

The Ukrainian initiative in the Kursk Oblast. Day 902 of the war

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 The situation on the frontline

Ukrainian forces are maintaining the initiative in the Kursk Oblast, where they have been constantly conducting offensive actions with the aim of expanding the area under their control and disorganising the Russian rear. Due to the rapid pace of these operations, various, often contradictory reports about them have emerged in the media; at least in some cases, they are part of the information war that both sides have been waging. Nonetheless, we can assume with a high degree of certainty that Ukrainian advances thus far peaked in the middle of 12 August, when, moving northwards, Ukrainian forces captured the area up to the Kremyanoye-Sheptukhovka-Ivnytsa line, more than 20 km from the border. By the evening of that day, Russian forces succeeded in driving them out of most of the newly occupied territory; since then, the frontline in the incursion's northern direction has formed at the depth of about 15 km that Ukrainian forces reached earlier. Fighting has increasingly turned into positional battles, which have been particularly intense south of Korenevo. Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups (SRGs) have continued to carry out raids towards the villages of Obshchiy Kolodezh and Kauchuk and, according to some sources, even further towards Lgov, but their frequency has fallen (on the earlier operations, see '[Ukrainian military action in Kursk oblast](#)'; '[The Ukrainian attack in the Kursk Oblast. Military consequences and Ukraine's objectives](#)').

In an effort to maintain the manoeuvre nature of their operations, Ukrainian forces have shifted the main thrust of their attack to the east and west of the area under their control (c. 500 sq km at its peak). They have most likely occupied the whole of Sudzha and expanded the area under their control north and south of this town, on the border of the Sudzhansky and Belovsky Districts. As a result of these moves, the area occupied by Ukrainian forces in the eastern direction has also reached the depth of 15 km from the border.

Ukrainian forces have also intruded into the Belovsky District from the border, but without much success. On the western side, particularly fierce fighting has been taking place in the village of Snagost', which has changed hands at least twice and is now back under Russian control. Further Ukrainian attempts to break into the Belgorod Oblast have failed as their small formations (mainly SRGs) have been stopped just across the border, mainly near the Kolotilovka crossing. Russia has moved more units into the combat area, resulting in a

series of encounter battles where both sides pressed forward simultaneously, something that has rarely happened anywhere on the battlefield until now.

A part of the Ukrainian grouping has still not been involved in the fighting; Tiotkino, some 45 km to the west of the current area of operations, has been identified as the intrusion's potential new direction. However, local reports suggest that the Ukrainian forces involved in operations in the Kursk Oblast are no longer growing in size. Russian figures, which are higher than those reported by other sources, indicate that the Ukrainian grouping comprises 12,000 troops from five formations: the 80th and 82nd Air Assault Brigades and the 22nd, 61st and 115th Mechanised Brigades. It is possible that the Russian military wants to demonstrate this way that it has been facing a more numerous opponent than is actually the case.

It is an open question whether, if Ukraine succeeds in intruding deeper into Russian territory, its military will decide to pull more forces from the battlefield in Ukraine and send them to the Kursk Oblast, risking a further deterioration of the situation on its own territory. Indeed, the grouping operating inside Russia is mostly made up of units assembled from subunits that have been withdrawn from areas of operation in Ukraine in recent weeks as the country's armed forces still do not have significant reserves to carry out a more extensive operation.

On 12 August, President Volodymyr Zelensky officially acknowledged for the first time that the Ukrainian army had entered Russian territory. The Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, General Oleksandr Syrskyi, described the ongoing actions as an offensive operation and stated that an area of 1,000 sq km has come under Ukrainian control. The following day Zelensky announced that Ukrainian forces had seized 74 settlements in the Kursk Oblast, while Syrskyi said that the area under their control had increased by another 40 sq km. According to the governor of the Kursk Oblast, Alexei Smirnov, Ukrainian troops have occupied 28 settlements, while the Ukrainian analytical project DeepState, which produces maps depicting the situation on the frontline, has put this number at 44 (these figures should be considered as the most reliable). Syrskyi's figure of 1,000 sq km is the maximum area of the Kursk Oblast that has seen fighting, including the activity of Ukrainian SRGs, over the past week.

On 12 August, Vladimir Putin appointed his trusted man, General Alexei Dyumin, former governor of the Tula Oblast who was appointed secretary of Russia's State Council last May, **as coordinator of the anti-terrorist operation in the Kursk Oblast.** Dyumin has previously served both in the military (in the last years of his career, he was commander of the Special Operations Forces, Chief of the General Staff of the Land Forces and Deputy Defence Minister) and in the civilian special services, including the Presidential Security Service. As commander of the Special Operations Forces, he played an instrumental role in the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Although the Kursk-born Dyumin's sole official task is to coordinate military and civilian activities, some Russian sources have described him as the actual commander of the 'North' group of forces. **His background suggests that his task of holding back Ukrainian forces and driving them out of Russian territory will resemble a special operation rather than a typical military operation** with a defensive and an offensive component. The major role that SRGs have been playing in the Ukrainian military action in the Kursk Oblast also supports this conclusion.

