

# News conference following 16th BRICS Summit

The President of Russia is giving a news conference following the 16<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit.

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**President of Russia Vladimir Putin:** Ladies and gentlemen,

The 16<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit has just concluded with great success.

It marked the culmination of Russia's chairmanship of the group and was one of the significant events on the global political calendar.

I have stated on numerous occasions that Russia has approached its BRICS chairmanship with full responsibility. Over 200 events were organised across thirteen Russian cities. Notably, numerous meetings of sectoral ministers took place, alongside various conferences, seminars, and the Business Forum. The Sports Games were also conducted very successfully.

This year, we have operated in the new expanded format and Russia as the group's chair has made every effort to ensure that new nations join our family swiftly and seamlessly. In my view, we have succeeded in this endeavour.

The new countries have witnessed and understood that it is feasible to work and achieve results within BRICS. They have come to appreciate that the cornerstone of our group is mutual respect and obligatory consideration of each other's interests. I can state with satisfaction that all of them are actively participating in working forums

and are putting forward useful and promising ideas and initiatives.

Regarding the Kazan Summit itself, delegations from 35 countries and six international organisations participated in it, as you are already aware. Such broad representation clearly underscores the authority and role of BRICS, as well as the growing interest in cooperation with us from states that are indeed pursuing truly independent and sovereign policies.

Each of these countries has its own path of development, distinct models of economic growth, and a rich history and culture. It is obviously this civilisational diversity and unique combination of national traditions that underlie the strength and enormous potential for cooperation not only within BRICS but also within the broader circle of like-minded countries that share the group's goals and principles.

The Summit's agenda was quite extensive. BRICS countries have held meetings in narrow and expanded formats to discuss pressing issues of the group's activities and prospects for expanding partnerships across three main areas: politics and security, trade and investment, and cultural and humanitarian exchanges.

Following the tradition, a BRICS Plus/Outreach-format meeting was held as well. This format has a proven track record and provides an opportunity for holding a direct and open dialogue between BRICS states and our friends and partners from the Global South and East. This year, Russia, as the current chair of BRICS, invited leaders from the CIS countries and delegations from many Asian, African and Latin American countries, as well as heads of executive bodies of a number of international organisations to attend this meeting.

We exchanged views on key international issues with a focus on the escalation in the Middle East. We also explored prospects for cooperation between BRICS states and countries from the Global South and East in the interests of inclusive sustainable development.

Most importantly, all sessions and events that I just mentioned took place in a traditionally business-like and open atmosphere fostering mutual understanding

that is customary for BRICS. This constructive approach to joint work allowed us to conduct an in-depth discussion of a wide range of issues over the course of three days.

The Kazan Declaration which summed up the discussions was approved at the summit. It is a comprehensive conceptual document with a positive forward-looking agenda. Importantly, it reaffirms the commitment of all BRICS countries to building a more democratic, inclusive, and multipolar world order based on international law and the UN Charter. It also underscores our collective determination to oppose the practice of imposing unlawful sanctions and attempts to erode traditional moral values.

BRICS countries are committed to deepening partnerships in the financial sphere. We will continue to enhance interbank communication and to work on creating mechanisms for payments in national currencies that are immune to external risks.

During the Summit, we also discussed at length possible joint efforts to further stimulate investment in order to promote economic growth in BRICS states and countries of the Global South and East. We will engage, among other means, the New Development Bank led by its President Dilma Rousseff.

Russia proposed extending Brazil's presidency and the presidency of Dilma Rousseff at this bank, since Brazil is presiding over the G20 this year, and next year it will take on the BRICS presidency. Let us face it, with the situation around Russia in mind, we believe this approach will help the institutions which we want to see developing further avoid challenges that are specific to Russia. We will manage these challenges effectively on our own.

There are promising prospects for bolstering sectoral cooperation and implementing new projects in industry, energy, logistics, high technology and many other key areas. Naturally, there is also potential for enhancing collaboration among our nations in the realms of culture, science, and sports, as well as through youth and civic organisations.

In Kazan, we reaffirmed that BRICS is not a closed format; it is open to all those who share BRICS values. The group's members are prepared to work towards identifying joint solutions without external impositions or attempts to enforce narrow approaches upon anyone. BRICS is compelled to respond to the burgeoning demand in the world for such cooperation. Accordingly, we devoted particular attention to the matter of potential BRICS expansion through the establishment of a new category – that of partner states.

