

Ukraine confirms its counter-offensive has failed. Day 617 of the war

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On 1 November, the *Economist* published an interview with the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, as well as an article by him in which he admitted that the situation at the front had reached a “dead end” and that neither side in the conflict was capable of going on the offensive. He pointed out that it was his personal mistake to have forecast the rapid exhaustion of Russian military capabilities, including their potential for mobilisation. The enemy’s resistance had meant that the Ukrainian army was only able to advance 17 kilometres deep into its positions during the five months of its counter-offensive. The general added that the current situation is reminiscent of trench warfare during World War I. The Ukrainian army’s attempts to break through the Russian positions failed because they became bogged down in minefields, and due to the enemy’s effective reconnaissance of Ukrainian forces’ groupings, which made it easier to destroy them. Another reason for the failure was that new brigades without combat experience were sent into battle. According to Zaluzhnyi, the Ukrainians need “new technologies” in order to break the stalemate. He identified the supply of air defence equipment as a priority; this should include fighter aircraft, drones, electronic warfare equipment, tools allowing counter-battery fire and equipment necessary for neutralising mines, including sapper robots. He also stated that Ukraine has limited capacity to train reserves on its territory, and said there are problems with rotating the soldiers on the front line. He stressed that Ukraine’s partners in NATO need at least one year, and in some cases (such as fighter planes) two, to increase their capacity to produce equipment and ammunition.

Evaluating the military assistance provided by the US so far, Zaluzhnyi pointed out that it has only been sufficient to stem the Russian invasion, but not to win the war. The delay in the delivery of ATACMS missile systems and tanks allowed the enemy to regroup and organise defences. He added that the F-16 fighter jets due to arrive in Ukraine next year may prove less useful due to Russia’s reinforcement of its S-400 air defence systems. In the general’s view, despite the difficult situation on the frontline, Ukraine has no choice but to maintain the initiative on the battlefield. He pointed out that prolonged trench warfare could exhaust the defenders’ ability to continue military operations. He announced that Vladimir Putin is counting on the collapse of Ukrainian public morale and a reduction in support from the West. In Zaluzhnyi’s opinion, although Russia has suffered heavy losses (around 150,000 people), it will still hold the upper hand over Ukraine for a long time to come.

The invading forces have expanded the area they controlled to the north and south-west of Avdiivka (including crossing the railway line towards Novokalynove) and on the north-

eastern and southern outskirts of the town. They have also made slight advances east of Kupiansk and south-west of Velyka Novosilka. The Russians halted attempts by Ukrainian troops to expand their bridgehead on the left bank of the Dnieper in the area of the village of Krynky (west of Nova Kakhovka), but did not dislodge them from its western part. Neither the successive attempts by the Ukrainians to storm enemy positions south of Orikhiv nor the Russian attacks north and south-west of Bakhmut and in and around the western part of Marinka have affected the situation on the ground. According to the Ukrainian General Staff, in the area of Marinka the invaders' troops are still striking with particular intensity (20 assaults per day; the number of attacks in the other directions usually does not exceed 10 per day).

On the night of 3 November, invaders carried out a massive kamikaze drone attack. Five hits were reported in Lviv oblast, and critical infrastructure facilities were damaged. Damage to infrastructure also occurred in Odesa oblast, and around Kharkiv, where 10 drones struck. The Ukrainian General Staff claimed to have shot down 24 of the 38 Shahed-136/131 drones used by the enemy. The day before, the Russians attacked Odesa oblast (two Oniks missiles failed to reach their target, according to Ukrainian reports) and Torske in Donetsk oblast. In total, they used seven missiles on that day. On 1 November, Russian drones hit a disused refinery in Kremenchuk and damaged energy infrastructure in Poltava oblast. Explosions from airstrikes were also reported from the Myrhorod area of Poltava oblast (the military airport there was probably targeted once again), from the city of Dnipro, and from Khmelnytskyi and Odesa oblasts. According to the General Staff, the defenders shot down 18 of the 20 Shahids used by the invaders, while the Russians also used five rockets (according to local reports, two of them were shot down). On 2 November, the destruction of a critical infrastructure facility by Russian artillery fire was reported from Kherson. According to Russian sources, the Ukrainians renewed their attacks on Crimea on 1 and 2 November (the invaders' forces shot down three out of six Storm Shadow cruise missiles and two Neptune-type missiles) using missiles and kamikaze drones, but this did not result in major losses.