The ongoing operations in the Kursk Oblast have still not forced the Russian military to withdraw any substantial forces from Ukraine. On 12 and 13 August, the spokesman for the operational-strategic group of troops 'Tavria', Colonel Dmytro Lychoviy, confirmed that Russia had redeployed its forces from the occupied parts of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts. However, he stressed that this was a "relatively small" number of subunits, which does not indicate "any weakening" of the Russian military. The 810th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade and the 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division, which have been mentioned as currently participating in operations in the Kursk Oblast, come from those two regions. Citing a source in the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, The Economist reported on 11 August that Russia had been mainly redeploying subunits from secondary sections of the Ukrainian battlefield to its own territory (earlier reports that Russia had redeployed some reserves from the Kharkiv area were confirmed), moving them at a slower pace than the Ukrainian command wants to see.

Reports in the Russian and Ukrainian infosphere have identified more than a dozen different numbers of units that supposedly fought in Ukraine before, but have now been sent to the Kursk Oblast; however, this information comes from a single source and has so far not been corroborated by reports from the area of operations. US officials have sidestepped the question about the scale of the Russian withdrawal from Ukrainian territory (according to The Wall Street Journal from 13 August). Ukrainian sources reported on 12 August that Russia has also continued to send military columns into the occupied parts of Ukraine, including the (currently relatively peaceful) Zaporizhzhia Oblast. On a visit to Kyiv on 13 August, Lithuanian Defence Minister Laurynas Kasčiūnas said that Russia had been moving its units from Kaliningrad to the Kursk Oblast. This confirms that **it is still seeking to drive Ukrainian forces out of its territory using mainly forces that are not involved in the fighting in Ukraine while maintaining the initiative on Ukrainian territory.**

Russian forces are continuing their offensive in the Donbas, where they have made further advances over the past week along the entire battlefield from Chasiv Yar in the north to Vuhledar in the south. The fiercest fighting is taking place in the Pokrovsk direction, where Russian troops have driven the defending units from another five villages (including three in the past two days), and on the outskirts of Toretsk. Russian units have reportedly entered the latter from the north-east, splitting Ukrainian defences in neighbouring Pivnichne into two parts. A spokesman for the 32nd Mechanised Brigade defending Toretsk has denied that regular Russian units entered the built-up area, but said that Russian SRGs have been operating in the town, eroding the compactness of its defence. After a temporary retreat following a Ukrainian counter-attack, Russian forces have retaken positions in the western part of Niu-York and moved to drive Ukrainian units from its centre.

Russian forces have also become more active in the Kharkiv Oblast: they have widened the breach south-east of Kupiansk and resumed their assaults in Vovchansk, but achieved no success there. Minor shifts of the line of contact in both directions have occurred on the border between the Kharkiv and Luhansk Oblasts.

On 10 August, **Ukrainian soldiers blew up one of the gas drilling platforms in the Black Sea** known as Boyko towers. A spokesman for the Ukrainian Navy, Dmytro Pletenchuk, said that they destroyed electronic warfare systems located at the site, which Russia had been using to jam GPS signals and obstruct navigation. According to Ukrainian military intelligence

(HUR), the previous day its forces conducted sabotage operations on the Kinburn Spit, destroying other electronic warfare systems, and near the town of Chornomorske in Crimea.

Russian air attacks

Russia has stepped up its air strikes on the Sumy Oblast and the neighbouring Chernihiv Oblast with the use of rockets and guided aerial bombs (Russian: KAB). The former region has been targeted by several rockets and around 40-50 KABs per day – several times more than before the start of Ukrainian operations in the neighbouring Kursk region. In both oblasts, Russia has been systematically targeting energy infrastructure, launching attacks on 6, 11, 13 and 14 August. Ukrainian infrastructure has also come under attack in Kramatorsk (10 August) and the Zhytomyr Oblast (14 August). On 10 August, a Russian missile hit a shopping centre in Kostiantynivka in the Donetsk Oblast, killing 14 civilians and injuring 44. It is unclear what was targeted in the attacks in the Kyiv Oblast on 11 August, which reportedly struck facilities in Brovary and Bila Tserkva. Russian rockets once again hit Kharkiv (6 August) and Odesa (11 August) as well as airfields in the Khmelnytskyi Oblast (Starokonstantinov, 11 August) and the Poltava Oblast (Myrhorod, 12 August). From the evening of 6 August until the morning of 14 August, Russia reportedly used a total of at least 46 rockets and 179 Shahed/Geran drones. Ukraine claimed to have shot down six missiles and 161 drones.

