

Russian offensive continues in east with attacks toward Avdiivka, Maryinka, Bakhmut area, Lyman, Kupiansk



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

Ukraine's counteroffensive against the Russian forces holding much of eastern and southeastern Ukraine, which began in early June, continued in its 27th week last week. As 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 the city of Avdiivka a few miles north of the large 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 continued last week to be what it has been for some time – largely a defensive operation. The General Staff issues several updates each day on the war that describe the frequency and outcome of Russian attacks at various points along the contact line – specifically, toward Kupiansk; in the area around Bakhmut; toward the cities of Avdiivka and Maryinka a few miles to the north and west of the city of Donetsk; the area south of Orikhiv; and the area near Kherson in southern Ukraine. The most comprehensive reports, covering the previous 24 hours, are issued twice a day, in the early morning and late evening. The General Staff also issues additional updates from time to time throughout the day.

With several reports being issued each day, there is obviously a risk of counting the same Russian attack several times. However, that can be avoided by counting for each day only the attacks reported by the General Staff in its comprehensive report early each morning covering the previous 24 hours. Based on those daily early morning reports covering the previous 24 hours, the Russian forces conducted a total of 520 attacks last week – 58 in the direction of Kupiansk, 49 in the direction of Lyman, 100 in the area near Bakhmut, 182 in the direction of Avdiivka, 107 in the direction of Maryinka, and 25 in the area south of Orikhiv. According to the General Staff, the Ukrainian forces repelled all of the attacks. The General Staff reported the Russian forces attacked in the direction of Avdiivka more than 20 times in each of two days last week and more than 30 times in each of three other days last week. It reported the Russian forces attacked in the direction of nearby Maryinka between 14 and 24 times in five days last week. And in the Bakhmut area, it reported the Russian forces conducted at least 10 attacks every day last week, more than 12 attacks in four of the days, and more than 20 attacks in one of the days.

Yesterday's early morning report on the Russian attacks showed a similar pattern on Sunday, the first day of week 28 of the counteroffensive. The General Staff reported the Russian forces conducted 4 attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 5 in the direction of Lyman, 13 in the Bakhmut area, 49 in the direction of Avdiivka, 18 in the direction of Maryinka, and 3 in the area south of Orikhiv – a total of 92 attacks, all of which were repelled. And today's early morning report said yesterday the Russian forces conducted 4 attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 8 in the direction of Lyman, 14 in the Bakhmut area, 42 in the direction of Avdiivka, 14 in the direction of Maryinka, and 3 in the area south of Orikhiv – a total of 85 attacks, all of which were repelled.

Yesterday, as on Sunday and all of last week, Avdiivka, which had a pre-war population of about 30,000, of which less than 2,000 remain in the city, and which has Ukraine's largest coke plant, was by far the most frequent target of the Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine. It has become this winter's Bakhmut, which was the target of a months-long siege last winter and spring. Today, Gen. Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, the commander of the operational and strategic grouping of troops in the area, said on Telegram, "Two days ago, the enemy launched massive offensive actions with the support of armored vehicles in the Avdiivka and Maryinka directions. They are actively using aircraft, guided bombs. Nineteen air strikes have been launched in the past two days. The onslaught continues."

The direction and number of Russian attacks last week and in the first two days of this week make it very clear that the Russian forces are continuing their offensive operations in eastern Ukraine and that, notwithstanding the fact that the counteroffensive is now in its 28th week, Ukraine remains engaged largely in defensive operations against the Russian forces in eastern Ukraine. And the large numbers of Russian attacks each day in the direction of Avdiivka and Maryinka, as well as in the area near Bakhmut and in the direction of Kupiansk and Lyman, make it very clear as well that the priority for the

Russian forces now is to take as much territory as they can in eastern Ukraine – perhaps so President Putin can claim, in the run-up to the March 17 election, the Russian forces are on the verge of completing successfully the “special military operation” he launched on Feb. 24, 2022 – and perhaps, also, to establish Russia’s control over the territory in eastern Ukraine in the event, as unlikely as it now seems, there is someday a ceasefire and negotiation to end the conflict. In announcing that “operation,” Putin said it was designed to protect the people of the Donbas “who, for eight years now [i.e., since the outbreak of conflict between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces after the annexation of Crimea in 2014] have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime.” He said, “It is not our plan to occupy the Ukrainian territory. We do not intend to impose anything on anyone else.” Obviously, he later changed his mind; indeed, less than eight months later, Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as the regions of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson in the southeast, were unilaterally incorporated into the Russian Federation.

David R. Cameron
December 12, 2023