

Russian forces are advancing towards Pokrovsk. Day 887 of the war

Jakub Ber, Piotr Żochowski, Jacek Tarociński

The situation on the frontline

From 23 to 30 July, Russian forces extended the wedge they had driven into the Ukrainian grouping west of Ocheretyne by about 5 km. **The pace of their advance over the past week was the highest since mid-April.** They managed to achieve this using continuous infantry assaults supported by massive artillery shelling and aerial bombardment that was concentrated on a narrow section of the battlefield located near the railway line leading to Pokrovsk. **This tactical success has come at the cost of significant losses.** The Ukrainian side has clearly had serious command problems on this section. There have also been frequent public complaints about insufficient reinforcements for the fighting brigades and their low level of training as well as poorly prepared fortifications.

Intense fighting continues on the remaining sections of the frontline in the Donbas and the Kharkiv oblast. In the defence belt of the 79th Air Assault Brigade in the Marinka area, Russian battalion tactical groups attacked Ukrainian positions twice with more than 50 infantry fighting vehicles and tanks in each of these assaults. They failed to break through the Ukrainian defences and much of the armoured equipment they used was destroyed.

Russian air attacks

Over the past week, the intensity of Russia's missile attacks has been relatively low: it has used only a few missiles of various types. It attacked Ukraine with Shahed 136/131 drones almost every day. The heaviest air strikes came on the three consecutive nights of 24–26 July when a total of 83 drones were used. Ukrainian air defence destroyed 62 of these while three flew into Romanian airspace. The drones hit residential buildings and the port infrastructure in southern Ukraine as well as energy facilities in various parts of the country. Russian forces have also continued to use guided bombs to attack targets in the frontline zone, including Kharkiv.

Ukrainian operations against Russia

On the night of 25–26 July, Ukrainian forces launched a missile attack on the Saky military airfield in Crimea. Available satellite imagery has confirmed that it was hit, but there is no exact data on Russian casualties and equipment losses. There have also been several drone strikes on military facilities and critical infrastructure located in the occupied areas and within Russia's borders. **Several energy substations and fuel storage facilities in the Belgorod, Kursk and Orlovsk oblasts have been destroyed or severely damaged.** Ukrainian drones have attacked military airfields: Engels (Saratov region), Dyagilevo (Ryazan region) and Olenya (Murmansk region, about 1,800 km from the Ukrainian border). There is no confirmed information on the effects of these air strikes; according to unofficial Ukrainian media reports, a Tu-22M3 strategic bomber was damaged at Olenya.

On 23 July, Ukrainian military intelligence launched a large-scale cyber-attack that paralysed the operations of key banking institutions and payment systems across Russia. Customers of major banks such as the Central Bank of Russia (CBR), Sberbank, Alfa Bank, Raiffeisen Bank and Vneshtorgbank were unable to use online banking services or had problems doing so. Mobile operators were also targeted, which caused disruptions to mobile communications and the Internet on networks including Rostelekom and MegaFon. The Russian authorities confirmed that the cyber-attacks had taken place, describing them as “the work of politically motivated hackers”. On 29 July, the CBR acknowledged that the intensity of these attacks was increasing.

In a joint operation on 25 July, the Security Service of Ukraine's counterintelligence and Ukrainian police forces detained **a 19-member group of agents of Russia's Federal Security Service for planning arson attacks on shopping centres and petrol stations in Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states.** The investigators have found that the suspects were in the process of recruiting more people in Ukraine, including criminals. They had legalised their stay in EU countries after obtaining false documents, such as passports, driving licences and university diplomas.

Western support for Ukraine

On 24 July, the German arms company Rheinmetall AG announced that Ukraine had signed a contract for the delivery of a complete ammunition production line. The contract's value was not disclosed; the company only said total value ranged in a low three-digit million euro range,. It is also unclear what calibres this line can produce. Delivery is expected to take place within 24 months. This is another step towards building an ammunition factory in Ukraine, something that Rheinmetall announced last February.

