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Putin Confident Front Will 'Stabilize' Despite Ukrainian Advances

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Russian President Vladimir Putin. **kremlin.ru**

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that he believed the situation in the four newly annexed Ukrainian regions would stabilize shortly despite Russian forces' ongoing losses to Kyiv's counteroffensive.

"We are working on the assumption that the situation in the new territories will stabilize," Putin said during a televised video call with Russian teachers.

Kyiv claimed further victories over Russian forces in eastern Ukraine on Wednesday, however, prompting the Kremlin to vow the recapture all territory lost so far in the Ukrainian military's recent advances.

Putin's reassurances follow Kyiv's claim that the Russian military had lost control of the southern Kherson region as well as almost all of the eastern Kharkiv region. Bolstered by deliveries of Western weapons, Ukrainian forces are now poised to enter the separatist stronghold of Luhansk.

Earlier on Wednesday, Putin formally signed a document formally annexing four Ukrainian regions – including Luhansk – into law. The move followed hurriedly arranged and internationally condemned referendums held in each region last month on whether to join Russia. Putin said that he had been "not only pleased, but surprised" by the overwhelmingly pro-Russian results.

During Wednesday's call with teachers, Putin also admitted that mistakes had been made in Russia's "partial" mobilization since he declared it on Sept. 21, conceding that the Defense Ministry hadn't updated its list of those eligible for service.

"We have to make adjustments," Putin said.

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The Russian president also signed a decree deferring mobilization for those attending evening classes and also said that undergraduate and postgraduate students would be exempt from the draft.

There have been numerous reports of men with no military background and those who should have been exempted from service on other grounds receiving call-up papers in the two weeks since the mobilization was announced.

Eight people who were mobilized reportedly died even before reaching the frontlines from a variety of causes including health complications and suicide.

Several governors have publicly admitted mistakes in the mobilization effort and, in some cases, those who were wrongly called up have been allowed to return home.

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