

## As war continues, Russia & Ukraine exchange POWs & return bodies. Trump & Putin talk about war & next round of talks.



As Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine, above, indicates, last week the Russian forces attacked the Ukrainian forces that still hold a small portion of Russia's Kursk region and toward Sumy as well as toward Kharkiv and Kupiansk, and toward the area around Chasiv Yar and toward Pokrovsk in Donetsk region. But as the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported in its daily updates, the Russian forces also continued to attack the Ukrainian forces defending other cities and towns in eastern Ukraine – among them, Lyman about 30 kilometers southeast of Izium, Kramatorsk about 25 kilometers northwest of Chasiv Yar, Toretsk about 20 kilometers south of Chasiv Yar, Vremivka about 50 kilometers south of Pokrovsk, the Orikhiv area southeast of Zaporizhzhia, and in Kherson region adjacent to the Dniro River in southern Ukraine.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported that over the past week from last Sunday through Saturday, the Russian forces conducted a total of 1,410 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending the cities and towns in northeastern and eastern Ukraine. As in previous weeks, the largest number of Russian attacks were directed against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk, an important transit hub on the highway that links Donetsk city with Dniro and, more importantly for the Russians at this point in the war, a city that, if taken, would open a pathway northward for their forces toward Kostyantynivka, Kramatorsk and Sloviansk and the remaining portion of Donetsk region they don't already hold. Over the seven days last week, the Russian forces conducted a total of 389 attacks against the forces defending Pokrovsk.

On Friday, as the war continued on the ground in northern, northeastern, and eastern Ukraine and continued as well in the air with countless Russian drone and

missile attacks against Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and other cities, Presidents Putin and Trump spoke by telephone for 50 minutes about the war and also about the escalating conflict between Iran and Israel. Trump subsequently posted a brief summary of the conversation on Truth Social: "President Putin called this morning to very nicely wish me a Happy Birthday, but to more importantly, talk about Iran, a country he knows very well. We talked at length. Much less time was spent talking about Russia/Ukraine, but that will be for next week. He is doing the planned prisoner swaps - large numbers of prisoners are being exchanged, immediately, from both sides. The call lasted approximately 1 hour. He feels, as do I, this war in Israel-Iran should end, to which I explained, his war should also end."

Putin's foreign policy aide Yury Ushakov also posted a commentary about the conversation on Putin's presidential site: "President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of the United States of America Donald Trump have just had another telephone conversation. The conversation lasted for about an hour, to be precise, for 50 minutes, it was substantive, sincere and, the main thing, very useful. Naturally, it was focused on the dangerous exacerbation of the situation in the Middle East. Vladimir Putin denounced the Israeli's military operation against Iran and expressed a grave concern over the possible escalation of the conflict, which would have unpredictable consequences for the entire situation in the Middle East region. Our President advised the US counterpart on his yesterday's telephone contacts with the Israeli Prime Minister and the President of Iran. He emphasized the importance of preventing the conflict from escalating and the readiness of the Russian side to engage in possible mediation efforts. The President of Russia reminded that prior to the current escalation, we had proposed specific steps intended to reach mutually acceptable agreements during the negotiations between US and Iranian representatives on the Iranian nuclear programme, but Israel delivered the strikes right on the eve of the next negotiation round scheduled for June 15. Russia's principle-based approach and interest in the settlement remain unchanged. And as Vladimir Putin noted, we will continue to act proceeding from this position. For his part, Donald Trump also views the situation as very alarming admitting, however, the effectiveness of Israel's strikes on its targets in Iran. But it is characteristic that the Russian and US presidents, notwithstanding such a complicated situation, do not rule out a return to the negotiating track on Iran's nuclear programme. Incidentally, as Donald Trump noted, the team of US negotiators is ready for resuming work with Iranian representatives. As it is known, five rounds of such indirect talks took place with Oman's mediation. In addition, our President also informed Donald Trump about executing the agreements reached by the Russian and Ukrainian delegations in Istanbul on June 2. Our President underscored that these days we are performing an exchange of POWs, including those seriously wounded and under 25 years of age. Ukraine has also accepted two batches of dead bodies. The Russian side has expressed its readiness to continue its talks with Ukrainians, as agreed, after

June 22. Donald Trump took note of this information and reiterated his interest in bringing the Russian-Ukrainian conflict to a speedy conclusion. Of course, Vladimir Putin wished Donald Trump a happy birthday – the President of the United States turned 79 today. Both leaders have expressed satisfaction with the established personal relations that make it possible to communicate sincerely and in a businesslike mode, search for the resolution of pressing issues on the bilateral and international agendas regardless of how complicated such issues may be. Vladimir Putin also noted that the United States are celebrating Flag Day today and 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US Army. As in their previous conversation, both presidents noted their brotherhood in arms during the Second World War.”

When the Russian and Ukrainian representatives met in Istanbul for the first time on May 16, they agreed to return 1,000 prisoners of war to the other side over three days on May 23-25 and subsequently did so. Although the second meeting of the representatives on June 2 lasted only a little more than an hour and produced no agreement on any movement toward an end to the conflict, the two sides, building on the success of the earlier exchange, did agree to an all-for-all exchange of prisoners of war who are severely wounded, seriously ill, or 18 to 25. And they agreed that each side would return to the other 6,000 bodies. The first exchange took place last Monday and involved some of the prisoners of war under the age of 25. On Tuesday, some of those with severe injuries or serious health issues were exchanged. And on Wednesday, some of the bodies were exchanged. On Saturday, more of those with severe injuries or serious health issues or under 25 were exchanged, and more bodies were returned. Today, Ukraine announced that Russia had returned another 1,245 bodies, bringing the total returned to 6,057. Russia has offered to return another 2,239 bodies. It received 27 bodies from Ukraine last week and said it received another 51 bodies today in the latest exchange. The large difference in the number of bodies returned may reflect the fact that, because the Russian forces have been advancing (if slowly) at various points along the contact line in the east for some time, they have been much more likely to find bodies of Ukrainian soldiers than the Ukrainian forces, which have much less frequently advanced into territory previously held by the Russian forces and, for that reason, have been much less likely to find bodies of Russian soldiers.

The exchange agreed on June 2 will presumably be completed this week and the precise numbers of prisoners and bodies returned will be made known once the exchange has been completed. In the meantime, the war continues, and as it does both sides prepare for the next round of talks, which, judging from Ushakov’s comment about June 22, may take place next week.

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