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Seoul Summons Russian Ambassador to Protest North Korean Troop Deployment

By AFP

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Anthony Wallace / AFP

South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador in Seoul on Monday in protest over claims that Pyongyang sent thousands of soldiers to fight in Moscow's war against Ukraine, the South Korean Foreign Ministry said, calling for the immediate withdrawal of the troop deployments.

Around 1,500 North Korean special forces soldiers have been stationed in Russia, according to South Korea's intelligence agency, and they are expected to head to the front lines in Ukraine soon. Authorities in Seoul said North Korea will likely send additional troops in the near future.

South Korea, which has long claimed the nuclear-armed North is supplying Russia with weaponry for use on the battlefield in Ukraine, has expressed alarm over the deployment,

which comes after Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a mutual defense agreement in June.

Vice Foreign Minister Kim Hong-kyun expressed Seoul's "grave concerns regarding North Korea's recent dispatch of troops to Russia and strongly urged the immediate withdrawal of North Korean forces and the cessation of related cooperation," according to a ministry statement.

Kim told the Russian ambassador in Seoul, Georgiy Zinoviev, that North Korea supplying Russia with weaponry and troops for the war in Ukraine "poses a significant security threat not only to South Korea but to the international community."

He also "emphasized that such actions violate multiple UN Security Council resolutions and the UN Charter."

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On Friday, South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) released detailed satellite images it said showed the first deployment of elite North Korean soldiers being moved by Russian military ships to Vladivostok.

The intelligence agency said that between Oct. 8 and Oct. 13, "North Korea transported its special forces to Russia via a Russian Navy transport ship, confirming the start of North Korea's military participation" in Moscow's war against Ukraine.

The first contingent of troops — which South Korean media reported was from an elite unit under North Korea's Special Operations Forces, also known as the "Storm Corps" — are currently stationed in military bases across Russia's Far East.

The special forces "are expected to be deployed to the front lines (of the Ukraine conflict) as soon as they complete acclimatization training," according to the NIS.

The intelligence agency said Pyongyang had "provided Russia with more than 13,000 containers' worth of artillery shells, missiles, anti-tank rockets and other lethal weapons" since last August.

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