During these days, the leaders and members of the delegations engaged in numerous informal interactions. Many bilateral meetings, contacts, and discussions took place. Our delegation endeavoured to meet with leaders of the majority of the participating countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Summit has concluded. I wish to express my gratitude once again to all my colleagues, who travelled to Kazan, for their contributions to our collective efforts. I must highlight that their input was quite substantial.

Throughout our chairmanship, we have felt the vigorous support of our partners. This is crucial, particularly as it does not cease with the conclusion of the Summit. There are several significant joint undertakings to be completed before the year's end. As I have previously stated, next year we shall pass the baton of chairmanship to Brazil. Naturally, we shall extend all necessary assistance to our Brazilian friends. We will continue to coordinate closely with all BRICS partners to further enhance cooperation within this framework.

Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the leadership of Tatarstan and the Kazan Mayor's Office for their hospitality and efforts to create a conducive environment for our joint work.

I also wish to apologise to the residents of Kazan for any inconvenience they may have experienced, such as moving motorcades and the closure of certain highways. However, I assure you that these disruptions were not in vain. I am grateful to you

for creating such favourable conditions for our work. Thank you very much.

I must apologise in advance, but we are unable to engage in lengthy discussions with you, as I have several more bilateral meetings, approximately seven, and cannot keep my colleagues waiting. Nonetheless, if there are any questions, please feel free to ask.

**Question:** Anton Vernitsky, Channel One.

Mr President, could you please share the details about financial cooperation between BRICS countries? Was a common investment platform discussed? Was the creation of an alternative payment system, an alternative to SWIFT payment network, brought up?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Speaking of SWIFT or alternatives to it, we are not creating any alternatives to anything, but settlements are, indeed, a critical issue which is why we are using our respective national currencies, which is a well-known fact.

Regarding payment systems, we are using the Russian financial messaging system created by the Central Bank of Russia. Other BRICS countries also have their own systems, which we will also use, are already using and will continue to use.

However, we are not inventing a separate common system, since we are doing well with what we have. All we need to do is take timely administrative decisions, which we also discussed with our colleagues, and we will continue down that path.

**Question:** Good afternoon.

Ilya Yezhov, RIA Novosti.

Mr President, the Kazan forum was the first summit for BRICS not as a five-member group but as a group with a broader geographic representation. Discussions about expanding it are underway, and your colleagues, including today, were clear about their

willingness to work more closely with BRICS. The BRICS partner country format has been explored as well.

Could you please share how this work is going and what is the key message that the Kazan Summit sent out regarding the further expansion of BRICS?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Indeed, I mentioned earlier that many countries are interested in joining this group. Thirty-five countries participated in the events in Kazan, and we agreed with our partners that we will approve a list of partner countries during the first phase of the potential expansion. This list has been agreed upon.

Some countries that took part in the events held yesterday and today have submitted their proposals and requests for a full-fledged participation in the work of the BRICS group.

Our next steps will be as follows: we will send out invitations and proposals to future partner countries for them to take part in our work in this capacity and, upon receiving positive responses, we will announce the countries on that list. It would be inappropriate to do so before we receive their responses, even though all these countries have previously filed requests.

**Question:** Good afternoon.

Viktor Sineok, MIC Izvestia.

It is known that the issue of the Ukraine conflict was raised during your numerous bilateral meetings. Could you please elaborate on the context in which you discussed the developments within the special military operation zone? In your opinion, how do the partners with whom you had discussions perceive this conflict, and did they express any support for our country?

**Vladimir Putin:** All the parties are in favour of resolving the conflict at the earliest

opportunity, preferably through peaceful means. You may be aware that the People's Republic of China and Brazil put forward an initiative at the General Assembly in New York. Numerous BRICS nations endorse these initiatives, and we, in turn, extend our gratitude to our partners for their attention to this conflict and their pursuit of methods to resolve it.

**Question:** Mr President, Keir Simmons from NBC News.

Mr President, satellite images are said to show North Korean troops are here, in Russia. What are they doing here and wouldn't that be a massive escalation in the Ukraine war?

