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### Obama lauds Putin at Russia talks



Barack Obama (l) and Vladimir Putin

The talks are seen as a chance to shift relations between the two states

US President Barack Obama has praised Russian PM Vladimir Putin at talks outside Moscow, saying there was an excellent chance to improve ties.

Mr Obama's meeting with the man widely regarded as the most powerful in Russia is taking place on the second day of the American leader's visit to Moscow.

Mr Obama praised Mr Putin for his "extraordinary work" as president and PM as the pair met for the first time.

Mr Putin said improvement of relations were "linked" to Mr Obama's role.

Afghan deal

The breakfast meeting was held at Mr Putin's dacha outside the capital.

Mr Obama said: "I am aware of not only the extraordinary work that you've done on behalf of the Russian people in your previous role as prime minis-, uh, as president, but in your current role as prime minister."

#### ANALYSIS

Richard Galpin

Richard Galpin, Moscow

In unusually blunt comments last week Mr Obama described Mr Putin as a man with a cold war mentality who still had one foot in the past.

It provoked the usual sharp response from Mr Putin's office.

The fact that Mr Obama is meeting the prime minister - ostensibly to discuss economic issues - is a reflection of the power Mr Putin still holds.

Many believe he remains the most powerful politician in the country, making the vast majority of all the important decisions.

So if the US president really wants to ensure the relationship between Washington and Moscow is on the mend, he needs to include Mr Putin in his charm offensive.

Mr Putin said: "We link hopes for development of our relationship with your name."

Last week, Mr Obama said he thought the former Russian president turned prime minister had "one foot in the old ways of doing business and one foot in the new".

Mr Obama is later due to deliver a major speech on democracy, the global economy and the US-Russian relationship.

On Monday, after meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, he signed eight separate agreements with Russia.

They included a pact to negotiate a new arms control treaty to replace the 1991 Start I pact which expires in December.

A new agreement could see the two countries reducing their nuclear warheads by up to the third, to below 1,700 each within seven years of the treaty's signing.

Separately, Russia also agreed to allow the US military to fly troops and weapons across its territory to Afghanistan, allowing it to avoid using supply routes through Pakistan that are attacked by militants.

However, on the contentious issue of US plans to base parts of a missile defence shield in Eastern Europe, the presidents merely said they had agreed to a joint study into ballistic missile threats and the creation of a data exchange centre.

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### **Obama in Moscow for nuclear talks**



Barack and Michelle Obama (05/07/09)

Mr Obama's visit comes at a time of strained US-Russian relations

US President Barack Obama has arrived in Moscow for talks with his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, focusing on further reducing nuclear stockpiles.

Officials on both sides were quoted as saying a document had been agreed, though Russia said it was not final.

Both men say they want deep cuts to their current levels of 6,000 nuclear warheads each.

In addition, Russia has been pressing Mr Obama to scrap a US plan for a missile defence shield in Europe.

See US and Russian nuclear weapon stockpiles

Afghanistan and Iran are also on the agenda.

The presidential Air Force One plane carrying Mr and Mrs Obama landed at Moscow's Vnukovo airport on Monday morning.

Mr Obama is expected to hold talks with Vladimir Putin, currently prime minister and formerly president, on Tuesday.

Many analysts say he is still in the driving seat in the Russian government.

Both sides have made clear their desire to improve, or "reset", relations between Washington and Moscow.

But BBC diplomatic correspondent Jonathan Marcus, who is in Moscow, says that is not going to be easy given the different perceptions of their national interests the two sides bring to the table.

Under the previous Bush Administration, relations between Washington and Moscow were almost as bad as during the Cold War, so there is ample opportunity for improvement, he adds.

'Difficult situation'

Mr Obama is travelling with his wife, Michelle, and two daughters.

This is not some star coming to town

Dmitry Trenin  
head of the Moscow Carnegie Centre think-tank

A summit of limited expectations  
Russian views on Obama

He is due to begin his visit by laying a wreath at the Grave of an Unknown Soldier near the Kremlin wall, before talks with Mr Medvedev.

The Russian president said in an interview for Italian media released on Sunday that US missile shield plans for Europe put a "very prominent nuclear country like Russia... in a difficult situation".

Arms control will top the agenda of the summit. The Soviet-era Start I accord expires in December.

The White House co-ordinator for weapons of mass destruction, Gary Samore, ruled out any final agreement on renewing Start being reached this week, but he did see an "announcement" being made.

"I think you will see an announcement that indicates some progress toward reaching that objective," he told reporters.

On Afghanistan, the US is confident of obtaining Moscow's approval for flying troops and weapons through Russian airspace.

President Obama will also meet Russian journalists and civil society activists.

Low-key feel

A University of Maryland opinion poll released on Sunday suggests that 75% of Russians believe the US abuses its greater power and only 2% have "a lot of confidence" that Mr Obama will do the right thing in world affairs.

