

Extra Feature Story

Obama Visits Russia Hoping to "Reset" Tense Relations

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President Barack Obama visited Moscow this week for a two-day summit with Russian leaders that focused on resetting sometimes tense U.S.-Russia relations and renewing cooperation on issues such as nuclear proliferation and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As part of the first U.S.-Russia summit in seven years, President Obama met with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev to discuss nuclear arms reduction and the use of Russian airspace to move supplies into Afghanistan to help the war effort.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Obama met for the first time with both men acknowledging diplomatic tensions but expressing hope for the future.

Mr. Putin is the powerful former president of Russia who still holds considerable sway within the government. He remarked that while there have been periods of diplomatic growth, there have also been "periods of, shall we say, grayish mood between our two countries and of stagnation."

President Obama said that while the two nations "may not end up agreeing on everything," they should be able to achieve "a tone of mutual respect."

President Obama hopes to reach out to young Russians

President Obama ended his visit with a speech at the New Economic School in Moscow where he addressed his hopes for a "fresh start" in relations between the two nations noting that "America wants a strong, peaceful and prosperous Russia."

Speaking to the young graduates, President Obama said, "The future does not belong to those who gather armies on a field of battle or bury missiles in the ground... The future belongs to young people with an education and imagination to create. That is the source of power in this century."

Although Mr. Obama's address was meant for Russian citizens, government-owned TV networks did not broadcast the speech.

U.S., Russia agree to reduce nuclear weapons

After hours of diplomatic talks, President Obama and President Medvedev publicly agreed to decrease their nuclear arsenals and negotiate a new arms control treaty to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START 1) which expires in December.

The two countries said they would reduce their deployed nuclear warheads by one quarter.

The START 1 treaty was proposed by former President Ronald Reagan in 1982. The landmark agreement resulted in the significant reduction of nuclear weapons by the U.S. and Russia.

Presidents Medvedev and Obama said it is important to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

"There are regions around the world where the presence of nuclear arms would create huge problems, and these are areas where we should concentrate our efforts together with our American partners," Medvedev said.

President Obama specifically referenced Iran and North Korea, two countries that have stepped up their nuclear arms capabilities.

Legacy of Soviet Union still causing discord

Although the two countries did agree to a reduction in nuclear arms, the talks did not make headway on certain divisive topics such as the legitimacy of former Soviet states Georgia and Ukraine.

Beginning in 1922, both countries were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or USSR. The union held together by socialist ideals and brutal military might until 1991 when it was dissolved. A loose Commonwealth of Independent States was created in its place.

The U.S. has supported the rights of the two countries in recent disputes with Russia, backing their interest in joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, which Russia disapproves of.

U.S.-Russia relations also hit a difficult point in 2008 when Georgia invaded the disputed territory of South Ossetia, prompting Russia to then invade Georgia. The U.S. supported Georgia in the dispute and sent humanitarian aid to the country.

"On areas where we disagree, like Georgia, I don't anticipate a meeting of the minds anytime soon," President Obama said of Prime Minister Putin on the Fox News Channel.

U.S.-Russia relations complicated by Cold War rivalry

As the only two superpowers to emerge after World War II, the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union dominated foreign policy during the latter part of the 20th century and the effects of the conflict still affect relations.

The Cold War is so named because the two countries never engaged in any direct combat but battled for power and influence in different parts of the world from Cuba to Afghanistan.

The confrontation officially ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, paving the way for the United States to find new ways to cooperate.

The relationship cooled significantly during President George W. Bush's terms in office, as then-Russian President Putin took an assertive stance against the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

-- **Compiled by Kate Stanton for NewsHour Extra**

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