Ukraine Troops Withdraw From Frontline City Avdiivka

By [AFP](#)

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Smoke from explosions billows over the Ukrainian city of Avdiivka. **Dmitry Yagodkin/TASS**

Ukrainian troops have withdrawn from the frontline city of Avdiivka to avoid being encircled, new military chief Oleksandr Syrsky said Saturday, handing Russia its biggest symbolic victory following Kyiv's failed summer counter-offensive.

Russia has been trying to capture Avdiivka for months. It is the most significant territorial gain for Russian forces since they seized the eastern city of Bakhmut last May and comes ahead of the second anniversary of the start of the invasion.

"I decided to withdraw our units from the city and switch to defense on more favorable lines," Syrsky said on Facebook.

"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."

It is Syrsky's first major decision since his appointment on February 8 and he said it was taken to preserve the lives of soldiers and prevent their encirclement.

Ukraine faces mounting pressure on the eastern front because of ammunition shortages, with a $60 billion US military aid package held up in Washington since last year by congressional wrangling.

General Oleksandr Tarnavsky, who commands the Avdiivka area, said of the withdrawal: "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"Encirclement was prevented, personnel were withdrawn, and our soldiers took up defense at the designated lines," he posted on Telegram.

Before issuing orders to pull out of Avdiivka, Tarnavsky on Friday said several Ukrainian soldiers had been captured by Russian forces.

The battle for the industrial hub, less than 10 kilometers (six miles) north of the Russian-controlled city of Donetsk, has been one of the bloodiest of the two-year war.

Many compare it to the battle for Bakhmut, in which tens of thousands of soldiers were killed.

Related article: [Russia Closes In on Avdiivka as Western Aid for Kyiv Falters, War of Attrition Grinds On](#)

Security pacts

Avdiivka had around 34,000 inhabitants before the Russian invasion. Most of the city has been since destroyed but around 1,000 residents remain, according to local authorities.

The city has important symbolic value, and Moscow hopes its capture will make Ukraine's bombing of Donetsk more difficult.

Avdiivka lies in the Donetsk region of Ukraine, which the Kremlin has claimed to be part of Russia since a 2022 annexation that remains unrecognized by nearly all United Nations members.

It briefly fell in July 2014 into the hands of pro-Russian separatists led by Moscow, before returning to Ukrainian control and remaining so despite the invasion and its proximity to the separatist capital Donetsk.

After the failure of Kyiv's counter-offensive in the summer, Russian forces went on the attack, facing a Ukrainian army struggling to replenish its ranks and running low on ammunition.

Russian authorities said they had foiled several Ukrainian drone attacks overnight.

In Belgorod region near the border with Ukraine, governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram that two drones had been shot down while in Kaluga oblast southwest of Moscow

governor Vladislav Shapsha said four drones were downed. According to preliminary assessments, they said there were no casualties or damage.

The fall of Avdiivka comes as President Volodymyr Zelensky is on a tour of Europe to secure desperately needed military aid.

Zelensky on Friday signed bilateral security pacts with France and Germany to lock in support for Kyiv in its battle against Russia.

Both accords include military assistance and security arrangements.

With the Ukraine war about to enter its third year, Zelensky is set to make further pleas for financing and armaments at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, where leaders such as US Vice President Kamala Harris have gathered.

A research institute that monitors assistance estimated Friday that the European Union would have to double its military support to Ukraine to fill a gap left by the United States.

"It is highly uncertain whether the US will send further military aid in 2024," the Germany–based Kiel Institute said in a report.

According to the institute's most recent data, the United States sent 42.2 billion euros ($45.4 billion) in military aid to Ukraine between February 2022 and December 2023, at a rate of around two billion euros a month.

The European Union and its 27 members have promised 49.7 billion euros of military aid since the start of the war, but have so far delivered or earmarked just 35.2 billion euros.

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