On 3 November, the Dutch newspaper *Het Financieele Dagblad*, citing defence minister Kajsa Ollongren, reported that the €500 million military support package destined for Kyiv in 2024 would include artillery (€260 million) and tank ammunition (€240 million). On 2 November, Reuters reported Washington's intention to announce a further \$425 million tranche of military support for Ukraine. US\$300 million is to be spent under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) to purchase anti-drone laser-guided munitions; the remaining amount will be used to provide missiles for NASAMS and HIMARS launchers, 105-mm and 155-mm artillery ammunition, TOW anti-tank guided missiles, Claymore anti-personnel mines, small arms, and vehicles from US Army stocks. On the same day, the German Chancellery announced it would send Kyiv two TRML-4D radars for IRIS-T systems, 12 armoured personnel carriers (type not indicated), seven Primoco One reconnaissance drones, five surface drones, five tractor-trailers with four semi-trailers, and 12 MAN TGS trucks. Berlin also confirmed its earlier announcements that an additional 25 Leopard 1A5 tanks would be delivered as part of a joint project with Denmark; according to earlier plans, Ukraine was to receive 90 tanks of this type; so far 20 have been handed over, but only eight of them are operational. On 31 October, Pentagon spokesman General Patrick Ryder announced that it would take between five and nine months to train Ukrainian pilots on F-16

fighters, depending on their skills.

On 1 November the Bloomberg news agency, citing sources in South Korea, reported that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had sent 10 shipments of war materiel to Russia since August. These included 1 million artillery shells of 122-mm and 152-mm calibres, which should meet the army's needs for two months. According to the South Korean army's Joint Chiefs of Staff, Pyongyang has agreed to supply Russia with short-range ballistic missiles and portable anti-aircraft missile launchers.

A day later, the US Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink stated that US officials monitoring military and humanitarian assistance had not noted any cases of misuse. She recalled that a third of the mission's staff, as well as representatives from the US Inspector General's Office, are involved in overseeing the distribution of the support provided.

Commentary

- Zaluzhnyi's article is the first official acknowledgement of the failure of the Ukrainian counter-offensive. The author took responsibility for its poor preparation and execution, and admitted that the potential of the Russian forces had been underestimated. In doing so, he singled out those countries which could have supplied more long-range missiles and fighter jets as having contributed to the failure by limiting and slowing down the delivery of offensive weaponry. The general's disappointment is demonstrated by his call for more deliveries of armaments capable of weakening enemy resistance, and his assurance that the Ukrainian army would not give up its attempts at 'manoeuvre warfare'. Indeed, his pessimistic assessment of the prospects for waging prolonged trench warfare indicates that the Ukrainian government is aware of the growing risk of exhausting the human and material resources needed to maintain the armed conflict.
- Continued Russian activity in most directions and the Ukrainians' waning commitment to offensive action demonstrate that the initiative is again shifting to the invaders, although there are no signs that Russia is preparing to launch a larger-scale offensive in the near future. They still have not amassed the forces in the theatre of operations that would guarantee them a numerical advantage, at least locally; it seems that they are still trying to minimise their losses, as judged, among other things, by the change in the nature of their assaults on Ukrainian positions in the area around Avdiivka. It should be remembered that the invaders have deployed between 200,000 (according to US data) and over 400,000 (according to Kyiv's estimates) troops in Ukraine, while the defenders' forces number close to 1 million soldiers, at least half of whom are engaged in the combat areas. The weather conditions are also not conducive to the development of an offensive (rain and mud limit the movement of vehicles); from an operational point of view, matters will only improve when the frost arrives. This allows us to assume that Russian operations cannot be intensified any earlier than the beginning of next year, and that the invaders' main objective over the coming weeks will remain the weakening of Ukrainian defences.

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