

Ukraine and Russia Trade Barbs Online

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Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko (front) and Defence Minister Colonel General Valery Heletey observe the Independence Day military parade, in the center of Kiev.

Soon after Ukraine's defense minister said online that Russia has started a "great war" entailing numerous casualties, Moscow replied that it is actually that minister who is "dragging the Ukrainian people into a bloody conflict."

Ukrainian Defense Minister Valeriy Heletey posted a statement on his Facebook page Monday claiming that Russia lost its "hybrid war" through separatist proxies in eastern Ukraine and has moved to a "full-scale invasion by regular troops."

"We must urgently build up defenses against Russia, which intends to not only strengthen its hold on territories previously occupied by terrorists, but to advance other territories of Ukraine," Heletey wrote.

"A great war has come to our home, the likes of which Europe had not seen since World War II," Heletey warned. "Unfortunately, casualties in this war will no longer be counted in the

hundreds, but thousands, maybe tens of thousands."

Russia's Foreign Ministry replied in a statement on its website that it was "shocked" by Heletey's remarks.

But instead of denying any involvement in eastern Ukraine, as Moscow has done in the past, or blaming the violence on the Ukrainian government, the ministry said Heletey's statement itself amounted to plotting a "fratricidal war."

"Heletey's appeal to prepare for yet another 'tens of thousands' of casualties in what he calls a 'Great Patriotic War' — and which in effect is a new executioner operation in his country — is completely shocking," the ministry said.

"By this, he is dragging the Ukrainian people into continuing a bloody civil conflict," the statement said. "Such a blasphemous cover-up for one's wish to keep one's official seat at any price has apparently not been seen in Europe ever before."

Also in his statement, Heletey claimed that Russia has privately threatened to use tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine if its government forces do not retreat. The accusation came in the wake of Russian President Vladimir Putin's remarks at a pro-Kremlin youth camp last week, where he said that foreign states should not "mess" with Russia's nuclear weapons-backed army.

Heletey said that "through informal channels, the Russian side has repeatedly threatened that, in case of continued resistance, they are ready to use tactical nuclear weapons against us."

The Russian Foreign Ministry's response made no mention of that accusation.

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