

Pokrovsk prepares to defend itself. Day 908 of the war

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 The situation on the frontline

In the Kursk Oblast, Ukrainian forces slightly expanded the area under their control to the east and west of their previous area of operations. According to most sources, they re-entered Snagost' (in the west) and Martynovka (in the east), which had already changed hands several times during the fighting. The Ukrainians also entered the border town of Gordeyevka, extending the region of operations westwards.

However, further Ukrainian attempts to push northwards failed, with the heaviest fighting taking place in the area of Korenevo, which remains under Russian control. Compared to the first week of fighting in the Kursk region, the number of encounter battles has decreased. The Russians are mainly trying to seal the defence lines, with sporadic efforts to regain ground.

On 15 August, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, General Oleksandr Syrskyi, announced **the establishment of a military commandery in the Ukrainian-controlled part of the territory of the Russian Federation,** headed by General Eduard Moskaliov. According to President Volodymyr Zelensky on 19 August, 1,250 km² and 92 settlements are under Ukrainian control (Ukrainian forces have probably captured an area half that size).

Ukrainian rockets destroyed all three bridges over the Seym River in the border district of Glushkovo, Kursk Oblast, which lies to the west of the current battle area. According to some sources, the Ukrainians also seized a small patch (up to 2 km deep and up to 7 km wide) which the river cuts off from the rest of Russian territory, with the village of Otruba located there. The Russians are rapidly (within 24 hours of the destruction) installing pontoon crossings to replace the destroyed bridges. The defence of this part of Russian territory – should a Ukrainian attack be directed there – will be significantly hampered. This is because it lies between the Seym River, the Russian-Ukrainian border and the current area of operations (the Sudzhansky and Korenevsky districts). With an area of approximately 600 km², it is of a similar size to the area so far captured by Ukrainian troops.

The seizure of part of the Glushkovo district area may be an attractive alternative for Ukraine in the absence of further advances deep into Russia, and it is highly likely that the destruction of the bridges is a prelude to further action. This is being taken into account by the Russians, who ordered the evacuation of the population from the area in the first days after Ukrainian troops crossed the border.

It remains an open question whether Kyiv will decide to further increase its forces in the Kursk Oblast at the expense of a progressive weakening of the groupings fighting in other directions. Estimates of the scale of Ukrainian involvement range from 10,000 to 15,000 troops, with at least 6,000 expected to be on Russian territory. Sub-units from the 95th Air Assault Brigade have joined the operation. A total of six Ukrainian brigades, half of which belong to the elite Air Assault Forces, are operating in the Kursk Oblast. This confirms that **operations on Russian territory are currently of paramount importance to Kyiv**, despite the fact that they have committed much smaller forces than on other sections of the frontline.

There is still no sign that the Ukrainian military action on Russian territory will force the Russians to redeploy more forces from Ukraine and thus relieve the burden on Ukrainian troops defending the main lines of action. Reserve subdivisions from several brigades/regiments with a total of 5,000 troops have been diverted to the Kursk Oblast, which represents approximately 1% of the forces currently engaged in Ukraine. In total, sub-units from nine Russian tactical compounds – comparable in numbers to the Ukrainian forces – are believed to be operating in the Kursk Oblast, with inexperienced units from the Leningrad Military District (including those from the Kaliningrad region) forming the core.

Russian operations in the Donbas have accelerated and, in under a week, their troops have significantly reduced the distance separating them from Pokrovsk, the main target of the assault. Less than 10 km remains from Russian positions in the Krasnyi Yar and Krutyi Yar areas of the town, and 4 km to neighbouring Myrnohrad. Pressing forward on a broad front, they also broke through to the eastern outskirts of Selydove, which they are 2 km away from. The central and local authorities have appealed to the residents of these towns to evacuate immediately (59,000 remain in the largest, Pokrovsk), while they have not ruled out making it compulsory in the coming days (the local Interior Ministry estimates that there are at most two weeks left for evacuation). In the direction of Pokrovsk, a further eight villages came under Russian control, and Ukrainian forces under threat of being cut off withdrew from their last positions east of the Karlivka Reservoir.

Ukrainian forces needed to directly defend the main Donbas transport hub under their control. Rail and road links have made Pokrovsk a hub through which supplies are redistributed to all the main areas of operations in the Donbas, from Velyka Novosilka to Siversk. The loss or blockade of this city will mean that Ukrainian troops in the south-western and northern parts of the region will have to be supplied by circuitous routes from different directions (in the case of the northern grouping from the centre in Sloviansk and Kramatorsk this would be via the Kharkiv Oblast, and for the southern grouping it would be via local roads from the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast). Selydove, 12 km south of Pokrovsk, is also a local transport hub, the capture of which would open the possibility for the Russians to cut off Ukrainian forces operating west of Donetsk.

