

Putin calls for a new world order

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Former Cuban leader Fidel Castro with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who began his tour of Latin America in Havana. *Source: AP*



Vladimir Putin and Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner at the presidential palace in Buenos Aires yesterday. *Source: AFP*

[< Prev](#)
[Next >](#)



RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin and his Argentine counterpart Cristina Kirchner have called for a multipolar world order as Moscow sought to boost ties with Latin America amid heightened East-West tensions.

The Russian leader is on a six-day Latin American tour seeking to increase Moscow's influence in the region at a time when the Ukraine crisis has eroded East-West relations to their lowest point since the Cold War.

His itinerary includes meetings with a string of leftist leaders critical of the US and a summit of the BRICS group of emerging countries, an agenda that neatly aligns with his push for a world less dominated by the West.

After his meeting with Ms Kirchner yesterday, Mr Putin backed her call to curb Western dominance of international relations as they cemented a nuclear energy deal. The two also discussed military co-operation, including the prospect of Russia providing transport planes for use in Antarctica. Their delegations signed a series of bilateral deals, including a nuclear energy deal. .

He also voiced his support for Argentina's longstanding claim to the Falkland Islands, the British territory it calls the Malvinas, which sparked a 1982 war between the two countries.

"We favour the principles of a multipolar world, which are equality, indivisibility and security. Russia continues to support the need to find a solution to the dispute over the Malvinas Islands at direct negotiations between Great Britain and Argentina," he said at a dinner in his honour.

Earlier, the former KGB spy launched his tour with a visit to Russia's Cold War ally Cuba, where he met President Raul Castro and his 87-year-old brother Fidel, father of the island's communist revolution.

According to Russian sources, Mr Putin said they had a "long and very interesting conversation" of about an hour on international politics and bilateral relations.

Mr Putin and Raul Castro visited a cemetery that holds the remains of Soviet soldiers who died while serving in Cuba during the Cold War. The two also oversaw the signing of a dozen bilateral deals, including for oil exploration off the island's coast.

Ahead of the visit, Russia wrote off 90 per cent of Cuba's Soviet-era debt of more than \$30 billion. Havana has sided with its old ally Russia in the Ukraine conflict.

Mr Putin's six-day trip will next take him to Brazil, where he will participate in a summit of the BRICS emerging nations after attending the World Cup final.

AFP, AP