

Small advances in east & southeast in week 8 of counteroffensive



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

Today, Ukraine Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar reported on Telegram that last week, in the eighth week of the counteroffensive, the Ukrainian forces continued to make small advances against the Russian forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine, 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 2 square kilometers (0.8 square miles) of territory in the Bakhmut area in eastern Ukraine and 12.6 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 37 square kilometers (14.3 square miles) in eastern Ukraine, most of it in the area around Bakhmut, and 204.7 square kilometers (79 square miles) in southeastern Ukraine as the forces push toward Melitopol and Berdiansk.

Over the last three weeks of the counteroffensive, the weekly increases in territory taken in eastern Ukraine have dropped from 7 square kilometers in week six to 4 square kilometers in week seven and to 2 square kilometers last week. Over the last three weeks, the weekly increases in territory retaken in southeastern Ukraine have remained in the range of 11 to 12 square kilometers each week – 11 in week six, 12.1 in week seven, and 11.6 last week in week eight. The increases last week, especially in eastern Ukraine, weren't large. But they nevertheless were increases, and they were achieved despite having to move through densely-mined fields, woods and trenches, tiers of anti-tank barriers, and heavy artillery – and having to do so despite a shortage of armored vehicles, tanks, and air cover.

Last Friday, speaking on a news telethon, Maliar, speaking broadly about the counteroffensive, said, “The defense forces are working to destroy the equipment and personnel of the Russian forces, and there are signs that it’s becoming increasingly difficult for invaders to resist. The main task facing us now, apart from moving forward, is, of course, weakening the enemy's ability to defend itself. And, in fact, this is being done now. Dozens of ammunition depots are destroyed every week, hundreds of Russian soldiers are decimated per day, their equipment destroyed. We already see signs that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the enemy to resist. And our defenders are full of strength to move forward.” Turning to the continuing conflict in the Bakhmut area in eastern Ukraine, she said Ukrainian troops were advancing gradually in the area south of Bakhmut and were repelling Russian efforts to retake the areas they had lost on the northern flank of Bakhmut. And turning to the large-scale offensive in southeastern Ukraine, she said the Ukrainian forces continue to advance – “gradually but steadily” – in the direction of Melitopol and Berdiansk: “We are moving,” she said, “but we need to realize the enemy’s efforts and resistance we are facing.”

On Saturday, Maliar reported on Telegram that the Ukrainian forces continued to advance on the southern flank around Bakhmut as well as on the Melitopol and Berdiansk fronts: “Today, like yesterday, it’s hot in the east. The enemy continued to attack in Kupyansk, Lyman, Avdiivka and Maryinka directions. Our defenders restrained the enemy with all their might and succeeded. Heavy battles are currently going on. The southern flank of Bakhmut direction, as yesterday, sees Ukraine’s advance with battles and strong enemy resistance. On the northern flank, the enemy attacked, trying to regain lost positions, but failed.” Regarding the offensive operation underway in southeastern Ukraine, Maliar said the Ukrainian forces are “gradually but surely” advancing in the direction of Berdiansk and Melitopol: “Our troops were successful in Novodanylivka, Balka Shyroka, Mala Tokmachka, Novopokrovka [four settlements], and now they gain a foothold on the achieved boundaries. The enemy redeploys units and uses all available reserves. Thanks to the fact that our fighters destroy enemy equipment depots every day, the intensity of enemy shelling has decreased somewhat.” Summing up, she said, “We are moving, but we need to realize the enemy’s efforts and resistance we are facing.”

In today’s update, Maliar said in regard to the continued fighting in the Bakhmut area, “Today, we continued our advance on the southern flank around Bakhmut. There are certain advances. Northern flank – battles continue without changes in positions. The enemy is now directing additional forces and resources to the Bakhmut axis.” She also noted that, “The enemy is active in the Kupyansk and Lyman axes. Today, there were several attempts to advance, but they failed and suffered losses. Fighting continues in the Avdiivka axis [north of Donetsk city]. The enemy is unsuccessfully trying to advance. Today, the enemy increased assault operations in the Maryinka axis [west of Donetsk city] with the use of equipment – tanks, BMPs [Russian fighting vehicles]. But unsuccessfully.” And she noted that, “In the south, Ukraine’s Defense Forces continue

the offensive operation in the Melitopol and Berdiansk directions. In the Zaporizhzhia region's Mala Tokmachka-Robotyne sector [south of Orikhiv], Ukrainian warriors have succeeded and are gaining a foothold within the re-captured frontiers.”

And so the counteroffensive continues in week nine.

David R. Cameron

July 31, 2023