

**Only a few small advances in week 11 of the counteroffensive.
Nevertheless, some good news: Ukraine will get some F-16s**



UK Defence Intelligence update on the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of August 16.

Today, in an online briefing, Ukraine Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar summarized, as she has on previous Mondays since Ukraine’s counteroffensive began in early June, developments in the previous week of the counteroffensive in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. In most weeks, she also provided an estimate of the amount of territory retaken by the Ukrainian forces in each area in the previous week. The amounts retaken each week ranged from 2 to 9 square kilometers in eastern Ukraine and 10 to 28 square kilometers in southeastern Ukraine. Today, she said the Ukrainian forces had retaken 3 square kilometers of territory on the southern flank of Bakhmut, bringing the total amount of territory retaken in that area since the counteroffensive began to 43 square kilometers (16.6 square miles). She said, “The news is now appearing along both the southern and the northern flanks. If you look at the map, it looks a bit like a horseshoe around Bakhmut.” Russia, she said, is trying to push Ukrainian forces from the city’s northern flanks but are not having much success because the Ukrainian forces hold the dominant heights in the area: “Our troops are harassing the enemy there. Actually, the occupiers are trapped because they cannot get out of Bakhmut and cannot carry out full-fledged advances.”

Maliar did not provide an estimate of the amount of territory retaken last week in southeastern Ukraine and, indeed, has not done so since late July, when she reported that, after week 8 of the counteroffensive, Ukraine had taken back a total of 205 square kilometers (79 square miles) of territory in that area. But there were some small advances last week in Ukraine’s push toward Melitopol and Berdiansk which, if

successful, would enable it to sever Russia's land bridge to Crimea. For example, last Wednesday, she reported that Ukrainian forces had recaptured the village of Urozhaine, 25 miles west of Vuhledar and the first village the Ukrainian forces had retaken since late July – a reflection of the difficulty those forces have encountered in attempting to advance through heavily-mined territory without sufficient air support. Today, Maliar announced on Telegram that, “Our units have had success to the southeast of Robotyne and to the north of the settlement of Mala Tokmachka,” both of which are a few miles south and southeast of Orikhiv and about 15 miles north of Tokmak, which in turn is about 30 miles from Melitopol. She said, “The Russians were trying to retake the positions they lost to the east of Robotyne but to no avail. Planned combat work is currently underway in Robotyne.”

Maliar also reported on the situation in and around Kupyansk. Kupyansk is northeast of Sloviansk and Lyman, just inside the eastern boundary of Kharkiv region and about 75 miles southeast of the city of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city with a pre-war population of 1.4 million. Kupyansk, which had a pre-war population of about 30,000, is a major rail hub where five lines converge, making it an important hub for the movement of supplies for the forces in the area. The Russian forces in the Kupyansk area have been attempting for several weeks to move westward in an effort to retake some of the territory they held in Kharkiv region prior to Ukraine's success last fall in driving them out of the region. Maliar said today, “The situation in the Kupyansk direction is difficult. The enemy is not abandoning plans to move forward, the enemy is pulling up additional forces.” She said, “We are confident in our defenders, but it is very difficult for them there and the enemy is not advancing there.”

One of the reasons Ukraine's counteroffensive has progressed slowly over the past 11 weeks has been the creation by the Russian forces of extensive minefields along much of the contact line in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. Another has been the shortage of tanks and armored vehicles, notwithstanding the decisions of several governments to provide Ukraine with tanks – German-made Leopard 2s, British Commanders, and American M1 Abrams – and armored vehicles. A third reason has been the lack of advanced fighter jets that can provide air cover for the ground forces. Poland agreed to give Ukraine 5 of the 22 MiG-29s it received from Germany in 2004 and Slovakia agreed to give Ukraine 13 of its MiG-29s. But the MiG-29 is an old plane created in the Soviet era and Ukraine needs more advanced fighter jets to counter the MiG-31, Su-25, and Su-35 jets being used by Russia.

At the outset of the war in early 2022, Ukraine had about 125 combat-ready Soviet-era fighter jets. By last winter, Ukrainian officials said they needed roughly 200 fighter jets, preferably F-16s, of which there are more than 4,000 in the world. But any government wishing to transfer any of its F-16s to Ukraine needs the prior approval of the U.S. After a good deal of internal debate within the Biden administration about the possible adverse consequences of approving such transfers – for example, the likely possibility that approval of such transfers would be regarded by President Putin as a significant

escalation and might prompt some type of response – President Biden agreed at the G7 summit in May that the U.S. will allow other governments to transfer F-16s to Ukraine and provide training for pilots and engineers. In July, 11 countries – Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Romania, Portugal, Canada, and the UK – agreed to train Ukrainian pilots to fly the F-16.

Last week Secretary of State Blinken wrote to his counterparts in Denmark and the Netherlands offering a formal assurance that the U.S. would fast-track all requests from third parties to transfer F-16s to Ukraine, and on Friday, American, Danish and Dutch officials announced the U.S. had approved the transfer of F-16s from Denmark and the Netherlands to Ukraine once the pilots are fully trained – something that is estimated to take six months. Denmark reportedly has 30 F-16s and The Netherlands is believed to have 42 F-16s. Yesterday, after having visited Sweden Saturday, where he requested the government provide Ukraine with some of its Gripen jet fighters, President Zelenskyy flew to Denmark and the Netherlands to formalize the agreements. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said Denmark will provide Ukraine with 19 F-16s – 6 early next year, 8 more later next year, and 5 more in 2025. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte did not provide a number or timeframe, but Zelenskyy subsequently said the Netherlands will provide Ukraine with 42 F-16s. Today, Danish Defense Minister Jakob Ellemann-Jensen added an important condition – that its F-16s be used only over Ukrainian territory: “We donate weapons under the condition that they are used to drive the enemy out of the territory of Ukraine. And no further than that.”

There were only a few small advances in Ukraine’s counteroffensive last week. But importantly, Denmark and the Netherlands agreed to provide it with more than 60 F-16s, the first of which will be available after the pilots and engineers have completed their training early next year. In the meantime, the counteroffensive continues in week 12 with whatever air cover Ukraine can provide from its slightly-expanded stock of old Soviet-era MiGs.

David R. Cameron
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