#### START I TREATY

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (Start I), signed in July 1991, cut the numbers of nuclear warheads by roughly half to 6,000. It expires on 5 December 2009

Start II, signed in 1993, was intended to further reduce number of warheads and ban use of Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) warheads, but was never ratified

In 2002, Sort, better known as the Treaty of Moscow, committed both sides to cut arsenals by two-thirds to 1700-2200 deployed warheads

Neither of Russia's main TV news bulletins on Sunday evening led with the impending US visit.

"This is being played as essentially a low-key visit that shows the American leadership's respect for the Russian leadership," Dmitry Trenin, head of the Moscow Carnegie Centre think-tank, told Reuters news agency.

"This is not some star coming to town."

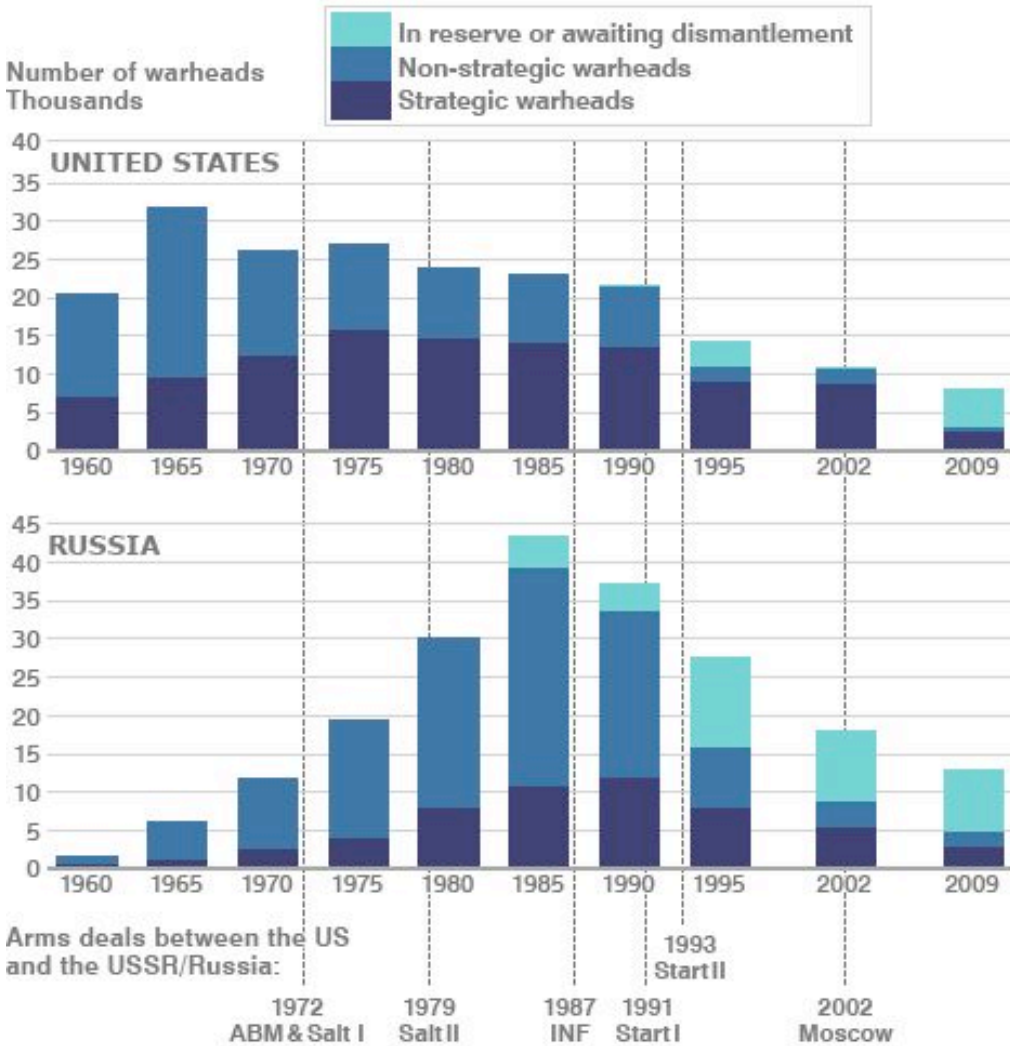
Nonetheless, correspondents say Mr Obama can expect a smoother reception than he received on a 2005 visit to Russia when he and other visiting US Congressmen were detained for three hours at an airport in the Urals city of Perm.

They were kept in an "uncomfortably stuffy room adjacent to the tarmac", a US spokesman said, as they resisted Russian customs officials' demands to search their plane.

Mr Obama later brushed off the incident in his book *The Audacity of Hope*, saying "It wasn't the Gulag".

Graph showing US and Russian nuclear weapon stockpiles

**US AND RUSSIA NUCLEAR WEAPONS**



SOURCE: Natural Resources Defense Council, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists