

IPB Questions: Blocking Position 07

From: S3

To: S2

Subj: IPB Questions on RUS Company Blocking Position 07 at Stepne UKR

1. **How would we attack Blocking Position 07?** We need IPB products to plan our attack.
2. **IPB 1.** Our battalion AO is a zone, six-kilometers wide, centered on the north-south road. Recommend an **Area of Interest (AOI)** to collect on. Include the adjacent positions, any AA for an armored CATK RES, and the brigade artillery positions 12 km back. We need to put eyes on those.
3. **IPB 2.** When do the autumn rains start? When these fields get muddy, all movement will be **severely restricted**. Where is the assembly area for the armored CATK RES? That is **key terrain**. We need to know their **avenue of approach**. We need to know *our* **avenues of approach**. What are the crops? These fields are ploughed. How soft are they?

We need to know everything about the *one grid square* in **Figure 1**. It is a single position on the main road. What is their **visibility**? **Concealment**? **Fields of fire**? Are there **obstacles**, covered by fire, that we cannot see? Why are the flanks hanging, vulnerable to flank ATK, envelopment, or bypass?

Is this a priority position? Is it new? Was it built by hand or machine? The zigzag looks professional, but why are there are no covered positions? See **Figure 2**. Are there any revetments or vehicle positions? Mortar positions? Is there lumber staged to build overhead cover? Is there any evidence of weapons bunkers, underground command posts, latrines, or sleeping positions?



Figure 1. Russian defensive position outside Stepne, Ukraine, Zaporizhia Oblast, 15 Nov 2022. **Source:** AEI CTP ISW.³

Adjacent positions are **key terrain**. Can they support each other with machine gun direct fire? Reinforce? On what **avenues of approach**? Across the fields? Are the roads mined? This block is apparently not part of an integrated defensive belt. We do NOT need any **civil considerations**.

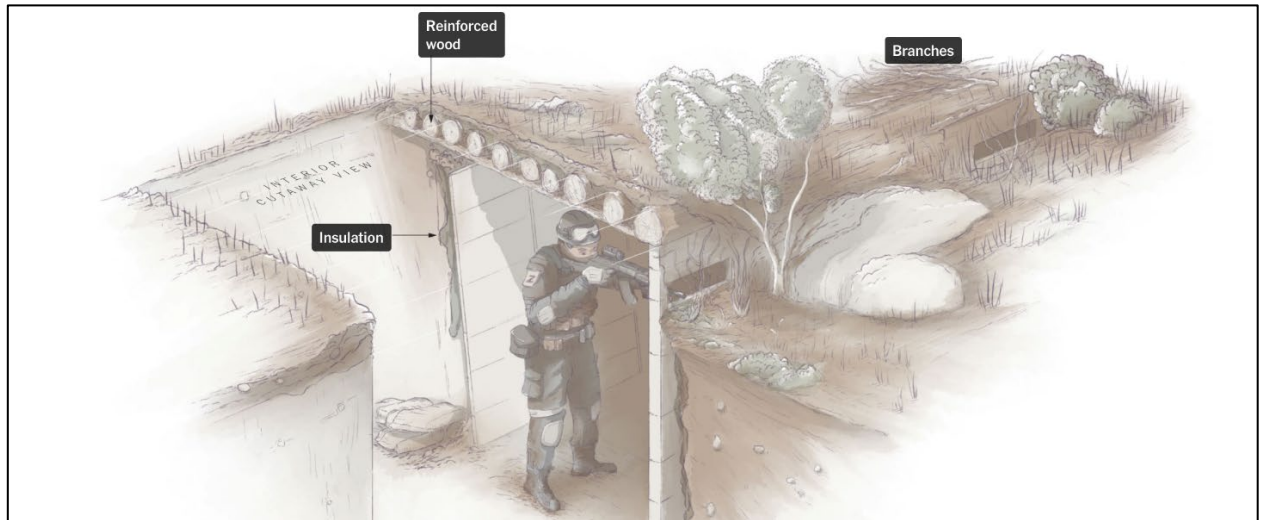


Figure 2. RUS trench diagram with overhead cover: logs, plastic sheeting, and earth. **Source:** NYT.²

- IPB 3.** Who defends Blocking Position 07? What unit of what brigade? How long have they been here? Is it actually a company position? What is the enemy unit's experience, leadership, training, and manning? How aggressive is their HHQ? Their RES? How responsive is their artillery support?

