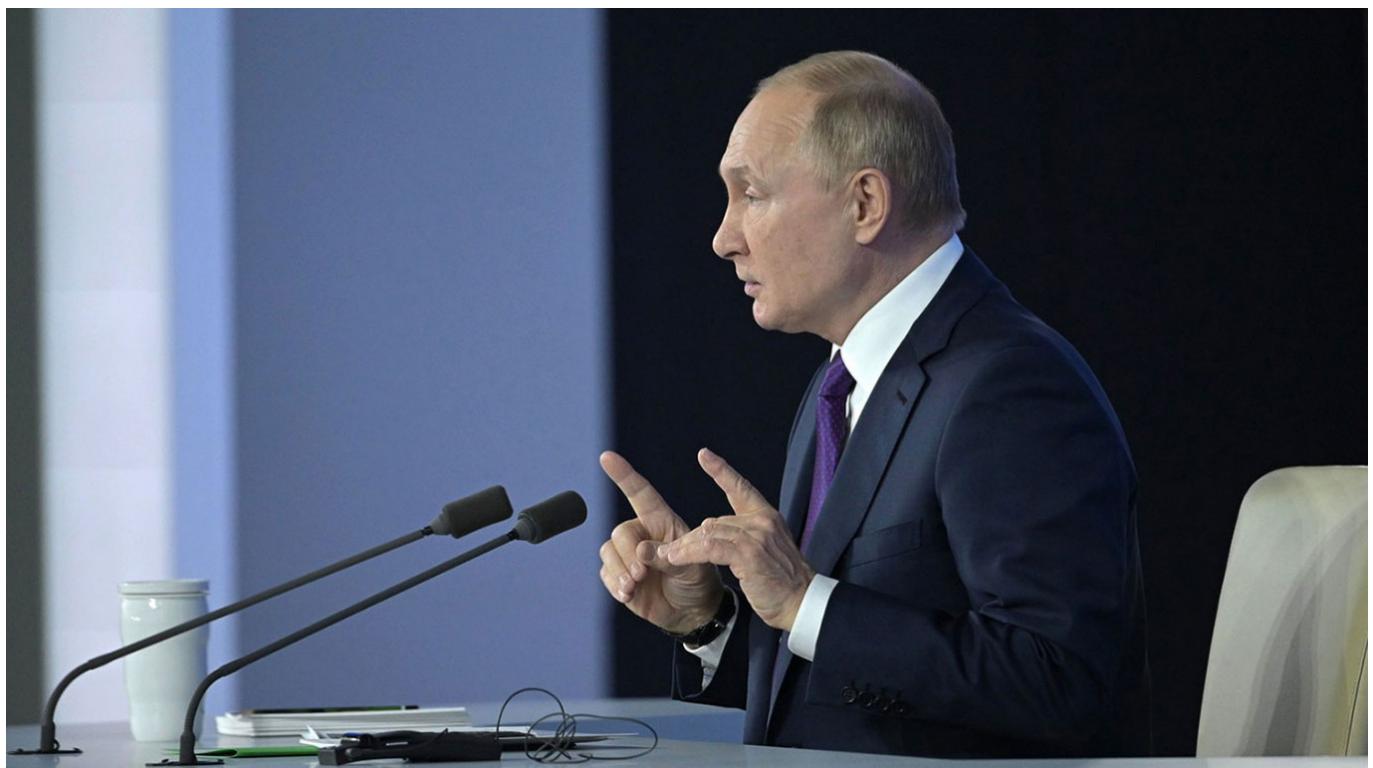


Putin Slams 'Lying West' But Says 'Positive' on U.S.-NATO Talks

December 23, 2021



Russian President Vladimir Putin. kremlin.ru

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday accused the West of lying to Russia on NATO's expansion but noted "positive" developments with Washington over Moscow's demands for security guarantees, with direct talks expected in Geneva next year.

The West has for weeks accused Russia of massing troops near its border with Ukraine and planning an invasion against Kiev.

Asked about whether a war against Ukraine was a realistic possibility, Putin replied that Russia was responding to threats from Kiev and that its actions regarding Ukraine "depend on our security," not on how talks with the U.S. proceed.

"We have to keep an eye on what is happening in Ukraine, and on when they might attack," he told journalists at his annual end-of-year press conference.

"One gets the impression that [Ukraine] is preparing a third military campaign and we're

being warned not to interfere and not defend [Russian-speaking residents in eastern Ukraine] or face new sanctions," Putin [said](#). "We must react and do something about it."

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At the same time, Putin said that ongoing negotiations with the United States on Russia's proposed security guarantees were "positive" and hinted at fresh direct talks in the new year.

"U.S. partners told us that they are ready to begin this discussion, these talks, at the very start of next year in Geneva," Putin said.

Putin repeated his demand that "there must not be any eastward NATO expansion," one of several points in a draft list of security guarantees that Russia is seeking from the U.S.-led military bloc.

"We were fooled by five waves of NATO's eastward expansion. We're not threatening anyone, they came to us. You're asking us for guarantees, but it's you who needs to give us guarantees immediately."

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Putin then slammed Ukraine's development in recent years, saying there is "complete poverty" in the country.

He called the 2014 Maidan Revolution a "bloody coup d'etat" and accused Ukrainian "extremists" of planning operations to retake Crimea and the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine.

Putin also defended Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and support of pro-Moscow rebels in the Donbass, saying that inhabitants of both regions had always thought of themselves as Russians.

He stressed that Donbass residents alone should determine the region's future, adding that Russia was ready to act as a mediator to "create a better future for the people living there."

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