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Putin's End-of-Year Presser in Quotes

The press conference lasted almost four hours. This will take you 5 minutes.

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Kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin held his annual press conference on Thursday, fielding questions on domestic and foreign policy from state media and independent journalists.

There were questions about economic growth, nuclear apocalypse and rap music. On the foreign policy front, he addressed new tensions with Ukraine, a territorial dispute with Japan and the U.S. withdrawal from Syria.

In all, the press conference lasted 3 hours and 45 minutes, three minutes longer than last year and well short of the record 4 hours and 40 minutes set a decade ago.

You can find our live coverage here. Or just read the highlights:

On Donald Trump and his decision to leave Syria:

— "If the United States has decided to withdraw its contingent – that is the right move."

— "The U.S. has been in Afghanistan for 17 years and has announced withdrawals almost every year, but [its troops] are still there."

— "We've delivered a serious blow against [Islamic State] in Syria... In that regard, Donald [Trump] is right."

— "I don't know if a meeting [with Trump] will happen or not."

On Western sanctions:

— "Russia throughout almost all of its history has been under some sort of sanctions... This is to do with the growth of Russia's power and its ability to compete... They are just a reason to constrain Russia's progress."

On nuclear war:

— "If, God forbid, something like that were to happen, it would lead to the end of all civilization and maybe also the planet... These are serious questions and it's a real shame that there's a tendency to underestimate them. It is a legitimate issue, and it is even growing."

— "We are essentially witnessing the breakdown of the international order of arms control."

— "Then [the U.S.] took another step, they left the [Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces] Treaty... Let them not say afterwards that we were trying to achieve some sort of advantage. We are not aiming for an advantage, we are aiming to retain balance and to provide for our own safety."

Related article: Putin Accuses U.S. of Raising Risk of Nuclear War and Predicts New Arms Race

On the Kerch naval crisis:

— "Why do our Ukrainian partners need this? They need to escalate the situation around the elections, to raise the rating of one candidate for the post. Did the provocation achieve its aims? In terms of raising ratings, maybe."

— "[Twenty-four Ukrainian sailors] were sent, and it was expected that one of them would die. And the fact that not one of them died was a great dissatisfaction to [Ukraine's] ruling circles."

— "An investigation is ongoing. After the proceedings it will become clear, what will happen to them."

On the recent crackdown on Russian rappers:

— "There's nothing good about detaining rappers, but there's also nothing good about

cursing. Fine, let them curse."

On the dispute over the Kuril Islands:

— "We aim and will sincerely aim at reaching a peace treaty with Japan. I am convinced — and [Japanese] Prime Minister [Shinzo] Abe agrees – the current situation is not normal. Russia and Japan are both interested in the complete normalization of our relations."

On the Skripal poisoning case and the diplomatic fallout:

— "It's good that he wasn't killed... If there were no Skripals, they would have come up with something else, that's clear to me. There's only one goal: to constrain Russia's growth as a possible competitor, I can see no other goals."

On the controversial pension age hike:

— "These issues are unpleasant and won't be met with enthusiasm, but they're unavoidable. I wouldn't have allowed it if I hadn't been convinced that it was unavoidable."

On military contractors and Russian troll farms:

— "All my chefs are members of the Federal Guards Service [FSO], military people of various ranks. I have no other cooks... We don't entrust food to anyone other than FSO members."

— On the Wagner military contractor: "Everyone should follow the law... There are almost 1 million people working in the private security industry. If Wagner is violating something, then prosecutors should step in with a legal opinion. As for their presence somewhere abroad: If they don't violate Russian law, they have the right to advance their business interests anywhere in the world."

On Ukraine's new Orthodox church:

— "The Ukrainian Orthodox Church was completely independent from the Moscow Patriarchate. The only tie was spiritual... And now this dependence will be to Turkey, to the Turkish Patriarchate. I think [this was] Bartholomew's main motive — as well as a hint from Washington."

— "Undoubtedly it has a political rationale. Nothing good will come of it for religious freedom in general. And I'm most concerned about the division of property that will follow. It's already happening, effectively. It could... get bloody.."

On holding his end-of-year press conference on a national holiday for security officials:

— "Intelligence, counterintelligence and journalism are essentially the same line of work. You deal with information and special services deal with information too."

Includes reporting from Reuters.

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