

Policymakers Cheer Obama's Re-Election Bid

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An Obama matryoshka next to traditional Russian matryoshkas. The U.S. president's recent announcement of a re-election campaign has prompted many in Moscow to praise the achievements of the "reset" **Vladimir Filonov**

Amid growing anxiety over whose name will appear on the 2012 presidential ballot, lawmakers and pundits were quick to welcome the news that one president would certainly stand for re-election next year — Barack Obama.

The U.S. president's announcement, made in an e-mail to supporters Monday, sent many in Moscow praising the achievements of a "reset" in relations that has become a hallmark of both Obama's and Dmitry Medvedev's presidencies.

"I will be very happy to see a second Obama term because this will mean a maximum in policy continuity regarding Russia," Mikhail Fedotov, head of Medvedev's human right's council, said by telephone Tuesday.

Fedotov said this was even more the case because there is no clear Republican challenger to Obama.

His comments were echoed by Alexei Malashenko, an analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center, who said a second Obama term would be the best possible outcome for Moscow because there was no more capable or promising leader in current U.S. politics. "He is the first U.S. president completely free of Cold War thinking," Malashenko explained.

Konstantin Kosachyov, chairman of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, also has enthusiastically embraced Obama as Moscow's obvious choice. "Obama's global agenda is much better and more productive than what was proposed by his predecessors," Kosachyov, who is also a leading member of United Russia, said in comments published on the party's web site Monday.

But Kosachyov made it clear that what he liked about Obama's stance on Russia might seem a weakness to others. Previous administrations, he said, defined U.S. national interests as meaning world dominance, while Obama accepts the concept of a multipolar world as being compatible with its national interests.

Fellow United Russia Deputy Sergei Markov put it more bluntly. "We should support Obama because "he softened support for anti-Russian regimes in our neighborhood, like that of [Georgian President Mikheil] Saakashvili," he said by telephone.

But not everyone in Moscow is convinced of the reset with Washington.

"This is mostly PR on both sides," said Andrei Piontkovsky, a veteran political analyst and opposition activist.

Piontkovsky said main achievements in relations like the New START missile treaty and an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation do not represent real progress. "START is just a Cold War-era missile treaty, while the so-called 123 agreement on civil nuclear cooperation opens the way for the United States to transfer nuclear waste to Russia," he said by telephone.

Instead, Piontkovsky said, the United States is closing its eyes to human rights infringements in Russia. "De facto, the reset amounts to Washington promising to abstain from harshly criticizing Moscow," he said.

Fedotov disagreed, saying that the reset was a "very important signal" that both sides are principally ready to improve relations.

"Of course, the real achievements are not so great yet because not everybody is ready for this," he said, adding that there was opposition on both sides of the Atlantic.

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