Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 24.09.2024 www.osw.waw.pl

Ukrainians destroy Russian ammunition depots. Day 943 of the war

Andrzej Wilk, Jakub Ber

The situation on the frontline

Russian forces have outflanked Vuhledar from the west, resulting in the city being in a pincer. According to some sources, the Ukrainian troops defending it (mainly the 72nd Mechanised Brigade) have begun to withdraw from the city, and the aggressor's soldiers entered the built-up area from the east. After Russia seized the village of Zhelanne Druhe, which Ukraine claims is still contested, the Ukrainian forces remaining west of Donetsk in the forks of the Vovcha and Lozova rivers are at risk of encirclement.

The Russians, operating towards Pokrovsk, cut the rail and road links between Selydove and Kurakhove, creating another obstacle for the retreating Ukrainian troops. They have also brought about a relative realignment of the front line south and east of Myrnohrad, where they have re-established control over areas recaptured by the defenders a week earlier. The Ukrainians are holding on to the western outskirts of Hrodivka, the last village on the main road to Myrnohrad. As a result of the bombardment in Pokrovsk, problems with the availability of water, electricity and gas are worsening, and the constant shelling is making it difficult to evacuate the remaining residents in the town (their number is still estimated at several thousand). **Due to the damage to the transport infrastructure, Pokrovsk's role as a logistical base for Ukrainian forces fighting in the northern Donbas has also diminished.**

Russian troops have entered Leonidivka to the west of Toretsk, threatening to outflank the town from the west. Fighting is ongoing in its centre, which the Russians have broken into by attacking from the east. Russian forces have extended their footholds on the western side of the Donets-Donbas canal north and south of Chasiv Yar. They also landed on the west bank of the Zherebets River in the area of Makiivka and Nevske (on the border of Luhansk and Kharkiv oblasts), from where Ukrainian troops gave way after several months of defence. The Russians deepened the breach south-east of Kupiansk, where they had about 2km left to cross the Oskil River at Kruhlyakivka. They also became active south of Velyka Novosilka, where they struck again at Makarivka, the Ukrainian recapture in the summer of 2023.

The Russian offensive in the Kursk Oblast slowed down, but the Ukrainian reinforcements arriving there failed to stabilise the defences. The Russians made further advances on both flanks, attacking primarily in the border areas. This indicates an intention to cut off the

Ukrainians from their home territory. However, further Ukrainian attacks in the Glushkovsky District, west of the main area of operations, failed to produce results.

Russian air attacks

The destruction of energy infrastructure in Ukraine's rear, which Russia mostly uses suicide drones for, **continued for another week**. According to reports published daily by the Ministry of Energy of Ukraine, facilities (mostly substations) in Kharkiv (21 September), Khmelnytskyi (22 September), Dnipropetrovsk (21 and 22 September), Donetsk (17 and 19 September), Kyiv (17 September), Poltava (22 and 24 September) and Sumy (17, 19, 21 and 22 September) oblasts were damaged.

Kharkiv is under constant attack, with guided aerial bombs (Russian: KAB) falling on it at least once a day (Russia has used missiles rarely in recent weeks). Sumy was attacked with slightly less intensity (18, 19 and 21 September). However, the number of strikes on Zaporizhzhia, which the Russians attacked with KABs on 15, 22 and 23 September, increased. The target of the only confirmed rocket attack on this city (23 September) was the Motor Sich plant. Russian missiles also struck the port of Odesa (20 September; a ship flying the Antigua flag was damaged, among others), Dnipro (20 September) and Kryvyi Rih (21 September). According to Ukrainian data, from the morning of 18 September until the early hours of 24 September, the Russians are believed to have used 37 missiles (the Ukrainian Air Force Command claimed to have shot down seven) and 345 Shaheds (with 300 destroyed).

