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Russia's Putin Says FIFA Corruption Arrests Show U.S. Meddling Abroad

By The Moscow Times

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin (R) and FIFA President Sepp Blatter take part in the official handover ceremony for the 2018 World Cup scheduled to take place in Russia, in this file picture taken in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, July 13, 2014.

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the United States on Thursday of meddling outside its jurisdiction in the arrest of top officials from soccer's world governing body, FIFA.

Putin said the arrests in Switzerland on Wednesday were an "obvious attempt" to prevent FIFA head Sepp Blatter's re-election this week but that the 79-year-old had Russia's backing.

The world's most popular sport was plunged into turmoil this week when seven senior soccer officials were arrested on U.S. corruption charges to face extradition from Switzerland.

Swiss authorities have also announced a criminal investigation into the awarding of the next two World Cups, including the 2018 tournament in Russia.

"If anything happened, it did not happen on U.S. territory and the United states has nothing to do with it," Putin said. "This is yet another blatant attempt [by the United States] to extend its jurisdiction to other states."

Citing former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, both of whom have evaded prosecution in the United States by hiding abroad, Putin questioned Washington's right to request the FIFA officials' extradition.

"Unfortunately, our American partners use such methods to achieve their selfish aims and illegally persecute people. I do not rule out that in the case of FIFA, it's exactly the same," Putin said.

He said FIFA head Blatter, who is standing for re-election to a fifth term at the FIFA Congress in Zurich on Friday, had been pressured to strip Russia of its rights to host the 2018 World Cup.

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