Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 11.03.2025 www.osw.waw.pl

Collapse of Ukrainian defences in Kursk region. Day 1112 of the war

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The situation on the frontline

On 8–9 March, Ukraine's defence north and east of Sudzha in Kursk Oblast collapsed. Troops began withdrawing towards the city but, according to various sources, part of the 10,000-strong grouping was cut off in areas occupied by the advancing Russian forces, and an unknown number were taken prisoner. Russia's earlier destruction of river bridges near Sudzha forced the retreating troops to abandon their heavy equipment.

By the morning of 11 March, the area in Sudzha in Kursk Oblast controlled by Ukrainian forces had shrunk to Sudzha along with the surrounding villages and areas west of Sudzha along the Sumy-Kursk route, which had remained under enemy fire control since the beginning of the month. The Ukrainians also hold on to a sliver of Kursk Oblast near Guyevo (south of Sudzha), cut off from the main fighting area, with less than 200 km^2 of Russian territory remaining under their control.

The Russians are continuing their assault on the flanks of the enemy grouping in Kursk Oblast, aiming to completely cut it off from its rear. They have expanded their holdings in the border area of Sumy Oblast, where, according to some sources, they have seized two villages in the direction of Yunakivka, through which supplies from Sumy pass for the units fighting in Kursk Oblast (the Ukrainian side provides conflicting information about the situation in this border area). At the same time, they are applying pressure across a wide front, pushing the Ukrainian troops towards Sudzha. Clashes are ongoing in the north-eastern (industrial) part of this city. According to some reports, the Russians made their way there on 8 March through a disused gas pipe, at that time in the enemy's rear, which was expected to further disorganise it. Sudzha has now been approached from the east by the main Russian forces.

Maintaining a presence on Russian territory will require Kyiv to quickly and significantly reinforce the grouping fighting there. It is true that on 10 March, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, General Oleksandr Syrskyi, stated that the situation in the Sumy and Kursk oblast border area was "under the full control of the Ukrainian army", but he also reported that a decision had been taken to reinforce and that soldiers in Kursk Oblast were not in danger of encirclement. It should be recalled that Ukraine already sent additional units into battle at the beginning of March, and these did not stop the enemy. A real strengthening

of the defence in this oblast would have to involve the withdrawal of some of the most valuable troops from other sections of the front currently seeing fighting.

The extent to which the US's withholding of intelligence assistance may have contributed to the acceleration of the Russian advance remains an open question. Indeed, it must be stressed that the disruption of the Ukrainian defence lines north-west of Sudzha and the taking of fire control of their only supply route had already occurred before Washington's decision. The Ukrainians still have the Starlink system at their disposal, but they are most likely no longer able to use it to conduct precision firing on the positions of enemy HIMARS launchers (the Americans have limited support in this regard to defensive operations on Ukrainian territory). This is the case whether they connect to SpaceX satellites via US terminals or via those of their own design (which, incidentally, they tested in Kursk Oblast in the summer of 2024).

Ongoing attacks by Ukrainian forces in the northern and western parts of Toretsk since the end of February have helped them regain about 20% of the city. Russia's counter-attacks failed, and it will probably not be possible to push the defenders out of Toretsk again without increasing the grouping. Despite the increase in the intensity of the clashes, it must be assumed that **the primary objective of the Ukrainians at present is not to regain the destroyed city, but to demonstrate their determination to continue fighting in a situation of US pressure for Kyiv to actually recognise at least some Russian territorial gains** and to conclude peace **at Kyiv**'s expense as soon as possible. The activity of the defenders also increased in other directions, and south-west of Pokrovsk they managed to regain some positions.

Russian forces have cleared the salient west of Kurakhove and are continuing their advance along the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia road, but at a significantly slower pace than a few weeks earlier. Slight shifts in favour of the invaders are also thought to have occurred in the area of Velyka Novosilka (north-west of which, however, the Ukrainians are thought to have successfully counter-attacked), Chasiv Yar, Siversk and in the direction of Lyman and around Kupiansk.

Russian air attacks

On 7 March, Russia launched another massive attack on the opponent's gas production infrastructure and energy facilities. Damage was reported by Naftogaz and DTEK, and there was an emergency disconnection of power supply in several districts. The most serious damage occurred in Ternopil Oblast (where an underground tremor of 2.6 on the Richter scale was recorded as a result of the explosion), Poltava (where gas production was halted), Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv. The enemy is thought to have used 67 missiles and 194 drones, of which Ukraine claimed to have shot down 34 and 100 respectively, while 86 drones were described as locationally lost. The authorities stressed that Mirage 2000 fighter jets donated by France (alongside US F-16s) took part in repelling the strike for the first time. Facilities in Poltava Oblast were also attacked on the following days (8, 9 and 10 March).

Ukrainians publicised a rocket attack carried out by the invaders on the evening of 7 March on Dobropillia in Donetsk Oblast, which killed 11 and wounded 47 civilians. The town is

now a major road junction through which supplies pass to the defender grouping in the Pokrovsk area, which lies to the south of it (due to earlier Russian actions, communication with Dnipropetrovsk region was hampered, forcing the Ukrainians to reorientate their logistics). The damage inflicted (eight blocks of flats and other facilities were damaged), combined with the nature of the attack (two consecutive strikes with a single Iskander-M ballistic missile), allow us to assume that a shipment of ammunition and/or fuel was hit.

