
Putin says Russia does not want to be superpower

RIA Novosti - 19/12/2007

Russia does not want to be a superpower dominating the modern world or imposing its opinion on others, but hopes to develop its capabilities enough to protect its interests, the Russian president has said.

"The Soviet Union wanted to be a leader in the global communist revolution. This was a big mistake. We would not like to repeat these mistakes in the future. We don't want to command anyone, we don't want to be a superpower that dominates and imposes solutions," Vladimir Putin told Time magazine December 12.

"But we want to have sufficient forces to defend ourselves, defend our interests and even build such good relations with our neighbors and main partners so that these partners become interested in the development and growth of the Russian Federation," he said.

Russian authorities have repeatedly criticized the U.S. for its desire to establish a 'unipolar' world instead of the bipolar world of Cold War times and the antagonism between the former Soviet Union and the West.

In return, some Western political scientists have accused Russian authorities of striving to return to a Cold War model and impose their policies on neighboring countries.

To describe the current complicated relationship between Russia and the West, including U.S. plans to deploy a missile shield in Central Europe, Iran's nuclear program and Russia's role in former Soviet republics, the foreign press have even invented a new term "cool war."

The U.S. plans to deploy a radar in the Czech Republic and 10 missile interceptors in Poland, purportedly to counter a missile threat from Iran and other "rogue" states. Moscow has opposed the plans, saying the European shield would destroy the strategic balance of forces and threaten Russia's national interests.

Western states led by the U.S. suspect Iran of pursuing a secret nuclear weapons program but Iran has insisted it needs nuclear power for electricity generation.

Putin said enhancing Russia's role in the world is a difficult task that can be fulfilled only if Russian society consolidates and if Russia's economic capabilities grow.

"This will be our task for the mid-term and long-term prospect. If we resolve it, a worthy place in the world is guaranteed for Russia," the Russian president said.

Speaking about Russia's recent past, Putin said he would hardly have had the courage to transfer from the old Soviet system to a new democratic Russia, like Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev did.

"Both he [Yeltsin] and Gorbachev still did what I would have probably failed to do. They made a step toward the destruction of a system the Russian people had been unable to bear any longer. I am not sure I would have had the courage to do so," he said.

"Gorbachev made the first step, and Yeltsin completed this transfer, I believe, a historical transfer, very important for Russia and the Russian people," Putin said, adding that it was the two former leaders that gave Russia its freedom then.
