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In Victory Day Speech, Putin Says Russia's 'Future' Depends on Troops in Ukraine

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Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Victory Day parade in Moscow. **Gavriil Grigorov / TASS**

Updated with details of military parade in Moscow and recast throughout.

Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a combative speech Tuesday attacking the West and claiming that Russia's future depended on the outcome of the war in Ukraine as he attended a slimmed-down military parade on Red Square to mark Victory Day.

"Civilization again finds itself at a decisive, critical moment. A real war has again been launched against our motherland," Putin told the assembled soldiers and guests.

"We are proud of the participants of the Special Military Operation and everyone fighting on the frontline," he said, using the Kremlin's preferred term for Russia's war in Ukraine.

"There is nothing more important now than your military work. Today, the security of our country depends on you. The future of our statehood and our people depends on you."

While the military parade passed off without incident, Russia's celebrations to mark the 78th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazism have been muted because of heightened security concerns following a drone attack on the Kremlin last week and intense fighting in Ukraine ahead of an imminent counter-offensive by Kyiv's forces.

The Kremlin has traditionally used Victory Day — a national holiday — for bombastic events that promote patriotic unity and showcase the country's military might.

But military parades have been canceled in over 20 Russian cities this year and not a single Immortal Regiment march — held in memory of those killed in World War II and usually attended by millions — will take place.

Embed:

Even the military parade on Red Square featured less equipment and fewer soldiers than in previous years, with no flypast and just one tank.

Despite the security issues, the Russian president was joined on Red Square by seven leaders of former Soviet republics: Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kyrgyzstan's President Sadyr Japarov, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, Uzbek leader Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedow.

The attendance of six of these leaders was announced Monday after what appeared to be a last minute effort by the Kremlin to rally international support.

Only Kyrgyzstan's Japarov had confirmed his attendance in advance.

Standing in front of military veterans, Putin delivered a speech that conflated the current war in Ukraine with the Soviet Union's victory over Nazism in 1945.

"It looks they [the West] have forgotten the consequences of the Nazi striving for world domination. They have forgotten who destroyed that monster, that absolute evil, who it was who stood up to protect their native land and did not begrudge their lives to liberate the peoples of Europe," Putin said.

And he was bitterly critical of Western countries, which have sent billions of dollars of military support to Kyiv as it resists the Russian invasion.

"The Western globalist elite are still asserting their exceptionalism, playing off people against each other and dividing societies," Putin said.

"They are provoking bloody conflicts and coups, they are sowing hatred, Russophobia and aggressive nationalism, they are destroying traditional family values that make a human a human."

The military parade across Red Square featured thousands of Russian troops and equipment, including Yars intercontinental ballistic missile system and the S-400 surface-to-air missile

system, but it was noticeably smaller than in previous years.

The only tank to appear was a World War II-era T-34 and the part of the parade involving military vehicles lasted less than five minutes.

About 8,000 military personnel marched across Red Square, the fewest since 2008, according to calculations by independent media outlet Agentstvo.

After 14 months of fighting in Ukraine, Russia has suffered heavy losses of men and equipment and is currently bracing for a Ukrainian attack. While the Defense Ministry has confirmed the deaths of less than 6,000 soldiers, Western officials reportedly believe the real figure is over 40,000.

In a video released Tuesday, the leader of the Wagner mercenary group Yevgeny Prigozhin was critical of the pomp and ceremony of the day's events.

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"Congratulations on the Victory Day achieved by our grandfathers. But it's a big question what we're celebrating. We just need to remember them [our grandfathers] and that's it. And not f*** around on Red Square," said Prigozhin.

Other commentators suggested that the lack of any concrete commitments from Putin would frustrate pro-war Russians.

"Now is the time for actions, not words. As no actions were announced, then disappointment is inevitable," political analyst and ex-Kremlin speechwriter Abbas Gallyamov wrote on messaging app Telegram.

"A silent question is hanging in the air among Russia's 'patriotic' community: 'Can you do anything apart from words, Vladimir Vladimirovich?'"

Russia has little to show for its military campaign in Ukraine and an offensive in recent months has failed to deliver any significant territorial gains.

And fighting appears to be intensifying in recent days ahead, with drone attacks last week on Russian railroads, oil storage facilities and the Kremlin itself.

Russia fired 25 missiles at targets in Ukraine overnight, according to the Ukrainian Air Force. The previous day, Russia reportedly launched 35 drones at Kyiv and fired cruise missiles that destroyed a Red Cross warehouse in the port city of Odesa.

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