

Putin Ranked World's 2nd-Most Powerful Person

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who is again running for president, is the world's second-most powerful person, topped only by U.S. President Barack Obama, according to a new Forbes list.

Obama bumped Chinese President Hu Jintao from the No. 1 spot in the magazine's annual rankings. The U.S. leader's clout rose after the deaths of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Hu came third as he gradually manages the transition of power to others in China.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel remained the most powerful woman at No. 4 on the list, as Europe's largest economy continued to wield its influence over the troubled European Union.

✘ Putin, who held the Kremlin from 2000 to 2008, reinforced his position as Russia's undisputed leader after President Dmitry Medvedev, whom Putin endorsed for the job in 2008, announced in September that he would be trading seats with the prime minister after

the elections.

"Assuming that he serves two more terms, the increasingly autocratic Putin will be in office until 2024. Take that, Stalin!" Forbes wrote.

But Putin's support ratings continued to decline, slipping to 47 percent in late October from 51 percent the month before, according to the state-owned VTsIOM pollster.✕

"The U.S. remains, indisputably, the most powerful nation in the world, with the largest, most innovative economy and the deadliest military," Forbes wrote.✕

Obama's approval ratings have fallen at home as he struggles with stubbornly high unemployment and a tepid economy, but his fortunes on the world stage have been quite different. ✕Under orders from Obama, Bin Laden, who helped orchestrate the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, was tracked down in Pakistan and killed in May after 10 years in hiding. ✕The United States joined the NATO-led intervention in Libya, which began with air strikes in March and led eventually to Gadhafi's death in October.

Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates at No. 5 was the first corporate executive on the list, thanks to a malaria vaccine backed by his charitable foundation that recently passed a key clinical trial. ✕"Gates' goal is to eliminate infectious disease as a major cause of death in his lifetime. He may succeed," Forbes wrote.

✕Mark Zuckerberg, the 27-year-old head of social networking site Facebook, shot into ninth position from No. 40 in last year's vote, sandwiched between U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, No. 8, who oversees monetary policy for the world's biggest economy, and British Prime Minister David Cameron at No. 10. ✕

"What the CIA failed to do in 60 years, Zuck [Zuckerberg] has done in seven — knowing what 800 million people think, read and listen to," Forbes wrote. ✕

The king of the world's largest oil producer Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al Saud, came in at No. 6, and Pope Benedict XVI was No. 7.

(Reuters, MT)

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