

Senior Defense Official Holds a Background Briefing

APRIL 29, 2022

Senior Defense Official

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Okay, good morning, everybody. Thanks for hanging in with me and happy Friday to you all.

We'll -- we'll go through some operational stuff first -- not a whole lot of changes -- and then I'll -- I'll shift from that to -- to the security assistance and -- and the training piece. Again, not a whole lot of updates from yesterday, and then we'll get to your questions.

So here we are on day 64. We've observed more than 1,950, now, missile launches. I would tell you that the -- the -- the preponderance of strikes still are in the JFO and Mariupol, and I would add that in Mariupol, what we're seeing, a predominance of the ordinance being dropped is dumb ordinance, not precision-guided, and -- and we think that that speaks to challenges that the Russians are having with PGM replenishment.

We have also observed, as you guys have all seen, you know, some increasing strike activities in central Ukraine, including Kyiv, as -- as well as Western Ukraine, including Odesa and the Odesa area. Again, I -- I want to be careful here. We -- we don't have perfect visibility into Russian targeting and -- and the Russian mindset as to everything they're doing. But in general, what we think they're trying to do is get at the ability of the Ukrainians to -- to replenish their own stores and to reinforce themselves.

So for instance, we're seeing at -- at least attempted attacks on -- on electrical power facilities, perhaps because the Russians believe if they can knock out some electricity, they can affect the ability of trains, for instance, to move. So it -- it's -- it's not a perfect picture. For instance, in Kyiv, some of the strikes in Kyiv we believe were meant for -- for military production capabilities. Now, I know that there's reports that they hit residential areas. We have no reason to doubt that they did, but we don't believe at 100 percent certain that they meant to hit residential areas. In other words, they could have been misses.

The -- the strikes around Odesa are a little bit more difficult to discern exactly what they're doing there. We still don't see any -- any amphibious move on Odesa, or any ground move on Odesa. Again, it could be of a piece -- could be of a piece of their efforts to try to pin down Ukrainian forces in the area between Odesa and Mykolaiv so that they can't come to the assistance of their colleagues further in the east in the Donbas area. We -- we're not 100 percent sure. I don't want to own their thought process; I'm just trying to give you what we -- what we kind of think.

Now, in the Donbas area, again, still fighting over in -- in various different locations. We believe that essentially what they're doing is -- is continuing to set conditions for a sustained and larger and longer offensive; that I am not suggesting that offensive hasn't begun. Of course, they've begun. There is fighting there. But we still think that it is of a piece of their trying to set the proper conditions for -- for sustained offensive operations.

They have made some -- the Russians now have made some incremental, uneven and slow advances to the southeast and southwest of Izyum. They appear to be advancing toward towards Sloviansk and a place called Barvinkoe. They continue to use -- and this is, again, we've talked about this before, given what we expected them to do in the Donbas and -- and the importance of long-range fires, but what we see them doing is using artillery and some airstrikes in advance of their ground movements. And so their ground movements are fairly plodding because A, the artillery and airstrikes that they are launching against Ukrainian positions are not having the effect that they want them to have. The Ukrainians are still able to resist a number -- and -- and B, they're still a little wary of getting out ahead of their supply lines. They don't want to make the same mistakes that they've made in Kyiv, and so we think they're -- they're making this sort of plodding, uneven progress, but it is very doctrinal in its approach: launch airstrikes, artillery strikes in advance of -- of ground movements, and then only -- only then, when you think you've softened up the Ukrainian lines do you start to move your ground units. But they're running straight into stiff Ukrainian resistance. So that's why we think this progress has been slow and uneven still over the last 24 hours.

