

# WebMemo



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## Confronting Putin's Anti-U.S. Crusade

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The cold shower that Russian President Vladimir Putin unleashed on the United States at the international security conference in Munich last weekend should not have come as a surprise. After all, Putin himself and a host of other senior spokesmen, including Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov (one of the “official” heirs-apparent) and military Chief of Staff General Yuri Baluevsky, have said as much in the past.

The list of grievances that Putin lodged against the United States and the West is long. The main complaint is that the American “hyper power” is pursuing its own unilateral foreign, defense, cultural and economic policy, disregarding international law, and ignoring the U.N. (where Russia has a veto). French President Jacques Chirac would be proud. However, Russia takes its opposition much further.

Putin accused the U.S. of expanding NATO to Russia's borders and deploying “five thousand bayonets” each in forward bases in Romania and Bulgaria. He blasted the plans for U.S. missile defense bases in Central Europe, possibly in Poland or the Czech Republic, mocking the stated goal of such installations as defenses against missile launches from Iran or North Korea. Putin clearly stated that the missile defenses are aimed to neutralize Russian retaliatory nuclear strike capability—a destabilizing factor in the Russian nuclear playbook.

He further accused Washington of not meeting its obligations on nuclear disarmament treaties and trying to hide hundreds of nuclear weapons in warehouses, “under the blanket and under the pillow.”

Adding to the rhetorical overkill, Putin blamed U.S. policies for the failure of nuclear non-proliferation,

implying justification for North Korean and Iranian efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

Putin lambasted NATO members that refuse to ratify the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty; criticized the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for democracy promotion; warned against Kosovo's independence; and rejected Western criticisms of Russia's track record in human rights.

Putin waxed nostalgic about the bi-polar world in which the U.S. and the USSR checked each other's ambition through a balance of nuclear terror known as Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). Many Russian and Western experts perceive Putin's speech as a declaration of a new Cold War.

**Back to the Future?** Putin's speech has a number of domestic and international “drivers,” which add up to a picture of Russia craving strategic parity with the United States and defining its national identity in opposition to the West.

While Russians enthusiastically embraced private business, designer brands, and Costa-del-Sol Spanish vacations, they were slow to internalize pluralistic values, support freedom of speech and press, and defend human rights. The rule of law in Russia is a far cry from Western standards.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/research/RussiaandEurasia/wm1356.gfm](http://www.heritage.org/research/RussiaandEurasia/wm1356.gfm)

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Several years of increasingly loud anti-American and anti-Western propaganda in pro-government and nationalist media have nurtured a generation of Russians who are ethno-centric, and reject liberal values. Some 60 percent in a recent poll supported the slogan “Russia for Russians.”

Sustained nationalist and anti-American brainwashing bridged the gap between the Soviet superpower chauvinism and the new Russian assertiveness, fueled by massive oil revenues and nationalism.

The “America-as-the-enemy” construct bolsters the legitimacy of the current regime, headed largely by former KGB officers, as the defender of Mother Russia. It rejects fully integrating Russia into the global economic and political community, as the other official “heir-apparent,” Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, suggested in his January 2007 speech at the Davos World Economic Forum.

Russia is planning to spend \$189 billion in the next five years for a rapid military modernization. Announced on February 8 by Defense Minister Ivanov, the program includes new nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, a fleet of TU-160 supersonic strategic bombers, and development of a fifth-generation fighter jet. Such a program is clearly aimed at balancing U.S. military power, not fighting terrorists in the Caucasus mountains. It needs the U.S. as “*glavny protivnik*”—the principal adversary.

Russia is also trying to corner the market in weapons sales, especially to rogue- and semi-rogue states. Russia is the largest arms supplier to China and Iran; it signed a \$3 billion arms deal with Hugo Chavez’s Venezuela over U.S. objections, and is courting Middle Eastern buyers.

Russia is happy to play into the Arab and Muslim street’s anti-Americanism and to signal that the U.S., which is facing severe difficulties in Iraq, does not exercise exclusive strategic dominance in the Persian Gulf and in the Middle East. Moscow is back—with a vengeance—in the most important energy depot of the world. It is no accident that the speech was delivered on the eve of Putin’s historic visit to Saudi Arabia, the first for any Russian or Soviet leader, and to Qatar and Jordan, America’s allies in the Middle East.

**Where Are We Going From Here?** From Washington’s perspective, the timing of Putin’s speech

couldn’t be worse. With Iraq in limbo, and Iran remaining truculent, the chances for Russian cooperation in taming Teheran’s nuclear ambitions are dwindling. Russia was recalcitrant in providing necessary pressure on Iran during the December 2006 negotiations on U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737, and may refuse to do so when the Security Council revisits the Iranian dossier in a few weeks.

Moreover, Putin is signaling that Russia is willing to be the vanguard of the anti-American camp in Europe and the Middle East, and from Caracas to Beijing. Russia is putting not just military might behind its rhetoric, but economic muscle as well: Putin publicly approved of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s idea of creating an OPEC-style cartel for natural gas. Whether such a coalition materializes, and whether it might translate itself into a military alliance, remains to be seen.

**What Should Washington Do?** The image of a new Cold War may be too simplistic to describe the emerging global world architecture. Clearly, the post-communist honeymoon is over, dead, and buried. A realistic reassessment of the relationship is in order.

The United States should avoid a rhetorical confrontation with Moscow. Deeds, not words, are necessary to send a message to the Kremlin that the U.S. and its allies will not be bullied, but that Washington is not interested in renewed hostility.

The U.S. should continue cooperation with Russia on matters of mutual concern, such as energy, non-proliferation, and space.

It is also time to build bridges to potential Russian allies to prevent the emergence of anti-American blocs. The U.S. should also appeal to its traditional allies in Europe and elsewhere to recognize the changing geo-strategic balance in the Eastern hemisphere, to boost mutual defenses, to coordinate energy policy, and cooperate on energy security among the consumers.

This is hardly the end of history, but rather continuation of an old and taxing game.

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