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North Korean Troops in Russia Not Seen Fighting Since Mid-January, South Korea Says

By AFP

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Reported images of North Korean soldiers in Russia in October 2024. **The Ukrainian Centre for Strategic Communication**

North Korean soldiers fighting alongside Russia's army in the Kursk region appear to have suspended combat operations last month, South Korea's spy agency told AFP Tuesday, coming after Ukraine claimed the soldiers had been pulled from the front line after facing heavy losses.

"Since mid-January, it appears that the North Korean troops deployed to the Kursk region of Russia have not engaged in combat," South Korea's National Intelligence Service said in a statement. "One reason for this may be the occurrence of many casualties, but the exact details are still being monitored."

Ukraine's military said Friday that it believed North Korean soldiers on the Kursk front had been "withdrawn" after sustaining heavy losses.

Western, South Korean and Ukrainian intelligence agencies have said Pyongyang deployed more than 10,000 troops to support Russian forces in the southwestern Kursk region, where Ukraine launched a surprise cross-border offensive in August.

Neither Pyongyang nor Moscow has officially confirmed the deployment.

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North Korean troops were expected to bolster Russia's military and help push back Ukrainian forces from the Kursk region. However, nearly six months later, Ukrainian forces still hold parts of Russian territory.

Ukraine has previously claimed to have captured or killed several North Korean soldiers in Kursk. President Volodymyr Zelensky released video last month of what he said were captured North Korean prisoners of war.

In December, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff reported that Pyongyang was "preparing for the rotation or additional deployment of soldiers" to support Russia's war effort.

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