



U.S.-Russian Relations under Bush and Putin

Interviewee: John Beyrle

Deputy Chief of Mission in Moscow, 2002-2005

United States Ambassador to Bulgaria, 2005-2008

United States Ambassador to Russia, 2008-2012

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Citation



[Begin Transcription]

BEHRINGER: Ok, so we are here with the Collective Memory Project at Southern Methodist University's Center for Presidential History on the U.S. and Russia oral history project. I'm Paul Behringer, postdoctoral fellow here at Southern Methodist University.

MILES: I'm Simon Miles, assistant professor in the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.

BEHRINGER: And we are here to interview Ambassador Beyrle. Would you mind introducing yourself?



State Bureau. And I served as deputy in that bureau for the last two years of the Clinton administration. And when the Bush administration came in, there was some debate about whether that bureau in the State Department was going to continue to exist, being responsible for Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union, or whether it would be folded back into the European Bureau, as had been the case previously.

The decision was made fairly early on to fold that bureau back into the European Bureau. But that took about six months to accomplish, bureaucratically, administratively, and in policy terms. And so, for those final six months of the new Bush administration, basically January to July of 2001, I served as the acting coordinator for that bureau, which was the equivalent of being an assistant secretary of state.

BEHRINGER: And early on in the administration, in March, 2001 the United States expelled 50 Russian diplomats accused of working with convicted spy Robert Hanssen. What was the thinking behind this move, and how did the Russians react? And was there any lasting impact on U.S.-Russia relations?

BEYRLE: Well, even in the Clinton administration, I would say especially during the last two or three years there was growing concern about the number of Russian intelligence operatives who were working in the United States, both in Washington out of the embassy and out of their consulate in New York and their UN representation office in New York as well. The FBI in particular was very concerned [00:04:00] that these numbers had ballooned to the point that it was getting very, very difficult in resource terms for them to keep track of it.





back to the Soviet days, he'd worked for the FBI for a long time. In retrospect, it became very clear that the reason that the FBI had stopped talking about wanting this expulsion to take place was they saw that would get in the way of the case they were trying to build on Hanssen. We know from reading the history now that the FBI was onto Hanssen for a number of months before he was actually arrested. We didn't know that at the time, but clearly after Hanssen was arrested, then the pressure renewed and even intensified to throw out these Russian spies—I think the number that we had agreed on earlier was 50 and it stayed at 50.

And I recall going into brief Secretary of State Powell, who I had not talked to at any great length before that. He had been in his office in the State Department for about three weeks at that point. And I went into brief him about what had led up to this point and to tell him that the interagency consensus now was that we needed to expel 50 Russians. And I remember Secretary Powell sitting almost like Buddha in his chair, not saying a word, not nodding, not shaking his head, taking it all in, but betraying absolutely no indication of which way he was leading on this question. That was one of the first instances in which I began to grow a great deal of respect for Secretary Powell, and I learned a lot from him in that moment about [00:08:00] playing your cards close to your chest.

Obviously there were discussions at higher levels between the White House and the State Department, the CIA and the FBI, and it was decided to go forward with this expulsion. And I think it was a day or two after that, that



Secretary Powell called in the then-ambassador Yuri Ushakov for Russia and told him that we were going to take this step, which was not really a surprise to them at this point. They realized that, certainly, they would be paying some price for the Hanssen scandal. It really was a scandal at 1 0 0 t5 652.9 Tm0 g0 G[0 TJETQq0.00



So that was that. It, I would say, did not have a really lasting effect on the U.S.-Russia relationship in that first year of the Bush administration for a number of reasons. The first reason, really, is that these are such routine occurrences in U.S.-Soviet, U.S.-Russia relations that it's never a surprise—there's almost a playbook that's pulled out. And, once it's done, it's done. There's a bit of residual tension and friction for a while, but in general, both sides tend to get over this because there's other work to be done. And it's recognized that this is just the way the game is played. The other reason, specific to the Bush administration and the time, was that simply 2001 was a year in which many other things happened, 9/11 most conspicuously, which very quickly overshadowed any tension or any friction which might have persisted after the expulsions took place. But in general, it was done fairly cleanly, I would say without a lot of .

