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Kremlin Says Ready for Civilian Evacuation From Ukraine's Kostiantynivka

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Nazar Vodzinsky (CC BY-SA 4.0)

The Kremlin said on Friday that it is ready to carry out a humanitarian operation to evacuate civilians fro the eastern Ukrainian city of Kostiantynivka, following a similar model that was used last month in the town of Oleshky, if it receives appropriate security guarantees.

President Vladimir Putin proposed the joint Russian-Ukrainian mission to U.S. envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner on Thursday, saying it would allow the world to understand who controlled Kostiantynivka. Putin's aide Yury Ushakov claimed the U.S. envoys "actively supported" his idea.

"We call on both the Americans and the Europeans — if claims that they are striving for peace are true — to use their influence specifically on the Ukrainians to push them toward implementing this humanitarian operation in Kostiantynivka," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters during a daily briefing.

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Kyiv has expressed concerns that Moscow might wish to use ceasefires for such missions to enable its military to regroup.

"Given that in Oleshky they brought in equipment and rotated troops under the cover of a humanitarian operation, it's clear they want to do the same in Kostiantynivka," Ukrainian presidential communications adviser Dmytro Lytvyn said Thursday.

Ukrainian human rights ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets, who oversaw the Oleshky mission with Russian counterpart Yana Lantratova, said Friday that Kostiantynivka "was not even mentioned" among the potential settlements where similar missions could be organized.

Kremlin spokesman Peskov said concerns of a possible military rotation into the city were "beyond any criticism" because any movements would be "clearly visible from satellites and drones."

"If they believe we'll it for troop rotation, then they're agreeing that it is we who control Kostiantynivka," he said.

Putin told Kushner and Witkoff the mission could settle disputes over contested "gray zones" along the frontline.

"If, as the Ukrainian authorities claim, they control this town, let them ensure security there. I believe this town is controlled by Russian troops," Putin said.

"We will ensure security on our side. We need five days to de-mine the access roads to the town. If Ukraine controls it, let them do the same," he said.

Reuters contributed reporting.

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