

Putin Says Mariupol 'Liberated,' Calls Off Azovstal Plant Assault

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Residential buildings damaged during the fighting in the city of Mariupol. "Azovstal" plant can be seen in the background. **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday hailed the "liberation" of the besieged Ukrainian port city of Mariupol and called off a planned assault on Ukrainian forces' last holdout.

Mariupol, a highly strategic port on the Sea of Azov, has been under siege by Russian forces for nearly two months. Fighting has intensified in recent weeks as Russia refocused its invasion toward Ukraine's east, and the last Ukrainian defenders have now taken refuge in the Azovstal steel plant.

"Mariupol has been liberated," Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told Putin in a televised meeting. "The remaining nationalist formations took refuge in the industrial zone of the Azovstal plant."

Putin said the "liberation" of Mariupol was a "success" for Russian forces, but ordered Shoigu

to call off the planned storming of the Azovstal plant, calling it “impractical.”

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“We should always think, in this case especially, about saving the lives and health of our soldiers and officers. There is no need to climb into these catacombs,” Putin said.

“Block off this industrial area so that not even a fly can escape,” he continued.

The Azovstal plant has been subject to heavy Russian bombing in the last two weeks as Russian forces move to capture the last Ukrainian-held part of the besieged city.

Russian forces have issued several calls to surrender, all of which have gone ignored by the Ukrainian forces.

On Wednesday, a Ukrainian commander [issued](#) a desperate plea for international aid for the estimated 2,000 civilians sheltering at the plant, saying: “This is our last address to the world. It may be our last one ever. It is possible that we have just days or hours left.”

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