

## Putin Ratchets Up Anti-U.S Rhetoric as Russia's Kremlin Race Intensifies

By Henry Meyer and Ilya Arkhipov - Jan 26, 2012 3:08 AM ET

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is stepping up rhetoric against the U.S. as his campaign for the March 4 presidential election intensifies after the biggest protests against his rule.

The U.S. "wants to control everything" and takes decisions unilaterally on key questions, Putin said on a campaign stop yesterday in the Siberian city of Tomsk, 3,100 kilometers (1,900 miles) east of Moscow. "Sometimes I get the impression the U.S. doesn't need allies, it needs vassals."



Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime minister.  
Photographer: Jock Fistick/Bloomberg

Putin, 59, is seeking a new term in the Kremlin amid the biggest challenge to his 12-year rule after fraud allegations at parliamentary polls sparked mass protests. The Russian leader, who has repeatedly accused the U.S. of interfering in other countries' affairs, said last week that reports by a state-owned Moscow radio station supported American interests.

"The No. 1 reason Putin is doing this is elections," Jan Techau, director of the European Center of the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace in Brussels, said yesterday in a phone interview. "It's pre-election saber-rattling. This is vintage Putin."

Putin's remarks added to anti-American rhetoric after a senior member of his ruling United Russia party said Jan. 24 that new U.S. ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, is trying to fuel revolution by meeting with opposition leaders.

### 'Reset' in Relations

Efforts to improve relations with the U.S. under the so-called "reset" policy of President Barack Obama were spearheaded by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who agreed in September to make way for Putin's return in March 4 elections.

Medvedev yesterday, while forecasting the disagreement between Russia and the U.S. over American plans to station missile-defense facilities in Europe would continue to bedevil relations and would get much worse from 2018 to 2020.

“Medvedev’s departure is significant to the extent that Putin has a specific attitude to American leaders: he doesn’t trust them,” Fyodor Lukyanov, an analyst at the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy in Moscow, said yesterday by phone. “The atmosphere will be less constructive.”

U.S.-Russia relations suffered a setback last year when the two nations disagreed over the NATO military campaign that led to the overthrow of Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi and U.S.-led attempts to censure Syria at the United Nations for its crackdown on anti-government unrest, which Russia says is part of another attempt at regime change.

### **Jackson-Vanik**

While the U.S. administration has pledged to repeal the Jackson-Vanik amendment, a Cold War-era law that barred favorable trade relations with the communist Soviet Union, American lawmakers have questioned annulling the measure and easing trade with Russia.

The Obama administration aims to repeal the legislation this spring, McFaul said on the radio station Ekho Moskvyy yesterday.

Keeping the amendment in force risks making U.S. companies unable to take advantage of Russia’s pending entry into the World Trade Organization and deprive the country of a potential doubling of exports to Russia, according to a November report from the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington.

Trade between the two countries rose 35 percent in 2010 to \$31.7 billion, according to the State Department.

Russia’s economy grew 4.2 percent in 2011, faster than the previous year’s 4 percent expansion, Putin said Jan. 12. The 30-stock Micex Index rose 0.7 percent to 1,498.79 yesterday, its biggest daily advance since Jan. 17. The ruble surged to its strongest level in more than two months, closing 0.5 percent higher at 30.72 per dollar.

### **Missile Defense**

The U.S. and its allies say the missile-defense system is meant to protect against threats from outside Europe, such as Iran. Russia says the shield will blunt its nuclear capability and wants the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the U.S. to sign a binding treaty stating the system is not aimed at their defenses, something the Obama administration has refused to do.

Missile defense is “linked to the U.S. desire to strengthen its position as the leader of the Western world,” Putin said. “That’s why they don’t want to cooperate on an equal basis, either with the Europeans or us.”

McFaul, who hosted Russian opposition activists at the U.S. embassy last week, said Obama sent him to Russia to pursue the “reset” policy, rejecting as “nonsense” the accusations that he’s trying to interfere in Russian domestic politics.

### **Not the Point**

“The point of the reset isn’t to prepare a revolution,” McFaul said in an interview with the Kommersant newspaper published yesterday.

Russian opposition groups, who accuse Putin’s party of inflating its vote in December’s parliamentary elections to about 50 percent from 30 percent, plan their next major protest on Feb. 4, a month before the presidential vote.

McFaul, a former professor at Stanford University who was the top White House adviser on Russian affairs before taking up his current post, was pilloried last week on Russian state television as aiming to export revolution.

“We want to understand if we are dealing with a new concept of an ambassador’s role,” said Alexei Pushkov, head of the Russian lower house of parliament’s foreign affairs committee. “Is he an ambassador to the Russian Federation or in part head of a non-commercial organisation promoting democracy?” Pushkov said by phone yesterday.

### **Twitter Messages**

A non-career diplomat, McFaul has been using Twitter Inc. and Livejournal to get out his message, and posted links to the blog of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

“There obviously is a risk: the Russians can be pretty rough on ambassadors they disapprove of, as I know,” said Tony Brenton, U.K. ambassador to Russia from 2004 to 2008, who was hounded by pro-Kremlin youth activists after attending an opposition conference.

“We and the U.S. have to be very careful,” Brenton said yesterday in a phone interview. “We can’t be backing the opposition because that would have counterproductive effects, but what we can legitimately do is insist that Russia observes its international commitments to run honest and fair elections, to allow freedom of the press and freedom of opposition.”

Putin, who was president from 2000-2008, before handing over to Medvedev for four years after serving the maximum two consecutive terms permitted by the constitution, needs to win more than half the vote for a first-round victory.

“The primary concern of the Russian elite is control of the political process,” said Techau. “Now they’re losing control of the political system and this kind of anti-U.S. reaction shows just how nervous the Russian elite has become.”

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