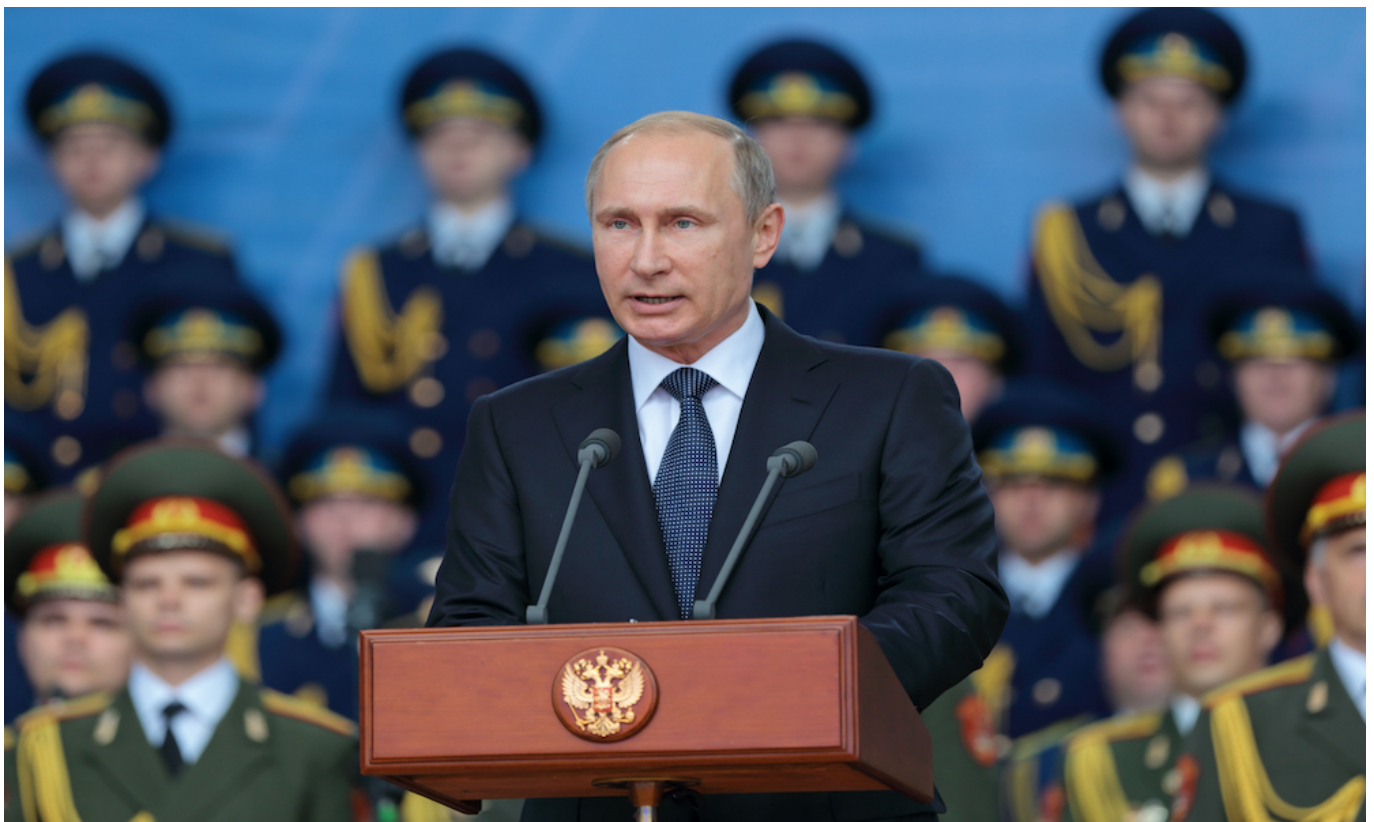




By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# The speech of an angry taxi driver



The fateful speeches of Vladimir Putin have become more frequent. For years, his speech at the Munich Security Forum in 2007 was considered one of the most significant in his career as the leader of Russia. However, in a little over a year, other equally "difficult" and significant addresses have already clouded the reputation of the famous Munich speech.

The frequency of Putin's "to be or not to be" addresses to the nation and the world has been increasing rapidly since Putin's essay in July of last year, through the dramatic announcement of the invasion of Russian troops on Ukraine on February 24, then his September speech in which he threatened nuclear retaliation against the Western world, which culminated on September 30, and a 37-minute speech in honour of the 4 newly annexed Ukrainian regions, incorporated into Russia.

"Putin's speech is a set of unbelievably illiterate conspiracy cliches that 30 years ago could be read in marginal national-patriotic newspapers. Now it has become the policy of the former superpower, which even in the days of the Soviet leaders could not afford such a discourse," assessed Andrei Kolesnikov of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

### Putin's rhetoric has irretrievably broken with the language of responsibility

"Le Monde" made an interesting observation, describing the evolution from Putin's speech in Munich in 2007 until today on the occasion of the annexation of 4 Ukrainian regions: "Since his chilling speech in Munich in 2007, Vladimir Putin has punctuated his disruptive strategy with spectacular diatribes, all the more virulent because they refer to a world progressively detached from reality. He reached a new level on September 30, in Moscow, on the occasion of the ceremony marking the unilateral annexation of Ukrainian territories conquered by force. His rhetoric has irretrievably broken with the language of responsibility".

Many have noticed this significant gap between Putin's views on the world and the same world in reality. First of all, because in the Kremlin, he has practically declared the end of the current international order, and at the same time, the beginning of a new one for the realisation of which he invaded Ukraine and annexed its regions, one by one. To implement that concept, Putin warned that he would call on his nuclear arsenal for help, wanting to confirm his own words to the West a week earlier - "I'm not bluffing".

"This symmetrical concept of equality and an almost superstitious idea of global justice are pushing Mr Putin and some people around him to go for the nuclear option – especially since the prospect of Russia winning a conventional war is uncertain, if not improbable, and the Kremlin doesn't recognise any exit strategy that cannot be passed off as some sort of victory," stated Alexander Baunov, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

But even though the entire speech composed of a distorted history lecture, a rather tedious enumeration of supposed Western sins, an airing of grievances and a vaunting of power (Baunov) has been for the West, was Putin really addressing the West, or perhaps his subjects?

### Putin is a Russian dictator losing a war of aggression, and he knows how that could end for him

Describing the audience that listened to Putin's speech in the Kremlin Hall as "predominantly older men with security and military backgrounds", The Guardian assessed that even after their leader's speech, "many remained in the dark about how the events might develop". Putin sounded more like an angry taxi driver than a head of state (noted The Guardian).

"Nobody knows what happens next, it's clear there is no grand strategy," said one Guardian's Moscow source, a well-connected political insider. "If one thing doesn't work, we

will try something else, and nobody knows where it will lead. Decisions are taken in the head of one man.”

While that "one man" propagated determination, faith in the historical project, and success for the full 37 minutes, it suggested he still wanted to help his followers overcome their fear of defeat and the unknown.

“Putin’s rant was meant to make the world quail in fear. In reality, Putin is likely more terrified than anyone right now. He is a Russian dictator losing a war of aggression, and he knows how that could end for him,” stated The Atlantic.

If the media commentators make a mistake in their assessment, only they will suffer damage; however, it appears that this will not be the case, as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made a very similar conclusion, and his faults in assessment are considerably more costly. “This is a pivotal moment. Putin has mobilised hundreds of thousands of more troops. Engaged in irresponsible nuclear sabre-rattling. And now illegally annexed more Ukrainian territory. Together, this represents the most serious escalation since the start of the war. None of this shows strength. It shows weakness,” said Stoltenberg.