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Saying 'All of Ukraine Is Ours,' Putin Does Not Rule Out Taking City of Sumy

By AFP

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Roscongress

President Vladimir Putin said Friday he did not "rule out" his forces taking control of Ukraine's northeastern city of Sumy as part of efforts to create a buffer zone along the border.

"We have no objective to take Sumy, but in principle I do not rule it out... They pose a constant threat to us, constantly shelling the border areas," Putin told Russia's flagship economic forum in St. Petersburg.

Sumy is around 30 kilometers (18 miles) from the Russian border and has been heavily targeted since Russia launched its invasion in February 2022.

In a string of hawkish remarks, Putin appeared to repeat his denial of Ukrainian statehood.

"I consider Russians and Ukrainians to be one people. In that sense, all of Ukraine is ours," he said.

"There is a saying: wherever a Russian soldier sets foot, that is ours."

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The comments raise fresh doubt over the prospect of peace talks between Moscow and Kyiv.

Russia has for months been rejecting calls for an unconditional ceasefire, and has demanded Ukraine give up even more territory as a precondition.

Ukraine launched a counter-attack into Russia's western Kursk region last August from its northeastern Sumy region.

Kyiv's troops captured dozens of border settlements, which they held for months, before being pushed out by Russia's forces — with the help of thousands of North Korean soldiers — earlier this year.

Putin has since ordered his troops to create what he called a "buffer zone" along the Russian border inside Ukrainian territory.

Russia's army has taken a number of border settlements in the Sumy region in recent weeks.

Putin said Friday his troops were up to 12 kilometers inside Ukrainian territory in the region, which is not one of the five Ukrainian regions that Moscow claims to have formally annexed.

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