

Pro-Kremlin Figures Voice Frustration After Ukraine Routs Moscow's Forces

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A military convoy of the Russian Defense Ministry moves towards Kharkiv. **Russian Defense Ministry / TASS**

Russian pro-government figures have voiced concern and frustration over Kyiv's weekend counteroffensive that saw its forces retake swathes of northeastern Ukraine, amid mounting domestic criticism of the Kremlin's handling of its six-month invasion.

Ukraine recaptured almost all of the Kharkiv region from Russian forces in a shock counteroffensive over the weekend, in what observers say is Moscow's largest setback so far in the war. The Russian Defense Ministry described its swift retreat as a "regrouping" to separatist-held areas in the Donbas region.

But some state television personalities and pro-government experts called the latest developments a blow to Russia's military ambitions.

"We've been told that everything is going according to plan. Does anyone really believe that six months ago the plan was to be leaving [the city of] Balakliya, repelling a counteroffensive

in the Kharkiv region and failing to take over Kharkiv?” political expert Viktor Olevich [said](#) during a political talk show on the state-run NTV channel Friday.

Former lawmaker Boris Nadezhdin gave a sobering outlook of Russia’s prospects in the war if it doesn’t change the tactics it’s employed so far.

“It’s absolutely impossible to defeat Ukraine using those resources and colonial war methods with which Russia is trying to wage war, using contract soldiers, mercenaries, [there is] no mobilization. A strong army, fully supported by the most powerful countries, is opposing the Russian army,” Nadezhdin [said](#).

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Russian chat shows always had the “NATO shill guest” who said relatively sensible things and could then be torn down by the others.

But Boris Nadezhdin here speaking some dangerous truths, you wonder if he might simply get arrested soon. pic.twitter.com/KwF8xqaEn4

— Shaun Walker (@shaunwalker7) [September 11, 2022](#)

“As a result of the successful operation — clearly in accordance with the plan and even ahead of schedule — to hand over the cities of Izyum, Balakliya and Kupiansk to respected Ukrainian partners....I propose to hand over a part — at least three areas near the border — of the Belgorod region to the Kharkiv region of Ukraine,” Russian national Igor Strelkov, a former commander of pro-Moscow rebels in eastern Ukraine, [said](#) in a post on the Telegram messaging app.

Following Kyiv's massive advance, officials in Moscow have vowed to continue what it calls a "special military operation."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov [stressed](#) on Monday that Russia's military action in Ukraine will continue “until the goals that were originally set are achieved.”

“It turned out that it was not an escape, but a pre-planned regrouping with a clear and comprehensible aim — to speed up the liberation of the Donetsk People’s Republic,” the state-run Rossiyskaya Gazeta newspaper [wrote](#) on Monday of Russia’s troop [pullback](#) from the eastern Kharkiv region over the weekend.

“Despite a massive assistance of the West to the Nazi regime [in Ukraine] and an unprecedented sanctions pressure on Russia, the goals of the special military operation will be achieved,” [said](#) Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, using Moscow’s unbacked talking point alleging that Kyiv is run by neo-Nazis.

“We are increasing the level of our combat capabilities within the special military operation,” [said](#) state-run Rossiya 1 reporter Alexander Sladkov, commenting on Russian strikes in the

Kharkiv region that led to widespread blackouts Sunday.

Yet others, like RT chief editor Margarita Simonyan, called for even more drastic action.

“If it was only Ukraine...It’s us against the other part of the world, against a large part of the world... and now people are asking — if we are at war with NATO, then we should probably fight as [we are fighting] with NATO and not as with Ukraine?” Simonyan [said](#) during a primetime political talk show on Rossiya 24.

“The time has come to get answers to those questions that concern our society that will satisfy society ... Probably, we don't know much [information],” Simonyan said.

“[But] a lot of time has passed and [our] society needs some answers.”

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