

FASTER AND FURIOUSER: UKRAINE'S FORCES TAKE BACK KHARKIV OBLAST AND MORE

[NB: check the byline, thanks. /~Rayne]

It's been quite a while since the last post about the Russo-Ukrainian War here. It's difficult to write about a war of attrition as not much big happens, just the grinding count of materiel damaged and seized along with the grueling and gruesome casualty count.

But the narrative in Ukraine has changed in huge way over the last six days. What initially looked like a push into southern Ukraine by its own forces turned into a blazing two-front counteroffensive with the eastern front cutting off Russia's critical supply route from Belgorod north of the Russian-Ukraine border to the cities of Kupiansk along the Oskil River and Izium. The appearance of a push along a single southern front may have been effective information warfare.

The tweet below includes a GIF showing the ground taken back over the last week:

Animated GIF showing how a blistering Ukrainian counteroffensive liberated Kharkiv Oblast west of the Oskil River in 6 days for @TheStudyofWar.

Russian forces likely do not control any territory west of the Oskil River in Kharkiv. Ukrainians are conducting clearing operations.

<https://t.co/CH1LIomRmx>
pic.twitter.com/62iivvRNKx

— George Barros (@georgewbarros)
September 12, 2022

During the counteroffensive there has been some confusion online about the ground taken, in part because Ukraine's forces had been asked to take photos and videos and share them to show their progress in an effort to demoralize both Russian troops and Russian media. The lag between the photos and videos and the time necessary to validate the locations along with the rapid dispersion may not only have surprised Ukraine's supporters but shocked-and-awed Russians.

Russian media analyst Julia Davis shared some reactions which are all over the map. The loss of the Battle of Kharkiv has punctured their bubble; they're trying to find a way to spin this.

They were surprised on Friday, rationalizing what they'd seen:

Watch this roundup of clips, featuring panicked Kremlin propagandists on several state TV programs, discussing impressive gains by Ukraine's Armed Forces in reclaiming control over Ukrainian territory. More in my article <https://t.co/WKx3JVtvkn>
[pic.twitter.com/8CYDRpB85X](https://t.co/WKx3JVtvkn)

— Julia Davis (@JuliaDavisNews)
September 9, 2022

Yesterday they sounded bitter, swinging wildly between demands for full mobilization to defeat "Ukrainian Nazis" or getting out:

Life comes at you fast: pundits on Russian TV realize that their military is failing and their country is in trouble. They are starting to play the blame game. Some of them finally understand that their genocidal denial of the Ukrainian identity isn't working in Russia's favor.
[pic.twitter.com/jNNn5xifI5](https://t.co/jNNn5xifI5)

— Julia Davis (@JuliaDavisNews)
September 11, 2022

But something isn't quite right in Moscow. The lack of obvious discussion and reaction from Moscow to this counteroffensive combined with calls on September 8 by St. Petersburg's city council to charge Putin with treason limns a black hole.

One might wonder if Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu is avoiding windows, rooftops, and helicopters.

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There are numerous reports of Russian troops literally running away heading east to the Russian border, abandoning equipment and clothing in their haste to avoid encirclement which surely must have happened at Izium. Still more reports mention Russian-speakers leaving the Donetsk region heading to Russia but being refused entry in spite of carrying newly-issued Russian passports issued as part of the annexation and integration of eastern Ukraine by Russia.

A major concern is for the welfare of prisoners of war. There may be 20 to 30,000 from this counteroffensive – and now even more with the apparent negotiations of Russian troops surrender east of Mikolaiv in the Kherson oblast north of the Dnieper River – they need to be housed, fed, clothed, and secured. Resources to manage this will come at the expense of personnel needed to continue the drive east and south as well as resources necessary for the Ukrainian people.

Anne Applebaum has an essay in The Atlantic encouraging a shift in thinking:

Russian soldiers are running away. They are leaving weapons and equipment behind, surrendering, hiding in civilian clothes.

Time to think about what happens if Ukraine wins.

<https://t.co/2lYS6sWa8z>

— Anne Applebaum (@anneapplebaum)

September 11, 2022

She's right that we need to think about a Ukrainian win, but we also need to consider what a Russian loss means. Not only do we have to consider the likely succession in leadership in Russia which is not delineated in publicly available records, but we need to think about control of Russian nuclear weapons.

Applebaum wrote Ukraine's expectations of a win are "extraordinarily ambitious," based on Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov statement to an audience in Kyiv this weekend that "victory should now include not only a return to the borders of Ukraine as they were in 1991—including Crimea, as well as Donbas in eastern Ukraine—but also reparations to pay for the damage and war-crimes tribunals to give victims some sense of justice."

It's not ambitious but prudent to make this demand; one asks for everything and works out a compromise for less. The first demand sets a ceiling and the response will set the floor. Failing to demand enough would play into Putin's hands. Reparations are most likely negotiable since Russia's economy has been badly damaged by this ridiculous genocidal war.

Which brings us to more damage which must be discussed and addressed as soon as possible, once Russia does fold its operations in Ukraine: where are the kidnapped Ukrainians including thousands and thousands of children forcibly taken into Russia? What is needed to return them home, to care for the children if separated permanently from family?

Further, what will Ukraine need from the rest of the world to document the war crimes which will be uncovered as the Russians exit occupied territory? There will be more horrors like Bucha left behind.

How does the world prevent potential unresolved

anger from spilling over when Russian troops return home, to find they may not be compensated as promised. Russia has agreed with China to sell China fossil fuels for yuan and rubles, but conversion of the yuan may be hampered by sanctions and rubles have no value in countries where Russian interests are tightly sanctioned. Which means currency of real value will be limited inside Russia. There may be a population easily radicalized and motivated for cash.

Winning, though, is a distance away. There are other immediate problems in addition to regaining southern Ukraine and occupied Crimea, like the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant which has been powered down into a safe state after experiencing power cuts to the plant. How this plant will be safely cycled back up once fighting ends may need resources.

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All of which is to say the US, NATO, and the rest of the world need to switch gears to keep up with Ukraine.

Faster and fiercer, people. Slava Ukraini, heroiam slava!