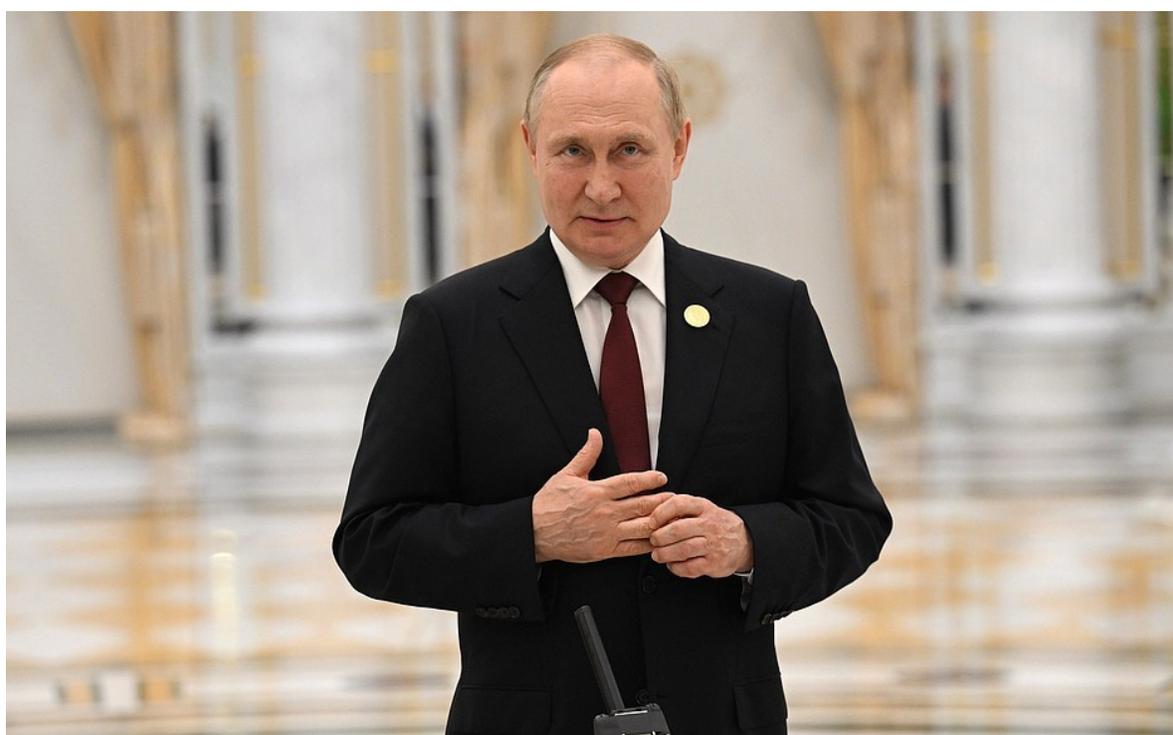


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# Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions

14-18 minutes





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Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions. Photo by Dmitry Azarov

**President of Russia Vladimir Putin:** Good evening.

Please go ahead. How did you like Ashgabat? The weather is hot, though. But the city has completely transformed in the past years, with new architecture. It is so beautiful.

**Question:** Mr President. It has been a while since your last visit to Turkmenistan. Today you have arrived in our country to attend the 6<sup>th</sup> Caspian Summit. Also today, you have met with the President of Turkmenistan and Chair of the Halk Maslahaty of the Milli Gengesh [the upper chamber of parliament] of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, who turns 65 today. You offered birthday greetings to your former colleague.

Therefore, my question is: what significance you attach to this visit to Turkmenistan, and, in your opinion, what are the prospects of further partnership between the Caspian littoral states following the 6<sup>th</sup> Caspian Summit here in Ashgabat.

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** I have already said it and want to say it again: congratulations to Turkmenistan and the people of Turkmenistan on such a good choice. Your new President is a young and energetic man with brilliant education and experience in public administration. We are forming a good relationship. He is taking

over from his predecessor and father. We had a very informative and good conversation during his visit to Moscow. We outlined a plan of specific actions to develop our bilateral relations and we are starting to implement it.

## **Additional**

As concerns your previous leader, Mr [Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov](#), we have established a very good and friendly relationship over the years. In many respects it was thanks to his efforts that a framework was created for developing Russia-Turkmenistan relations, and that our cooperation continues, both between our energy companies and in humanitarian affairs, in education and transport. It is very important as logistics in the modern world are essential to economic success.

I must say that, after the official part, he invited us to an informal lunch, where we had a chance to offer our birthday greetings, but perhaps 90 percent of the time was dedicated to an informal and open conversation about the development of cooperation in the Caspian region. You know which areas were in our focus. There were many ideas and proposals expressed. I do not want to reveal everything as they must first be formalised in corresponding multilateral and bilateral documents.

