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## 'No other option': Excerpts of Putin's speech declaring war

*Before launching the biggest attack by one state against another in Europe since World War II, Putin addressed his nation.*



In this video grab taken from footage made available on February 24, 2022 on the official website of the Russian president (kremlin.ru) President Vladimir Putin addresses the nation at the Kremlin in Moscow [Handout/KREMLIN.RU/AFP]

**By Al Jazeera Staff**

24 Feb 2022



In the early hours of Thursday, February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed his nation, announcing a “special military operation” against Ukraine.

The speech came on the heels of his decision to recognise the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic on February 21 and the signing of mutual cooperation agreements between Russia and the two breakaway regions.

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Below are highlights translated by Al Jazeera staff based on the transcript, released by the Russian presidency:


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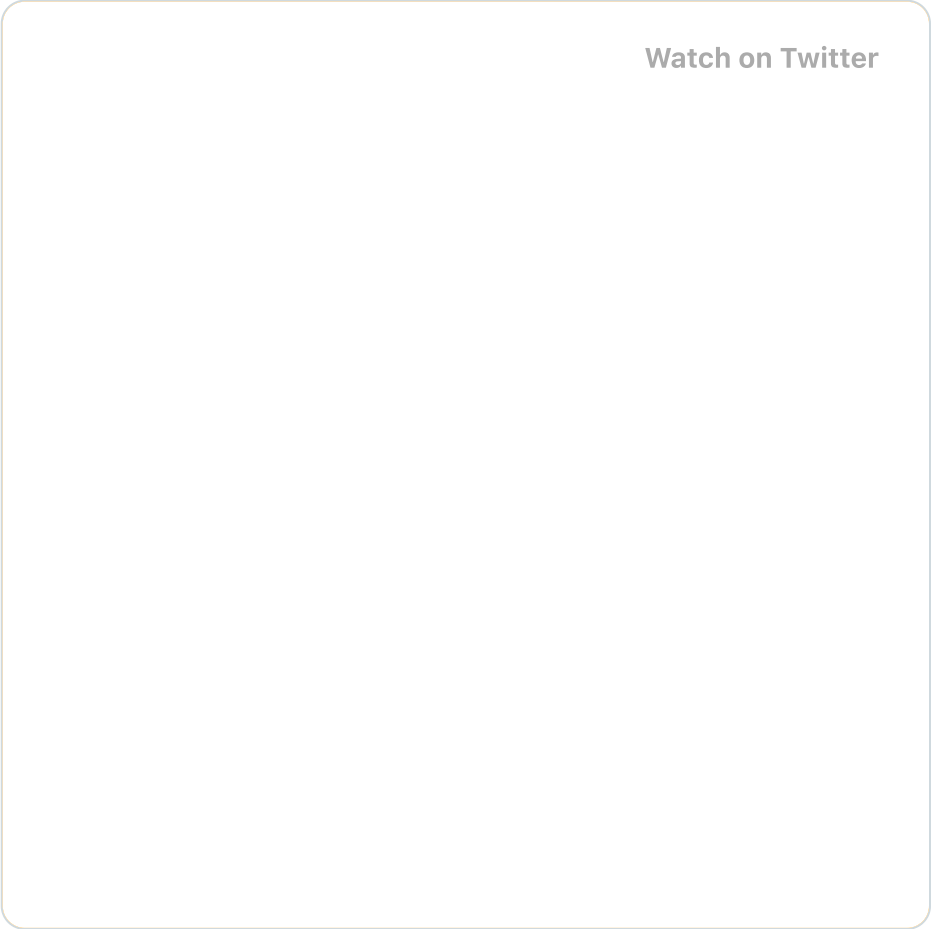
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“Respected citizens of Russia! Dear friends!

“Today, I again consider it necessary to come back to the tragic events taking place in the Donbas and the key issue of ensuring Russian security. Let me start with what I said in my address of February 21. I am referring to what causes us particular concern and anxiety – those fundamental threats against our country that year after year, step by step, are offensively and unceremoniously created by irresponsible politicians in the West.

“I am referring to the expansion of the NATO to the east, moving its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders. It is well known that for 30 years we have persistently and patiently tried to reach an agreement with the leading NATO countries on the principles of equal and inviolable security in Europe. In response to our proposals, we constantly faced either cynical deception and lies, or attempts to pressure and blackmail, while NATO, despite all our protests and concerns, continued to steadily expand. The war machine is moving and, I repeat, it is coming close to our borders.”