We also assess that because of this slow and uneven progress, again, without perfect knowledge of every aspect of the Russian plan, we do believe and assess that they are behind schedule in what they were trying to accomplish in the Donbas. We still believe that -- that they want to -- that -- that they want to press the Ukrainians from three -- from three directions: from the east, where they already have Russian forces in the -- the -- the eastern part of the Donbas region and have had for eight years; from the north, we just talked about that coming out of Izyum; and then from the south coming out of Mariupol. I do not have today a -- a number of how many troops have left Mariupol and are moving north. I -- I know I'm going to get asked that question. I'm trying to get ahead of you here. I don't have that number, but we still assess that they are moving forces, trying to move north out of Mariupol and so that they can approach the Ukrainian Armed Forces from that southerly direction. But again, we would assess that their progress in doing so has been slow and uneven, and certainly not decisive in any -- in any event.

Today, we believe that they -- they still have 92 operational BTGs in Ukraine, but that doesn't mean, as I said yesterday, that these are all -- BTGs are full-up rounds. Yes, they're operational. They're capable of -- of conducting combat operations, but as I said yesterday, we believe they have suffered attrition. They have suffered losses. Not all these BTGs are -- are at 100 percent capability, and we also assess that part of this is not -- is -- is obviously, the -- the fighting that's going on, but also because, you know, they -- they were fairly rushed in reinforcing some of these units into the east. You know, we -- we talked a couple of weeks ago about how they are moving troops out of Kyiv and

Chernihiv and -- and they were to move them to the east to Velykyi and to Belgorod and refit them and resupply them. And that happened, but it happened at a fairly clipped -- a fairly-fast clip, and -- and so we don't assess that every BTG that was put back in was put back in even at full strength. So just something to -- to note.

They, again, they're trying to overcome, you know, some of those challenges they had. We've said that before, but it is absolutely not clear that they have solved all their problems, and so we would not assess that -- that they -- that they -- that they have everything in place that they need to be fully-successful. That's it. Of course, they have a numeric advantage and they are concentrating more force in a smaller geographic area, so we have to take that into account. And again, the Ukrainians are putting up a strong resistance throughout the -- throughout the area.

There's absolutely nothing to update in the maritime environment. I'm not even going to go through all the details with you, cause there's really nothing changed from yesterday. So I'm not going to waste your time with that.

And on security assistance, still a -- still a little bit more than 60 percent now of the howitzers have transferred to -- into Ukrainian military hands. That's not a change from yesterday, it's about 60 percent, but there's been no numeric changes from yesterday.

Let's see. Got about -- you know, the -- the -- the 155 artillery rounds continue to -- to flow into Ukraine, even over the last 24 hours, and more and more are getting into the region for further shipment into Ukraine, but that -- that -- they are arriving in there.

In the next 24 hours, more than a dozen flights are expected from the continental United States and -- and that will include howitzers, more 155 rounds, some of those Phoenix Ghost UAVs, and -- and even some of the radars that we talked about. So the -- that's on PDA-8, and like I said, more than a dozen flights expected in the next 24 hours.

In -- let's see -- see if I can find anything else interesting in here. I would say in the last 24 hour, there have been almost 20 deliveries via airlift from seven different nations that have been received in the region at multiple locations, with -- with everything from mines to -- to small caliber rounds and rockets, 122 millimeter rockets, helmets, body armor, 155 -- I'm sorry, that's from the United States -- but so lots of things coming in from other nations as well.

On the training side, we've got that second class of more than 50 Ukrainian military. They're -- they're now, I think, in day three of their training outside Ukraine. There's additional howitzer training for more additional Ukrainians, almost 100 more getting howitzer training at -- at a different location outside Ukraine.

The -- there are about 15 Ukrainians that are now in day two of a week-long course on the Q-64, and about 60 of them are -- commenced training yesterday. As I said on the M113, that -- that'll be broken up, that's a the five day thing. You've got about three days that are dedicated to maintaining that -- that piece of gear and two days dedicated to learning how to drive it. So that's about a five day thing and it began yesterday.

And I think I'll stop there and we'll take questions. Let's see. Lita, you're on.

