

More small advances in week 13 of Ukraine's counteroffensive



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

Today, as she has on previous Mondays, Ukraine Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar summarized, in a post on Telegram, developments in the previous week of Ukraine's counteroffensive in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. In the continuing battle on the northern and southern flanks of the city of Bakhmut in Donetsk region, one of the two regions in eastern Ukraine – Luhansk is the other – that comprise the Donbas, Maliar reported that “the enemy conducts defensive actions to restrain the advance of our troops and attempts to regain lost positions” in three small settlements just south of Bakhmut “but without success...In total, 47 square kilometers [18 square miles] have been liberated near Bakhmut. Over the past week, the liberated area has increased by three square km. [1.2 square miles].”

Maliar has noted in previous weekly reports that the Russian forces were attempting to move further westward into Kharkiv region in the area in and around Kupiansk in northeastern Ukraine, in part, perhaps, to draw Ukrainian forces away from the two primary areas of conflict in the Bakhmut area and in southeastern Ukraine. Today she noted that in the Kupiansk area the Ukrainian forces have repelled several Russian attacks in the past day, preventing them from advancing. However, she said the attacks continue, and that the Russian forces also continue to attack in the direction of Lyman as well. And she said the Russian forces continue to attack in and around Avdiivka and Maryinka, which are, respectively, on the northwestern and southwestern fringe of the Donetsk city metropolitan area.

As important as the continuing battles along the contact line between the Ukrainian and Russian forces in eastern Ukraine are, the principal focus of the counteroffensive is southeastern Ukraine, where the Ukrainian forces seek to drive southward toward Melitopol and Berdiansk and eventually sever the “land bridge” between Russia and the territory it controls in Ukraine and Crimea, which it annexed in 2014. Maliar has not provided weekly estimates of the amount of territory retaken in the previous week of the counteroffensive since the end of week 8 in late July, by which time the Ukrainian forces had retaken a total of 205 square kilometers (79 square miles). Nevertheless, today she noted that, in the course of conducting offensive actions, the Ukrainian forces had some success in moving into several small settlements south of Orikhiv. She said, “The enemy in the south is suffering significant losses in personnel, weapons, and equipment, is relocating its units and troops, and deploying reserves.”

Last Monday, Maliar noted 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 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. Today, she said the Ukrainian forces had success near several towns and settlements a few miles south of Robotyne and Mala Tokmachka – most notably, Novodanylivka, Novoprokopivka, and Verbove – and thus are a few miles closer to Tokmak and, eventually, Melitopol. But as she noted last week, 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. And there is not just one line of Russian defense but, in most places, three lines, separated by minefields, trenches, and “dragon teeth” barriers. It will be very difficult for the Ukrainian forces to get through the several lines of defense. But if they do, they will be able to cut Russia’s “land bridge” to Crimea and the territory in southern Ukraine the Russians now hold.

As week 14 of Ukraine’s counteroffensive began yesterday, it did so with the prospect that it will soon be directed by a new minister of defense. Yesterday, President Zelenskyy announced on Telegram that Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov will be replaced this week by Rustem Umerov, a member of the Rada in which he represents the liberal and pro-European Holos (Voice) party and, since last September, the head of Ukraine’s State Property Fund. Importantly, Umerov is a leader of the Crimean Tatar community, having moved with his family to Crimea as a child after the USSR re-established the right of return for Tatars in 1989. His appointment sends an unambiguous signal to Russia and the world that Ukraine will never accept Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea. Noting that Reznikov has gone through “more than 550 days of full-scale war” – he was appointed defense minister in November 2021, three months before Putin began the war – in his evening address last night, Zelenskyy said, “I believe the ministry needs new approaches and other forms of interaction with both the military and society at large.” What those new approaches and forms of interaction

might be and whether they will be adopted and, if adopted, effective remains to be seen.
In the meantime, the counteroffensive continues in this, week 14.

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September 4, 2023