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# Russian Veterans Urge Putin to Postpone WWII Parade Over Virus

By AFP

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The letter from veterans calls for Putin to "take a difficult but, as we see it, fair decision to hold the military parade on another date." **Sergei Kiselyov/Moskva News Agency**

Russian veterans on Wednesday urged President Vladimir Putin to postpone a military parade to mark the 75th anniversary of Soviet victory in World War II, due to the coronavirus risk to participants.

Russia has so far not dropped plans to hold a massive parade with thousands of troops marching through Red Square on May 9, despite a national lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic and a ban on large public events.

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Before the pandemic, world leaders including France's Emmanuel Macron were expected to attend the parade that was set to last an hour and a half and include 15,000 troops and the latest missile systems.

World War II veterans from all over Russia have been invited to watch and take part in events over four days, defense minister Sergei Shoigu said in February, but the plans have seemed increasingly unrealistic given the current virus situation.

Russia has seen cases of the coronavirus grow swiftly in recent days. On Wednesday the number of confirmed cases rose to 24,490 while 198 people have died.

An appeal signed by the heads of three veterans' organizations was sent to Putin, Interfax reported, citing the head of the defense committee of the lower house of parliament, Vladimir Shamanov.

"Unfortunately based on the current situation in the world, it's impossible to guarantee health and safety while holding the parade," said Shamanov, who signed the letter as head of the Russian Association of Heroes, a group of highly decorated military veterans.

The call by veterans appeared to be a formality that would allow the Kremlin to cancel the event without losing face.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov at the weekend raised the possibility the parade could be held "later," in a televised comment.

The letter from veterans calls for Putin to "take a difficult but, as we see it, fair decision to hold the military parade on another date."

It said the event should be held "when the epidemiological situation will allow the parade not to be a threat but a real celebration of peace and security for all its participants."

The military parade is overseen by Putin, who gives a speech to troops. It usually involves thousands of soldiers and the audience on Red Square includes World War II veterans.

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