

War in Ukraine

Ukraine's lightning advance near Kharkiv leaves Russian forces in disarray

Kyiv consolidates hold in north-east as Russian sympathisers flee to border



Ukrainian soldiers occupy a rooftop after entering the strategic transport hub of Kupyansk on Saturday. The town is crucial to Russian supply lines © Telegram @kuptg via REUTERS

Roman Olearchyk and **John Paul Rathbone** in Kyiv, and **Polina Ivanova** in Berlin
YESTERDAY

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Ukraine forces consolidated their hold of territory in the north-east of the country on Sunday after Russia abandoned several military strongholds following a lightning Ukrainian advance that has routed Moscow's forces and left them in disarray.

Russian sympathisers were fleeing Russian-occupied territories in the Luhansk region, south of Kharkiv, said Serhiy Hayday, the Ukrainian head of the Luhansk region's military Administration.

"Massive de-occupation is on the horizon," Hayday said on Ukrainian television on Sunday, as Russians "continue to pack their bags". "Maybe this [victory] will not be in a day or two, but it will happen soon . . . We can say that their morale is shattered."

"People are leaving as entire families, there are lots of children. There are more than 400 cars on the border right now," Andrei Turchak, a leader of Russia's governing United Russia party wrote on Telegram, sharing photographs of displacement camps on the Russian border.

The Russian retreat is one of President Vladimir Putin's biggest setbacks since he ordered a full invasion of Ukraine on February 24, and could prove a turning point

ordered a full invasion of Ukraine on February 24, and could prove a turning point, involving the capture of thousands of Russian soldiers and their equipment.

Ukraine's lightning counter-offensive in the north-east

Sep 8: Ukrainian troops push east from Kharkiv

- Under Russian control
- Ukrainian-claimed counter-offensive
- Assessed Russian advance
- Nuclear power plant
- Russian-claimed control
- Reported Ukrainian partisan warfare
- Under Russian control
- Populated areas



Source: Institute for the Study of War, AEI's Critical Threats Project, WorldPop, FT research • Updated 8am GMT

The Russian-installed leader of occupied areas of the Kharkiv region advised all residents of the area to flee in order to save their lives. Vitaliy Ganchev reminded them that displacement camps were operating and could house refugees, the Tass news agency reported on Saturday.

General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, commander of the armed forces, said they were just 50km from the Russian border and that “since the beginning of September, more than 3,000 square kilometres have been returned”.

But there were also conflicting reports of the state of play on the sixth day of the Ukrainian offensive that has overrun Russian positions in the north-eastern Kharkiv region. The Ukrainian general staff said the “liberation of the Kupyansk and Izyum districts of Kharkiv oblast still continues”.

Air raid warning sirens rang out over Kyiv on Sunday morning, there were reports of heavy shelling of the city of Kharkiv overnight and the southern city of Mykolayiv, which is near a separate Ukrainian offensive around Kherson, also suffered heavy shelling, local authorities reported.

A snowball rolling down the hill, getting bigger and bigger

Oleksii Reznikov, on the Ukrainian counter-offensive

After acknowledging a retreat from key areas of the Kharkiv region on Saturday, the Russian defence ministry on Sunday suggested it was back on the assault, claiming it had landed strikes on Ukrainian forces in the area and in southern parts of the country.

In comments to the Financial Times, Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine's defence minister, described the rapid counteroffensive that had taken Russian soldiers by surprise and led many to flee as being like a “snowball rolling down the hill, getting bigger and bigger.”

He claimed that Ukraine's counter-offensive was also making steady progress in southern regions near the city of Kherson. “We are moving, but probably a bit slower” than in the east, he said.

The Russian defence ministry made a rare statement on Saturday portraying the pullback from Balakliia and Izyum as a move intended to focus attention on a different frontline, rather than a defeat following the Ukrainian attack, which began

on September 6.

“In order to achieve objectives . . . it was decided to regroup the Russian troops . . . to increase efforts in the Donetsk direction,” defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said. He added that to this end, “an operation was conducted over three days to wind down and transfer out” Russian troops in that area.



German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock and her Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba meet in Kyiv on Saturday © REUTERS

The announcement came soon after Ukrainian troops captured Kupyansk, north of Izyum, a road and rail hub supplying Russia’s defences across north-eastern Ukraine. This has left thousands of Russian troops cut off from supplies.

Annalena Baerbock, Germany’s foreign minister, said the Ukrainian advance was a moment of hope. “This is what we need,” she said, speaking on a visit to Kyiv. “We know that the time between UN General Assembly and Christmas is crucial, and weapons support is crucial, and we will be at their side.”

Analysts said Kyiv’s attack had taken advantage of Russian defences that had been depleted after troops were sent south to fend off a separate Ukrainian offensive. As many as 10,000 Russian troops may be caught in the new manoeuvre, Sir Lawrence Freedman, emeritus professor of war studies at King’s College London, estimated.

Ukrainian fightback in Kherson



Source: [Institute for the Study of War](#), [AEI's Critical Threats Project](#), WorldPop, FT research • Map updated 8am September 11

* Crimea was annexed by Russia in 2014 but this is not recognised by the international community © FT

Despite stiffer Russian resistance in the south, Nataliya Humenyuk, spokesperson for Ukraine's armed forces near Kherson, said on Saturday that government troops were also making significant gains in the region.

Military analysts said Ukraine had launched the two, nearly simultaneous, offensives to overwhelm the Russian military's centralised system of command, which struggles with multidirectional deployments.

“Russian generals are afraid to make mistakes . . . which leads to the centralisation of

decision-making, because everybody's trying to push decisions as much upwards as possible to avoid responsibility. That kills their ability to deal with multidirectional approaches," said Andriy Zagorodnyuk, a former Ukrainian defence minister.

One military commentator, embedded with Russian troops, described it as a "catastrophe" and the "biggest Russian military defeat since 1943".

But analysts warned against reading too much into early Ukrainian successes. "They [the Russians] have very good electronic warfare. They have very good artillery. They do have a few high-tech weapons . . . So you have got to be careful. You always have to respect the adversary," General Wesley Clark, a former supreme Nato commander, said.

Russia is reportedly sending in more troops. Ukraine's general staff said that 1,200 Chechen soldiers had been deployed to reinforce Russian positions around Kherson. Videos posted on social media on Saturday also allegedly showed the Russian army helicoptering in fresh troops to reinforce Izyum.

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