

## U.S.-Russian Relations under Bush and Putin

### **Interviewee: Stephen Hadley**

Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 2001-2005  
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 2005-2009

### **Interviewers:**

Paul Behringer,  
Post-Doctoral Fellow, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University  
Simon Miles,  
Assistant Professor, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University

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**[Begin Transcription]**

BEHRINGER: Mr. Hadley, thanks for joining us today. My name is Paul Behringer, post-doctoral fellow at the Center for Presidential History.

MILES: And my name's Simon Miles, assistant professor at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.

HADLEY: And I'm Steve Hadley. I was Deputy National Security Advisor from 2001 to 2005 in the administration of President George W. Bush. And then from 2005 to 2009, I was National Security Advisor.

BEHRINGER: And to start, I was wondering if you could begin by describing the George W. Bush administration's intentions, as it took over from the Clinton administration and its relations with Russia.

HADLEY: The Bush administration really was part of that transition, rather extended transition, from the Soviet Union to the post-Soviet Russia. The United States was trying to develop a relationship with Russia where it was not the adversary that the Soviet Union had been. And Russia in turn was trying to develop its own identity in the post-Soviet reality and establish its own position in the world.

So it was a period of transition and what the Bush administration, what President Bush wanted to do, was try to engage Russia, to try and see if it could become a partner, maybe even a strategic partner, and to emphasize areas of cooperation while recognizing the need to hedge our bets a bit, because we did not

know how Russia would evolve [00:02:00] and that played out in a number of areas.

But if you want to look at the overall framework and the overall approach, I think that's what it was in the Bush administration.

BEHRINGER: And can you lay out a little bit what the different schools of thought were toward Russia in the Bush administration and where you fit into that personally?

HADLEY: I'm not sure there were a lot of different schools of thought. I think it was much more a range of skepticism as to what might be possible. I don't think there was anybody who felt we shouldn't try to reach out to Putin, to reach out to Russia, to see if we couldn't build a constructive relationship.

I think there was though a range of skepticism as to whether it would work and how much we should insist on reciprocity, and how much we should be willing to do to take the initiative. And those ranged, I think, the most forward-leaning probably being Secretary of State Powell, and after that probably National Security Advisor Rice, and then I think on the scale of more skeptical, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and then at the other pole, I think the most skeptical was probably Vice President Cheney. And I think the president was probably closer to Condi and Secretary Powell than he was to Don Rumsfeld and the vice president. And that's probably where I was.

BEHRINGER: And so then the first meeting between President Bush and President Putin happens in June, 2001 in Slovenia. Do you remember, what were the

administration's goals for that meeting, what were the [00:04:00] expectations?

And anything about the meeting itself and what the impact of that meeting was on the relationship?

HADLEY: This is the one where the president looked into his eyes, right?

BEHRINGER: That's correct, yep.

HADLEY: I think the objective for that meeting was, if you accept the notion that the effort was to try to see if we could engage and have a positive post-Cold War relationship with Russia, then the president felt that he needed to build a personal relationship with Putin.

Putin was new to the presidency, had just been elected, had only been prime minister for about a year before that. Was clearly new on the world stage. And I think Bush thought he was a little nervous, and Bush wanted to both reassure him and engage him and try to start building a personal relationship.

And I think this is the meeting where President Bush has written about in his memoir, that he sees the fact that Putin was a believer. And the story about the cross, the crucifix, that had been found in the burned rubble of their dacha and what that meant to Putin. He used that story to try to build a personal bond to Putin over their mutual fact that they were both believers.

And that of course raised the issue of, do you trust him. And the dilemma for President Bush is, when he's trying to build a relationship, if he'd stood up next to Putin and said in response to that question, "No, I don't trust him any farther

than I can throw him," that's not congenial towards building a personal relationship.

