

Russian attacks continue 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 1,047 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces in eastern Ukraine in the seven days last week from Sunday through Saturday. The total number of Russian attacks averaged about 150 a day and ranged from 109 to 190 attacks each day last week. The most frequently attacked Ukrainian forces, as in previous weeks, were those defending Pokrovsk, a city which had a pre-war population of about 60,000 and is a transit hub 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 471 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk and the surrounding area. As in the previous week, on three days last week the Russian forces conducted more than 70 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk and the surrounding area. Yesterday, they conducted 78 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk and the surrounding area.

But Pokrovsk and its surrounding area weren't the only targets of repeated attacks by the Russian forces last week. The Ukrainian forces defending Lyman and the nearby area were attacked 105 times last week, those defending Toretsk were attacked 101 times last week, and those defending Kramatorsk were attacked 98 times last week. And the Ukrainian forces that, since the August incursion into Russia, have held a portion of Russia's Kersh region northeast of Sumy were attacked 83 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 three of the seven days last week, and another 78 attacks yesterday, makes it very clear that, while all of the targeted areas in eastern Ukraine are priorities for the Russian forces, their highest priority remains, as it has been for the past several weeks, indeed months, taking Pokrovsk. Why? Because taking Pokrovsk would open pathways both northward, toward the cities of Kostiantynivka, Kramatorsk and Sloviansk in Donetsk region, and westward, toward Pavlohrad and Dnipro, which had a pre-war population of nearly one million and is the fourth largest city in Ukraine.

While the war on the ground continued last week throughout eastern Ukraine, attention was inevitably focused on Washington with the inauguration Monday of President Trump. Trump said nothing about the war in his inauguration address – in fact didn't even mention Ukraine. But the next day he told a news conference he would be speaking with President Putin "very soon." And on Wednesday, in his Truth Social post, he said, "I'm going to do Russia, whose Economy is failing, and President Putin, a very big FAVOR. Settle now and STOP this ridiculous War! IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE. If we don't make a 'deal', and soon, I have no other choice but to put high levels of Taxes, Tariffs, and Sanctions on anything being sold by Russia to the United States, and various other participating countries. Let's get this war, which never would have started if I were President, over with! We can do it the easy way, or the hard way – and the easy way is always better. It's time to 'MAKE A DEAL'." (As if war is a TV show.)

Russian Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov said, "We do not see any particular new elements here." Trump, he said, "liked sanctions" and used them often in his previous term. But, he added, "Russia is ready for an equal and careful dialogue with the United States, which we had during Trump's first term. We are waiting for signals that have not yet been received."

But as the *Financial Times* noted on Thursday in reporting on the Truth Social post, President Biden imposed extensive sanctions on Russia after the war began and trade with Russia subsequently plummeted. And the Biden administration also imposed restrictions on liquified natural gas projects in Russia and set an international cap on the price of Russian oil. So it's not clear the U.S. could do anything more, in terms of economic sanctions, to persuade Russia to stop its war. In fact, it's probably the case that the only thing that might persuade Russia to stop its war is the one thing Trump apparently won't do – not only continue but increase American military assistance for Ukraine.

David R. Cameron
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