

## Ukraine's counteroffensive has begun



British Defence Intelligence update on Russian attacks and troop locations as of today.

For weeks, indeed months, there has been speculation about precisely when Ukraine's long-anticipated counteroffensive would begin. Today there's some reason to believe it began yesterday. Today, the Russian Defense Ministry announced that, starting yesterday morning, Ukrainian forces began a "large-scale offensive" on five sections of the contact line between Russian and Ukrainian forces in the southern area of Donetsk region. According to defense ministry spokesman Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, two Ukrainian mechanized brigades, with six mechanized and two tank battalions, were involved, with support from other units and forces. Two pro-Russian reporters confirmed today that an attack was in progress. One of the reports said "30 NATO vehicles" were involved in the attack, including German-produced Leopard tanks. A Russian military blogger likewise reported Leopards in action. The Kyiv Post was unable to confirm the reports, but if either report is true it would mark the first time a Leopard has been used in the conflict.

This evening, after a day of not commenting on the reports, Kyiv acknowledged it was conducting "offensive actions" on the front line and noted some progress in the Bakhmut area. Deputy Defense Minister Ganna Malyar posted on Telegram, "We continue holding the defense that began on Feb. 24, 2022. The defensive operation consists of everything, including counteroffensive actions. Therefore, we start going on the offensive in certain directions. In particular, Bakhmut sector remains the epicenter of military operations. There we are moving along a fairly wide front. We are

successful. We occupy the dominant heights. The enemy defends itself, wants to hold its positions. In the south, the enemy holds the defense. Fighting of local significance continues.” Likewise, Ukrainian Col.-Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of Ukraine’s ground forces, reported on Telegram, “Bakhmut direction. The elimination of the enemy continues, the Defense Forces are moving forward. We are getting them on the ground and from the air.”

Further to the south, in the southern Donbas sector, a pro-Russian source reported Ukrainian forces were engaged “in heavy battles” near the village of Novodonetske and had “gained ground at some locations” and “were attempting to exploit this success.” And a pro-Russia reporter confirmed a Ukrainian attack was in progress in Novodonetske and said “30 NATO vehicles” were involved in the attack, including German-produced Leopard tanks. A Russian military blogger likewise reported Leopards in action.

In another report, the head of the Donetsk People’s Republic, the pseudo-state created by pro-Russian separatists in part of the Donetsk region, said, “Over the past two days, the enemy attacked twice from the direction of Vremevka [nearVuhledar} and sustained heavy losses both in terms of manpower and military hardware.” He added that “the fighting continues.”

Another indicator that the counteroffensive may have begun is the fact that today’s map from British Defense Intelligence (above) shows a small, but significant, change for the first time in several weeks in the contested area between the two sides – specifically, a widening of the contested area between Lyman in northern Donetsk region and Rubizhne in western Luhansk region.

The reports are fragmented and incomplete. But yesterday is likely to be remembered as the day Ukraine’s counteroffensive began.

David R. Cameron  
June 5, 2023