

Obama Visit Expected Despite 'Mini-Crisis' in Ties

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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U.S. President Barack Obama is likely to visit Russia in the first half of next year despite a "mini-crisis" in relations over U.S. moves to punish Russians accused of rights violations, the Kremlin said Tuesday.

Yury Ushakov, a foreign policy adviser to President Vladimir Putin, gave no further details. Both Obama and Putin have signaled since winning presidential elections this year that they want an improvement in U.S.-Russian ties.

Putin invited Obama to visit Russia after the U.S. leader's election for a second presidential term last month, but relations between the former Cold War rivals remain uneasy.

Putin, who won election to a third term in March, has been angered by the U.S. Congress' passage of the Magnitsky Act at the same time it ratified Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization.

The Magnitsky Act allows the United States to deny visas and freeze assets of Russian officials accused of involvement in the prison death of anti-graft lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in 2009. Obama signed the Magnitsky Act into law last week.

"The Americans haven't created a mini-crisis out of nothing. We are losing time for the normal development of relations," Ushakov said at a news briefing. "Now we should spend some time on getting through this mini-crisis. Why do we need it? It's incomprehensible."

Obama, who visited Russia in 2009, struck up a good rapport with then-President Dmitry Medvedev, launching a "reset" in bilateral relations that led to the signing of a new nuclear arms reduction treaty.

But Obama has a more difficult relationship with Putin. Russia has assumed the presidency of the Group of 20 major economies for the coming year and hosts a summit in St. Petersburg in September.

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