Russian forces have taken Niu-York and are heading further north, threatening to outflank Toretsk from the south-west. The Russians have also taken further positions on the eastern outskirts of Toretsk from the previously occupied Zalizne and Pivnichne, the north-western part of which remains under Ukrainian control. There is conflicting information about Russian operations in Toretsk itself, which, according to some sources, the Russians attempted to enter from the east via three main roads simultaneously. Threatened with being cut off, Ukrainian units withdrew from the salient between Niu-York and Zalizne,

abandoning the last section in the area of the defence line established in 2014. The Russians also made slight advances on other directions in the Donbas (with the exception of the relatively quiet Velyka Novosilka area), as well as in the Luhansk and Kharkiv regions.

Russian air attacks

The Russians have continued to launch pinpoint strikes against targets deep inside Ukrainian territory and to destroy infrastructure in the immediate rear of the defenders.

Enemy missiles hit Sumy three times (15, 16 and 18 August), and on 20 August hit energy infrastructure facilities in the Sumy Oblast leaving 72 towns with no electricity as a result. Industrial facilities in Pavlohrad, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, were hit twice (15 and 16 August). On 16 August, the airport near Dnipro was the target of a missile attack (the Ukrainians admitted the destruction of one MiG-29 fighter); the Patriot system battery, located in the region, was most likely damaged, as was the power substation the following day. In addition, Odesa's port infrastructure (14 August) and the Ternopil fuel base (20 August) were hit, as were facilities in the Kharkiv, Cherkasy and Poltava Oblasts (15 August).

Ukraine declared a complete repulse of the subsequent attacks on Kyiv and the Kyiv Oblast (15, 17, 18 and 20 August), however, on 18 August it is thought that 50 buildings were damaged in one area (with two completely destroyed). According to Ukrainian sources, between the evening of 14 August and the morning of 20 August, Russia used a total of 44 missiles, 15 of which are thought to have been shot down (mainly in the Kyiv area), and 93 'shaheds' (92 of which were reported destroyed).

Ukrainian operations against Russia

On 18 August, Ukrainian suicide drones caused a large fire at the Kavkaz fuel combine in the Rostov region, one of the largest fuel and lubricant depots under the authority of Rosrezerva. It took two days to put the fire out and at least ten tanks were destroyed. However, a strike using, among other things, ATACMS missiles on the Crimean Bridge and Kerch and Sevastopol on 16 August ended with little success. According to some sources, shrapnel from the downed missiles slightly damaged the surface of the bridge, causing a traffic disruption of several hours.

Satellite imagery has confirmed that **on 14 August the workshop section of Borisoglebsk airfield in the Voronezh region and the warehouse at Savasleyka airfield in the Nizhnovgorod region were damaged in the largest Ukrainian drone attack on Russian airbases to date.** Earlier reports of a fuel depot fire at the latter facility were not confirmed. According to the Ukrainian General Staff, the airfields of Khalino near Kursk and Baltimor near Voronezh were also attacked (other sources mentioned three airfields, without Kursk).

Ukraine's Main Directorate of Military Intelligence (HUR) on 17 August reported on a **successful hacking attack on a Russian internet provider for one of the state-owned companies of the military nuclear industry in Snezhinsk** in the Chelyabinsk region. As a result of the hit, data on the company's servers was destroyed and the company itself was said to have had no internet access. According to HUR, the operation gave them access to

the personal data of employees and information on mechanisms to circumvent Western sanctions in order to obtain technological components for the Russian military industry.

Western support for Ukraine

On 19 August, the German government announced the transfer of a further military support package to Ukraine, including the IRIS-T SLS short-range air defence system, 14,000 155 mm calibre artillery shells, ten surface drones and 26 VECTOR reconnaissance drones. Two days earlier, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper had reported that **the ruling coalition's planned budget cuts would translate into a reduction in Germany's military support for Ukraine.** Germany's Ministry of Defence tried to soften the negative tone of the material by publishing a summary of information on planned deliveries to the end of this year and in 2025, and the Ministry of Finance expressed its readiness for further talks. However, they did not refute the information contained in the article. **The amount of funds allocated by Berlin for military support to Kyiv is expected to fall steadily – from €8 billion this year to €4 billion in 2025, €3 billion in 2026 and €0.5 billion each in 2027 and 2028.** It was pointed out that the funds have already been allocated (mainly for contracts in the German arms industry) and the limit for 2025 has been exceeded, ruling out further investment. In all likelihood, this means a limitation of German armaments and military equipment deliveries to what Berlin has previously announced and reiterated twice in recent days (15 and 19 August).

