

North Korean Troops in Russia Expected to Enter Combat Soon, Pentagon Says

By [AFP](#)

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AP Photo/Cha Song Ho

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Saturday that thousands of North Korean troops currently stationed in Russia are expected to enter combat against Ukraine "soon."

Speaking during a visit to Fiji, Austin said around 10,000 North Korean soldiers are believed to be in Russia's Kursk region, near the border with Ukraine, where they are being integrated into Russian military formations.

"Based upon what they've been trained on, the way they've been integrated into the Russian formations, I fully expect to see them engaged in combat soon," Austin told reporters.

He added that there has not yet been "significant reporting" of North Korean troops actively fighting.

South Korean officials and a research group said Thursday that Russia provided North Korea

with oil, anti-air missiles and economic assistance in exchange for troops, a claim both Washington and Seoul have backed.

Ukraine has warned that Russia, bolstered by North Korean soldiers, has amassed a 50,000-strong force to retake parts of the border region captured by Ukrainian forces.

Ukrainian troops seized swaths of Kursk in a surprise offensive in August, even as their forces remained heavily stretched in the Donetsk region, which has been the focal point of nearly three years of fighting.

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