incursion has undoubtedly conveyed an important message to the Russians – that they too, like those living in Ukraine, are vulnerable to the vagaries of war. But whether it will have any significant impact on the war in eastern Ukraine, such as diverting Russian troops that might otherwise have been used to reinforce those fighting in eastern Ukraine, remains to be seen.

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