How do they defend Blocking Position 07? Where are the machine guns, mortars, and rockets? Where are their vehicles? We need a template of probable positions like **Figure 3**. Can a forward unit withdraw on the flanks? If every platoon has MANPADS, where do you assess their locations?

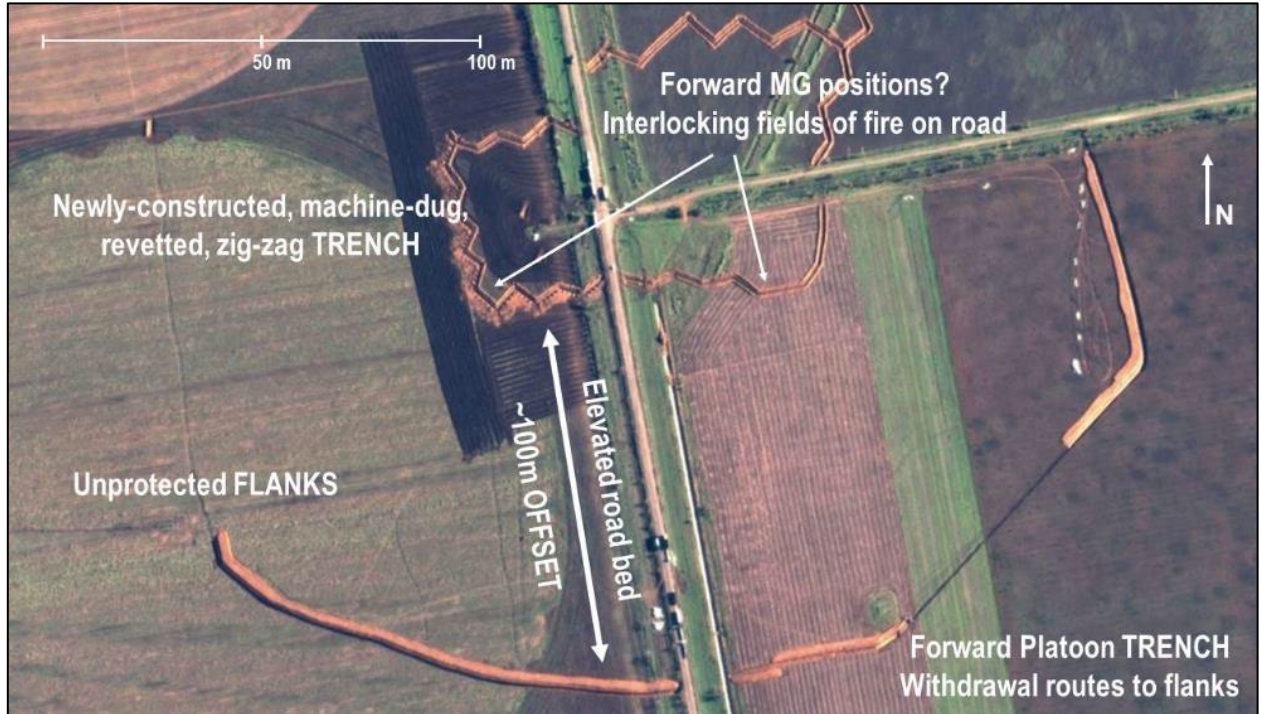


Figure 3. Example template of Russian defensive position.

- IPB 4.** How will they fight? How will they respond to our UAS? Reconnaissance? Artillery? Probing attacks? What decisions will the enemy commander make? What triggers the RES?

5. **Improvements.** What will the position look like in three weeks? Is it a priority? How will they improve it? What indicators will tell us that they are improving? How long will improvements take?

