Vladimir Putin's speech to the Defence Ministry Board

Moscow • 17 December 2025

Expanded meeting of the Defence Ministry Board

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Mr Belousov, Comrades,

Today, at the expanded meeting of the Defence Ministry Board, we will discuss our results over the past period and identify priority tasks for strengthening the Armed Forces and enhancing the country's defence capability.

I would like to highlight that the past year has been a significant milestone in addressing the objectives of the special military operation. The Russian Army has taken and firmly holds the strategic initiative along the entire frontline.

Our troops are advancing with confidence and grinding down the hostile forces, defeating enemy units, its groups forces and reserves, including so-called elite formations trained in Western centres and equipped with modern foreign weaponry.

To date, over 300 communities have been liberated this year, among them major urban centres that the enemy had transformed into heavily fortified strongholds, extensively featuring permanent defensive structures. Yet, they proved unable to withstand the courage and superior military skill of our personnel.

The positions we have seized, the bridgeheads established in recent months, and the unique tactical and operational experience gained in breaching the enemy's in-depth defences now enable us to intensify the pace of our advance in key strategic sectors. We take pride in the heroism of our soldiers and officers on the front lines, and of all who stand in defence of Russia and the safety of our citizens.

I would also like to acknowledge our comrades-in-arms from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. By the decision of Comrade Chairman of State Affairs Kim Jong-un, DPRK personnel were deployed to participate in the liberation of the Kursk Region. They fought with valour and courage alongside Russian soldiers against the enemy and took part in the large-scale and exceptionally difficult mission of demining the liberated Kursk soil.

It is our duty to forever honour the memory of all our fallen comrades and to support their families, their children and parents. The state will fulfil all necessary obligations in this regard. I ask you now to observe a moment of silence in memory of those who gave their lives for the Motherland.

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(A moment of silence is announced.)

Comrades, members of the board,

We are aware that that the Kiev regime is backed by the potential of the countries comprising the world's largest military-political bloc, NATO. Large-scale military assistance is being continuously provided, with advisers, instructors, and mercenaries dispatched, and intelligence data shared.

Amidst such challenging conditions, our troops demonstrate high combat readiness and proficiency. The capabilities of the Russian army are being constantly enhanced, and efforts to strengthen the Armed Forces have been unwavering in recent years.

I refer to the improvement of their combat composition, qualitative advancements in the military command system, in operational and combat training, and, naturally, the increased efficiency of the defence industry, which has rapidly reconfigured numerous production and technological processes and is manufacturing essential products in ever-growing volumes.

Owing to the precise work of the defence-industrial complex, the army and navy are promptly equipped with modern weaponry and hardware. The Ground Forces are receiving missile systems and artillery with high-precision capabilities, loitering munitions, a diverse range of unmanned aerial vehicles, and robotic systems.

The Aerospace Forces are being supplied with upgraded missiles and aerial bombs equipped with guided planning and correction modules, capable of operating effectively in complex jamming environments. Many here are aware of the marked improvement in efficacy achieved recently – at times exceeding 80 percent. I wish to express my gratitude to those involved in this work. This constitutes substantive and tangible support.

This year, the Navy has been augmented with new submarines, including the Knyaz Pozharsky strategic missile submarine cruiser, as well as 19 surface combatants and support vessels.

Successful tests have been conducted for the Burevestnik strategic cruise missile with unlimited range and the Poseidon unmanned submersible. Given their nuclear propulsion systems, these platforms will remain unique and unmatched for the foreseeable future, ensuring Russia's strategic parity, security, and global standing for decades to come. We will continue to develop these systems, enhancing and perfecting them, but they are already in service.

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By the end of the year, the medium-range missile system armed with the Oreshnik hypersonic missile will be placed on combat duty. Its first operational deployment was conducted last November.

The high standards of training of our units and formations, and their ability to fulfil the most complicated tasks have been reaffirmed during regular exercises, including with the participation of our foreign allies and partners, with whom we share the experience we have accumulated during the special military operation.

