

Putin Pledges to Seek Closer Ties With U.S.

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A RS-12M Topol mobile intercontinental ballistic missile. Russia says the U.S. could use a European missile shield to intercept Russian missiles. **Denis Grishkin**

Moscow will seek closer ties with the United States but will not tolerate interference in its affairs and wants guarantees that a U.S. missile shield will not be used against Russia, under terms of a decree signed by President Vladimir Putin.

Putin set out foreign policy priorities in a wide-ranging document signed hours after his inauguration Monday, veering little from an article he wrote on the subject during the election campaign.

Moscow wants to bring cooperation with Washington "to a truly strategic level," but relations must be based on "equality, noninterference in internal affairs and respect for one another's interests," the decree said.

Russia will "consistently stand up for its policy in connection with the creation by the United States of a global missile defense system, seeking firm guarantees it is not directed against

Russia's nuclear deterrent forces."

The decree touched on policy around the world, but it served as a message to the United States ahead of Putin's expected meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama, who hosts a Group of Eight summit later this month.

In a warning that encompassed both Russia and Syria, where Moscow and Washington have deep differences, Putin's decree said Moscow would "counter attempts to use human rights concepts as an instrument of political pressure and interference in the internal affairs of states."

In the Middle East and North Africa, it said, Russia would advocate resolving crises through an end to violence by all sides, national dialogue without preconditions and the principle of noninterference — a repeat of Russia's position on bloodshed in Syria.

Closer to home, Putin made clear that strengthening bonds among former Soviet republics from Belarus to Central Asia and giving Moscow's alliances economic and security alliances with those nations more global clout, are top priorities.

The decree called integration among members of the Commonwealth of Independent States a "key foreign policy direction" and reiterated plans for a Eurasian Economic Union, by January 2015, based on ties with Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Putin discussed bilateral relations at a closed-door meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama's top security aide Tom Donilon at his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow on Friday.

"Putin emphasized that in developing the relationship with the United States, Russia is ready to go really far, on condition that the Americans will act on the principles of an equal and mutually respectful partnership," Putin aide Yuri Ushakov said.

Ushakov said Donilon handed Putin a letter from Obama, calling it "a multipage detailed document whose main message is that Obama is ready to cooperate with Putin in order to move forward on the path of the creation of partnership between the United States and Russia."

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