On 25 July, the Pentagon announced that after recalculating the cost of the aid it had provided to Ukraine, it found an error that overstated it by \$2 billion. As a result, the US now has more funds available to spend on weapons for Ukraine. In 2023, a similar review found that US aid had been overstated by \$6.2bn. On the same day, the UK said that since the start of the war it had supplied Ukraine with 12,000 anti-tank systems of various types, mostly NLAW grenade launchers.

On 29 July, Germany announced another package of its military aid to Ukraine, which includes eight Leopard 1A5 tanks (provided in cooperation with Denmark and the Netherlands), 21,000 35mm missiles for Gepard anti-aircraft systems, 10 naval drones, two

Bergepanzer 2 armoured recovery vehicles and 10 battlefield reconnaissance radars.

On 29 July, the US unveiled a new package of its military support worth a total of \$1.7bn, including \$200m to be taken directly from the Pentagon's stocks under the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) and \$1.5bn to fund contracts with US industry under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI). The package consists of missiles for NASAMS air defence systems and Stinger anti-aircraft systems, RIM-7 missiles, missiles for HIMARS launchers, 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition, Javelin and TOW anti-tank guided missiles, AT-4 grenade launchers, small arms ammunition, explosives, spare parts, high-precision aerial bombs and Electronic Warfare equipment.

Ukraine's military potential

On 23 July, the secretary of the parliamentary committee on national security, defence and intelligence, Roman Kostenko, reported that 3,800 prisoners were serving in the Ukrainian armed forces. According to him, the **demand for them has decreased as the number of men subject to the ongoing mobilisation has risen**. He added that there are plans to draft up to 5,000 inmates and that the country should consider mobilising those who are held in detention centres.

On 25 July, the commander of the National Guard, General Oleksandr Pivnenko, said that the issue of rotations on the frontline would be resolved later, because despite the increase in the number of mobilised personnel, it was necessary to train them. He ruled out carrying out any brigade-level rotations, but left open the possibility of limited rotations in individual battalions or companies. The speaker of the Parliament (Verkhovna Rada), Ruslan Stefanchuk, said that **no announcement of demobilisation is expected as long as martial law remains in force**.

On the same day, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal confirmed that **work on building fortifications in the Kherson oblast was 97% complete** and said that the government had allocated more than two billion hryvnias (over \$48 million) for this purpose. On 26 July, the chairwoman of the parliamentary budget committee, Roksolana Pidlasa, announced that only 592 million hryvnias (c. \$14.4 million) out of the total of 56 billion hryvnias (over \$1.36 billion) earmarked for 2024 remained available in the reserve fund from which the government allocates funds for urgent needs related to erecting and modernising fortifications. She indicated that closing the budget gap, including with regard to military spending, would require increasing taxes.

On 29 July, the commanders of the subdivisions comprising the 80th Air Assault Brigade called on President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, General Oleksandr Syrskyi, to keep Colonel Emil Ishkulov in command of this brigade. According to unofficial information, he was dismissed for refusing to follow an order which, in his view, could have led to unjustifiably high losses among his soldiers. A similar incident occurred on 15 July, when soldiers of the 24th Mechanised Brigade came to the defence of their commander. At the same time, some soldiers and volunteers have been demanding that commanders of other brigades be dismissed, accusing them of blindly following orders coming from above which have resulted in significant losses and chaos in command. What all these interventions have in common is the demand to increase the

armed forces' combat potential and improve command; they have not been accompanied by any calls to surrender. **All of this indicates that there is a great deal of tension in the Ukrainian military**; defusing this situation requires firm but tactful steps from General Syrskyi, President Zelensky and Defence Minister Rustem Umerov.

According to a poll published by Razumkov Centre on 30 July, 59.8% of respondents believe that mobilisation is necessary, because otherwise Russia will occupy Ukraine, 21.9% expressed the opposite opinion while 18.3% took no position. At the same time, 40% of those questioned said that mobilisation would increase casualties and would not bring victory or peace closer; 32% disagreed with this view while 28% did not share either of these opinions.