BEHRINGER: That's fascinating. [00:12:00] Speaking of moving on with the relationship, also around this time you met with the Chechen rebel leadership, correct?



Obviously, Russia, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, had had to contend with a number of simmering ethnic disputes, which had had the lid kept on them by the Soviets, and the lid very quickly blew off. And one of those was in Chechnya, a province in the Caucasus on the southern border of the Soviet Union—Russia with Georgia—and the Chechens made very clear that they wanted to fight for their independence. And there was a sort of breakaway militant part of the Chechens, which actually began to wage a war to win their independence from Russia. Russia was not about to give up any part of its territory, especially to an armed uprising.

And so a fairly brutal war ensued through all of the Yeltsin years, essentially 1992 until Putin took over in 2000. It was a war that was characterized by indiscriminate shelling of civilian population, [00:14:00] human rights abuses, terrible human rights abuses on both sides. I recall when I was working in the bureau of the State Department responsible for Russian affairs—this is in the Clinton administration—the Russian side gave us a videotape, which they had captured from the Chechens, of the Chechens torturing and even killing Russian prisoners. And I was delegated to watch that video. Somebody had to watch it, and no one higher up above me wanted to watch it. And I didn't have the heart to delegate it to anybody on my staff.

So some pretty terrible things happened on both sides. And there was quite a lot of push, especially at the end of the Clinton administration, to get the Russians to work out some sort of a peace deal, or at least a negotiation which



have some senior member at the policy level in the administration meet with the right Chechen.

And it turned out that a man named Ilyas Akhmadov—who, I think I described earlier, was the kind of de facto foreign minister of the breakaway part of Chechnya—was visiting the United States. He gave an interview with the National Press Club. He had meetings up on Capitol Hill, met with John McCain, met with members of the former Clinton administration. And it was decided that I should meet with him. And we made very, very clear that this was a meeting that conferred no legitimacy on their claim to pull away from Russia, because the view of the Clinton administration and also the Bush administration was that Chechnya was a part of Russia and Russia had the right to deal with an armed uprising on its territory. The question was always how they were doing it. But we wanted to make clear that we weren't tilting in the direction of the separatists, [00:18:00] but that we wanted to talk to them, to send a message to the Russians that they weren't getting a complete free pass on this, which the narrative had evolved they had been given in the Clinton administration.

So this meeting would take place, not in the State Department, but in a professor's office at George Washington University, fairly close to the State Department. I remember walking over that day and taking a member of my staff as a note taker because we wanted a very, very good record of this meeting. We didn't take an interpreter. He spoke a little English, but we did most of the meeting in Russian, my Russian was good enough. And the



message that I had to convey to him was essentially an anti-terrorist message. I was able to, not to describe to him, but to tell him that I had seen evidence of atrocities on the Chechen side—and I certainly had seen that evidence. And I pushed him very hard, as we had



sometimes would last five, 10, and even longer, 15, 20 minutes if you didn't interrupt him. He was very self-possessed, very capable, obviously very intelligent, but strikingly different than Boris Yeltsin, who, in the final years of his tenure as president of Russia, was really an old and sick man.

BEHRINGER: And before this time, I should say before 9/11, was there a focus in the Bush administration about cooperating in counter-terrorism operations with the Russians, and did this meeting with and dialogue with the [Chechens] affect any of that?

BEYRLE: There was always talk about counter-terrorism cooperation between Russia and the United States [00:22:00] because Russia had a formidable intelligence apparatus. Obviously, they were very plugged in to what was happening in Afghanistan—at least they thought they were, it turned out they weren't quite as plugged in as we, and they, thought they were and they pretended to be or said they were—but it never really amounted to a lot. If there was intelligence exchange with the Russians and this was true, even after 9/11, it was usually 70/30, 80/20 in favor of the Russians, meaning, of the hundred percent of intelligence that was exchanged, they got





wanted them to be able to operate [00:28:00] on an equal plane. And we wanted them to be protected from the rampant corruption that was going on in Russia. So there was an agenda to be talked about.

