

Putin Hails Soldiers Fighting in Ukraine at Russia's Victory Day Parade

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Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses the military parade on Red Square in Moscow. **Mikhail Mettsel / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin lashed out at Western countries and hailed Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine on Monday as he addressed an annual military parade in Moscow that marks the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany.

"You are fighting for the motherland, for her future, and so that nobody forgets the lessons of World War II. So that there is no place in the world for executioners, killing squads and Nazis," Putin [told](#) thousands of soldiers on Red Square.

Despite speculation that Putin could use the occasion to announce a mobilization of reservists for the war in Ukraine or proclaim a limited victory, there were no major political announcements.

Nor did Putin's speech contain any threats to use nuclear weapons.

May 9 is one of Russia's most significant holidays, and in recent years it has been increasingly used a way for the Kremlin to boost pride in the Russian Armed Forces and encourage patriotism.

A total of about 11,000 personnel and 131 pieces of military equipment took part in the parade on Red Square, according to the Kremlin, slightly lower numbers than last year.

A much-anticipated flypast was [canceled](#), with officials saying the reason was bad weather.

Jets were expected to fly over Moscow – and other Russian cities – in the shape of a “Z,” a symbol that has become a symbol of support for Russian troops fighting in Ukraine. In the end, there was a notable absence of Z-symbols on Red Square for the parade.

In his televised speech, Putin repeated allegations that NATO and Western countries were planning to use Ukraine to attack Russia, claiming Russia had no choice but to invade Ukraine.

“Russia carried out a pre-emptive rebuff to aggression. It was a necessary, timely, and the only correct decision. It was the decision of a sovereign, strong and independent country,” Putin said of the attack on Ukraine.

Some of the soldiers taking part in the parade were recently returned from the frontlines, according to Putin.

Russian troops have made heavy use of World War II imagery in Ukraine, with troops seen [raising](#) World War II-era military banners over buildings and towns captured from Ukrainian forces.

Heavy fighting continued in Ukraine on Monday, with Russian forces attempting to push forward in an offensive in the east of the country that does not appear to be yielding significant military gains.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Monday that Ukraine would not allow Russia to appropriate victory in World War II.

"We are proud of our ancestors who together with other nations in the anti-Hitler coalition defeated Nazism. And we will not allow anyone to annex this victory. We will not allow it to be appropriated," the Ukrainian leader said.

AFP contributed reporting.

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