And, Mr President, we are weeks away from US election. Russia again is accused of interfering, and that you have had private conversations with former President [Donald] Trump. Have you been speaking with him? And what have you been saying?

**Vladimir Putin:** Allow me to address the first part of your question.

Images are a serious matter. If images exist, they indicate something.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that it was not Russia's actions that precipitated the escalation in Ukraine, but rather the 2014 coup d'état, supported primarily by the United States. It was even publicly disclosed how much financial support the then US Administration allocated towards preparing and orchestrating this coup. Is this not a pathway to escalation?

Subsequently, we were misled for eight years with assurances that everyone sought to resolve the conflict in Ukraine through peaceful means, specifically via the Minsk Agreements. Later on, and I am certain you have heard this as well, several European leaders openly admitted that they had been deceiving us, as they had used that time to arm the Ukrainian military. Is this not the case? It is indeed.

Further steps towards escalation involved Western countries actively arming the Kiev regime. What was the outcome? It led to the direct involvement of NATO troops in this

conflict. We are aware of the actions undertaken and the methods employed when unmanned marine vehicles are deployed in the Black Sea. We know who is present there, from which European countries – NATO members they are, and how they conduct these operations.

The same applies to military instructors, not mercenaries, but military personnel. This also pertains to the deployment of high-precision modern weaponry, including missiles such as ATACMS, Storm Shadow, and so on. Ukrainian servicemen cannot execute these operations without space reconnaissance, target indication and Western software – requiring the direct involvement of officers from NATO countries.

With regard to our relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, you may be aware that the Treaty on Strategic Partnership was ratified, I believe, just today. It has Article 4, and we have never doubted the fact that the DPRK leadership takes our agreements seriously. However, it is up to us to decide what we will do and how we are going to do it, and we will act in accordance with this article. First, we need to hold talks regarding the implementation of Article 4. However, we will be in contact with our North Korean friends to see how this process unfolds.

In any case, the Russian army is acting confidently on all fronts, which is a well-known and undisputed fact. It is advancing on all sections of the frontline. Active operations are underway in the Kursk direction as well. A portion of the Ukrainian forces that invaded the Kursk Region, about 2,000 troops, has been blocked and encircled. Attempts are being made to break this group free from the outside and from within, but they have remained unsuccessful so far. The Russian army has begun an operation to eliminate this group.

With regard to contacts with Mr Trump, this issue has been making headlines for years now. At one point, Mr Trump and Russia were accused of being connected. However, after an investigation conducted in the United States, everyone, including US Congress, concluded that it was utter nonsense and that nothing of the kind ever happened. There were no contacts back then, and there are none now.

Russia-US relations after the elections depend primarily on the United States. If



the United States is open to building normal relations with Russia, we will do the same. If not, so be it. This is up to the future Administration.

**Question:** Good afternoon.

Pavel Zarubin, Rossiya TV channel.

May I follow-up on your conversations with Mr Trump? The former US President, now a candidate for the US Presidency, has claimed that during one of his telephone conversations with you, he supposedly threatened to strike the centre of Moscow. Is there any truth to this assertion?

Furthermore, is it possible to threaten you at all? Do threats have any impact on you? How do you perceive the fact that, in the current landscape of high-level politics, conversations between leaders are increasingly being exposed to the public domain, if that story is true?

Additionally, if I may, a question regarding BRICS Summit: do you currently feel isolated? Do you perhaps miss engaging with your Western counterparts?

Thank you very much.

**Vladimir Putin:** Regarding the first part of your question, as to whether it is possible to use threats. Well, you can threaten anyone. However, it serves no purpose to threaten Russia, as it merely strengthens our resolve. I do not recall having such a conversation with Mr Trump. This is undoubtedly a very intense phase of the electoral campaign in the United States, and I would advise against taking statements of this nature too seriously. However, what Mr Trump has recently expressed, which I have heard, is his wish to do everything possible to bring an end to the conflict in Ukraine. I think he is sincere about that. Statements of this nature, regardless of their origin, are certainly welcomed by us.

You know, we receive various signals from our Western partners concerning potential contacts. We have not isolated ourselves from such engagements. When it is alleged

that we refuse, or I refuse, to engage in conversations or maintain contacts, including with European leaders, I must clarify that this is untrue. We do not refuse, we have never refused, and we are not refusing now. If anyone wishes to restore relations with us, they are welcome to do so. We constantly repeat this, although we do not impose ourselves upon others.

