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Zelensky Says Counteroffensive Against Russia Underway

By Anna Malpas for AFP

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on Saturday. **president.gov.ua**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that a counteroffensive against Russian forces was underway, while declining to give specifics on his troops' operations.

"Counteroffensive and defensive actions are taking place in Ukraine: at which stage I will not talk in detail," Zelensky said on Saturday, commenting after Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that Kyiv's operation was already failing.

Russia has reported thwarting Ukrainian attacks in the east and south.

"It's interesting what Putin said about our counteroffensive. It is important that Russia always feels this: that they do not have long left, in my opinion," Zelensky said.

He added that he was in daily touch with military commanders, including armed forces chief Valery Zaluzhny, and "everyone is positive now — tell that to Putin!"

Related article: Putin Says Ukrainian Counteroffensive Failed to Reach Goals

On Saturday, Kyiv's forces conducted counteroffensive operations in at least four frontline areas, according to the Washington-based think tank the Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

"Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces have tactical advantages in conducting assaults at night due to Western-provided equipment with superior night optics systems," ISW said.

To shore up that stockpile, Zelensky secured fresh pledges of military aid while meeting with visiting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau over the weekend.

'Held to account'

Trudeau, 51, and Zelensky, 45, hugged and used each other's first names as the Canadian leader made his second unannounced visit to Kyiv since full-scale war broke out in February last year.

Canada, which hosts a large Ukrainian diaspora, has been one of Kyiv's key allies since the Russian invasion.

It has provided Ukraine with significant military aid, trained more than 36,000 soldiers and adopted sanctions against Moscow.

On Saturday, the Canadian leader said he would provide Can$500 million (US$375 million) in fresh military assistance to Kyiv, and pledged Canada would be part of the multinational effort to train Ukraine's fighter pilots.

Trudeau also urged international organizations to come to the aid of those in Russian-occupied territories after flooding from the breached Kakhovka dam forced thousands to flee their homes and sparked fears of humanitarian and environmental disasters.

Ukraine accuses Russia of blowing up the dam on Tuesday, while Moscow says Kyiv fired on it.

When asked why he stopped short of blaming Russia for the dam collapse, Trudeau said: "I know there are investigators and there are a lot of questions and intelligence being analyzed on what exactly happened to have this dam collapse.

"But there is no doubt in my mind that absent Russia's invasion of last February, that dam would still be standing today."

Pledging Can$10 million in flood relief, Trudeau also said Russia "will be held to account" for its actions in Ukraine.

Earlier in the day, Trudeau placed flowers by a wall of remembrance displaying photos of soldiers killed in combat.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Oleksandr Polishchuk handed Trudeau a box that he said held shrapnel from a rocket that fell on the Black Sea port city of Odesa.

He said the gift was intended to remind Trudeau of Ukraine's suffering from Russian strikes.

Iran must 'end support' for Russia

Three people were killed early Saturday in a fire sparked by debris from shot-down Russian drones in the Odesa region.

French President Emmanuel Macron urged his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi to "immediately end" Tehran's support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which involves supplying Moscow with attack drones, the Elysee said.

Macron in a telephone call underlined the serious "security and humanitarian consequences" of Iran's drone deliveries "and urged Tehran to immediately end the support it thus gives to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine," it said in a statement.

The call came a day after White House national security spokesman John Kirby said Russia was receiving materials from Iran to build a drone factory that "could be fully operational early next year."

The United States has said that Russia has received hundreds of Iranian attack drones to hit Kyiv and "terrorize" Ukrainians, a charge denied by Tehran.

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