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Putin Says Russian Soldiers in Ukraine 'Defending Russia's Future'

By AFP

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Putin delivers an address via video link from the Moscow Kremlin to congratulate veterans, active service members, civilian personnel of the Russian Armed Forces, and the nation as a whole on Defender of the Fatherland Day. **Mikhail Metzel/Russian Presidential Press and Information Office/TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Sunday his soldiers in Ukraine are defending "national interests" and vowed "unchanged" determination to strengthen the country's armed forces in a rapidly changing world.

The comments come ahead of the third anniversary of Russia's offensive in Ukraine, which triggered the deadliest armed conflict in Europe since World War II.

"Today, at the risk of their lives and with courage, they are resolutely defending their homeland, national interests and Russia's future," Putin said in a video released by the Kremlin on Russia's Defenders of the Fatherland Day.

"We will continue to improve the combat capabilities of the army and navy, their combat readiness as an essential component of Russia's security [and] guarantee of its present and future sovereignty," he said.

Russia has seen accelerated rapprochement with the United States under President Donald Trump, with whom Putin spoke for an hour and a half by phone on Jan. 12.

Since then, the first Russian-American talks have taken place in Saudi Arabia, with the Kremlin saying it wanted to resume dialogue with Washington "on all parameters."

Putin said on Sunday that he wanted to give his armed forces "new, modern models" of weapons and equipment.

In November 2024, his troops fired a previously unknown experimental hypersonic missile called "Oreshnik" against Ukraine.

Ukraine was attacked by Russia on Feb. 24, 2022, with the Kremlin claiming to be protecting itself against the threat of NATO and preventing the organization's expansion.

"Today, at the risk of their lives and with courage, they are resolutely defending their homeland, national interests and the future of Russia," Putin said Sunday.

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