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At Debate, Obama Accuses Romney of Cold War Thinking

By The Moscow Times

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Presidential candidate Mitt Romney, left, debating with the incumbent, Barack Obama, in Florida on Monday. **Eric Gay**

U.S. President Barack Obama attacked Republican rival Mitt Romney's stance on Russia during a debate dedicated to foreign policy, accusing him of trying to drag the country back into the Cold War.

Obama, speaking Monday night in Boca Raton, Florida, just two weeks before the Nov. 6 election, criticized Romney for describing Russia as "without question our No. 1 geopolitical foe" during a CNN interview in March.

"I'm glad that you recognize that al-Qaida is a threat, because a few months ago when you were asked what's the biggest geopolitical threat facing America, you said Russia, not al-Qaida," Obama said, according to a transcript of the debate on the ABC News website.

"The 1980s, they're now calling to ask for their foreign policy back," he said.

Romney, in turn, accused Obama of being too lenient toward President Vladimir Putin and appeared to misquote Obama in connection to a conversation that he had with then-President Dmitry Medvedev in Seoul in March. Obama was overheard on an open mic asking Medvedev to tell Putin, who had been elected president a few weeks earlier, that he needed "space" on missile defense.

"On all these issues, but particularly missile defense, this, this can be solved, but it's important for him to give me space," Obama said, adding a few moments later: "This is my last election. After my election, I have more flexibility."

"Russia does continue to battle us in the UN time and time again," Romney said at the debate. "I have clear eyes on this. I'm not going to wear rose-colored glasses when it comes to Russia, or Mr. Putin. And I'm certainly not going to say to him, 'I'll give you more flexibility after the election.'"

Romney said, if elected, he would stand up to Putin immediately. "After the election, he'll get more backbone," he said.

Obama considers the New START arms treaty signed in 2010 and resurgent ties with Russia, which hit post-Soviet lows during George W. Bush's time in office, as a hallmark of his presidency.

The "reset" in relations, however, has cooled down in recent months, with the Kremlin accusing the U.S. of supporting the political opposition, closing USAID, and ending the Nunn-Lugar initiative to secure and dismantle weapons of mass destruction.

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