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Ukraine’s Zelensky Accuses Putin of Starting World War III

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Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky. **president.gov.ua**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin had already started a third world war by invading Ukraine four years ago, and that he must be stopped to avoid global instability.

“I believe that Putin has already started it. The question is how much territory he will be able to seize and how to stop him... Putin will not stop at Ukraine,” Zelensky told the BBC in an interview published Monday.

He argued that the war was the Russian leader’s attempt to impose a “different way of life” on the world and added: “Stopping Putin today and preventing him from occupying Ukraine is a victory for the whole world.”

Zelensky has given a series of interviews on the eve of the Russian invasion’s fourth anniversary as U.S. President Donald Trump continues to press Kyiv for a deal involving territorial concessions and summer presidential elections.

Zelensky signaled a willingness to hold elections if they are legitimate and backed by long-term security guarantees from the U.S. Congress. When asked about agreeing to give up the embattled Donbas region to the Kremlin in a deal to end the war, Zelensky warned that Russia would recover military strength in "no more than a couple of years" and invade a new target.

"Where would he go next? We do not know, but that he would want to continue [the war] is a fact," the Ukrainian leader claimed.

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Russia has vowed it will capture the entire Donbas by force if Kyiv does not withdraw, with Putin showing no signs of compromise on his hardline demands to end his four-year invasion.

Ukraine still controls around one-fifth of the heavily industrialized and fortified Donetsk region, while Russia has seized nearly the entire Luhansk region. Together, the two are referred to as the Donbas.

In an interview with AFP published Friday, Zelensky maintained that Ukraine was not losing its war against Russia and had even reclaimed 300 square kilometers (115 square miles) in a new counteroffensive. He told the BBC that victory would mean the eventual restoration of Ukraine's 1991 borders.

As U.S.-mediated talks in Geneva last week failed to make progress on the key issue of territory, reports suggested that he had privately told his closest advisers that peace negotiations had stalled and ordered them to prepare a contingency plan for the war to continue for another three years.

AFP contributed reporting.

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