

Kremlin Eyes 'Crimea-Style' Annexation of Ukraine's Kherson

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Local youths walk past a Russian serviceman in Skadovsk, Kherson region, Ukraine. **SERGEI ILNITSKY / EPA / TASS**

The Kremlin hopes to annex southern Ukraine's Kherson region just as it did Crimea, a senior Russian lawmaker [said](#) Tuesday.

Moscow annexed the Black Sea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, staging a referendum later condemned as illegal by the West.

"The Kherson region's admission into Russia will be complete, similar to Crimea," State Duma member Igor Kastyukevich wrote in a report, following a visit by Presidential Administration Deputy Chief of Staff Sergei Kiriienko to the area.

It is believed to be the first time that a Kremlin official has publically advocated for the Ukrainian region to become part of Russia. Previously, the head of the country's ruling United Russia party vowed that Russia would [remain in southern Ukraine](#) "forever."

Kastyukevich's report also said that said Kiriienko [promised to give locals Russian passports](#) and public payments from the Russian budget during his visit to a United Russia volunteer center in Kherson.

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The city of Kherson and its surrounding districts were the first major Ukrainian region to fall to Russian forces following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. Russian forces have since installed pro-Moscow "military-civilian administrations" in occupied areas and introduced Russian currency, media and internet services.

Ukraine says some 600 people are being held prisoner for resisting Russian rule in occupied Kherson and claims they are being tortured.

Tamila Tasheva, the Ukraine presidency's permanent representative in Crimea, said the bulk of those being held were "journalists and militants" who organized "pro-Ukrainian gatherings" in the city of Kherson and its surrounding region.

The Kremlin on Tuesday [denied](#) a state media report based on anonymous sources that the status of occupied territories would be non-negotiable in future peace talks with Ukraine.

AFP contributed reporting.

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