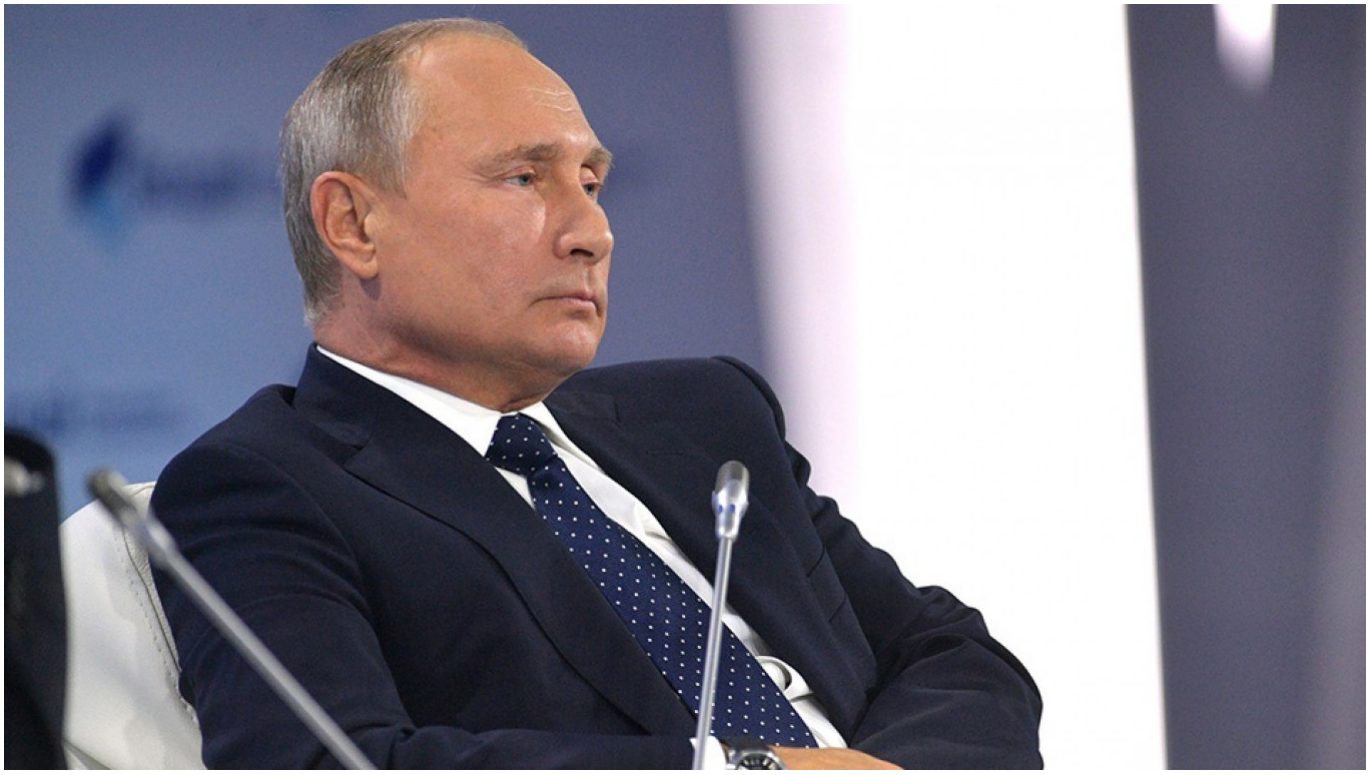
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'Aggressors Will Be Annihilated, We Will Go to Heaven as Martyrs,' Putin Says

By Reuters

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Kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that Russia was ready to "annihilate" any attacker who would use nuclear weapons against it, but would never strike first.

"An aggressor should know that vengeance is inevitable, that he will be annihilated, and we would be the victims of the aggression. We will go to heaven as martyrs, and they will just drop dead. They will not even have time to repent for this," he said.

In March this year Putin unveiled an array of new nuclear weapons in one of his most bellicose speeches in years, saying they could hit almost any point in the world and not be intercepted.

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Among the new weapons that Putin said were either in development or ready: a new

intercontinental ballistic missile, a small nuclear warhead that could be attached to cruise missiles, underwater nuclear drones, a supersonic weapon and a laser weapon.

Putin, who has dominated his country's political landscape for the last 18 years and often used anti-Western rhetoric to mobilize support, said the technological advances meant that NATO's build-up on Russia's borders and the roll-out of a U.S. anti-missile system would be rendered useless.

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