

## Russian attacks focus on Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Vremivka & Lyman



As Friday's British 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 Kupiansk in Kharkiv region; toward 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 last week, the Russian forces also continued to attack, as they have for the last several months, 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; toward Orikhiv 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. They also continued to attack, with the assistance of a substantial number of North Korean troops, the Ukrainian forces in Russia's Kursk region northeast of Sumy.

In its daily updates covering the seven days last week from Sunday through Saturday, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported a total of 1,484 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces. In the previous week, the General Staff had reported a total of 1,259 Russian attacks and in the week before that a total of 1,412 attacks. 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 (358 attacks) and Kurakhove (302 attacks) than against any other target in eastern Ukraine. Judging from the number of attacks against both cities in recent weeks, taking those two cities clearly appears to be Russia's highest priority in eastern Ukraine. That's not surprising, of course, since taking Pokrovsk would open a pathway northward to Kostiantynivka, Kramatorsk, and Sloviansk, and taking Kurakhove would open a pathway westward toward Zaporizhzhia.

But while taking Pokrovsk and Kurakhove appear to be Russia's highest priorities in eastern Ukraine, the Russian forces also conducted a large number of attacks against the Ukrainian forces holding other cities in eastern Ukraine last week. For example, they conducted 194 attacks in the Vremivka sector southeast of Pokrovsk and southwest of Kurakhove, compared with 185 attacks the week before, and 159 attacks toward Lyman, southeast of Iziun, compared with 94 attacks the week before. And they conducted more than 200 attacks last week against the Ukrainian forces, which since their incursion into Russia in August, have held part of the Kursk region north of Sumy.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that, based on the aggregate number of attacks last week, the highest priorities for the Russian forces in the continuing war in eastern Ukraine are Pokrovsk and Kurakhove. And based on the General Staff's updates thus far this week, those two cities remain the highest priorities for the Russian forces, which conducted 78 attacks toward Pokrovsk and 61 attacks toward Kurakhove on Sunday and yesterday. In its Intelligence Update Sunday, British Defence Intelligence reported the Russian forces had made further gains to the south of Pokrovsk and were approximately 3 kilometers from the southern outskirts of the city, having reportedly taken the village of Shevchenko, which lies at an intersection of two routes leading into Pokrovsk. The agency also reported the Russian forces had intersected highway T-05-18 northeast of Velyka Novsilka, a town just to the east of Vremivka and southeast of Pokrovsk. Clearly the Russian forces are slowly closing in on both Pokrovsk and Kurakhove.

In a speech today at a meeting of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, said, "As of December 17, the Defense Forces are conducting combat operations on the frontline, with a total length of over 1,170 kilometers. The most challenging situation is currently in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove sectors." But he added that the Russian forces have also intensified their pressure on the Kramatorsk, Toretsk, and Vremivka axes as well. He added that, for the third consecutive day, the Russian forces have been engaged in intensive offensive actions in the Kursk region in an attempt to drive the Ukrainian forces out of the Russian Federation. He added that the Russians are actively using units of the North Korean army and the latter "have already suffered heavy losses."

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