

Anti-Hitler Alliance: A Lesson for Our Time

June 4—Russian President Vladimir Putin today granted an interview to the French TV channels Europe-1 and TF-1, prior to leaving for France for the June 6 D-Day commemoration ceremonies. The full [text](#) is available in English on the Russian Presidential website.

The President began the interview by paying tribute to the alliance of countries that freed Europe from the Nazi enslavement, including the fighters of the French Resistance, and cited this anti-Hitler alliance as the model for relations in the future:

“This will be an important event for Europe and the rest of the world. We will pay tribute to those who prevented Nazism from enslaving Europe, and I believe that Russia’s attendance is a momentous event. The thing is that Russia and the anti-Hitler coalition countries, including France, were allies in that struggle for freedom, and my country played a vital and maybe even the decisive role in defeating Nazism. But we’ll never forget the French Resistance fighters and the French soldiers who fought side by side with us on the Soviet-German front, which is also called the Eastern front. I believe that this should not only remind us about our history, but also help to promote our relations now and in the future.”

The Ukraine Crisis

Putin stressed that it was not Russia which triggered the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, but rather “our European friends and our friends from the United States [who] supported the anti-constitutional armed coup.” When the interviewers told him that the United States claims to have proof that Russia sent in its troops and supplied weapons, he replied:

“Proof? Why don’t they show it? The entire world remembers the U.S. Secretary of State demonstrating the evidence of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, waving around some test tube with washing powder in the UN Security Council. Eventually, the U.S. troops invaded Iraq, Saddam Hussein was hanged, and later it turned out there had never been any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. You know, it’s one thing to say



Russian Presidential Press and Information Office
President Vladimir Putin arrives in Deauville, France, for the anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 2014.

things and another to actually have evidence.”

Putin emphasized that Russia had no other choice of action in the case of Crimea, and that following the West’s support for an “anti-constitutional state coup in Ukraine,” Russia could not be sure that Ukraine would not join a North Atlantic military bloc, stressing that if Ukraine were to join NATO, then “NATO’s infrastructure will move directly towards the Russian border, which cannot leave us indifferent.” In response to those who accuse Russia of pursuing an aggressive military policy, Putin responded that, in fact, it is “the United States [which] is pursuing the most aggressive and toughest policy to defend their own interests...”

“There are basically no Russian troops abroad while U.S. troops are everywhere. There are U.S. military bases everywhere around the world and they are always involved in the fates of other countries, even though they are thousands of kilometers away from U.S. borders. So it is ironic that our U.S. partners accuse us of breaching some of these rules.”

Putin pointed out that Russia’s defense budget is minimal compared to the defense budget of the United States, which “is larger than the combined military budgets of every country in the world—every country—combined. So who’s pursuing an aggressive policy?”

Putin stated Russia is not trying to establish an empire or even to sustain some kind of Russian nationalism, but rather to defend its national interests, which include developing the territory of Russia within its own border and also pursuing “economic integration”

with neighboring countries, by means of the newly established Eurasian Union. Asked whether he thinks the world is on the verge of another Cold War, Putin responded: “I hope we are not on the verge of any war,” and said that, while it appears President Obama has chosen not to meet with him while in Europe, Putin would be ready for such a meeting.

A Question of Sovereignty

The Russian President called for Kiev to be in a dialogue with Russia, and said he might meet with the Ukrainian President in France in the context of the D-Day ceremonies. He noted that Ukrainian President-elect Petro Poroshenko could immediately halt the Ukrainian Army’s attacks against the Ukrainian people, and start a constructive dialogue with Russia over the future of the region. Asked whether Russia respects Ukraine’s sovereignty, he stated: “Yes, we recognize its sovereignty. Moreover, we’d like Ukraine to act as a sovereign state. Joining any military bloc or any other rigid integration alliance amounts to a partial loss of sovereignty.”

Putin referenced the vision of a Europe of sovereign nations as presented by France’s late President Charles de Gaulle, whom he praised for protecting France’s sovereignty as opposed to those who would cede their sovereignty to a supranational body: “I think of the Gaullist

tradition and General Charles de Gaulle, who protected France’s sovereignty. I think this deserves respect.”

Asked about Russia’s support for the Syrian government, he said, “We fear the breaking up of Syria,” referencing the al-Qaeda connections of the rebels, and stressing that Russia fears Syria will become “a second Afghanistan ... a completely uncontrollable spawning ground for the terrorist threat, including for European countries.” He noted that Russia wants to work with the United States and Europe to bring stability back to Syria, by working with a legitimate government.

Throughout the interview, Putin presented a calm, confident demeanor and was never ruffled by the nasty tone of the interviewers. Upon the two journalists’ return to France, Jean-Pierre Elkabbach of Radio Europe 1 reported his impressions of the interview, according to a report on Russia’s 1tv: “It was a very free interview without any submission of the questions beforehand. Putin was clearly improvising. And I would like to say that I know a lot of French leaders who would have something to learn in this regard. Gilles Bouleau and I prepared well. But neither Putin nor his entourage saw or approved these questions beforehand.” The reporters admitted, said 1tv, “that they came to Russia with the certainty that President Putin would dodge sharp questions, and did not expect such a frank discussion.”



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