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Russia Claims Front 'Stabilized' as Ukraine Pushes on With Counteroffensive

By Leyla Latypova

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Ukrainian soldiers sit on an armored vehicle as they drive on a road in eastern Ukraine. **Francisco Seco / AP / TASS**

Russian officials sought to allay concerns Wednesday that Ukraine could achieve a major breakthrough in its ongoing counteroffensive amid reports that Kyiv's forces were advancing in both the south and east of the country.

Russian pro-war blogger Semyon Pegov confirmed Wednesday that Ukraine had recaptured a number of locations in the southern Kherson region, including the settlements of Velika Aleksandrivka and Davidiv Brid.

At the same time, Kyiv's forces appeared to be moving forward in the eastern Luhansk region following their seizure of the strategic rail hub of Lyman over the weekend.

Russian President Vladimir Putin pledged that “the situation” in Ukrainian regions newly annexed by Russia would not devolve into a military rout.

"We are working on the assumption that the situation in the new territories will stabilize," Putin said during a televised video call with Russian teachers.

But Russia’s retreat in the Kherson region — which saw Kyiv regaining control of territory captured by Russia in the first week of the invasion — has stirred unease among pro-war commentators.

Pro-war Telegram channel Starshe Eddy, allegedly run by war correspondent German Kulikovskiy, said Russia was facing an “obvious operational crisis” in the south.

One of Ukraine’s major goals appears to be the recapture of the city of Kherson, where tens of thousands of Russian soldiers are believed to be stationed.

Embed:

> Путин о будущем Донбасса:
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> "Исходим из того, что ситуация будет стабилизирована, мы сможем спокойно развивать эти территории».
>
> Также президент признался, что результаты референдумов на новых территориях РФ его не только порадовали, но и удивили pic.twitter.com/9u2J3dD1Ep
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> — Кремлевский пул РИА (@Kremlinpool_RIA) October 5, 2022

Ukrainian advances are likely already creating supply problems for Russian troops stationed on the Western bank of the Dnipro River.

Pro-Kremlin journalist Alexander Kots said Tuesday that Russian troops “have no strength left” to be able to hold certain parts of occupied Ukraine.

“There will be no good news anytime soon,” Kots, a reporter for tabloid Komsomolskaya Pravda, posted on Telegram.

Pegov, who runs the popular pro-war channel War Gonzo, said the situation unfolding in Kherson could be likened “in one way or another” to Ukraine’s sweeping offensive last month in the northern Kharkiv region, which saw Kyiv quickly regain large swathes of territory.

“Signals of the ‘Kharkiv scenario’ possibly unfolding there... were coming from the battleground for a long time,” Pegov posted Tuesday.

“Commanders... reported the lack of manpower and ammunition. In response... they heard

'Don't make things up, everything is fine'."

Putin was not the only Russian official to claim Wednesday that the situation was under control following the alarm among war supporters.

"We can say now that the frontline has stabilized," said Denis Pushilin, leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic that Russia annexed last week.

"The line of defense is being strengthened and strengthened by any means available," he said on Russian state television.

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Miscommunication between Moscow and its commanders on the ground was likely a key factor explaining the apparently ongoing retreat and heavy casualties in the Kherson area, according to former Australian general Mick Ryan.

"In fast-moving operations like the Kharkiv and northern Kherson operations, those who do not have to constantly refer back to higher headquarters will be able to set and dominate operational tempo, ultimately seizing the initiative," he tweeted Wednesday.

But Russian-appointed officials denied that there had been a retreat at all.

"The Russian army is maneuvering. Regrouping... allows [us] to gather strength and attack," Kherson's Moscow-installed deputy governor Kirill Stremousov was cited as saying Wednesday by state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

"They [Ukrainians] will not enter Kherson. That is impossible," Stremousov said.

Evidence from the battlefield, and assessments by observers, suggest that Russia is still suffering from an acute manpower shortage in Ukraine.

Few of the men drafted into the Russian Armed Forces in the two weeks since Putin ordered a "partial" mobilization have yet arrived on the frontlines. Even when they do, some analysts believe they are unlikely to be able to halt the Ukrainian advance.

"The injection of mobilized troops is likely to provide only human speed bumps for the Ukrainians," said ex-general Ryan.

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