“After the collapse of the USSR, the realignment of the world began, and the norms of international law that had been developed – the key, basic ones being adopted in the aftermath of World War II and largely consolidating its outcome – began to get in the way of the self-proclaimed winner of the Cold War.

“Of course, in practical life, in international relations and the rules that regulated them, it was necessary to take into account changes in the state of affairs in the world and the balance of power. This should have been done professionally, smoothly, patiently, taking into account and respecting the interests of all countries and understanding one's own responsibility. But no, the euphoria from having absolute superiority, a kind of modern-day absolutism, and the low level of general culture and arrogance of decision-makers [led to] decision prepared, adopted and pushed through that were beneficial only for themselves. The situation began to develop according to a different scenario.

“You don't have to look far for examples. First, without any approval from the UN Security Council, they carried out a bloody military operation against Bel-

grade, using aircraft and missiles right in the very centre of Europe. [They carried out] several weeks of continuous bombing of cities and critical infrastructure. We have to remind of these facts, as some Western colleagues do not like to remember those events, and when we talk about it, they prefer to point not to the norms of international law, but to the circumstances that they interpret as they see fit.

“Then came the turn of Iraq, Libya, Syria. The illegitimate use of military force against Libya, the twisting of all decisions taken by the UN Security Council on the Libyan issue led to the complete destruction of the state, to the emergence of a major hotbed of international terrorism, to a humanitarian catastrophe and a civil war that has not ended to this day. The tragedy, to which they doomed hundreds of thousands, millions of people not only in Libya, but throughout this region, gave rise to a massive migration wave from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe.

“They ensured a similar fate for Syria. The Western coalition’s military activities on the territory of this country without the consent of the Syrian government or the approval of the UN Security Council are nothing but aggression, intervention.

“However, there is a special place for the invasion of Iraq, which was carried out also without any legal grounds. As a pretext, they put forward supposedly reliable information from the United States about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. As proof of this, publicly, in front of the eyes of the whole world, the US secretary of state shook some kind of a test tube with white powder, assuring everyone that this is a chemical weapon being developed in Iraq. And then it turned out that all this was a hoax, a bluff: there were no chemical weapons in Iraq.”

“In this context, there were promises to our country not to expand NATO even one inch to the east. I repeat – they deceived us, in other words, they simply conned us. Yes, you can often hear that politics is a dirty business. Perhaps [that is so], but not to this extent. After all, such cheating behaviour contra-

dicts not only the principles of international relations, but above all the generally recognised norms of morality. Where is justice and truth here? Just total lies and hypocrisy.

“By the way, American politicians, political scientists and journalists themselves write and say that in recent years, an actual “empire of lies” has been created inside the United States. It’s hard to disagree with that, as it’s true. But let us not understate: the United States is a great country, a system-forming power. All her satellites not only dutifully agree, sing along to its music, but also copy its behaviour, and enthusiastically accept the rules they are offered. Therefore, with good reason, we can confidently say that the entire so-called Western bloc, formed by the United States in its own image and likeness, all of it is an ‘empire of lies.’”

“Despite all of this, in December 2021 we once again made an attempt to agree with the United States and its allies on the principles of ensuring security in Europe and on the non-expansion of NATO. Everything was in vain. The US position did not change. They did not consider it necessary to negotiate with Russia on this important issue for us, continuing to pursue their own goals and disregarding our interests.”

“As for the military sphere, today, modern Russia, even after the collapse of the USSR and the loss of a significant part of its capacity, is one of the most powerful nuclear powers in the world and possesses certain advantages in some of the newest types of weaponry. In this regard, no one should have any doubts that a direct attack on our country will lead to defeat and horrible consequences for any potential aggressor.”

“As NATO expands to the east, with every passing year, the situation for our country is getting worse and more dangerous. Moreover, in recent days the leadership of NATO has been openly talking about the need to speed up, force the advancement of the alliance’s infrastructure to the borders of Russia. In

other words, they are doubling down on their position. We can no longer just watch what is happening. It would be absolutely irresponsible on our part.

“Further expansion of the NATO infrastructure and the beginning of military development in Ukraine’s territories are unacceptable for us. The problem, of course, is not NATO itself – it is only an instrument of US foreign policy. The problem is that in the territories adjacent to us – territories that were historically ours, I emphasise – an “anti-Russia” hostile to us is being created, placed under full external control; [it] is intensively settled by the armed forces of NATO countries and is supplied with the most modern weapons.

“For the United States and its allies, this is the so-called policy of containment of Russia, [which brings] obvious geopolitical benefits. And for our country, this is ultimately a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a people. And this is not an exaggeration – it is true. This is a real threat not just to our interests, but to the very existence of our state, its sovereignty. This is the very red line that has been talked about many times. They crossed it.

