

Putin Signs Bill Finalizing Ukraine Land Grab

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Leonid Pasechnik, Vladimir Putin, and Denis Pushilin. kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin finalized the annexation of four partially occupied Ukrainian regions Wednesday with laws and decrees [signed](#) as his forces' losses on the battlefield continue to mount.

The Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine, as well as the southern Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, are "accepted into the Russian Federation in line with federal constitutional law," according to the four bills.

Putin had submitted the draft constitutional laws to lawmakers shortly after the four regions held referendums dismissed by Kyiv and its Western allies as a sham last month.

Both houses of Russia's parliament passed Putin's bills unanimously this week.

In eight separate decrees, Putin ratified treaties formally recognizing the four annexed regions as Russian subjects and named their current leaders as "acting governors."

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The Kremlin [admitted](#) earlier this week that it does not yet know the exact boundaries of the regions it is annexing, saying it will consult with locals to finalize their borders.

The bureaucratic formalities — which make the partly occupied Ukrainian territories Russia's 86th, 87th, 88th and 89th regions — come as Kyiv claims sweeping gains along two major battlefronts.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday said his forces were making "rapid and powerful" gains and had retaken "dozens" of villages from Russia this week in the east and south.

Zelensky said eight settlements in the southern Kherson region, where Moscow's forces have retreated, have been retaken.

In a briefing in Moscow, the Russian military conceded in updated maps of the fronts that they had incurred significant territorial losses.

The latest battlefield maps from Moscow showed that Russian troops had left many areas in Kherson, including along the west bank of the Dnipro River.

In the eastern Kharkiv region, the maps indicated that Russian forces had almost entirely abandoned the east bank of the Oskil River, potentially giving the Ukrainians space to shell key Russian troop transportation and supply corridors.

"Our soldiers do not stop. And it's only a matter of time before we expel the occupier from all of our land," Zelensky said.

Russia's land grab marks a major escalation of the seven-month war, with fears that Putin could use a tactical nuclear weapon to defend what Moscow now views as its sovereign territory.

AFP contributed reporting.

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