

Battle of Avdiivka. Day 596 of the war

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At dawn on 10 October, the Russians launched an offensive operation at Avdiivka. The city and its immediate surroundings came under intense barrelled artillery fire and rocket systems (thermobaric and incendiary phosphorus shells, among others, were used). The main centres of Ukrainian resistance, headed by the coke plant, also became the target of massive aerial bombardment. According to Ukrainian soldiers, this was the strongest fire preparation launched by Russia on the Donbas since the beginning of the war. Troops of the Russian 1st Army Corps (the former 'Donbas People's Militia') launched an assault, attempting to come out at the rear of the defenders near the villages of Berdychi and Stepove in order to encircle the entire grouping near Avdiivka. The 10 October attacks were carried out with a significant infantry force supported by tanks and infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) with the intention of quickly breaking through enemy defences weakened by massive shelling and bombardment. In doing so, the invaders suffered heavy losses in terms of men, tanks and IFVs and switched to the tactic of operating small infantry assault groups in the following days. By 13 October, confirmed Russian advances at Avdiivka were small (counted in hundreds of metres at most), mainly west of Krasnohorivka and north of Vodianie. Russia does not appear to have succeeded in crossing the Avdiivka–Pokrovsk railway line or in seizing key points of Ukrainian resistance on the southern flank near the village of Sieverne. The Russian offensive operation in the area is ongoing and the course of the front line could change at any time.

The operations at Avdiivka were synchronised with attacks on neighbouring sections of the front. The invaders struck at Pisky, Staromykhailivka, Marinka, Novomykhailivka and further west in the Vuhledar area. In these places, too, they failed to break through the enemy's defences and recorded only minor tactical successes. On the other sections of the front, there have been no significant changes in the position of the belligerents in recent days. Heavy fighting continues in the Robotyne–Novoprokopivka–Verbove area, characterised by alternating attacks and counter-attacks launched by both sides under heavy artillery fire. Clashes also continue south of Bakhmut in the Kurdiumivka–Andriivka–Klishchiivka area. The Russians also maintain the initiative on the front in the Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts, but there too they are failing to achieve significant successes.

At dawn on 12 October, the Ukrainians destroyed a road overpass over the railway line near the village of Vasylivka (occupied part of Donetsk Oblast). This means that transport in the area will be severely hampered – at least in the short term, the Horlivka–Donetsk route, which serves an important function in the Russian logistical system in Donetsk, will be shut down. According to media reports, the Ukrainian side has carried out further attacks on enemy warships using naval drones. In Sevastopol harbour, the patrol ship Pavel Derzhavin

(11 October) and the small missile ship Buyan (13 October) are believed to have been damaged, according to the SBU.

On the night of 11–12 October, Russia attacked using 33 Shahed 131/136 drones, 28 of which were shot down, according to the Ukrainian Air Force Command. Targets in the Izmail port area on the Danube were hit.

On 11 October, the 16th meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in the Ramstein format was held in Brussels with the in-person participation of President Volodymyr Zelensky. Further tranches of support for Kyiv were announced by the US, UK, Canada, Germany, Lithuania, Denmark, Iceland, France, Finland, Norway, Spain, Belgium and Bulgaria. The US has offered a \$200 million military aid package, which will come entirely from the Department of Defence's stockpiles (the 46th of its kind). It includes AIM-9M missiles, HIMARS ammunition, 155-mm and 105-mm artillery rounds, AT-4 anti-armour systems, TOW-2 anti-tank guided missiles, equipment to combat unmanned aerial systems, demolition munitions and 16 million rounds of small arms ammunition.

The UK, as part of a multilateral mechanism called the International Fund for Ukraine (IFU), administered by London, will provide Ukraine with a joint package alongside Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Iceland and Lithuania. This includes Terrahawk Paladin units for combatting unmanned aerial vehicles, tracks and engines for armoured vehicles, pontoon bridges, heavy transporters for tank transport and demining equipment. Canada has decided to provide, among other things, 155-mm artillery ammunition and 76-mm naval ammunition, aircraft bombs and winter clothing worth a total of \$25m.

Germany announced a €1bn package, which includes a second Patriot medium-range air defence system with more than 60 missiles. In addition, it declared the previously announced short-range air defence systems (a third IRIS-T SLM battery and a second IRIS-T SLS battery) will be shipped in October. Deliveries of armaments and military equipment from previous packages are also expected in the coming weeks, including 155-mm ammunition, 10 Leopard 1A5 tanks, three Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, 15 armoured transport vehicles and up to 20 armoured medical vehicles.

Finland announced a 19th military aid package worth nearly €100 million, as usual without providing details of its contents. Lithuania reiterated its announcement to hand over to Kyiv two NASAMS short-range air defence launchers, which it had bought specifically for Kyiv. Spain reiterated its pledge to hand over six Hawk air defence system launchers (training of Ukrainian soldiers is due to start in November). Spain will also provide 155-mm and 105-mm artillery ammunition and heavy machine guns for drone warfare. Spanish food rations are currently on their way to Ukraine, then generators, compressors and winter equipment will also be sent. US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin also announced that Bulgaria will supply parts for S-300 air defence systems, while France has promised to speed up production of CAESAR gun-howitzers and deliver additional CAESAR howitzers to Kyiv (French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu spoke of deliveries of six additional CAESARs during a visit to Kyiv in late September). The Czech Republic and Denmark have declared a joint transfer of armoured vehicles and small arms to Ukraine. These will be produced in Czech plants, financed by the Danish government. The first package is to include 50 vehicles (most likely 15 tanks and 35 IFVs), 2,500 pistols, 7,000 assault rifles, 500 machine guns and 500 sniper rifles. Assistance is also expected to include reconnaissance equipment and artillery

ammunition. Denmark has also announced a transfer of demining equipment worth €134 million.

