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# Putin Shrugs Off NATO Spending Plans, Says Russia's Advance in Ukraine 'Will Continue'

By AFP

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Vladimir Putin. **Alexander Demianchuk / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that NATO's push to boost defense spending does not pose a "threat" to Russia, days before the alliance was expected to approve a plan to expand its military capabilities across Europe.

At a late-night press conference in St. Petersburg, Putin also said Russian forces would continue advancing in Ukraine and questioned the legitimacy of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

NATO leaders will gather in The Hague next week for a key summit to discuss raising defense spending to 5% of GDP, a proposal that comes as U.S. President Donald Trump pressures member countries to contribute more to the military alliance.

Putin, who casts his war in Ukraine as part of a broader confrontation with the West, downplayed the threat posed by the alliance.

"We do not consider any rearmament by NATO to be a threat to the Russian Federation, because we are self-sufficient in terms of ensuring our own security," Putin told a group of foreign journalists. "We are constantly modernizing our armed forces and defensive capabilities."

While acknowledging that increased NATO spending could pose "specific" challenges, the Kremlin leader said that Russia "will counter all threats that arise. There is no doubt about that."

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On the war in Ukraine, Putin told journalists that Russia holds the "strategic advantage" and that his troops are making daily advances across the front.

"Our troops are advancing along the entire line of contact. Every day, more or less, but every day they go forward. And the advance will continue," he said.

Putin also repeated his refusal to negotiate directly with Zelensky for now, claiming the Ukrainian leader's mandate had expired — a claim Kyiv has rejected as propaganda.

Zelensky's five-year term technically expired in May 2024. However, Ukraine's constitution does not allow for elections to be held during martial law, which was declared following Russia's full-scale invasion.

"I am ready to meet with anyone, including Zelensky. That is not the issue," Putin said. "If the Ukrainian state trusts someone in particular to conduct negotiations, for God's sake, it can be Zelensky."

"We don't care who negotiates, even if it is the current head of the regime," he continued, but added that such a meeting would only be possible in a "final phase" of peace talks.

"We need to find a solution that would not only put an end to the current conflict, but also create conditions that would prevent similar situations from recurring in the long term," Putin told journalists.

The Kremlin has so far ruled out a full ceasefire in Ukraine. Instead, it has continued to issue maximalist demands, including that Ukraine cede more of its territory to Russia and drastically reduce the size of its military.

Ukraine has dismissed those terms as ultimatums aimed at prolonging the war.

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At the St. Petersburg press conference on Wednesday, Putin also claimed Russian forces do

not deliberately target civilians, despite well-documented strikes on residential areas and near-daily air attacks that have killed scores of civilians

Russian missile strikes on Kyiv earlier this week killed at least 28 people, according to local officials.

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