

Obama Defends 'Reset' With Russia During Visit to Warsaw

May 29, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

WARSAW — U.S. President Barack Obama defended his "reset" of relations with Russia and pledged close U.S. cooperation with Poland on missile defense during his first visit to Warsaw.

"We believe missile defense is something where we can cooperate with Russia. ... This will not be a threat to the strategic balance," Obama said Saturday.

Obama has invited Russia to take part in his missile defense plans meant to counter the possible threat of a short- or medium-range ballistic missile attack from countries such as Iran. But Moscow is seeking a bigger say in the development of them, stirring unease among Poles and others.

Obama on Saturday reiterated Warsaw's role in missile defense plans, which envisage deploying SM-3 interceptors in Poland from 2018.

Warsaw has tried to mend its own long-chilly ties with Moscow, but areas of friction remain,

including over an investigation into the causes of a plane crash in the Smolensk region last year that killed Polish President Lech Kaczynski and 95 others.

Obama visited a monument to the crash victims on Saturday.

On energy security, Obama confirmed U.S. firms' interest in developing Poland's shale gas deposits — estimated by some experts to be the biggest in Europe at 5.3 trillion cubic meters — and in helping build its first nuclear plant.

Warsaw hopes that both projects will greatly reduce its heavy reliance on polluting coal and Russian natural gas imports.

Obama also said Poland's transition to democracy over the past two decades provided a model both for former Soviet neighbors such as Ukraine and Belarus and for reforming Arab countries.

"I want to thank Poland for the democratic leadership in the region through its example," Obama said in televised comments during a conversation with Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski. "Countries such as Ukraine make use of the Polish example.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich was among 20 regional heads of state to join Obama on Friday evening for talks on how to promote democracy in Europe and in the Arab world.

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