

## Ukraine's counteroffensive is largely that – a defensive operation against Russia's continuing attacks in the east and southeast



UK Defence Intelligence update on the battlefield situation in Ukraine as of December 1.

Ukraine's counteroffensive against the Russian forces holding much of eastern and southeastern Ukraine, which began in early June, continued last week in week 26. As last Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation (above) indicates, the Ukrainian forces continued to attack the Russian forces in the area around the largely destroyed city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine; the area south of Orikhiv in southeastern Ukraine; and the area on the east bank of the Dnipro River near the city of Kherson in southern Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Russian forces continued their effort to advance toward Kupiansk in Kharkiv region in northeastern Ukraine and toward Avdiivka, a few miles north of the large Russian-held city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.

But judging from the daily updates on the war released by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ukraine's counteroffensive last week was, as it has been in recent weeks, largely a defensive operation. In its several updates each day, the General Staff has reported that the Ukrainian forces had repelled repeated attacks by the Russian forces in the direction of Kupiansk, in the area around Bakhmut, in the direction of Avdiivka and Maryinka, a nearby small city west of Donetsk city; and in the area south of Orikhiv.

Last Sunday evening (Nov. 26), the General Staff reported that in the past 24 hours the Russian forces had conducted 6 attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 7 attacks in the area around Bakhmut, 24 attacks in the direction of Avdiivka, and 4 attacks in the direction of Maryinka, all of which had been repelled by the Ukrainian forces. Last

Monday morning (Nov. 27), the General Staff reported that in the past 24 hours there had been 7 Russian attacks toward Kupiansk, 10 attacks in the Bakhmut area, 30 attacks in the area near Avdiivka, and 7 attacks in the Maryinka area, all of which had been repelled by the Ukrainian forces. Last Tuesday evening, the General Staff reported that in the past 24 hours there had been 4 Russian attacks toward Kupiansk, 3 attacks toward Lyman, 16 attacks in the Bakhmut area, 15 attacks in the Avdiivka area, 12 attacks in the Maryinka area, and 3 attacks in the area south of Orikhiv, all of which had been repelled by the Ukrainian forces. Last Wednesday evening, the General Staff reported that in the past 24 hours there had been 5 Russian attacks toward Kupiansk, 16 in the Bakhmut area, 27 in the Avdiivka area, 17 in the Maryinka area, and 9 in the area of Verbove and Robotyne in the Zaporizhzhia region south of Orikhiv, all of which had been repelled by the Ukrainian forces. Last Thursday evening, the General Staff reported that in the past 24 hours there had been 7 Russian attacks toward Kupiansk, 4 in the direction of Lyman, 15 in the direction of Avdiivka, 9 in the direction of Maryinka, and 14 in the direction of Verbove and Robotyne, all of which had been repelled. Friday evening, the General Staff reported that in the past 24 hours there had been 9 Russian attacks in the Kupiansk direction, 7 in the Lyman direction, 18 in the Bakhmut area, 16 in the Avdiivka direction, 10 in the Maryinka direction, and 10 near Verbove and Robotyne, all of which had been repelled by the Ukrainian forces. Saturday morning, the General Staff reported there had been 13 Russian attacks in the Kupiansk direction, 8 in the Lyman direction, 21 in the Bakhmut direction, 21 in the Avdiivka direction, and 12 in the direction of Robotyne and Verbove, all of which had been repelled. Saturday evening, the General Staff reported there had been 7 Russian attacks in the Kupiansk direction, 3 in the Lyman direction, 15 in the Bakhmut direction, 20 in the Avdiivka direction, 9 in the Maryinka direction, and 8 in the direction of Robotyne and Verbove, all of which had been repelled.

On Sunday evening, the first day of week 27 of the counteroffensive, the General Staff reported that in the past 24 hours, there had been 7 Russian attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 3 attacks in the direction of Lyman, 16 attacks in the area near Bakhmut, 14 in the direction of Avdiivka, 5 in the direction of Maryinka, and 3 in direction of Robotyne, all of which had been repelled. Yesterday morning, the General Staff reported that over the past 24 hours there had been 8 Russian attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 3 in the direction of Lyman, 16 in the area near Bakhmut, 21 in the area around Avdiivka, 8 in the direction of Maryinka, and 3 in the area of Robotyne, all of which were repelled. Last night, the General Staff reported that over the past 24 hours, there had been 10 Russian attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 8 in the direction of Lyman, 9 in the area around Bakhmut, 15 in the direction of Avdiivka, 14 in the direction of Maryinka, and an unspecified number of attacks in the area near Robotyne, all of which had been repelled.

And this morning, the General Staff reported that over the past 24 hours, there had been 10 Russian attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 11 in the direction of Lyman, 11 in the area around Bakhmut, 18 in the direction of Avdiivka, and 18 in the direction of

Maryinka, all of which had been repelled. However, today British Defence Intelligence reported that “over recent weeks Russian forces have made creeping advances through the ruins of Maryinka...Russia now likely controls most of the built-up area. However, Ukrainian forces remain in control of pockets of territory on the western edge of the town.... Russia’s renewed efforts against Maryinka are part of Russia’s autumn offensive which is prioritising extending Russia’s control over the remaining parts of the Donetsk Oblast – highly likely still one of the Kremlin’s core war aims.”

There was, and no doubt still is among many, an assumption that Ukraine’s counteroffensive is about taking back the territory Russia has taken and formally incorporated into the Russian Federation – the regions of Luhansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine and Zaporizhzhia and Kherson in southeastern Ukraine. Perhaps someday that will happen and Ukraine will get back not only that territory but Crimea, annexed in 2014, as well. But for now and the near future, the counteroffensive is focused on a more immediate challenge – stopping Russia’s continuing offensive in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. How long Russia will continue its offensive remains to be seen. Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense reported today that Russia’s “combat losses” (i.e., killed or wounded and removed from combat) from Feb. 24, 2022, when President Putin announced Russia’s “special military operation,” through today total 333,840. Through Saturday, Nov. 25, Russia’s combat losses totaled 323,760 – which means that over the past 10 days Russia has lost 10,080 killed or wounded – roughly 1,000 a day. One would think that at some point not only Russian mothers, wives, sisters, children, and men, especially those likely to be conscripted, but even the military leadership itself would say enough is enough. But that’s not likely to happen anytime soon, if ever. And so the war goes on – and Russians continue to kill Ukrainians and Ukrainians continue to kill Russians.

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