So Bush [00:06:00] tried to daub something, basically, to suggest that he was willing to give Putin the benefit of the doubt and wanted to build a relationship based on trust—which is what he did. And that's what he said. In subsequent years, when the president has been asked, particularly in my presence, why he talked about looking into Putin's eyes and seeing his soul, he has said, "Well, Hadley, I just read the talking points you gave me." [laughter] But that is not correct, that is, that line came from the president. And I think it was trying to emphasize his connection with Putin and trying to begin to build a personal relationship, and that any other answer to that question would have been mitigated against those—that objective.

BEHRINGER: And then less than three months later, after the first meeting, 9/ 11

happens. What was the Russians' reaction and how did 9/ 11 affect the relationship moving forward?

HADLEY: Putin, as you know, was one of the first callers to express condolences, which touched the president. You also may remember from Condi Rice's memoir that she had an interaction with Putin and mentioned that we were going to be raising the alert level of our nuclear forces and wanted to reassure Russia that that had nothing to do—and reassure Putin that it had nothing to do with Russia. And I think she says in her book that Putin responded by lowering the alert level of the

Russian strategic forces in acknowledgement of it. I think Putin and Bush both thought that this would be an area of cooperation between the United States and Russia. [00:08:00] And indeed it proved to be during the Bush years and subsequent. And I think Putin actually even had a higher expectation that this could be the fulcrum to move U.S.-Russian relationships to a different plane. And it was a piece of it, but—and one of the things in reviewing Bush administration policy and what was done over the eight years, I think people would be astonished by the number of different areas where we were interacting with Russia during this period. So it was one element that could and did help transform the relationship. There were a lot of others as well.

BEHRINGER: And one of the other elements that you're meeting with Russia over during this period is missile defense and the ABM treaty specifically. And I was wondering if you could tell us what was the rationale behind pulling out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and how did Russia's reaction fit into that calculus? How did you try to communicate that to the Russians and what was their reaction?

HADLEY: So President Bush as candidate Bush had made clear that missile defense was a priority, not because it was aimed at Russia, but because of the threat coming out of Iran and North Korea. It was the third-country threat, which the United States had been struggling with all the way back to the Bush 41 administration, when I served in that administration, in the Defense Department, and we came up with

what was called, I think, GPLS,<sup>1</sup> Global Protection against Limited Strikes, which was an effort to come up with a limited ballistic missile defense system [00:10:00] aimed at Iran in particular and also North Korea. And it was aimed to protect both the United States and our friends and allies against that.

So this was an issue that has been around for some time through the Bush 41 administration, through the Clinton administration, and Bush 43 as a candidate made clear that the urgency—it was so pressing to develop a capability against third-country ballistic missiles that he was willing to get out of the ABM Treaty. Because all the experts were telling us that you couldn't really make the kinds of investments and do the kinds of testing that would produce an effective theater ballistic missile capability—not a strategic ballistic missile capability, but a theater ballistic missile capability—within the constraints of the ABM Treaty.

And secondly, it was believed that the kinds of things the Russians were willing to allow in terms of relaxing the limits of the ABM treaty were not going to be sufficient to make, to allow the kind of effort that the president felt was required in order to develop a capability against these third-country nuclear threats.

So the president, early on, in his early meetings with the president—I can, by referring to a document I think I can get you the names of those meetings—but

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<sup>1</sup> Here Mr. Hadley pronounces the acronym phonetically as *Gee-Pelz*.

he basically said to President Putin that—two things: One, it was his intention to get out of the ABM treaty so that we could pursue defenses against third-country threats. And at the same time, he wanted to dramatically reduce the levels of offensive strategic nuclear weapons [00:12:00] on the part of both sides.

And Bush did two things. One, he said to Putin, “I’ve gotta get out of the ABM Treaty. I’d like us both to get out of the ABM treaty together. And I would like us to cooperate on ballistic missile defense, because I think Iran and third countries are as much a threat to you with their ballistic missiles than they are with us, because they’re closer to you than they are to us in the case of Iran. So I would like to get out of the ABM Treaty cooperatively. I’d like to do cooperative missile defense with you. But I’m willing to get out unilaterally if that’s what you prefer, and I’m willing to get out unilaterally and have you criticize the heck out of me, if that’s what you need to do for your politics. So you tell me what works for you, and that’s what we’ll do.”

And at the same time, he, in one of the early meetings between the two—and I just want to take a minute to see if I can find that. He also—and I can’t. He also—yes. He also told the former president—he told the president, let me just get this right. [referring to notes or a document] In that first meeting in Ljubljana in June of 2001, and then again in Genoa in July of 2001, he went through this description with Putin and shortly thereafter, he made the point to Putin, that he was willing to reduce unilaterally, if necessary, our strategic offensive nuclear weapons down



to the 17-2100 level, I believe was the level he was talking about. And he was willing to do that unilaterally if necessary [00:14:00], but he hoped that Putin would do the same thing with respect to the level of Russian forces. And of course, that's what we said we would do. Putin agreed that he would do it. There was a joint statement between the two of them, said that was their intention, and it was codified in the Moscow Treaty.

Remember at the time the priesthood, the nuclear priesthood, said you could not both have no constraints on missile defenses and reduce the level of strategic offensive forces, that that was just not on. And the irony is that when President Putin came back to President Bush, he said, "I don't want to get out of the ABM treaty together, you are going to need to go get out of the ABM treaty unilaterally. But if you do, I will not criticize you. I will be very muted in my response." And President Putin was true to his word on that. And that's how that issue was resolved. And within a period of about six months of us getting out of the ABM treaty, the United States and Russia had agreed on the Moscow Treaty, dramatically reducing the level of strategic offensive arms, something that the priesthood said was not possible. And that was what the president was able to achieve in his engagement with President Putin.

BEHRINGER: And just sticking on missile defense for a second: did you get the sense that it was missile defense in particular that the Russians were concerned about, the implications of missile defense, or was it later in the administration when you're

trying to negotiate over the radar and systems in Poland and [00:16:00]

Czechoslovakia? Was it more about location, that they wanted these placed in a different spot?

HADLEY: I think it was both. I think they were concerned about the location. I think they were also concerned that they did not really understand the capability, the technical capability of the systems.

I think they believed initially that the kinds of systems we were going to develop to defend against theater ballistic missiles would also have inherent capabilities—strategic ballistic missiles—that there wasn't really a line between anti-theater ballistic missile and anti-strategic ballistic missile. And therefore, by developing the capability against anti-theater ballistic missile, we were developing either inherent capability against strategic ballistic missiles, or a technological roadmap that would lead us there to defenses against strategic ballistic missiles in relatively short order. That's the first concern. And then secondly, of course, when we proposed to put anti-theater ballistic missile capabilities in Europe, there was all kinds of concern about what the capabilities of the radars might be with respect to Soviet—or Russian capabilities at that time. So I think the location compounded it.

You need to remember one thing that people have forgotten in all of this. And I was involved in all of them. The United States has been trying to convince, Russia—first the Soviet Union, and then Russia—to work cooperatively with us on

ballistic missile defense since the Bush administration—the Bush 41 administration. There was then a thing called the Ross-Mamedov talks [00:18:00], which were trying to develop a cooperative way forward on missile defense, and I was the representative to those talks for the Department of Defense. The Clinton administration lost all historical memory of those talks, decided they wanted to start a dialogue on ballistic missile defense cooperation with the Russians, and didn't have any of the documents.

And I remember that Strobe Talbott, then Deputy Secretary of State, called me up and said, "People tell me you were involved in a missile defense cooperation effort with the Soviet Union, later Russia, under the Bush administration. Can you tell me what you did? And by the way, do you have any documents? To let us know what we proposed and what they've proposed."

So the Clinton administration made their run at it. And then of course the Bush 43 administration made our effort, which ended up failing. And then of course the Obama administration. And if you can talk to Jim Miller, who was—ended up being Under Secretary for Policy in the Obama administration, they made an effort at cooperative missile defense with the Russians. So this has been—and I, in parallel with that effort of the Obama administration, ran a Track II effort with former Russian military and former US military involved in missile defense, and we actually came up with an architecture for cooperative missile defense between the United States, Russia, and the Europeans, which we gave then to the

administration to guide the Track I effort, the effort between the governments, but it fell a cropper again to politics as these so often do.

