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Putin Says He'll Work With West But Won't Roll Over

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SAROV, Nizhny Novgorod Region — Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Friday that he sees no new chill in ties with Washington, but he warned that Russia would not let the United States gain nuclear supremacy and had no intention of playing "yes man" to the West on global issues.

Nine days before a vote almost certain to hand him a six-year presidential term, Putin was chiseling his image as a tough leader prepared to stand up to the United States when necessary.

After a campaign in which he has railed against Washington, Putin suggested his rhetoric did not mean that there was any kind of new Cold War.

"I don't think there is some kind of chill," he said in a meeting with security analysts.

But Russia's veto of a UN resolution condemning Syrian President Bashar Assad's crackdown of dissent showed that it could take a firm stance against the West when it wanted, he said.

“I think our position on the Syrian issue in the UN Security Council shows that we do not intend to play along with anyone,” Putin said when an analyst suggested it was time “for Russia to stop playing along with the Americans on everything.”

Russia’s decision to build Iran’s first nuclear power plant, despite years of opposition from countries concerned that the project could help Tehran acquire nuclear weapons, was further proof of its independence, he added.

Russia has supported four rounds of Security Council sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, which Western nations fear is developing a bomb.

But Russia opposes further sanctions, even though it says it, too, does not want Iran to have nuclear weapons.

Putin said he opposed Western moves to depose governments in places like Damascus and Tehran.

“So they changed regimes in North Africa, and what will they do now?” he said. “It’s unclear what kind of regime Egypt will have and what they are wreaking in Syria is unclear. They are trying to take the situation under control, but how it will end nobody knows, including them.”

Putin also vowed to stand his ground in a dispute over U.S. plans for a European anti-missile shield.

Russia and the United States signed a landmark treaty in 2010 to put new limits on long-range, offensive nuclear weapons, but the dispute over missile defense has clouded relations since and made further reductions unlikely.

Russia wants the United States to offer legally binding assurances that its missile shield could not be used to weaken Russia’s offensive arsenal, a demand that is a nonstarter in Washington.

Putin has pledged 23 trillion rubles ($790 billion) over a decade to modernize Russia’s weaponry and said Russia’s growing might should give it a stronger voice in negotiations, one Washington should not ignore.

The United States, just a few years ago, had been telling its NATO allies: “‘Let Russia tinker. We don’t really care; all they’ve got left is some rust,’” Putin said. “Today that is not so at all,” he said, describing the weapons put on duty in recent years. “This is no joke.”

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