And I recall that when President Putin and President Bush came into the room and shook hands for the very first time—and there was a big gaggle around, it was a press spray, and so the press was taking pictures—it struck me that President Putin and President Bush were still both a bit nervous at that point. President Bush, when he was nervous, would tend to speak a little bit more loudly. Just something that other people had noticed and mentioned to me, and I certainly saw that on display. And Putin, in ways that were more subtle, but easy to pick up—I'd met with him at that point in two or three different occasions, so I kind of had a feel of him over the course of several hours across the meeting table—and I could see that he also realized that a lot was at stake here. Then the two of them went off with a small group of advisers, Condi Rice on the American side with President Bush, and they had their famous one-on-one meeting, which was scheduled to last 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, Colin Powell and I and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and his staff went off into a separate room to have a bilateral meeting of the foreign ministers. And that meeting was really just marking time for the half hour of the one-on-one until we would rejoin the presidents or the presidents would rejoin us around a bigger table and work through the whole agenda. So a half hour of discussion between Ivanov and Powell took place. Ivanov began looking at his watch. [00:30:00] 45 minutes passed. He called an aid into the



room. He was concerned that the meeting between Bush and Putin had ended and no one had told him and that they had gone off. And I remember Secretary Powell telling him, "Don't worry, they'll come and tell us when this is done."

This stretched onto an hour, then to almost an hour and a half. And by that time, Powell, and Ivanov were completely out of notecards, completely off the agenda, and they were just talking freely about all sorts of interesting things. I remember, at one point, Foreign Tuobai Tuout and I remember



one meeting the agenda that we were all going to cover at this meeting, so we have a few loose ends to tie up and then we have to go do the press conference."

So after 10 or 15 minutes, literally, we all got up and went outside for the press conference. We—Condi Rice was national security advisor, Colin Powell, and our Russian counterparts—we were all seated sort of to the side on a riser, looking out at the press. Bush and Putin were on a separate podium stand, answering questions. President Bush read a statement,



relationship and the relationship between the presidents was going to be closer than we had expected. And as we found out after 9/11, it had also had a profound effect on President Putin, because, after the 9/11 attacks President Putin famously was the first world leader to try to put a call into President Bush. And, three or four days later, in a meeting with his national security leadership he overruled most of them and gave the green light for the United States to put bases in Central Asia—Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan—from which to wage the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. So, looking into his eyes and getting sense of his soul actually, I think, paid off for the United States in an unexpected way, really just two or three months afterwards.

BEHRINGER: And one of the main things coming out of that meeting was that the United States announced that it was pulling out of the ABM—the Anti-Ballistic Missile—Treaty. What was your sense of how the Russians felt about that?

BEYRLE: Well, you're right. One of one of the items on the agenda for the Ljubljana meeting certainly was a signal to the Russians that we were beginning to think about the modalities of pulling away—doing away with the ABM Treaty, which 2 Tf1 0 0 1 4860





Russian intelligence services certainly the hard line faction in the Kremlin, that America's desire to build a national missile defense had to have, if not as a spoken, certainly a large unspoken, component, the desire to be able to defend against Russia in a way that upset the balance of power. And through the Bush and the Obama administration, into the Trump administration, through the Trump administration, missile defense was the insoluble problem. We twisted ourselves into knots in negotiations with Russians, trying to show them, describe to them, [00:42:00] how the defense systems that we were conceiving of to guard against missile attacks from places like Iran and North Korea could in no way threaten their missile capabilities. It just couldn't.