“About the situation in the Donbas. We see that the forces that carried out a coup in Ukraine in 2014, seized power and are holding it through sham electoral procedures, have given up on the peaceful settlement of the conflict. For eight years, for eight long years, we have done everything possible to resolve the situation by peaceful, political means. All was in vain.

“As I said in my previous address, one cannot look at what is happening there without compassion. It is simply not possible to stand all this any more. It is necessary to immediately stop this nightmare – the genocide against the millions of people living there, who rely only on Russia, only on us. These aspirations, feelings, pain of people are the main motivation for us to take the decision to recognise the people’s republics of Donbas.

“What I think is important to emphasise further is that the leading NATO countries, in order to achieve their own goals, support extreme nationalists

and Neo-Nazis in Ukraine, who, in turn, will never forgive the Crimeans and Sevastopol residents for choosing reunification with Russia.

“They, of course, will crawl into the Crimea, just like in the Donbas, in order to kill, just as the gangs of Ukrainian nationalists, Hitler’s accomplices, killed defenceless people during the Great Patriotic War. They openly lay claim to a number of other Russian territories.

“The course of events and the incoming information show that Russia’s clash with these forces is inevitable. It is only a matter of time: they are getting ready, they are waiting for the right time. Now they also claim to acquire nuclear weapons. We will not allow this to happen.”

“We have been left no other option to protect Russia and our people, but for the one that we will be forced to use today. The situation requires us to take decisive and immediate action. The people’s republics of Donbas turned to Russia with a request for help.

“In this regard, in accordance with Article 51 of Part 7 of the UN Charter, with the approval of the Federation Council of Russia and in pursuance of the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance ratified by the Duma on February 22 with the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic, I decided to launch a special military operation.

“Its goal is to protect people who have been subjected to abuse and genocide by the regime in Kyiv for eight years. And for this we will pursue the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine, as well as bringing to justice those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.

“Our plans do not include the occupation of Ukrainian territories. We are not going to impose anything on anyone by force. At the same time, we hear that recently in the West there is talk that the documents signed by the Soviet to-



totalitarian regime, securing the outcome of World War II, should no longer be upheld. Well, what is the answer to this?

“The outcome of World War II, as well as the sacrifices made by our people on the altar of victory over Nazism, are sacred. But this does not contradict the high values of human rights and freedoms, based on the realities that have developed today in the decades following war. It also does not cancel the right of nations to self-determination, enshrined in Article 1 of the UN Charter.”

“In this regard, I appeal to the citizens of Ukraine. In 2014, Russia was obliged to protect the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol from those whom you, yourself call “Nazis”. Crimeans and Sevastopol residents made their choice to be with their historical homeland, with Russia, and we supported this. I repeat, we simply could not do otherwise.

“What is happening today does not come out of a desire to infringe on the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. It is related to the protection of Russia itself from those who took Ukraine hostage and are trying to use it against our country and its people.”

“I also need to address the military personnel of the Ukrainian armed forces.

“Dear comrades! Your fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazis and defend our common Motherland, so that today's Neo-Nazis can seize power in Ukraine. You took an oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people, and not to the anti-national junta that plunders Ukraine and abuses its people.

“Don't follow its criminal orders. I urge you to lay down your weapons immediately and go home. I want to make clear that all servicemen of the Ukrainian army who do so will be able to freely leave the combat zone and return to their families.

“Once again, I emphasise, all responsibility for possible bloodshed will lay on the conscience of the ruling regime in Ukraine.

“Now a few important, very important words for those who may be tempted to intervene in the ongoing events. Whoever tries to hinder us, or threaten our country or our people, should know that Russia’s response will be immediate and will lead you to consequences that you have never faced in your history. We are ready for any turn of events. All necessary decisions in this regard have been made. I hope that I will be heard.”

“Dear compatriots!

“I am confident that the soldiers and officers of the Russian Armed Forces devoted to their country will professionally and courageously fulfil their duty. I have no doubt that all levels of government, the experts responsible for the stability of our economy, financial system and social sphere, the heads of our companies and all Russian business will act in a coordinated and efficient manner. I count on a patriotic consensus position of all parliamentary parties and public forces.

“As it has always been the case in our history, the fate of Russia is in the reliable hands of our multinational people. And this means that the decisions made will be implemented, the goals set will be achieved, the security of our Motherland will be reliably guaranteed.

“I believe in your support, in that invincible strength that our love for the Fatherland gives us.”

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA