

## Russian forces continue attacks against Pokrovsk, other cities in east



Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine.

Last week the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported a total of 1,114 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces in eastern Ukraine in the seven days from Sunday, Jan. 12, through Saturday, Jan. 18. The most frequently attacked Ukrainian forces, by far, were those defending Pokrovsk, a city which had a pre-war population of about 60,000 and is a transit hub located on the E50 highway that links Donetsk city, about 60 kilometers to the southeast, with Dnipro to the west. Last week, the Russian forces conducted a total of 491 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk. On three days last week – Monday, Tuesday, and Friday – the Russian forces conducted more than 70 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk and the surrounding area. On Saturday, they conducted 98 attacks and yesterday 89 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk.

The Ukrainian forces defending the other cities along the contact line between the forces in eastern Ukraine were also attacked repeatedly by the Russian forces last week; Those defending Toretsk and the nearby area were attacked 99 times last week, those defending Lyman and the nearby area were attacked 98 times last week, and those defending Kramatorsk and the nearby area were attacked 93 times last week. And the Ukrainian forces that, since their August incursion into Russia, have held a portion of Russia's Kersh region northeast of Sumy were attacked 119 times last week by Russian and North Korean forces.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Russian forces attacked the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk and the nearby area almost 500 times last week, and with more than 70

attacks on four of the seven days last week and more than 185 attacks the last two days, leaves little doubt that, while all of the targeted areas in eastern Ukraine are priorities for the Russian forces, their highest priority is clearly taking Pokrovsk. Pokrovsk is clearly becoming the Bakhmut of 2025, the only difference being that, while the Russian forces continue to attack from the east, they are also trying to outflank the Ukrainian forces defending the city by attacking from the southeast.

The Pokrovsk area has one of the largest coal mines in eastern Europe. The mine, located a few miles west of the city and owned by a steel-producing company, is the only one in Ukraine that produces the coal from which the coke needed in order to produce steel can be obtained. Steel is Ukraine's second-largest export product after agricultural goods and is, of course, an essential component of most military equipment. As the Russian forces continued their approach toward the city last week, the firm that owns the mine suspended operations at it because of the worsening security conditions and power outages and blew up one of the mine's three shafts, southeast of Pokrovsk, when, with the Russian forces advancing toward the shaft, it became too dangerous for the miners to continue working there. Explosives were also planted in two other shafts to the west of Pokrovsk, near villages that are still controlled by the Ukrainian forces, in case those shafts have to be destroyed as well. Ukraine produced roughly 7 million tons of steel last year and there were plans to increase production to more than 10 million tons this year. But without the coking coal from the Pokrovsk mine, steel production this year may not exceed last year's amount. Meanwhile, the Russian forces have reportedly taken control of the rail line southwest of Pokrovsk as well as the E50 highway that connects it with Dnipro. And they are reportedly deploying some of the forces used in taking Kurakhove last week to the effort to take Pokrovsk. How much longer the Ukrainian forces can continue defending the city with their supply lines interrupted and the Russian forces bringing in additional troops is uncertain.

Losing Pokrovsk, if Ukraine does lose it, obviously won't end the war. But it will mean that Russia will have more troops available to assist those which are now attacking the Ukrainian forces defending other cities and towns in eastern Ukraine – most notably, those defending Lyman, Kramatorsk and Toretsk, each of which was attacked nearly 100 times last week.

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