Despite the talks in Geneva, the war continues with no end in sight.

U.K. Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of Feb. 20.

As the British Defence Intelligence map indicates was the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of Friday, last week the Russian forces continued to attack in the area south of Sudzha in the Russian region of Kursk toward the Ukrainian city of Sumy and at a number of points along the long contact line between the Russian and Ukrainian forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine stretching from the area south and east of Kupiansk to the area south and west of Siversk toward the cities of Slovyansk and Kramatorsk in the western portion of Donetsk region, toward the city of Pokrovsk and the area around it, and at several locations along the contact line between the forces in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of southeastern Ukraine.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported that over the seven days last week from Sunday, Feb. 15, through Saturday, Feb. 21, the Russian forces conducted a total of 1,329 attacks – on average about 190 a day – against the Ukrainian forces defending the cities and towns in northeastern, eastern, and southeastern Ukraine. That is roughly in line with the number of attacks the Russian forces have conducted each week over the past several months. 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 261 attacks – on average nearly 40 each day – against the forces defending Pokrovsk and the area around it. The Russian forces also conducted nearly as many attacks – 249 – against the Ukrainian forces defending Huliaipole, a small city in Zaporizhzhia region about 80 miles south of Pokrovsk. And they conducted 126 attacks last week against the Ukrainian forces

defending the city of Kostyantynivka, which is south of Kramatorsk and west of Chasiv Yar in Donetsk region.

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 continues its air war against the people of Ukraine last week. On Saturday night, for example, Russia fired 22 Iskander ballistic missiles, 20 cruise missiles, and 297 drones at Kyiv and other cities in Ukraine, hitting electricity-generating plants, other public utilities, and apartment buildings.

As Russia's war against Ukraine continued last week both on the ground and in the air, talks between the delegations of American, Ukrainian and Russian officials resumed Tuesday at the InterContinental Hotel in Geneva, nearly two weeks after the previous round of talks in Abu Dhabi on Feb. 4-5 and a week before the war between Russia and Ukraine enters its fifth year tomorrow. The Russian delegation was headed by Vladimir Medinsky, who led the Russian team at talks in Istanbul soon after the war began in 2022, while the Ukrainian delegation was headed by Rustem Umerov, the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council. The American delegation included presidential envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Gen. Alexus Grynkewich, the Commander in Chief of U.S. and NATO forces in Europe, and Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll. The three delegations also included several members of the military in order to bring some expertise into the discussion of how a ceasefire and subsequent security guarantees for Ukraine might be implemented if and when Russia and Ukraine agree to end the war.

The talks took place for four hours on Tuesday and two hours on Wednesday and concluded without any apparent progress in regard to the resolution of the differences between the two sides in regard to the issues on which they remain deeply divided – the provision of security guarantees for Ukraine, control of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the largest in Europe, which is now held by Russia; and what is clearly the most difficult issue in the talks – the territorial issue, meaning the retention by Russia or return to Ukraine of some or all of the territory in Ukraine's regions of Luhansk and Donetsk that is now held by the Russian forces.

Before the talks ended Wednesday, President Zelenskyy, speaking of Tuesday's meeting, said, "Yesterday's meetings were indeed difficult, and we can state that Russia is trying to drag out negotiations that could already have reached the final stage." Prior to the end of the talks, Medinsky was quoted by the Russian news agencies as saying the talks were "difficult but business-like" and that the next meeting would "take place in the near future." The main difficulty appears to be Russia's insistence that it retain the territory its forces now hold in the two eastern-most regions of Ukraine – Luhansk and Donetsk – that together make up the Donbas, while Ukraine understandably insists that those regions be returned to Ukraine. Zelenskyy also made it clear in a social media post that Ukraine objects to the U.S. position that it will guarantee Ukraine's security provided Ukraine accepts Russia's demand that it retain a substantial portion of the

territory it now holds in eastern Ukraine: “Our American friends, they are preparing security guarantees. But they said – first this swap of territories, or something like that, and then security guarantees. I think – first, security guarantees. Second, we will not give up our territories because we are ready for compromise. What kind of compromise are we ready for? Not for the compromise that gives Russia the opportunity to recover quickly and come again and occupy us.” In an interview with Axios, Zelenskyy said he’s prepared to discuss a troop withdrawal in exchange for the creation of a neutral, internationally monitored buffer zone. But he has consistently rejected Russia’s claim to the Donbas and has made it clear that he believes the Ukrainian people would never support Ukraine withdrawing from the region and turning it over to Russia: “Emotionally, people will never forgive this. Never. They will not forgive…me. They will not forgive the U.S.”

In an interview over the weekend, Witkoff said the U.S. has put forward proposals to Russia and Ukraine that may bring the sides together in the next three weeks and possibly lead to a summit involving the three presidents. In an interview released Saturday, he said, “You know, everyone throws the word ‘dignity’ around. But what does dignity get you if you have that amount of killing there?” He said he thinks the recent talks have had a “real positive effect in some respects” and said Russia and Ukraine “don’t seem like they really want to fight with one another, and I don’t think they do.” He said the real problem in reaching a peace agreement lies “at the leadership levels.” But he said he and Kushner are hopeful they’ve made some proposals that will bring both sides together in the next three weeks “and maybe even result in a summit between President Zelenskyy and President Putin.”

In a similar vein, Kyrylo Budanov, the head of President Zelenskyy’s office, said another round of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, in which the U.S. will also participate, is tentatively scheduled for approximately Feb. 27. But he said the main issue remains territory and the Russia continues to want full control of the Donbas, which Ukraine won’t accept. And in the meantime, despite the catastrophic losses experienced by both sides over the past four years, the war goes on and tomorrow begins year five.

David R. Cameron
February 23, 2026