

Putin Says No Rift With Medvedev

June 21, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

PARIS — Prime Minister Vladimir Putin dismissed speculation of a rift with President Dmitry Medvedev on Tuesday, saying he and his protege shared a "joint program" for Russia's development.

When asked about Medvedev's pledge to reduce the role of the state, reform the justice system and fight corruption, Putin said it was a "joint program with President Medvedev."

"There are absolutely no differences between our positions," Putin said at a news conference in Paris.

"If you look at my public statements, in the recent past or even some years ago, you will see that all these ideas were already formulated. It is our joint program," Putin said.

He dodged a question on whether he would run in the 2012 presidential election, saying the Russian people would decide who becomes president.

In a speech at a St. Petersburg forum last week, Medvedev called on the government to speed up privatization to cut the role of the state in the economy and said state capitalism would

lead Russia into a dead end.

When Putin was asked whether he could imagine himself making such a speech, he said Medvedev was right to have drawn attention to the problems, but added that it was wrong to "groundlessly defame" the judicial system.

"I have said many times, in different situations and in different audiences, that we are not going to build any state capitalism," said Putin, who as president created a host of powerful state corporations.

"This discussion heated up when we had created a number of state corporations," Putin said.

Opponents said some of the corporations became sprawling state conglomerates that stifled competition.

"The creation of state corporations is not intended to increase the share of state property. It is intended to pull together assets, consolidate them and raise their capitalization and then take them to market," Putin said.

Putin also called for international pressure on Syria's leadership over its deadly crackdown on anti-government protests — but said Iraq-style international intervention would only make matters worse.

He called for a political solution in Syria, and said Russian officials are working on this at the United Nations, without elaborating.

He dismissed talk of a Russian alliance with Syria, saying their close ties dated to the Soviet era and that no "special relationship" remains now with Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime.

(Reuters, AP)

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