

Russia Begins Kherson 'Evacuations' as Ukrainian Forces Advance

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People gather in Kherson for evacuation. **Dmitry Marmyshev / TASS**

State-run Russian television aired footage on Wednesday of long lines of people and their luggage on the banks of the Dnipro River in southern Ukraine's Kherson region after Moscow announced it was evacuating tens of thousands of local residents.

"People are getting on the ferry and going to the temporary accommodation centers," one apparent volunteer [told](#) pro-Kremlin media outlet Mash.

"After that, the people are directed to where they want to go. They either stay on [the other] shore or go to the Russian Federation."

The apparent rush to remove as many as [60,000 civilians](#) from the city of Kherson and nearby areas followed an announcement by Moscow that Ukrainian forces were intensifying their attacks on Russian-held areas west of the Dnipro river and a [warning](#) from Russian military

commander Sergei Surovikin that “difficult decisions” might be necessary.

However, Kyiv dismissed the evacuation as a sham and accused the Kremlin of trying to frighten locals into fleeing.

“Russians are trying to scare the people of Kherson with fake messages about the shelling of the city by our army and are also staging a propaganda show with the evacuation,” Andrii Yermak, the chief of staff for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said on Telegram.

In another sign of the deepening problems facing the Russian military in southern Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday [declared](#) martial law in four Ukrainian regions annexed by Moscow earlier this month, including Kherson.

The Russian-installed deputy head of the Kherson region, Katerina Gubareva, didn’t respond to a request for comment from The Moscow Times late Wednesday on how many people had been evacuated.

Related article: [Putin Declares Martial Law in Moscow-Claimed Ukrainian Regions](#)

It was also unclear to what extent those transported across the Dnipro had been given a choice over whether to leave.

One woman from the annexed-Crimea region with grandparents living in Russian occupied-Kherson told The Moscow Times that she was unsure whether her family members would be evacuated by Russian forces.

“They don’t talk to us, they think we are the occupiers,” she said of her relatives, likely supporters of Kyiv.

Ukrainian forces have this week continued to make advances along the entire frontline in the Kherson region.

Russia’s Defense Ministry [said](#) Tuesday it had thwarted an attempted Ukrainian advance northeast of Kherson around the village of Bruskinske and pro-Kremlin bloggers have reported Ukrainian attacks on Russian lines in several other nearby areas.

In the past months, Ukraine has been conducting a military campaign to strangle Russia’s supply lines over the Dnipro river, which it uses to supply its soldiers fighting in Kherson.

“I think Ukraine will try to create conditions that will force Russia to flee. This is something they did in Kharkiv and in Lyman. So they will try not to engage but make conditions which force Russia to withdraw or face imminent death,” military analyst Konrad Muzyka, head of Poland-based Rochan Consulting, told The Moscow Times.

The two most important crossings over the Dnipro — the Antonivsky Bridge and the Nova Kakhovka hydroelectric dam — have been hit by Ukrainian strikes in recent months, slowly making Russia’s position north of the river untenable.

Despite the deteriorating military situation, Russian-installed officials in Kherson have denied the Russian army intends to retreat to the eastern banks of the Dnipro.

Embed:

"Nobody is going to give away Kherson. The military will fight to the death," Moscow-installed governor Vladimir Saldo said on Russian-state television Wednesday.

Ahead of the evacuation, those who had chosen to leave were advised to pack documents, money, their telephone, medicines, and enough supplies to last two or three days, according to [instructions](#) circulating on pro-Russian Telegram channels.

Ukrainian officials have likened the evacuations to forced deportations.

"Russia is carrying out deportations as in Soviet times," said Sergiy Khlan, the deputy head of the Kherson region, during a press conference Wednesday.

If Kyiv did manage to seize control of all the Russian-held land west of the Dnipro, it would not only shatter any Russian hopes of being able to advance north to Kryvyi Rih and east to the Black Sea city of Odesa, but raise the possibility of a Ukrainian advance toward Crimea.

"The big question for Ukraine is what next? Whether they will try to cross the river and push towards Crimea or not," Muzyka said.

AFP contributed reporting.

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