

Ukrainian forces continue to repel Russian attacks in the east



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

Ukraine's counteroffensive against the Russian forces holding much of eastern and southeastern Ukraine continued in its 28th 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, while 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 the British map, which hasn't changed at all since late October, is deceptive; it doesn't reflect the fact that there are many Russian attacks conducted each day against a number of targets along the contact line in eastern Ukraine, and that the counteroffensive was last week, as it had been for several weeks and remains this week, largely a defensive operation to repel the Russian attacks. It is not that, as some have claimed, the counteroffensive has stalled. Rather, it is the fact that, at least at this point in the war, the counteroffensive, especially in eastern Ukraine, is literally that – a counteroffensive, an effort to counter the continuing Russian offensive in eastern Ukraine.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine 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 and exaggerating the extent to which the Russian forces continue offensive operations in eastern and southeastern Ukraine.. 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 the daily early morning reports covering the previous 24 hours, in the seven days last week from Sunday through Saturday the Russian forces conducted a total of 646 attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, Lyman, the area to the south of Bakhmut, in the direction of Avdiivka and Maryinka, the area south of Orikhiv, and the area near Kherson. The Russian forces conducted 75 attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 29 in the direction of Lyman, 79 in the area near Bakhmut, 308 in the direction of Avdiivka, 106 in the direction of Maryinka, and 49 in the area south of Orikhiv. According to the General Staff, the Ukrainian forces repelled all of the attacks. In the previous seven days, the Russian forces had conducted a total of 521 attacks – 58 toward Kupiansk, 49 toward Lyman, 100 in the Bakhmut area, 182 toward Avdiivka, 107 toward Maryinka, and 25 in the area south of Orikhiv.

What is perhaps most noteworthy in these data is the number of Russian attacks toward Avdiivka – 182 two weeks ago and more than 300 last week – as they attempt to encircle and take that city. Every day last week the Russians conducted at least 30 attacks against the Ukrainian forces holding Avdiivka and the surrounding territory. On three days last week, the Russian forces conducted more than 40 attacks and on two other days last week they conducted more than 50 attacks, all of which were repelled. Judging by the number of attacks conducted last week, the Russian forces' highest priority has been to encircle and then take Avdiivka, with Maryinka, Kupiansk, Lyman, and the Bakhmut area also being important targets.

The Russian forces have little to show for their efforts last week, other than a significant number of new casualties. Ukraine's Ministry of Defense estimates that in the week beginning Sunday, Dec. 10 and concluding on Saturday, the Russian forces had 6,700 "combat losses" – that is, 6,700 killed or seriously wounded and removed from battle – bringing the total number of Russian

“combat losses” from Feb. 24, 2022, when Russia’s “special military operation” began, through last Saturday to 344,820.

But neither the extraordinary number of “combat losses” nor the formal adoption today by the EU of its 12th package of sanctions, approved by the European Council last week, have stopped the Russians, and so their attacks continue in the direction of Kupiansk, Lyman, the area near Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Maryinka and the area south of Orikhiv in this, week 29 of Ukraine’s counteroffensive.

David R. Cameron
December 18, 2023