

Answers to questions from journalist Pavel Zarubin

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Pavel Zarubin: Mr President, your interview with Tucker Carlson has already garnered one billion views. While there has been a lot of positive feedback, we can see the kind of comments that Western leaders are making. For example, the Prime Minister of the UK and the German Chancellor labelled your explanation that the special military operation had been caused by a threat from NATO as “absurd” and “clearly ridiculous.” What do you think of this?

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: First of all, it is good that they have been watching and listening to what I say. If we are not able to maintain a direct dialogue today due to certain reasons, we should be grateful to Mr Carlson for acting as an intermediary. So, it is good that they are watching and listening.

The fact that they are distorting my words and misrepresenting things is concerning. Why? Because I never said those things. Nowhere in the interview did I say that the start of the special military operation in Ukraine is linked to the threat of a NATO attack on Russia. Where in the interview did I make such a statement? The interview was recorded. They can go back and pinpoint exactly where I said this.

What I actually said was that we have been constantly deceived about NATO’s non-expansion to the east. By the way, then NATO Secretary-General, a representative of Germany, made such a promise. He explicitly stated NATO would not expand even an inch to the east. After that, NATO proceeded to expand five times, completely deceiving us. Of course, we were concerned about the possibility of Ukraine being drawn into NATO, as it poses a security threat to us. So, this is what I actually said.

However, what served as the trigger was the current Ukrainian officials’ outright refusal to comply with the Minsk agreements, coupled with Ukraine’s relentless attacks on the unrecognised republics of Donbass, the Donetsk People’s Republic

and the Lugansk People's Republic, which continued for eight years and resulted in numerous deaths. Realising that there are no prospects of resolving this problem under the Minsk agreements, these republics formally requested our recognition. We recognised them and signed a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance. After that, as required by the UN Charter, we fulfilled our obligations under the treaty.

As I said, we did not initiate this war; rather, we are striving to end it. During the first phase, we tried to achieve this through peaceful means, specifically, through the Minsk agreements. However, it became apparent that we had been given the runaround once again. Both the former German Chancellor and the former President of France admitted and publicly stated that they had never intended to honour the agreements and had merely used them to buy time to supply the Ukrainian regime with more weapons, which they successfully did. Our only regret is that we did not take action sooner, believing that we were dealing with honest people.

Pavel Zarubin: Carlson faced criticism before the interview, and since then he has been accused of asking too few probing questions and of allegedly being too soft on you, which is why you felt so comfortable with him. Do you think you overwhelmed the American journalist with your authority?

Vladimir Putin: I believe that your Carlson – “your” as a member of the journalistic community – is a dangerous man, and here is why. To be honest, I thought he would be quite aggressive and ask so-called tough questions.

I was not just prepared for this, I wanted it, because it would give me the opportunity to respond with equally sharp answers, which would add a certain character to our conversation. But he chose a different tactic. He tried to interrupt me several times, but still, surprisingly for a Western journalist, he remained patient and listened to my lengthy monologues, especially when I spoke about history. He gave me no cause for doing what I was prepared to do. That is why, to tell the truth, I did not fully enjoy that interview. But he acted strictly according to his plan, and he did what he intended. As for how informative it turned out to be in the end, that is not for me to judge. It is for the viewers, listeners and possibly readers of this material to judge.

Pavel Zarubin: Following that interview, calls have been made to impose sanctions against Tucker Carlson, and there are even rumours that he could be arrested. Is this possible?

Vladimir Putin: Assange has been locked up, and few people mention him now. Only those close to him still talk about it, and that is all. One specific feature of public opinion is that people tend to forget quickly. But Assange was at least accused of revealing state secrets. Carlson cannot be charged with that because he did not touch upon any secrets. Nevertheless, anything is possible, theoretically, in modern-day America, in the United States today.

This would be bad for Carlson. I feel sorry for him, but it was his choice. He knew what he was doing. On the other hand, this could be a good opportunity for people around the world to see the true nature of modern “liberal democratic” (in scare quotes) dictatorship, which is supposedly represented in the current ruling class in the United States. This would reveal its true face.

Pavel Zarubin: Carlson said that after the interview... I wanted to ask you a question so that we can put the doubt to rest. Carlson said that after the interview your conversation continued. What did you discuss? Now everyone wants to know.

Vladimir Putin: As I have already said, and as far as I can see, he had a plan for the interview and he stuck to it. But there were other topics too that had to be raised, in my opinion. Still, I decided not to inject new topics into our conversation without being prompted to do so by the journalist.

