

Ukraine War Must End To Prevent Nuclear 'Abyss,' Lukashenko Tells AFP

By [Antoine Lambroschini for AFP](#)

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Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko. president.gov.by

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko Thursday said Russia, Ukraine and the West must agree to halt the Ukraine conflict to avoid the "abyss of nuclear war" and insisted Kyiv should accept Moscow's demands.

"We must stop, reach an agreement, end this mess, operation and war in Ukraine," Lukashenko, Russian President Vladimir Putin's top ally, told AFP in an exclusive interview in Minsk.

"Let's stop and then we will figure out how to go on living," he said during the one-hour interview at the Palace of Independence.

"There's no need to go further. Further lies the abyss of nuclear war. There's no need to go there," he said, speaking on the 148th day of Moscow's offensive in Ukraine.

Lukashenko accused the West of seeking a conflict with Russia and of provoking the Ukraine war.

"You have fomented the war and are continuing it," he said.

"We have seen the reasons for this war," he added.

"If Russia had not got ahead of you, members of NATO, you would have organized and struck a blow against it," he said, echoing Putin.

Belarus has served as a staging ground for Russia's intervention in Ukraine, but Lukashenko has so far avoided becoming a party to the conflict.

'Everything depends on Ukraine'

Analysts say that he is keenly aware of the fact that most Belarusians do not support sending troops into Ukraine.

The 67-year-old leader, who has ruled Belarus for nearly three decades, insisted that Kyiv authorities can end the war if they re-start talks with Moscow and accept its demands.

"Everything depends on Ukraine," he said.

"Right now, the peculiarity of the moment is that this war can be ended on more acceptable terms for Ukraine."

He urged Kyiv authorities to "sit down at the negotiating table and agree that they will never threaten Russia."

Talks between Russia and Ukraine largely ground to a halt in mid-April.

Lukashenko said that Ukraine must accept the loss of territory occupied by Russia in eastern and southern Ukraine.

"This is no longer being discussed," he said. "One could have discussed this in February or March."

On Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that peace talks with Ukraine "make no sense", and announced that Moscow's military aims in the pro-Western country were no longer focused "only" on the east.

Lukashenko has sought to promote himself as Putin's most faithful ally, welcoming Russian troops under the pretext of military exercises before Moscow launched its Ukraine offensive.

Despite officially being a non-belligerent, the Belarus strongman has demanded that his country be included in any talks and a deal to end the conflict.

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Lukashenko insisted that the war could have been avoided if Western countries had given

Putin "the security guarantees" he wanted.

"You, members of NATO and Americans, needed war."

Belarus is 'authoritarian'

Speaking of his opponents at home, Lukashenko admitted that he ran an authoritarian state but claimed there were no political prisoners in his isolated country.

"Yes, our system of power is tougher. I even do not rule out the word 'authoritarian'," Lukashenko said.

Belarus rights group Viasna says the country currently has 1,259 political prisoners.

But Lukashenko dismissed "talk of hundreds" of imprisoned people and claimed that "no one from the opposition" was currently being held in prison.

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Referring to people who took part in historic protests against Lukashenko's controversial re-election in 2020, he said: "These people spoke out against the state. Not against the authorities — against the state and their own nation."

Lukashenko crushed the demonstrations with Moscow's help.

Key protest leaders are now either imprisoned or in exile.

'No dictator'

"I am no dictator," Lukashenko insisted, while admitting that Belarus had "elements of authoritarianism."

"I do not even remember if those prominent bandits, who fomented this mutiny, if they are in prison," he said.

"Perhaps one or two have been convicted."

Among those who fled Belarus in 2020 is Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, a political novice who ran against Lukashenko in the August 2020 polls in place of her jailed husband.

She now leads the Belarusian opposition from exile in Lithuania, while her husband Sergei Tikhanovsky is serving 18 years in prison on what supporters say are politically motivated charges.

In power since 1994, Lukashenko has kept his landlocked homeland, wedged between Russia and EU member Poland, largely stuck in a Soviet time warp.

A quarter of a century after the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the tightly controlled eastern European nation still has a security service called the KGB, adheres to a command economy and looks to

former master Moscow as its main ally, creditor and energy provider.

Lukashenko reiterated that his political opponents were financed from abroad, mainly from Poland.

"What, did you want me to sit quietly?" he said, claiming that the protests were a Warsaw-sponsored plot to "break Belarus."

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