

In Victory Day Speech, Putin Says Russia Fighting 'Aggressive' NATO-Backed Force in Ukraine

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President Vladimir Putin in the stands at the Victory Day parade. [Kremlin.ru](https://www.kremlin.ru)

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Saturday that his soldiers in Ukraine were fighting an "aggressive force" backed by all of NATO and described his war goals as "just," in a combative address to the annual Victory Day parade on Red Square.

Putin has made the memory of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II a central narrative of his 25-year rule, and authorities typically mark the parade with pomp and grandeur.

But a spate of Ukrainian long-range attacks in recent weeks prompted the Kremlin to ramp up security measures and downsize this year's celebrations.

The parade was vastly [scaled back](#) compared to previous years, with no military hardware on display for the first time in nearly two decades and only a handful of foreign dignitaries in

attendance — most of them leaders of Russia's close allies.

Both Moscow and Kyiv agreed to observe a three-day ceasefire over the event, following a last-minute appeal from U.S. President Donald Trump. Moscow had threatened a "massive" strike on central Kyiv if Ukraine disrupted the proceedings.

In an address to the parade, attended by Russian military units as well as soldiers from North Korea, Putin invoked the Soviet victory to rally support for his army in Ukraine.

Embed:

☒ Russia's Victory Day parade on Red Square is underway. The event will not feature military hardware for the first time since 2008.

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— The Moscow Times (@MoscowTimes) [May 9, 2026](#)

"The great feat of the generation of victors inspires the soldiers carrying out the goals of the special military operation today," Putin said.

"They are confronting an aggressive force armed and supported by the entire NATO bloc. And despite this, our heroes move forward," he said.

"I firmly believe that our cause is just," he added later.

Three-day ceasefire

After two failed attempts at truces this week by both Russia and Ukraine, Trump announced on Friday a three-day ceasefire between both sides would come into effect from May 9.

"Hopefully, it is the beginning of the end of a very long, deadly, and hard fought War," Trump posted on his Truth Social network, adding the ceasefire would be accompanied by a prisoner exchange.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky issued a decree on Friday ordering the Ukrainian military not to attack the parade and in a separate statement confirmed his government would adhere to the ceasefire to enable the swap of 1,000 detainees from each warring side.

"Red Square is less important to us than the lives of Ukrainian prisoners who can be returned home," Zelensky said, referring to the historic site in the Russian capital where the annual event is held.

Both the Ukrainian Air Force and Russian Defense Ministry reported fewer drone attacks overnight.

Now in its fifth year, the war has killed hundreds of thousands of people and spiraled into Europe's deadliest since World War II.

U.S.-mediated talks on ending the fighting have shown little progress since February, when Washington shifted focus to its war against Iran.

Before Trump's announcement on Friday, Zelensky had balked at the idea of a truce over the parade and warned Moscow's allies against attending.

Russia had threatened a massive strike on the heart of Kyiv if Ukraine disrupted the commemoration and urged foreign diplomats to leave the Ukrainian capital ahead of the event.

Security was tight in the capital before the parade, with AFP reporters seeing empty streets.

Mobile internet was also disrupted.

Accompanying Putin in the stands were Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, accompanied by his son Nikolai Lukashenko. Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev were also present, though their attendance had not been announced in advance.

For the first time, a veteran of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was seated next to Putin during the parade, the exiled outlet Agentsvo [reported](#).

Leonid Ryzhov, who commanded a motorized rifle brigade involved in fighting in Ukraine's Luhansk region in the early months of the invasion, could be seen sitting at Putin's left on the reviewing stand.

To Putin's right sat Svet Turunov, a Soviet World War II veteran who served in artillery units on the Leningrad and 4th Ukrainian fronts. From 1976 to 1990, Turunov served as an aide to the Soviet defense minister.

In past years, the seats closest to Putin during the Victory Day parade were typically reserved for veterans of what Russia calls the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet Union's fight against Nazi Germany in World War II.

Troops from North Korea took part in the parade for the first time, according to the state television broadcast of the ceremony.

The parade commentator said North Korean servicemen had made a "significant contribution" during fighting against what he described as "neo-Nazi invaders" in Russia's Kursk region.

He said the North Korean troops had demonstrated "mass heroism, selflessness and courage" during the fighting.

AFP contributed reporting.

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