

## Counteroffensive, now in fifth week, continues with small advances



UK Defence Intelligence update on the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of July 4.

On June 30, Yevgeny Prigozhin, whose private military company, the Wagner Group, has been deeply involved in Russia's war in Ukraine, issued another rant about the leadership of the ministry of defense – specifically, Sergei Shoigu, the Minister of Defense, and Gen. Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff – charging, as he had on several previous occasions, that they had not only failed to provide his troops with ammunition and other supplies but had even attacked his troops. The next day some of his troops went to Rostov-on-Don, which is about 100 miles from Mariupol at the head of the Sea of Azov, and took control of the military headquarters there. He said his troops had blockaded the city and were going to Moscow and that it wasn't a military coup but a "march of justice." He demanded to see Shoigu and Gerasimov and said, "We will destroy anyone who stands in our way. We are moving forward and will go to the end."

But the Federal Security Services (FSB) charged Prigozhin with organizing an "armed insurrection," President Putin declared it was a "criminal adventure" and an "armed mutiny," and Prigozhin didn't get to Moscow and didn't get to speak with Shoigu and Gerasimov (although he did speak briefly with their deputies in Rostov). As the Wagner troops moved northward toward Moscow, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, who was in contact with both Prigozhin and Putin, arranged a deal in which, in exchange for the Wagner Group stopping its advance and returning to its camps in Ukraine and Prigozhin agreeing to relocate in Belarus, the charges against him would be dropped. Prigozhin, facing imminent arrest by the FSB, agreed to the deal, the Wagner

troops stopped moving toward Moscow and returned to their camps in Ukraine, and last Tuesday Prigozhin flew to his new home in Minsk.

In the meantime, last week Ukraine's counteroffensive entered its fourth week. Last Monday, Ukraine announced it had regained control of another village in the region of Zaporizhzhia in southeastern Ukraine. Writing on Telegram, Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said, "Defence forces have brought Rivnopil back under our control." Although only a small town, it is located about 20 miles south of Vuhledar and 15 miles west of Volnovakha, well inside the territory that British Defence Intelligence indicates, in its most recent map of the battlefield situation (above), is controlled by Russian forces. Maliar also said the Ukrainian forces had taken back about 130 square kilometers (50 square miles) of territory in the south since the counteroffensive began on June 4. A week earlier she had said the Ukrainian forces had taken back 113 square kilometers so, as she said, "the situation in the south has not undergone significant changes over the past week." Nevertheless, she noted that offensive action had started along the eastern part of the contact line running from Bakhmut to Vuhledar. She also noted the Ukrainian forces had retaken 1 to 2 kilometers at several points along the contact line in the last several days and had advanced by 600 meters to 1 kilometer near Bakhmut the day before.

Last Tuesday, Maliar noted the Ukrainian forces had taken account of the "fact of contradictions" between the Wagner Group and the Russian authorities – specifically, the fact that some of the Wagner forces had gone into Russia and some of the Russian forces had been recalled to Russia to deal with them – and had undertaken offensive action in the Bakhmut area: "While planning offensive operations in the east, our military took into account the fact of contradictions between Wagner and incumbent Russian authorities. At present, offensive operations in Bakhmut direction have been going on for the fourth day. Our defenders advance on the flanks every day. Gradually, but confidently."

Last Wednesday, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported that "fierce battles" were underway between Ukrainian forces and Russian forces attempting to advance toward Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Marinka, west of Donetsk city. Meanwhile, it reported Ukrainian forces had made some progress, despite losing a number of Bradley armored fighting vehicles and Leopard tanks and having to move through territory that had been heavily mined, in pushing southward in Zaporizhzhia region. Maliar, speaking on national television, noted the Ukrainian forces had made advances southward toward Berdiansk and Mariupol: "Every day, there is an advance. Yes, the advances are slow, but they are sure." She also noted that the Ukrainian forces had completed "mopping up operations" in and around the village of Rivnopil, taken earlier in the week. And she noted the Russians were diverting forces both to the southern front and to Bakhmut, where the Ukrainian forces had made some advances in areas near the town. She noted the Russians had "redirected their paratroops and assault brigades to both the south and the east. They are bringing in their best reserves now."

Last Thursday, the General Staff reported in its evening update that the Russians continued to focus on the Lyman, Bakhmut, and Marinka areas and had conducted “unsuccessful offensive operations” in all three areas. Maliar said Ukraine’s forces had made gains in both southern and eastern Ukraine, advancing 1,300 meters in the direction of Berdiansk and 1,200 to 1,500 meters in several other places along the contact line. She said, “Our defense forces are continuing to mount an offensive on the Melitopol, Berdiansk and Bakhmut fronts. They are clawing back every meter of our land from the enemy in tough battles. They are making gains. Meanwhile, enemy forces are continuing their attempts to advance on the Lyman, Avdiivka and Marinka fronts, but are unsuccessful... On the Berdiansk front, Ukraine’s forces have advanced by some 1,300 meters.” She also reported that Ukrainian forces were making gains in the area around Rivnopil, where they were consolidating their recently captured positions and inflicting significant losses on the Russian forces: “They are practically bleeding the enemy’s offensive capabilities dry, destroying their equipment, storage depots and command centers, and killing their personnel.” And she said the Ukrainian forces had regained the initiative in the battle in the Bakhmut, the Russian forces were taking losses and slowly retreating, and the Ukrainian forces had advanced by 1,200 to 1,500 meters on Bakhmut’s flanks: “Our forces are making gains. They are currently consolidating their positions in the liberated territories.” The Bakhmut front is, she said, once again “hot,” with intense fighting taking place across the front.