During the taped part of the interview, we should have discussed efforts to use inter-ethnic relations and the Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire as a way of denigrating and demonising Russia. One of the subjects we discussed when the cameras were turned off was what US Secretary of State, Mr Blinken, mentioned on several occasions. He said that his relatives, his great-grandfather, fled the Jewish pogroms and left Russia.

This topic keeps surfacing across the world, in Europe and in the United States. Let me reiterate that it is being used to demonise and discredit Russia and to demonstrate that it is home to barbaric, cruel people and outlaws. However, we can clarify many issues if we try to understand what today’s US Secretary of State actually said and if we look beyond political slogans by focusing on the substance.

All this information is in our archives. For example, Mr Blinken’s great-grandfather did leave the Russian Empire. I think that he was born somewhere in the Poltava Province, and then moved to Kiev before emigrating. This raises the following question: does Mr

Blinken think that Kiev and the surrounding territories are historically Russian land? This is my first point here.

Second, if he says that his great-grandfather left Russia to escape the Jewish pogroms, this, at least, means, and I would like to stress this point, that in 1904, since this is when Mr Blinken's great-grandfather left Kiev for the United States, Ukraine did not exist – this is what he seems to believe. This way, Mr Blinken seems to share our views. That said, he should have refrained from saying so in public. This could undermine his cause.

Pavel Zarubin: Just the other day, there were articles in the German media saying that the grandfather of Germany's current Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock was a devoted Nazi. Considering the way the relations between our countries have been unfolding over the past years, could it be that the Nazi virus still exists in this country at a genetic level or something like that?

Vladimir Putin: This is an iteration of nationalism, albeit a radical one. By the way, something has just occurred to me about these pogroms. They took place mainly in the south and southwest of the Russian Empire. In fact, this is where present-day Ukraine is, for example in Kiev, in 1905. If Mr Blinken's ancestor left in 1904, the first pogrom in Kiev, I mean a big one, happened in 1905, which means that his great-grandfather, or his great-great-grandfather, could only find out what happened there from newspapers, or from those who were in Kiev at that time.

In fact, these tragic mass atrocities started in the early 19th century. I think it was in 1820 or in 1821 when the first major pogrom took place. We know that these crimes took place in Odessa, and later in Melitopol, in Zhitomir, and in other cities of present-day Ukraine, as well as in Byelorussia. There were also several incidents of this kind in Siberia, but the very first one happened after a Greek Patriarch was killed in Constantinople. This was when the Greeks who lived there thought that the Jews were involved in the assassination in one way or another.

But this is not what matters here. What does matter is that there were resistance militias who tried to counter these attacks, formed by Jewish and Russian youth, while the government, even the tsarist authorities, delivered a proper assessment of these tragic events and tried to stop them, including by sending in the army. Let me reiterate that this is a whole different story.

Speaking of nationalism, Nazism and fascism, you know, I will tell you something that may sound strange. First, Ms, what is her name?

Annalena Baerbock.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, Baerbock (I do not want to mispronounce her surname) represents the Greens party. Many representatives of this part of the European political spectrum speculate on people's fears and engage in fearmongering about what might happen in the world due to climate change. Later, they speculate on these fears, fanned by themselves, and follow their political line that differs greatly from their earlier programme, with which they assumed power. This is what is now happening in Germany. For example, the share of coal has increased in the national energy mix. The share of coal was already higher than in Russia, and it has now increased even more. I mean, what happened to the "green" agenda? This is the first thing.

Second, the German Foreign Minister and people like her, are, of course, hostile towards Russia. In my opinion, she is also hostile towards her own country because it is hard to imagine such a high-ranking politician treating the economic interests of her country and people with such disdain. Right now, I will not go into details, but this is exactly what is happening in reality, and we can see this.

The next part of my statement will probably sound out of tune with what I have just said. I do not think that the current generations of Germans should assume complete political responsibility for everything perpetrated by Nazi Germany. It is impossible to blame the current generation of people for what Hitler and his cronies perpetrated in Germany and other parts of the world, in Europe and so on. I believe that this would be unfair. To be frank, sticking this label on the entire German nation is an unfair position; this misuses what people experienced, what the people of the Soviet Union experienced. To my mind, this is unfair and inappropriate. We should proceed from present-day realities and see who is doing what, and what policy they are conducting.

By the way, in this connection, it would be useful to do the following. As I see it, many people in many countries are voicing this viewpoint; unfortunately, this concerns even those countries where this issue should not be politicised.