As you can observe, we continue to live and work normally, and our economy is developing. Last year, our growth was between 3.4 and 3.6 percent; this year, it is projected to be around four percent or perhaps 3.9 percent. Meanwhile, the eurozone's economy is on the verge of recession. In the United States, there is growth, estimated at about 3.1 to 3.2 percent, which is not bad. However, they also face significant challenges, including deficits in three major areas: foreign trade deficit, payments deficit, and a huge debt, which, I believe, stands at US\$34 trillion.

We, too, encounter challenges, but it is preferable that we refrain from disputes or conflicts and instead focus on how to address these issues collaboratively. This is precisely what we are doing within the BRICS framework.

**Question** retranslated): Thank you very much.

A journalist from Cameroon.

Mr President,

Our team is just back from Donbass. We are putting together a documentary to show how things really are in Donbass and to tell everyone what it means for Africa.

Mr President, we are aware of the fact that many African countries have fallen victims to terrorism and other destabilising actions. At the same time, we see Russia helping the Central African Republic and other Sahel countries. Before Russia's involvement, other countries were present there, but only after Russia had come in the situation stabilised in many of these countries. So, my question is: is it not time for Russia to deepen this kind of partnership with African states not only in the military sphere, but in other spheres as well?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** I fully agree with you. This is the point of our cooperation with BRICS partner countries. Creating an investment platform within BRICS is precisely the goal of our efforts.

We believe that in the near future – I have just spoken with my colleagues at the conclusion of today’s Summit – our experts suggest that the economies of countries like Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, and others will develop at a steady and positive pace. However, there are regions around the world where growth will go at a very fast pace. These are primarily South Asian and African countries. This is exactly why we, within BRICS, are addressing the issue of creating a new investment platform using the latest electronic tools. The goal is to create a system that could – surprisingly enough it is an achievable goal – be non-inflationary and to create proper conditions for investing in efficiently and quickly developing markets worldwide, especially in Africa.

Why do we think that? I believe many will agree with me. There are several reasons for that.

First, these countries are experiencing significant population growth. In Africa... Yesterday, I spoke with the Prime Minister of India. They have a yearly population growth of ten million people. That means ten million more people in India every year. Africa is growing rapidly as well.

Second, these regions of the world are less urbanised, but urbanisation will definitely ramp up, and both people and countries will strive to catch up with the living standards in other regions of the world, including Europe.

All of that, and some other factors, shows that growth rates... Yes, and capital accumulation will happen as well, and is already happening. All of this suggests that we should focus on these regions around the world.

We, in BRICS, are trying to create a working group at the BRICS New Development Bank

in order to develop mechanisms for effective and reliable investment in these countries. I believe this will benefit everyone, including the investors and the recipient countries. New production facilities will be created, which will be efficient and ensure return on investment.

To achieve this, we need to create tools that are immune to external risks, especially those of political nature. I think we can do this. This is the path we will follow.

Thank you. This is a very important question.

**Steven Rosenberg, BBC:** I have read the final BRICS statement, which refers to the need for global and regional stability, security and just peace. In general, the motto of Russia's BRICS chairmanship includes such notions, it seems to me – justice and security. But how does all this relate to your actions in the last two and a half years, with the invasion of Ukraine? Where is justice, stability and security, including the security of Russia? Because there were no drone attacks on Russian territory, no shelling of Russian cities, and no foreign troops occupying Russian territory before the start of the special military operation – this did not happen.

And last: how does this all fit in with the recent statement by British intelligence that Russia has set out to wreak havoc on the streets of Britain and Europe with arson, sabotage and so on? Where is the stability?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** I will start with Russia's security because it is the most important thing for me.

You have mentioned drone attacks and so on. Yes, this was not the case, but there was a much worse situation. The situation was that we were constantly put in our place as we made constant and persistent proposals to establish contacts and relations with the countries of the Western. I can say this for sure. It seemed kind of gentle, but basically, we were always put in our place.