In particular, I would like to mention the good results demonstrated during the Zapad 2025 joint strategic exercise. All objectives involving the protection of the security of the Union State from potential external aggression have been achieved.

Today, we can see that the geopolitical situation remains tense throughout the world, and even critical in some regions. NATO countries are actively building up and modernising their offensive forces, and creating and deploying new types of weapons, including in outer space.

Meanwhile, people in Europe are being indoctrinated with fears of an inevitable confrontation with Russia, with claims that preparations must be made for a major war. Various figures who have held or continue to hold positions of responsibility appear to have simply forgotten what that responsibility entails.

They are whipping up hysteria, guided by momentary, personal or group political interests rather than the interests of their people. I have said many times that this is a lie and an irrational narrative about an imaginary Russian threat to European countries. But they are doing this deliberately.

The truth is that Russia has always, until the last possible moment tried, even in the most complicated circumstances, to find diplomatic solutions to differences and conflicts. Responsibility for the failure to use these chances lies squarely with those who believe that they can use the language of force with us.

We continue to call for developing mutually beneficial and equal cooperation with the United States and European countries, and for creating a joint security system in the Eurasian region. We welcome nascent progress in our dialogue with the new US administration, which cannot be said of the current leaders of the majority of European countries.

At the same time, we realise that our Armed Forces remain the key guarantor of Russia's sovereignty and independence in any international situation. As I have stated, we must work consistently to strengthen them.

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What I would like to emphasise here are the objectives to be set in the area of military development, taking into account the dynamics of the situation along the line of contact, among other factors.

First. The goals of the special military operation will undoubtedly be achieved. We would prefer to accomplish this and address the root causes of the conflict through diplomatic means. However, if the opposing side and its foreign patrons refuse to engage in substantive dialogue, Russia will achieve the liberation of its historical lands by military means. The task of creating and expanding a security buffer zone will also be carried out consistently.

Second. Work on modernising the Armed Forces must continue at a rapid pace and to a high standard, primarily within the framework of the new State Armament Programme for 2027-2036, which is currently under development.

As I have repeatedly emphasised, the experience gained during the special military operation, emerging trends in combat tactics, and rapidly developing military technologies must be fully taken into account.

Key areas of the state programme include air and missile defence systems, command and control systems, electronic warfare capabilities, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) operating in all environments.

Of course, improving our strategic nuclear forces remains a priority. As before, they will play a decisive role in deterring aggression and maintaining the global balance of power.

Today, Russia marks Strategic Missile Forces Day. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate veterans, service members, and civilian personnel of the Strategic Missile Forces on their professional holiday and to wish them continued success and all the very best.

Third. The Russian army must continue to remain at the forefront of technological progress. This means accelerating the introduction of robotics, information technologies, and new materials into the Armed Forces, as well as expanding the use of artificial intelligence in command and control systems and autonomous combat platforms.

Fourth. It is essential to equip the orbital constellation with next-generation spacecraft. This will provide the troops with high-speed, secure communications, while also significantly improving the quality of intelligence and high-precision navigation data.

Next. In May of this year, the Strategy for the Development of the Navy until 2050 was approved, outlining its prospective configuration. The clear and timely implementation

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of this strategy will enable the modernisation of the Navy and enhance its effectiveness in carrying out combat tasks across all theatres of military operations.

Furthermore, it is imperative to continue actively developing military and military-technical cooperation with foreign countries – our allies and partners – to strengthen the collective security system and the Union State. Overall, efforts in this direction constitute a significant factor in enhancing regional and international security.

Comrades,

One of the state's priorities is the expansion of social guarantees for participants of the special military operation and their family members, as well as for all our servicemen.

Over the past year, the Ministry of Defence, in collaboration with the Defenders of the Fatherland State Foundation, has made substantial progress in improving the quality of medical care for wounded servicemen, addressing their rehabilitation and employment needs, ensuring timely payments, and implementing other measures, including additional forms of social support for the families, children, and parents of fallen servicemen.

