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U.S. Officials Confirm North Korea Sent Troops to Russia

By AFP

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North Korean soldiers. **Uwe Brodrecht (CC BY-SA 2.0)**

A senior U.S. official confirmed Wednesday that thousands of North Korean soldiers were sent to Russia for training, but said that their exact mission remained unclear.

"We know that thousands of DPRK troops are in Russia to be trained. We don't know what their mission will be or if they'll go on to fight in Ukraine," the unnamed official said, using an abbreviation for North Korea's official name.

"Russia is suffering extraordinary casualties on the battlefield every day. If Russia needs to turn to DPRK for manpower, that's a sign of desperation — not strength — on the part of the Kremlin," the official added.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier provided the first confirmation from Washington about the reported deployment of North Korean troops in Russia. He also said it was not yet

clear why the troops were sent there.

"What exactly they're doing? Left to be seen," he told journalists. "If they're co-belligerents, their intention is to participate in this war on Russia's behalf, that is a very, very serious issue."

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Meanwhile, NATO spokeswoman Farah Dakhlallah said that the military bloc's "allies have confirmed evidence of a DPRK troop deployment to Russia," without identifying the countries.

"If these troops are destined to fight in Ukraine, it would mark a significant escalation in North Korea's support for Russia's illegal war and yet another sign of Russia's significant losses on the front lines," Dakhlallah said.

South Korea's intelligence agency said last week that Pyongyang deployed an initial contingent of 1,500 special forces soldiers to Russia's Vladivostok. On Wednesday, it told South Korean lawmakers that an additional 1,500 troops were sent.

"The planned deployment of about 10,000 troops from North Korea to Russia is expected to have occurred by December," lawmaker Park Sun-won told reporters.

North Korea denied that it sent military forces to Russia, while Moscow has not confirmed the reports.

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