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Russia's Military Announces, Then Backtracks on 'Regrouping' in Southern Ukraine

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Russian soldiers in southern Ukraine's Kherson Region. **Alexander Polegenko / TASS**

Updated with Peskov's, Kyiv's remarks.

Russia's Defense Ministry on Monday announced a partial withdrawal of troops in southern Ukraine's Kherson region, only to then dismiss its own statement disseminated through state media as a "provocation."

Russia's state-run news agencies TASS and RIA Novosti published the Defense Ministry statement on the "regrouping" of troops to the left bank of the Dnipro River.

"Having assessed the situation, the command of the Dnipro grouping decided to move its troops to more favorable positions east of the Dnipro [River]," the Russian military was quoted as saying.

"After the regrouping, Dnipro will release some of its forces which will be used for the

offensive," it added.

Minutes later, the announcement disappeared from the TASS and RIA Novosti's social media pages.

TASS said the story was "annulled" because it was "published mistakenly." RIA made no mention of the removal.

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"The distribution of a false report about the 'regrouping' of troops near Dnipro allegedly on behalf of the Russian Defense Ministry's press center is a provocation," Russia's RBC business news website reported, citing the Defense Ministry.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov later on Monday declined to comment on the retracted withdrawal announcement, redirecting reporters' questions to the Defense Ministry.

Ukraine's National Resistance Center told the RBC Ukraine news website that reports of Russian forces "regrouping" were an "information operation" against Kyiv, saying that it had not received any information about the "movements of enemy fighters."

The Russian military sometimes uses the term "regrouping" to describe what amounts to a battlefield retreat, such as when its troops completely withdrew from the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson in November last year.

Moscow on Friday claimed that its forces had thwarted a Ukrainian attempt to forge a bridgehead on the left bank of the Dnipro River amid earlier reports that Kyiv's military had sent military attachments and armored vehicles across the river.

The U.S.-based Insitute for the Study of War said Sunday that Russian units deployed on the left bank of the Dnipro River were "likely currently engaged in defending against larger-than-usual Ukrainian operations."

Kyiv launched a major counteroffensive in the south and east in June but the front line has barely moved and the two sides have continually bombarded each other with heavy weaponry.

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