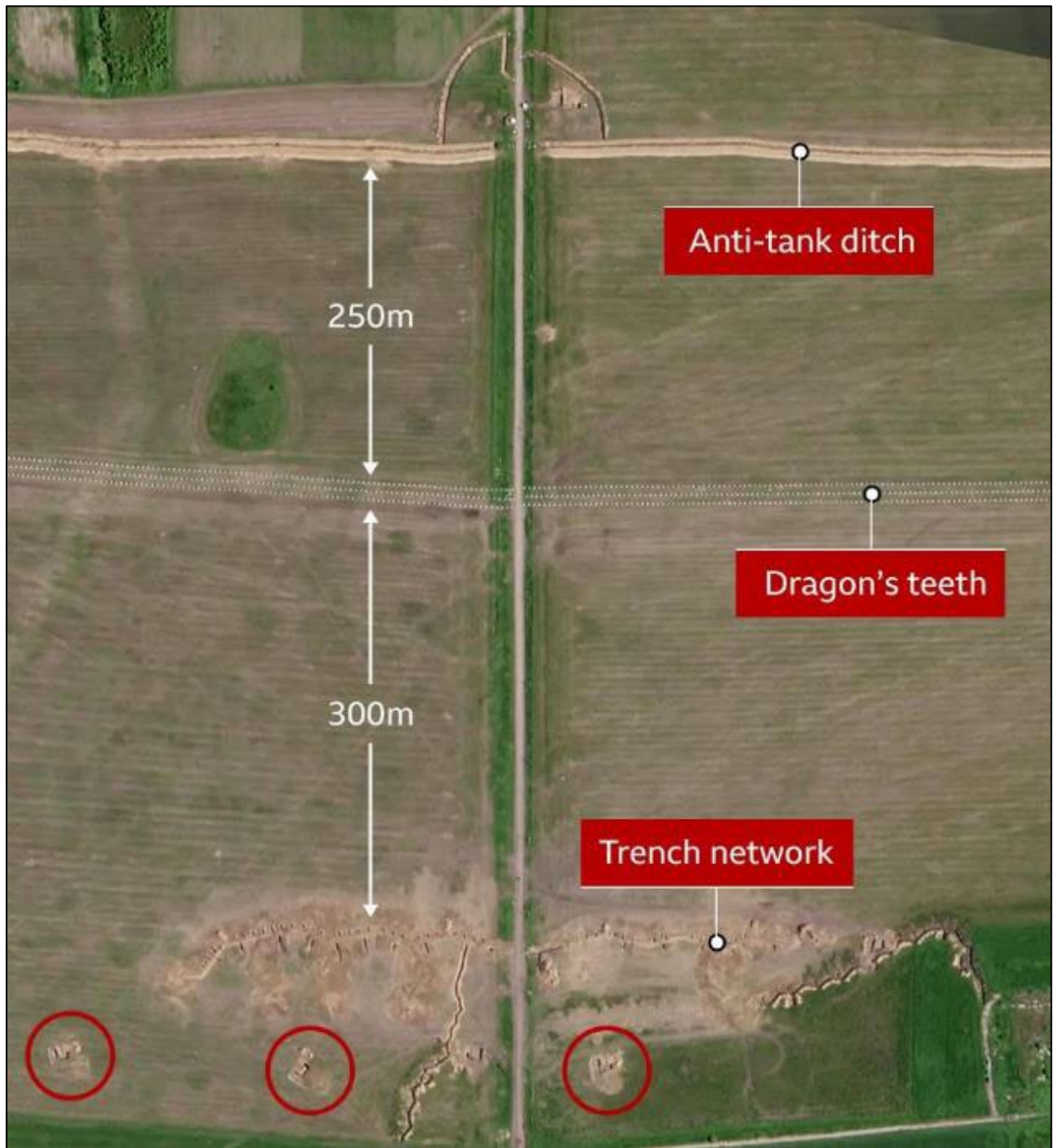


Figure 4. Improved RUS defensive position. **Note:** Mortar positions in circles. **Source:** Planet Labs PBC, 3 May 2023.⁴

Some improved RUS positions have anti-tank ditches out at 600 meters for ATGM, and cement pyramid-shaped dragon's teeth closer in.⁴ Some trench networks are hardened with bunkers, obstacles, minefields, and vehicle revetments.² See **Figure 4**. Are RUS engineer units available?

6. **Defense in depth.** What do you know about RUS defense in depth practices? Our battalion IPB for one enemy position is entirely different than a HHQ IPB looking at a multi-battalion defense in depth. **Figure 5** shows multiple defensive lines, each separated so that incoming artillery on one line does not impact another. Their minimum separation is 1 km. The usual separation is 5 km. At

that distance, there is NO mutual support between the lines because battalion weapons, including mortars and ATGM, cannot range the 5 km from one line to the next.

