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Putin Jokes About Occupying Ukraine's Sumy Region

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Vladimir Putin during his visit to Kursk. **kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin appeared to make light of militarily seizing Ukraine's Sumy region during a visit to Russia's southwestern Kursk region, even as the Kremlin claims to be pursuing a negotiated end to the war.

The moment was captured on video published by the state-run news agency TASS, in which a local official from the Glushkovsky district near the border with Ukraine told Putin: "Sumy should be ours."

"We cannot live like we're on some kind of peninsula. There should be more of us [Russians]. At least in Sumy," the official, Pavel Zolotarev, added. "With you as commander-in-chief, we'll win."

Zolotarev's proposal came in response to Putin asking how far Russian forces should push Ukrainian troops from the border.

Putin, smiling and gesturing to nearby officials, quipped that his appointment of Alexander Khinshtein as Kursk region's acting governor was part of that effort: "That's why Alexander Yevseyevich was chosen. He also wants more of everything."

His remark was met with laughs from officials.

Related article: Russian Army Claims Advances in Sumy as Ukraine Orders Evacuations

Putin's comments came days after multiple reports claimed that Russian negotiators had threatened to seize Ukraine's Sumy and Kharkiv regions during direct peace negotiations held in Turkey.

Moscow has not formally laid claim to either region, though both have come under heavy Russian attack in recent months.

Earlier this month, Russia's Defense Ministry said it was creating a "buffer zone" in Ukraine's Sumy region, mirroring the justification used for its current offensive in Kharkiv.

The military's statement followed Putin's call during a previous trip to Kursk for forces to push the Ukrainian military farther from the Russian border.

Russia's Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, told Putin during the visit that Kursk had been "fully liberated" with help from North Korean troops. Ukrainian forces had occupied parts of the border region following a surprise incursion in August.

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