But this was not a rational argument. This was a theological argument almost, and there was really no convincing the Russians otherwise. We really, to this day, haven't resolved that. We have kind of put it to the side and



can you talk a little bit more broadly what the impact was on U.S.-Russian relations?

BEYRLE: It had a tremendously altering effect on it in a positive sense. President Putin not only was the first world leader to try to reach out to P



President Bush in the fall of 2001, and from there they flew to Texas and Bush hosted Putin at his home, the Crawford R



important to try to build a close relationship and President Bush did everything he could to foster that in the months succeeding 9/11.

BEHRINGER: I was hoping to move next to the topic of the color revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. And I was wondering if you could talk about where you were in government during those. And what types of debates within the administration there were about how to react to those, and how the Russians that you spoke to reacted? What was the general Russian view of them? And—sorry—one more thing would be, would you distinguish between the revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, or is lumping them all together a proper way to think about them?

BEYRLE: Well, during the time of those color revolutions, basically 2003, 2004, 2005, I was the deputy chief of mission in Moscow. I had returned to Moscow as deputy to Ambassador Sandy Vershbow. So I had a front row seat for all of the effects that these color revolutions had on the U.S.-Russia relationship. But they also took place at a time when the U.S.-Russia relationship was getting a little more rough. There was a bit more friction because of Russia's failure to support the United States going into Iraq, [00:52:00] and we can we talk about that separately.

With regard to the color revolutions—the color revolutions were seen in



vestiges of corruption that flowed out of being part of the old Soviet Union and the corruption that developed in the newly independent Russia during the 1990s. And the revolutions in, especially in Ukraine and in Georgia, were led by political leaders that we in the United States, in the West, saw as democrats, men—they were all men—who were devoted to the rule of law, or at least made the rule of law, democratic practices, independent institutions, part of their policies, part of their platforms. And they were in all cases replacing leaders—Shevardnadze in Georgia, Yanukovich in Ukraine, Akayev in Kyrgyzstan—who were all from the Soviet era and who had close links to



feelings, cultural, economic ties—and you are pushing forward leaders who are anti-Russian, anti-Kremlin, and this will have very negative consequences.”

They were very simply against it, but they were powerless to really stop it from happening. They certainly tried in the case of Ukraine. There was the poisoning of Yushchenko, who was the Ukrainian politician who eventually ended up becoming president after the election that he “lost” to Yanukovich was overturned after street protests because the election was very clearly fraudulently managed.

So the Russians tried as much as [00:56:00] they could to keep their people in power. In the case of Shevardnadze in Georgia there was very little they could do. Shevardnadze, at the end, like



principles. Nothing is perfect and none of this continued for long and ended up in any of these countries being paragons of virtue. But, at the time, it certainly was preferable to the direction that the countries had been going under the old leadership.

BEHRINGER: And, in your position as a deputy of mission, are you just reporting the views of Russia [00:58:00] to the State Department, saying, "Here's the Russian view," or are you making recommendations about how the United States should react to the revolutions in their conversations with Russians? Are you saying we need to reassure them, or what are those kind of conversations, if you can talk about that a little bit.

BEYRLE: Well, the job of the deputy chief of mission in most embassies is kind of the chief operating officer. The ambassador is the one who's going in to see the foreign ministers or, in some countries, the presidents and the prime ministers, really dealing at the policy level. The deputy chief of mission is responsible for keeping the embassy running. Moscow is a huge embassy with 25 or 30 different agencies, the Secret Service, Treasury, Defense Department, NASA, Commerce Department, so there's a lot of administrative work to do there. But I had known Ambassador Vershbow, Sandy Vershbow, for a long time. We were from the same cadre. We were both Russia specialists. And so my job as deputy chief of mission was certainly as the chief operating officer, freeing Sandy up not to have to worry about budget and things like that. But Sandy was also very open and we collaborated, worked together a lot, talked a lot about what we were seeing, how we should frame our recommendations to



Washington in terms of policy. So Sandy was very much the lead on that as the ambassador but he was very generous and collaborative.

