

As attacks continue against Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, other cities, Russia uses new IRBM and NATO-Ukraine Council meets.



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 in Kharkiv region; toward the city of Chasiv Yar west of Bakhmut, which was taken last year after a lengthy 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 in its daily updates on the war, the Russian forces also continued to attack last week at other points as well – 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 Russia's Kursk region just north of Sumy – and did so with some of the 12,000 North Korean soldiers that arrived after the Russia-North Korea defense treaty signed in June took effect two weeks ago.

In its daily updates covering the seven days last week from Sunday through Saturday, the General Staff reported a total of 1,412 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces. In the previous week, the General Staff reported a total of 1,196 Russian attacks and in the week before a total of 1,117 attacks. And as has

been the case for the last several weeks, in the seven days last week the Russian forces launched many more attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk (351 attacks) and Kurakhove (341 attacks), which is about 30 kilometers south of Pokrovsk, than against those defending any of the other cities in eastern Ukraine. Those two cities are, and have been for several weeks, the two highest priorities for the Russian forces in eastern Ukraine for obvious reasons. Taking Pokrovsk would open a pathway northward to Kostiantynivka, Kramatorsk, and Sloviansk. And taking Kurakhove would open a pathway westward toward Zaporizhzhia.

After the U.S. gave Ukraine permission to use U.S. ATACMS (Army Tactical Missile System) missiles against targets in Russia and the UK did the same in regard to its Storm Shadow missiles, President Putin announced in a statement in the evening of Nov. 21 that two days earlier six U.S. ATACMS had hit military facilities in Russia's Bryansk and Kursk regions and earlier in the day a combined missile assault involving British Storm Shadow missiles and U.S. HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems) had attacked those facilities. "From that point onward," he said in his statement, "as we have repeatedly emphasized in prior communications, the regional conflict in Ukraine provoked by the West has assumed elements of a global nature.... In response to the deployment of American and British long-range weapons, on November 21, the Russian Armed Forces delivered a combined strike on a facility within Ukraine's defense industrial complex. In field conditions, we also carried out tests of one of Russia's latest medium-range missile systems – in this case, carrying a non-nuclear hypersonic ballistic missile – that our engineers named Oreshnik. The tests were successful, achieving the intended objective of the launch. In the city of Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, one of the largest and most famous industrial complexes from the Soviet Union era, which continues to produce missiles and other armaments, was hit. We are developing intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles in response to US plans to produce and deploy intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. We believe that the U.S. made a mistake by unilaterally destroying the INF Treaty in 2019 under a far-fetched pretext. Today, the U.S. is not only producing such equipment, but, as we can see, it has worked out ways to deploy its advanced missile systems to different regions of the world, including Europe, during training exercises for its troops. Moreover, in the course of these exercises, they are conducting training for using them. As a reminder, Russia has voluntarily and unilaterally committed not to deploy intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles until US weapons of this kind appear in any region of the world. To reiterate, we are conducting combat tests of the Oreshnik missile system in response to NATO's aggressive actions against Russia. Our decision on further deployment of intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles will depend on the actions of the United States and its satellites. We will determine the targets during further tests of our advanced missile systems based on the threats to the security of the Russian Federation. We consider ourselves entitled to use our weapons against military facilities of those countries that allow to use their weapons against our facilities, and in case of an escalation of aggressive actions, we will respond decisively and in mirror-like manner."

Continuing, Putin said, “It goes without saying that when choosing, if necessary and as a retaliatory measure, targets to be hit by systems such as Oreshnik on Ukrainian territory, we will in advance suggest that civilians and citizens of friendly countries residing in those areas leave danger zones. We will do so for humanitarian reasons, openly and publicly, without fear of counter-moves coming from the enemy, who will also be receiving this information. Why without fear? Because there are no means of countering such weapons today. Missiles attack targets at a speed of Mach 10, which is 2.5 to 3 kilometers per second. Air defense systems currently available in the world and missile defense systems being created by the Americans in Europe cannot intercept such missiles. It is impossible.”

Russia’s use of the Oreshnik was the first-ever operational use of an intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM). IRBMs are classified as having a maximum range of between 3,000 and 5,500 kilometers. The Oreshnik reportedly travelled just over 800 kilometers. Russia announced its withdrawal from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, which banned the development and production of IRBMs, in February 2019. However, British Defence Intelligence believes the development of the Oreshnik almost certainly occurred before that and appears to be a variant of the Rubezh RS-26 ballistic missile, a solid-fueled intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) with a nuclear warhead that was first tested in 2011. The missile payload was observed as six groups of six non-nuclear warheads, for a total of 36 submunitions, which travel at hypersonic speeds (greater than Mach 5) before impact.

