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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Visits Occupied Ukraine Territories

April 18, 2023

Putin lands in southern Ukraine's Kherson region. **Screengrab / Presidential press service / TASS**

Updates with Agentsvo reporting on visit timing and Peskov comments.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has visited occupied Ukrainian territories for the second time since launching a full-scale invasion, the Kremlin said Tuesday.

Putin visited a military headquarters in Ukraine's Kherson region in the south, as well as a Russian National Guard headquarters in the Luhansk region in the east, according to the Kremlin.

The trip is the nearest to the frontlines Putin has been seen since he ordered tanks over the border in February last year and comes amid a faltering Russian offensive in eastern Ukraine and an expected Ukrainian counter-offensive.

The Kremlin did not say exactly when the trip took place and footage of the two visits showed Putin wearing different clothes.

"It's important for me to hear your opinion on the situation, to listen to you and to exchange

information," Putin said in a conversation with officers in Kherson region in a video clip released by the Kremlin.

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The Russian leader also wished the troops a happy Easter, which Orthodox Christians marked on Sunday, April 16, and Putin was shown gifting an icon to senior officers.

Independent investigative media outlet Agentstvo said that after analyzing the footage that Putin's visit may have taken place before April 16.

"Easter is coming up now, isn't it?" Putin was heard saying in an earlier version of the video published by Agentstvo on messaging app Telegram.

The outlet said the video was issued by the Kremlin, which then quickly removed it and re-uploaded a version with the words "coming up" removed, Agentstvo said.

Footage of the two visits also showed Putin wearing different clothes.

The Kremlin said Tuesday that Putin's visit to the occupied Ukrainian territories took place on Monday.

Asked about Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov's absence, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said "gathering together is a big risk."

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, accused Putin of visiting the scenes of Russian "crimes."

Embed:

> Putin's degradation is impressive. The world waited for his statement a year ago. Now they don't. There's no such political actor. There's only a "special tour" of the mass murders author in the occupied and ruined territories to enjoy the crimes of his minions for the last time.
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> — Михайло Подоляк (@Podolyak_M) April 18, 2023

"Putin's degradation is impressive," Podolyak tweeted, saying Putin was touring Ukraine's occupied territories "to enjoy the crimes of his minions for the last time."

The first time Putin visit occupied Ukrainian territory was in March when he made a surprise visit to the occupied port city of Mariupol in Ukraine's Donetsk region.

The Kremlin annexed Ukraine's Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions in September in a move widely condemned by the international community.

Russia's spring offensive in Ukraine has largely failed to yield any significant territorial gains despite what are believed to be tens of thousands of casualties on both sides.

Fierce fighting continues in and around the city of Bakhmut, where Russia has claimed its forces continue to advance in the longest and bloodiest battle of Moscow's military campaign.

AFP contributed reporting.

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