The Moscow Times
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St. Petersburg Navy Parade Canceled Over 'Security Concerns'

July 27, 2025



The St. Petersburg Navy Day parade in 2024. **Peter Kovalyov / TASS / kremlin.ru**

St. Petersburg's annual Navy Day parade has been cancelled due to security concerns, the Kremlin confirmed Sunday, coming days after local authorities issued and then removed a statement about the event being called off.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the parade would not take place as planned given the "general atmosphere" and "security concerns." He did not provide further details.

On Friday, authorities in St. Petersburg initially announced that the event had been called off. That statement was later changed, with the city government explaining that it lacked the authority to comment on the event, which Russia's Defense Ministry organizes.

Earlier, the local news outlet Fontanka, citing sources familiar with the matter, reported that this year's Navy Day celebrations would be significantly downsized and replaced with a wreath-laying ceremony and other festivities on Palace Square.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared in a video message earlier on Sunday, praising the "bravery" and "heroism" of Russian Navy personnel involved in the ongoing war against Ukraine.

"We celebrate this holiday in a working atmosphere," Putin said later in the day, addressing Russian servicemen who took part in large-scale naval exercises dubbed "July Storm."

The drills, launched earlier this week in the Baltic and Caspian seas, as well as in the Arctic and Pacific oceans, involved more than 150 ships and over 15,000 troops, the Kremlin leader said.

"Our main task is to ensure Russia's security and firmly protect our sovereignty and national interests," Putin said in St. Petersburg, where he was travelling on Sunday.

The St. Petersburg Navy Day parade in 2024 took place on July 28, though part of the event planned in the nearby port city of Kronstadt was canceled, also due to security concerns.

At the time, news outlets reported that Russian security services had warned of a likely attack on naval vessels involved in the parade.

According to the New York Times, then-U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin held two phone calls with Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov after Russian intelligence warned of possible covert Ukrainian operations around the planned parade.

That warning was allegedly serious enough that Austin contacted Ukrainian officials to urge them not to carry out any potential attacks.

St. Petersburg's annual Navy Day parade was first held in 2017. Smaller parades are typically held in Vladivostok and Kaliningrad.

AFP contributed reporting.

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