And I had a lot of contacts in Russia. My Russian was good enough that I was able to track what I was hearing and reading in the press and watching on television. And certainly I was out talking to a lot of different Russians, [01:00:00] and that is what Washington never gets. Washington always has a sense of what's being said in the press, what the official statements of the Kremlin are, but what Washington needs is the understanding of what the arguments were within the Kremlin that led to that outcome, because, a lot of times, policy is not decisions. It's simply the outcome. It's simply what results from a number of factors. And it's no different on the Russian side than it is on the American side. And the embassy is uniquely placed, especially if it has good contacts, good ability to communicate with the government, with people in the foreign ministry, in the Kremlin, in the Duma and the Federation Council, to get a better sense of really what's happening and to inform Washington of how the policies are being developed in the Kremlin— who's for, who's against, what was discarded, what was never thought of. And that obviously helps Washington craft its responses and also its forward-looking policies, understanding what it's up against in Moscow.

BEHRINGER: Sticking with this theme for a little bit—so you're deputy of mission and then you go to become—

BEYRLE: Yeah. Deputy chief of mission.

BEHRINGER: Sorry, deputy chief of mission, and then you go—



was the [01:04:00] war in Iraq and the fact that the Bush administration had decided, essentially, to push in on that alone. And the Russians had essentially joined the Germans and the French in opposing the invasion of Iraq by the Bush administration, by the United States. We had the coalition of the willing as we called it. The Brits were with us, a number of other countries, including, I might add, Bulgaria, which was a member of NATO by that point. But the Russians had not joined us at that point. And the Russians and President Putin had come to a different understanding, different feeling, vis-a-vis President Bush because of that. They felt essentially that they had been slighted, that they had not been listened to, and that the things that they thought were on offer for them after so conspicuously joining with us in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, things like expanded



thought in 2001 about where the money was ever going to come from to pay that off, not to mention money available for upgrading the Russian military. I mentioned the disposable income of the average Russian, who suddenly saw he had the ability to fly to Bali for a winter vacation with money he simply—he or she, families—had never had before. And this somehow convinced the Russian leadership that they were on the right track, that they had kind of solved the equation, and that they didn't need the United States and Western Europe to be their helpers anymore, to be their promoters, to be their supporters. And in fact, a narrative even developed that the things that were still wrong with Russia—corruption, pockets of poverty, the need to build up the military to confront the American missiles—was because of the United States, that the United States was again, not an enemy of Russia, but certainly an adversary which was making Russia's life difficult.

And by the time I arrived as ambassador in 2008—this was before the war broke out with Georgia—you could feel it in the air. The air was fairly crackling with a sense of grievance. I remember talking to contacts in the Russian Duma, Federation Council, Foreign Ministry, people that I had [01:08:00] dealt with on a regular daily basis when I was deputy chief of mission, and I saw now in my first month as ambassador—their attitude was completely different. And especially towards Georgia. They were dismissive and even angry because of what had happened between Georgia and the United States and Western Europe with regard to NATO enlargement.



We're kind of branching off here into different areas, so let me just stop at that point. I'll say that the atmosphere in Russia in 2008 was markedly different than the atmosphere that I'd left in 2005. The Russians were clearly spoiling for a fight. And I used those words when I came back to Washington on consultations at the end of July, and talked to Dan Fried, the assistant secretary of state, and told him this, that I was concerned, and obviously relations between Russia and Georgia were quite troubled at that time. We didn't know that a war was going to break out, but it certainly seemed likely.

BEHRINGER: And speaking of—you mentioned NATO enlargement right there toward the end. You go to become Ambassador of Bulgaria and not everyday we get to talk about Bulgaria. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about Bulgaria's role in U.S.-Russian relations and what it was like to be in Bulgaria in that period?

