

Putin Says Conflict in Eastern Ukraine 'Looks Like Genocide'

By [AFP](#)

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Russian President Vladimir Putin. kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday said that the conflict in eastern Ukraine between Kiev's army and pro-Russian separatists "looks like genocide," at a time of heightened tensions with the West.

Putin's comments came as U.S. President Joe Biden was scheduled to speak with Ukraine leader Volodymyr Zelenskiy and the heads of other countries on Russia's borders concerned over Kremlin military aggression.

They came in response to a question during a meeting of the presidential rights council, during which Putin fielded a query on discrimination against Russian speakers beyond Russia's borders.

"I have to say that Russophobia is a first step towards genocide," the Russian leader said.

"You and I know what is happening in Donbass," referring to the conflict zone in the east of the country, adding that: "It certainly looks like genocide."

Putin has previously made similar comparisons about the war in eastern Ukraine including in 2015 and 2019.

Most people in Ukraine speak both Ukrainian and Russian, though regions in the south and east — and some in the center — are predominantly Russian-speaking and have traditionally been more Russia friendly.

A popular uprising in Ukraine forced a Moscow-backed regime out of office in 2014.

Since then Moscow has annexed Crimea and Kiev's forces are locked in conflict with separatists supported by Russia in the east of Ukraine. The fighting there has cost some 13,000 lives so far.

The United States and its allies have for weeks accused Russia of planning an invasion of Ukraine and massing troops along Kiev's borders.

Biden earlier this week spoke with Putin via video link and warned Russia of crippling sanctions if it took military action against Ukraine.

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