

Kremlin Loyalists Rally Behind Military as Kherson Withdrawal Set to Begin

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SERGEI ILNITSKY / EPA / TASS

High-profile Kremlin loyalists voiced support for the military's decision to withdraw from the strategic southern Ukrainian city of Kherson on Wednesday, the latest major reversal for Russia's embattled offensive in Ukraine.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu ordered to pull troops out of Kherson and set up defenses on the left bank of the Dnipro River after Russia's commander in Ukraine, Gen. Sergei Surovikin, told him in a televised meeting that supplying the right bank was no longer feasible.

Margarita Simonyan, the head of the state-funded RT network, [said](#) the retreat was a necessary move to avoid exposing Russian troops on the right bank of the Dnipro and "opening the way to Crimea" for Ukraine's forces.

She [compared](#) the retreat to Gen. Mikhail Kutuzov's 1812 withdrawal from Moscow as Napoleon's troops invaded Russia.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Kremlin-linked founder of the Wagner mercenary group, [said](#) the “extremely difficult” task of withdrawing troops with minimal losses would be “the greatest achievement that Surovikin will have to accomplish.”

“It doesn’t do the Russian army justice, but it emphasizes the commander’s personal qualities,” Prigozhin’s press service wrote on social media, praising Surovikin for “not being afraid of responsibility” and “taking the full weight of the decision.”

Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov voiced “full agreement” with Prigozhin, [calling](#) the recently appointed commander’s decision “difficult but fair.”

Related article: [Russia Orders Retreat from Occupied City of Kherson](#)

“Surovikin both spares his soldiers and takes a more advantageous, comfortable and safe strategic position,” Kadyrov wrote in a post on the Telegram messaging app.

All three figures previously [criticized](#) the Russian military’s defeat in Lyman, a key supply hub for Russian forces in eastern Ukraine before Kyiv’s troops recaptured it last month.

Despite their praise for Surovikin, Prigozhin and Kadyrov still raised doubts over Russia’s military decision-making.

Kadyrov asked why ensuring supplies to Kherson “wasn’t done from the start,” while Prigozhin said the military should “understand who’s right, who’s wrong and what the problem is.”

“It’s important not to agonize, not to thrash around in paranoia, but to draw conclusions and work on mistakes,” Prigozhin said.

Their reactions followed [reports](#) by the independent media outlet Meduza that the Kremlin has ordered state media to avoid quoting officials who criticize Russia’s campaign in Ukraine.

Russian state media characterized the Kherson announcement as a “maneuver” or “regrouping” rather than a “retreat.”

Leading state television host Vladimir Solovyov called it a “difficult decision...but brave” in his evening program, adding: “Trust the generals.”

Sergei Mironov, another vocal supporter of Russia’s invasion who heads the minority A Just Russia party in the lower house of parliament, [lamented](#) Kherson’s loss in a tweet and vowed “retribution” and the city’s recapture.

Popular Russian pro-war bloggers voiced similar reactions, with one [saying](#) “this betrayal is carved in my heart for centuries” and another [writing](#) “it will leave a scar on my heart.”

Others slammed Russia’s military command for being [misled](#) by false reports and [relying](#) on “idiotic” war planning “based on disinformation.”

President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, stayed silent on the announced pullback as he [toured](#) a

hospital, [met](#) the head of Russia's national public health institute and [spoke](#) at an event commemorating its 75th anniversary.

Kherson city was the first urban hub captured by Russia during its "special military operation" and the only regional capital to be controlled by Moscow's forces since its offensive began on Feb. 24.

Kherson was one of four Ukrainian regions that Russia declared it had annexed in September, shortly after being forced to withdraw from swaths of territory in the northeastern Kharkiv region.

AFP contributed reporting.

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