



By: TA | AP Insight

# Can Russia use Trump's 50-day ultimatum to make progress on the front line?



Russia can use the progress it made on the front in eastern Ukraine in the spring to make strategic gains over the next 50 days while US President Donald Trump's ultimatum lasts.

However, this also represents a major challenge for the Russian armed forces, whose movements and actions the Ukrainian army continues to successfully counter.

President Donald Trump's **ultimatum** to Russia to accept a peace deal in Ukraine within 50 days or face bruising sanctions on its energy exports has given the Kremlin extra time to pursue its summer offensive.

The dogged Ukrainian **resistance**, however, makes it unlikely that the Russian military will make any quick gains.

President Vladimir Putin has declared repeatedly that any peace deal should see Ukraine withdraw from the four regions that Russia illegally annexed in September 2022 but never fully captured.

He also wants Ukraine to renounce its bid to join NATO and accept strict limits on its armed forces -- demands Kyiv and its Western allies have rejected.

A chronic shortage of manpower and ammunition has forced Ukrainian forces to focus on holding ground rather than launching counteroffensives.

But despite a renewed Russian push -- and an onslaught of aerial **attacks** on Kyiv and other cities in recent weeks -- Ukrainian officials and analysts say it remains unlikely that Moscow can achieve any territorial breakthrough significant enough in 50 days to force Ukraine into accepting the Kremlin's terms anytime soon.

## Russia's main targets

Since spring, Russian troops have accelerated their land gains, **capturing** the most territory in eastern Ukraine since the opening stages of Moscow's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Russian forces are closing in on the eastern strongholds of Pokrovsk and Kostyantynivka in the Donetsk region, methodically capturing villages near both cities to try to cut key supply routes and envelop their defenders -- a slow offensive that has unfolded for months.

Capturing those strongholds would allow Russia to push toward Slovyansk and Kramatorsk, setting the stage for the seizure of the entire Donetsk region.

If Russian troops seize those last strongholds, it would open the way for them to forge westward to the Dnipropetrovsk region. The regional capital of Dnipro, a major industrial hub of nearly 1 million, is about 150 kilometers (just over 90 miles) west of Russian positions.

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In the neighboring Luhansk region, Ukrainian troops control a small sliver of land, but Moscow has not seemed to prioritize its capture.

The other two Moscow-annexed regions -- Kherson and Zaporizhzhia -- seem far from being totally overtaken by Russia.

Early in the war, Russia quickly overran the Kherson region but was pushed back by Ukrainian forces from large swaths of it in November 2022, and retreated to the eastern bank of the Dnieper River.

A new attempt to cross the waterway to seize the rest of the region would involve massive challenges, and Moscow doesn't seem to have the capability to mount such an operation.

Fully capturing the Zaporizhzhia region appears equally challenging.

## Russian attempts to establish a 'buffer zone'

Moscow's forces captured several villages in northeastern Ukraine's Sumy region after reclaiming chunks of Russia's Kursk region from Ukrainian troops who staged a surprise incursion in August 2024.

Ukraine says its forces have stopped Russia's offensive and maintain a presence on the fringe of the Kursk region, where they are still tying down as many as 10,000 Russian troops.

Putin recently described the offensive into the Sumy region as part of efforts to carve a "buffer zone" to protect Russian territory from Ukrainian attacks.

The regional capital of Sumy, a city of 268,000, is about 30 kilometers (less than 20 miles) from the border. Putin said Moscow doesn't plan to capture the city for now but doesn't exclude it.

**Russia may hope to use its gains in the Sumy and Kharkiv regions as bargaining chips in negotiations**

Military analysts, however, say Russian forces in the area clearly lack the strength to capture it.

Russian forces also have pushed an offensive in the neighboring Kharkiv region, but they haven't made much progress against fierce Ukrainian resistance.

Some commentators say Russia may hope to use its gains in the Sumy and Kharkiv regions as bargaining chips in negotiations, trading them for parts of the Donetsk region under Ukrainian control.

"A scenario of territorial swaps as part of the talks is quite realistic," said Mikhail Karyagin, a Kremlin-friendly political expert, in a commentary,

## Wearing down Ukraine with slow pressure

Ukrainian commanders say the scale and pace of Russian operations suggest that any game-changing gains are out of reach, with Moscow's troops advancing slowly at a tremendous cost to its own forces.

While exhausted Ukrainian forces are feeling outnumbered and outgunned, they are relying on drones to stymie Moscow's slow offensive.

Significant movements of troops and weapons are easily spotted by drones that are so prolific that both sides use them to track and attack even individual soldiers within minutes.

Russian military commentators recognize that Ukraine's drone proficiency makes any quick gains by Moscow unlikely.

They say Russia aims to bleed Ukraine dry with a strategy of "a thousand cuts," using relentless pressure on many sectors of the front and steadily increasing long-range aerial attacks against key infrastructure.

"The Russian army aims to exhaust the enemy to such an extent that it will not be able to hold the defense, and make multiple advances merge into one or several successes on a strategic scale that will determine the outcome of the war," Moscow-based military analyst Sergei Poletayev wrote in an analysis.

"It's not that important where and at what speed to advance: the target is not the capture of this or that line; the target is the enemy army as such."

## Western supplies are essential for Ukraine

Ukrainian troops on the front express exasperation and anger about delays and uncertainty about U.S. weapons shipments.

Delays in U.S. military assistance have forced Kyiv's troops to ration ammunition and scale



back operations as Russia intensifies its attacks, Ukrainian soldiers in eastern Ukraine told The Associated Press.



*Speeded-up weapons shipments from European allies are crucial to allowing Ukraine to stem the Russian attacks - Mark Rutte with Volodymyr Zelenskyy*

The United States will **sell** weapons to its NATO allies in Europe so they can provide them to Ukraine, according to Trump and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Included are Patriot air defense systems, a top priority for Ukraine.

Speeded-up weapons shipments from European allies are crucial to allowing Ukraine to stem the Russian attacks, according to analysts.

“The rate of Russian advance is accelerating, and Russia’s summer offensive is likely to put the armed forces of Ukraine under intense pressure,” Jack Watling of the Royal United Services Institute in London said in a commentary.

But most of the capabilities that Ukraine needs — from drones to artillery systems — can be provided by NATO allies in Europe, he said.

“In the short-term, Europe can cover most of Ukraine’s needs so long as it can purchase some critical weapons types from the U.S.,” Watling said.