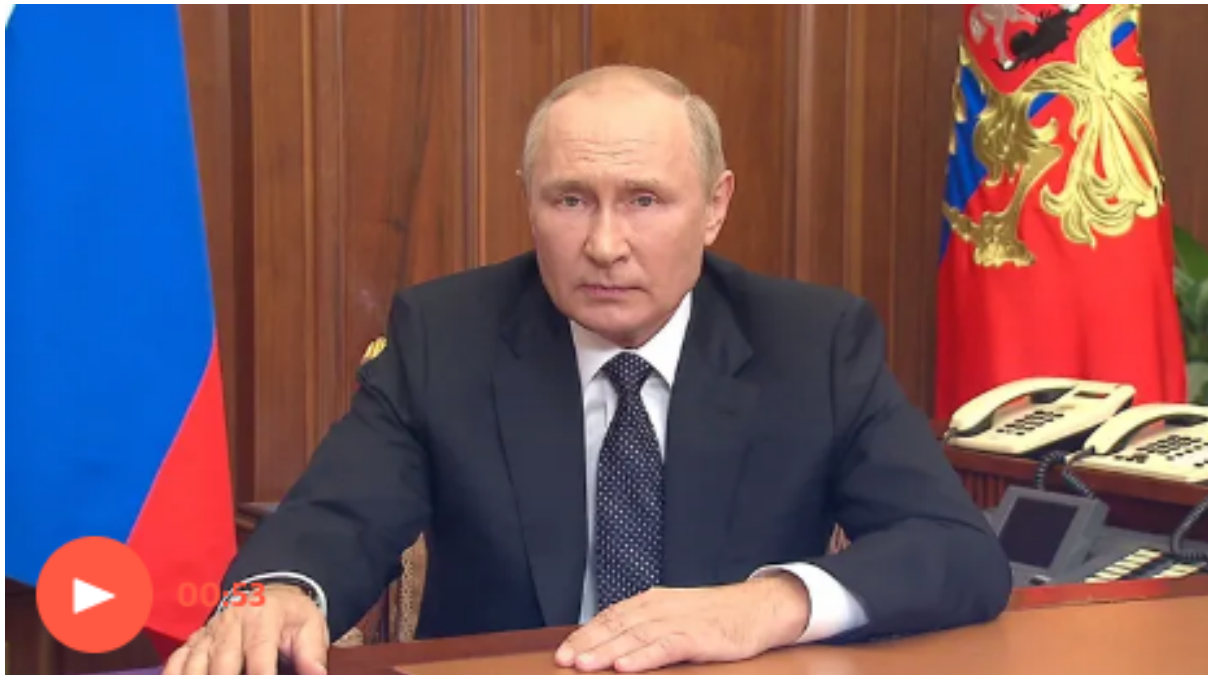


# Putin announces partial mobilisation and threatens nuclear retaliation in escalation of Ukraine war

**Russian president threatens west with nuclear retaliation, saying ‘we will use all the means at our disposal’**



Vladimir Putin announces partial mobilisation of Russian troops for Ukraine – video

'I'm not bluffing': Putin warns the west over nuclear weapons – video

## **Pjotr Sauer**

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Vladimir Putin has announced a partial mobilisation in Russia in a significant escalation that places the country’s people and economy on a wartime footing.

The president also threatened nuclear retaliation, saying that Russia had “lots of weapons to reply” to what he called western threats on Russian territory and added that he was not bluffing.

In a highly anticipated televised address, Putin said that Russia's first mobilisation since the second world war was a direct response to the dangers posed by the west, which "wants to destroy our country", and claimed the west had tried to "turn Ukraine's people into cannon fodder".

"Military service will apply only to citizens who are currently in the reserve, especially those who have served in the armed forces, have certain military professions and relevant experience," he said.

Shortly after Putin's announcement, the country's defence ministry, Sergei Shoigu, said 300,000 Russians would be called up as part of the mobilisation that will apply to "those with previous military experience".

"These are not people who've never seen or heard anything about the army," he said, adding that students can "keep going to class".

According to the decree signed by Putin on Wednesday, the contracts of soldiers fighting in Ukraine will also be extended until the end of the partial mobilisation period.

Here is what Russian President **Vladimir Putin** said earlier about nuclear weapons:

*Nuclear blackmail has also been used. We are talking not only about the shelling of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant – encouraged by the west – which threatens to cause a nuclear catastrophe, but also about statements from senior representatives of Nato countries about the possibility and permissibility of using weapons of mass destruction against Russia: nuclear weapons.*

*I would like to remind those who make such statements about Russia that our country also possesses various means of destruction, and in some cases they are more modern than those of Nato countries. When the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, we, of course, will use all the means at our disposal to protect Russia and our people.*

*This is not a bluff. And those who try to blackmail us with nuclear weapons should know that the weathervane can turn and point towards them.*

The Russian leader's televised address to the nation comes a day after Russian-controlled regions in eastern and southern Ukraine **announced plans to hold "referendums" this weekend on becoming part of Russia**. The Kremlin's plans to annex four regions are likely to further escalate the war following Ukrainian recent successes on the battlefield.

