

As the war continues, Russia & Ukraine discuss next round of talks while Putin & Macron discuss possible settlement



As Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine above indicates, last week the Russian forces continued to attack the Ukrainian forces near Sudzha in the Russian region of Kursk, those defending the Ukrainian city of Sumy just to the south of Sudzha, the cities of Kharkiv and Kupiansk in northeastern Ukraine, the area west of Chasiv Yar and the city of Pokrovsk in Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine. 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, including 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, as well as those in the Orikhiv area southeast of Zaporizhzhia and in Kherson region adjacent to the Dnipro River in southern Ukraine.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported that over the seven days last week the Russian forces conducted a total of 1,122 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending the cities and towns in northeastern, eastern, and southeastern Ukraine. As in previous weeks, the largest number of Russian attacks were directed against the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk, a transit hub on the highway linking the city of Donetsk to Dnipro that, if taken, would open a pathway northward toward Kostyantynivka, Kramatorsk, Sloviansk and the western portion of Donetsk region that is still under Ukrainian control. Last week, the Russian forces conducted a total of 382 attacks against the forces defending Pokrovsk, slightly more than the 365 attacks conducted in the previous week against the forces defending that city. The Russian forces also conducted more than 100 attacks last week against the Ukrainian forces

defending other cities in eastern Ukraine – most notably, against those defending Lyman and Toretsk.

The Russians didn't just attack the Ukrainian forces on the ground; they continued to attack Ukraine from the air with missiles and drones. Indeed, over six hours late Saturday evening into early Sunday morning Russia fired a total of 477 drones and 60 cruise and ballistic missiles at civilian as well as military targets in Ukraine. It was the largest one-day attack thus far in the war and completed a week during which Russia fired a total of 1,270 drones and 114 missiles, along with nearly 1,100 glide bombs, at civilian and military targets in Ukraine.

While the war on the ground and in the air continued, discussions continued over the timing of the next round of talks between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators. In their first meeting in Istanbul on May 16, the Russian and Ukrainian delegations agreed that each side would return to the other side 1,000 prisoners of war over three days on May 23-25. Despite the fact that the war continued both on the ground and in the air, the exchange took place as scheduled and was completed. On June 2, the two teams of negotiators met again in Istanbul and discussed the memoranda both sides prepared prior to the meeting regarding a potential future peace agreement. The memoranda outlined a number of provisions pertaining to the basis for a settlement, the timeframe for a possible peace agreement, and the terms of a potential ceasefire. Building on the success of the May 23-25 exchange, the two sides agreed to an all-for-all exchange of prisoners of war who were severely wounded, seriously ill, or 18 to 25. They also agreed to return 6,000 bodies of soldiers killed in the war.

Last Monday, Russian Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov said the negotiating teams were continuing their discussions at the expert level while the exchange of prisoners of war and return of bodies continued. He also said, "There will soon be more clarity about holding the third round of the negotiations. Therefore, we're continuing the process, and certainly, we're concentrated above all on addressing our issues, those issues that are given priority on our agenda, namely the attainment of the goals set by President Putin at the start of the special military operation. We expect some estimates for the third round this week. It's hard to guess now, but some dates should appear."

On Friday, following the Eurasian Economic Union Summit in Minsk, President Putin was asked when the third round of talks would take place, his assessment of Ukraine's draft memorandum, and whether Ukraine has reacted to Russia's draft memorandum. He said, "Regarding the memorandums, as expected, there were no surprises. I will not tell you anything surprising, either. These are two absolutely opposing memorandums, but that is precisely why talks are set up and held – to find ways to bring positions closer. The fact that they were diametrically opposed does not seem surprising to me, either. I would not like to go into details, as I believe it would be counterproductive – even harmful – to get ahead of the talks. With regard to what has been achieved so far following the talks, I think you can see it for yourself. Today, if I am not mistaken, another exchange took place... or was it yesterday? Today, right? And this is important.

The humanitarian aspect matters because, as diplomats say, it creates conditions for substantive discussions on core issues. We agreed that after completing these exchanges and the humanitarian operation which we proposed – specifically, the transfer of the servicemen’s bodies – we would press ahead with more contacts. We have already handed over more than 6,000 bodies and are ready to transfer nearly 3,000 more, but it is now up to the Ukrainian side to agree to accept the remains of their fallen soldiers.”

“We agreed that after this phase is completed, we would hold the third round of talks. We are ready for it overall. The venue and the time need to be agreed upon. I expect President Erdogan to keep unchanged his supportive stance with regard to this process. We are very grateful to him for that. We stand ready to hold this meeting in Istanbul. As for the exact timeframe, the heads of the negotiating teams from both sides – who remain in constant, direct contact and regularly get on the phone with each other (which, I believe, is a good sign) – are discussing the date for the next meeting. The agenda? In my opinion, the discussion should focus on the memoranda from both sides.”

Yesterday, Gen. (ret.) Keith Kellogg, President Trump’s Special Envoy for Ukraine, said, “Russia cannot continue to stall for time while it bombs civilian targets in Ukraine.” Today, Peskov denied that Russia is stalling on the talks with Ukraine: “Objectively, it’s hard to talk about the possibility of a significant acceleration, and no one is stopping or stalling the work on implementing the agreements between Moscow and Kiev. Naturally, we are interested in the achievement of the goals and objectives of the special military operation by political and diplomatic methods. So we have no interest in stalling anything.” Regarding the timing of the next round of talks, he said the dates of the third round in the negotiations “are being coordinated. So far, the agreements reached at the second round of Russia-Ukraine talks are being implemented. Then we just need to meet once an understanding is reached and all the previous humanitarian agreements are fulfilled. They [the negotiators] will meet and continue the discussion. Indeed, we appreciate the efforts taken by Washington and members of President Trump’s team to promote the Ukraine settlement talks.”

This afternoon, Presidents Putin and Macron spoke by telephone and discussed at some length the situation in the Middle East in the wake of the conflict between Iran and Israel and the U.S. strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities. They also discussed the situation involving Ukraine. According to the summary of the conversation on his site, Putin reiterated that the conflict “was a direct consequence of the policies pursued by the Western countries, which had for years been ignoring Russia’s security interests, creating an anti-Russia staging ground in Ukraine, and condoning the violations of rights of Ukraine’s Russian-speaking citizens, and at present were pursuing a policy of prolonging hostilities while supplying the Kiev regime with a variety of modern weaponry.” Speaking about the prospects of a peaceful settlement, he confirmed Russia’s position in regard to possible agreements: “they are to be comprehensive

and long-term, provide for the elimination of the root causes of the Ukraine crisis, and be based on the new territorial realities.” “Root causes,” of course, refers to Ukraine’s desire to become a member of NATO. “New territorial realities,” of course, refers to the fact that Russia has annexed and incorporated into the Russian Federation the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson (as well as Crimea in 2014).

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