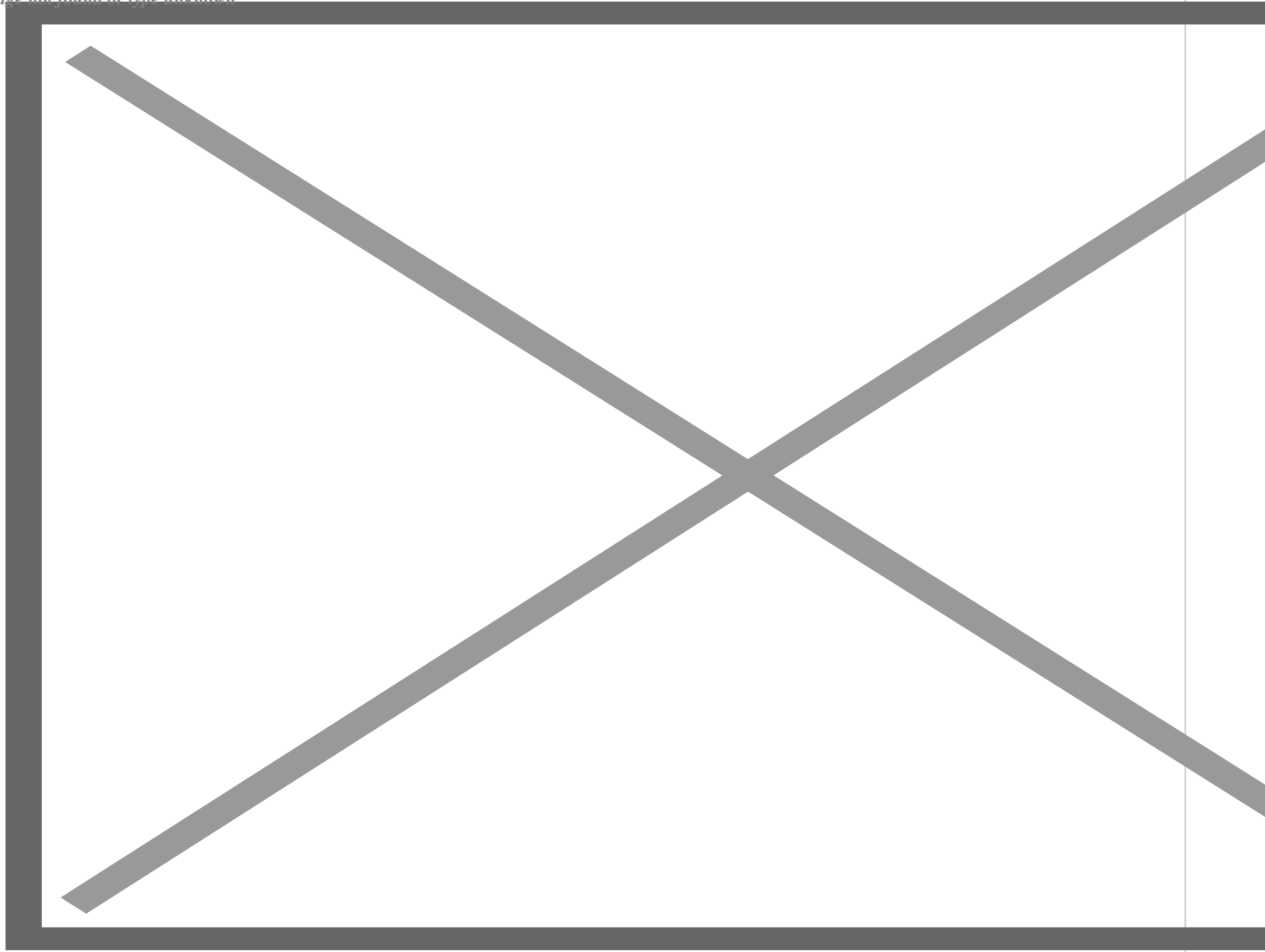


Vladimir Putin vows to firmly defend Russia's interests

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?Russia holds a military parade to mark the 76th anniversary of victory in World War II in Moscow, on May 9, 2021. (Photo by TASS)

Moscow, May 9 (RHC)-- President Vladimir Putin has vowed that Russia will firmly defend national interests, at a time of soaring tensions between Moscow and the West.

Addressing a military parade marking the 76th anniversary of victory in World War II on Sunday, Putin said that Russia “consistently defends international law. At the same time, we will firmly defend our national interests to ensure the safety of our people.”

The Russian leader made the speech to thousands of soldiers and veterans on Red Square during the annual parade, which sees Russia’s most advanced military hardware rumble through the streets of Moscow.

“The Soviet people kept their sacred oath, defended the homeland, and freed the countries of Europe from the black plague,” he added, referring to Nazi Germany during World War II. Putin also voiced concern over what he described as a creeping return of ideologies of the time, when “slogans of racial and national superiority, of anti-Semitism and Russophobia, became ever more cynical.”

This year’s parade comes at a time when Moscow's relations with the West are severely strained over a host of issues, including the situation in Ukraine and the imprisonment of opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

The United States and Russia have expelled each other's diplomats in recent months in a series of retaliatory moves. The Kremlin and the European Union (EU) member states have also been involved in a similar tit-for-tat diplomatic dispute.

Russia’s relations with a number of U.S.-backed countries in Central and Eastern Europe have deteriorated in recent weeks, leading to a series of diplomatic expulsions. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned last week that relations between the Kremlin and Washington could plunge to the Cold War level if Washington continued to reject dialog with Moscow.

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