On Tuesday, at President Zelenskyy’s request, the NATO-Ukraine Council met at NATO headquarters in Brussels to discuss the implications of Russia’s use of its new hypersonic IRBM which, if Putin was correct, can attack targets with multiple warheads at a speed of Mach 10 and cannot be intercepted by any of the air defense systems currently available in the world or being created by the U.S. in Europe. The Council, which consists of the ambassadors of the NATO member states and Ukraine, was launched at the July 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius as part of a three-part package of support designed to bring Ukraine closer to NATO. The package includes, in addition to the Council, a multi-year program of assistance to help rebuild the Ukrainian security and defense sector and transition Ukraine to full interoperability with NATO, and a reaffirmation that Ukraine will become a member of NATO when the Allies agree and conditions are met. It provides a forum for consultation between the Allies and Ukraine on security issues of common concern, including of course Russia’s war against Ukraine. The Allies and Ukraine meet as equal participants in the Council, and the Council can meet at the level of Heads of State and Government, Foreign and Defense Ministers, Ambassadors, or at the military level, including the Chiefs of Defense. It is a joint body in which the NATO Allies and Ukraine sit as equal participants to advance political dialogue, engagement, cooperation, and Ukraine’s aspirations for membership in NATO and provides for joint consultation, decision-making, and activity.

And, as occurred on Tuesday, the Council also serves as a crisis consultation mechanism between NATO and Ukraine. At Tuesday's meeting, the NATO ambassadors discussed the security situation in Ukraine following Russia's launch of its new hypersonic IRBM and senior Ukrainian military officials briefed the Council on the attack via a video link. During the meeting, the NATO Allies reaffirmed their support for Ukraine and concluded that last week's attack, which targeted Dnipro, was "another attempt by Russia to terrorize the civilian population in Ukraine and intimidate those who support Ukraine as it defends itself against Russia's illegal and unprovoked aggression." The NATO spokesperson made it clear that "deploying this capability will neither change the course of the conflict nor deter NATO Allies from supporting Ukraine."

Also on Tuesday, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, after meeting in Athens with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, said, "Today we discussed and will discuss regional security challenges and how we as Allies can continue to provide meaningful support to Ukraine...Greece has supported Ukraine since the early days of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Last month, you signed a bilateral security agreement with Ukraine, and I welcome that Greece will help accelerate F-16 training for Ukrainian pilots and technicians, strengthening their hands in this brutal war. All of this is essential in an increasingly dangerous environment. In pursuing its illegal war in Ukraine, Russia makes use of North Korean weapons and troops, Iranian drones, and Chinese dual use goods for its defense industry. This is a dangerous expansion of the war and a challenge to global peace and security. Our support for Ukraine has kept them in the fight, but we need to go further to change the trajectory of the conflict. We need to provide critical air defences and deliver on the commitments made at the NATO Summit in Washington: The new command, the NATO command to coordinate security assistance and training, the financial pledge of 40 billion euros in 2024, and further measures to bring Ukraine closer to NATO."

On Thursday, at the conclusion of a state visit to Kazakhstan, Putin returned to the ATACMS issue, noting that they were used twice in the Kursk region after Russia fired the Oreshnik – on Saturday night, when eight ATACMS with cluster warheads were fired at a Russian military airfield in Kursk region, and on Monday, when five ATACMS were fired at another military airfield in the region. Asked whether there are ongoing risks associated with Ukraine's use of the Western missiles against Russia, he replied, "Are there risks involved in strikes on Russian territory? Undoubtedly, as I have reiterated on numerous occasions. These actions denote the direct involvement of Western nations in an armed conflict. How could it be perceived otherwise? If their experts are orchestrating flight plans, relaying intelligence to themselves, and coordinating strikes on targets within the Russian Federation, then of course such risks exist.... They received a response today. Our Armed Forces have been executing retaliatory strikes over the past couple of days. Today, there was a comprehensive operation: 90 missiles were deployed alongside 100 unmanned strike vehicles. Seventeen targets within Ukraine were struck, encompassing military, military-

industrial, and auxiliary facilities that support the armed forces and industrial defense enterprises. I wish to reiterate once more: We will certainly respond to such acts of aggression against the Russian Federation.... We do not rule out the combat employment of Oreshnik on military-industrial facilities or command centers, including those in Kiev. We remain cognizant that the Kiev authorities continue their attempts to target our critical assets, including those in St. Petersburg and Moscow.” Following those words, on Thursday night Russia conducted another major attack, the second in two weeks, on the Ukrainian energy infrastructure with 90 missiles and 100 drones which left more than one million without electricity.

And so the war continues – and threatens to escalate.

David R. Cameron

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