"To those who allow themselves such statements regarding Russia, I want to remind you that our country also has various means of destruction, and for separate components and more modern than those of Nato countries and when the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, to protect Russia and our people, we will certainly use all the means at our disposal," Putin said.

He added: "It's not a bluff."

The Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said Putin's decision to announce a partial mobilisation was a "predictable step" that highlights that the war was not going according to the Kremlin's plan.

Putin's speech was also swiftly condemned by western leaders on Wednesday. The UK defence secretary, Ben Wallace, said Putin's actions were "an admission that his invasion is failing" and "Russia is becoming a global pariah".

Germany's vice-chancellor, Robert Habeck, said Russia's decision to announce a partial mobilisation was "another bad and wrong step from Russia".

Shortly after Putin's speech, Russian opposition groups called for nationwide antiwar street protests against the mobilisation law while the country's opposition leader, Alexei Navalny slammed Putin for sending more Russians to their deaths for a failing war.

"It is clear that the criminal war is getting worse, deepening, and Putin is trying to involve as many people as possible in this," Navalny said in a video message from jail recorded and published by his lawyers.

"He wants to smear hundreds of thousands of people in this blood."

By Wednesday evening, more than 650 people had been arrested at protests against mobilisation across the country, according to the independent protest monitoring group OVD-Info.

Putin's national address was planned initially for Tuesday evening, hours after the four Ukrainian regions announced "referendums" on joining Russia. However, the speech was postponed without explanation, causing a flurry of speculation.

Some observers proposed that the Kremlin had changed its mind on its decision to announce a mobilisation, while others pointed to Putin's habit of keeping his audience waiting. Those close to the Kremlin, however, said the decision to postpone the speech indicated Putin was planning a major escalation.

"The longer the announced appearance of President Putin is delayed, the more serious the announcements in it will be," the pro-Kremlin analyst Sergei Markov wrote on his Telegram late on Tuesday.

Putin in his speech also said he would support the votes scheduled for this weekend to join Russia in the parts of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions that are under its control.

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, slammed Russian plans to stage referendums in the occupied regions as a "noise" and thanked Ukraine's allies for denouncing the votes.

In his nightly address, Zelenskiy said Russia's plans to hold referendums would not change Ukraine's plans to retake areas occupied by Russian forces.

"The situation on the frontline clearly indicates that the initiative belongs to Ukraine," he said. "Our positions do not change because of the noise or any announcements somewhere. And we enjoy the full support of our partners in this."

The Kremlin is likely to closely orchestrate the upcoming votes in the parts of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions that are currently under its control which are but certain to go Moscow's way.

Western leaders quickly slammed the votes as illegitimate and have vouched to continue their military support of Ukraine.

“I thank all friends and partners of Ukraine for today’s mass principled firm condemnation of Russia’s attempts to stage new sham referenda,” Zelenskiy said.

The partial mobilisation announced by Putin will widely be seen as a major admission of the Kremlin’s military failures in Ukraine. Shoigu in his speech admitted that conditions in Ukraine were “difficult”, saying Russia was at war with “the collective west”.

Shoigu on Wednesday also gave the first official estimate of Russia’s battlefield losses since late March, announcing that 5,937 Russian soldiers had been killed in Ukraine since the start of the fighting. Western intelligence as well as independent media reports suggest the real figure is significantly higher, with up to 80,000 Russian soldiers killed or wounded since the start of the war.

## Putin flirts again with grim prospect of nuclear war – this time he might mean it

*Pjotr Sauer*

Russian leader’s speech marks biggest escalation of Ukraine war, and raises fears of unprecedented disaster

- [Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates](#)

'I'm not bluffing': Putin warns the west over nuclear weapons – video

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“This is not a bluff.”

The message from Vladimir Putin’s ominous morning **speech**, which marked the biggest escalation of the Ukraine war since the invasion on 24 February, was

clear: **Russia is willing to use nuclear weapons if Ukraine continues its offensive operations.**

While the longtime Russian leader has previously flirted with the grim prospect of using nuclear weapons, experts say his latest statements went further, raising fears around the world of an unprecedented nuclear disaster.

Addressing the nation on Wednesday, Putin confirmed he was planning to annex four partly occupied regions of southern and eastern Ukraine after this weekend's Kremlin-orchestrated "**referendums**".

He added that he was prepared to use "all means" to defend the "territorial integrity" of the Russian-occupied lands and their people.

"Putin's statements go beyond the Russian nuclear doctrine, which only suggests Russian first use in a conventional war when the very existence of the state is threatened," said Andrey Baklitskiy, a senior researcher in the Weapons of Mass Destruction and other Strategic Weapons Programme at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.

