

As Russian attacks continue, Ukrainians withdraw from Avdiivka



UK Defence Intelligence update on battlefield situation in Ukraine as of Friday.

Last week, with new leadership in charge of the Ukrainian military, the war continued in eastern Ukraine. As in previous weeks, the Russian forces conducted offensive operations at a number of points along the 1200-kilometer “contact line” between the forces and the Ukrainian forces conducted defensive operations against the Russian attacks. The latest British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation as of last Friday (above) indicates, as it has for some time, that the Russian forces continued to attack in the direction of Kupiansk in Kharkiv region in northeastern Ukraine, toward the area around the largely destroyed city of Bakhmut, and toward Avdiivka, a small city about ten miles north of Donetsk city. But the Russian forces continued to attack at other points along the “contact line” as well – most notably, toward Lyman in northern Donetsk region which is close to Sloviansk; toward Marinka, a small city about ten miles to the west of Donetsk city; toward the area controlled by the Ukrainian forces south of Orikhiv; and toward the area in Kherson region in southern Ukraine where the Ukrainian forces have established a beachhead on the east bank of the Dnipro River.

Based on the daily updates on the previous day’s combat engagements issued each day by the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, last week the Russian forces conducted almost 600 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending those points along the contact line – a total of 61 attacks in the direction of Kupiansk, 44 in the direction of Lyman, 77 in the direction of the area around Bakhmut, 224 toward Avdiivka, 183 toward Marinka, 24 toward several villages and small towns south of Orikhiv, and 24 toward the Ukraine forces just east of Kherson city in southern Ukraine. The Ukrainian forces holding Avdiivka, a city with a pre-war

population of about 30,000 and a large coke and chemical plant, have been attacked more frequently over the last several weeks than those at any other point along the “contact line.” Indeed, over the last six weeks, the Ukrainian forces holding Avdiivka have been the target of almost 1200 Russian attacks, far more than any other site along the “contact line.” The fact that Avdiivka was the target of so many Russian attacks over the past six weeks and that the second most frequently-attacked point on the “contact line” over that period was Marinka, a few miles west of Donetsk city, suggests that the immediate priority for the Russians at this point in the war is to secure the area around Donetsk city, after which they will presumably attempt to take most if not all of the territory in Donetsk region they don’t already hold.

It was quite extraordinary that the Ukrainian forces holding Avdiivka were able to withstand nearly 1200 Russian attacks of waves of troops supported by tanks, heavy artillery, drones and aircraft. Given the scale and frequency of the Russian attacks, it was perhaps not surprising that on Saturday morning Gen. Oleksandr Tarnavsky, the commander of the Ukrainian forces in the area, announced that the Ukrainian forces in Avdiivka were withdrawing to “pre-prepared positions.” On Telegram he said, “In a situation where the enemy is advancing over the corpses of their own soldiers with a ten-to-one shelling advantage, under constant bombardment, this is the only right decision. Encirclement was prevented, personnel were withdrawn, and our soldiers took up defense at the designated lines.” Soon thereafter, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the new Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, announced the Ukrainian forces had withdrawn from the city. In announcing the decision, Syrskyi said, “Based on the operational situation that has developed around Avdiivka, in order to avoid encirclement and preserve the life and health of military personnel, I decided to withdraw our units from the city and switch to defense on more advantageous lines. Our soldiers performed their military duty with dignity, did everything possible to destroy the best Russian military units and inflicted significant losses on the enemy. The life of military personnel is the highest value.”

And so, after a prolonged siege that began in October and, according to Ukrainian estimates, cost the Russian forces 30,000 casualties and 400 tanks, those forces control the bombed-out and largely destroyed city of Avdiivka. A hollow victory, much like their hollow victory at Bakhmut last May.

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