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Kremlin Denies Putin Threatened Ex-British PM Johnson With Missile Attack

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Boris Johnson on a visit to Kyiv in a show of support for Ukraine amid the Russian invasion.
president.gov.ua

Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Russian President Vladimir Putin had threatened him with a lethal missile attack days before the Russian leader ordered his troops into Ukraine.

"He sort of threatened me at one point and said, 'Boris, I don't want to hurt you, but with a missile, it would only take a minute,' or something like that," Johnson quoted Putin as saying.

The alleged threat came in a phone call on Feb. 2, three weeks prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, according to a new BBC documentary on Putin's interactions with world leaders to be broadcast Monday.

Johnson described Putin's tone as "relaxed" with an "air of detachment."

"[H]e was just playing along with my attempts to get him to negotiate" not to attack pro-

Western Ukraine, the former prime minister told the BBC.

The Kremlin on Monday denied Johnson's claims as "not true, or more aptly a lie."

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The BBC suggested Johnson would have had "no choice but to take seriously" the Russian leader's threat, regardless of how lightly it was delivered.

Nine days after the call, on Feb. 11, British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace arrived in Moscow, where his Russian counterpart assured him that Russia would not invade Ukraine.

Wallace described the assurances as a "fairly chilling, but direct lie" that both sides had been aware of.

"I think it was about saying 'I'm powerful'," he told the BBC.

Wallace said General Valery Gerasimov, who was appointed to lead Russia's military campaign in Ukraine this month, told him at the end of the talks: "Never again will we be humiliated."

Johnson, who stepped down in July 2022 amid a series of domestic scandals, has been one of the most impassioned Western backers of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky since the start of the invasion.

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