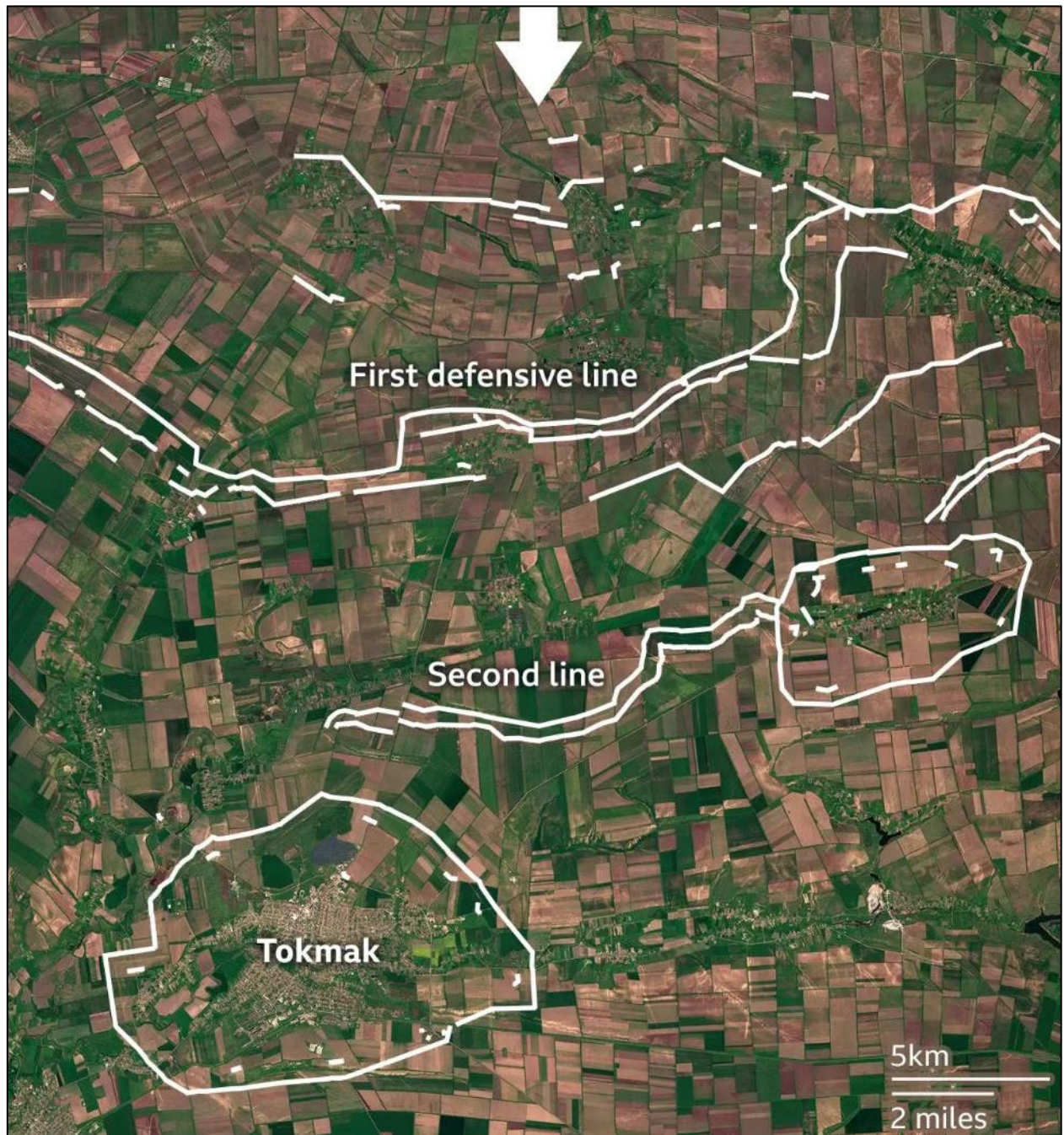


Figure 5. Russian defense in depth, Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast, UKR. **Source:** BBC, Planet Labs PBC, 3 May 2023.⁴

Study how RUS defenses in depth are enabled by UAS-to-artillery fires networks. RUS has consolidated their artillery and now controls fire from HHQ due to a shortage of FOs.¹ During artillery duels, rapid target acquisition by UAS—less than 5 minutes—is critical, too important to be left to human observers.¹ If targets were processed by a fire control HQ, it would take 30 minutes.

