

## **EXCLUSIVE TO CPF: David Satter – Obama and Medvedev**

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The upcoming meeting between Dmitri Medvedev and Barack Obama in London will give each of the leaders an opportunity to assess the other. Obama will be seeking to find a common language with the Russian president and a basis for resolving differences. Medvedev, however, will be looking for something else. He will probably seek to determine to what degree Obama can be induced to mistake propaganda for reality and the degree to which he can be misled.

It is an irony of present day world politics that Russia neglects its real geopolitical interests which dictate a close relationship with the West in favor of the pursuit of imperial illusions which benefit no one but the members of the present Russian regime. In the fundamental sense, Russia and the West should be allies. They have common interests. These include the need to balance Chinese power, prevent nuclear proliferation and combat Islamic extremism. Yet, the Russian government is ready to ignore these core interests in favor of nurturing the false impression that Russia is still a superpower that is entitled to dominate its neighbors. It is this that explains Russia's opposition to the U.S. missile shield in Eastern Europe, the expansion of NATO to include former Soviet republics and the otherwise inexplicable support for the nuclear aspirations of Iran. It is Russia's backing for Iran that forces the West to waste huge amounts of time and effort to seek to resolve a problem that should never have existed in the first place.

Russia is not the Soviet Union and Medvedev does not have the undivided power of previous Russian or Soviet leaders but Obama would do well to keep the experience of past first meetings between Russian and American leaders in mind. It was, after all, Khrushchev's underestimation of Kennedy at their first summit meeting in Vienna that helped persuade him to take the risk of installing missiles in Cuba. President Carter began his administration by warning against "excessive fear of communism." He sought to establish a personal relationship with Brezhnev and even embraced him at the Vienna summit meeting in 1978. His moment of awakening came after the invasion of Afghanistan when Brezhnev told him over the hot line that the invasion was undertaken to protect Afghanistan from a foreign invasion. In fact, of course, the only foreign invasion was the Soviet invasion. Carter said that he learned more about communism during that call than he had learned during his entire previous life.

Russia needs to be persuaded not that the U.S. is seeking accommodation with Russia and good relations. Russia's leaders already know this. It needs to understand that the U.S. has principles and has no intention of compromising them. It is this that will make the Russians less confident about taking risks and serve as an effective deterrent. Unfortunately, as recent events have shown, although it cannot threaten the world the way the Soviet Union did, deterring Russia is still an issue.

A cyber attack on Estonia was launched from Russia after the Estonians, following long consultations with Moscow, moved a Soviet war memorial from a place in the center of town. The Russians have also threatened to respond with electronic interference if anti-missile missile batteries are installed in Poland. Russia is considering delivering highly effective S300 anti-aircraft batteries to Iran which could have the effect of precipitating an Israeli attack and would certainly

increase Iranian self confidence. Finally, Russia is fully capable of undertaking a new invasion of Georgia. There is an unsettled situation along the Georgian- South Ossetian border and little to prevent Russia from administering another blow to Georgia. Russia could also be led by overconfidence to take the risk of provoking a conflict with Ukraine.

It is normally taken for granted that the leaders of a country have the interests of their country at heart. Western leaders make this assumption about Russia. Unfortunately, the Russian regime has a long history of behaving not like a true government but like occupiers and this tradition did not change after the fall of the Soviet Union. The pursuit of imperial illusions is not in the interests of the Russian people whose numbers are declining rapidly under the weight of a system that does not respect individual rights. The Russian people need a regime that respects human rights and the West needs to identify with their needs rather than the interests of their rulers. It is this principle that should guide President Obama when he meets with Medvedev this week.

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