

Russia evacuates tens of thousands from Kherson ahead of Ukrainian offensive

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Russian officials in Kherson, the port city at the mouth of the Dnieper River, announced plans Tuesday to evacuate civilians ahead of an expected Ukrainian offensive to recapture the city. Officials from Kherson, which Russia seized during its offensive earlier in the year, said the evacuations were “to avoid casualties among the civilian population.”

Parts of the city are just 50 miles from Crimea, the strategic peninsula annexed by Russia in 2014 and whose reconquest is a stated goal of the Ukrainian war effort. Russian officials said they intend to evacuate up to 60,000 people from the portion of the city on the north bank of the Dnieper amid warnings that Russian forces will have to retreat over the river.

During the past month, Ukraine has recaptured significant portions of the Kherson region using American supplied HIMARS systems and Excalibur projectiles to carry out attacks behind Russian lines. The collapse in southern Ukraine followed the debacle for Russian forces in the Kharkiv region, in which Ukrainian forces advanced dozens of miles in a matter of days.

Despite Russian President Vladimir Putin’s announcement of a partial mobilization earlier this month, both Russian and US commentators have stated that the Russian front is likely to continue retreating amid the ongoing NATO-backed Ukrainian offensive.

While Russian forces suffered a series of setbacks on the battlefield, the Russian military has also launched missile and drone attacks on electricity substations and water distribution centers in Ukraine.

Russian officials said the attacks were in retaliation for the bombing of the Kerch Bridge on October 8, for which the Ukrainian special forces took credit in statements to the press.

In an analysis of the Russian attacks on civilian

infrastructure, the Institute for the Study of War commented that “the Kremlin remains trapped in a cycle of appeasing its pro-war constituencies but retaining Russian President Vladimir Putin’s vision of a limited war in Ukraine that is incompatible with their demands and expectations.”

The attacks have had a devastating impact on the Ukrainian population, with electricity and water shut off altogether in some areas.

Despite the disaster for the Ukrainian population, which is viewed as cannon fodder for American imperialism, the US is seeking to escalate the conflict. The *New York Times* reported, citing US officials, that “the Ukrainian military has a window of opportunity to make gains against Russia’s army over the next six weeks,” before the late-fall mud makes offensive operations more difficult and the cutoff of Russian gas is expected to trigger an energy crisis.

The continuing Ukrainian advances have raised the danger of a nuclear escalation. On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesperson Dimitri Peskov suggested that the four regions of Ukraine occupied by Russia are under the protection of Russia’s “nuclear umbrella.”

“All these territories are inalienable parts of the Russian Federation, and they are all protected,” Peskov said. “Their security is provided for at the same level as the rest of Russia’s territory.”

Amid mutual military exercises on the part of NATO and Russia, there are growing warnings about the potential for a miscalculation leading to a direct clash between nuclear armed powers. On Thursday, British Defense Minister Ben Wallace said a Russian jet had released a missile near a British surveillance aircraft in the Black Sea last month, in what Wallace characterized as a mistake. Wallace made this statement a day after returning from discussions with

Washington.

Ahead of the trip, a ministry of defense spokesperson told *Sky News*, “My boss, Ben Wallace, is in Washington this morning having the sort of conversations that... beyond belief really the fact we are a time when these sort of conversations are necessary.”

On Tuesday, during a livestreamed interview with *Deutsche Welle's* “Conflict Zone” program, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg raised the prospect that the use of tactical nuclear weapons by Russia would directly draw NATO into the conflict.

In a revealing exchange, Stoltenberg was asked, “Putin’s ally, Dmitry Medvedev, says that he thinks the NATO military alliance would not risk a nuclear war and directly enter the Ukraine war, even if Moscow struck Ukraine with nuclear weapons; is he right?”

Stoltenberg replied, “He was not right, because what we have stated clearly is that there will be severe consequences.”

In his remarks, Stoltenberg made a revealing admission, asserting that the war did not begin in 2022, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but in 2014. “So, since 2014, we have adapted the Alliance, and the war didn’t start in February, it actually started eight years ago when they went into Donbas and Crimea.”

Stoltenberg added, “NATO allies, like especially the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, have trained and equipped the Ukrainian forces, not since February, but since 2014. And that has ensured that the Ukrainian armed forces are much bigger, much better trained, much better led, much better equipped now, than in 2014, and this is making a huge difference on the battlefield, as we speak.”

Stoltenberg made clear the extent of the NATO buildup in Eastern Europe over the past eight years. “For the first time in our history, we have battlegroups in the eastern part of Alliance... What we have seen since 2014 is the biggest reinforcement of NATO’s collective defense since the end of the Cold War.”

Stoltenberg called on NATO to “ramp up production” of wartime armaments, saying that NATO had provided arms to Ukraine “by depleting our existing stocks.”

Critically, Stoltenberg made clear that NATO’s rearmament is targeting not only Russia, but China. Stoltenberg was asked, “Is the next conflict for NATO with China?” to which he replied, “What we have stated clearly, and that’s for the first time in our

Strategic Concept, is that the rise of China matters for our security, and it is a challenge for our values, for our interests and for our security.”

But while the US and NATO are seeking to escalate the conflict with Russia and China, the social, economic and political crisis triggered by the war is intensifying. In the UK, inflation hit a 40-year high on Thursday, with bread prices surging as much as 30 percent throughout Europe in recent months. On Tuesday, the *Guardian* reported that the British Broadcasting Corporation has prepared secret scripts to read on air to announce rolling blackouts that are expected over the winter.



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