Ukrainian operations against Russia

Two munition depots in the Tver Oblast were partially destroyed in Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian territory, as confirmed by satellite imagery. On 18 September, the 107th Arsenal of the Main Rocket and Artillery Directorate (Russian: GRAU) of the Russian Defence Ministry near Toropets was hit. Eighteen large detonations were reported, which caused seismic shocks. According to the Ukrainian side, the Russians stored, among other things, Iskander missiles and North Korean KN-23s there. According to Estonian intelligence, 30,000 tonnes of ammunition (equivalent to 750,000 152mm calibre artillery shells) exploded there, equivalent to a stockpile for two to three months of fighting. On 21 September, the 23rd GRAU Arsenal in the village of Oktyabrsky, 16 km from Toropets, was attacked. It was thought to contain 2,000 tonnes of ammunition, including North Korean-made cartridges. According to some sources, the depot was hit by a Palianytsia jet-powered drone (described as a missile-drone in the Ukrainian broadcast). The 719th Artillery Missile Base in Kamenny in Krasnodar Krai was also hit, but no major damage was confirmed there. **The attack on 21 September was one of the largest carried out by the Ukrainians to date.** The Russians claimed to have destroyed 101 drones that day, and 54 on 18 September. In addition to those mentioned above, facilities in other regions of the Russian Federation and in occupied Crimea are also thought to have been attacked.

The strike on the depot near Toropets is probably the most successful Ukrainian attack on Russian munition depots since February 2022. The scale of the destruction of the

stockpiles there will affect the Russians' planning of their ammunition consumption, although it is not certain that this will be directly felt by the defenders on the frontline. Indeed, for operations in Ukraine, Russia's troops obtain ammunition from dozens of different depots in the European part of Russia.

Western support for Ukraine

On 19 September, the German Chancellery announced the handover of another military support package to Kyiv. It included previously announced armaments and military equipment, including 22 Leopard 1A5 tanks (in cooperation with Denmark), five Bandvagn 206 articulated tracked transporters, three Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, two TRML-4D radar stations, 30 Vector and 20 Heidrun reconnaissance drones and 20 surface drones. 61,000 pieces of 155 mm calibre artillery ammunition were also delivered. **A day earlier, the Lithuanian defence ministry announced the delivery of additional support worth €40–50 million by the end of this year.** Lithuania plans to provide, among other things, radiolocation stations and short-range air defence systems. 10 million euros is to be invested in the production of Palianytsia drones. **The US will prepare another $375mn military support package**, as reported on 20 September by Reuters (and others). The General Staff of the French Army reported that **a group of Ukrainian pilots has completed training on Alpha Jet combat-training aircraft**. The course began in March this year.

Ukraine's military potential

On 21 September, journalist and social activist Serhiy Hnezdilov, who has been serving in the army since 2019, announced that he was leaving his unit, considering himself a deserter. He called his decision an act of defiance against the attitude of Ukraine's highest authorities. In doing so, he accused them of mismanaging the state's war effort, being unwilling to make difficult decisions on mobilisation, failing to communicate honestly with the public and tolerating corruption. Hnezdilov stressed that, in view of the extreme fatigue – especially in the infantry – it is necessary to introduce the possibility of demobilisation after the expiry of the legal deadline for service. In his opinion, in order to enable the release of some soldiers, it is necessary to create a mobilisation reserve made up of all citizens, to significantly increase the pace of mobilisation and to curb abuses. The speech resulted in wide public resonance, especially in the army. Most of the soldiers in authority who spoke publicly on the issue criticised Hnezdilov. They stressed that, although it is difficult to disagree with the accusations levelled against the Kyiv authorities, a public admission of desertion is a breach of the military oath and an act of disloyalty to fellow soldiers and could lead to a further erosion of discipline in the army.

According to unofficial information from the *Ukrainska Pravda* newspaper, **Defence Minister Rustem Umerov dismissed two deputy heads of the Main Directorate of Intelligence (HUR) in recent days: Viktor Zaytsev and Ihor Ostapenko**. The dismissals were said to have taken place without being agreed with HUR chief General Kyrylo Budanov. According to journalists, Umerov is planning further dismissals among generals, with the dismissal of Budanov himself also being considered.

On 20 September, *The Guardian* described the Russians' preparations for a Ukrainian offensive operation in Kursk Oblast on the basis of captured documents. **According to the British newspaper's findings, the Russians expected an attack from the Sumy Oblast and had been trying to prepare for it for several months**, including by drawing additional troops from inland, expanding fortifications and camouflaging positions. The possibilities of organising an effective defence were limited mainly due to the personnel deficit of the Russian army, the low level of training and the weakened morale.