Following the Contact Group meeting, the formation of several coalitions for the development of Ukrainian military capabilities was once again confirmed. The United States, with the help of Denmark and the Netherlands, will lead an alliance to develop those related to the operation of F-16 fighter jets. Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway had already promised to supply these aircraft to the Ukrainian Air Force. Estonia and Luxembourg are to lead efforts to build Ukraine's information technology infrastructure (the 'IT coalition'). Lithuania, in turn, is to lead a coalition for demining.

On 12 October, the Turkish defence ministry confirmed that it had agreed to set up a mechanism with Bulgaria and Romania to enhance the security of Black Sea shipping and neutralise the mine threat. The statement stressed that 'the operational procedures and the scope of the mechanism will be determined in meetings to be held in the coming days'. Since Russia withdrew from the grain deal in July, Ukraine has been using a temporary corridor running through the territorial waters of Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. On 13 October, US Ambassador to Kyiv Bridget Brink announced that 19 ships loaded with 740,000 tonnes of grain and other commodities (including iron ore) had departed from Ukrainian ports since July.

Ukraine and Croatia signed an intergovernmental agreement on 10 October on cooperation in the field of mine clearance. It provides for coordination in the following areas: provision of technical means, education of the public in hazard recognition, specialised training (including explosive detection dogs) and an exchange of knowledge and experience in the production of sapper equipment. A day later, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković announced the transfer of a new aid package to Ukraine. It has a value of €30 million and this amount will be used mainly for the implementation of the signed agreement. Also on 11 October, the head of the Ukrainian interior ministry, Ihor Klymenko, said that he planned to increase the number of sappers in subordinate units (emergency service, police and national guard) to 2,800. He added that there are currently 210 sapper units operating in the country under the authority of the Interior Ministry (more than 1,100 people and about 350 pieces of specialised equipment).

On 11 October, President Zelensky assured the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Carl Grossi, that Ukrainian forces would not directly attack the Enerhodar nuclear power plant. This was in response to Russian foreign intelligence chief Sergey Naryshkin's statement that Western intelligence services were preparing Ukrainian saboteurs to attack Russian nuclear energy facilities.

Also on 11 October, deputy head of Ukrainian military intelligence Vadym Skibitsky announced that Russia intends to use the potential of the Belarusian arms industry to increase production of artillery munitions. He indicated that plans for 2024 envisage the production of around 2.1 million rounds of ammunition, and added that the Russian military uses up to 15,000 rounds each day.

Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko asserted on 12 October that he had set aside funds to purchase 650 tonnes of petrol and 2,000 tonnes of diesel fuel for the armed forces and other security structures. He also stated that Kyiv City Council had voted to transfer 1.26 billion hryvnias (more than \$34 million) from the capital's budget for drones, night vision devices and

equipment repairs. The provision of financial aid by the city authorities is a response to earlier street protests calling on Klitschko to cut spending on street repairs, among other things, and to transfer these funds to the armed forces.

On 11 October, Ukrainian local authorities reported that in occupied Melitopol, the Russians had begun repairing and assembling drones in technical education facilities and had engaged local young people to do so. They plan to create a technological park for the production of drones which would be located in buildings occupied by the civilian population in order to hinder attacks by Ukrainian forces.

Commentary

- The area around Avdiivka is of primary importance for the frontline in Donbas, as it allows the Ukrainians to keep Donetsk within range of field artillery fire and drone activity. This means being able to conduct constant surveillance of this city and fire on the enemy military infrastructure located there, using the cheapest and most indiscriminate reconnaissance and combat tools. The Donetsk agglomeration – an important road and rail hub where many mines and industrial plants have been converted into barracks and warehouses – plays a key role in Russia's logistical system in Ukraine. The capture of Avdiivka would de facto mean a change in Donetsk's status from frontline to rearline city.
- The invaders have been attempting to take Avdiivka since the first days of the war, with the highest intensity of these efforts occurring in the summer of 2022 and during the past winter. In almost 20 months of fighting, the Russians have only managed to move a few kilometres forward on the wings of the Ukrainian fortified area, while on the Yasynuvata and Donetsk sides the front line is practically on the 2014 demarcation line. So far, the method of operations has led to significant losses in the ranks of the 1st Army Corps and has been the subject of heated criticism on Russian social media. This time, Russia has changed its tactics; by concentrating artillery and aviation, it hoped to exploit the surprise effect and quickly break through the defence with mechanised troops. Judging by the Ukrainian side's reaction, the Russian attack at Avdiivka was not a surprise to the defenders – which probably determined its failure. It is noteworthy that Russia only engaged the brigades previously fighting in this section for the assault operations, without bringing in new forces. The possibility of breaking the Ukrainian front in this area currently appears limited.
- The conclusion of an agreement by Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania on enhancing the security of Black Sea shipping will have a positive impact on the functioning of the Ukrainian grain corridor. The planned involvement of anti-mine ships belonging to NATO countries (although the initiative itself is not under the aegis of the alliance) will reduce the immediate threat to civilian vessels and may result in an increase in Ukrainian exports by sea.

