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# Obama Urged to Take a Harder Line on Putin's Russia

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U.S.-based pro-democracy watchdog Freedom House slammed President Vladimir Putin for the "worst deterioration in Russia's democracy and human rights situation" and urged U.S. President Barack Obama to take a harder line, according to a report published Thursday.

The report criticized Putin for his "anti-American rhetoric and policies" and said the Obama administration should take a "markedly different approach" from the reset policy of Obama's first term.

The U.S. and allied leaders should not lend Putin "undeserved legitimacy or invest much time with him," the report said, and Obama should personally "speak out against Putin's human rights abuses and crackdown on civil society."

In one of the other recommendations, Freedom House urged Obama to abandon his calls for "win-win" cooperation with the Kremlin, saying "such rhetoric only feeds the impression in

Moscow that the Obama administration needs and wants a good relationship more than Putin does."

"The United States undermines its own credibility in the world when it comes across as too forgiving and desirous of good relations at all costs instead of proactively asserting its interests and values."

Freedom House also urges the Obama administration to "aggressively" implement the Magnitsky Act and encourage democratic allies to pass similar legislation. In force for a few weeks now, the act, named after a whistle-blowing Russian lawyer who died in pretrial detention, seeks to punish Russian officials who commit human rights violations by imposing sanctions that include denying them entry to the United States.

Among the other proposals, the report said there should be no U.S. support for Russia's bid to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as long as Putin continues his crackdown at home.

Freedom House also criticized the Obama administration for "meekly" accepting a range of recent moves by Putin that many see as blatant anti-Americanism, namely expelling USAID from Russia, ejecting the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), ending the Nunn-Lugar nuclear nonproliferation program with the United States, banning American adoptions of Russian children and terminating a bilateral counternarcotics agreement.

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