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Russia Says Pushing Offensive Into Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk Region

By AFP

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Russia's Defense Ministry said forces from a tank unit had “reached the western border of the Donetsk People's Republic and are continuing to develop an offensive in the Dnipropetrovsk region.” **Telegram / Dnipropetrovsk Regional Military Administration head Serhii Lysak**

Russia said Sunday it was pushing into Ukraine's eastern industrial Dnipropetrovsk region for the first time in its three-year offensive — a significant territorial escalation amid stalled peace talks.

Ukraine's top political and military leaders did not immediately respond to the claim, which would be a symbolic and strategic blow to Ukraine's forces after months of battlefield setbacks.

Moscow, which has the initiative on the battlefield, has repeatedly refused calls by Ukraine, Europe and U.S. President Donald Trump for a full and unconditional ceasefire even as it holds talks with Kyiv on a possible settlement to the war.

Russia's Defense Ministry said forces from a tank unit had “reached the western border of the Donetsk People's Republic and are continuing to develop an offensive in the Dnipropetrovsk region.”

Although there was no response from leaders in Kyiv to the claims, Ukraine's southern army command said Russia “does not give up its intentions to enter the Dnipropetrovsk region, but our fighters are bravely and professionally holding their section of the frontline.”

Dnipropetrovsk is not among the five Ukrainian regions — Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Crimea — that Moscow has publicly claimed as Russian territory.

In a set of peace demands issued to Ukraine at negotiations in Istanbul on June 2, Moscow demanded formal recognition that these regions were part of Russia — something Kyiv has repeatedly ruled out.

At a first round of talks last month, Ukraine said Russia threatened to accelerate and expand its offensive if Kyiv did not capitulate.

Tens of thousands have been killed in Russia's three-year war, millions forced to flee their homes and cities and villages across eastern Ukraine devastated by relentless air attacks and ground combat.

Russia's ex-president Dmitry Medvedev, now deputy chairman of the national security council, said the fresh advance was a warning to Kyiv.

“Those who do not want to recognize the realities of the war at negotiations, will receive new realities on the ground,” he said on social media.

Russia's army posted photos showing troops raising the Russian flag over the village of Zorya in Ukraine's Donetsk region, close to the internal border.

A Ukrainian lieutenant colonel, 60-year-old Oleksandr, told AFP that Russians entering the region would not change the dynamics of the battle.

"They are advancing slowly, very slowly, but they are advancing," he told AFP in the town of Mezhova, around a dozen kilometers from the border between the Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions.

One person was killed there in an overnight bomb attack.

Oleksandr was defiant, despite the claims.

“They could say all of Ukraine belongs to them. Saying it is one thing. But I don't think it will radically change the situation. Our resistance will remain unchanged.”

Embed:

Dnipropetrovsk had an estimated population of 3 million before Russia launched its offensive. Around 1 million people lived in the regional capital, Dnipro.

It is an important mining and industrial hub for Ukraine and deeper Russian advances into the region could have a serious knock-on effect for Kyiv's struggling military and economy.

Ukrainian military personnel previously told AFP that Russia could advance relatively quickly in the largely flat region, given there were fewer natural obstacles or villages that could be used as defensive positions by Kyiv's forces.

The region and in particular the city of Dnipro — have been under persistent Russian strikes since Moscow invaded in February 2022.

Russia used Dnipro as a testing ground for its "experimental" Oreshnik missile in late 2024, claiming to have struck an aeronautics production facility.

Ukraine also said Sunday a prisoner exchange — the only agreement reached at the Istanbul talks — would start "next week" after both sides accused each other of trying to thwart and delay the swap.

Moscow said Ukraine was refusing to agree to take back the bodies of killed soldiers, while Kyiv said Russia had not sent the names of more than 1,000 captured soldiers to be released.

Both sides had said days earlier the exchange could take place this weekend.

"The Russian side, as usual, is trying to play a dirty, political, information game," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his evening address.

If Russia fails to comply with the agreement, it "will cast great doubt" on diplomatic efforts to end the three-year war, he added.

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