After its Easter truce and before its Victory ceasefire, Russia's war against Ukraine continues with no end in sight

British Defence Intelligence map of battlefield situation as of May 2, 2025.

After the talks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia between Russian, Ukrainian, and American officials on March 23-25, there was some reason to think there might soon be a ceasefire in the war in Ukraine. But President Putin immediately attached conditions to the terms of the proposed ceasefire – most notably, the removal of all sanctions and restrictions on Russian financial institutions – all of which were rejected, so the war continued as it had prior to the talks. On April 11, U.S. Presidential Envoy Steve Witkoff met with Putin at the Presidential Library in St. Petersburg and returned with a list of the conditions under which Russia would agree to a ceasefire.

On April 17, in a meeting at the Elysée in Paris hosted by President Macron, the French, British, German, and Ukrainian foreign ministers and officials met with Secretary of State Rubio and Witkoff and discussed the conditions Putin conveyed to Witkoff. They included 1) de jure recognition by the U.S. of Russian control of Crimea, formally incorporated into the Russian Federation in 2014; 2) de facto recognition of the Russian occupation of nearly all of Luhansk oblast (region) and the occupied parts of Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, all four of which were formally annexed by Russia in 2022; 3) a promise that Ukraine will not join NATO; 4) a lifting of the sanctions against Russia that have been in place since the annexation of Crimea in 2014; and 5) increased economic cooperation with the U.S. Not surprisingly, the U.S. and Ukraine rejected the first four conditions and, except for Russia's 30-hour Easter truce from 6 p.m. on Saturday, April 19, until 12 a.m. on Monday, April 21 – a ceasefire that was repeatedly broken by the Russian forces – the war continued with no end in sight.

Over the seven days last week from Sunday, April 27, through Saturday, May 3, the Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces had conducted a total of 1,387 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending cities and towns in eastern Ukraine and holding a portion of Russia's Kursk region just north of Sumy. Over the seven days in each of the previous three weeks, the Russian forces conducted a total of 1,051 attacks in the week of April 6-12, 925 attacks in the week of April 13-19, and 1,078 attacks in the week of April 20-26. The Russians didn't of course announce an intensification of their offensive in eastern Ukraine. But the substantial increase in the number of attacks last week compared with the previous three weeks undoubtedly reflects the fact that the Russian forces' much-anticipated Spring offensive is under way.

Last week, as in each of the previous three weeks, the greatest number of Russian attacks were conducted against the Ukrainian forces defending the territory in and around Pokrovsk. 543 attacks, more than one-third of all of the Russian attacks last week, were conducted against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk. Taking Pokrovsk remains, as it clearly has been for the past several weeks, the top priority for the Russian forces in eastern Ukraine. That it has been and continues to be their top priority is the result, of course, of the fact that it's a transit hub that, if taken, would open a pathway for the Russian forces both northward toward the cities of Kostyantynivka, Kramatorsk, and Sloviansk, and westward toward the portion of Donetsk region that is still held by Ukraine.

But Pokrovsk wasn't the only target of the Russian attacks last week. Last week, the Russian forces also conducted 169 attacks against the Ukrainian forces in the area of Novopavlivka south of Pokrovsk, 165 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending Lyman, about 30 kilometers southeast of Izium; and 160 attacks against the Ukrainian forces still holding a portion of Kursk region. (Putin claimed the Russian forces had retaken all of Kursk region but the Ukrainian military reported it still held a portion of the region.)

Last Monday, the Kremlin announced the Russian forces will observe a three-day ceasefire from the start of May 8 until the end of May 10, coinciding with Russia's celebration of Germany's formal surrender in Berlin in the evening of May 8, 1945 (by which time it was already May 9 in Moscow). In a statement announcing the ceasefire, the Kremlin said, "Russia believes that the Ukrainian side should follow this example. In the event of violations of the ceasefire by the Ukrainian side, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will give an adequate and effective response. The Russian side once again declares its readiness for peace talks without preconditions, aimed at eliminating the root causes of the Ukrainian crisis, and constructive interaction with international partners."

Obviously, there won't be peace talks until there is a ceasefire, and there's no reason to think Russia will agree to a ceasefire until the conditions Putin conveyed to Witkoff are accepted. Nevertheless, in announcing the three-day ceasefire,

Russia did declare “its readiness for peace talks without preconditions” and suggested a possible pathway toward peace – first, Ukraine’s agreement to a similar ceasefire; second, its agreement to “peace talks without preconditions, aimed at eliminating the root causes of the Ukrainian crisis;” and third, “constructive interaction with international partners.”

The war has caused an immense amount of death and destruction and suffering, and more than three years after it began there is still no end in sight. Perhaps the time has come for Ukraine and its allies to consider the possible pathway toward peace suggested in Russia’s announcement of its three-day ceasefire..

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