I must emphasise that there remains work to be done here. Currently, in preparation for the Direct Line, it has become evident that many questions on these topics are being raised. We will undoubtedly revisit this matter with the leadership of the Ministry of Defence.

I would particularly like to commend the heroic efforts of medical officers and personnel, who often perform the impossible to save our fighters and return them to active duty after treatment. Unique experience has been gained in providing medical and psychological support to servicemen with injuries, trauma, and illnesses related to combat operations.

This experience must be incorporated not only into the work of military medical institutions, but also into civilian healthcare, and must be enshrined in legislation.

Undoubtedly, efforts to index servicemen's monetary allowances must continue, and the pace of providing them with permanent and service housing must not decline. Every Defender of the Motherland must be confident that the state will provide them and their loved ones with all necessary social support.

In conclusion, I would like to once again express my gratitude to the soldiers and officers currently on the front lines, to all participants of the special military operation for their heroism and dedication, and to extend my best wishes to the leadership, all personnel, and civilian staff of the Ministry of Defence for further achievements in service to the Motherland and our people.

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I firmly believe that you will continue to steadfastly safeguard the sovereignty and security of Russia.

Thank you for your attention.

The floor is yours, Mr Belousov.

<…>

Vladimir Putin: Comrades,

I would like to thank the Minister for providing a detailed analysis of the status of matters in the Armed Forces and along the line of contact.

As is customary, I will share a few general considerations with you. I will probably not say anything that you do not already know, but I still believe it is important to say it.

I would like to begin with our recent history, with the most recent developments, in order to have a clear idea of where we are now and why we are where we are.

You have heard me say it many times before, yet I think it is worth saying it again. Shortly after the Soviet Union had fallen apart, we thought we would quickly become members of the "civilised" family of European nations and the civilised Western family more broadly. Today, it turns out that civilisation there is nonexistent, and degradation is all there is there, but that is not the point. Back then, we thought it was a good thing and that we would become a full-fledged and equal member of that family. Nothing of the kind happened. You see? Nothing of the kind happened, and we did not become an equal member of that family.

On the contrary, they started going after Russia from all angles, and even ratcheted the pressure up. Almost everything concerning Russia was decided from a position of strength. They would pat us on the shoulder and invite us to attend various events, but the West used force, including military force, to push its Russia-related interests.

Truly so. Supporting separatism and terrorism was clearly demonstrated and carried out by supplying terrorists with weapons and money and providing them with political and media support across the board. Economic restrictions were imposed on us as well, and that, too, is about forceful pressure, and a very serious one at that.

I remember this very well. When we said that we needed to protect our country against terrorism, we were told to do whatever we needed to, but not to do certain things or else we will not be eligible for loans or renewed easy terms." This was direct forceful pressure and outright restriction in the economic sphere.

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Destructive instruments aimed at destabilising Russia from within were also deployed – and this was entirely deliberate. We have seen the same pattern in other countries: mechanisms for undermining domestic political stability were created and put to use.

Of course, by then, the entire post-war security architecture had ceased to function. Everything began to erode rapidly, and the established rules, along with the UN Charter, were cast aside. Consider the events in Yugoslavia. How did that align with the UN Charter? Was that not the use of force? We have spoken of this many times, but the fact remains: they simply did as they saw fit, acting at their own discretion. They would manipulate the situation and force a vote if they could. If not, to hell with it – they applied armed force directly. In the end, they ravaged and dismantled Yugoslavia and fractured the Serbian people, scattering a single nation across different state entities.

I will not dwell now on NATO expansion, though its role is obvious. Even today, we are told we have no right to dictate how others should ensure their security or to deprive them of their choices. We are not depriving anyone of anything. We are not making exceptional demands. We are simply insisting that the promises made to us be honoured. It was publicly stated that NATO would not expand eastward. What followed? They disregarded this entirely, and one wave of expansion followed another. I repeat: we are not asking for anything extraordinary – only that the assurances given to us be fulfilled.