Q: Hi, thanks. One quick question on the American who was apparently killed in Ukraine, Joseph Cancel Willy (sic) -- or Willy Joseph. Do you have anything more on him or -- and I know you had very little visibility into Americans that may have gone over there to fight but is -- is there anything you are gleaning on -- on that?

And then just a broader question on the training, is the U.S. helping to facilitate the movement of the Ukrainian soldiers to training? And just give us a -- sort of a -- a better picture of -- I know you don't want to say where it's happening but sort of how this is being sort of constructed?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yeah, so on the -- on the -- on the individual killed, Lita, we don't have any information on -- on him, we -- we -- we just don't. We have -- we have no way of tracking individual Americans that decide to -- to go fight in Ukraine.

I -- let me just say what I -- you know, our -- our -- our thoughts and -- and -- and prayers go out to his family. We understand from press reporting that -- you know, that he -- that he was married and -- and had a -- a -- a young child, and that's -- that's just horrible -- horrible news for any family to get. And -- and the -- and the Department of Defense sends its deepest condolences to all his family and -- and loved ones.

We -- we continue to urge Americans not to go to Ukraine. It is an active war zone. This is not the place and it's not the time for Americans to travel to Ukraine, no matter how altruistic they may be. Now, what we would encourage Americans to do is contribute to any number of non-governmental and non-profit organizations that are trying to contribute to humanitarian assistance there -- Red Cross is a great example. If you want to help Ukraine as a private citizen, that's the best way to do that.

On your other question, without getting into too many specific details -- and I'm not going to if pressed -- I'm just not going to go there, guys -- but yes, we have, in -- in many cases, helped with the transportation of Ukrainian soldiers to training sites, not helping them get out of Ukraine.

So I do not want to leave you with the impression that we're going into Ukraine and we're flying -- we're transporting Ukrainian soldiers out of the country. That is not happening. But once they are out

of the country, in the past, in certain circumstances, we have helped get them to their training locations and we will assist in -- in getting them from those training locations back to a position where they can reenter Ukraine.

We are not -- not transporting soldiers from inside Ukraine out of Ukraine. We -- as the President said, there's not going to be any U.S. forces fighting in Ukraine, and so we are not -- we are not participating in that, but we are helping with their -- with -- with some of the transportation to get them to -- to training locations.

But again, let me just stress, that transportation starts and ends outside of Ukraine. Does that answer your question?

Q: Yes, on that. Do you have any sort of ballpark goal about how many Ukrainian soldiers who are looking forward to trying to train, either the U.S. or the U.S. along with allies -- I mean, what -- can you give us sort of a sense of the scope going forward?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: We're not being driven by a numeric -- numeric goal of -- of -- of numbers of -- of trainers. This isn't like a -- it's not like boot camp, where you -- you've got sort of quotas you have to meet every quarter or every year. We are working with the Ukrainians and -- and -- and having a collaborative discussion with them about how many trainers they want trained on a given system.

So for the radars, you just don't need that many, and so it's a -- it's -- it's about 15 in this first tranche. And we'll see what the next tranches need to be. For the -- for the first two tranches of artillerymen being trained, it was roughly -- it was a little bit more than 50. It wasn't exactly the same number for -- for the second, as well -- as it was for the first, but it was around 50. And that was a decision made in concert with the Ukrainians. I mean, obviously it's their choice how many they send. But it -- it really is driven by how many the Ukrainians want trained on a given system and how they expect to use those trainers when they -- when they go back into Ukraine.

Where are they going to go?

What units are they going to train?

How many training sessions are they going to conduct, for how long?

All that's being decided by the Ukrainians.

So we're not driven by a numeric goal. We're driven by meeting a capability. And that's all been fully

consulted and baked with the Ukrainians.

Now, look, it will go on for as long as it needs to go on. I mean, Secretary Austin was very clear, certainly when we were in Europe just this week, that we're going to help get them the capabilities they need. And part of helping with that is making sure they know how to use some of the capabilities they're not familiar with. And we'll just keep -- we'll keep doing that for as long as we need to.

Sylvie?

