

Putin interrupts meeting with Lukashenko to ski: How many hidden talents does the Russian leader have?

El Ciudadano · 23 de febrero de 2021



Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Belarusian counterpart Alexandr Lukashenko interrupted their talks in Sochi on Monday. In the middle of their meeting, they decided to go skiing on the slopes of the Krasnaya Poliana station. This was one of the main venues for the Sochi 2014 Olympics.

After skiing, the two leaders rode snowmobiles and continued their negotiations over a working lunch. Is this type of meeting normal? For diplomacy, in general, it is not. However, for Putin it is any given political day. Therefore, we will review some of the innumerable skills – and also ideas – that have turned the Russian leader into a kind of myth or living legend.

Putin skiing with his Belarusian counterpart in Sochi

Who is Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin?

Alexander the Great stood 1.60 meters tall and ruled an empire stretching from Greece and Egypt to India for 13 years (336–323 BC). Napoleon Bonaparte was 1.68 meters tall and thus conquered and controlled Europe for 11 years (1804–1815). Vladimir Putin is 1.70 meters tall, 21 years old in the mecca of politics and a decade as one of the most powerful men on the planet. Even 'his reign' seems destined to extend for 36 years.

Putin is president of the Russian Federation – the largest nation in the world – which was the head of the former Soviet Union. It is an economic, energy and nuclear power. His name inspires respect – fear in some cases – in leaders as different as Joe Biden, Xi Jinping, Kim Jong-un, Narendra Modi, Benjamin Netanyahu, Hasan Rohani and Angela Merkel. Everyone wants a photo with him.

Since 1999 he has alternated as Prime Minister and President, a position he will hold until 2024. However, the Russian people approved a constitutional referendum, held between June 25 to July 1, 2020, which allows Putin to run for two additional terms of office. six years each.



Putin considers Xi Jinping a friend, rather than an ally. Together they make up 1–2 of world politics and power. Photo: AP

The hypothetical reelection of Putin is more than probable. In 2018 he won the presidency with more than 76% popular support. Today, despite Russia being one of the countries most affected by the pandemic, he

continues to enjoy good ratings of approval. The big media criticize him with caution; great leaders dare not trample on his name. All this has created an aura of mystery around his figure, with stories, urban legends and theories. These range from those verifiable to some loaded with mysticism.

The origins of the man, the myth, the legend

«He is the greatest spy Russia has ever had», «His wisdom is infinite», «He is an experienced air, sea and land explorer», «He is a 'Dan' superior to Chuck Norris in taekwondo» (yes, you read that right, Chuck Norris), «He has the ability to communicate with animals» and many others. But how did he stop being a nobody to become the «most important world leader since Winston Churchill»? This is how The Intercept defines him.



The Russian President has his own comic, «Super Putin», about a martial arts specialist who manages to save humanity from the end of the world

He was born and raised in the city of Leningrad, present-day Saint Petersburg. His family was so poor that he had to share an apartment with two other families. “We weren’t rich, but we had a television. Although my parents lived from day to day and often borrowed money until they got paid», he recounted in an interview in 2018. He has even said that he hunted rats on the stairs of his house to «have fun».

In the troubled Soviet Union of the 1960s, and given his short stature, he dabbled in martial arts at age 14 to learn to defend himself against those who bullied him. Thus, he became a black belt in judo and sambo.

In 2014, the World Taekwondo Federation awarded him the 9th Dan black belt and the title of Grandmaster, placing him one grade above Chuck Norris.



Putin is a black belt in judo and sambo, and he was also awarded that level in karate and taekwondo. Photo: Web

His first steps in politics

In 1975 he graduated as a lawyer with high honors. Immediately, he is recruited by the dissolved Committee for State Security or KGB: the Soviet secret police and intelligence agency. The media in his country have described him as one of the «best spies in the history of the KGB».

In 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, President Boris Yeltsin appointed him head of the new Federal Security Service: the FSB. There, he would begin his liftoff to the top of the world. In a collapsed Russia, corrupt and full of traitors, he managed to push out of his way all those who seemed to want to finish him but without weapons, with intelligence.



He was a recognized spy for the Soviet KGB and head of the Russian secret service. He is a fan of James Bond movies, because in them one man saves the world. Photo: Web

A loyal man in a world of traitors

«The enigmatic and cold ex-spy did what no one did: be loyal to his bosses until the end. Even, or especially, when things got ugly for them and others abandoned ship for fear of contamination and ruining their political careers», stated Vanity Fair in a biographical report.

For this reason, on August 9, 1999, Yeltsin appointed him Prime Minister of the nation. In his speech, the president anticipated the future that awaited Putin and Russia:

«I have decided to appoint the person who, in my opinion, is capable of consolidating our society, ensuring the continuation of reforms in Russia with the support of the broadest political forces. He will be able to lead those who in the new 21st century will have to renew our great Russia».

Boris Yeltsin

In just eight years, an unknown young man of poor origins rose higher than any other in Russian history. At that time, his electoral rating was 1%, recalls journalist Oliver Carroll in a report in The Intercept. By then, the population assumed that Putin would take the same political course as Yeltsin.

