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Putin Cancels Annual Press Conference for First Time in Decade

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Russian President Vladimir Putin giving his annual end-of-year news conference in 2021. **kremlin.ru**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has canceled his annual end-of-year press conference for the first time in 10 years, the Kremlin announced on Monday, as the war in Ukraine enters its 10th month.

"As for the big press conference, yes, it won't happen before the New Year," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"But we hope that the president will still find an opportunity to talk with [journalists], as he regularly does, including during foreign [visits]," Peskov added.

Peskov gave no reason for the break with tradition, but Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine is likely to have been a significant factor in the decision, the RBC business daily reported last month, citing a source familiar with the matter.

Putin, who has been in power since 2000, has held a press conference with Russian and

foreign journalists in December on most years of his rule, answering questions on an array of topics related to Russia's domestic and foreign policy.

The media gathering — a major political event in the country — usually lasts several hours.

Last year, the Kremlin hand-picked around 500 Russian and foreign journalists to participate in Putin's annual press conference, though many media outlets were unable to apply for accreditation due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Last year, several editorially independent media outlets, including Novaya Gazeta — whose editor-in-chief had just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize — said they had received no invite to the annual event.

Several questions at last year's four-hour event were dedicated to the geopolitical situation in Ukraine.

"This is not our choice, we do not want this," Putin said last December when answering a question about a potential conflict with Kyiv.

Russia sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24 and announced a mobilization to prop up Moscow's forces there on Sept. 21.

AFP contributed reporting.

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