**On Victory Day, Putin says nuclear forces are on alert**

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday warned his nuclear forces were “always” on alert, and added that Moscow would not tolerate any Western threats, during an address on the annual Victory Day parade.

In a defiant speech on Red Square before thousands of soldiers dressed in ceremonial attire, Mr. Putin heaped praise on his Army fighting in Ukraine and accused “Western elites” of fomenting conflicts around the world.

“Russia will do everything to prevent a global clash, but at the same time we will not allow anyone to threaten us. Our strategic forces are always on alert,” Mr. Putin told the crowd.

“Dear friends, Russia is now going through a difficult, crucial period. The fate of the Motherland, its future depends on each of us,” he said.

The May 9 parade marks the Soviet Union’s defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War and has become Russia’s most important public holiday as Mr. Putin puts the country firmly on a combat footing.

Mr. Putin has used nuclear rhetoric throughout the conflict but has grown increasingly belligerent since last year, pulling out of a nuclear test ban treaty and a key arms reduction agreement with the United States.

**Nuclear drills**

Earlier this week, he ordered the Russian military to hold nuclear drills involving the Navy and troops based near Ukraine, raising fears he could use the powerful weapons on the battlefield.

In comments recorded on Tuesday but released by the Kremlin after the parade, Mr. Putin vowed to modernise his Army’s weaponry and said Russia would use whatever foreign parts it could get to make them.

Mr. Putin has repeatedly framed the current fight against Ukraine as an existential battle against “Nazism”, a message he reiterated in his address Thursday.