

Ukraine Says Russian Attacks Easing Around Embattled Town

By [AFP](#)

November 02, 2023



Russian howitzer combat formation on the Zaporizhzhia direction. **Alexander Polegenko / TASS**

Ukraine said Thursday that Russian assaults on the nearly encircled eastern town of Avdiivka had eased as the Kremlin rejected Kyiv's assessment that the 20-month conflict was deadlocked.

Avdiivka, an industrial hub at the center of fighting between Ukrainian and Russian forces since 2014, came under a renewed Russian effort last month to besiege the war-battered town.

"The number of assaults there has slightly decreased," Ukrainian military spokesman Oleksandr Shtupun said Thursday.

"The enemy continues to try to surround Avdiivka, but not so actively at the moment," he added.

In a post on social media, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his forces were mounting "defensive actions in Avdiivka," without providing details.

The town, which once had a population of some 30,000, lies in the eastern Donetsk region that the Kremlin claimed to have annexed last year despite not fully controlling it.

Shtupun said Russian forces could be regrouping to launch another concerted wave of attacks but claimed Ukrainian forces were largely in control.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said this week that Moscow's forces were making gains near Avdiivka and said Ukrainian efforts to reclaim territory were "desperate" and resulting in losses.

Both Russia and Ukraine have struggled to make any decisive breakthroughs on the battlefield for months.

But Russia on Thursday denied the conflict was deadlocked after Ukraine's most senior military official, General Valery Zaluzhny, said the sides were in a "stalemate" reminiscent of World War 1.

"No, it has not reached a stalemate," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"Russia is steadily carrying out the special military operation. All the goals that were set should be fulfilled," he added, using the Kremlin's name for its invasion.

Ukraine has launched a large-scale counteroffensive to reclaim captured territory but has had limited successes against heavily fortified Russian defensive lines.

Also on Thursday Zelensky reported a failed Russian offensive near Vuhledar in which he claimed Russia sustained "heavy losses" and local officials said Russian shelling killed a 60-year-old man in Kherson.

Original url:

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