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‘Are You the Real Putin?’ Russian Leader Shuts Down Body Double Rumors

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Social media-fueled speculation has claimed that Putin was allegedly replaced by a “body double” years ago. **Stanislav Krasilnikov / TASS**

Vladimir Putin, who may be the most-photographed man in Russia, was once offered the choice to use a body double early in his presidency — an offer he rejected, he has revealed in an interview Thursday.

Various conspiracy theories have circulated around Putin over the years, including over his unexplained disappearances from public view and seeming changes in physical appearance. Social media-fueled speculation has also claimed that Putin, 67, was allegedly replaced by a “body double” years ago.

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“Are you the real Putin?” a state-run TASS news agency correspondent asked the president after showing him a list of popular online search terms about Putin, which included “Putin

body double. Proof."

"Yes," Putin responded in the latest installment of the interviews marking his 20 years in power.

"I refused the idea of any doubles. This was during the toughest time of our war against terrorism," Putin said.

He confirmed that the offer was extended in the "early 2000s," amid Russia's bitter conflict against Islamist separatists in the second Chechen war.

Putin also confirmed that the idea had been for his body double to make public appearances in high-risk places on his behalf. He made several visits to Russian troops in the republic of Chechnya during the war.

Later in the interview, Putin confirmed that he doesn't use a cellphone unless one of his aides offer him theirs.

"It is far easier for me to use a special phone line to be connected to any number," he said in reference to the Kremlin's phone network.

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