

Another week of small advances in Ukraine's counteroffensive



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

Today, on a news telethon as well as on Telegram, 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 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. Today, reporting on the developments in week 12 of the counteroffensive, Maliar said the Ukrainian forces had taken another square kilometer in the Bakhmut area in eastern Ukraine last week, bringing the total retaken in that area since the counteroffensive began to 44 square kilometers (17 square miles). Describing the situation in that area, she said, "In Bakhmut direction, there are gradual but confident advances every week – this is what annoys the enemy the most. The commanding heights, which are taken, go along the southern and northern flanks, which looks like a semi-encirclement on the map. The enemy attacks the northern flank, wants to recapture the positions we have taken there. The struggle continues precisely for this. There is progress in the southern direction: last week, another square kilometer was liberated. Altogether, 44 square kilometers have been already liberated." She also noted the Russian forces carried out "ineffective offensive operations" near Avdiivka, Maryinka, Vuhledar, and other small cities or towns in Donetsk region. (Avdiivka and Maryinka are small cities in the northern and western outskirts of the Donetsk metropolitan area. Vuhledar is a town about 25 miles southwest of Donetsk city, which had a pre-war population of 900,000.)

Maliar didn't 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, as of the end of week 8 of the counteroffensive, Ukraine had taken back a total of 205 square kilometers (79 square miles) of territory in that area. But she did say that “offensive operations are ongoing in the southern region. Robotyne has been liberated. And our troops are moving further south-east of Robotyne and south of Mala Tokmachka.” Robotyne, where the Ukraine flag was raised last Wednesday as the battle for the town continued, and Mala Tokmachka are a few miles south and southeast of Orikhiv and about 15-20 miles north of Tokmak, which in turn is about 30 miles north of Melitopol. Continuing, she said, “The Defense Forces of Ukraine continue to conduct offensive operations in Melitopol direction, gain a foothold on the achieved boundaries, and carry out counter-battery fight.” The Ukrainian forces face considerable obstacles in their push toward Melitopol and Berdiansk – extensive minefields that, once cleared of mines, are quickly remined, deep trenches, extensive “dragon teeth” barriers, and other concrete fortifications. But if they do succeed in reaching those cities, they will be able to cut Russia’s “land bridge” to Crimea and to the territory in southern Ukraine now held by the Russians.

Maliar also reported on the situation in and around Kupyansk, a city with a pre-war population of 30,000 that is in the easternmost portion of Kharkiv region, about 70 miles east southeast of the city of Kharkiv, 10 miles from the border with Luhansk region, 20 miles south of Ukraine’s border with Russia, and north of Kramatorsk, Sloviansk, and Lyman. Kupyansk is a rail and road hub in the region – five rail lines converge there, including one that goes to Russia. The city and the surrounding area were taken by Russian forces in the early days of the war, but they were retaken by Ukraine last fall when it took back almost all of Kharkiv region. Although for some mysterious reason, the map accompanying the British Defense Intelligence daily update on the battlefield situation (above) doesn’t indicate that the territory to the east of Kupyansk is being contested by the Russian and Ukrainian forces, as Maliar has noted in several previous weekly updates, the Russian forces have been attempting to move westward and retake some of the territory they held in Kharkiv region prior to Ukraine’s success in driving them out last fall, and the Ukrainian forces have thus far been successful in preventing them from doing so.

Two weeks ago, Maliar said, “The main focus of the Ukrainian army is the south, and the Russians are focused on the east,” where they are trying to retake the territory they held in Kharkiv region prior to Ukraine retaking it last fall: “The ongoing clashes have been most concentrated in the Kupyansk sector. The enemy tried to regain the positions lost there last fall.” Last Monday, she said, “The situation in the Kupyansk direction is difficult. The enemy is not abandoning plans to move forward, the enemy is pulling up additional forces. We are confident in our defenders, but it is very difficult for them there.” Last Thursday, she said, “In the Kupyansk direction, the enemy does not stop its attempts to advance. They are carrying out numerous attacks, trying to hit our infrastructure. Fighting continues. Our soldiers heroically repel the enemy and break all their plans. It is no less hot in the Lyman direction. There the enemy made unsuccessful assault efforts with the aim of displacing our troops.... In addition, the enemy is

currently planning to regroup and replace troops in this area.” And last Friday, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of Ukraine’s ground forces, likewise said, “The operational situation in the Eastern direction is remaining tense. After a month of fierce battles and suffering significant losses in the Kupyansk and Lyman directions, the enemy is now regrouping its forces and means while also transferring the newly formed brigades and divisions from the territory of Russia. ...Under such conditions, we must promptly take all measures to strengthen our defense on the threatened lines and advance where possible.” Today, Maliar said, “The situation was tense in Kupyansk and Lyman directions. We observe that, despite the fact that the enemy was significantly destroyed by our defenders, they are gathering new forces, regrouping and trying to attract the most professional units – air assault units. The enemy does not abandon its intentions to move in these directions although they do not succeed.”

And so the counteroffensive continues in this, week 13.

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