Because of UAS and long-range precision fires, key sites and material stockpiles cannot be concealed, except in deep subterranean or heavily hardened structures.¹ RUS field artillery depots, generally in warehouse buildings, supply ammunition to batteries within 30–50 km. But these

depots are vulnerable to long-range (50 km) enemy fire. Sometimes batteries accumulate vast amounts of ammunition at their firing positions, but this increases the risk of being targeted and reduces the unit's ability to displace. During the offensive against Donbas in May–June 2022, RUS artillery—consolidated in brigade support groups of 80–90 tubes—was firing 20,000 shells per day.¹

RUS counter-battery fire is not provided by the unit being targeted, but by an adjacent unit, so that the targeted battery can displace (for MLRS) or seek cover (tube artillery).¹ RUS batteries generally position themselves one-third of their range behind the front line, with 100 to 150 meters between cannons. Fire missions are executed by entire batteries.¹ RUS MLRS (BM-21 Grad, 9K57 BM-27 Uragan, and 9K58 BM-30 Smerch) are positioned at their maximum ranges of 35 to 70 kilometers.

7. **Defensive positions.** In agricultural areas, small, flat, enclosed fields, bordered by berms and tree lines, make for strong RUS defenses. See **Figure 6**. Summer crops, like corn and wheat, provide concealment.² Tree lines, with overhead concealment, hide infantry trenches, ATGM, tanks, and guns. Behind the infantry, artillery and air defense batteries also use foliage for concealment. Smart RUS helicopter pilots fly low and pop up behind tree lines to fire at approaching UKR vehicles.²



Figure 6. Russian defense in depth, Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast, UKR. **Note:** Belts are 8 km apart.²
Source: BBC, Planet Labs PBC, 3 May 2023.⁴

In small towns along attack routes, RUS observation posts, in multi-story buildings, call artillery, snipers, infantry ATGM, and tanks, to fire on UKR units.² Intersections are covered by intersecting machine gun and ATGM. Clearing a single village is a time-consuming and exhausting operation.

Hardened cover is a requirement for stationary defensive positions at vital locations. Hasty positions, if not improved, suffer airburst artillery attack. Urban cellars are ideal. Digging positions requires engineers with excavation equipment, sheeting, and overhead cover materials like lumber. RUS units disperse to avoid UAS observation and artillery fires, but isolated units are then vulnerable to ground assault. Moving dispersed units—for reinforcement or counterattacks—must be done rapidly under enemy UAS observation. Concentrated units are quickly targeted by artillery.

Russian companies are often dispersed across a 3-kilometer AO. See **Figure 7**. But dispersion causes problems for unit commanders, including control, situation awareness, maintenance, identification of friendlies, and deconfliction of direct fires. Resupply is difficult. Multiple small stockpiles are required. Tent cities do not survive.



Figure 7. Dispersed hedgerow positions. **Note:** Labeled open fields are ~1.2 km wide, ~1.7 km north to south. **Source:** NYT.²

When RUS units deviate from assigned positions, routes, or schedules, they are often fired on by their own artillery. In complex terrain, RUS units fire on each other. Because map-reading and navigation are poor, moving RUS units are often targeted by their own UAS.

UAS airspace is rarely deconflicted. UAS cannot be excluded from specific air space because front-line units do not wait for HHQ approval. All units need a way to detect and defeat UAS, either by dazzling sensors, jamming navigation, or jamming the control signals. Russian fratricide—jamming their own UAS—is a problem.¹

Sources:

1. Zabrodskiy, M., Watling, J., Danylyuk, O.V., & Reynolds, N. (2022). *Preliminary lessons in conventional warfighting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022*. Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).
2. Gibbons-Neff, T., Holder, J., & Hernandez, M. (2023, June 28). 21 Miles of Obstacles. *The New York Times*.
3. Mappes, G. & Kagan, F.W. (2022, November 27). Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 27. *American Enterprise Institute (AEI) Critical Threats Project (CTP) with the Institute for the Study of War (ISW)*.
4. Palumbo, D. & Rivault, E. (2023, May 22). Ukraine war: Satellite images reveal Russian defences before major assault. *BBC*.