And eventually that placing would have led Russia to the category of second-rate countries to only function as raw material appendages with the loss of the country's sovereignty to a certain degree and to a large extent. In such a capacity Russia is unable not only to develop, it just cannot exist. Russia cannot exist if it loses its sovereignty. This is what matters most. Russia's breaking away from that condition, strengthening its sovereignty and economic, financial and military independence amounts to our security being increased and conditions being created for Russia to steadily develop in the future as an independent, full-fledged and self-sufficient state, with the kind of partners we have in BRICS, who respect Russia's independence, respect our traditions, and whom we treat the same way.

As for justice in the spheres of development and security, I have my arguments regarding this, and I will try to answer your question. Here are my points.

What is justice as applied to development? Consider the recent events that took place during the coronavirus pandemic. What happened at that time? I would like to draw your attention and the attention of all the other media representatives to this issue. During that period, the United States printed about \$6 trillion, and the Eurozone countries printed about \$3 trillion or slightly more than that. All that money was used in the global market to buy everything and anything, primarily food but also medicines and vaccines, which are now being destroyed en masse because they are past their sell-by date. They placed all these products on the market, thereby provoking food inflation and various other kinds of inflation worldwide.

What did the world's leading economies do? They abused their exclusive positions in global finance, in terms of both the dollar and the euro. They printed money and used it to buy up the products they needed the most. They – you – consume more than they produce or have the money to buy. Is this fair? We do not think so, and we would like to change this. This is what BRICS is doing.

Now, about security in general. I have already presented my views regarding Russia's security. I see what you mean. But is it fair in terms of security that you have for years disregarded our repeated requests to our partners not to expand NATO eastward? Is it fair that you lied through your teeth, saying that the bloc would not expand while doing

precisely that in violation of your commitments? Is it fair that you have moved into our underbelly, that is Ukraine, and started building – not preparing to build but actually building military bases there? Is this fair?

Is it fair that you staged a government coup, which I spoke about when answering your colleague's question, in complete disregard of international law and all the tenets of international law and the UN Charter? Is it fair that you financed a government coup in a foreign country, specifically Ukraine, and pushed the situation there towards a hot phase? Is this fair in terms of global security?

Is it fair that you violated your commitments within the OSCE, when all Western countries signed a document stating that no country may ensure its security at the expense of other countries? We warned you against doing this – against expanding NATO – because it infringed on our security. But you did it nevertheless. Is this fair?

This is not fair. We want to change this, and we will change it.

Could you repeat the last part of the question, please?

**Question:** It concerns claims by UK intelligence that Russia is generating mayhem on British streets.

**Vladimir Putin:** Look, thank you for repeating this part of your question, but it is absolute drivel.

You see, the domestic policies of these states have led to the scenes we have been witnessing on the streets in some European cities. However, you and I know all too well, and I have already mentioned this in my remarks, that the European economy is teetering on the brink of a recession, while the Euro zone's leading economies have de facto entered a recession. Even if they do succeed in expanding their economies by a meagre 0.5 percent, this would be attributable to the south, where there are no major manufacturers, as well as to the real estate sector, tourism, etc. But are we to be blamed for that? What do we have to do with this?

All of a sudden, Western countries, I mean European nations, decided not to use our fuel and energy. We have never turned our backs on them. By the way, there is still a functional pipeline in the Baltic Sea – it is part of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. All the German authorities have to do is just press a button to resume supplies. But they are not doing this for political reasons, while their main partner engineered a situation – go figure why and for what reason – that has forced an entire sector of the German economy to move to the United States because the government there offers a more favourable business environment. The primary sources of energy there are three times cheaper than in Europe, if I am not mistaken, or maybe four times, and the tax framework is also different. They know what they are doing. But what do we have to do with all this?

Faced with deteriorating living standards and a higher cost of living, people have responded accordingly. This is quite obvious, and statistics from these European countries make this abundantly clear. But what do we have to do with all this? How can anyone blame us for that? This amounts to shifting the blame onto others and trying to avoid responsibility for erroneous economic and domestic policies.

As far as the economy is concerned, I think this is quite obvious to any impartial expert. However, there have been widespread attempts in Europe and other countries, as well as in the United States to abuse the environmental agenda and climate change-related matters, and they are still doing this. They are running ahead of the train for no particular reason, since the technology has yet to reach a point where these actions would make sense. They are closing everything related to nuclear power generation, or coal, which started even earlier, and in general have launched this crackdown on hydrocarbons.

