
Russia. Isavnin: Putin's words might suggest a willingness to negotiate

Vladimir Putin's speech during Russia's Victory Day on Moscow's Red Square, listened to and analysed by residents of the Russian capital, turned out to be slightly different from what was imagined: "We expected him to announce a mobilisation or new declarations of war, or words directly pointing to the use of nuclear weapons. In fact, his speech was somehow more 'peaceful' than expected, *as though he meant to send a message to both the international community and world leaders that he may be ready for some form of negotiation*", **Aleksander Isavnin**, researcher at the Free Moscow University, told SIR. "I don't know whether political leaders will grasp that message or understand it correctly," he continued. "In any case, in this way he and his propaganda will have a good reason to say: we have shown enough openness, but the West is not willing to communicate with us or attempt to negotiate for peace." Isavnin also notes that on Red Square the "Z's and V's propaganda apparatus was absent, not even on soldiers and military equipment or decorations. Not even the battalion from Donbas bore those symbols: *it might signal some form of openness.*" However, the Z and V symbols were displayed in other Russian cities, "maybe because instructions did not arrive in time. Those symbols were visible in Moscow until a few days ago, but they were gradually taken down. Actually, using the Latin alphabet is not very patriotic." *Military officials from other countries, who are normally present, were absent from the podium, while the leaders of various faiths and religions were there.* "There is an international version of Putin and a local one", Isavnin continues, "and the military parade was followed all over the world. Putin is certainly not capable of retreating, nor will he ever say he was wrong. And if the Western negotiators expect him to acknowledge his mistake, he certainly won't. He will plunge the country into further misery rather than admit he wasn't right or that he is losing. Right now, however, he is hardly succeeding: *if Western leaders understand that this involves a disposition to engage in some form of negotiation it's better than expecting some frank talk from Vladimir Putin.*" Did he send any particular message to the Russian people? "Nothing new. In fact he said nothing different from what he has been saying all along. We are fighting against global war, we are fighting against the Nazis, we are continuing the battle that our fathers began. He was perhaps somewhat less aggressive compared to his previous statement of 24 February when he announced 'the special operation in Ukraine'. Again, this may be an indication of his openness." The weather in Moscow was not that bad and there was even some sunshine during the Parade, but the aviation part was cancelled: why? "If they wanted to, it could have been done. *I think that even the fact that it was cancelled in other big cities sends out a specific message.* The nuclear weapons were there because he couldn't avoid it. But he called off the air force display." **Andrej Zubov**, a Russian historian and Putin's staunch opponent, shares the same view. He wrote on his Facebook profile: "Putin has apologised rather than triumphed, as he had triumphed in the spring of 2014. The letter 'Z' was not displayed in the sky, nor on the tanks. No battlefield victories were announced, war and mobilisation were not declared." *Zubov refers to the "twist in the minds of the Kremlin's hawks" on May 9, 2022* He predicts: "The retreat begins now, both diplomatic and military. It will start slowly at first, and rapidly thereafter."

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