

As attacks continue toward Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, other cities in east, Russia deploys North Korean forces against Kursk incursion



As Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine, above, indicates, the war in eastern Ukraine continued last week, as it has for several months, with the Russian forces attacking westward toward the city of Kupiansk in the eastern portion of Kharkiv region; toward Chasiv Yar, a small city about 10 kilometers west of Bakhmut which the Russians took last year after a prolonged siege; and toward Pokrovsk, a city with a pre-war population of 60,000 about 60 kilometers west of Avdiivka, which the Russians took in February.

But as the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported last week in its daily updates on the war, the Russian forces also continued to attack at a number of other points – toward Kharkiv from territory they hold north of the city; toward Lyman about 30 kilometers southeast of Iziun; toward Kramatorsk about 25 kilometers northwest of Chasiv Yar; toward Toretsk about 20 kilometers south of Chasiv Yar; toward Kurakhove about 25 kilometers west of Donetsk city; toward Vremivka about 30 kilometers southwest of Kurakhove; in the Orikhiv sector southeast of Zaporizhzhia; and toward the area in Kherson region in southern Ukraine where the Ukrainian forces hold territory on the east bank of the Dnipro River.

In its daily updates covering the seven days last week from Sunday through Saturday, the General Staff reported a total of 1,172 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces. In the previous seven days from Oct. 13-19, the General Staff reported a total of 1,243 Russian attacks. As has been the case for the last several weeks, the Russian forces launched many more attacks last week against the Ukrainian

forces defending Pokrovsk (293 last week) and Kurakhove (249 last week) than against those defending any of the other cities in eastern Ukraine. But the forces defending some of those other cities were also the targets of many Russian attacks – most notably, those defending Lyman (115) and Kupiansk (80). Nevertheless, based on the total number of attacks last week, Pokrovsk and Kurakhove were, as they have been for several weeks, clearly the two most important targets for the Russian offensive in eastern Ukraine. Both are located at junctions of rail lines and major highways and, if taken, would provide pathways to other important cities still held by Ukrainian forces. Taking Pokrovsk would open a pathway northward to Kostiantynivka, Kramatorsk, and Sloviansk to the north. And taking Kurakhove, about 30 kilometers south of Pokrovsk, would open a pathway toward Zaporizhzhia.

On Friday, British Defence Intelligence reported that “Russian Land Forces (RLF) have almost certainly advanced into the coal mining town of Selydove, around 13 km southeast from the major logistics hub of Pokrovsk. The town remains contested, with fighting likely continuing to take place within the town centre. Selydove is the last significant urban area screening the southern flank of Pokrovsk as well as the E50 highway – which connects Selydove to Pokrovsk. Since the beginning of October 2024, the RLF rate of advance towards Pokrovsk had slowed significantly, with the RLF remaining within approximately 7 km of the city. The RLF have recently directed resources towards the southern part of the axis, targeting Selydove and partially encircling the town. Russia likely aims to use the E50 highway as a secondary route of advance to Pokrovsk if Selydove is taken.”

Last week, there were reports based on social media videos that North Korean troops had arrived at Russia’s Sergeevka training facility north of Vladivostok and close to the border with China. The Kremlin initially dismissed the reports. But on Thursday the Russian Parliament ratified the Russia-North Korea defense treaty signed in June, according to which if either state is subjected to an armed invasion, the other will provide military assistance, and at the BRICS summit on Thursday Putin didn’t deny the reports and expressed Russia’s gratitude to North Korea for the troops. Subsequently, news reports indicated that approximately 12,000 North Korean troops had been deployed to Russia and were receiving training at five training bases in eastern Russia. Intelligence sources reported that some of the North Korean troops have already been deployed to the Kursk region, the site of Ukraine’s August incursion into Russian territory north of Sumy.

It is perhaps not surprising that Russia has had to resort to appealing to North Korea for troops; the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense reports that Russia’s estimated “combat losses” – i.e., troops either killed or wounded and removed from combat – from February 24, 2022, when the war began, to yesterday – are approximately 689,040.

David R. Cameron
October 28, 2024