

Despite dam catastrophe, Ukraine pushes forward with counteroffensive



UK Defence Intelligence update on Russian attacks & troop locations as of June 8.

Notwithstanding the devastating consequences of the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam on the Dnipro River, Ukraine's long-awaited counteroffensive, which began on Sunday with what the Russian defense ministry described as a "large-scale offensive" at several places along the contact line between Russian and Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine, and what Kyiv acknowledged were "offensive actions," continued this week. Since Sunday, Ukrainian forces have been attacking Russian positions on the northern and southern flanks of Bakhmut and have taken back some of the territory on those flanks. Yesterday, Col.-Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of Ukraine's ground forces, posted a message on Telegram that the Ukrainian forces were making progress and continuing to advance toward Bakhmut: "The defense forces are successful and continue to move. The defense operation is ongoing, the enemy tries to stop our forces but is fought back." He also posted a video showing Ukrainian troops destroying a Russian tank behind one of the destroyed buildings in that city.

Elsewhere since Sunday, Ukrainian forces attacked Russian positions in Zaporizhzhia region southwest of the small city of Orikhiv, which is about 25 miles southeast of the city of Zaporizhzhia and on the road to the larger city of Tokmak, another 25 miles to the south. As yesterday's British Defence Intelligence map of Russian attacks and troop locations indicates (with green arrows), another focus of the Ukrainian counteroffensive, in addition to Bakhmut, is the area west of Vuhledar along the boundary between the Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions. Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, the Russian defense ministry spokesman, said the Russian forces had repulsed several Ukrainian attacks near the settlements of Vremivka and Velyka Novosilka with seaborne and airborne precision weapons. Today, Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar, writing on Telegram, summed up the situation in eastern Ukraine: "The situation is tense in all areas of the front line. The east is the epicenter. The enemy continues to concentrate its

main efforts on the Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Maryinka directions. The enemy is conducting defensive actions in the Zaporizhzhia sector.” She said battles were continuing near Orikhiv and nearby Velyka Novosilka and Russian troops were mounting an “active defense” at Orikhiv. Konashenkov, the Russian defense spokesman, said, “The armed forces of Ukraine continued attempts to conduct offensive operations in the southern Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia directions. The tensest battles took place in areas near the settlements of Maryinka and Avdeyevka [Russian spelling] The southern battlegroup successfully repulsed six attacks.... The enemy was stopped from breaking into our defenses.”

But that surely won't be the last Ukrainian effort to push back the Russian forces in that area. One of the major strategic objectives of the Ukrainian counteroffensive is to prevent Russia from retaining a “land bridge” between Russian territory and Crimea (plus any other territory Russia may hold in southeastern Ukraine). To do that, Ukraine will have to drive southward all the way to the Sea of Azov. That, obviously, will not be easy; Russia has strengthened its defenses in that area to prevent that from happening. But that is the ambition – that and winning back all of Luhansk and Donetsk regions in eastern Ukraine. And despite the catastrophic damage inflicted by Russia when it destroyed the Kakhovka dam, there's no reason to think Ukraine will stop fighting until that happens.

David R. Cameron
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