

Putin Claims Ukrainian Counteroffensive 'Failed' – Russian Agencies

By [AFP](#)

July 23, 2023



Alexander Demyanchuk / TASS

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Sunday that Kyiv's counteroffensive had "failed", as he began two-day talks with his Belarus counterpart and closest ally Alexander Lukashenko.

The longtime leaders met for the first time since Lukashenko helped end a mutiny by Russian Wagner mercenaries in Russia last month, in the biggest threat to Putin's more than two-decade rule.

"There is no counteroffensive," Lukashenko said, before being interrupted by Putin:

"There is one, but it has failed."

The pair met in Putin's native Saint Petersburg, hours after the Russian army had struck Ukraine's Black Sea port of Odesa.

In a sign of the importance of the meeting, Putin said he had "changed some of my plans" so that talks with Lukashenko could last two days.

The Russian leader said the pair would discuss "security in our region."

The Belarus strongman now hosts Wagner fighters on his territory, after brokering a deal that convinced its leader Yevgeny Prigozhin to end a march on Moscow and exile himself to Belarus.

Lukashenko said Minsk was "controlling" the situation with the notorious Wagner fighters, and restricting them to staying in the centre of the reclusive country.

Wagner's presence in Belarus has rattled EU and NATO member Poland, which has strengthened its border.

Both Putin and Lukashenko accused Warsaw of having territorial ambitions on Ukraine and Belarus, with the Belarusian strongman issuing a veiled threat.

"They are asking to go West, ask me for permission... to go on a trip to Warsaw, to Rzeszow," Lukashenko said, referring to Wagner fighters, to Putin, who smiled. "But of course, I am keeping them in central Belarus, like we agreed".

"We are controlling what is happening (with Wagner)," he said, adding: "They are in a bad mood."

He thanked Putin for vowing to defend Belarus should it be attacked.

The comments came two days after Putin said western Poland was a gift from Stalin.

Lukashenko accused Poland of trying to "rip off a western chunk" of Ukraine.

He also accused Poland of bringing mercenaries to the border, saying he had "brought him a map of moving armed forces of Poland to the borders of the union state".

The comments came after Warsaw summoned the Russian ambassador over Putin's Poland remarks.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/07/23/putin-claims-ukrainian-counteroffensive-failed-russian-agencies-a81935>