

## A few small advances in week 16 of Ukraine's counteroffensive



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

Each Monday since Ukraine's counteroffensive began in early June, former Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar reported on developments in the previous week and, among other things, noted the amount of territory retaken by the Ukrainian forces in the previous week and since the counteroffensive began. Last week, for example, she reported that in the continuing battle in eastern Ukraine around the largely destroyed city of Bakhmut, the Ukrainian forces had retaken 2 square kilometers [0.8 square miles] of territory in the previous week, bringing the total amount of territory retaken in that area since the counteroffensive began to 51 square kilometers [20 square miles]. And she reported that 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, the Ukrainian forces had retaken 5.2 square kilometers [2 square miles] of territory in the previous week, bringing the total amount of territory retaken in that area since the counteroffensive began to 260 square kilometers [100 square miles].

Unfortunately, last week Maliar, along with the other five deputy ministers of defense, was dismissed by Rustem Umerov, who replaced Oleksii Reznikov as minister of defense on Sept. 6, and the ministry didn't issue its usual Monday update on the amount of territory retaken in the previous week of the counteroffensive in eastern and southeastern Ukraine – perhaps because the weekly reports of modest gains in territory had fueled concerns in Ukraine and among its supporters in the West about the pace of the counteroffensive. Nevertheless, the staff of the ministry has continued to issue updates on the extent of progress in the counteroffensive and those updates suggest that

last week – week 16 of the counteroffensive – was another week of small advances by the Ukrainian forces.

Today, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported on its Facebook page that “Ukraine’s defense forces continue to conduct defensive operations in the east and south of Ukraine, an offensive operation in the Melitopol sector and offensive actions in the Bakhmut sector, destroying the enemy, liberating temporarily occupied territories step by step and consolidating their positions on the achieved lines.” Yesterday, after issuing an identical statement, the General Staff noted that in the Bakhmut area “the enemy tried to regain the lost position in the Klishchiivka area with no success.” And it noted that the Ukrainian forces had repelled Russian attacks in the direction of Avdiivka and Marinka, which are, respectively, just to the north and west of Donetsk city, and had also successfully repelled Russian attacks in the vicinity of Robotyne, which is south of Orikhiv and which the Ukrainian forces had retaken in late August.

On Sunday, Gen. Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, the commander of the operational and strategic group of forces in southeastern Ukraine, said in an interview that the Ukrainian forces had made a breakthrough in the Russian lines near Verbove, which is also south of Orikhiv and a few miles east of Robotyne: “On the left flank, we have a breakthrough and we continue to advance further. Not as fast as expected, not like in the movies about WWII. The main thing is not to lose this initiative.” Asked whether the weather, as autumn turns to winter, may stop the counteroffensive, he said it wouldn’t: “The weather can be a serious obstacle during advance, but considering how we move forward, mostly without vehicles, I don’t think it will heavily influence the counteroffensive.” Intense rains in the fall can, he said, make movement with heavy equipment, particularly tanks, more difficult. But, he noted, Ukrainian troops move in small groups, mostly on foot.

Continuing, Tarnavskiy said the biggest breakthrough in the counteroffensive will come when his forces take Tokmak, a small city 15-20 miles south of Robotyne and Verbove and about 30 miles north of Melitopol: “I think it will happen after Tokmak. At the moment they are relying on the depth of their defensive line there. But the actions of our fighters force them to slowly pull back when they face our assault squads.” But, he acknowledged, the Ukrainian forces must at least advance to Tokmak: “Tokmak is the minimum goal. The overall objective is to get to our state borders.”

Yesterday, President Zelenskyy announced that Defense Minister Umerov had informed him that the first of the 31 M1 Abrams tanks promised by the U.S. had arrived. U.S. officials later confirmed that two platoons (i.e., 8 to 10) of M1 Abrams tanks had been delivered Saturday. With that important addition to Ukraine’s forces, week 17 of the counteroffensive began on Sunday.

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