BEYRLE: Bulgaria was always a very special country among the Warsaw pact nations, and even after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. And even before the Warsaw Pact existed, [01:10:00] Bulgaria had always had a special relationship with Russia. The historical mythology which had developed, which had some basis in historical truth but was also gilded a bit, was that the Russians had liberated the Bulgarians from the Ottoman yoke i

Russia in Bulgaria and this, during the Soviet period, during the Warsaw Pact, the Russians and Bulgarians worked hard to make the most of. Bulgaria wanted to be the special member of the Warsaw Pact. Some people even called it the 16th Republic of the Soviet Union.

So after the Soviet Union fell apart, Bulgaria became an independent country. Russia still maintained significant influence in that country, and there was not an immediate anti-Russia backlash as we saw in the Czech Republic, in Poland, even in Romania and Hungary. Bulgaria was always more in the middle, and a large part of the reason for that was energy. Bulgaria still depended on Russia for close to 90% of the energy it got, both gas and petroleum, and that gave the Russians tremendous leverage.

At the same time, it didn't stop the Bulgarians [01:12:00] from pushing to join NATO in the second round, after the initial round of NATO enlargement, which took in the Czechs, the Poles, and the Hungarians. The [Bulgarians]³ joined in the next wave after that. And by the time I arrived as ambassador in 2005, they were already functioning members of the NATO alliance. They were already sending troops to Afghanistan and to Iraq, a battalion or so, as I recall, and the main thing that I worked on as ambassador in Bulgaria was the defense relationship. We signed a defense cooperation agreement with the Bulgarians when I was ambassador, which allowed for the opening of two bases—we call them Joint Military Facilities, one a land army facility W*ⁿBT/F2 12 Tf1 0 0 1 418.3 301.25 Tm0 g



Georgia and to Ukraine, which in effect would have been a signal of a green light that they were on their way to join the NATO alliance, and this obviously was something that [01:18:00] the Russians were very opposed to.

And the Europeans, especially the Germans and the French, were concerned that it would cause a tremendous backlash in Moscow that would have effects on their own relationships with Moscow and with the Kremlin. So, in the end, it was decided that the communique at the end of the NATO summit would say that the allies welcomed the prospect of Membership Action Plan, but made very clear that they were not on track, that they weren't ready yet. When that was being drafted, the American side, which had been fighting very hard to have more forward-leading language, managed to get a sentence in there that said a very unusual thing for a NATO alliance communique. It said that we agreed, the NATO allies agreed, that Ukraine and Georgia will join NATO. It didn't say when, didn't say how, didn't say they were in the Membership Action Plan, but it said very clearly they will join NATO. How the French and the Germans allowed that to happen I don't know—these things are drafted very late at night sometimes. And that was the only thing that Russia paid attention to. Didn't pay attention to the fact that they in fact had not been granted a Membership Action Plan, that they were still in kind of the halfway house on their way to NATO membership. They focused on the fact that this had been said as a fact.

And Saakashvili also trumpeted that in a way that led to frictions throughout the spring and especially in the summer of 2008, there were



overflights by Russian military aircraft over [01:20:00] Georgian territory. There was shelling from North Ossetia into South Ossetia. There's always a kind of irreducible minimum of skirmishing going on, on that border, but it really ramped up in the summer of 2008 to the degree to which that we—Secretary Rice—talked to Saakashvili to explain that we were concerned that he was in effect baiting the Russians, that he was maybe falling in—not baiting them—but falling into a trap, that the Russians were trying to provoke him in a way that would give them a *casus belli*, a defensible reason, for attacking. We could see the handwriting on the wall. I certainly felt that myself in this crackling atmosphere that I described which was very Georgia-focused in a very negative way.

So the actual proximate cause of the war will be debated for a long time, but there's no question that the Russians massed a great number of Russian troops north of the Roki Tunnel, which leads from North Ossetia into Georgia proper, South Ossetia, and that the fighting in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, ramped up to the point where the Georgians actually killed several Russian peacekeepers who had been deployed there, and that triggered a Russian invasion. And the war was on by August 8th, 2008.