But has anyone done the math? Can Africa get along without these hydrocarbons? The answer is no. They are trying to impose the latest tools and solutions for preserving the environment on African countries, as well as several other developing markets, but these countries have no money to pay for them. Just give them the money then. But no, they are not getting it. At the same time, I believe that the tools the West uses are neo-colonial practices consisting of humiliating these countries and making them dependent on Western technology and loans. They engage in predatory lending

practices so that these countries would never be able to repay them. This is yet another neo-colonial tool.

This is why we have to start by looking at what the West has achieved with its economic, financial and domestic policies. Of course, people get scared whenever the international situation deteriorates or when they witness escalation in various conflict zones, be it the Middle East or Ukraine. But we are not the ones behind this escalation. It is always the other side that seeks to escalate tension.

But we are ready for this escalation. It is up to you to decide whether the countries who are doing this are also ready.

**Question:** Areej Muhammad, Moscow bureau for Sky News Arabia, United Arab Emirates.

Mr President, a number of reports suggest that Moscow may provide support to Iran in the event of an Israeli attack. What do you think of these reports? Do they accurately reflect the situation? Is Russia considering assistance during this round of escalation in the region?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** First of all, we are very concerned about what is happening in the region. No matter what anyone says, Russia is not interested in further aggravating this conflict. Strategically, we stand to gain nothing from it; we will only face additional problems.

As for assistance to Iran, first of all, we maintain close contact with the Iranian leadership. Of course, we do. We see our role as facilitating a settlement, above all, by [helping the sides] reach compromises. I believe this is possible. In fact, no one in that region – the meetings I had on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit confirm this – that no one in the region wants further escalation. No one wants a major war there.

**Question:** Mr President,



Tursunbek Akun, Kyrgyzstan. I chair the human rights organisation of Kyrgyzstan. I am also the coordinator of the human rights congress in Central Asia. I represent not only Kyrgyzstan, but also the public of all Central Asian countries.

First of all, I congratulate you on the excellent organisation of the BRICS Summit. Like many people around the world, I can hardly envy you for being the President of the Russian Federation. This is an extremely heavy burden, but no matter how heavy it is, you are carrying it with honour.

The West has been trying to isolate Russia from the rest of the world for almost three years, but today that attempt ended in a complete failure. This is confirmed by the results of the BRICS Summit, where your political and state stance was supported by about 35 countries. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and other international organisations are attending this Summit.

Today, historic events occurred on Russian soil, in Kazan, marking the moment when the multipolar world finally gained the upper hand. The unipolar world led by the United States is gradually losing its significance and ground. The BRICS Plus leaders' meeting featured discussions on the most complex issues concerning the Middle East, where Israel has been refusing to comply with the UN resolution, and openly ignoring UN decisions. In fact, the UN Secretary-General was declared persona non grata there. Iran launched a massive strike on Israel, and now Israel is announcing retaliatory actions. According to open sources, it is preparing to bomb Iran's oil and nuclear facilities.

I have a question and a suggestion. US military forces are patrolling the Persian Gulf to help Israel. Should the BRICS countries, chaired by Russia, take steps to offset the unilateral domination of the United States and Israel and give an appropriate response to their actions if they start a war against other states? Along with US warships now patrolling off the Gulf shores, Russian warships and those of other BRICS countries should also be present to support Iran, Palestine, and Lebanon. This alone should put an end to the lawless actions of the United States and Israel.

And the second question, Mr President. The United States and the West are making every effort to denigrate you once again by claiming that the President of Russia is

refusing to negotiate. However, you have laid out your demands and conditions before Zelensky's Swiss summit. They did not accept them. Do your demands remain unchanged? I am sure you never refused to negotiate, did you?

**Vladimir Putin:** A colleague asked about our relations with Iran and our readiness to provide assistance.

First, a few words about the situation in the Middle East. I spoke about it earlier today and would like to repeat it here. I believe that there is no person on Earth whose heart does not bleed when they see what is happening in Gaza. Over 40,000 people, mostly women and children, have been killed. Our position on this is clear, and you know it. We have stated it clearly, including how the situation can be resolved. The solution can only be found by addressing the root causes, the primary one being the lack of a fully recognised, sovereign Palestinian state. It is necessary to implement all relevant UN Security Council resolutions on this matter.

