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Russia in ‘De Facto’ State of War Says Belgorod Governor

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The town of Shebekino in the Belgorod region after shelling. **Vyacheslav Gladkov / Telegram**

The governor of Russia’s Belgorod region, which lies on the border with Ukraine, said Monday that Russia was in a “state of de facto war” and called for the annexation of adjacent Ukrainian territory.

“We live in a state of de facto war. Whether we like it or not, it’s happening,” Belgorod Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said during an interview on state-controlled TV channel Rossiya 24.

The comments words were a rare admission of the scale of the fighting in Ukraine and how it is has spilled into Russia — top officials generally prefer the phrase "special military operation" to the word "war."

Last week, the Belgorod region was the site of an armed incursion by anti-Kremlin Russian fighters, an attack the Kremlin has accused Kyiv of organizing.

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At least six "sabotage-reconnaissance groups" have crossed the border with Ukraine into Belgorod region since the start of the war, Gladkov said, without offering details of the attacks.

The Belgorod region, which lies across the border from Ukraine’s second-largest city Kharkiv, has reported hundreds of shelling and drone attacks in the 15 months since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion.

Gladkov argued that Russia should annex Ukraine’s Kharkiv region as a way to prevent further strikes on Russian territory.

“Annexing Kharkiv to [become a part of] the Belgorod region. This is the best solution to the problem of shelling in the Belgorod region,” he said.

In September, Russia’s army withdrew from around the city of Kharkiv during a counteroffensive by Ukrainian forces.

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