

Few advances in east and southeast in week 9 of Ukraine counteroffensive



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

On the previous six Mondays, Ukraine Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar, in summarizing developments in the previous week of Ukraine’s counteroffensive in eastern and southeastern Ukraine, presented precise estimates of the amount of territory retaken by the Ukrainian forces in the two areas in the previous week. The amounts each week ranged from 2 to 9 square kilometers in eastern Ukraine and 10 to 28 square kilometers in southeastern Ukraine. Last Monday, Maliar reported that in week 8 the Ukrainian forces took back two square kilometers of territory in eastern Ukraine and 13 square kilometers of territory in southeastern Ukraine, bringing the total amount taken since the counteroffensive began in early June to 37 square kilometers (14 square miles) in eastern Ukraine and 205 square kilometers (79 square miles) in southeastern Ukraine. But yesterday, unlike the previous six Mondays, Maliar didn’t say how much territory was retaken last week in either area – an unspoken indication that, in all likelihood, very little was retaken last week.

The fact that Ukraine apparently didn’t retake a significant amount of territory in either eastern or southeastern Ukraine last week no doubt reinforced the concerns of many observers and interested parties about the pace and success of the counteroffensive. Perhaps it was not coincidental, then, that after a telephone conversation yesterday with U.S. Gen. Mark Milley, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, said in a statement on Telegram that “Heavy fighting is underway, and step-by-step, Ukrainian troops are continuing to create the conditions to advance. The initiative is on our side. In some directions, the enemy is conducting active assaults but they are having no success.

In particular, it is related to their attempts to distract Ukrainian forces from certain areas of the front.”

As Gen. Zaluzhnyi said, heavy fighting is indeed underway, in both eastern and southeastern Ukraine. Last Friday, commenting on Russia’s overall strategy, Maliar said, “For the enemy, the eastern front remains the epicenter of hostilities. These are the strategic priorities of his offensive. The enemy believes that by striking in the East, they will be able to turn the tide of the situation at the front. Therefore, the greatest efforts are being made in the East.” Yesterday, during a national telethon, she said, “Most of their forces are now concentrated in the Kupiansk direction” and the fighting in that direction was “probably the hottest.” [Kupiansk is northeast of Iziium and Lyman and in Kharkiv region, just west of Luhansk region.] She said, “One of the objectives they have set is to recapture the territories [in Kharkiv region] that we liberated last autumn. For them, it is now important, both in terms of morale and in military terms... The enemy’s goal is to draw our forces away from the offensive area and break through our defenses in these sectors. It is a difficult and exhausting struggle, but our defenders do not allow the enemy to realize its plans.”

Turning to the continuing battle in the area around the largely destroyed city of Bakhmut, Maliar said, “The situation in the Bakhmut area is also difficult. There, you remember we always spoke of advancing on the flanks around Bakhmut, because it was important for us to capture the commanding heights. On the southern flank, we are slowly but consistently and confidently moving forward through dense artillery fire and minefields but continue to advance. On the northern flank, the enemy is launching attacks there and making attempts to recapture the heights that we have established control over, and very fierce battles are raging now.” She also noted that “the enemy is also attacking Avdiivka and Marinka. There are also fierce battles there, but the defenders do not allow the enemy to advance.” [Avdiivka and Marinka are small cities to the north and west of Donetsk city.] Turning to the offensive in southeastern Ukraine in the direction of Melitopol and Berdiansk which, if successful, would break through Russia’s current “land bridge” to Crimea, Maliar said, “The enemy is fiercely resisting. In addition to continuous mining, the enemy equipped protected concrete engineering fortifications on key commanding heights. In such difficult conditions, our troops are moving forward gradually, but very persistently.”

Today, in another news telethon, Maliar reiterated what she said yesterday about the intensity of the fighting in the Kupiansk direction: “If we measure the intensity of the fighting, the hottest spot is in the Kupiansk direction. Indeed, the enemy is pulling up forces there, and we record that they are pulling up forces from the Avdiivka direction, where they have been unable to advance for more than a year. And not only to Kupiansk; they are also pulling up forces to Bakhmut. Why? Because we are on the offensive there, and they cannot withstand this advance and have to fortify themselves. I can assure you that we are also taking appropriate measures to resist the enemy and prevent them from advancing along the offensive line.” Turning to the offensive in

southeastern Ukraine aimed at Melitopol and Berdiansk, Maliar made it clear that the Ukrainian forces are advancing – and are doing so under very difficult conditions: “There are certain advances in the south, and there, too, the enemy’s potential is being destroyed in large numbers, and the enemy is resisting: they are mining, reinforcing key dominant heights with concrete and engineering fortifications. But nevertheless, the destruction of their defense potential leads to the fact that we are moving.”

And so the counteroffensive continues in this, week 10.

David R. Cameron

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