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Putin Thanks North Korea for Helping Retake Kursk as Pyongyang Confirms Troop Deployment

By AFP

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North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. **KCNA / EPA / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin on Monday thanked North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for sending troops to help Russia reclaim territory from Ukrainian forces in the Kursk region.

"The Korean friends acted, guided by sentiments of solidarity, justice and real camaraderie," the Kremlin quoted Putin as saying. "We appreciate it greatly and are deeply thankful to Comrade Kim Jong Un personally... and to the North Korean people."

Over the weekend, Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov also praised the "heroism" of the North Korean soldiers, saying they had "provided significant assistance in defeating Ukrainian forces."

North Korea on Monday confirmed for the first time that it had deployed troops to Russia,

with state news agency KCNA reporting that Pyongyang's soldiers participated in combat operations to retake territory in the Kursk region, where Ukraine launched a surprise incursion in August.

The confirmation follows months of reports from South Korean and Western intelligence agencies that Pyongyang had sent more than 10,000 soldiers to assist Russia in Kursk last year.

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North Korean forces "participated in the operations for liberating the Kursk areas," the country's Central Military Commission was quoted as saying in the KCNA report.

Kim said the deployment was in line with a mutual defense treaty with Russia, and called the soldiers "heroes and representatives of the honor of the motherland," according to KCNA.

He added that a monument commemorating their "battle feats" would soon be built in the North Korean capital, and publicly acknowledged casualties by referring to "the tombstones of the fallen soldiers."

The country must "take important national measures to specially honor and care for the families of war veterans," Kim said.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said Monday that North Korea's troop deployment violated UN Security Council resolutions and accused Pyongyang of "admitting to its own criminal acts."

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