

Russian forces make major advances in Kursk amid ceasefire talks

Andre Damon
13 March 2025

Russian troops are on the verge of recapturing all the territory seized by Ukraine in an offensive in Kursk last summer, imparting an air of crisis to calls by US President Donald Trump for a 30-day ceasefire in the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced Thursday that Russian forces have seized the town of Sudzha, the largest Ukrainian-occupied settlement in the Kursk region, alongside the settlements of Melovoy and Podol.

Russian forces have recaptured 86 percent of the territory in Kursk occupied in last year's offensive, Valery Gerasimov, the head of the Russian General Staff General, said. He claimed that Ukraine's remaining forces were largely "encircled" and "isolated."

"Russian troops appear close to driving Ukraine from all the territory it seized in the Kursk region of Russia last year," the *New York Times* commented, "a battlefield success that would deny President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine a significant bargaining chip in any negotiations."

Ukrainian forces are now pinned down and encircled on three sides and are being forced to retreat across the border on foot or in single vehicles, as Russian forces appear to have gained local air superiority.

On August 6, Ukraine launched its offensive into Kursk in the largest attack on Russian territory since the Second World War. The offensive involved 35,000 troops and included the capture of 1,300 square kilometers of Russian territory.

On Wednesday, Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of Ukraine's military, said that in order to protect the lives of Ukrainian troops, some further withdrawals would be required. "To do this, the units of the Defense Forces, if necessary, will maneuver to more favorable

positions," he said in a social media post.

An article in the *Financial Times*, titled, "From daring invasion to rapid retreat: the end of Ukraine's Kursk gambit," paints a devastating picture of the state of the Ukrainian military in Kursk.

The FT interviews Artem Kariakin, a Ukrainian soldier working to evacuate Ukrainian troops from the region. "The main thing was just to get out of there," he said.

Initially intended as a short-term raid, the Ukrainian military decided to attempt to hold the pocket. "But then the plan shifted to holding land—exposing Kyiv's troops to bigger risks," the FT reported. "The operation's goals changed on the go."

Military analyst Rob Lee told the FT, "The pocket was always relatively small. ... Russia then repeatedly just chipped away at it at the flanks."

Another military analyst, Michael Kofman, told the FT, "Russian forces were steadily compressing the pocket and interdicting the main resupply routes. ... At a certain point, it was simply no longer tenable to sustain these forces."

The article continued, "From that point on, swarms of drones would target anything that moved on the road ... making it extremely difficult to resupply troops. Medical evacuations soon became almost impossible, [Kofman] said, and ground forces got stuck in trenches for weeks on end, unable to rotate."

The looming Russian reconquest of the Kursk region forms the backdrop of ongoing negotiations over a possible ceasefire.

On Tuesday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that the US and Ukraine had agreed to propose to Russia a 30-day ceasefire, accompanied by an announcement that the US had resumed the provision of military assistance and intelligence sharing

with Ukraine after abruptly cutting it off days earlier.

The NATO alliance was thrown into crisis late last month when a White House meeting between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky turned into a shouting match, after which Trump cancelled a joint press conference and effectively ejected Zelensky from the White House.

In response to the meeting, European leaders escalated their calls for the deployment of European troops to Ukraine to serve as “peacekeepers,” while French President Emmanuel Macron raised the prospect of deploying French nuclear weapons to Germany amid a looming conflict between the EU powers and the US.

“This is the moment when Europe must pull its full weight for Ukraine, and for itself,” Macron said in a meeting of European military leaders on Tuesday.

Trump met with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte on Thursday, reiterating his intention to annex Greenland, a territory of the NATO member Denmark. “We have to do it,” Trump said, adding, “We really need it for national security. I think that’s why NATO might have to get involved in a way, because we really need Greenland for national security.”

“I think it will happen,” Trump declared. In first announcing his intention to annex Greenland in January, Trump refused to rule out military force in seeking to acquire the territory.

Against this backdrop of escalating crisis and conflict within NATO, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a tentative response to Trump’s proposal for a 30-day ceasefire.

“The idea itself is the right one, and we definitely support it,” Putin said. “But there are questions that we need to discuss, and I think that we need to talk them through with our American colleagues and partners.”

Putin said that among the issues of contention is what will happen to Ukrainian forces occupying Russia, with Putin saying that the forces currently occupying Russian land should be made to surrender.

Putin said that given the Russian advances, any suspension of fighting would be to the advantage of Ukraine. Instead, he called for “the elimination of the root causes.” Putin has said the February 2022 “special military operation” was carried out to prevent Ukraine from joining the NATO alliance and serving as a frontline garrison state for NATO.

“These 30 days—how will they be used? To continue

forced mobilization in Ukraine? To receive more arms supplies? To train newly mobilized units? Or will none of this happen?” Putin asked.

He added, “Who will give orders to stop fighting? What is the price of those orders? Who will determine where and by whom they were violated?”

Putin’s remarks followed the statements of his aide Yuri Ushakov, who declared, “The proposed temporary ceasefire in Ukraine is nothing more than a reprieve for the Ukrainian military,” adding that “Russia seeks a long-term peace settlement on Ukraine that addresses Moscow’s interests and concerns. Steps that mimic peaceful actions are of no use to anyone.”

In his meeting with NATO Secretary-General Rutte, Trump said, “We’ve been discussing with Ukraine land and pieces of land that would be kept and lost, and all of the other elements of a final agreement.”

Putin is set to meet Trump’s special envoy, Steve Witkoff, on Thursday.

Whatever the outcome of the negotiations over the war in Ukraine, the Trump administration is pursuing a global military escalation, in which his calls for the annexation of Greenland, Canada and Panama would be stepping stones for a major intensification of conflict with China.



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