The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Could Capture Ukrainian Stronghold of Vuhledar 'In Days,' Analyst Says

By Moscow Times Reporter

September 23, 2024



An aerial view of the Ukrainian town of Vuhledar. **@pavlokyrylenko_donoda / twitter**

Russian troops edged closer to encircling Kyiv's stronghold of Vuhledar in the eastern Donetsk region on Monday, according to the Ukrainian crowd-sourced tracking site DeepState.

The advance is a part of Moscow's wide-reaching offensive in eastern Ukraine that rapidly accelerated last month despite Ukraine's surprise incursion into western Russia's Kursk region.

"The situation is difficult," said Ukrainian military analyst Ivan Stupak, adding that the city could fall in "a matter of days" given "the pace of the advance."

"[Vuhledar is known as] a fortress city, a fortified area on an upland that has been built up

over many years. It was supposed to hold out, but, unfortunately, we are coming to the point where the city is practically surrounded," Stupak told The Moscow Times.

Russian troops have made multiple attempts to capture the strategic coal-mining town during its two-and-a-half-year invasion, an effort that has cost Moscow thousands of troops, hundreds of tanks and armored vehicles, according to the Financial Times' sources.

But maps released by DeepState on Monday suggest that Russian troops might finally be nearing their goal, moving to block off the only remaining entryway north of the town and surrounding the 72 Mechanized Brigade that is defending it.

Troop "exhaustion" among Ukraine's forces and delayed Western military aid deliveries to Kyiv have been cited as key factors that enabled Russia's advance on Vuhledar.

Analyst Stupak believes that the near-capture of the town was also made possible after the Ukrainian command decided to redeploy some of the equipment and personnel stationed in the "fortress city" to aid the defense of the key logistics hub of Pokrovsk some 50 kilometers north of Vuhledar.

Embed:

> Updated map showing Russian advances on the flanks of Vuhledar, around Ukrainsk, and in New York and Toretsk. The situation in Vuhledar continues to deteriorate. https://t.co/VhSJQxhgtwhttps://t.co/e9DaSslWGo https://t.co/jfp4LhSPdr pic.twitter.com/h9zJYd3hkV
>
> — Rob Lee (@RALee85) September 22, 2024

Russian troops have been rapidly advancing on Pokrovsk since August and are now positioned less than 10 kilometers away from the city proper, according to Stupak.

Israeli military expert David Sharp labeled the possible capture of Pokrovsk as a "key point" in Russia's "battle for the Donetsk region" in an interview with The Moscow Times last month.

"Pokrovsk is a large city, so advancing toward it means gaining territory. But it could also be an important defense center, of course, if it is properly organized," Sharp said in August.

Though Vuhledar does not hold the same value for propping up the Ukrainian army's logistics system as Pokrovsk, its loss to Moscow would still count as a major setback for Ukrainian forces.

"This is [the entryway to] the southern Donbas, which we are holding up to prevent the Russian army from advancing further," said analyst Stupak.

Related article: What We Know About Russia's Advances in Ukraine's Donetsk Region

Stupak's view was echoed by defense analyst Federico Borsari, who told The Kyiv Independent earlier this month that the capture of Vuhledar would be "a morale blow for Ukraine" and "a very serious development that can potentially threaten the security of the entire southwestern portion of Donetsk region."

With no additional Western aid in sight and little hope that Russia might redirect some of its troops toward the besieged Kursk region, experts say Ukraine's chances to turn things around in Donbas remain slim.

Stupak believes that one thing that could still help Ukraine gain the upper hand is its increasingly audacious strikes on military depots in western Russia, claiming that Kyiv is now eyeing a total of seven depots as potential targets.

"There's a large quantity of missiles and various bombs in there and the shortage of ammunition should somehow stop the Russian army," explained Stupak.

"If we [Ukrainians] can't stop Russian soldiers head-on, then at least the lack of ammunition, I think, will help," he added.

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