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Putin Congratulates Obama on Re-Election

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U.S. President Barak Obama celebrating his re-election at a rally in Chicago on Tuesday. **Kevin Lamarque**

Editor's note: See related editorial*.*

President Vladimir Putin has congratulated U.S. President Barack Obama on his re-election, while Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev expressed relief that Russia wouldn't have to deal with Mitt Romney.

Other Russian politicians cheered Obama's victory as a sign that relations between the two countries would continue to improve under a "reset" started by Obama during his first term.

Putin sent a congratulatory telegram to Obama and plans to call him by phone in the near future to offer his personal best wishes, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"In general, the Kremlin greets the information about Barack Obama's election victory very positively," Peskov said, according to Interfax.

He said the text of the telegram would be made public after the U.S. side received it.

"We hope to develop and improve the positive initiatives in bilateral relations between Russia and the U.S. in the interests of international security and stability on the world stage," he said.

Medvedev, who as president from 2008 to May 2012 worked closely with Obama, was open in his delight about the election results.

"Obama is a clear and predictable partner," he told reporters, adding to a reporter's question that Obama was "quite a successful president."

He took a dig at Romney for declaring Russia as the United States' "No. 1 geopolitical foe" on the campaign trail.

"I am pleased that the president of this wealthy country will not be someone who considers Russia as the No. 1 foe. This is paranoia," he said. "Whether we like America or not, the health of the dollar affects every Russian family."

Turning to the reset in relations, he said it was "somewhat successful and somewhat not but will need to continue."

The architect of the reset, U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul, pledged to continue to work toward closer ties with Russia.

"The Obama administration formulated a strategy for Russia four years ago, and we will follow it now," he wrote in Russian on Twitter during a question-and-answer session about the U.S. election.

Other Russian politicians also saw hope for the reset, with Alexei Pushkov, the hawkish United Russia chairman of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, saying Obama's victory meant that relations would not return to the post-Soviet lows experienced during the administration of George W. Bush.

Romney's hawkish supporters "made a very serious and in some respects even a desperate attempt to return the United States, including its foreign policy, to the days of George W. Bush," Pushkov said, according to Interfax.

He expressed hope that Obama's victory would mean a "less aggressive" U.S. foreign policy.

Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the Federation Council's International Affairs Committee, cautioned that it would be hard for Obama to pursue new highs in U.S.-Russian relations because of differences over NATO, Afghanistan and an overall international situation that has become "fuzzy" after the Arab Spring toppled authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, Interfax reported.

He predicted that the reset would continue but in a halting manner.

"I agree with the experts who say that U.S. foreign policy under the re-elected President Barack Obama will be carried out on an 'incentive-response' principle that is virtually unpredictable in terms of what the incentives will be, what the responses will be and even what the relationship with Russia will be," Margelov said.

“But there is in this case an incentive for the reset: growing global problems that neither the U.S. nor Russia can resolve on its own,” he said.

Nikolai Levichev, head of the Duma faction of A Just Russia, said Obama now has a free hand to pursue the reset and predicted that it could be even more successful.

"In my opinion, this is a chance to try to repeat the reset,” said Levichev, a Duma deputy speaker, according to Interfax. “It will be a kind of take two."

He said Obama’s chances for success were higher because he wouldn’t need to lay the foundation for the reset, which he did during his first term, and now his “hands are untied” because he won’t face the constraints of running for a third term.

The future of the rest, however, hangs largely on Moscow, said Sergei Karaganov, a former presidential adviser to Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin.

"Much will depend on Russia,” said Karaganov, who heads the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy think tank, Interfax reported. “If Russia is perceived as waning power, then tensions may increase. If not, then I think we will see cool, practical cooperation.”

Meanwhile, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party and a Duma deputy speaker, said Obama would not be able to accomplish much and warned of four years of stagnation.

"He understands that this is his second and final term, a time when he can especially take it easy and travel around the world to carry out negotiations,” Zhirinovsky said, Interfax reported. “But nothing much will happen."

He said the U.S. should rethink its election system to introduce a single, six-year presidential term, which he said would be “better and more useful.”

"Then the president would have the opportunity and the time to implement his promises and plans," he said.

Russia introduced a six-year presidential term starting with Vladimir Putin’s election for a third term earlier this year. But the Russian president is allowed to serve two consecutive terms.

Under Obama and the current U.S. system, Zhirinovsky said, “America is doomed to stagnation.”

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