BEHRINGER: And as this crisis is unfolding, you've just become ambassador to Moscow. What was the impact on your ability to do your job and even moving [01:22:00] forward for the last six months of the administration?

BEYRLE: Well, it was interesting because the war actually broke out while I was back in the United States on consultations. I had arrived as ambassador on July 3rd,



help from Putin, and Putin flew back very quickly thereafter. President Bush had met and spoken to Putin and he came back for the meeting in the

Situation Report of 11/03/99 with CIA and CIA at 15:40 on 08/12/59 32 1808102268284



Did we already recall him?" And I said, "No, Mr. President, we haven't, and here's why we shouldn't. We need—you need to have someone who you can trust and who the Russians know and understand. And I can talk to these people. I can find out what's going on." And this was never really a serious option, but it had to be talked about, and by the time the list came up for a second look several days later, that point had disappeared.

But remember this all happened at a time that two other things were happening. First, there was an election campaign going on for president. George Bush was in the last months of his presidency. Obama and McCain were fighting it out to see who the new president would be. And at the end of an administration, there's always a bit of pressure that gets let out. People are tired. People are looking forward to the end, to being able to get out from the pressure cooker, from the crucible. And there's just a little less forward-leaning, a little less push to do things than there would be at the beginning of the administration when—or even the middle of the administration—even for something as important as a war between Russia and Georgia on Georgian territory.

The second thing that was happening, obviously at the same time, was the economic crisis. Bear Stearns, Lehmann Brothers had disappeared. The stock market was collapsing, the auto industry. There were many, many other factors to consider when we looked at economic sanctions against Russia, and the Europeans [01:28:00] in particular had no stomach for this at all. And President Bush understood that, if we don't have the Europeans with us on economic



sanctions—a basic fact that holds true to this day—our sanctions will basically amount to nothing because they'll be circumvented by the Europeans, and the Russians will get everything they need, irrespective of the fact that we are sanctioning and preventing things from happening. So there were things that



because Dimitri Medvedev, only months before that, had become the new president of Russia, essentially filling in for Vladimir Putin for the four years



obligation, both countries, so we had a global obligation to manage U.S.-Russia relations in the most positive, the most responsible way that we could, simply because we had over 90% of the nuclear weapons on the face of the earth. So, it led in fairly short order to an understanding on both sides that we could and would work together on a new treaty, which became the New START treaty, which Obama and Medvedev signed in Prague in 2010, really within the first two years of Obama being president. This was part of the Reset.

The Reset had other aspects that allowed us to resupply our forces in Afghanistan through Russian territory—something that really had been unthinkable in the last years of the Bush administration, although we needed it very much. The Russians had the prospect of joining the World Trade Organization. They were the world's largest economy at that point outside the WTO, and we very much wanted them to be bound by the rules, even though, as with the Chinese, there were questions about how much they would adhere to those rules. At least we wanted them inside that. There were visa liberalizations to make it easier for businessmen and students to travel—there were a lot of things [01:34:00] that we could do and we actually did get done during the reset. So it was a qualitatively different relationship, and it produced results.

The reset is often criticized as a failure. The reset isn't a failure. It produced the START Treaty. It produced the resupply of forces, a 1-2-3 nuclear cooperation agreement, many other things which serve the interests of both sides. The problem with these periods of U.S.-Russia relations where we get



but have very different views of the world and their place in it. And that, more often than not, will lead us on divergent paths and make it more important, more incumbent on us, if not to travel down the same path—some areas we can: in space, counterterrorism cooperation; obviously, missile defense we can't—but we never want to diverge to the point where we really do have to start worrying about armed conflict. Because the consequences of that obviously would be cataclysmic, not just for both countries, but for the world.

BEHRINGER: Well, Ambassador, we thank you so much for giving us your time and speaking with us at such length. It's been a real pleasure to talk with you.

BEYRLE: Thank you very much. Thanks very much for having me, I enjoyed it.

MILES: Thanks, so did we.

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