Last Friday, Maliar reported that Ukrainian troops were advancing in all directions of the counteroffensive: “If we talk about the entire frontline, both east and south, we have seized the strategic initiative and are advancing in all directions.” She said the Ukrainian troops were moving “confidently” on the flanks around Bakhmut, which is still held by the Russian forces. She noted that “In the south, we are moving with varying success, sometimes there are days when it is more than a kilometer, sometimes less than a kilometer, sometimes up to two kilometers.” Lest some conclude from the limited extent of the advances that the counteroffensive wasn’t succeeding, she said its effectiveness should not be judged just by the distance of the advances and the liberation of settlements. There are, she said, “a lot of different military tasks. Therefore, all these tasks are being carried out and only the military can assess this correctly and accurately, and, according to their assessment, everything is going according to plan.”

Last Saturday, the Ukrainian military said the most intense battles on the front line were taking place in and around Bakhmut and Marinka. In Bakhmut, a spokesperson for the Eastern Grouping of the Ukrainian Armed Forces said the forces were attacking the Russian forces on both the northern and southern flanks. He noted the Russians had moved an airborne regiment from the Lyman front to the northern flank of Bakhmut: “The enemy is concentrating their best forces in the area of our attack. Number one is Bakhmut right now.” And in the Marinka area, another military spokesperson said, “This is the hottest spot. There were 15 combat engagements in the last day, most of them took place in Marinka.”

On Sunday, as the counteroffensive began its fifth week, Maliar reported on Telegram that, despite heavy fighting, the Ukrainian forces were gradually advancing toward Berdiansk and Melitopol: “South: With heavy battles, but gradually we are advancing in the Berdiansk and Melitopol directions. Our troops are facing intense enemy resistance, remote mining, redeployment of reserves, but persistently and unceasingly we are creating conditions for the fastest possible movement forward.” She noted that fierce battles were taking place all along the front line. In the east, she said Russian forces were advancing toward Avdiivka, Marinka and Lyman. “It’s hot everywhere now,” she said. The Russian forces were also moving toward Svatove, a small city in the contested area (see map) between the Luhansk and Donetsk regions in northeastern Ukraine. “Fierce fighting is taking place,” she said. “The situation is quite complicated.” She also reported “partial success” in the Bakhmut area. Ukrainian forces were advancing on the southern flank of the city. But the fighting continued on the northern flank of the city and the Russians had just redeployed two air assault regiments there.

On Monday, Maliar reported on Telegram that Ukrainian forces were undertaking both offensive and defensive operations in eastern Ukraine. She said fighting in the Bakhmut area had intensified and “a struggle is underway to seize the initiative: Today, the enemy attempted to advance in this sector. And our forces achieved a measure of success. The situation is changing rapidly and control over positions can be lost and regained twice within a day.” She said Russian forces were attacking near Lyman in northern Donetsk region and near Avdiivka and Marinka, both of which are on the contact line near the city of Donetsk. “The enemy tries to oust our troops from the positions held,” she said, “but receives a strong rebuff. Now heavy battles are going on there. Over the past week, after the operational (tactical) position was improved and the front line was leveled, the freed area has been increased by 9 square kilometers.” In the south, she reported the Ukrainian forces were conducting offensive operations in the direction of Melitopol and Berdiansk and moved forward in the direction of several villages “and had success.” She said that over the past week, the Ukrainian forces had taken back a total of 28.4 square kilometers in the south, bringing the total amount of territory taken back in the south to 158.4 square kilometers, roughly 58 square miles.

Yesterday, Maliar reported that the Ukrainian forces were making gains every day in the areas surrounding Bakhmut: “We are advancing on the southern flank of Bakhmut. To the north, to be honest, there is heavy fighting and so far no advance. Our forces are encountering serious resistance. The enemy is pouring in all its forces to stop in the south and in the east.” She noted the Russian forces were also making advances further to the north, near Lyman and Svatove. Notwithstanding those advances, yesterday Oleksiy Danilov, Secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council, wrote on twitter that “At this stage of active hostilities, Ukraine’s Defense Forces are fulfilling the number one task – the maximum destruction of manpower, equipment, fuel depots, military vehicles, command posts, artillery and air defense forces of the Russian army. The last few days have been particularly fruitful.”

Last Friday, speaking at a luncheon at the National Press Club in Washington, Gen. Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Ukraine's counteroffensive is "advancing steadily, deliberately working its way through very difficult minefields ...500 meters a day, 1,000 meters a day, 2,000 meters a day, that kind of thing." He said he wasn't surprised progress was slower than some people had thought it would be: "War on paper and real war are different. In real war, real people die. Real people are on those front lines and real people are in those vehicles.... This is going to take six, eight, 10 weeks, it's going to be very difficult. It's going to be very long. And it's going to be very, very bloody. And no one should have any illusions about any of that."

He's obviously right; it's going to be very difficult, it will take a long time – probably much longer than Milley suggested, and it will be very bloody. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, as Ukraine continues to make small advances in this, the fifth week of its counteroffensive, it is slowly taking back its country.

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