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Gorbachev Denounces Putin on Rights and Corruption

By The Moscow Times

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Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has accused the government of endangering citizens' rights and President Vladimir Putin's inner circle of being full of "thieves and corrupt officials."

New laws that widen the definition of treason and raise fines for illegal protests and defamatory speech constitute "an attack on the rights of citizens," Gorbachev said during an interview with the BBC published Thursday.

And while Putin's entourage is effective at keeping him in power, it includes many "thieves and corrupt officials," the 82-year-old former leader said.

Gorbachev urged Putin to restore "open, direct dialogue" with the Russian people.

"For goodness sake, you shouldn't be afraid of your own people," he said, adding, "If things

don't change, Russia will continue to drift like a piece of ice in the Arctic Ocean."

Gorbachev, who led the Soviet Union from 1985 until its dissolution in 1991, said his relationship with Putin had "soured" and that the two had not held a direct meeting for more than a year.

"I've criticized him a lot in public. He sometimes loses his temper. Once he said that 'Gorbachev's tongue should be cut short'," Gorbachev said.

He also moved to deflect widespread criticism over the fall of the Soviet Union.

"I'm often accused of of giving away Central and Eastern Europe. But who did I give it to? I gave Poland, for example, back to the Poles. Who else does it belong to?" he said.

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