The invaders continued to destroy the energy infrastructure in Odesa Oblast, and their targets included Odesa's port and industrial infrastructure. DTEK facilities were hit by Russian drones on 4, 6, 7 and 8 March, periodically cutting off parts of the city and the region from electricity, water and heating supplies. On 10 March, fuel tanks were attacked. **On 5 March, a Russian missile hit a hotel in Kryvyi Rih – six people were killed and 32 injured.** President Volodymyr Zelensky confirmed that humanitarian volunteers from the US and UK (and, according to some sources, the French) were staying there. Drone strikes and, occasionally, rocket strikes also occurred in Kharkiv (4, 5 and 7 March), Pavlohrad (5 March) and Zaporizhzhia (8 March).

On 8 and 9 March, Sumy was attacked several times, which should be linked to the intensification of the Russian offensive in Kursk Oblast on those days (the city is the logistical centre of the Ukrainian grouping on Russian territory). Kyiv Oblast remains a constant target for drone strikes, and damage to civilian infrastructure has been reported there almost daily, with the exception of 8 March. According to Ukrainian data, from the evening of 4 March until the morning of 11 March, Russia used a total of 1,053 strike drones and their imitators. Ukraine declared it had shot down 644, with 352 locationally lost without negative consequences. The enemy was also thought to have used 81 missiles during this period (after taking into account the 7 March attack), 36 of which were destroyed.

Ukrainian operations against Russia

On the night of 11 March, the Ukrainians carried out their largest strike on Russian territory to date – they probably used at least 337 drones (this was the number of **drones** shot down, according to the Russian side). Sites in six regions of the country were targeted. The attack had little effect – by midday Kyiv time, there were reports of a few casualties and damage only to civilian infrastructure, with a standard halt to airport traffic in Moscow Oblast. As is the case with the increase in Ukrainian activity on the frontline, this intensification of strikes on Russian territory must be linked to the US-initiated peace negotiations currently underway. **The 11 March attack represents a demonstration of Kyiv's determination ahead of the US-Ukrainian talks scheduled for that day in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.**

On 8 March, a drone damaged a refinery tank in the town of Kirishi in Leningrad Oblast. This most likely occurred as a result of a Ukrainian sabotage operation. According to the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, drones struck the Ryazan refinery on 9 March and the Novokuybyshev refinery in Samara Oblast on 10 March. There is no information that they caused any significant damage. On 9 March, Ukrainian drones were also said to have unsuccessfully attacked the Lukoil refinery in Kstovo in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast and the Novolipetsk Metallurgical Plant in Lipetsk Oblast.

Western support for Ukraine

France will provide Kyiv with 155 mm calibre artillery ammunition and AASM aerial bombs for Mirage 2000 fighters worth €195 million. It also intends to speed up deliveries of AMX-10RC armoured reconnaissance vehicles (so-called wheeled tanks) and VAB armoured personnel carriers. This was announced on 9 March by Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu. Three days earlier, his German counterpart Boris Pistorius, in a meeting with Ukrainian minister Rustem Umerov, stated that **Berlin had prepared a new €3 billion military support package for Ukraine**. This had been called for at the end of 2024 by Germany's defence and foreign ministries, but the initiative was blocked by the Chancellery and so far no decision has been made on the transfer of funds. In turn, Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever on 6 March said there would be another postponement of the delivery of the F-16 fighter jets promised to Kyiv, which are due to start in 2026. **At the end of 2024, Portugal delivered eight decommissioned SA-330 Puma helicopters** to the **Ukrainian army**, as confirmed in a list of arms and military equipment sent to Ukraine published by the defence ministry there.

The Netherlands will invest €700 million in drones, with part of the funds to be placed in the Ukrainian arms industry. This was announced on 5 March after Prime Minister Dick Schoof's telephone conversation with President Zelensky. On the same day, the allocation of €10 million for Ukrainian drone production was announced by the Latvian defence ministry. One day earlier, an additional €100 million aid package to Kyiv was passed by the Irish government. Part of it is to be used for the purchase of 'non-lethal military equipment'.

Russian operations against Ukraine

On 7 March, Ukrainian intelligence detained eight people who set fire to state railway facilities, military vehicles and administrative buildings in three of the country's oblasts on the orders of Russian special services. The suspects were recruited through the Telegram messaging service. Among them are four minors aged 14 to 16, who set fire to a railway relay box and a military supply vehicle in Kharkiv Oblast.

On 8 March, the Security Service of Ukraine detained an official of the State Space Agency who was passing classified information on strategic enterprises to the Russians and giving them access to satellite images intended for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The agent was recruited by the Federal Security Service in 2024 through his wife, who resides in Rostov-on-Don, in Russia. He agreed to cooperate in exchange for attractive remuneration and wanted to move to Russia after his planned retirement this summer.

Ukraine's military potential

On 9 March, the Ukrainian defence ministry reported that the first volunteers aged 18 to 24 had signed contracts with the armed forces and taken the military oath, starting service in the 10th Assault Brigade. The specialisations of sharpshooter and scout are the most popular. Volunteers receive a bonus of 200,000 hryvnias (approximately $4,800) upon

joining the army, another 300,000 hryvnias (approximately $7,200) upon completion of training and commencement of frontline service, and 500,000 hryvnias (approximately $12,000) upon completion of their contract and demobilisation.

The Ukrainian media has published critical material pointing to problems in the work of the Defence Procurement Agency. On 10 March, Ukrainska Pravda reported that the agency had not even contracted a trial batch of 155 mm artillery ammunition, which was to be manufactured by a domestic armament plant in cooperation with an EU partner. Last autumn, a private company, Ukrainian Armoured Vehicles, together with a European partner, submitted a bid for the supply of this type of ammunition, claiming to be able to produce 100,000 rounds. To date, however, no new contract has been concluded, which may indicate that the bidder had overestimated its own production capacity. The media highlights that in 2024, the agency signed contracts for the supply of armaments and ammunition worth more than 700 billion hryvnias (about $17 billion), of which contracts worth 450 billion hryvnias (about $10.8 billion) were executed.

