

News conference following Russian-French talks

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President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Kremlin and to host the President of the French Republic, Mr Emmanuel Macron in Russia.

It appears symbolic that our meeting is taking place on February 7 (it looks like it will end on February 8, Moscow time), the day when a fundamental treaty between Russia and France was signed 30 years ago. That vital document provided a reliable foundation for the development of bilateral cooperation based on partnership and mutual respect for decades to come. Our talks with President Macron today were held in a business-like atmosphere and were substantive and meaningful.

It is clear to us that Mr President has come to Russia primarily to discuss the current issues of European and global security, for which our countries bear special responsibility as permanent members of the UN Security Council. In addition to this, France is holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union.

During the talks, we continued to exchange views on the proposals regarding long-term legally binding security guarantees, which Russia has made to the United States and NATO. I would like to remind everyone that these proposals include three key points: NATO's non-expansion, non-deployment of offensive weapon systems near the Russian border, and the return of the bloc's European capabilities and infrastructure to the 1997 level, when the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed.

Regrettably, the replies from the USA and NATO, which we received on January 26, disregard these concerns of fundamental importance to us. Moreover, our Western partners once again said that all states have a right to freely choose their security arrangements and to enter into any military blocs and alliances. Well, we never questioned this principle. On the other hand, it is also obvious that these blocs and alliances have no obligation to admit any country that wishes to join them.

This open-door policy, which we have discussed with many of our partners, including with President Macron today, is very liberal. We believe that only the United States and possibly several other NATO members are benefitting from this interpretation of the fundamental principle of equal and indivisible security, which has been set down in many European documents and includes, as we all know, a pledge not to strengthen one's security at the expense of the security of other states.

The reference to the open-door policy, which I have mentioned, is questionable as well. I would like to repeat (I have said this on numerous occasions, including in this very room during a recent news conference following Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban's visit) that according to Article 10 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, the member states may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European state in a position to contribute to European security to accede to that treaty. But this does not mean that the bloc is obligated to admit any country, as I have said as well. All right.

However, I would like to point out that they continue trying to placate Russia with deliberations that NATO is a peaceful and purely defensive alliance. People in many countries, namely Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan have learned the truth of this statement the hard way, and this is also true about the large-scale military operation against Belgrade waged without a UN Security Council sanction, which is definitely not an operation that could be waged by a peaceful organisation.

In addition, we cannot overlook the fact that the 2019 NATO Military Strategy openly describes Russia as the main security threat and an adversary. NATO has designated Russia an adversary. Moreover, while advancing its military infrastructure very close to our border, NATO and its member states believe that they have a right to teach us where and how we can deploy our armed forces. They consider it acceptable to demand that we do not hold planned drills and exercises and present the movement of our troops on our own – I repeat, our own – territory as a threat of a Russian invasion, in this case the invasion of Ukraine. They claim that the Baltic states and our other neighbours feel threatened as well. In any case, this presumption is being used to pursue an unfriendly policy towards Russia.

To be continued.

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