Ukraine is increasingly suggesting that Russia has been firing KN-23 ballistic missiles provided by North Korea (its version of Russia's Iskanders), leaving it unclear as to the type of rocket used. During the period analysed, Russia has reportedly used six or seven North Korean missiles. We should assume that this narrative is part of the Ukrainian information policy aimed at demonstrating Russia's close collaboration with the regime in Pyongyang.

Ukrainian operations against Russia

On 9 August, Ukrainian kamikaze drones destroyed an ammunition depot at a Russian air force training centre near Lipetsk. In addition, an energy facility was hit in the Lipetsk region. The attack also targeted five other Russian regions and occupied Crimea, but no major damage was reported there. Russia claimed to have shot down a total of 75 Ukrainian drones that day (the highest number, 29, in the Belgorod Oblast). **Smaller-scale strikes continued in the following days, mainly targeting the rear of the Russian forces in the Kursk Oblast.** In addition to drones, Ukraine reportedly used Tochka-U ballistic missiles in an attack on 11 August, which damaged buildings in Kursk and Voronezh.

One of Ukraine's largest attacks on Russian territory took place on 14 August: Russian sources reported that 117 Ukrainian drones and four Tochka-U ballistic missiles were destroyed. The targets included another pilot training centre, Savasleyka in the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, where, according to initial reports, a fire broke out at the fuel depot. Ukrainian sources also suggested that military airfields in the Voronezh Oblast may have been attacked, but there has been no information on this so far. The largest number of Ukrainian drones (37) and missiles (four) reportedly targeted the Kursk Oblast.

On 9 August, the Pentagon announced another package of military support, worth \$125 million. Under the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), anti-aircraft missiles for Stinger launchers, guided missiles for HIMARS launchers, 105mm and 155mm artillery ammunition, Javelin and TOW anti-tank guided missiles, AT4 anti-tank grenade launchers and multifunctional radar stations will be transferred from the US military's warehouses. On the same day, Lithuania's defence ministry announced that **in August the country would provide Ukraine with weapons including 14 M113 armoured personnel carriers and short-range anti-aircraft systems along with missiles.**

A report published on 9 August by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that **219 civilians were killed and 1018 injured in Ukraine in July, making it the "deadliest" month for civilians since October 2022.** "The high number of casualties in July continues a trend of increasing civilian casualties since March 2024", the report emphasised. The UN has estimated that at least 11,520 civilians have been killed and at least 23,640 have been injured since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, the actual numbers are much higher. The report noted that the number of dead and wounded in clashes has not yet been fully taken into account and that some of the places where the heaviest fighting took place in early 2022 (such as Mariupol) are still under occupation, which makes it impossible to carry out investigations.

On 12 August, experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency inspected the cooling tower of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, where a fire had occurred the day before. **The inspection report stated that there was no significant damage to the facility and that there were no traces of tyres or debris from a drone that was thought to have caused the fire.** According to officials from the Russian occupation authorities, the fire was the result of artillery shelling by the Armed Forces of Ukraine and an attack by a Ukrainian kamikaze drone on the power plant. The spokeswoman for the Russian foreign ministry, Maria Zakharova, accused the government in Kyiv of engaging in "nuclear terror." The Ukrainian administration of Enerhodar, for its part, claimed that the Russians had set fire to car tyres in the cooling tower. President Zelensky called on the international community to hold the Russian government responsible for causing the fire and blackmailing Ukraine and the rest of the world.

On 13 August, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine announced that **it had imposed restrictions on the movement of civilians in the 20-kilometre border zone in the Sumy Oblast.** According to the new regulations, only people registered there will be allowed to stay in the area. The General Staff justified its decision citing the increased intensity of hostilities and the activity of Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups.

On 6 August, President Zelensky said that **in July, the Armed Forces of Ukraine used more drones in combat than Russia** and that “this should be a permanent trend on the frontline.” He added that the Ukrainian armed forces had signed contracts for a total of one million drones this year and that production would increase next year. On 13 August, Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov announced that his ministry had launched a programme to study the design of unmanned aerial vehicles in cooperation with the Kyiv School of Economics.

Belarusian operations against Ukraine

On 10 August, **Alyaksandr Lukashenka announced that Ukrainian combat drones had been shot down over Belarusian territory**. The dictator called the incident a “Ukrainian provocation” and ordered a stronger military presence in the areas bordering Ukraine. At the same time, the Belarusian foreign ministry handed a note of protest to Ukrainian charge d’affaires Olga Tymush, warning that the government in Minsk could take “retaliatory steps” if there was a “repeat of the provocation.” On 13 August, a spokesman for the Ukrainian foreign ministry, Heorhiy Tykhyi, said that Ukraine “does not see any particular reason to respond to statements from Belarus, as the Belarusian side is known for making many statements that should not be responded to.”

Status as of 12:00 Kyiv time.

