

Pentagon Says 10K North Korean Troops in Kursk Oblast

November 4, 2024

There are 10,000 North Korean troops in Russia's Kursk Oblast, and the Pentagon press secretary said if they enter combat, they are legitimate targets for Ukrainian soldiers.



Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder conducts a press briefing at the Pentagon, Nov. 4, 2024.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder also said officials estimate there are now 11,000 to 12,000 North Korean troops in Russia. "We've seen the press reports about alleged [North Korean] combat ops, and we're looking into those," Ryder told reporters during a news conference. "At this point, we cannot corroborate those reports. But as you heard [Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III] say last week, should these troops engage in combat support operations against Ukraine, they would become legitimate military targets."

The North Korean troops entered Russia last month, and Russian troops are training those forces in infantry tactics, operating with unmanned aerial vehicles, artillery tactics, trench-clearing and the like, officials said. "All indications are that they will provide some type of combat or combat support capability," the general said. "We would fully expect that the Ukrainians would do what they need to do to defend themselves and their personnel."

The Russians have provided the North Korean troops with Russian uniforms and equipment.

"We'll see exactly how these forces are integrated into Russian operations, and how they're committed to the battlefield, assuming that they are replacements for Russian forces," he said.

Ryder pointed to Austin's remarks last week discussing the large number of casualties Russian forces are suffering. The North Korean forces could be coming in "to replace the massive losses that Russia is experiencing. I think that is probably a fair assessment, and I certainly would not want to be a North Korean soldier there."

Ryder also discussed the deployment of additional U.S. forces to the Central Command region. Austin ordered additional ballistic missile defense destroyers, fighter squadrons, tanker aircraft and several B-52 long-range strike bombers to the area.

The B-52 bombers have already arrived in the region with the other forces expected in the days and weeks to come. "These forces will begin to arrive as the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group prepares to depart," Ryder said. "These deployments are in keeping with our commitments to the protection of U.S. citizens and forces in the Middle East, the defense of Israel and de-escalation through deterrence and diplomacy."

These forces join other U.S. assets such as the terminal high-altitude area missile defense system, which has deployed to Israel, as well as an amphibious ready group, and a Marine Expeditionary Unit. These forces "demonstrate the flexible nature of U.S. global defense posture and U.S. capability to deploy worldwide on short notice to meet evolving national security threats," Ryder said. "Secretary Austin continues to make clear that should Iran, its partners or its proxies use this moment to target American personnel or interests in the region, the United States will take every measure necessary to defend our people."

