

Ukraine continues to make small advances in the counteroffensive



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

On Monday, Ukraine Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar reported that last week, in the seventh week of the counteroffensive, the Ukrainian forces continued to make small advances against the Russian forces, as they have every week since the counteroffensive began in early June. She reported that over the course of the fighting last week, the Ukrainian forces took back four square kilometers (1.5 square miles) of territory in eastern Ukraine and 12.7 square kilometers (4.9 square miles) of territory in southeastern Ukraine. Those gains brought the total amount of territory taken back since the counteroffensive began to 35 square kilometers (13.5 square miles) in eastern Ukraine, most notably in the area around Bakhmut, and 192 square kilometers (74.2 square miles) in southeastern Ukraine as the forces push toward Melitopol and Berdiansk. They obviously were not huge increases. But they were nevertheless increases – increases that are noteworthy given that, as Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi said last week, the Ukrainian forces face “extremely complex minefields, anti-tank barriers, and a system of fire destruction.”

In a message distributed by President Zelenskyy’s office, Maliar said the main focus of the fighting in eastern Ukraine was in the area around the largely destroyed city of Bakhmut, with the Ukrainian forces continuing to advance on the southern flank of the city while the Russian forces were continuing to hold the northern flank. She said the main fighting in that area was in and around several villages southwest of the city, where “the enemy is holding on to each meter of the occupied land, putting up strong resistance, using reserves but, at the same time, suffering significant losses.” Maliar also said the Ukrainian forces were pushing forward in the direction of Melitopol and

Berdiansk which, if taken, would in effect cut Russia's "land bridge" to Crimea – the importance of which for Russia was highlighted by the second attack on the Kerch Strait bridge last week, which forced the Russians to stop road traffic across it, and the prospect that Ukraine will undoubtedly continue to attack the bridge. Echoing what Zaluzhnyi said, Maliar noted the challenges facing the Ukrainian forces as they move toward Melitopol and Berdiansk, "Speaking of the south, our Armed Forces face continuous minefields, the use of kamikaze drones and anti-tank guided missiles by the enemy."

Today, Maliar reported on Telegram that the Ukrainian forces were holding back a Russian attack in the Kupiansk area north of Bakhmut in the direction of Lyman: "Ukraine's Defense Forces continue holding back the onslaught by Russian troops in the Kupiansk and Lyman directions. There, the enemy is looking for weak spots in our defense, launching artillery strikes, attacking with infantry groups and using special operations units. They are making every effort to push through our defense but in vain. In the above directions, our defenders are taking all measures to stop the enemy."

She also reported that in the Bakhmut area, the Ukrainian forces were continuing offensive operations on the southern flank of the city and in several settlements southwest of the city. And in regard to the offensive operations in southeastern Ukraine, she reported the Ukrainian forces were gradually advancing in the direction of Melitopol and Berdiansk: "Battles are underway. Our defenders are succeeding and gaining a foothold within the recaptured frontiers. The enemy is making unsuccessful attempts to regain the lost positions" in the area south of Orikhiv.

And so the counteroffensive, now in week eight, continues.

David R. Cameron

July 26, 2023