

## More small advances in week 15 of Ukraine's counteroffensive



UK Defence Intelligence update on the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of Sept. 8.

Today, as she has on previous Mondays, Ukraine Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar reported on developments last week in Ukraine's counteroffensive in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. In the continuing battle in the area around the largely destroyed city of Bakhmut that, after a prolonged battle has been controlled since May by Russian forces, Maliar reported that Ukrainian forces had retaken two square kilometers [0.8 square miles] of territory last week. As a result, the Ukrainian forces have retaken 51 square kilometers [20 square miles] of territory in the area around Bakhmut. She noted that the Ukrainian forces had recaptured two villages, Andriivka and Klishchlivka, on the southern flank of the city which, because both are on higher ground, could set the stage for Ukrainian forces retaking the city. Further south in Donetsk region, Maliar reported that the Ukrainian forces continued to hold back a Russian offensive toward the towns of Avdiivka and Maryinka, which are, respectively, a few miles to the north and west of Donetsk city.

In the counteroffensive in southeastern Ukraine that is directed toward Melitopol and Berdiansk and that, if successful, will sever Russia's "land bridge" between Russian-held territory in the Donbas and Crimea, Maliar reported the Ukrainian forces took back 5.2 square kilometers [2 square miles] last week. That brought the total amount of territory retaken in southeastern Ukraine since the counteroffensive began in early June to more than 260 square kilometers [100 square miles].

President Zelenskyy will arrive in the U.S. tomorrow for the U.N. General Assembly and will meet with President Biden and the members of the Senate on Thursday. In a CBS interview conducted last Thursday in anticipation of the visit, Zelenskyy was

asked how he would describe the fighting at the front. He said, “It’s a difficult question. I will be completely honest with you. We have the initiative. This is a plus. We stopped the Russian offensive and we moved onto a counteroffensive. And despite that, it’s not very fast. It is important that we are moving forward every day and liberating territory.” The interviewer asked, “You have about six weeks of good weather left, and I wonder, after that point will the front be frozen in place?” Zelenskyy said, “We need to liberate our territory as much as possible and move forward.... We must do it. We can’t lose time. Forget about the weather, and the like. In places that we can’t get through in an armored vehicle, let’s fly. If we can’t fly, let’s send drones. We mustn’t give Putin a break.”

As week 16 of Ukraine’s counteroffensive begins, it does so with new leadership in the Ministry of Defense. On Sept. 3, Zelenskyy announced that Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov would be replaced by Rustem Umerov, a member of the Rada and, since last September, the head of Ukraine’s State Property Fund. He was quickly confirmed by the Rada and took over as Defense Minister three days later. Today the government announced it had dismissed six deputy defense ministers. It gave no reason for the dismissals. One news source said all of them had submitted their resignations after Umerov asked them to do so. Unfortunately, one of those dismissed was Hanna Maliar, who has been a consistently reliable source of information about the war throughout the conflict. Today, Umerov said on Facebook, “Rebooting. We started. We continue. Ministry continues to work as usual.” Umerov has considerable experience in business and finance and no doubt has the background to oversee and manage a large and sprawling defense budget. But whether the best way for a new defense minister to fight and win an ongoing and difficult war is to dismiss six experienced deputies remains to be seen. In the meantime, the war continues in week 16 of the counteroffensive.

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