The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ukraine Risks Losing Kursk Foothold as Russia Pushes Forward

By Bashir Kitachayev

March 10, 2025



A destroyed house in a village in the Kursk region. **Alexei Dmitrashkovsky / Facebook**

Ukrainian troops in Russia's Kursk region may be forced to retreat as a renewed Russian counteroffensive pushes toward the Kyiv-held city of Sudzha, putting Ukraine's forces at risk of encirclement.

Over seven months since Kyiv launched its Kursk region offensive, Moscow now seeks to cut off the only supply road to Ukrainian troops, forcing Kyiv to abandon the occupied territories — and potentially weakening its position in peace negotiations to end the war.

Ukraine captured approximately 1,376 square kilometers of land when its forces first entered the Kursk region in August 2024. The Russian army has gradually reclaimed most of the lost ground in the months since, leading to heavy casualties on both sides.

Russian forces have made even greater advances this month, likely taking advantage of U.S.

President Donald Trump's suspension of military aid and intelligence sharing to Ukraine.

By Sunday, the area of the Kursk region under Ukrainian control had shrunk to just 338 square kilometers, with Sudzha the only major settlement still held by Kyiv.

Ukrainian forces are now in a critical position as the Kremlin presses forward on multiple fronts.

According to the Ukrainian open-source intelligence project DeepState, Russian forces have advanced six kilometers from the south toward the road linking Ukraine to Sudzha, the main supply route for Ukrainian forces in the region.

At the same time, Moscow has intensified attacks from the north, crossing the state border and assaulting the villages of Zhuravka and Novenkoe in Ukraine's Sumy region. Russian troops are now within five kilometers of the Sumy-Sudzha highway.

Related article: Ukraine Sending Reinforcements to Kursk Region Amid Russian Advances

Since last year, Russia has been deploying large numbers of fiber-optic-guided FPV drones on the Kursk front. These drones, which are resistant to electronic warfare measures that typically jam regular drones, enhance Russian forces' ability to control the battlefield.

According to Julian Röpcke, a military analyst for Germany's Bild newspaper, the range of these drones enables Russia to exert control over the corridor used to supply Ukrainian troops in the Kursk region.

The effectiveness of these drones has made road travel impossible, according to Ukrainian military Telegram channels, which cite soldiers on the ground.

"The situation is bad. Russian forces are trying to cut our logistics to force our command to withdraw Ukrainian troops from the Kursk region," Ukrainian military analyst Ivan Stupak told The Moscow Times.

Despite this, Stupak said he believes it is unlikely that Ukrainian troops will be encircled.

On Sunday, Russian forces claimed to have captured four Kursk region settlements north of Sudzha. Ukrainian troops retreated to the outskirts of Sudzha to avoid encirclement.

Russian forces employed unconventional tactics, reportedly using an inactive gas pipeline to infiltrate Ukrainian rear positions undetected.

Pro-Russian military bloggers claim that soldiers traveled approximately 15 kilometers inside the pipeline. However, the Ukrainian military reported that they detected the attempt in time and responded with artillery strikes, inflicting significant losses on Russian troops.

The Russian military said that 800 soldiers managed to pass through the pipeline and establish positions behind Ukrainian lines in Sudzha's industrial zone.

Embed:

Overnight, Russian Telegram channel Baza reported that Russian forces had captured several more settlements.

However, Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, said Monday that there was no threat of encirclement in the Kursk region and that Kyiv was sending reinforcements to the area.

The New York Post reported Saturday, citing Ukrainian military sources, that Kyiv's forces could be forced to retreat to Ukrainian territory in the next two weeks. Soldiers interviewed by the publication expressed doubts about the rationale behind the Kursk region incursion.

Stupak echoed these concerns, saying it would have been better if Kyiv had withdrawn its troops during the first month of the incursion.

"The goal should have been to expose Russia's weakness, demonstrate that we can conduct such operations, inflict reputational and material losses on the Kremlin, and then leave," Stupak told The Moscow Times.

Now, "the authorities believe this territory must be held at any cost because they think it offers leverage in negotiations," he said. "But if they insist on holding it regardless of the losses, that will be the worst, most irrational scenario."

Stupak suggested that Ukraine's worsening position may be linked to the suspension of U.S. military aid.

"The lack of intelligence has undoubtedly impacted the situation, making it harder for our troops to detect Russian attack plans. Currently, F-16s are not operating over the Kursk region, American precision bombs are not being dropped, and HIMARS rocket artillery is unable to strike targets," Stupak said.

As the Trump administration pushes for peace talks aimed at ending Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Kyiv has said it would seek to trade the occupied parts of the Kursk region for Ukrainian territories under Russian occupation.

President Volodymyr Zelensky also argued that the Kursk region incursion would divert Russia's forces from their efforts to advance in the Donbas and compel Moscow to allocate resources to defend its own territory.

President Vladimir Putin has dismissed the idea of a territorial exchange, vowing instead to reclaim the Kursk region by force.

Stupak voiced skepticism about the strategic goals of the Kursk operation.

"We were the only ones who decided that the Kursk region was a bargaining chip for Ukraine. No one else recognizes it as such — not the U.S., not Russia," he said.

"At the same time, the operation and subsequent fighting in the Kursk region are draining resources," he said. "Well-trained Ukrainian units equipped with Western technology are

stationed there, and these units require constant reinforcements. These resources have been diverted at the expense of other fronts, where we continue to lose territory."

He also noted that the Kremlin has not eased up on its Donbas offensive to defend the Kursk region. Instead, it is relying on reserve units and mercenaries, including North Korean fighters, in the area, the analyst said.

A forced retreat from the Kursk region could significantly weaken Ukraine's position in future negotiations, Reuters reported, citing analysts.

Stupak said that while Ukraine's withdrawal from the Kursk region would deal a severe reputational blow to Kyiv, he doubts it would dramatically affect negotiations.

"By the time talks begin, the Kursk region will likely no longer be under Ukrainian control. Right now, we're holding on to a piece of land with no clear purpose while suffering heavy losses. It's like trying to use a domino tile in a card game," he said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/03/10/ukraine-risks-losing-kursk-foothold-as-russia-pushes-forward-a88310