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North Korea Sends 5K Construction Troops to Russia – Seoul

By AFP

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North Korean servicemen. **Uwe Brodrecht (CC BY-SA 2.0)**

North Korea has sent about 5,000 construction troops to Russia since September to help with "infrastructure reconstruction," a South Korean lawmaker said Tuesday after a briefing by Seoul's spy agency.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been emboldened by the war in Ukraine, securing critical support from Moscow after sending thousands of troops to fight alongside Russian forces.

South Korean lawmaker Lee Seong-kweun told reporters that "around 5,000 North Korean construction troops have been moving to Russia in phases since September and are expected to be mobilized for infrastructure reconstruction."

He added that "continued signs of training and personnel selection in preparation for

additional troop deployments have been detected."

The spy agency told lawmakers that about 10,000 North Korean troops were estimated to be currently deployed near the Russia-Ukraine border, according to Lee.

At least 600 North Korean soldiers have died in the Ukraine war and thousands more sustained injuries, according to South Korean estimates.

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Analysts say North Korea is receiving financial aid, military technology and food and energy supplies from Russia in return for sending troops.

That has allowed it to sidestep tough international sanctions imposed over its nuclear and missile programs that were once a crucial bargaining chip for the United States.

U.S. talks

Since Kim's 2019 summit with U.S. President Donald Trump collapsed over the scope of denuclearization and sanctions relief, Pyongyang has repeatedly declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear state.

Pyongyang did not respond to Trump's offer to meet with Kim last week, and instead its Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui headed to Moscow, where she and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to strengthen bilateral ties.

Lee said Seoul's spy agency believes Kim was open to talks with Washington "and will seek contact when the conditions are in place."

Although the proposed meeting with Trump did not materialize, "multiple signs suggest" that Pyongyang "had been preparing behind the scenes for possible talks with the U.S.," said the lawmaker.

In September, Kim appeared alongside Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin at an elaborate military parade in Beijing — a striking display of his new, elevated status in global politics.

An international sanctions monitoring group, the Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team, said in a report last month that North Korea was planning to send "40,000 laborers to Russia, including several delegations of IT workers."

Under UN sanctions, North Korean workers are prohibited from earning money abroad.

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