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As Ukraine's Kursk Incursion Rages for a Third Month, What Is Happening on the Ground?

By Moscow Times Reporter

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The city of Sudzha in the Kursk region. **vk.com/sudgaonline**

Russia's southwestern Kursk region bordering Ukraine has been engulfed in battles with Kyiv's troops for over two months.

Ukraine has claimed over two dozen Kursk region settlements since launching its surprise incursion on Aug. 6, in the most significant cross-border attack on Russian territory since World War II.

With most of the territory captured by Kyiv remaining under Ukrainian control, the region's residents continue to express dissatisfaction and fear for their safety.

The Moscow Times assesses the current situation in the region:

Military developments

The Kursk region remains one of the primary battlegrounds in the ongoing conflict between Russian and Ukrainian forces.

In August, Kyiv claimed it had controlled over 1,250 square kilometers of Russia's territory, including 92 settlements.

Apti Alaudinov, the head of Chechnya's Akhmat special forces unit who has become one of the main speakers for Russia's counteroffensive in the Kursk region, claimed on Monday that about 50% of the territory captured by Ukraine during the incursion had been retaken.

Among the latest recaptured settlements in the Kursk region were Novaya Sorochina and Pokrovsky, Russia's Defense Ministry said last week.

However according to the U.S.-based think tank, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), after two months of fighting in the Kursk region, Ukraine still controlled most of the territory previously seized in Russia's Kursk region as of Oct. 13.

Related article: Zelensky Says Ukrainian Forces 'Holding the Line' in Kursk

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Saturday that Moscow had attempted to push back Ukrainian positions in Kursk but that Kyiv was "holding the line."

Among the settlements still under Ukrainian control is Sudzha, a town of about 5,000 people that is home to a key gas transit hub between Russia and Europe, according to ISW.

Social consequences

More than 112,000 Kursk region residents have been displaced from their homes since the start of the incursion, 12,300 of whom have been placed in temporary shelters, Russian officials said. At least 308 people, including 11 children, were injured during the attack, according to local authorities.

Moscow also accused Kyiv of forcibly taking more than 1,000 Kursk residents during the incursion. Presidential human rights commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova said Monday that she "received messages regarding more than 1,000 such people from relatives trying to find them."

The Moscow Times could not independently verify Moskalkova's claims and Ukraine has not yet responded to the accusations.

In total, over 8,000 Russians were officially recognized as victims of the attack, Russia's Investigative Committee reported last month. To help them, the Russian government last month allocated more than 6.2 billion rubles (about $62 million).

Public sentiment

Residents of the Kursk region continue to voice their frustration over the authorities' inaction

more than two months after the incursion began.

“First, they let them [Ukrainian forces] through, and so many people died. And now they're bragging about ‘liberating’ our own towns and villages,” resident Natalia Kartseva said in a comment on the VKontakte social media site.

Another Kursk resident, Nikolai Pakhomov, appeared to share similar views.

“Has our Kursk region already been liberated? ... The ones responsible for allowing the Ukrainians to breach our border haven’t been punished yet! Is anyone even planning to give the public the names of those responsible? Or have they already been transferred to other positions?” Pakhomov wrote on social media.

In an effort to address the aftermath of the incursion, Kursk region Governor Alexei Smirnov, last week approved a new executive structure for the regional government that includes the creation of a Borderland Restoration and Development Ministry. However, this move has also sparked dissatisfaction among the local population.

A Kursk resident named Anatoly Sudakov voiced frustration, stating that it seemed like a waste of resources.

“Another case of sitting around doing nothing and wasting the budget, if you ask me,” Sudakov said on VKontakte.

“How can we even talk about recovery right now when part of the region is under occupation and another part is in an active combat zone? What exactly are they planning to restore?”

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