

War enters year four and, after White House meltdown, European leaders meet with Zelenskyy in London



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 758 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces in eastern Ukraine in the seven days last week from Sunday, Feb. 23, through Saturday, March 1. As in previous weeks, the Russian attacks were focused especially on the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk, an important transit hub on the highway that links Donetsk city with Dnipro and that, if taken, would also open a pathway northward for the Russian forces toward Kostyantynivka, Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. Over the seven days last

week, the Russian forces conducted a total of 211 attacks against the forces defending Pokrovsk. But Pokrovsk and its surrounding area weren't the only targets of repeated attacks by the Russian forces last week; they also conducted 89 attacks on the Novopavlivka front west of Donetsk city, 79 attacks against the forces defending Toretsk; and 54 attacks against the forces defending Lyman. And assisted by North Korean troops, the Russian forces also conducted 109 attacks last week against the Ukrainian forces which, since last August's incursion, hold a portion of Russia's Kursk region just over the border from Sumy.

While the war continued last week, the attention of the world was focused on three visits to the White House – those of French President Macron last Monday, the third anniversary of President Putin's Feb. 24, 2022 announcement of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine; British Prime Minister Starmer on Thursday; and Ukrainian President Zelenskyy on Friday. While Trump and Macron reportedly got along quite well in the meeting, Macron made it clear in their joint press conference that they disagreed about both Putin and Zelenskyy, who Trump had earlier called a "dictator," and why the war had happened. Macron said Russia "is the aggressor" and "President Putin violated the peace." And speaking of how it might end, he said, "We want peace, he [Trump] wants peace. We want peace swiftly, but we don't want an agreement that is weak." Any peace deal, he said, must be "assessed, checked and verified." Importantly, he said they had agreed on the deployment of a European peacekeeping force once a ceasefire has been agreed: "They would not be along the front lines. They would not be part of any conflict. They would be there to ensure that the peace is respected." Trump said he accepted the concept and, apparently speaking for Putin, said, "Yeah, he will accept that. I specifically asked him that question. He has no problem with it."

Following Starmer's meeting on Thursday with Trump, his office said, "The leaders discussed the depth of the special relationship between their two nations and their commitment to shared security and prosperity. They spoke about the fair, balanced and reciprocal economic relationship that the two countries enjoy. They agreed their teams should work together to deepen this relationship, and to work together to agree a trade deal focused on tech. On defence and security, they agreed that the strength of the UK and US's intelligence and defence relationship is unrivalled. The Prime Minister underlined the announcement he made this week to increase defence spending to 2.5% [of GDP]. The leaders agreed that, on Ukraine, talks must work towards a lasting peace. The Prime Minister said the UK is ready to play a leadership role on supporting Ukraine's future security. They discussed their shared commitment to a 'peace through strength' approach and that their teams should collaborate on this."

On Friday, President Zelenskyy met with Trump and Vance at the White House and, in a televised meeting in the Oval Office, was subjected to an unprovoked and entirely unwarranted verbal assault first from Vance and then from Trump. Zelenskyy had come to Washington to sign an agreement that would give the U.S. access to valuable

minerals in Ukraine but wanted a post-ceasefire security guarantee. Trump claimed the U.S. involvement in the minerals deal would provide Ukraine a security guarantee and, for that reason, Ukraine should agree to a ceasefire. But Zelenskyy had argued, with good reason, that Ukraine couldn't agree to a ceasefire without any security guarantee beyond the possible U.S. involvement in some future minerals deal. In a post on Saturday, responding to the Trump and Vance assertions that he had not expressed Ukraine's gratitude to the U.S., Zelenskyy thanked Trump, the Congress, and the American people for their support, and made it clear that he was ready to sign the minerals deal. But he argued, as he had earlier, that Ukraine needs a security guarantee prior to any ceasefire, rather than only at some uncertain point in the future: "We are ready to sign the minerals agreement, and it will be the first step toward security guarantees. But it's not enough, and we need more than just that. A ceasefire without security guarantees is dangerous for Ukraine." It was a simple and straightforward position: Before there is a ceasefire, there must be a security guarantee in place. After all, as he pointed out, Putin has broken more than two dozen ceasefires over the past 10 years: "A ceasefire won't work with Putin." Putin's friends in the Oval Office either didn't understand the argument or, more likely, objected to it because Russia objected to it.

On Sunday, British Prime Minister Starmer, coordinating with French President Macron, hosted a summit meeting in London of European leaders and officials to discuss how to bring about an end to Russia's war in Ukraine and guarantee Ukraine a lasting peace. The meeting was attended by Macron, Zelenskyy, and the leaders of Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Czechia, Romania, and Canada, as well as the foreign minister of Turkey, NATO Secretary General Rutte, European Commission President von der Leyen, and European Council President Costa. Prior to the meeting, Starmer also spoke with the Presidents of Estonia and Lithuania and the Prime Minister of Latvia.

Following the meeting, Starmer, speaking as the chair of the meeting, said, "Today, I hosted counterparts from across Europe including Türkiye, as well as the NATO Secretary General and the Presidents of the EU Commission and EU Council and Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada, in London to discuss our support for Ukraine. Together, we reaffirmed our determination to work for a permanent peace in Ukraine, in partnership with the U.S. Europe's security is our responsibility above all. We will step up to this historic task and increase our investment in our own defence. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past when weak deals allowed President Putin to invade again. We will work with President Trump to ensure a strong, just, and lasting peace that ensures Ukraine's future sovereignty and security. Ukraine must be able to deter and defend itself against future Russian attack. There must be no talks on Ukraine without Ukraine. We have agreed that the UK, France and others will work with Ukraine on a plan to stop the fighting which we will discuss further with the US and take forward together. Equally importantly, we discussed further rapid steps to enhance our support for Ukraine in pursuit of 'peace through strength'. We will step up our

military support, ensuring Ukraine has the support it needs to train its armed forces and accelerating our support in areas of greatest need. To help bring President Putin to the table, we will put further pressure on Russia by increasing sanctions, including on Russia's energy revenues, while tightening enforcement of existing measures. We also agreed that Ukraine must have robust security arrangements in place at the time of any future peace deal so that Russia does not invade again. We will accelerate plans to build up Ukraine's own armed forces and border defences after any deal, and ensure that Ukraine can draw on munitions, finance and equipment to defend itself. In addition, many of us expressed readiness to contribute to Ukraine's security, including through a force consisting of European and other partners, and will intensify our planning. We will continue to work closely together to drive forward next steps and will take decisions in the coming weeks."

In the meantime, yesterday, as the leaders meeting in London discussed the need for a permanent peace in Ukraine, there were more than 100 Russian attacks against the forces defending the cities, towns, villages, and residents of eastern Ukraine in what is now year four of the war.

David R. Cameron
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