

**Ukraine disputes Russia’s claim Maryinka has been “liberated.”
In fact, like Bakhmut it’s been destroyed.**



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 29th week last week. As Friday’s British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation (above) indicates, the Russian forces continued to attack in the direction of Kupiansk in Kharkiv region in northeastern Ukraine, toward the area around the largely destroyed city of Bakhmut, and toward the city of Avdiivka a few miles north of the large city of Donetsk. Interestingly, for the first time in more than two months, the British Intelligence map shows no green arrows representing Ukrainian attacks toward Bakhmut, the region just south of Orikhiv, and the area just east of the Dnipro River near the city of Kherson. The omission of those or other green arrows suggests what has become increasingly apparent in recent weeks – that the Ukrainian counteroffensive, initially assumed to be an offensive that would take back the territory taken by Russia in eastern and southeastern Ukraine, has instead become exactly what the term implies – a defensive operation against the continuing offensive operations of the Russian forces in eastern Ukraine.

The extent to which the Ukrainian counteroffensive has become a defensive operation against the continuing Russian offensive operations is perhaps best illustrated in the daily updates on the war issued by the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The General Staff issues several updates each day that describe the frequency and outcome of Russian attacks at various points along the contact line – specifically, toward Kupiansk; toward the area around Bakhmut; toward the small cities of Avdiivka and Maryinka to the north and west of Donetsk; and in the area south of Orikhiv in the

direction of Melitopol. Last week, for example, the General Staff reported a total of more than 70 attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, more than 40 in the direction of Lyman, more than 60 in the area south of Bakhmut, more than 200 in the direction of Avdiivka, more than 60 in the direction of Marynka, and more than 70 in the area south of Orikhiv – in all, more than 500 attacks. In the week of Dec. 3-9, the Russians conducted more than 500 attacks against those targets and in the week of Dec. 10-16, they conducted more than 650 attacks against those targets. As in the two previous weeks, the Ukrainian General Staff reported that all of the Russian attacks last week had been repelled. And also, as in the two previous weeks, the most frequent target of the Russian attacks was the small city of Avdiivka, which presumably reflects its importance to the Russians not only because of the large coke plant located there but also because it is only a few miles from Donetsk, which is by far the largest city in eastern Ukraine.

The Russian attacks on those targets continue this week and, as in the past three weeks, the most frequent target of the Russian attacks continues to be Avdiivka. But on Monday, following a naval ceremony in St. Petersburg, President Putin met with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Shoigu informed him that “Today, as a result of active offensive actions, the assault teams of the South group of forces completely liberated the town of Maryinka located five kilometers southwest of Donetsk. Over the past nine years, the Armed Forces of Ukraine have created a strongly fortified area there connected by underground passages, with well-fortified defences on practically every street that are well protected from air and field artillery strikes. There were permanent fire positions and a ramified system of underground routes. Owing to their decisive actions, our servicemen breached the fortified area. Considering that there are over 3,000 residential buildings in that town, and each one was a well-fortified position, the fact that this town was liberated naturally reduces the defence capabilities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and provides us with extra opportunities to further advance in this direction. Importantly, we have significantly pushed the artillery further back to the west from Donetsk. This allows us to protect Donetsk from attacks more effectively.”

After extending his congratulations, Putin said, “There are at least two positive outcomes here. The first is that we are pushing the enemy’s combat units away from Donetsk. And second, by breaching this fortified area, which the enemy has been building since 2014 and creating a significant number of reinforced concrete defensive structures and tunnels, our troops have gained access to a broader operational space. But of course this is a matter for commanders on the ground and specialists from the General Staff, the Defence Ministry. It is a separate topic. Nevertheless, we now have this option in this area.”

But Ukraine disputed the claim that the Russian forces had taken Maryinka. A spokesman for the Ukrainian military said that fighting continued for control of the town: “Our troops are in the administrative borders of Maryinka, the battles for the city continue. The city is completely destroyed, but it is incorrect to talk about the complete

capture of Maryinka.” And in a press conference, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, said, “Our official position is that we protect every bit of our land, every bit of it, but if enemy shells start to dig this place together with stones, with soil and with our soldiers, then the lives of our soldiers are more important to us. Maryinka has been holding on for almost two years, and it has been destroyed by the enemy, street by street and house by house. As of today, our forces are still in the northern part of the town and have prepared a defensive line near the settlement, but I can say that this settlement no longer exists.” Noting that the Russian forces had used the same tactics they used in Bakhmut, destroying it “street by street, quarter by quarter,” he said, “The fact that we have now moved to the outskirts of Maryinka is not something that can cause a public outcry. This is the war. Sadly it is like that.”

And with those words, Ukraine’s counteroffensive, now in week 30, continues in a war with no end in sight.

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