

Russia Withdraws Troops From Ukraine's Snake Island

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Snake Island, Ukraine. I.E.Mazurok (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Russian forces have withdrawn from the strategic Black Sea outpost of Ukraine's Snake Island.

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed Thursday that the withdrawal was a voluntary show of "goodwill" as Moscow seeks to discredit claims that it is enforcing a naval blockade in the area.

"On June 30, as a step of goodwill, the Russian Armed Forces fulfilled their tasks on Snake Island and withdrew the garrison there," Defense Ministry spokesperson Igor Konashenkov said at a briefing.

Konashev said that the move was a symbolic step to disprove statements by Ukraine and its allies that Moscow is blockading its pro-Western neighbor after invading the country in late February.

"In this way, we are demonstrating to the global community that the Russian Federation is not hindering the efforts of the UN to organize a humanitarian corridor for the export of agricultural products from the territory of Ukraine," Konashev added.

The withdrawal follows claims from Ukrainian forces that an overnight assault forced Russian soldiers to retreat from the heavily contested area.

"KABOOM! No Russian troops on the Snake Island anymore. Our Armed Forces did a great job," Andriy Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian president's office, wrote in a Twitter [post](#) Thursday.

Unverified images early Thursday showed columns of black smoke rising from the island, which sits east of the Danube Delta.

Snake Island has held key strategic significance to Russian forces since the early days of the war in February. Occupying Russian soldiers have used the outpost to set up air defense and missile systems and assert Russia's control over the Black Sea.

The island has also become a widespread symbol of Ukrainian resistance, following a viral radio exchange in which Ukrainian soldiers told a Russian warship to "go f*** yourself" after ordering them to surrender.

Despite Kremlin denials, Russia has repeatedly been accused of enforcing a naval blockade on Ukraine, while shipping Ukrainian grain and agricultural products to Russian ports.

Russia's withdrawal from Snake Island could open the door again for Ukraine to export grain from its southern port of Odesa, according to military analyst Rob Lee — an important step for the Ukrainian economy that has been crippled by the war.

"The most significant aspect is that this could open the door to Ukrainian grain exports from Odesa, which is critical for Ukraine's economy and for the global food supply," Lee wrote in a Twitter post.

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