

Putin Says Zelensky a 'Disgrace to Jewish People'

By [AFP](#)

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Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks at the plenary session of SPIEF. **Alexei Danichev / RIA Novosti Photohost agency**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday said Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky, who is Jewish, was a "disgrace" to people of his faith.

"I have a lot of Jewish friends," Putin told an annual economic forum in St. Petersburg. "They say that Zelensky is not Jewish, that he is a disgrace to the Jewish people.

"I'm not joking," he added.

AFP and representatives of other countries the Kremlin deems "unfriendly" were not accredited to cover the forum.

Moscow claims Ukraine's treatment of Russian speakers in the Western-backed country is comparable to the actions of Nazi Germany.

These allegations have been contested by the Ukrainian government and the country's Jewish community.

Putin said Moscow "must fight" neo-Nazism, adding that Russia had suffered enormous losses during the country's fight against Nazi Germany in World War II.

"We will never forget it," Putin said. "Why is no one listening to us?"

He also said Ukraine's counteroffensive would fail as Kyiv's troops sought to advance in several directions, including the southeastern region of Zaporizhzhia.

"I think that Ukraine's armed forces stand no chance here, as well as in other directions — I have no doubt about that," Putin said.

Putin claimed Ukraine's armed forces were suffering "heavy losses."

"In some places Ukrainian units are managing to reach the first line (of defense), in other places they are failing," he said.

"They are using the so-called strategic reserves," he added.

Putin said Ukrainian forces did not achieve their objectives in any section of the front, adding: "That's the important thing."

He then confirmed Russia had sent nuclear arms to its ally Belarus, which borders Ukraine.

"The first nuclear warheads were delivered to the territory of Belarus... This is the first part."

The Russian leader had announced the plans to send tactical nuclear weapons — less powerful than strategic ones — in March.

"By the end of summer, the end of the year, we will complete the process," of transferring tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, Putin said.

Tactical nuclear arms are battlefield weapons that, while devastating, have a smaller yield compared to long-range strategic weapons.

Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko has allowed his territory — which borders Ukraine as well as EU and NATO members Poland and Lithuania — to serve as a launch pad for Russia's Ukraine offensive.

Putin's announcement had spurred fears of nuclear conflict, but experts and governments said it was unlikely it would change the course of the conflict.

Putin said the weapons were meant as deterrence to "those who are thinking of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia."

Belarusian troops began training on nuclear-capable Russian missile systems in April.

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