As the war continues, the EU prepares another package of sanctions. And Russian drones & jets continue to enter EU & NATO airspace.

UK Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of September 19.

As Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine indicates, last week the Russian forces continued to attack the Ukrainian forces at a number of locations in Ukraine, extending from the area south of Sudzha in the Russian region of Kursk toward the Ukrainian city of Sumy to the area along the border north of Kharkiv, toward the city of Kupiansk and the area around it, the area around the small city of Chasiv Yar, the city of Pokrovsk and the area around it, and the area in Kherson region adjacent to the Dnipro River in southeastern Ukraine. But as the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported in its daily updates last week, the Russian forces also continued to attack the Ukrainian forces defending a number of other cities and towns in eastern Ukraine, including Lyman and Kramatorsk in the area between Izium and Chasiv Yar, Toretsk between Chasiv Yar and Pokrovsk, and the Orikhiv area in Zaporizhzhia region.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported that over the seven days last week from Sunday through Saturday, the Russian forces conducted a total of 1,301 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 city that, if taken, would open a pathway for the Russian forces toward the cities of Kostyantynivka, Kramatorsk, and Sloviansk in Donetsk region that are still held by Ukraine. Over the seven days last week, the Russian forces conducted a total of 430 attacks against the forces defending Pokrovsk and the area around it.

While the Russian forces continued to attack the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk and the other cities in eastern Ukraine, Russia also continued to attack Ukraine with drones and missiles every night. On Friday night, for example, Russia fired 579 drones, 8 ballistic missiles, and 32 cruise missiles at Kyiv and other cities in Ukraine, destroying apartment buildings, hospitals, schools, and other public facilities, and killing a number of people, including children. President Zelenskyy subsequently said, "The enemy's target was our infrastructure, residential areas and civilian enterprises… Each such strike is not a military necessity but a deliberate strategy by Russia to intimidate civilians and destroy our infrastructure."

Also on Friday, three Russian MiG-31 fighter jets flew into Estonian airspace "without permission and remained there for a total of 12 minutes," according to the Estonian government, prompting it to request, under Article 4 of the NATO Treaty, consultation in the NATO Council with the other members in regard to the intrusion. Article 4 provides for consultation in the Council with other members whenever, in the opinion of a member, its territorial integrity, political independence, or security is threatened. The Russian jets had filed no flight plans with Estonia, their transponders were off, and they had no radio contact with Estonia.

On Jan. 14, 2025, following a meeting of the leaders of the Baltic area members of NATO, Secretary General Mark Rutte announced the launch of Baltic Sentry, an initiative to strengthen the protection of critical infrastructure by enhancing NATO's military presence in the Baltic Sea and improving the Allies' ability to respond to destabilizing acts such as damaging undersea infrastructure including energy and communication cables. Baltic Sentry makes use of a variety of assets, including frigates, maritime patrol aircraft, a small fleet of naval drones, and a variety of national surveillance assets in order to protect critical undersea infrastructure and respond if needed.

On September 10, Russia fired a large number of drones and missiles at Ukraine. Polish Prime Minister Tusk reported that a number of drones entered Polish air space and requested that the NATO Council consider the intrusion under Article 4. The Council met and considered the matter, after which Rutte said, "The North Atlantic Council met this morning and discussed the situation in light of Poland's request for consultations under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty. Allies expressed solidarity with Poland and denounced Russia's reckless behavior. A full assessment of the incident is ongoing. What is clear is that the violation last night is not an isolated incident…. The Supreme Allied Commander will continue to actively manage our deterrence and defense posture along the entire eastern flank. Allies are resolved to defend every inch of Allied territory. We will closely monitor the situation along our eastern flank, our air defenses continually at the ready…. Russia is waging a dangerous war of aggression against Ukraine that continually targets civilians and civilian infrastructure. Allies are determined to step up their support for Ukraine in the face of Russia's escalating campaign."

Two days later, Rutte announced that NATO had launched an initiative, Eastern Sentry, modeled on Baltic Sentry, to reinforce the ability of its eastern European members to defend themselves against attacks. Eastern Sentry reportedly has available to it two F-16 fighter jets and an anti-air warfare frigate from Denmark, three Rafale jets from France, and four Eurofighters from Germany to deal with violations of the air space of NATO members. NATO made it clear that, while it was a response to the violation of Polish airspace, Eastern Sentry won't be limited to responding to future violations of the air space over Poland. As far as we know, NATO hasn't yet responded to Friday's incursion into Estonian airspace with either Baltic Sentry or Eastern Sentry and it may not do so at this point. But presumably if there is another incursion, it will respond with either or both Sentries.

Meanwhile, as Russia's war against Ukraine continues both on the ground and in the air, last week the EU introduced yet another package of sanctions, its 19th, against Russia. In introducing the package last Thursday, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen noted its most important provisions. Among other things, the package would ban the import into European markets of Russian liquified natural gas. The EU will sanction another 118 vessels in the shadow fleet that continues to transport Russian oil and gas, and it will prohibit all transactions with the two major Russian companies, Rosneft and Gazpromneft, and other companies will be subject to an asset freeze. The EU will also go after those who continue to fuel Russia's war by purchasing oil despite the sanctions. In addition, the EU will close the financial loopholes Russia has used to evade sanctions by introducing a transaction ban on additional banks in Russia and third countries. The EU will also prohibit transactions in cryptocurrencies and identify banks that are making use of Russian alternative payment systems, will add new direct export restrictions for items and technologies used on the battlefield, and will list 45 companies in Russia and third countries that have been providing direct or indirect support to the Russian military. In addition, the EU will develop a new way to finance Ukraine's defense efforts by using the cash balances of the Russian financial assets that are frozen in European financial institutions.

As von der Leyen pointed out last week, the EU's sanctions are severely affecting Russia's economy. The interest rate is at 17%, inflation is persistently high, Russian access to financing and revenues is decreasing, and the overheated war economy is reaching its limits: "We know that our sanctions are an effective tool of economic pressure. And we will keep using them until Russia comes to the negotiation table with Ukraine for a just and lasting peace."

There is, of course, one significant problem standing in the way of formal approval of the new package of EU sanctions – the possibility, indeed likelihood, that either Hungary or Slovakia, or both, will block approval of the new package of sanctions, which like all EU sanctions must be approved unanimously. Indeed, it's quite likely that either Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán or Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico, or both, will oppose the new package of sanctions, although doing so will

undoubtedly incur the wrath of Ukraine's friends and supporters in the EU and ensure that both leaders and their governments remain the pariahs that they are today.

David R. Cameron
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