So this has been an effort now over a span of over 30 years under four different administrations. And what we did was just the third of that four-part— [00:20:00] what we did under the Bush 43 administration was just the third installment of that four-part saga.

BEHRINGER: And speaking of efforts to convince Russia to cooperate, I wanted to shift a little bit to the run-up to the Iraq War. Can you talk a little bit about what types of efforts the Bush administration made to communicate their intentions on Iraq and try to bring the Russians along in getting an international coalition there?

HADLEY: I can't recall the specifics. We did it. That was Secretary Powell's province. You remember—and I can't give you the date, but you can come up with it—there were 16 UN Security Council resolutions on [Iraq]<sup>2</sup> from 1991 forward that called on Iran—sorry, called on Iraq to either destroy or account for their weapons of mass destruction, to stop their support for terrorism, stop their invasion of their neighbors and to stop their oppression of their own people. And of course, over a period of—over the course of those resolutions from 1991 to 2003, under three administrations, we tried to get Iraq to comply with those resolutions through sanctions, smarter sanctions, smarter sanctions still, four different kinds of

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Hadley here and elsewhere in the paragraph says “Iran” but quickly corrects himself.

inspections regimes, no-fly zones over the northern part of the country, the southern part of the country, a resolution of the Congress of the United States, the Democratic-controlled Congress of the United States, I believe, that made regime change the policy of the United States [00:22:00] in 1998. And then of course the president, Bill Clinton, a Democrat, used force against Iraq over a number of days to try to convince them to accept inspectors. So we'd been at this for a long time. And it had been, the Russians had joined—my recollection is—had joined most of those resolutions at the Security Council. And indeed, when we went for a 17th Security Council resolution that promised “serious consequences,” I believe was the formulation, if Iraq did not comply, it was a unanimous resolution of the UN Security Council, including China, Russia, and everybody else, including France at that point.

And it was only when, under the pressure from Tony Blair, we went for an 18th resolution that in, I think, February timeframe of 2003—you had that famous press conference when Schröder and Chirac and Putin I think they were all together, at least two of the three were there, basically announced that they were breaking with the United States, and that under no circumstances would they vote for a UN Security Council resolution that authorized the use of force against Iraq.

And that's when the consensus really that had held up for 12 years really fell apart at that point. Putin's motivation, I think, was, he'd gone from a position of dramatic weakness. The price of oil went up, his economy went up, and clearly he

was beginning to feel that Russia had a much more firm platform for which to engage the world [00:24:00], wanted to step more on the stage. And in some sense, the deal I think he struck with—the de facto deal he struck I think with French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder is, "I, Putin, will join you in your call for a greater multilateralism and a multipolar world free of American dominance if you will stop yammering at me, like the Americans do, about democratic reform within Russia," and that was a deal Schröder and Chirac were willing to cut and a deal that we were not willing to cut. So I think that was the initial motivation for Putin, but I think it emerged more clearly later on that the issue was not that use of force by any country had to be authorized by the UN Security Council 'cause Putin, after all, was pretty free to use force without a Security Council resolution in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. No, the issue for Putin became no more regime change by force of arms led by the United States.

That's really congealed, I think, in his mind after Syria,<sup>3</sup> when Russia joined—under Medvedev—joined the UN Security Council in authorizing what was supposed to be a humanitarian operation in Syria backed by use of force in which they believe was then turned into an operation to displace Gaddafi. And I think that marked the line where Putin really said, "No more regime change, whether you have a UN Security Council or not. The United States is not gonna—there's

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<sup>3</sup> See clarification below, Mr. Hadley meant Libya in this paragraph.

gonna be no more regime change by use of force [00:26:00] and the United States, of course, being in his view, the big offender.