By the end of this year, Ukraine is expected to receive, among other items, two IRIS-T SLM and IRIS-T SLS systems each (one of them in the announced package), ten Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, 16 155 mm self-propelled howitzers on PzH 2000 tracked chassis and RCH 155 and Zuzana 2 wheeled chassis (the latter type is produced in Slovakia, financed by Germany and Denmark) and 30 Leopard 1A5 tanks. In turn, in 2025, Kyiv would receive three IRIS-T SLM and IRIS-T SLS systems each, two Skynex anti-aircraft artillery systems and five Gepards, at least 20 self-propelled howitzers of the aforementioned types, 37 Leopard 1A5 tanks and 20 Marder infantry fighting vehicles.

It is noteworthy that Germany is not planning further deliveries of Leopard 2 tanks to cover the losses suffered by the Ukrainian army. This is important because Leopard 1A5 tanks do not meet the requirements of the modern battlefield and are used by the Ukrainians as support artillery, just like the T-55 and T-62, used by the Russians.

In its 20th military aid package, Denmark announced the spending of 783 million kroner (\$116 million), which will go towards purchases for the Ukrainian army (including 112 million kroner in Ukraine) and support for the arms industry there (300 million kroner).

The war and the internal situation in Ukraine

Verkhovna Rada Plenipotentiary for Human Rights Dmytro Lyubinets reported on 15 August that he had had a telephone conversation with his Russian counterpart Tatyana Moskalkova one day earlier. He announced that **the Russian side had requested the call and that it concerned the organisation of another exchange of prisoners of war.** The direct cause was

the large number of Russian soldiers taken prisoner during the Ukrainian military operation in the Kursk region.

A day later, Ukraine's Security Service announced that more than 100 Russian soldiers had been taken prisoner on 15 August, the largest single capture since the invasion began. **According to Ukrainian media, nearly 2,000 Russian soldiers have been taken captive during the Kursk operation**, but according to Western assessments, Ukrainians captured more than 300 soldiers (including conscripts) and officers from various Russian uniformed formations within two weeks.

On 19 August, speaking at a meeting with the heads of foreign diplomatic missions, **President Zelensky stated that "the Kursk region operation has become the largest investment in the process of freeing Ukrainians from Russian captivity"**. He pointed out that 'replenishing the exchange fund' was one of the main objectives of the entry of Ukrainian forces into the territory of the Russian Federation. On the same day, General Syrskyi and Land Forces Commander General Oleksandr Pavliuk made analogous statements. According to Lubinets, more than 14,000 Ukrainians remain in Russian captivity.

Ukraine's military potential

Defence Minister Rustem Umerov announced on 15 August that his **ministry is working on the creation of a unified centre for the real-time coordination of all drone operations**. "Our priority is unmanned systems that are already making a difference on the battlefield", Umerov commented during a visit to Ukraine by his Lithuanian counterpart Laurynas Kasčiūnas. The two ministers visited a training ground where innovative military solutions are being tested, including reconnaissance drones, remote-controlled machine guns, sapper robots and ground-based robotic sanitation platforms.

Belarusian operations against Ukraine

Alyaksandr Lukashenka, in a TV interview with the Rossiya channel **on 15 August, argued that the Ukrainian military operation in the Kursk region is aimed at provoking Russia into taking "asymmetric actions", including the use of nuclear weapons**. According to Lukashenka, this would isolate Moscow internationally and deprive it of allies. He also mentioned the alleged large contingent of mercenaries taking part in the fighting in the Kursk region on the Ukrainian side, including Poles. He threatened that violations of Belarus's borders by 'foreign adversaries' would result in the use of nuclear weapons. He also pointed out that the Ukrainians had dislocated 120,000 troops near the border with the Republic of Belarus, forcing Lukashenka to move a third of the Belarusian army's personnel to the border areas. At the same time, Lukashenka reiterated his call for both sides in the conflict to engage in peace talks on the basis of the agreement reportedly reached in Istanbul in April 2022.

Ukrainian State Border Service spokesman Andriy Demchenko, commenting on the Belarusian dictator's words, said there had been no increase in the amount of equipment or

personnel of the Belarusian military near the border with Ukraine. "The situation on the border with the Republic of Belarus remains unchanged, as does Lukashenko's rhetoric, which does not correspond to reality. His escalation of the situation is aimed at pleasing Russia", Demchenko commented.