I believe everyone here understands that agreements with the Soviet Union were treated one way, and agreements with modern Russia, after the USSR's disintegration, quite another. All our interests were simply ignored.

This ultimately led to the coup in Ukraine. What kind of democracy is this, the one we have been lectured about for decades? It was a straightforward armed power grab. Had they gone to the polls – as I have said countless times – they would have won the elections fairly. Nothing stood in their way; victory was assured. But no – they simply demonstrated force, and that was that.

Thereafter, they began violently suppressing the southeast, their southeastern regions, effectively unleashing a war. It was not we who started the war in 2022; it was the destructive forces in Ukraine, backed by the West. In essence, the West itself instigated this conflict. We are only seeking to end it, to stop it. Initially, we pursued peaceful means through the Minsk negotiations, as you will recall. Eventually, we were compelled to introduce a military component once it became clear we were being deceived. That deception has since been laid bare: senior officials have stated unabashedly that they never intended to honour the agreements, but only to buy time to arm and equip Ukrainian forces. They engineered a coup, initiated military operations, and deliberately – I am convinced, deliberately – precipitated a war.

President Trump has said that had he been in office at the time, none of this would have happened. He may well be right. Because the previous administration deliberately brought matters to an armed conflict. And I think the reason is clear: they believed Russia could be swiftly broken up and dismantled. European "swine underlings" immediately joined the efforts of that previous American administration, hoping to profit from our country's collapse: to reclaim what had been lost in earlier historical periods and to exact a form of revenge. As has now become evident to all, every one of those attempts, every destructive design against Russia, has ended in complete and total failure.

Russia has demonstrated its resilience in the economy, finance, domestic politics, the state of society, and, ultimately, in its defence capability. Yes, there are still many issues and problems in this area.

I can see people here in this hall who came directly from the front, from the frontlines, from the line of combat contact. They are sitting here, I see them. And they know better than anyone that the army still faces many problems; they encounter them every day.

And yet, our Armed Forces have become completely different –fundamentally different. The most important result of the special military operation is that Russia has regained its status as a fully sovereign state. Russia has become sovereign in every sense of the word. We have regained this status to a large extent thanks to your participation, thanks to the contribution of the Armed Forces.

Our army has become totally different. This applies to troop command, tactics, strategy, equipment, and the work and performance of the defence and industrial complex. This also concerns the strategic component: our nuclear shield is more updated than the nuclear component of any officially recognised nuclear power. How much modernised is it, over 80 percent?

Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov: Ninety-two percent.

Vladimir Putin: Our nuclear forces are 92 percent modernised. No other nuclear power in the world has such a level.

We have new armaments and new weapon systems. No one else in the world has these, and no one will for a long time. I have mentioned this before and we know Avangard, Burevestnik, and other systems.

Our ground forces are also growing and strengthening. Yes, I repeat, those who have come from the front know that many problems remain. But these troops are completely different now: they are battle-hardened. There is no other army like this in the world; it simply does not exist.

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Yes, the Ukrainian Armed Forces are also going through the ordeal of military action. But, unfortunately for them, just as the Ukrainian state itself is disintegrating – symbolised by the "golden toilets" – their armed forces are also degrading. This is evidenced by the growing number of deserters: more than 100,000 criminal cases for desertion alone have been opened in Ukraine, and the total number of deserters is in the hundreds of thousands. This is a clear sign of degradation.

And our Armed Forces are on the rise. I repeat, much remains to be done, but it will all be done. We have always stated – and I want to reaffirm this – that we remain ready for negotiations and ready to resolve all the problems that have arisen in recent years through peaceful means. The United States administration has demonstrated such readiness, and we are engaged in dialogue with it. I hope the same will eventually occur in Europe. It is unlikely with the current political elites, but it will be inevitable as we continue to strengthen, if not with the present politicians, then with a change of political elites in Europe.

I would like to thank you for your dedicated work in 2025 and express my confidence and hope that all the challenges facing our country will be successfully resolved.

Thank you very much. *(Applause.)*

All the best.