BEHRINGER: Just to clarify real quickly, you meant Libya, not Syria.

HADLEY: I meant Libya. I'm sorry. Thank you very much. And it was—then showed up in Syria because Syria looked like at one point that the allies—the United States and the allies—were going to be able to topple Assad and that's when the Russians intervened, and they intervened for their own geopolitical purposes, but they also intervened to make the point, "There will be no more regime change, whether you have a UN security council resolution or not, no more regime change by use of force."

MILES: Can I ask a follow-up question on that? We're talking about the years of the Freedom Agenda and I wonder, apropos of the bargain, which you say was made by Chiraq and Schröder with Putin, of, "we'll stay quiet and we'll find common cause on this," was there debate within the Bush administration about similar questions of the extent to which you should focus on mutual interest and not be too critical of Putin's human rights record? Was there tension between the tenets of the Freedom Agenda and some practical concerns about engagement with Russia?

HADLEY: I don't think so. Not in the way you framed it. I noticed in your questions, you said that Tom Graham was arguing to dial back some of the concerns about

democracy and human rights with Russia in favor of cooperation and areas of mutual interest.

I don't remember that being Tom's position. Indeed, remember one of the initiatives during the first administration was was a very high-level [00:28:00] strategic dialogue that was initiated, which Condi, as National Security Advisor, and Putin's then-chief of staff—whose name escapes me at the moment, but you can find it, it would be the 2002 period. It was basically to talk about how—a number of issues, but one of the issues on the agenda was trying to encourage Russia to move towards integration with Western values and Western political institutions.

And Bush said on a number of occasions to Putin, "Putin, you have a historic opportunity to bring Russia for the first time permanently into the Western family of nations to accept freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law as the governmental framework for Russia as it is in the West."

And this was not just a pipe dream. I mean, look at the end of the Cold War, look at the Charter of Paris, which was adopted, I think in 1991, which was the new framework for relations in Europe. And it reads even more friendly towards Western values than the Helsinki Accords. And every nation in Europe—every nation in Europe, including Russia—signed on for that accord.

So people don't realize how much at that point in time we thought that that was the deal, that that was Russia's future. And it was the future that Russia had



embraced not only under Yeltsin, but we thought it would continue under [00:30:00] Putin. And Putin on a number of occasions—my recollection is, and again, these events are now pretty long time ago—Putin said to Bush—and I know I was one of the people with Tom Graham conducting the day-to-day conversations on the strategic dialogue. And my counterpart said to me, "I know Putin. I've talked to Putin. He wants to move Russia permanently into the West, wants it to be more free, more democratic rule of law and all the rest."

But there are—as Putin said to Bush—"There are dark forces in Russia. And if you don't manage this correctly, you will awaken those dark forces, which do not want that same objective. And so you need to let me do it my way." So this was very much part of the conversation and that isn't dialing back human rights or advocacy of freedom and democracy. Where it came into, I think, into play and where there was disagreement was over the issue of once you overturn the Taliban in Afghanistan, or once you overturn the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, what is your obligation to the people of Afghanistan or people of Iraq, respectively? Is it enough, using Iraq as an example to replace Saddam Hussein with another general, but a general who simply says, "I won't pursue weapons of mass destruction. I won't invade my neighbors, and I won't pursue and support terrorists, so your national security objectives will be met. Back me, and I'll be the new military strongman in Iraq." And we talked about whether that was a deal that the United States should accept.

[00:32:00] And there was vigorous discussion. I remember one National Security Council meeting in particular. And I think that was kind of where Cheney and Rumsfeld probably were leaning. But the president's view was, "We are the United States of America. We ought to shoot higher." We ought to not create a Jeffersonian democracy, that caricature was never it, but it was, "give these people an opportunity to build a democratic future."

