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Ceasefire Holds as Ukraine Withdraws From Contested Debaltseve

By Jason Ditz

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The Ukraine ceasefire is looking much stronger today, as the site of the only real violations, Debaltseve, seems to be resolved, with Ukrainian soldiers conducting a coordinated withdrawal from the town.

In the days leading up to the ceasefire, the strategically located Debaltseve was surrounded by rebel forces, but the town itself remained under military control. After the ceasefire, the two sides were constantly trading fire in the town, even as calm prevailed over the rest of the frontier.

Ukraine's military reports 22 soldiers had been killed in Debaltseve in the last several days, and over 150 others wounded. President Petro Poroshenko claimed their mission was "accomplished" in Debaltseve at any rate, and there was no reason to pull out.

US officials had been threatening Russia over the Debaltseve clashes, and US media outlets are almost universally presenting the Ukrainian withdrawal as a "bloody defeat" for the military.

Though Debaltseve's location on the road from Donetsk to Luhansk makes it strategically valuable, however, it seems that the ceasefire is much more valuable to the Ukrainian government at this point, and agreeing to give up a single, surrounded town rather than ditch the ceasefire was likely not a difficult decision for them to make.