South Africa urges Putin to not attend August summit due to international arrest warrant

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By Associated Press

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<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/south-africa-urges-putin-to-not-attend-august-summit-due-to-international-arrest-warrant>

Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to attend an economic summit in South Africa next month and the country is desperately trying to persuade him to stay away to avoid the legal and diplomatic fallout over his [**international arrest warrant**](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/international-criminal-court-issues-arrest-warrant-for-putin-over-ukraine-war-crimes), South Africa’s deputy president said in an interview with a news website on Friday.

As a signatory to the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court, South Africa is obliged to arrest Putin on an indictment the court issued against the Russian leader in March for war crimes involving the abduction of children from Ukraine.

Moscow has dismissed the warrant. South African authorities are likely to breach the treaty and not arrest Putin, but some opposition parties, rights groups and legal activists have said he should be arrested and have threatened to do it themselves, raising security issues for the BRICS summit in Johannesburg.

Having already decided not to condemn Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, South Africa faces the prospect of further straining relations with the West if it allows Putin to freely attend the summit of the BRICS emerging economies bloc of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Putin hasn’t yet traveled to a country that is a signatory to the court treaty since the arrest warrant against him was issued.

The Kremlin has not said that Putin will attend and the brief rebellion in Russia by the Wagner private military group appeared to make it unlikely he would travel after such a serious threat to his rule.

But Russia does want Putin to attend alongside Chinese leader [**Xi Jinping**](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/how-an-international-arrest-warrant-for-putin-puts-a-new-spin-on-xi-visit-to-russia) and the other presidents, South Africa Deputy President Paul Mashatile said in the interview with News24, a top South African news outlet. All the leaders were invited to the summit before the indictment against Putin was issued, South Africa has said.

“It’s a big dilemma for us. Of course, we cannot arrest him,” Mashatile said. “It’s almost like you invite your friend to your house, and then arrest them. That’s why for us, his not coming is the best solution. The Russians are not happy, though. They want him to come.”

Mashatile was put in charge of finding a solution by South African President [**Cyril Ramaphosa**](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/protesters-in-south-africa-call-on-president-cyril-ramaphosa-to-resign). Russia has rejected the alternatives, which included moving the summit to China, holding a virtual summit or Russia being represented by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Mashatile said.

Ramaphosa will now attempt to convince Putin not to travel to South Africa when they meet at the Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg at the end of this month, Mashatile said.

“We’ve now decided to leave this matter with the president, who is talking to Putin,” Mashatile said. “The president is going to the Russia-Africa summit later this month, so they will continue to talk. We want to show him the challenges that we face because we are part of the Rome Statute and we can’t wiggle out of this.”

South Africa has history on the issue after failing in 2015 to arrest then-Sudan President Omar al-Bashir on a visit to South Africa when he was wanted by the ICC tribunal for alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Allowing Putin to attend the BRICS meeting would put more pressure on South Africa’s relations with the U.S. and its other important Western diplomatic and trade partners.

U.S.-South Africa relationships are already under strain after the U.S. accused Africa’s most developed country of providing weapons to Moscow for the war in Ukraine on a Russian cargo ship that visited South Africa’s main naval base near Cape Town in December.

South Africa has denied there was any weapons transaction but Ramaphosa has ordered an investigation into the visit of the Lady R ship, which is under U.S. sanctions for allegedly transporting weapons for Moscow.