

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Dmitry A. Medvedev of Russia in Seoul, South Korea

March 26, 2012

President Medvedev. So I would like to start by saying, once again, that together with my friend and colleague Barack Obama, we had a very substantial discussion of different issues of our agenda of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Russia.

I told Barack that despite the fact that reset that has been largely debated over the past 3 years get different assessments, I still believe that it was an extremely useful exercise, and we probably enjoyed the best level of relations between the United States and Russia during those 3 years than ever during the previous decades. And we managed to achieve a lot in various areas. First and foremost, that was the new START Treaty that was signed. And we also managed to establish close cooperation on the most sensitive international issues.

And I would like to especially thank the U.S. President for his huge work and huge support in Russia's accession to the WTO. In my view, that was an extremely important topic, and I hope that we will be able to achieve similar successes in resolving remaining issues, such as the revoke of Jackson-Vanik amendment.

Lots remains to be done, of course, in terms of trade and economic relations. We need to bring them to the new level through increasing the volume of trade and raising the general level and pace of cooperation. And I believe that it would serve the interests of the U.S. companies and the U.S. citizens, especially now that the global economy is experiencing the turbulent times.

We, of course, as usual, discussed various international issues, including the most difficult ones, such as Syria. Yesterday I had a very good meeting with the Special Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General, Mr. Annan, and like I told the U.S. President, we believe that his mission is very good, and we hope that he will be able to reach good results and to somewhat appease, at least initially, the situation, and would help to establish communication because—between various public groups and forces that exist in Syria. And yesterday I expressed my every support to Mr. Annan.

Anyways, we need to make sure that we not end up in greater problems that we already have and that the threat of the civil war is averted, that it does not become reality, and that this mission would lead to dialogue between all the groups that exist in the country and government authorities.

Of course, we also spoke about the situation in the Middle East. We touched upon the Iranian nuclear program, the North Korean nuclear program, other sensitive issues, Afghanistan cooperation. So I guess we touched upon all main issues and gave all main positions.

Of course, we also spoke about the missile defense. I believe we still have time; time hasn't run out. And now we need to discuss and cooperate on various aspects on European missile defense. I believe such discussion could be more active. Now, in my view, time has come for discussions between technical aspects, and of course, we remain at our own positions, both the United States and Russian Federation. But I believe we still have time to agree on a balanced solution, and I believe that the good experience Barack and myself have gained while

working on the START Treaty will help us and be very useful when finding solution to this very difficult problem.

And of course, Barack, I would like to take the opportunity to say how much I enjoyed the cooperation we had with you. And I believe that it really was the highlight of the previous years. And due to the high level of cooperation, we managed to resolve various complicated issues bilaterally—international agenda. And I hope that the same high level of our relations will remain between the United States of Russia—the United States of America and the Russian Federation when the new President starts—steps in office.

And I would like to—I already invited you to visit Russia. I understand that this year will be difficult for you since it's an election year. But still, I hope that you will be able to come. I already invited you to my hometown, St. Petersburg, so I would like to take the occasion to reiterate my invitation on behalf of myself and President-elect Vladimir Putin.

President Obama. Thank you. Well, first of all, let me just say that the last 3 years of my work with President Medvedev has been extremely productive. And he listed some of the achievements that has resulted from this work—the new START Treaty reduces our nuclear stockpiles in ways that can help create greater peace and security not just for our countries but for the world and is consistent with our obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Russia's ascension into the WTO can open up trade and commerce between our two countries that can create jobs and economic growth for both Russians and Americans. And as Dmitry mentioned, we think it's going to be very important for us to address Jackson-Vanik so that American businesses can fully take advantage of an open and liberalized Russian market.

It is true that there have been times where we have had to manage tensions between our countries, and that's to be expected. Obviously, there are always tensions between countries, and that's certainly true given the long history of the cold war between our two countries. But what I think we've been able to do is to ensure that rather than look backwards, we've been looking forwards.

Sorry, translator, I forgot you were there. [*Laughter*] I got on a roll.

Moving forward, we've got more work to do between our two countries. Dmitry identified some areas of continued friction, missile defense being an example. And what we've agreed to is to make sure that our teams, at a technical level, are in discussions about how some of these issues can be resolved.

The bilateral Presidential Commission that was chaired by Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary of State Clinton, will be working actively around a number of the trade and commercial issues, not only with respect to WTO, but how we can more vigorously expand the kind of investment and the kind of cooperation on the economic front that can benefit both Russia and the United States.

On the international front, we agreed that, as two of the world's leading powers, it's absolutely critical that we communicate effectively and coordinate effectively in responding to a wide range of situations that threaten world peace and security.

So on Syria, although there had been some differences over the last several months, we both agreed that we should be supportive of Kofi Annan's efforts to try to end some of the bloodshed that's taking place within Syria and move towards a mechanism that would allow for the Syrian people ultimately to have a representative and legitimate government that serves their interest.

On Iran, we agreed that the P-5-plus-1 talks with Iran that should be announced soon offer us an opportunity to resolve diplomatically the critical issue of ensuring that Iran is abiding by its international obligations that will allow it to rejoin the community of nations and have peaceful uses of nuclear energy while not developing nuclear weapons.

And with respect to North Korea, we are going to be both sending messages to North Korea that they should not go forward with this missile launch, which would violate existing U.N. Security Council resolutions. And our hope is, is that we can resolve these issues diplomatically.

So let me just say that at a time of great challenges around the world, cooperation between the United States and Russia is absolutely critical to world peace and stability. And I have to say that I could not have asked for a better partner in forging that strong relationship than Dmitry. I am confident that in his new role he is going to continue to have an outstanding influence in world affairs and help to continue to deepen and improve the relationship between our two countries.

I wish him all the best. And I would love to visit St. Petersburg. He is absolutely right that my next visit to Russia will undoubtedly be after my election. [*Laughter*]

Good luck, my friend.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:01 p.m. at the Millennium Seoul Hilton hotel. In his remarks, he referred to former Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan of the United Nations, in his capacity as Joint U.N.-Arab League Special Envoy for Syria. President Medvedev spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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