Ukraine, which has been making rapid military gains over the past few weeks, has stressed that it will continue its efforts to liberate occupied lands, with Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, stating on Wednesday that referendums will "act step by step to liberate our country".

This means Putin's resolve will probably be tested in the coming weeks.

Baklitskiy said the concept floated by Putin of "territorial integrity" was "tricky" given that Russia was planning to absorb four Ukrainian regions, where heavy fighting is taking place.

"What would it mean if Ukraine retook the territory Russia considers its own and Putin did not use nuclear weapons in response?" Baklitskiy added.

"Coming from the person who has the sole decision-making power regarding Russian nuclear weapons, this will have to be taken seriously."

Mark Galeotti, an expert on Russian politics, also said Putin's nuclear threats were unprecedented but questioned whether the Russian leader was willing to go through with his threats, which would de facto mean nuclear war.

"It's glib to assume anyone claiming they are not bluffing is bluffing, but the credibility of a threat to risk thermonuclear Armageddon if Ukrainian forces continue to move in territories still Ukrainian by law is questionable."

Instead, Galeotti argued, the apocalyptic threats could have been intended to force the west and Ukraine into accepting Russia's territorial gains in the war.

Zelenskiy, in an interview with the German newspaper Bild on Wednesday, likewise said he did not believe Putin would use nuclear weapons. "I don't think the world will allow him to use those weapons," he said.

The Ukrainian leader, however, did not rule out the possibility of a Russian nuclear strike, saying "we can't look into Putin's head".

For millions of Russians, the most worrying takeaway from Putin's speech will be that they and their loved ones could soon be fighting and dying for their president's illusory aims.

Since the start of the war, Putin has sought to shield his population from the realities of the war, with the Kremlin eager to cultivate a sense of normality on the streets of Moscow and other major cities. Many responded to these efforts, with polls consistently **showing** the average Russian was quickly turning away from the conflict.

But with the decision to announce the first mobilisation since the second world war and the call-up of 300,000 mostly young Russians, this unwritten social contract has now been annulled, and the war will be entering the households of thousands of families across the country.

Nationwide antiwar protests were swiftly announced by the jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny on Wednesday, but with much of the **opposition either exiled or behind bars**, observers said they did not expect Russians to take to the streets en masse.

Putin is admitting his previous threats were hollow by saying ‘this is not a bluff’

*Keir Giles*

“Russia’s repressed society will accept this obediently,” said Andrei Kolesnikov, of the Carnegie Moscow Center thinktank. “They will deal with the issue in their own practical way, avoiding the draft however they can.”

On Wednesday morning, some were frantically looking for a way out of the country.

Direct flights from Moscow to Istanbul, Yerevan, Tashkent and Baku, the capitals of countries that allow Russians visa-free entry, were sold out, while the cheapest flights from Moscow to Dubai cost about 350,000 rubles (£5,000), a fee too steep for most.

Options to leave by land were severely limited this week when four of the five EU countries bordering Russia **announced** they would no longer allow Russians to enter on tourist visas.

Searches for the phrase “How to break your arm” and “How to avoid the draft” increased on Google and the Russian search engine Yandex on Wednesday, another stark indication of the lengths many were willing to go to in order to avoid the draft. The offering of bribes to dodge the army, already a flourishing industry before the war, will probably become much more common in the coming weeks.

Wednesday also brought bad news for the thousands of soldiers fighting in Ukraine, a force plagued by issues of **morale and discipline**.

According to a government decree posted on the Kremlin’s website, the contracts of soldiers currently fighting in Ukraine will be automatically extended “until the end of the partial mobilisation” period.

“I can’t keep on fighting for ever. Mentally and physically, I am exhausted,” said one soldier, who has been fighting in Ukraine since April and was planning to quit the army once his contract ran out in November.



For Kolesnikov, Putin's latest move is a sign of the growing desperation of a leader who is playing the last cards at his disposal to prevent a military collapse that would pose the biggest threat to his regime since he came to power more than 20 years ago.

"This is clearly the emotional and spontaneous decision of a cornered person," he said.

# Ukraine military chief says 'limited' nuclear war cannot be ruled out



By [Miriam Berger](#)

September 7, 2022 at 5:04 p.m. EDT

Young men swim in the Dnieper River from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear complex, which is under the control of Russian forces. (Heidi Levine for The Washington Post)

Ukraine's top military chief warned Wednesday that a "limited" nuclear war between Russia and the West cannot be discounted, a scenario with grave global implications.

"There is a direct threat of the use, under certain circumstances, of tactical nuclear weapons by the Russian armed forces," the Ukrainian commander in chief, Gen. Valery Zaluzhny wrote in an article published by Ukrinform, a state-run media outlet. "It is also impossible to completely rule out the possibility of the direct involvement of the world's leading countries in a 'limited' nuclear

conflict, in which the prospect of World War III is already directly visible.”