

Ukrainian forces withdraw from Avdeevka

Jason Melanovski
21 February 2024

Ukrainian forces withdrew from the destroyed eastern city of Avdeevka on Saturday, following months of bloody fighting that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of soldiers and ended in a clear debacle for the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The fall of the formerly Ukrainian-controlled city was first announced by Ukraine's newly appointed Commander-in-Chief Oleksander Syrsky on Facebook. Syrsky wrote that he had given the order to retreat "in order to avoid encirclement and preserve the lives and health of servicemen."

Syrsky's claims of concern for the well-being of Ukrainian soldiers are self-serving and cannot be taken seriously as the risk of encirclement was already well known by early February. Syrsky, who recently replaced former General Valery Zaluzhny as head of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, reportedly continued to hold on to the city and send in reinforcements on direct orders from Zelensky. According to Russian sources, at the height of fighting this past month, Ukrainian forces were suffering casualties of up to 1,500 soldiers a day.

Russia's Defense Ministry later confirmed that Russian forces had taken control of the city on Sunday, marking its most significant victory since the similarly bloody battle over the city of Bakhmut in May 2023 that became known as a "meat grinder" due to mass casualties on both sides. Syrsky similarly led Ukraine's defense of Bakhmut on direct orders from Zelensky, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers, many of them experienced veterans.

Released videos from Russian drones in Avdeevka also appeared to show Ukrainian soldiers haphazardly retreating while under attack from Russian artillery fire and air strikes, leaving behind multiple military vehicles. The videos clearly contradict Syrsky's claims of an orderly withdrawal as they were recorded a day before Syrsky ordered the retreat.

On Tuesday, further evidence of a debacle emerged

as the *New York Times* reported that "hundreds" of Ukrainian soldiers had in fact been encircled and captured despite assurances of an orderly withdrawal from Ukrainian officials.

In the days prior to the botched retreat, Ukraine ordered its 3rd Separate Assault Brigade into battle in a last-ditch effort to hold on to the city. While pro-NATO Western media outlets such as the *New York Times* reported on the deployment of the brigade as a heroic act, they failed to mention that the 3rd Separate Assault Brigade is composed of far-right Azov Battalion soldiers. It is led by the neo-Nazi Andry Biletsky, the founder of the Azov Battalion, who has called for a "crusade of the white nations of the world against the Semitic-led subhumans."

Of the prewar population of approximately 30,000, just 900 civilians remain in the largely flattened city. Most of them are living in basements and underground shelters.

Following the outbreak of full-scale war in February 2022, Ukraine stationed over 10,000 soldiers in Avdeevka, which is strategically important due to its proximity to Donetsk. Control by Kiev granted Ukrainian forces the ability to hit the heavily populated Donetsk with artillery and potentially attempt to "retake" the city, which had been under the control of Russian-backed separatist since the NATO-backed coup ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.

As usual, both Ukrainian and Western officials blamed the loss of Avdeevka on insufficient funding from its imperialist backers. At the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, Zelensky blamed Republicans in Congress for holding up additional military aid over demands to crack down on migrants at the US southern border.

"Please, everyone remember that dictators do not go on vacation. Hatred knows no pause. Enemy artillery

does not fall silent due to procedural issues. Warriors standing against the aggressor need sufficient strength,” Zelensky said.

In a clearly rehearsed joint PR stunt, US President Joe Biden echoed Zelensky’s comments. According to a readout of a phone call with Zelensky on Saturday, Biden stated, “Ukraine’s military was forced to withdraw from Avdeevka after Ukrainian soldiers had to ration ammunition due to dwindling supplies as a result of congressional inaction, resulting in Russia’s first notable gains in months.”

As predicted by military experts, with the war dragging on, Russia’s numerical and military superiority is growing over Ukrainian forces that are suffering from severe manpower and ammunition shortages. With the loss of Avdeevka, the risk of further losses by Ukraine is now being openly acknowledged by the Western media outlets.

“If the Russians had the strength, they would blow through and try to go all the way to the Dnipro River if they could at this point. Apparently, that’s not happening,” retired General Wesley Clark, former NATO commander, told CNN. “Avdeevka was protecting a series of road junctions that held an eastern front together for the Ukrainians. And so, when it falls and there’s no easily defensible ground to the west of Avdeevka, it opens a hole in the Ukrainian defenses.

“They’re using their airpower much more effectively in the Avdeevka battle than they have in the past. They could initiate a war of movement east of Dnipro River. They could move many, many miles and seriously dislocate defenses that are protecting Kharkiv and even Kiev itself. So, it’s a very dangerous time in the war,” Clark warned.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact