

Obama's Visit to Moscow as a Step in the "Grand Game"

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Global Research, July 09, 2009

[Strategic Cultural Foundation](#) 9 July 2009

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The results of US President Obama's visit to Moscow remain at the center of media debates. In Russia quite a few commentators are open about their disappointment particularly with the relatively minor importance of the nuclear disarmament document produced by the talks. In essence it represents a replay of the 2002 Treaty between the US and the Russian Federation on Strategic Offensive Reductions. As for the urgent problems in various parts of the world where the interests of Russia and the US are interwoven, what is being discussed is not the promised reset but a modernization of the entire configuration of the system and an overhaul on the fundamental level in the geopolitical, military, and economic spheres. Obviously, greater sensitivity to Russia's interests in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well as in the relations with China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and the post-Soviet republics should be built into the configuration as otherwise no real reset is possible. However, quite obviously this is not going to materialize. Obama's Administration is determined to protect strictly and persistently the US geopolitical interests in Eurasia.

As a comment on the Moscow talks, the Financial Times Deutschland wrote that the US strategy of taming Putin and Medvedev with the help of concessions is loaded with serious risks. It remained unclear, however, what concessions the Financial Times Deutschland managed to discern. Obama's top Russia adviser Michael McFaul said bluntly before the visit that the US was not going to convince Russians or bargain with them. Appreciating McFaul's candor we can nevertheless project that some concessions of limited and short-living importance will be made to sweeten the pill, as discussed recently in V. Berger's paper *The Eloquent Silence*. Kyiv might tone down its anti-Russian rhetoric in the framework of the game coordinated by Washington and meant to avoid alienating the Russian leadership on the eve of the talks important to the US from the standpoint of the realization of its strategy in Afghanistan. An agreement permitting the US troops to cross Russia's airspace en route to Afghanistan was signed in Moscow. Russian President Medvedev said its text would be available to the public in the nearest future. Obama was obviously delighted that he deal had been reached and said it would save the US time and resources in delivering supplies to Afghanistan. Details of the corresponding document were leaked to the Russian media – up to 12 US aircrafts with military supplies would be flying across Russia daily.

The intermediate results of Obama's visit to Moscow are an illustration of the US chess game strategically aimed at irreversibly partitioning and subduing the Eurasian space. At the same time, no shifts in what concerns the planned US missile defense and other disturbing issues loom on the horizon, and in these respects Obama's stance is practically the same as that of former US President G. Bush. As the Russian leadership frequently indicated, the recurrent invocations of the threat allegedly posed by Iran's nuclear program

do not appear convincing.

The question whether Moscow should formulate an independent agenda in dealing with Afghanistan (and Central Asia in general) or limit its role to providing technical and military assistance to its anti-terrorist coalition partners realizing their own geopolitical plans in Eurasia remains open. The organization of the US military transit across Russia can be tantamount to the use of Russia's resources including its airspace in the interests of the US politics aimed at containing China. In the context, the recent outbreak of violence in China's Uyghur province which left hundreds of people killed or injured could not be a random set of events.

There is no need to explain how the whole range of developments will affect the interactions in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Possibly, Russia will be offered an informal deal involving the cooling of the confrontation with Ukraine and Georgia as compensation. No doubt, a new round of tensions in the relations with the two countries will follow as soon as the US gets what it wants in Central Asia with Russia's help. We know too well from the recent history what approach to such informal deals is practiced by the US.

Joe Biden's work on the reformatting of Eurasia will certainly continue. He plans to visit Tbilisi and Kyiv with inspections in mid-July, and the tour has a chance to become a no less important event than Obama's talks in Moscow. The nearest future can dispel any illusions about the promised reset, and even the most reckless idealists will lose hope that it is altogether possible.

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