Q: Sorry. Sorry. I'm here. You said that the weapons are just starting arriving. So you -- do you see any effect of the -- the -- of the new weapons on the ground already?

Do you see any effect of, you know, the heavier weapons that you have been sending?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yeah, Sylvie, so I can't point to specific battles in which our howitzers have been used yet. They -- they're just arriving in the country. They're being married up now with the trainers. The Ukrainians would have a much better sense of -- of how their training is going in there and the degree to which these howitzers have been used.

I -- I hasten to remind everybody that, once we transfer these systems into Ukraine, they are Ukrainian property. And the Ukrainians determine where they are, how they're used and -- and to what affect, not the United States. And we don't have -- you know, we don't have an ability to know where every single system is, on any given day, and the degree to which it's being effective. So I would refer you to the Ukrainian armed forces to speak to specifically the howitzers. All I can tell you is that -- that -- that, you know, 60 percent of -- of the 90 that we committed to are in the -- are in the country. And -- and I can't -- I honestly just can't go further than that.

And we do believe that -- I will say this, we do believe that these howitzers will be, when applied, can be very, very effective in helping them in the Donbas fight, which we've already seen is deeply reliant on long-range fires, specifically artillery, by both sides. So we -- we firmly believe that these howitzers, once put in the fight, will be effective in the fight.

David Martin?

Okay, nothing heard. Tony Capaccio?

Q: Hi, there. What -- when will the DOD detail the \$16 billion portion of the supplemental?

How and when will it be made public, sir?

Is the comptroller going to be sending a letter to the defense committees, or how is it going to work out?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I -- I don't have an update for you on what communication the comptroller's going to have with Congress on this, Tony.

I mean, obviously we need to get it approved so we can start to fill it out. I suspect that we will already be doing some -- some pen-to-paper work on what we would want in the -- in both the -- in both the \$6 billion for USAI and what we would want to purchase, as well as the \$5 billion for -- for PDA and what would come into that.

I -- I know that there are planners that are starting to put pen to paper on what that -- what specific systems -- but we don't want to get too far ahead, either, because we don't know when Congress will approve it or even, quite frankly, if they'll approve it. And we want to make sure that, as we fill these out, we're doing it in concert with the Ukrainians and they need in the moment, or what -- or for the future moment.

And so our focus right now is on completing PDA-8 and -- and having continued conversations with them about their -- their needs going forward.

So I'm afraid I just don't have a specific update for you, but I can assure you that we are already beginning to think about what -- what kinds of systems could be in there.

But, again, we won't make those decisions unilaterally. We'll make them in concert, full concert with the Ukrainians.

Q: Okay, a lot of -- lot of attention on the howitzers. At this point, can you say, though, that they haven't actually started firing on Russian forces and that the artillery duel, so to speak, is yet to come?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Tony, as I said to Sylvie, we -- we simply don't know. We just don't know. And I can't tell you that we -- that we will know, unless in fact the Ukrainians tell us, "Hey, we used your howitzer in -- in a certain location, at a certain time, with a certain effect."

But we -- we may not have that kind of granularity, Tony.

Q: Sure, and one other thing. What's the status of the delivery of the 700 Switchblades and the 121 Ghost -- Phoenix Ghost drones that have been committed to the Ukraine?

And have -- have Ukrainian soldiers actually been trained on the Ghost Phoenix at this point -- Phoenix Ghost?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yeah, I think that, as far as I know, there hasn't been -- there hasn't been training on the -- on the Phoenix Ghost yet. We -- again, we believe that a first tranche of those drones should be arriving in the region today, but not all 121, but a first tranche of them will be arriving in -- in the region today.

And, again, we're still working out how the specific training is going to be done on this. We don't believe that the training will --

(CROSSTALK)

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Tony, just let me finish for a second. We don't believe that the training will take very long for -- for pilots that have some existing UAS knowledge. It shouldn't take very long.

Q: And the Switchblades, the 700 that have been committed? What's the status of those, roughly?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I don't have an update for you on that.

