

Putin Blasts 'Neo-Nazis' in Ukraine on Holocaust Remembrance Day

By [AFP](#)

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Russian President Putin, Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar, and President of the Federation of Jewish Communities Alexander Boroda (L-R) meet on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday repeated a claim that neo-Nazis were committing crimes in Ukraine — an allegation Moscow has used to justify its military intervention — as the world marked Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"Forgetting the lessons of history leads to the repetition of terrible tragedies," Putin said.

"This is evidenced by the crimes against civilians, ethnic cleansing and punitive actions organized by neo-Nazis in Ukraine. It is against that evil that our soldiers are bravely fighting," he said in a statement.

Supporters of Putin's military operation allege Ukraine's treatment of Russian speakers in the

country is comparable with the actions of Nazi Germany.

One of the goals of the operation was the "de-Nazification" of Ukraine, Putin said when he announced nearly one year ago he had ordered Russian troops toward Kyiv.

The claims have been contested by the Ukrainian government and the country's Jewish community.

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The Soviet Union's victory over Hitler's army — long a symbol of patriotic pride for Russians -- has taken center stage since the beginning of the military intervention.

'Political games'

Putin said that "attempts to revise the contributions of our country to the Great Victory (against Hitler) actually equate to justifying the crimes of Nazism and open the way for the revival of its deadly ideology."

Friday is the 78th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp built by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland — a date that has become Holocaust Remembrance Day.

The Auschwitz museum did not invite Russian representatives to the ceremony marking the day the Soviet Red Army liberated the Nazi camp because of the offensive in Ukraine.

"Russia will need an extremely long time and very deep self-examination after this conflict in order to return to gatherings of the civilized world," Piotr Sawicki, a spokesman for the museum at the site of the former camp, told AFP.

Russia's Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar told AFP that "for us, this is clearly a humiliation because we perfectly know and remember the role of the Red Army in the liberation of Auschwitz and in the victory over Nazism."

"These political games have no place on Holocaust day," Lazar added.

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