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By Alec Luhn

Putin says west is provoking Russia into new cold war as ‘spies’ deported  
Russian president denies fanning tensions and says Nato expansion in Europe has been ‘geopolitical game changer’

*Путін заявляє про те, що Захід провокує Росію на нову холодну війну*

*Президент Росії заперечує нагнітання напруги та говорить, що експансія НАТО в Європі являє собою «геополітичну гру»*

*В інтерв'ю німецькому каналу, яке відбулося після висилання польських та німецьких дипломатів з Росії, Путін заявив, що Захід провокує Росію на нову холодну війну. Російський лідер сказав, що розширення військового впливу Росії поблизу кордонів Європи є відповіддю на збільшення військових баз НАТО в Європі.*

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/17/putin-claims-west-provoking-russia-new-cold-war-spies-deported>



Vladimir Putin has suggested to a German interviewer that the west is provoking Russia into a new cold war. The airing of the interview, which was recorded by the German channel ARD in Vladivostok last week, followed Russia’s tit-for-tat expulsions of German and Polish diplomats, as well as the deportation of a Latvian accused of spying.

Asked whether the accusatory rhetoric between Moscow and Washington and a noticeable increase in Russian displays of military strength near western countries points to a new cold war, Putin said two rounds of Nato expansion in central and eastern Europe had been “significant geopolitical game changers” that forced Russia to respond.

Moscow resumed strategic aviation flights abroad several years ago in response to US nuclear bomber flights to areas near Russia that had continued after the cold war, he added.

“Nato and the United States have military bases scattered all over the globe, including in areas close to our borders, and their number is growing,” Putin said. “Moreover, just recently it was decided to deploy special operations forces, again in close proximity to our borders. You have mentioned various [Russian] exercises, flights, ship movements and so on. Is all of this going on? Yes, it is indeed.”

Putin has previously been accused by western leaders of fanning cold war-style tensions, most recently by the Australian prime minister, Tony Abbott, who said he told Putin at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Beijing last week that Russia should stop “trying to recreate the lost glories of tsarism or the old Soviet Union”. In August, Barack Obama told the late-night talk show host Jay Leno that the Russians often “slip back into cold war thinking”.

In a speech in Australia on Monday, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, who spoke at length to Putin during the G20 summit in Brisbane this weekend, said western sanctions against Russia would remain in place as far and long as they were needed and warned of growing Russian influence in eastern Europe. She argued that Russia should not be allowed to drive a wedge between Europe and the United States.

Also on Monday, the European Union’s new foreign policy chief, Italy’s foreign minister, Federica Mogherini, called for intensified diplomacy, including trips to Kiev and Moscow, to end the Ukraine crisis. Conservative commentators criticised Mogherini for being too soft on Russia after she was appointed in August, and her first meeting with other European foreign ministers on Monday saw them agree to consider additional sanctions against separatist leaders but not Russian officials.

The British foreign secretary, Philip Hammond, is to announce on Tuesday that the UK will donate communications equipment and 10 armoured vehicles worth £1.2m to the Ukraine special monitoring mission of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is being expanded in the face of an increasingly unstable ceasefire in the east of the country.

During the ARD interview, Putin dodged a question about whether Moscow had supplied weapons to the separatists and deployed troops to eastern Ukraine, as Nato and Kiev have argued. “Nowadays people who wage a fight and consider it righteous will always get weapons,” he said, blaming the west for supporting the government forces’ use of ballistic missiles.

“You want the Ukrainian central authorities to annihilate everyone there in eastern Ukraine,” Putin said. “Is that what you want? We certainly don’t. And we won’t let it happen.”

But a report on the weapons used in the Ukrainian conflict released on Monday by the consulting group Armament Research Services (ARES) suggested that rebels were “very likely” to have received arms from Russia “however the level of state complicity in such activity remains unclear.”

“It is very likely that pro-Russian separatist groups have received some level of support (including small arms, light weapons, guided light weapons, heavier weapons systems, and armoured vehicles) from one or more external parties,” the ARES report said, although it admitted that the “most significant sources” of weapons and armoured vehicles were domestic ones.

Putin also said Russia’s “friendship” with Germany was stronger than ever. German business groups have been among the most adamant opponents of sanctions. But in a sign of slipping political relations, Russia’s foreign ministry confirmed to the news agency RIA Novosti on Monday that it had expelled an employee of the German embassy in Moscow in response to Berlin’s “unfriendly actions toward an employee of one of Russia’s foreign institutions in Germany”. A Russian diplomat in Bonn had previously been expelled on suspicion of spying, Der Spiegel reported.

Moscow has also deported Alexei Kholostov, a former Latvian MP known as an advocate of Latvia’s Russian minority, on spying allegations, the Latvian foreign ministry told Interfax news agency on Monday. In a Russian television report aired this weekend, Kholostov said on camera that he was “in Russia on assignment for the Latvian special forces, which work under the CIA’s control”.

In another ongoing spy scandal, the foreign ministry also said on Monday it had expelled “several Polish diplomats” over “activities incompatible with their status”, a common euphemism for spying. Polish television reported that four diplomats had been deported. Poland’s foreign minister called the move a “symmetric response” after Polish authorities arrested a military officer and a Russian-Polish lawyer last month on suspicion of spying for Russia.

