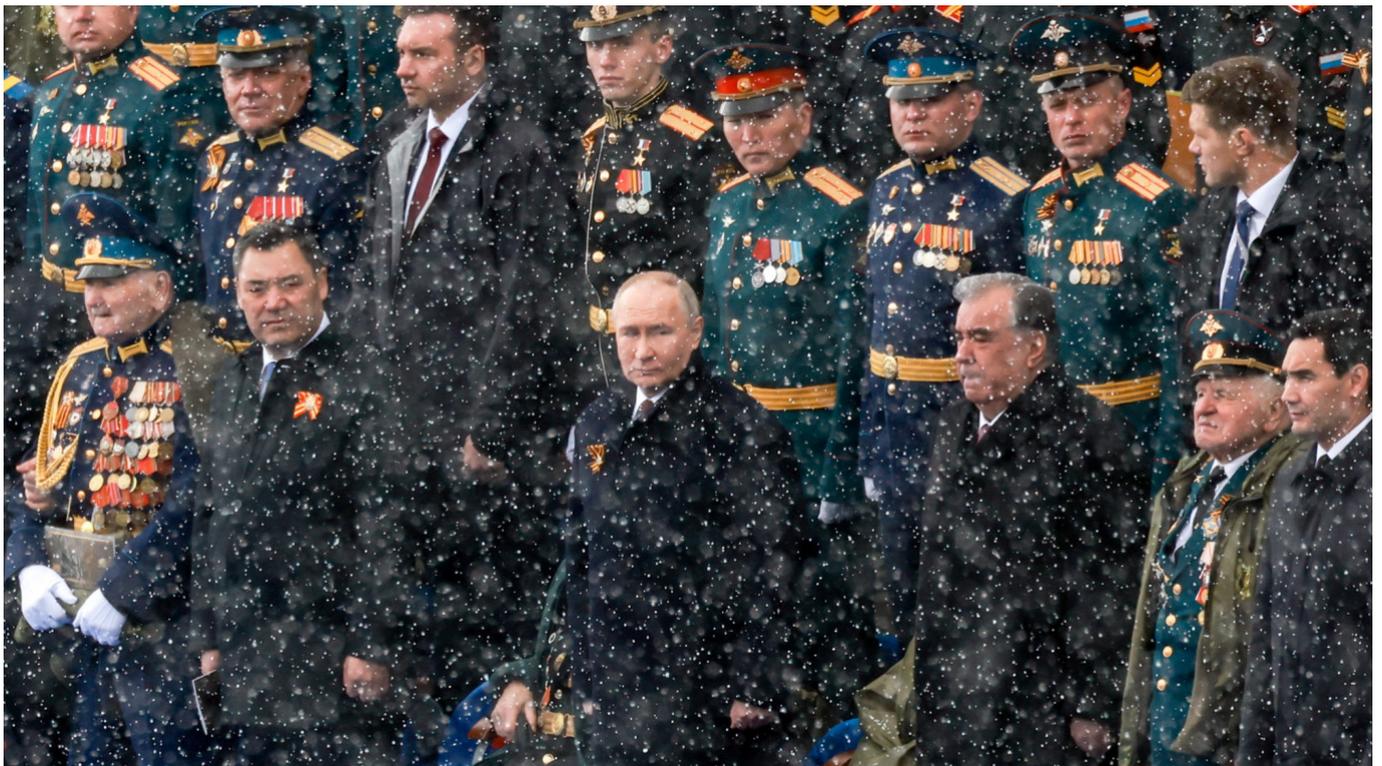


In Victory Day Speech, Putin Rails Against ‘Distortion’ of History

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Vladimir Putin attends the Victory Day parade at Red Square on Thursday. **Vyacheslav Prokofyev / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a defiant speech Thursday slamming Ukraine and its Western allies over their alleged attempts to “distort” history and stoke regional conflicts as he attended a military parade on Red Square to mark Victory Day.

“Today we see how they’re trying to distort the truth about WWII. It interferes with those who are used to building their essentially colonial policy based on hypocrisy and lies,” Putin told assembled guests and servicemen.

“Revanchism, abuse of history, and an attempt to justify the current Nazi followers is part of an overall policy of the Western elites to stoke new regional conflicts,” he said, seeming to refer to the authorities in Kyiv, whom Russian officials including Putin regularly accuse of holding neo-Nazi views.

The Kremlin has traditionally used Victory Day for bombastic events that promote patriotic unity and showcase the country’s military might.

But in some parts of Russia, including the western Kursk and Pskov regions, parades to mark the 79th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazism were canceled due to safety concerns amid the war in neighboring Ukraine.

In Moscow, Russia's Defense Ministry [said](#) around 9,000 servicemen and 61 pieces of [military equipment](#), including Yars intercontinental ballistic missile system and the S-400 surface-to-air missile system, took part in the Red Square military parade.

Unlike last year's slimmed-down celebrations, the parade in the Russian capital featured the traditional flypast of airforce jets, which painted the sky with the colors of the Russian flag.

Putin was joined on Red Square by six leaders of former Soviet republics: 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.

So, too, were the leaders of Cuba, Laos, and Guinea-Bissau in attendance.

In a high-profile snub, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan skipped the event amid a spat between Moscow, even though he was in the Russian capital on Wednesday evening for a regional summit.

Standing in front of military veterans, Putin delivered a speech that, much like the one he gave at last year's Red Square event, conflated the current war in Ukraine with the Soviet Union's victory over Nazism in 1945.

"We celebrate Victory Day against the background of the special military operation," Putin said, using the Kremlin's preferred term for its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"We bow our heads to the memory of civilians killed in the neo-Nazis' barbarian shelling and terrorist acts and our brothers-in-arms who died in the righteous fight against neo-Nazism," he added.

The Victory Day address comes as invading Russian forces [continue](#) to make incremental territorial gains in eastern Ukraine, claiming several Ukrainian villages in just the past week alone.

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The longtime Kremlin chief, who was [sworn in](#) as president for a fifth time earlier this week, also repeated warnings that Russia could resort to using nuclear weapons against its adversaries if it felt existentially threatened.

"Russia will do everything to prevent a global clash, but at the same time, we will not allow anyone to threaten us. Our strategic forces are always on alert," Putin said.

Earlier this week, Putin [ordered](#) Russia's military to hold nuclear weapons exercises in response to what Moscow calls Western "provocations."

The Russian president concluded Thursday's speech by echoing previous calls for national unity amid the ongoing war against Ukraine and isolation from the West.

"Victory Day unites all generations. We are moving forward based on our age-old traditions and are confident that together we will ensure a free and secure future for Russia, our united people," Putin said.

AFP contributed reporting.

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