What am I talking about? I am referring to an exceptionalism of certain nations, as compared to others, some kind of exclusivity, etc. Just listen: this is how Nazism started. Now that this has become so widespread, it would be appropriate to conduct

this anti-fascist and anti-Nazi propaganda and work at the same global level. I repeat, at the global level.

And this should not be done at some state level. This will prove effective only if it is done at the level of public conscience and public initiative, regardless of the country where it takes place.

Pavel Zarubin: The European Union is generally in panic over Donald Trump's potential return to the presidential post in the United States. Trump completely dumbfounded European leaders with his recent statements, made just a couple of days ago, and they are not trying to hide it. Trump said that the United States must protect the European countries only if the European countries can pay for it. Why has this sort of relationship come about between Europe, the European leaders and politicians, and Donald Trump?

Vladimir Putin: Trump has always been considered a non-system politician. He has his own ideas about how the US should develop its relations with its allies. There was friction before. Take, for example, the United States and its withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol on environmental protection. It was tense. But the then President of the United States decided that the United States should withdraw from the agreement, despite the high appeal of the environmental agenda. He believed that the agreement causes harm to the US economy. That was all. He stood his ground and that was it. There was a massive wave of criticism from European leaders but he still did it. Yes, he made certain changes later.

How is Trump's stance different? It is fundamentally no different. He wanted to force Europeans to raise their defence expenditure or, as he said, to pay the United States for protection and for opening a nuclear umbrella over their heads. Well, I don't know, it is their problem, they need to work it out for themselves. There may be logic from his perspective. There is none from the Europeans' perspective. Europe wanted the United States to continue performing certain functions that it took up at the establishment of NATO, at no charge. It is their business.

I personally believe that there is absolutely no point in NATO. Its only purpose is to serve as a tool of US foreign policy. If the United States considers this tool no longer necessary, that is their decision.

Pavel Zarubin: The current President of the United States Biden has been causing a mounting wave of speculation around the world concerning his health. We are talking

about the president of one of the world's biggest nuclear powers, all while witnessing very peculiar, to put it mildly, scenes almost every day. What do you think when you see and hear all this?

Vladimir Putin: What this suggests to me is that the election campaign and domestic political struggles are gaining traction in the United States. These processes are exacerbating so I do not think that it would be appropriate for us to weigh in on them.

You see, when Biden and I met in Switzerland, even if it happened several years ago, in fact, three years ago, there were already those back then who were saying that he was unfit for office. I did not see anything of this sort. Well, he did keep glancing at his notes but, to be honest, I looked at mine too. Nothing special about that. And the fact that he banged his head on something when descending from a helicopter, well, who of us has never banged his head on something, let them throw the first stone, as the saying goes.

Overall, what I think... I am not a doctor, so I do not think that I can make any comments on this topic. We must look elsewhere, focus on the political position instead. I believe that the current administration is pursuing what amounts to a harmful and erroneous policy. This is what I told President Biden back then.

Pavel Zarubin: Therefore, the question we had four years ago is taking on new relevance today. Who would be better for us? Biden or Trump?

Vladimir Putin: Biden. He has more experience, and he is more predictable too, an old school politician. That said, we will work with any leader of the United States who has the trust of the American people.

Pavel Zarubin: Allow me to come back to the Tucker Carlson interview. We mentioned statements by the current German and British leaders. We also heard from the person whom you mentioned in your interview with Carlson with the following words: "Where is Mr Johnson now?" According to Arakhamia's confessions, it was Johnson who ordered Kiev not to sign a deal with Moscow and to keep fighting instead. Had the Kiev authorities ignored this kind of advice, how would events have unfolded?

Vladimir Putin: This is what Mr Arakhamia said. After all, he... Look at the recording. We did not force him to say these words. He spoke his mind. Why he did so is another

matter. I do not know. Maybe he likes saying things as they are. He did say that had we fulfilled the agreements negotiated in Istanbul, the war would have ended one and a half years ago. He was the one who said it. I think Arakhamia's recordings should be included in the interview with Carlson.

Why has the West adopted this position? I am referring to the West, primarily the Anglo-Saxon world, since former Prime Minister Johnson would have never travelled there on his own initiative, without seeking Washington's advice. These consultations probably took place, and I think that he was on a business mission, with expenses covered by the US administration, including the per diem. So he went there on a mission to make the case for fighting Russia until the last Ukrainian (without saying so directly), or should we say until victory and Russia's strategic defeat. This is probably the kind of result they hoped for.

However, I can repeat here what I told Mr Carlson. If they see that it is not working out the way they expected, they probably have to make adjustments. But this is a matter of the art of government and politics, since politics, as we all know, is the art of compromise.

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