

“Russia never Annexed Crimea, no Plans to intervene in Ukraine, it’s a Western Delusion” - Putin

By [Pres. Vladimir Putin](#)

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On June 6 Russian President Vladimir Putin will attend a ceremony commemorating the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy.

Ahead of his visit to France the Russian leader gave an extensive interview to Radio Europe 1's news program author and frontman, Jean-Pierre Elkabbach and, anchor of the evening news on TF1 TV channel, Gilles Bouleau covering burning issues from Ukraine and Crimea to US foreign policy. The interview was recorded on June 3 in Sochi.

On what happened in Ukraine:

Vladimir Putin: There was a conflict and that conflict arose because the former Ukrainian president refused to sign an association agreement with the EU. Russia had a certain stance on this issue. We believed it was indeed unreasonable to sign that agreement because it would have a grave impact on the economy, including the Russian economy. We have 390 economic agreements with Ukraine and Ukraine is a member of the free trade zone within the CIS. And we wouldn't be able to continue this economic relationship with Ukraine as a member of the free trade zone. We discussed this with our European partners. Instead of continuing the debates by legitimate and diplomatic means, our European friends and our friends from the United States supported the anti-constitutional armed coup. This is what happened. We did not cause this crisis to happen. We were against this course of events.

The point is no one should be brought to power through an armed anti-constitutional coup, and this is especially true in post-Soviet space where government institutions are not fully mature. When it happened some people accepted the regime and were happy about it while other people, say, in eastern and southern Ukraine just won't accept it. And it is vital to talk with the people who didn't accept this change of power instead of sending tanks, as you said yourself, instead of firing missiles at civilians from the air and bombing non-military targets.

On Russian troops in Ukraine:

The interviewer told the Russian President that the United States claimed they had evidence that Russia had intervened in the conflict by sending troops and weapons.

Vladimir Putin: Proof? Why don't they show it? The entire world remembers the US

Secretary of State demonstrating the evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, waving around some test tube with washing powder in the UN Security Council. Eventually, the US troops invaded Iraq, Saddam Hussein was hanged and later it turned out there had never been any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. You know, it's one thing to say things and another to actually have evidence. I will tell you again: no Russian troops...

There are no armed forces, no Russian 'instructors' in southeastern Ukraine and, there never were any.

On whether Russia wanted to annex Ukraine and tried to destabilize the situation there:

Vladimir Putin: We never did that. The Ukrainian government must now sit down and talk with their own people instead of using weapons, tanks, planes and helicopters. They must start the negotiating process.

On Ukraine's sovereignty:

Vladimir Putin: Yes, we recognize its sovereignty. Moreover, we'd like Ukraine to act as a sovereign state. Joining any military bloc or any other rigid integration alliance amounts to a partial loss of sovereignty. But if a country opts for this and wants to cede part of its sovereignty, it's free to do so. Regarding Ukraine and military blocs, this is what worries us, because if Ukraine joins, say, NATO, NATO's infrastructure will move directly towards the Russian border, which cannot leave us indifferent.



Photo: Russian President Vladimir Putin gives interview to the French media. RIA Novosti/Aleksey Nikolskyi

On Crimea:

Vladimir Putin: It's a delusion that Russian troops annexed Crimea. Russian troops did nothing of the kind.

Russian troops were in Crimea under an international treaty on the deployment of the Russian military base. It's true that Russian troops helped Crimeans hold a referendum on their (a) independence and (b) desire to join the Russian Federation. No one can prevent these people from exercising a right that is stipulated in Article 1 of the UN Charter, the right of nations to self-determination.

In accordance with the expression of the will of people who live there, Crimea is part of the Russian Federation and its constituent entity.

I want everyone to understand this clearly. We conducted an exclusively diplomatic and peaceful dialogue - I want to stress this - with our partners in Europe and the United States. In response to our attempts to hold such a dialogue and to negotiate an acceptable solution, they supported the anti-constitutional state coup in Ukraine, and following that we could not be sure that Ukraine would not become part of the North Atlantic military bloc. In that situation, we could not allow a historical part of the Russian territory with a predominantly ethnic Russian population to be incorporated into an international military alliance, especially because Crimeans wanted to be part of Russia. I am sorry, but we couldn't act differently.

On current relations between Russia and the US:

Vladimir Putin: As for my relations with Barack Obama, I have no reason whatsoever to believe he is not willing to talk to the President of Russia. But ultimately, it is his choice. I am always ready for dialogue, and I think that dialogue is the best way to bridge any gaps. We have been in contact until now, we have talked on the telephone regularly.

Problems between countries always exist, especially between such big countries as Russia and the United States. There have always been some issues, but I don't think we should go to extremes. At any rate, it wouldn't be our choice. I'm always willing to talk to any of my partners, including President Obama.

On US foreign policy:

Vladimir Putin: Speaking of US policy, it's clear that the United States is pursuing the most aggressive and toughest policy to defend their own interests - at least, this is how the American leaders see it - and they do it persistently.

There are basically no Russian troops abroad while US troops are everywhere. There are US military bases everywhere around the world and they are always involved in the fates of other countries even though they are thousands of kilometers away from US borders. So it is ironic that our US partners accuse us of breaching some of these rules.



Photo: Russian President Vladimir Putin gives interview to the French media. RIA Novosti/Aleksey Nikolskyi

On the situation in Syria:

Vladimir Putin: All sides are guilty of atrocities there, but primarily the extremist organizations that are thriving in Syria. We are mostly worried about those organizations that are directly connected with al Qaeda. There are many of them there, which no one tries to deny any longer. It's a general fact. But we are mostly worried that the wrong action could turn Syria into another Afghanistan, a completely uncontrollable spawning ground for the terrorist threat, including for European countries. All the terrorists who are operating there now would eventually move to other countries, including in Europe.

We very much fear that Syria will fall apart like Sudan. We very much fear that Syria will follow in the footsteps of Iraq or Afghanistan. This is why we would like the legal authority to remain in power in Syria, so that Russia can cooperate with Syria and with our partners in Europe and the United States to consider possible methods to change Syrian society, to modernize the regime and make it more viable and humane.

On the collapse of the Soviet Union:

Vladimir Putin: We will not promote Russian nationalism, and we do not intend to revive the Russian Empire. What did I mean when I said that the Soviet Union's collapse was one of the largest humanitarian - above all humanitarian - disasters of the 20th century? I meant that all the citizens of the Soviet Union lived in a union state irrespective of their ethnicity, and after its collapse 25 million Russians suddenly became foreign citizens. It was a huge humanitarian disaster. Not a political or ideological disaster, but a purely humanitarian

upheaval. Families were divided; people lost their jobs and means of subsistence, and had no means to communicate with each other normally. This was the problem.

On being named by Forbes one of the most powerful persons in the world:

The interviewer wanted to know whether Russian president was flattered by that.

Vladimir Putin: You know, I'm an adult and I know what power means in the modern world. In the modern world, power is mainly defined by such factors as the economy, defense and cultural influence. I believe that in terms of defense, Russia is without any doubt one of the leaders because we are a nuclear power and our nuclear weapons are perhaps the best in the world.

With regard to cultural influence, we are proud of the Russian culture - literature, the arts and so on.

As for the economy, we are aware that we still have a lot to do before we reach the top. Although lately, we have made major strides forward and are now the fifth largest economy in the world. It is a success but we can do more.

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