Russia Announces 'Tactical' Withdrawal From Ukraine's Robotyne

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A Russian military cargo vehicle in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region. **Alexander Polegenko / TASS**

A Kremlin-installed official in southern Ukraine admitted Tuesday that Russian forces have withdrawn from the village of Robotyne more than a week after Kyiv announced its recapture.

"The Russian army abandoned — tactically abandoned this settlement," said Yevgeny Balitsky, the Russian-appointed governor of Ukraine's occupied Zaporizhzhia region.

Ukraine, which launched a grinding counteroffensive in June, announced Robotyne's recapture on Aug. 28.

Balitsky maintained that abandoning Robotyne would benefit Russian forces and claimed that the village "ceased to exist" after lengthy battles.

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"Holding on to a bare surface without a way to completely dig in and create a safe area for

yourself doesn't make sense," he said in an interview on state-run television.

The Kremlin has regularly downplayed Kyiv's counteroffensive, with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu declaring Wednesday that Ukrainian forces had "not achieved their goals in any of the sectors [of military operations]."

Russia's Defense Ministry has claimed to have repelled Ukrainian tank attacks in nearly daily updates since Kyiv's Aug. 28 announcement.

On Monday, the Russian military said it had "improved the tactical situation" near Robotyne without indicating who controlled the village.

Balitsky previously warned that territory beyond Robotyne would be a "mass grave for Ukraine's armed forces."

The U.S. think tank Institute for the Study of War said geolocated footage posted Tuesday shows Ukrainian forces advancing south of Robotyne.

Robotyne's capture paves the way for the Ukrainian forces to push deeper into Russian positions toward Crimea, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said last week.

The Kremlin annexed southern Ukraine's partially controlled Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and southeastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions last fall.