

Putin Says Civilians 'Must Be Removed' From Kherson as Battle Looms

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Vladimir Putin during a walkabout in Moscow on Friday. Credit Ramil SITDIKOV / Sputnik / AFP

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that the remaining civilian population should be evacuated from the city of Kherson in Russian-occupied southern Ukraine as all indicators suggested the battle for the strategically key city on the Dnipro River was imminent.

"Now, of course, those who live in Kherson must be removed from the zone of the most dangerous actions," Putin said during a walkabout on Red Square where he had been meeting youth volunteers from Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine on Friday.

The civilian population "must not suffer" from shelling and offensive activities related to military action, he added.

Putin also said that 49,000 of the 318,000 Russian reservists called up in the country's recent mobilization drive were already on the frontlines in Ukraine.

On Thursday, Pro-Russian Telegram channels reported that the Russian flag on Kherson

city's administrative building had been taken down, though other Russian flags were reportedly still flying from other buildings nearby.

Kherson's Russian-installed administration has been evacuating tens of thousands of civilians to the left bank of the Dnipro River as a Ukrainian counteroffensive continues to advance on the city.

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Kirill Stremousov, the deputy head of Kherson's Moscow-installed administration, warned that Russian troops could move to the left bank of the Dnipro River in the coming days.

"Most likely, our units, our troops will go to the left bank part of the Kherson region," Stremousov [told](#) Russian state television.

The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russia was leaving Kherson ahead of the battle for the city, though it also reported that some Russian troops were "dressing in civilian clothes and settling into abandoned houses" awaiting the arrival of Ukrainian forces in the city.

The Russian retreat could be a ploy, said Natalia Gumenyuk, spokesperson for Ukraine's Southern Military Command. "It could be a provocation to give the impression that the settlements are abandoned, that it is safe to enter them," she said.

The U.S. military has predicted that the final battle for Kherson would take place before mid-November, after which it said the Ukrainian offensive would be severely hampered by weather conditions.

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