Q: Okay, thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Well, actually, let me just --

Q: Yeah, if you -- go through your cheat sheet there.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Thank you for giving me that permission.

So total, right now, we're still at 100 of the Switchblades.

Q: Okay, thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yeah. Okay, Phil Stewart?

Q: Hey. There was a German magazine report saying that U.S. special forces were inside Ukraine training Ukrainians on urban warfare techniques. Just double-checking, are there any -- has there been any change to the disposition, the idea that U.S. forces are allowed or not allowed to go into Ukraine to do training?

Thanks.

(AUDIO GAP)

Q: We can't hear anything, by the way.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Can you guys hear me now?

Q: Now we can.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Hello?

(CROSSTALK)

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: -- what the hell happened there. Phil, did you get my answer?

Q: No, no, no, no. I thought maybe the question was, like, you know, a -- a shocker and the systems went down.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No, it wasn't a shocker. I guess the system screwed up. What I was saying is there are no U.S. forces training in Ukraine.

Q: Thanks so much.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Okay. Eric Schmitt?

Q: Two questions. You said in your introductory comments that the Russians are behind schedule in what they're trying to achieve in the Donbas. How far behind schedule are they, in your estimate? And what had the Pentagon -- what have they thought they would have been able to achieve by this point? Then I've got a -- one more question.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I'd say, just in general, we'd assess, cause it's different on every line of -- of approach, Eric, but I think you're -- be fine if you said that we believe they're at least several days behind where they wanted to be. But again, it varies on the line, whether it's from the north or the south.

And we -- we believe that they -- they -- they meant to be much further along, in terms of a total encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the east, and they have not been able to link north with south. In

fact, they're nowhere close to linking north with south as the Ukrainians continue to fight back.

Q: And the second question is there was a statement out of NATO I think overnight or early this morning about over the past four days, NATO aircraft have gone up to intercept Russian warplanes in both the Baltic and Black Seas. No contact made but just wanted to get your sense of what this means at this time, over the last four days, of the significance of these -- of these intercepts? Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yeah, I -- I -- I checked on this myself. I -- I've learned that NATO has offered an additional statement, making it clear that -- that all these -- these interchanges were safe and professional. There was no threat by Russian aircraft to -- to NATO airspace or NATO territory, that these were more normal intercepts. And again, you know, the NATO air policing effort is long longstanding, years long, and there's routine interchanges with -- with Russian aircraft as a result of that air policing mission.

And the indications that I've gotten this morning is that -- that those -- those exchanges in the last 24 hours were also kind of akin to that safe and professional, did not pose a threat.

Felicia Schwartz?

Q: Thanks. Can you update us on Russia's nuclear posture amid renewed threats from Putin this week? What's the latest U.S. assessment on whether Russia would use tactical nuclear weapons?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: We continue to monitor their nuclear capabilities every day the best we can and we do not assess that there is a threat of the use of nuclear weapons and no threat to NATO territory. And the last thing I will say is that as he does every day, the -- the Secretary assesses our own strategic deterrent posture and he has seen no reason to change that strategic deterrent posture.

Lara Seligman?

Q: Hey. Thanks for doing this. I just wanted to ask you a big picture question. Just given what you've been saying about the logistical issues that Russia has been having with logistics and PGMs, how does the Pentagon assess broadly that the -- the fight in the Donbas is going for Ukraine? Do you assess that they're going to continue to be able to hold against Russia? And can you give us any details of -- for how long you think this might last?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It's very difficult, Lara, to -- to predict with certainty the future of war. I -- I -- I think any -- anybody here would -- would -- would be humble about that. And it's very hard to make specific predictions about a war we're not fighting.

I would just tell you that the Ukrainians continue to resist effectively in the Donbas. We -- you know, one of the reasons why we think they're -- the Russians are behind schedule is because of the Ukrainian resistance. And we're doing everything we can, as well as, you know, 40 other nations, to help the Ukrainians continue that -- that -- that defense.

