



Ukraine's counter-offensive

The media, which describe the Ukrainian advance as the biggest counter-offensive since the Second World War, have lost all sense of proportion.

Peter Hanseler

Fri 16 Sep 2022

If the Western media are to be believed, the tide has turned in Ukraine.

The headlines are full of stories: the biggest counter-offensive since the Second World War - the Russian invaders are fleeing headlong back to the border.

CNN reported on a huge counter-offensive on Sunday.

Throughout this week, the tone remained the same - the tide of the war had turned. On Sunday, Twitter said something important was happening in Moscow: communications were paralysed and tanks were in the streets - a coup d'état. About

the latter: I was just out walking and looking at the stands for the 875th anniversary.

However, such horror reports are nothing new: In autumn 1998, I was also in Moscow and at that time the Financial Times wrote that tanks were rolling into the centre of Moscow and that civil war had begun - at that time simply without social media - but tanks were not there then either.

What really happened in Ukraine and what will the possible consequences be? For months, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced an offensive in Kherson. At first there was talk of an army of a million, then the announcements died down somewhat. The fact is that the Ukrainian general staff advised against such an offensive.

Zelenskyy, however, prevailed, as a victory was needed to justify the gigantic deliveries of weapons and money from the USA and Nato countries. The Russian armed forces number about 200,000 men - including troops from the Donbass. The Russians were initially confronted with about 700,000 Ukrainian soldiers. The front measures 1100 kilometres.

The military operation is therefore being conducted by the Russians with a very small force that cannot possibly secure a front of 1100 kilometres. Priorities have to be set and therefore risks have to be taken. This was now evident in one section of the front.

The Ukrainian armed forces launched not one, but two offensives: At the beginning of September, the offensive in Kherson started, which turned into a debacle for the Ukrainians within a very short time. Huge losses of soldiers and material without any significant gains in terrain. Even the Washington Post spoke of a debacle - a newspaper that could not be more pro-Ukrainian.

The article featured a Ukrainian tank commander who had no military experience prior to the military operation, but by September was already commanding a tank group. An indication that Ukrainians are sent to the front as cannon fodder after a quick bleaching. His successor had no experience either.

The second Ukrainian offensive in the Kharkov region, however, ended quite differently: between 4 and 9 September, the Ukrainians took a large area. However, there was not much fighting.

The Russians retreated very quickly, leaving at least 2,000 square kilometres to the Ukrainians; the Western media speak of 6,000. That sounds like a lot, but it is not.

The Russians control over 120,000 square kilometres of Ukraine. Thus, 2000 square kilometres correspond to only 1.6 per cent.

The media reports calling this advance the biggest counter-offensive since the Second World War have once again lost all sense of scale.

The largest counter-offensive conducted in the Second World War was the Russian operation "Bagration" in June 1944: This was conducted against the Army Group Centre of the German Wehrmacht. At that time, the Russians conquered about 400,000 square kilometres within six weeks, which is more than the area of Germany.

In Operation Bagration, 1.6 million Russians were deployed. So much for the order of magnitude. The current Kharkov offensive was led by about 15,000 Ukrainians, with about 3,000 Russians retreating.

On Tuesday, it appeared that Ukraine was waging another offensive around the Zaparoshe area - home to Europe's largest nuclear power plant, which has been under Russian control since March. That is a fire hazard.

The Russians, on the other hand, are attacking Bakhmut - a town of about 70,000 people and one of the last targets to gain control of the Donbass.

What could be the consequences?

Despite the grotesque hurrahs of the Western media, this action is a clear defeat for the Russians - that is undisputed and this already has consequences: The Russian ultra-nationalists are screaming for escalation, opponents of the war are making their appearances - even on Russian television.

There has already been a first escalation: power supplies were attacked by the Russians in order to attack Ukrainian troop transports by rail. A novelty - since February, the Russians have strictly adhered to not destroying Ukrainian infrastructure. This has changed and it is to be hoped that this remains an isolated incident.

Furthermore, Ukrainians living in Ukrainian towns and villages abandoned by the Russians will thank the Russians. The Ukrainians are already looking for traitors, although it is to be feared that the definition will be very broad.

What the Russian leadership under President Putin will do is pure speculation. Kremlin spokesman Peskov said the day before yesterday that a general mobilisation was not an option. Nevertheless, the current conflict seems to be

moving from a special military operation to a NATO war against Russia or has already reached that point.

Various sources also claim that of the approximately 15,000 men who led the counter-offensive around Kharkov, at least 20 per cent were foreign troops or advisers from Nato countries operating Western weapons systems.

At present, the situation is very unclear. However, it is wrong to interpret this as a defeat for the Russians.

ARTICLE TAGS:

[Analysis](#) [Russia](#) [Ukraine](#) [Weltwoche](#) [Putin, Vladimir](#) [Financial Times \(FT\)](#) [NATO](#)
[Army Group Centre](#)