

As Russian attacks continue in the east, U.S. provides more assistance, while in Moldova a friend of Ukraine and the EU is reelected president



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 toward the city of Kupiansk; toward the center of the small city of Chasiv Yar 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 Izium; 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. And they continued to attack the Ukrainian forces holding a portion of the Kursk region of Russia just north of Sumy – and did so with some of the 12,000 North Korean soldiers sent to Russia and subsequently deployed after the Russian Parliament ratified on Oct. 24 the Russia-North Korea defense treaty signed in June.

In its daily updates covering the seven days last week from Sunday through Saturday, the General Staff reported a total of 1,086 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces, an average of about 155 attacks each day last week. In the previous seven days from Oct. 20-26, the General Staff reported a total of 1,172 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 (226) and Kurakhove (331) than against the forces defending any of the other cities in eastern Ukraine. But the forces defending some of those other cities were nevertheless the targets of many Russian attacks – most notably, those defending Kupiansk (109) and Lyman (108).

Nevertheless, last week Pokrovsk and Kurakhove were clearly, as they have been for the past several weeks, 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. Last week was the first in which the number of attacks toward Kurakhove (331) exceeded the number of attacks toward Pokrovsk (226). But clearly, judging from the number of attacks last week, both are important targets for the Russian forces in eastern Ukraine.

Following a meeting last week with a delegation from the Czech Armed Forces led by Chief of the General Staff Lt. Gen. Karel Řehka, Col.-Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, said, “Currently, the Armed Forces of Ukraine are holding back one of the most powerful Russian offensives since the full-scale invasion began...The enemy does not stop assault actions in several directions, using air superiority and long-range firepower, and also has a significant advantage in artillery shells.” The Russian forces continue to attack Ukraine’s eastern cities not only with ground forces but with missile strikes and 500-kilogram (1100-pound) glide bombs.

Syrskyi said he had spoken with Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr., the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, about the Ukrainian military’s “urgent needs” and that Brown had assured him of continued U.S. support. Last week, during a visit to Kyiv, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said more aid would be arriving soon, and on Friday the Pentagon announced it will be providing an additional \$425 million in military assistance to Ukraine, bringing the total amount of military assistance the U.S. has provided since the war began in February 2022 to \$60.4 billion. The aid package will include weapons from existing U.S. stockpiles, including air defense interceptors for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, munitions for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, 155 mm artillery, and armored vehicles and anti-tank weapons.

The war in Ukraine is expected to continue throughout 2025. But whether the American aid package announced Friday will be delivered, and additional military assistance, if and when needed, will be provided, will depend, importantly, on who wins tomorrow's presidential election in the U.S. and takes office on Jan. 20, 2025. In the meantime, another presidential election took place yesterday, this one much closer to Ukraine. In Moldova, President Maia Sandu, who served as Prime Minister in 2019 before defeating Alexandr Stoianoglo, a former Prosecutor-General, in the second round of the 2020 presidential election, was elected for another four-year term. In the first round on Oct. 20, Sandu received 42.5 percent while Stoianoglo received 25.95 percent and nine other candidates received a bit over 30 percent of the vote. In yesterday's second round, Sandu received 55.3 percent of the vote to Stoianoglo's 44.7 percent and was elected to another four-year term..

Sandu, who has said, "Joining the EU is Moldova's Marshall Plan," has led the drive for eventual membership in the EU; Moldova applied for membership in March 2022, a month after Russia began its war against Ukraine; was granted candidate status in June 2022; and opened accession negotiations with the EU last December. She strongly supports Ukraine in its war against Russia, in contrast to Stoianoglo, who is strongly opposed to EU membership and strongly supports Russia in its war against Ukraine.

David R. Cameron
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