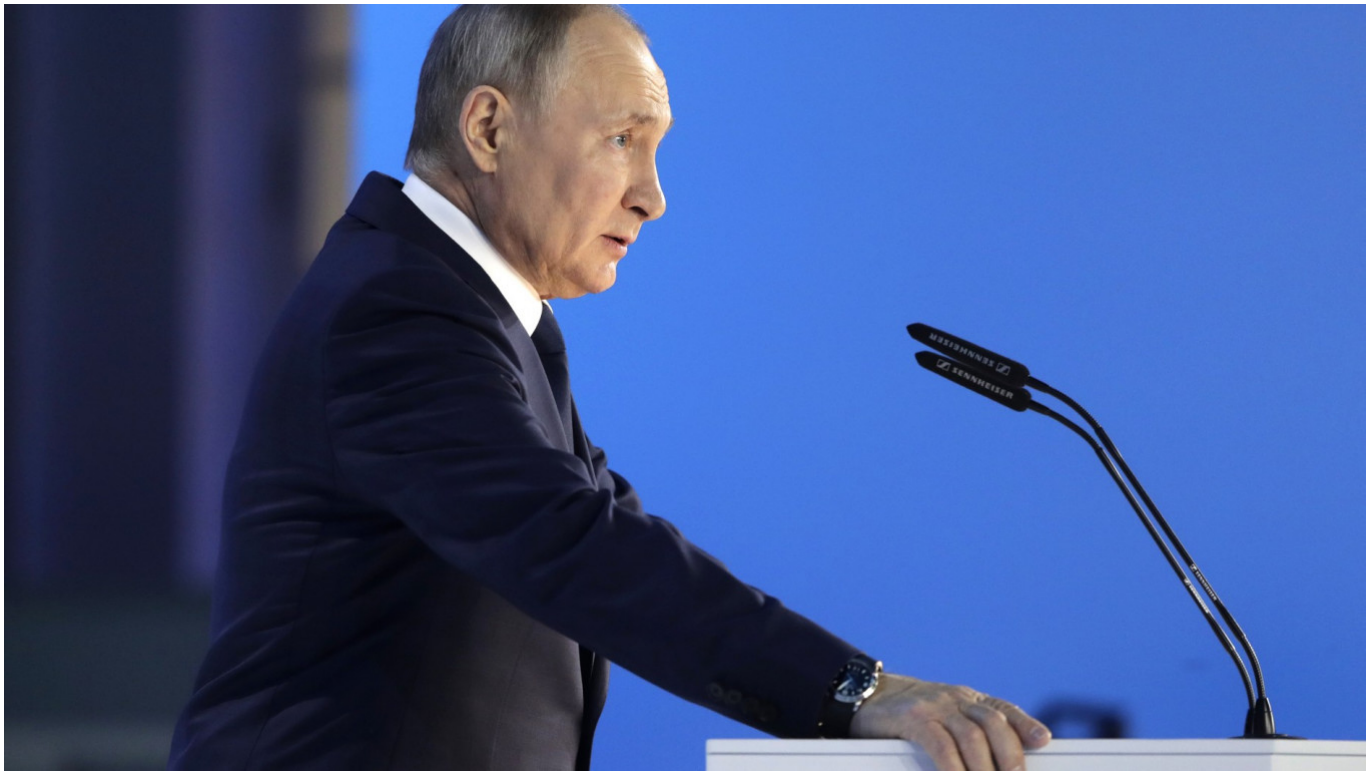
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Putin Warns of 'Swift' Response to Rivals Crossing 'Red Line'

Putin pointed to reports that Russian and Belarusian security forces thwarted an alleged attempt to assassinate Belarus' longtime leader.

April 21, 2021



Putin gave his annual address amid heightened tension with Ukraine and the West. **Kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin warned Wednesday of Russia's "swift" and "severe" response to foreign hostile actions and decried Western sanctions, which he likened to a sporting competition.

"I hope that no one will think of crossing the 'red line' in relation to Russia, which we ourselves will define in each specific case," Putin said in his annual state-of-the-nation speech.

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“Russia’s response will be swift, asymmetrical and severe,” Putin warned at Manezh exhibition hall next to the Kremlin.

He accused Western countries of levying “illegal” economic sanctions “to impose their will on others by force.”

“This is turning into some kind of sport — who can say something negative about Russia the loudest,” said Putin, noting that Moscow behaves “in a restrained and modest manner” in response.

“These days this practice is turning into something much more dangerous,” he warned, citing reports over the weekend that Russian and Belarusian security forces thwarted an alleged attempt to assassinate Belarus’ longtime leader.

“They have crossed all the lines,” the Russian president said to an audience of around 1,000 lawmakers, regional heads and other state officials.

In what appeared to be a warning to Russia’s struggling opposition movement led by jailed and hunger-striking Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, Putin said: “The organizers of any provocations threatening our core security interests will regret their actions more than they've regretted anything in a long time.”

The Kremlin later defined the “red lines” as “insults and interference, including in elections.”

Putin’s address took place as hundreds took to the streets of major cities in the Russian Far East in support of Navalny, whose failing health has drawn worldwide concern.

He spoke amid heightened tension with Ukraine, dissatisfaction at home over stagnating incomes and rising inflation, the coronavirus pandemic, new sanctions from the U.S. and growing pressure from the international community over allegations of spying and election interference. Russia’s already tense relationship with the West has further deteriorated in recent weeks, with new rounds of tit-for-tat sanctions and diplomatic expulsions between Moscow and the U.S. and a slew of European countries.

Despite the ominous warnings, Putin said during his state-of-the-nation address that Russia would not like to burn bridges with other countries.

“Russia is a welcoming country that’s open to its real friends.”

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