Now, look, we've also been honest about now that the fighting has shifted to the Donbas, an area which is more confined geographically, where they have shorter lines of communication -- the Russians -- that they have certainly superior numbers and that -- that they can now -- they're trying to learn from some of their previous mistakes, that the fighting there could become prolonged. And I know everybody wants to get, you know -- what does that mean? I -- I -- we can't tell you, we don't know. Weeks, months, we're -- we're not sure.

But we -- we certainly believe that the conditions are -- are -- could be set for a much longer slog here in -- inside the Donbas, given both sides' familiarity with the terrain, the long range fires that both sides are applying, the -- the -- the artillery action to mechanize -- the -- the -- the propensity to be able to use mechanized maneuvers here in this part -- part of Ukraine.

I mean, it could go on for some time. We've described it as a potential knife fight and I think it's beginning to shape up to be exactly that.

Dan Lamothe?

Q: Good morning. Thank you. Acknowledging you don't know where the Howitzers are once transferred, can you speak more broadly to what the counter-battery fight has looked like thus far, what you're seeing, what you're hearing?

And can you drill down a bit at all on what you're seeing south of Izyum, in that area, southeast -- southeast and southwest? Thanks.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I don't have a whole lot on the use of artillery. Again, you know, we -- we don't have perfect visibility in every -- in -- in every aspect of the fight but we do see the Russians using artillery to -- to -- as I've said, to -- in advance of the movement of ground forces.

But they have not been -- our assessment is they have not been as effective using long range fires against the Ukrainians as they wanted to be. And -- and the Ukrainians also have long range fires of their own, they have artillery, and they're -- and they're getting now -- they'll be getting more American artillery and the trainers to go with it, to use in their defense.

So this -- this could become a bit of a gun battle here and -- and certainly the -- the -- the Russians are -- are staying close to doctrine, in terms of how they're using artillery in advance of ground

movement. But I -- I -- you know, I just don't have a blow-by-blow for you.

Now -- and things are going on -- on the -- your question about moving to the south out of Izyum -- so again, we -- we sort of -- if you draw -- if -- if you're looking at Izyum, if you were to -- the way I'd sort of look at this, Dan, is -- is draw a line directly south from Izyum, going towards a town called Dobropillya -- they -- they -- they clearly want to make gains going from Izyum down towards Dobropillya -- actually, more to the northwest of that town. That's that southwestern movement that we've been talking about.

And then -- and then draw the line from Izyum at about, not quite 180 south, but maybe 170 south, a little bit to the east of south, towards Sloviansk, and they -- they keep trying to move on Sloviansk, and I mentioned that earlier. But they have -- they have had trouble advancing. They -- they -- they're -- they're trying hard. They -- they don't want to get ahead of their supply lines. The Ukrainians are pushing back, and so their advance towards the Sloviansk area -- Sloviansk-Kramatorsk, that -- sort of that little -- that little axis right there. They haven't made much progress.

And then if I -- and then draw another line out of Izyum just a little bit south of east towards a town called Lyman, L-Y-M-A-N, Lyman, which is where they're also trying to advance to. But again, they -- they have made -- but -- but -- but plodding progress there. They're not -- they're not moving very fast. A few kilometers a day is about the most they can handle because they're getting pushed back, and because they're -- again, they're wary of getting out ahead of their supply lines.

So that's sort of the push out of Izyum, and that's really, I mean, there is some push from a town called Kreminna, where we do believe the Russians have possession of that, which is, if you look at Lyman on a map and you look not due -- directly due east, but a little bit to the northeast, you'll see this town of Kreminna -- I'm -- I'm probably butchering how to pronounce that, and we do believe the Russians are in control of that, and they are -- they -- they want to move from Kreminna west towards Lyman. So Lyman is definitely in -- in their target sites, but again, they haven't really been able to get much beyond Kreminna. Again, they're -- the Ukrainians are up there. They're in that area and they're fighting back bravely.