Valentin Yumashev, Yeltsin's son-in-law and adviser, was the one who brought Putin to the Kremlin. In 2019 he recalled in an interview with the BBC: "We started working together and I immediately noticed his extraordinary capacity for work. He was brilliant formulating ideas, analyzing and arguing his proposals (...) He had proven to be a liberal and a democrat who wanted to continue with market reforms".



In 2011, he piloted a seaplane to help put out forest fires raging across the central Ryazan region. Photo: Web

Putin: one man, two policies

His political management can be divided into two phases. In the first, he «doubled State control over the economy and returned the secret services to the center of Russian life». It was «a pro-Western, pro-US and reformist phase of the free market», until 2006–2007.

In the second, he promoted the concept of «sovereign democracy». There, he began to move away from the West, with a clear turning point: the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. At that time he ratified his idea of a «sovereign economy» and sent a message to the United States: «I have the power».



In 2014, while visiting a zoo, a leopard cub attacked journalists. Putin came over and stroked him until he calmed down. A legend says that he dominates weak minds and can control animals

Speaking to The Intercept, Gleb Pavlovsky, a political consultant who worked in the Kremlin during the first 12 years of his government, reaffirmed: "In 20 years, the United States saw Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump, each with a different political perspective (...) Russia has always had Putin. People think that a president is only faithful to a policy and he is not like that, not at all. The Putin of the early years has nothing in common with the current one.

Precisely, between 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, Forbes magazine named him «The most powerful man in the world». However, he has remained in the top 3 since 2009.



In 2011, the Kyrgyz Government thanked him for his support by naming a 4,446-meter mountain «Vladimir Putin» located in the Tien Shan mountain range. Photo: Web

The Tsar of the new age

Currently, Putin dominates the political world at will. In Syria he shook up American forces, defeated terrorism and helped Bashar al-Assad consolidate his power. He is China's number one ally, although he

calls President Xi Jinping «a friend, more than an ally». He has a cordial and respectful relationship with the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un.

He is a key piece that has not let the United States take control of Venezuela. Putin defends this country given his great friendship with the late Hugo Chávez and his respect for Nicolás Maduro. He is the head of the BRICS, a group of emerging powers made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. He has excellent relations with the governments and presidents of Iran and Turkey. He is respected by Israel and Europe gives in to him despite threats of sanctions from Washington.



He is an animal lover. He has three dogs: a Central Asian Shepherd, a Bulgarian Shepherd, and an Akita. People close to him claim that he takes them to certain meetings as a form of intimidation

Putin's global vision for the future

In 2020, Russia held the events commemorating the 75th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany. That day, Putin hinted at some of his ideas about his future for the world.

The Russian leader advocates an «improvement» in the system of international relations. His idea is to avoid making the same mistakes that led to World War II.

“It is advisable to discuss steps to develop collective principles in world affairs, speak frankly about peacekeeping, [strengthening global and regional security](#), strategic arms control, joint efforts to combat terrorism, extremism , and other pressing challenges and threats», he wrote in an article.



Vladimir Putin also has great ice hockey, fishing and horse riding skills.

The most respected man in the world?

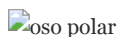
The President maintains that the main States of the world are responsible, in one way or another, for the initiation of a war. Then, he assures that only through dialogue, respect for the self-determination of the peoples and non-interference is it possible to advance towards a better and more globalized world, in which no one assumes the role of judge, justifying or condemning what occurs in whichever country it decides .



In 2012 he taught captive-bred Siberian storks to fly. He put on a helmet, a white coat and piloted a small plane for the birds to identify him as his ‘progenitor’ and allow themselves to be guided on a section of their migratory route to Central Asia.

Putin has made Russia a country more detached from liberal values, more conservative, patriotic and nationalistic. His deep religious beliefs and radical positions have won him detractors. Many Russians accuse him of leading an authoritarian regime that controls the media, State bodies and every region of the country.

Despite this, [his idea of a multipolar world, with respectful relationships between nations](#), make him the «man» to follow. This is gaining momentum at a time when the United States imposes «the law of the jungle», violating all existing and future international conventions. This sad phase began when it invaded Iraq in 2003 based on «fake news» and without authorization from the Security Council of the United Nations (UN).



Putin personally helps track polar bears in the Arctic to save them from climate change. Another legend claims that animals approach him because they are attracted to his «magnetism.»

Make Russia Great Again?

It is public that Putin has wanted to rescue the values of the old Soviet Union. Even his politics could easily be identified with the phrase «Make Russia Great Again». But, between two models with nationalistic senses – Washington and Moscow – humanity can lean more towards the one who does not meddle in the affairs of others and advocates consensus.

So, beyond thinking about what a Russia would be like without Putin, perhaps it is more appropriate to think about what a world would be like without Putin. The leader of the Kremlin is the brake lever that prevents the US from taking control of the Universe, as its influence also extends to outer space. In the end, his name will remain in the history books as a mix of man, myth and legend of the 21st century.

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