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# Russia appears to have diverted several thousand troops from occupied Ukraine to counter Kursk offensive, US officials say

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Russia appears to have diverted several thousand troops from occupied territory inside Ukraine to counter a surprisingly successful [Ukrainian offensive inside Russian borders](#) in a move that potentially weakens Moscow's war effort, two senior US officials told CNN.

The development has drawn American attention and US officials are now working to determine precisely how many troops Russia is moving, but sources said multiple brigade-sized elements made up of at least 1,000 troops each appeared to have shifted to the Kursk region, where Ukraine launched an operation last week.

"It is apparent to us that Mr. Putin and the Russian military are diverting some resources, some units, towards the Kursk Oblast to ostensibly counter what the Ukrainians are doing," National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told CNN on Thursday.

The Russian troop movements away from Ukraine "doesn't mean that Mr. Putin has given up military operations in the northeast part of Ukraine or even down towards the south, towards places like Zaporizhzhya," Kirby said. "There's still active fighting along that front."

But the movements have raised the tantalizing possibility that what originally appeared to be a quixotic bid by Ukraine to humiliate Russian President Vladimir Putin could have a more significant strategic impact on the battlefield, depending on how long Ukraine is able to hold the Russian territory.

The Ukrainian operation has impressed American officials, particularly the way the Ukrainian military was able to keep its details so secret—the incursion even caught US officials by surprise, officials said.

While the operation has risked softening some of Ukraine's own defenses along the 600-mile frontline, it may also divert Russian troops who have been making some incremental gains inside Ukraine through the summer, sources added. Ukraine says it has captured over 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of Russian territory since the start of its surprise assault, forcing tens of thousands of Russians from their homes.

A senior US official and a senior European intelligence official both said a major goal of the operation appears to be to create "strategic dilemmas" for Putin, particularly when it comes to where Russia should allocate manpower.

Still, Russia is believed to have hundreds of thousands of troops on the frontline in Ukraine, so diverting a few thousand may not have a large impact in the short term, officials said.

Russia also does not appear to be moving its larger and better-trained units away from Ukraine and into Kursk just yet, said two other sources familiar with western intelligence. One of those sources said Russia appears to instead be bolstering Kursk's defenses primarily with untrained conscripts taken from elsewhere in Russia.

“We haven’t seen a substantial move [of Russian troops] just yet, and we can’t tell whether that’s just because they’re only just getting started moving forces, or whether they just don’t have the forces to move,” said one of the sources familiar with US intelligence.

In addition to the troops moved from inside Ukraine, Russia has also sent personnel from the Leningrad military district and Kaliningrad, in Russia, to help defend Kursk, one of the senior US officials said.

Even as they acknowledged the limited success of the Kursk operation thus far, multiple US and western officials familiar with the latest intelligence cautioned that Ukraine is extremely unlikely to be able to hold the territory for long and emphasized that it’s too soon to judge how the operation will affect the broader outcome of the war.

The US also remains reluctant to allow Ukraine to use long-range, US-provided weapons inside Kursk, multiple officials said—not because of the risk of escalation, but because the US only has a limited supply of the long-range missiles, known as ATACMS, to provide to Ukraine and thinks they would be better used to continue targeting Russian-occupied Crimea, officials said.

Some officials also raised concerns that Ukraine, which one western official said has sent some of its more experienced forces into Kursk, may have created weaknesses along its own frontlines that Russia may be able to exploit to gain more ground inside Ukraine.

“It’s impressive from a military point of view,” the official said of the Kursk operation. But Ukraine is “committing pretty experienced troops to this and they can’t afford to lose those troops.”

“And having diverted them from the front line creates opportunities for Russia to seize advantage and break through,” this person added.

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