Naturally, we did not speak only about energy or logistics. We also covered industrial cooperation – in the areas that, certainly, are of common interest to all the countries – in particular, the main areas of our economic activity. We agreed on selecting these priority areas and distributing competences among ourselves. According to these competences, we will take steps to build broad cooperation in major areas, primarily in industrial production

and high technology.

In my opinion, there are great prospects. It is important and relevant to focus more on these things.

As for our traditional areas of cooperation such as energy and some others, we reached specific agreements as well, including with respect to extending several contracts. Gazprom management will be travelling to Turkmenistan soon.

So, we are very grateful to the leadership of Turkmenistan for organising this event. After this lengthy break, let's call it a COVID hiatus, we finally had a chance to work with each other in a full format. It was very useful. So, thank you very much.

**Question:** The keynote of the G7 summit in Germany was punishing Russia as much as possible. Also, jokes were made about, I apologise, your naked torso. Everybody had a go, including the Prime Minister of Canada, who suggested dropping jackets to be cooler than Putin. Here, at the Caspian Summit, did you by any chance discuss anything like that?

Also, Boris Johnson said that if the Russian President were a woman, there would be no war. What do you think about that?

**Vladimir Putin:** I do not know how much they wanted to take off, to only bare their tops or also bottoms. But I think it would have been a disgusting sight anyway. I would like to quote Pushkin here. I may be wrong with the details but he said something to the effect that "You can be a sensible person and think about the beauty of your nails." So, obviously, I agree with that: everything should be balanced in a person, both body and soul should be taken care of. To achieve this, one should refrain from drinking too much and other bad habits. It's important to exercise and keep fit.

The colleagues you mentioned, I know them all personally. It is not the best period in our relationship, clearly. Nevertheless, they are all leaders, which means they have strong characters. If only they set their minds to it, they can achieve success, of course. But it takes effort. The mere fact that they are talking about it is good and I can praise them for that.

Now, to the second part of the question. Did you say Johnson? I do not want to elaborate on what could have been, I simply want to remind you about the events in recent history, when Margaret Thatcher made a decision to start a military operation against Argentina for the Falklands. There was a woman who decided to start a military operation. Where are the Falkland Islands and where is Great Britain? The decision was dictated by nothing but imperial ambitions and the goal was to reaffirm the country's imperial status.

Therefore, I think that, at any rate, it is not exactly a good jab from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom at the current events.

**Question:** The NATO summit has begun with the war-mongering rhetoric. Russia has been declared a “direct threat” to the security of the Alliance. Stoltenberg admitted that NATO had been rearing for confrontation with Russia since 2014. The Prime Minister of Belgium said that Ukraine must win and that it must do this on the battlefield, which has allegedly been coordinated with the Ukrainian authorities.

How would you assess these statements? And how should we regard them?

**Vladimir Putin:** We should regard it as a fact. As regards their preparations for some actions against us since 2014, this

information is not new to us. It explains our decisive actions to protect our interests. They have long been looking for an external enemy, for a threat that would rally their allies. I am referring above all to the United States.

Iran is not quite right for that role. Russia is much better. They see us as a chance to rally their allies in a new historical period. There is nothing new in this for us. This is fresh proof of what we have been saying all along: that NATO is a relic of the past, of the Cold War era. They always replied that NATO had changed, that it had become more of a political alliance, but at the same time they were looking for an opportunity to give it a new lease on life as a military organisation. Well, this is exactly what they are doing now. There is nothing new in this for us.

**Question:** What about Ukraine's victory?

**Vladimir Putin:** As for Ukraine's victory, we are aware of this as well. Ukraine conducted talks with us, sometimes better than at other times. We made certain arrangements at some point, but later they, pardon the expression, chucked them. The calls to Ukraine to continue fighting and to abandon any further negotiations reaffirm our supposition that the united West and NATO do not care for Ukraine or the interests of the Ukrainian people, and that their goal is to protect their own interests. In other words, NATO and the leading members of the alliance are using Ukraine and the Ukrainian people to reinforce their positions and their role in the world, not to reaffirm their leadership but their hegemonism in the direct meaning of the word, their imperial ambitions. This is what they want. What they have always said about their exceptionalism, the idea they tried to impress on the international community that those who are not with them

are against them – all this are manifestations of the same policy. This is not new to us.

**Question:** Mr President, Turkey has abandoned its convictions on the issue of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO. Will that decision have any effect on Russia-Turkey relations? What will Russia do now, especially in light of Stoltenberg's statement that you wanted less NATO on Russia's borders but got the opposite: more NATO.

**Vladimir Putin:** I am aware of this premise, which is wrong and bears no relation to reality. Our position has always been, as I have already said during this conversation today, that NATO is a relic of the Cold War and is only being used as an instrument of US foreign policy designed to keep its client states in rein. This is its only mission. We have given them that opportunity, I understand that. They are using these arguments energetically and quite effectively to rally their so-called allies. This is the first point.