And it's the best I can do. I mean, I -- I just don't have a -- you know, we just don't have a fingertip feel for every single scrap on any given day, but -- but that's what the map looks like right now.

Courtney?

QUESTION: Hi. Just one on the -- the announcement from the White House yesterday. Have you guys gotten any more clarity that -- on the -- any specifics on the accelerated cyber capabilities against air defense systems? You know, we -- I -- I know the secretary talked a little bit about it yesterday, and you mentioned specifically yesterday the -- the S300s. Is there talk about sending

THAAD or Patriots or something like that? And then, what is accelerated cyber capabilities even mean? Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: We're just talking about being able to -- to continue to help Ukraine improve their cyber resilience, and some of those funds will be dedicated to -- to ongoing -- will -- will be additional to ongoing efforts to improve the Ukrainians' cyber -- cyber defense and resilience capabilities, and I don't think we want to get into more than that. And I think the secretary answered the advanced air systems, air defense systems pretty well yesterday. I -- I don't want to go beyond what he said yesterday. I think -- I think he captured it pretty well.

QUESTION: I guess what I'm trying to figure out, though, is do you -- do you expect that the U.S. is going to start giving the Ukrainians some U.S. air defense systems, advanced air defense systems?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: There's no -- there's no active discussion about that right now, other than -- other than, of course, Stingers, short-range air defense. But in the long term -- in the -- in long-range air defense, what we are focused on, as the secretary said, was on helping them get the kinds of systems that they -- that they know how to use effectively and -- and are familiar with, and I don't have any indications that -- that right now, we're prepared to go beyond that.

QUESTION: Okay, thanks.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Jennifer Griffin? Jen, you there? Yeah, maybe we lost Jen.

Heather from USNI?

QUESTION: Thanks so much. So I know that there's no maritime updates in the Black Sea area, but I was wondering if you've seen any accumulation of Russian warships in the Mediterranean that suggest that they might be trying to get war ships into the Black Sea.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No, I -- I don't think we have any -- any updates in the -- in their Med posture that would -- I'm looking now at the maritime stuff. We're not -- no. We're not -- we're not seeing anything in their -- in their Med maritime posture that -- that give us immediate concern that they're putting more in the Black Sea, no.

Jack Detsch?

QUESTION: Sorry, on mute. I was wondering if you have anything on the reports about Valery Gerasimov, the -- the Russian chief of staff either being in the field in Ukraine taking over as theater commander or assisting in, apparently, this -- this Russian move out of Belgorod.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No, I mean, we -- you know, we've seen the rumors, but we're -- we -- we have nothing to comment on or confirm with that.

QUESTION: Got it. And then have you heard anything about the -- the Russians massing more forces around Kharkiv to -- to move further south?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: The -- let me -- let me check that. Hold on a second. Kharkiv -- not ready for a question on Kharkiv, Jack. Let's see if I've got something on that.

QUESTION: Yeah, the -- the reporting we've seen was they were southeast of -- of Kharkiv for -- for another drive. I'm sorry.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: That -- that they are southeast of Kharkiv?

QUESTION: Yeah, about 75 miles.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yeah, so what we're showing -- and again, not -- not perfect, but we -- we -- we do show some -- some kinetic activity, in other words, some -- some strike activity around Kharkiv. Our assessment is that the Ukrainians continue to mount a strong -- what we are referring to as a strong resistance in Kharkiv and the surrounding area. So they're -- the -- the -- we assess that the Ukrainians are in control of Kharkiv, but they're -- but they -- but they have faced some stiffer Russian activity both in terms of bombardment and -- and -- and still -- still Russian forces around Kharkiv, but they're -- but they're pushing back. So that's the best I can do, I'm afraid.

What -- what we -- what I -- maybe what you were asking is are we seeing any big movement from the Russians out of Kharkiv on sort of a -- a line of access, and the answer to that would be no.

Okay, I think that's about it for today, guys.

Out here.
