As U.S. & Ukraine discuss peace plans & prepare for talks in Davos, Russia's war continues on the ground and in the air.

UK Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of Jan. 16.

As Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine indicates, last week the Russian forces continued to attack Ukraine south of Sudzha in Russia's Kursk region toward the city of Sumy, along the border north of Kharkiv, and at a number of points along the long contact line between the Russian and Ukrainian forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine from the area around and just to the east and south of Kupiansk to the area in Donetsk region in and around Lyman, toward the cities of Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, and Kostyantynivka in that region that are still held by the Ukrainian forces, toward the city of Pokrovsk and the area around it, and in several locations along the contact line between the forces in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions in southeastern Ukraine.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported that over the seven days last week from Sunday, Jan. 11, through Saturday, Jan. 17, the Russian forces conducted a total of 1,128 attacks – on average about 160 a day – 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 last week were directed against the Ukrainian forces defending the area in and around Pokrovsk which, if taken, would open a pathway northward toward the territory in Donetsk region still held by Ukraine. The General Staff reported that over the seven days last week the Russian forces conducted a total of 276 attacks – on average nearly 40 attacks each day – against the forces defending Pokrovsk and the area around it. The General Staff also reported that

the Russian forces conducted more than 200 attacks last week against the Ukrainian forces defending Huliaipole, a small city about 80 miles southwest of Pokrovsk.

While the Russian forces continued to attack the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk and the other cities and towns in northeastern and eastern Ukraine, Russia also continued its air war against the people of Ukraine last week. On Sunday, President Zelenskyy reported on X that over the past week Russia sent 1,300 attack drones, 1050 guided aerial bombs, and 29 missiles at a number of cities, hitting apartment buildings and strategic targets such as electricity-generating plants and the power infrastructure, causing massive blackouts and the loss of power, heat, and water in Kyiv and a number of other cities. On Saturday night, for example, more than 200 drones hit target s in 15 locations in six regions, including Kyiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and other major cities. A number of people were killed or injured in these attacks and several million have had no heat or running water at a time when the temperatures in much of Ukraine have been in the 10-to-20-degree range during the day and in single digits at night.

On Friday, Ukraine's Ambassador to the U.S., Olga Stefanishyna, announced that delegations from Ukraine and the U.S. would hold talks Saturday in Miami focused on the issues of security guarantees for Ukraine and its economic recovery. She said work is underway "on two key documents – agreements on security guarantees and economic prosperity of Ukraine totaling up to $800 billion, which could be signed at the World Economic Forum in Davos." (The annual meeting of the Forum is taking place in Davos this week.) The purpose of the visit, she said, "is to finalize these agreements with American partners so that they maximally meet Ukraine's national interests." On Friday, President Zelenskyy said the delegation would try to finalize with the U.S. representatives documents pertaining to postwar security guarantees for a proposed peace settlement and to the economic recovery of Ukraine.

On Saturday, the Ukrainian delegation, which consisted of Kyrylo Budanov, the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine; Rustem Umerov, the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine; and Davyd Arakhamia, the leader of the Servant of the People (President Zelenskyy's party) group in the Rada arrived in Miami and immediately met with U.S. Secretary of the Army Daniel Driscoll and President Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. The meeting continued on Sunday in preparation for the meeting of Presidents Trump and Zelenskyy at Davos at which, if all goes well, they will conclude an agreement in regard to the peace plans both have issued, including provisions pertaining to a security guarantee for Ukraine and the post-war economic recovery of the country.

On Saturday, after arriving, Budanov, writing on Telegram, reiterated the message, saying said they had come to Miami to discuss "the details of the peace agreement." But on Saturday, Zelenskyy, also writing on Telegram, added an important point, saying the principal task for the Ukrainian delegation was to convey to the American officials how the continuing Russian missile and drone attacks are undermining diplomacy. They are,

he said, “constantly worsening even the small opportunities for dialogue that existed. The American side must understand this.”

After the talks concluded yesterday, Witkoff and Umerov issued a joint statement in which they said the meeting focused on aligning positions on a 20-point plan, a “multilateral security guarantee framework,” a “US security guarantee framework for Ukraine,” and an “economic and prosperity plan. Our shared priority is to stop the killing, ensure guaranteed security, and create conditions for Ukraine’s recovery, stability, and long-term prosperity.” Witkoff said the talks were “productive and constructive” and said, “Russia remains fully committed to achieving peace in Ukraine.” Umerov for his part said, “Over the course of two days, together with Kyrylo Budanov and David Arakhamia, we worked in the United States. On the American side, the consultations included Special Envoy for Peace Missions Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, U.S. Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll, and White House staff member Josh Gruenbaum. We had substantive discussions on economic development and prosperity plan as well as security guarantees for Ukraine, with a focus on practical mechanisms for their implementation and enforcement. We informed our American partners about recent attacks on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure by Russia. We agreed to continue the work at the team level during the next stage of consultations in Davos.” Importantly, separate talks also took place in Miami between the U.S. representatives and Russian presidential envoy Kirill Dmitriev.

The talks between American, Russian, and Ukrainian representatives will continue in Davos. Whether they will move the Russians and Ukrainians closer to an end to the war remains to be seen. In the meantime, Russia’s war against Ukraine continues on the ground and in the air. And as if that were not bad enough, there are concerns that Russia may, either accidentally or on purpose, damage the transmission lines that provide electricity for the cooling system of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, a six-reactor facility that is the largest nuclear plant in Europe. One of the backup power lines was damaged again and a localized ceasefire was agreed for the fourth time Friday so the IAEA, working with both sides, could coordinate repair of the line. Without a functioning cooling system, there could be a catastrophic meltdown at the plant. In a statement the next day, the Main Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense warned that Russia was considering attacking electricity transmission substations that ensure the operation of Ukraine’s nuclear power plants in order to force Ukraine to agree to Russia’s conditions for ending its war.

David R. Cameron
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