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Russia Holds 80th Anniversary Victory Day Parade on Red Square

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Russian soldiers marching in Moscow's 80th anniversary Victory Day parade. **Russian Defense Ministry.**

Russia held its 80th anniversary Victory Day parade on Friday morning with a large military display on Red Square, as President Vladimir Putin welcomed a lineup of world leaders in a show of wartime defiance and international support more than three years into the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Nearly 30 world leaders attended the celebrations in Moscow, which mark the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. Among them were China's Xi Jinping, Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro, alongside leaders of Russia's traditional allies in Central Asia.

Serbia's Aleksandar Vučić and Slovakia's Robert Fico were the only European leaders present. Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev and Laos' Thongloun Sisoulith cancelled their trips to Russia for Victory Day at the last minute.

As the parade began, Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov greeted columns of

soldiers, breaking with his predecessor Sergei Shoigu, who now heads Russia's Security Council, by attending the Red Square event wearing a civilian suit and tie.

An announcement at the beginning of the parade said over 11,000 soldiers from the Defense Ministry and other security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB) and National Guard, marched in the parade. Another 1,500 servicemen who fought in the "special military operation," the Kremlin's official name for the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, made an appearance.

Servicemen from "friendly nations" also took part in Friday's event, though no North Korean soldiers marched in the parade. However, after the main celebration, Putin did meet with North Korean officers and thanked them for their help in fighting Ukrainian forces in the Kursk region.

During his traditional Victory Day address, Putin slammed what he called attempts "to slander the real winners" of World War II, a possible reference to Ukrainian officials who have criticized Moscow's annual parade, or even to U.S. President Donald Trump's claim earlier this week that America did more than "any other country in producing a victorious result."

"Truth and justice are on our side. The entire country — our society, our people — stand behind those taking part in the special military operation," the Russian leader added.

"We are proud of their courage and determination, of the strength of spirit that has always brought us nothing but victory," Putin said. "Russia will remain an invincible defender against those who support Nazism, Russophobia and anti-Semitism."

In a nod to Xi, Putin also highlighted China's role in World War II, saying, "We'll always remember that opening the second front brought victory closer," a reference to the Second Sino-Japanese War between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan.

Unlike previous years, the Kremlin leader dedicated little of his speech on Friday to the ongoing war against Ukraine and avoided direct condemnations of the West. In his 2024 address, for example, he criticized "Western elites" for revanchism and "stoking regional conflicts."

After Putin's speech, nearly 200 tanks, including the WWII-era T-34, opened up the mechanized section of the parade. Various types of armored vehicles, artillery systems, drones and infantry vehicles were also seen rolling across Red Square, followed by a flyover of fighter jets and bombers.

No high-ranking U.S. officials appeared to be present at the parade, as some had earlier speculated. The Kremlin had said that the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow Lynne Tracy was invited to attend, but it was not immediately clear if she accepted the invitation.

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The 80th anniversary parade came after Putin unilaterally ordered a ceasefire from midnight on May 8 through May 11 to coincide with the celebrations. Ukrainian officials dismissed the

proposal, calling instead for a 30-day ceasefire initially proposed by the United States in March.

Both sides have accused each other of violating the temporary truce.

Despite the polished military display on Red Square, life in the Russian capital has been far from smooth in recent days. An unprecedented wave of Ukrainian drones overnight on Tuesday grounded flights and disrupted air traffic at Moscow's airports, stranding thousands of passengers.

Major internet outages have also been reported throughout the week as city authorities ramped up security ahead of Victory Day celebrations.

Also, for the first time, restaurants and stores near the parade route were ordered to close, apparently due to concerns that they could be used as staging grounds for bombings. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, bombing attacks have struck Moscow several times, most recently in the assassination of army general Yaroslav Moskalik on April 25.

Besides Moscow, cities across Russia held their own Victory Day parades, including St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, Ulan-Ude, Novosibirsk, Yakutsk, Ufa, Kazan and others. In major cities, internet disruptions were reported amid the celebrations.

In the southwestern Belgorod region, authorities reported Ukrainian drone attacks against the regional government building as May 9 commemorations were just about to get underway. Victory Day events would still take place despite the air assault, authorities said.

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