On the other hand, regarding Sweden and Finland, we do not have such problems with Sweden and Finland as we have, regrettably, with Ukraine. We do not have territorial issues or disputes with them. There is nothing that could inspire our concern regarding Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO. If they want it, they can do it.

However, they should know that they did not face any threats before but, if military contingents and infrastructure are deployed in their territory now, we will have to take mirror-like actions and create the same threats for them that are created for us. This is obvious. Don't they understand this? Everything was good

between us before, but now there will be tension, which is obvious and certainly unavoidable if, as I have said, any threats are created for us.

As for the assumption that we were fighting against NATO approaching us through Ukraine but now have Sweden and Finland to deal with, there is no substance behind it at all, because Finland and Sweden's NATO membership is not at all the same as the potential membership of Ukraine. These are two different things. They know this very well, but they are promoting this idea to show that Russia has received more of what it did not want to have. No, this is entirely different, and we are aware of that. And they are aware of that. They are trying to substitute these notions, to show that Russia has not attained its goals. But this will not deceive us.

If Sweden and Finland want to join NATO, let them do it. You know, there are rude jokes about stepping into unsavoury things. This is their business. Let them step into what they wish. But Ukraine is a totally different matter. They were turning Ukraine into an anti-Russia, a bridgehead for trying to stir up Russia itself. They began fighting Russian culture and the Russian language, they began to persecute those who regarded themselves part of the Russian world. There is nothing like that in Finland or Sweden; the situation is completely different. If they want to join [the bloc], they are free to do it.

**Question:** Today Lev Leshchenko said that he was willing to perform a song about the heroes of the special operation. Ilya Reznik has already written lyrics. The other day I came back from Lugansk where Head of the Lugansk People's Republic Pasechnik proposed making a film. He pitched his idea to Vladimir Mashkov

who was immediately inspired by it. We remember the role that Soviet art played during the Great Patriotic War. What do you think about these ideas and proposals?

**Vladimir Putin:** It is a good idea. You see, the guys who are performing their combat duty there, fighting, risking their lives, some actually losing their lives, they are sacrificing themselves for the goals of this military operation. They are protecting people in Donbass, protecting Russia's interests and ensuring the security of our country. Don't we realise this? I have said it many times before: if an anti-Russia foothold is established at our borders, we will be constantly under this threat, under this sword of Damocles. So, these guys are performing a crucial mission to ensure the security of Russia and, of course, they deserve to be known and talked about around the country. Not only do I support such ideas (this is the first time I have heard about this), but I think that we should write songs and poems and build monuments to these heroes.

**Question:** Mr President, have the goals of the special operation changed since it began? What is the current goal? Do you understand when all this will end?

**Vladimir Putin:** Nothing has changed, of course. I talked about it in the early morning on February 24. I talked about it directly and publicly for the entire country and the world to hear. I have nothing to add. Nothing has changed. Also back then, several days into the operation, I said that the tactics may be different, the tactics proposed by the Defence Ministry and the General Staff, with respect to where the troops must move and what targets must be hit, what must be achieved when several groups entered central Ukraine and what must be achieved in Donbass. The Kiev

regime had been preparing for that for a long time, since 2014.

Therefore, we needed to take certain action to distract them.

Yes, I am the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, but I have not graduated from the Military Academy of the General Staff. I trust professionals. They are doing what they consider necessary to attain the overall goal. I have formulated the overall goal, which is to liberate Donbass, protect its people and create conditions that will guarantee the security of Russia itself. That is all. We are working calmly and steadily. As you can see, our forces are moving forward and attaining the objectives that have been set for the particular period of the engagement. We are proceeding according to plan.

We are not speaking about any deadlines. I never speak about them, because this is life, this is reality. It would be wrong to make things fit any framework, because, as I have already said, the issue concerns combat intensity, which is directly connected with possible losses. And we must think above all about saving our guys' lives.

**Question:** May I ask about the terrorist attack, well, not an attack but the explosion at the shopping centre in Kremenchug in Ukraine? There are different versions.

**Vladimir Putin:** There was no terrorist attack there nor an explosion.

I was here, so I do not know the details. What I know, and what we have pointed out many times and we have shown the footage, including from drones, that weapons, MLRS, artillery guns and heavy weapons are deployed in residential districts and other places. We are not shooting at empty fields. We usually shoot

at targets that have been identified.

I am sure that this is what happened in this case as well. They are hiding the equipment, especially equipment delivered from the West, in hangars, at outdoor markets, at plants and in the shops where this equipment is repaired or adjusted after a long period of transportation from foreign countries.

The Russian army does not strike at civilian facilities. There is no need for that. We have the possibility of identifying the targets, and we have modern long-distance precision weapons to attack them. Of course, I will find out the details when I return to Moscow.

### **See also**