Ukraine has retaken 50% of seized territory, says Blinken

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that while Ukraine has reconquered half the territory that Russia initially seized in its invasion, Kyiv faced a "a very hard fight" to win back more.

"It's already taken back about 50% of what was initially seized," he said in an interview to CNN on Sunday.

"These are still relatively early days of the counteroffensive. It is tough," he said, adding: "It will not play out over the next week or two. We're still looking I think at several months."

Hopes that Ukraine could quickly clear Moscow's forces from its territory following the launch of a summer counteroffensive are fading as Kyiv's troops struggle to breach heavily entrenched Russian positions in the country's south and east.

Late last month President Volodymyr Zelenskiy was quoted as saying that progress against Russian forces was "slower than desired" but that Kyiv would not be pressured into speeding it up.

Following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea grain deal that guaranteed the secure sale of Ukrainian grains, President Vladimir Putin has said that the decision was taken as the pact eventually lost its meaning and was no more of any significance, according to Al Jazeera.

“The continuation of the ‘grain deal’ – which did not justify its humanitarian purpose – has lost its meaning,” Putin said, according to the article on the Kremlin’s website. The agreement that had permitted Ukraine to export grain from its Black Sea ports a year ago, despite the war, to help alleviate a global food crisis, was terminated last week by Moscow, which claimed that the requirements for the extension had been disregarded.

In July 2022, Turkey and the UN began talks on the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Russia announced last week on Monday (July 17) that it was suspending its participation in a UN-brokered deal that allowed the export of Ukrainian grain. The agreement, brokered by Turkey and the United Nations in July 2022, was scheduled to expire at 5 pm ET on Monday.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announced Moscow will not renew the agreement, saying it "has been terminated." The deal had allowed Ukraine to export grain by sea, as per the CNN report.

Russia and Ukraine, both have warned each other against the travelling of ships in the Black Sea, saying that it will be considered as "potential military cargo".

Moscow had also accused Ukraine of using the Black Sea grain corridor for “combat purposes”.

While, Kyiv hit back at Moscow, stating that Russia must stop playing hunger games with people around the world.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative was hailed as a "beacon of hope" by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at a signing ceremony in Istanbul last year. Humanitarian organisations are now warning of potential food shortages.