However, we must engage with all participants in the process and, under no circumstances, allow the conflict to escalate or intensify. This includes working with Israel, which, it must be acknowledged, faced a terrorist attack in October of last year.

We must carefully and calmly analyse the situation, ensuring that disproportionate responses to these terror acts are not encouraged. It is essential to engage with all sides and work towards de-escalation, including along the Lebanese track. I believe this is achievable overall, but it requires very careful action. To be honest, I have to take great care as I speak, because every careless word could harm this delicate process. On the whole, I would like to thank you for raising this issue, as it is of utmost importance.

Regarding negotiations with Ukraine, I have spoken on this many times before. We are grateful to President of Turkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who once provided a platform for talks with the Ukrainian delegation. At the end of 2022, through these negotiations, we reached a potential agreement, a draft peace accord. The Ukrainian delegation had initialled it, which meant they were satisfied with it – but then they suddenly backed out.

Recently, Türkiye once again reached out, with President Erdogan's aide calling from New York, saying there were new proposals for negotiations that they asked us to consider. I agreed and said we were open to it. The next day, however, the head of the Kiev regime abruptly announced that they were not planning to negotiate with us. We told our Turkish colleagues: "Thank you for your efforts, but first, please clarify with your clients whether they actually want negotiations or not. Let them say it outright." As far as we know, in Ukraine's parliament, instead of hearing any proposals for peace, another plan was announced – a so-called victory plan. Well, alright then.

As for the victory: last year, during their so-called counteroffensive operation, Ukraine's losses amounted to around 16,000 personnel, both killed and permanently wounded. Now, just in the last month or so, in the Kursk theatre alone, losses have reached 26,000 – again, in irreparable losses and casualties. As for equipment, during last year's counteroffensive, they lost about 18,000 pieces of military hardware, if I remember correctly. Now that number has increased by almost another thousand. True, they lost nearly 100 fewer tanks, but I believe that is because they are simply using fewer tanks due to a shortage in the Ukrainian army.

However, rather than listing such numbers, it would be better to face the realities on the ground and sit down at the negotiating table. But the Kiev regime does not want that. I think this is partly because starting peace talks would require lifting martial law, and immediately after that, they would have to hold presidential elections. It seems they are not ready for that yet. But the ball is in their court.

**Question:** Could you tell us what you would be willing to accept for ending the war in Ukraine, and where is the limit?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** I have just told you that we are ready to discuss a peace agreement in any shape or form based on the reality on the ground. That is to say, I am not ready to accept anything else.

**Question (retranslated):** Thank you very much, Mr President.

I am from Saudi Arabia.

It can be argued that the BRICS group has already moved beyond the stage when it could be referred to as a platform. Can we refer to it as some kind of a centralised governance framework at this juncture?

I think that BRICS needs some form of a centralised governance framework at this current stage in its development, or a body that would serve as a hub for managing all these contacts around the world. For example, one country may be chairing BRICS today, only to be replaced by another country tomorrow, which could be less effective in this role.

My second point on this matter concerns Russia's desire to create a mechanism of this kind for working with its partners. Would it be possible for the Central Bank and the New Development Bank, which already exists, to work with other similar banks in other countries? After all, we do need funds for promoting mutual investment.

My final question is whether you have discussed Saudi Arabia's accession to BRICS?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Let me start with the way we operate the BRICS group. Of course, institutionalising this group has become an obvious imperative for us. You were spot on when you said that we need to give this group a structure. Of course, my colleagues and I will think about it and will work on this matter. Overall, every participating country is unique and self-sufficient, in its own way. At the same time, we are all sincere in our commitment to developing and strengthening our union. Therefore, I do not think that BRICS could fail in any way. I do not see this happening.

At the same time, we would prefer not to create too much red tape within BRICS, so that we have all these officials driving luxury cars and employing all the staff members they need, getting generous salaries, while no one has a clear understanding of who is doing what. That said, I do agree that we need to bring more structure into our efforts, so this is something we can think about.

As for the bank, as I mentioned earlier, we already have the New Development Bank. For now, it operates on a rather modest scale, having provided funding for 100 projects worth about \$32-\$33 billion. As for investment, this is an extremely important topic. It is instrumental for Saudi Arabia, Russia and other countries like China and India to ensure that their investment in emerging markets is reliable and safe. This is something that really matters to us. Our proposals on establishing a new investment platform are designed to achieve this goal.

