

As Putin's "special military operation" enters year four, Russian attacks continue against Pokrovsk, other cities in east



As Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine, above, indicates, last week the Russian forces continued to attack, as they have for the past several months, toward Kupiansk in Kharkiv region, toward the area around Chasiv Yar, west of Bakhmut which they took in 2023 after a prolonged siege, and toward Pokrovsk, west of Avdiivka which they took last February. But as the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported in its daily updates last week, the Russian forces also continued to attack 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 Vremivka about 50 kilometers south of Pokrovsk, in the Orikhiv area 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, with the assistance of North Korean troops, to attack the Ukrainian forces that, since their August incursion, hold a portion of Russia's Kursk region just to the north of Sumy.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported a total of 869 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces in eastern Ukraine in the seven days last week from Sunday, Feb. 16, through Saturday. In the previous week from Sunday, Feb. 9, through Saturday, Feb. 15, the Russian forces conducted 935 attacks. The total number of Russian attacks each day last week varied from 90 on Friday to 156 on Tuesday. As in previous weeks, the Russian attacks were focused especially on the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk, a city that had a pre-war

population of about 60,000 and is – at least in peacetime – an important transit hub on the E50 highway that links Donetsk city, about 60 kilometers to the southeast, with Pavlohrad and Dnipro to the west. If taken, Pokrovsk would open a pathway northward in Donetsk region toward Kostyantynivka, Kramatorsk, and Sloviansk. Over the seven days last week, the Russian forces conducted a total of 274 attacks against the forces defending Pokrovsk, compared with a total of 291 attacks against those forces in the previous week.

But Pokrovsk and its surrounding area weren't the only targets of repeated attacks by the Russian forces last week and the week before; they conducted 101 attacks last week and 102 attacks the week before on the Novopavlivka front west of Donetsk city, 80 attacks last week and 92 attacks the week before against the forces defending Toretsk; 68 attacks last week and 82 attacks the week before against the forces defending Lyman; 61 attacks last week and 78 attacks the week before against the forces defending Kupiansk, and 32 attacks last week and 58 attacks the week before against the forces defending the area around Kramatorsk. The Russian forces, assisted by North Korean troops, also conducted 103 attacks last week and 139 attacks the week before against the Ukrainian forces holding a portion of Russia's Kursk region just over the border from Sumy.

It was exactly three years ago today that President Putin, frustrated by the continuing refusal of the U.S. and NATO to provide Russia the security guarantees it requested two months earlier and the refusal of Ukraine to fully implement the measures agreed by the Russian, Ukrainian, French and German leaders at Minsk in February 2015 to end the continuing conflict between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian separatists supported by Russian troops in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine that had begun in the spring of 2014 shortly after Russia annexed Crimea, went on Russian television at 6 a.m. and announced a "special military operation" in that region. But it was not just a "special military operation" in the Donbas; it was from the outset nothing less than a full-fledged, multi-pronged invasion of Ukraine launched from Belarus in the north, where Russian forces had conducted large-scale joint military exercises with Belarusian forces, from Russian territory adjacent to the Donbas, and from Crimea and the Black Sea in the south.

Russia's war has been immensely costly to Ukraine, to its cities, towns and villages, and especially, of course, to its men, women and children. But what Putin didn't say when he spoke to the Russian people that morning exactly three years ago was how costly it would turn out to be for Russia as well; the Armed Forces of Ukraine estimate that, as of today, 868,230 Russian troops have been killed and 2.6 million wounded in the three years of Putin's "special military operation."

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