As for Saudi Arabia, let me assure you that we have been maintaining effective ties with the Crown Prince, who is our friend, as well as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques – the King of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's representatives took part in our work today, and we hope that this cooperation expands and gains momentum in the future.

**Question** (retranslated): My name is Bianca, and I am a reporter for GloboNews, the principal television network in Brazil.

My question pertains to Venezuela. Yesterday, you expressed gratitude to President Nicolas Maduro for his endeavours, including his participation in BRICS. However, Brazil opposes this. I would like to ascertain which side Russia supports and whether Venezuela could join BRICS despite Brazil's objections.

Furthermore, regarding Ukraine, you also expressed appreciation to Brazil and China for their efforts to resolve the conflict in Ukraine through political means. I would like to inquire, on a scale of one to ten, what probability you assign to the success of this peace plan in Ukraine? Additionally, what, in your view, is utterly unacceptable?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** First and foremost, with regard to the probability, it is challenging for me, and I believe it would be inappropriate, to provide any numerical assessment from one to ten. This is due, in part, to the fact that... I do not wish to sound discourteous, but the attempts to initiate negotiations followed by the abandonment of such initiatives... I have mentioned that a high-ranking representative from Turkiye

contacted us directly from New York. Prior to this, Turkiye had also proposed an initiative concerning the situation in the Black Sea, aimed at ensuring safe and free navigation, as well as discussing and formalising certain arrangements and agreements related to the security of nuclear power facilities. We agreed to this. However, the leader of the Kiev regime subsequently declared publicly: no negotiations. We conveyed to our Turkish friends: you should resolve this matter; you present us with a proposal referencing them, we agree, and then we receive a refusal merely a day later – what does that signify? They simply shrugged, indicating the complexity of dealing with such partners.

Why do I assert that it is exceedingly difficult to evaluate this on a scale from one to ten? The behaviour of the Ukrainian leadership today is highly irrational. Trust me, I am well-informed on this matter. I shall refrain from offering further evaluations at this juncture. For instance, I believe their provocations in the Kursk Region are associated with attempts to influence the internal political situation and the electoral process in the United States. They seek, at any cost, to demonstrate to the current Administration and its electorate and the party that their investments in Ukraine have not been futile. They are utilising all means, regardless of the cost, including the lives of their soldiers. They are working for them, not for the interests of the Ukrainian people. Thus, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to assess the situation using any kind of scale.

Turning to Brazil and its perspective on the ongoing developments in Venezuela, we know what they think about it. Russia and Brazil hold different views regarding Venezuela. I discussed this with the President of Brazil the other day. Otherwise, we have developed very good, friendly relations. At least this is how I see it.

Venezuela is fighting for its independence and sovereignty. I remember a time – it happened after the previous election – when an opposition leader came to a square, looked up at the sky and proclaimed in front of the Lord thy God that he viewed himself as President. How ridiculous.

At the time, we discussed this situation with the US leadership. After all, they supported, and still support, the opposition. But they did not say anything at the time,

and just smiled in response. That was it. What an awkward situation, right? Anyone can step outside, look at the sky and say that he or she can be anyone, why not the Pope, for that matter. But this is not how it works. This is not how it is supposed to happen. There are specific election procedures. Go to the polls and win an election.

We believe that President Maduro won the election, and that the election was fair. He has formed his government, and we wish his government and the people of Venezuela every success.

I do hope that Brazil and Venezuela will be able to iron out their differences bilaterally. I know President Lula to be a very decent and honest man, and I am certain he will take an impartial and unbiased position on this situation. During our telephone conversation, he asked me to convey a message to the President of Venezuela. I hope that the situation improves.

As for enabling Venezuela, or any other country for that matter, to join BRICS, I can say that this can only be achieved by consensus. We have a rule whereby all countries within this group must give their consent for accepting any other applicants into the BRICS group. This is the only way this can be done.

I beg your indulgence, but my colleagues are waiting for me at a bilateral meeting. This is a hard choice for me: I can stay here and talk to you, or go to the meeting. So, please, forgive me, and do not hold it against me.

Thank you very much.

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