Why? One, because it's consistent with our values. It's who we are as a people. It's what we stand for and have always stood for internationally. If you look at the rhetoric associated with every foreign war that America has ever fought, it's always fought in the name of the advancing the cause of freedom and democracy. Why? Because of, our view is that free and democratic societies are stable over the long term and don't invade their neighbors and will be good friends and allies of the United States. That it's in our interest to advance the cause of freedom and democracy. So, we should—and finally, the other thing I would say, if you look at the kind of societies that Afghanistan was, or Iraq was, our judgment was those societies, absent a dictator, would not hang together if it was not a democratic political framework. The only way you could hold Iraq together without the brutality of Saddam Hussein was if Sunni, Kurds, Shi'a, and other minorities were working together in a democratic framework towards a common future, otherwise the country would fall apart. And that is not a prescription for stability [00:34:00]

over the long term. So it was both consistent with our ideals but it was very practical.

But the last thing I need to say is, that was a discussion we had after a decision had been made to change the regime. Those—in both the case of Afghanistan and Iraq, the reason for the interventions were all on hardcore national security grounds. That those regimes, in Afghanistan and Iraq, under the Taliban, under Saddam Hussein, threatened American national security interests. That's why we intervened. In the case of Afghanistan, because we were attacked under an operation that was conceived in Afghanistan. And in the case of Iraq, because we tried diplomatic solutions for 12 years—sanctions, inspections, use of force, UN resolutions—and in some sense it was not a war of choice, but a war of last resort, everything else having failed to achieve the UN Security Council objectives.

MILES: So one person who did not present it in that way is Vladimir Putin. And I want to look ahead to his remarks at the Munich Security Conference of very early 2007, in which he delivers an extremely forceful speech to the assembled audience in which he criticizes the United States, not for promoting stability, as you said, but rather for destabilizing the international system and exhibiting a sort of disdain for international law, international institutions. And, without getting into all of the charges that were leveled, I wonder what was the response and the reaction? How did you interpret [00:36:00] the speech? Were you and others surprised to hear the

Russian president so vociferously denouncing American policy in that way? Or did you anticipate, based on kind of the trend of relations leading up to it, that something like this was coming?

HADLEY: So I need to, and I don't want to prolong this, but I need to step back a step and sort of say what gave rise to that speech. One of the things was, we know he was not a fan of our going into Iraq. I think if we'd been able to promptly stabilize the situation in Iraq, a lot of the heat would have gone out of his objection, but I remember at one point at a joint press conference after the invasion of Iraq with Bush—and I can't recall where it is—one of the things that surprised me, and maybe surprised the president, is President Bush said something about bringing freedom and democracy in Iraq or building a free society in Iraq. And Putin said, "Iraq, who would want to live in Iraq? Why would you ever want to claim success, given where Iraq is today?" This woulda been in the period of 2005, 2006, when the security situation was so terrible. So one of the things was, stability being the most important thing to someone like Putin, he looked at Iraq and it produced instability.

Second thing happened was the color revolutions. One of the things we did in our strategic dialogue—that I mentioned that Tom Graham and I ran on a day-to-day [basis], but that Condi oversaw for the two presidents, and which was blessed by the two presidents and was a White House-Kremlin operation—we had a mistaken premise. We thought that the Russians [00:38:00] would accept the

principle that in the near abroad, the former Soviet space, we had—we both had—strategic interests and that therefore the near abroad could be an area of U.S.-Russian cooperation. So that those areas, which had largely been a drag on the Soviet Union economically, could actually be prosperous, stable neighbors, which we thought would be good for Russia and would give them stable neighbors, prosperous neighbors that would contribute to Russian prosperity rather than be a drain on its budgets.

And so we tried to develop—quietly—rules of the road, how the United States and Russia would cooperate in the near abroad. And we had a pretty robust set of guidelines, and we then took them to our respective governments and drove them up the chain of decision. And of course, President Bush blessed them very quickly.

By the time they got out of the Russian system, there was nothing left of them. And the color revolutions that followed that effort and did follow that effort convinced Putin that what we were doing was not producing stable, prosperous states that would be good neighbors for Russia, but were producing states that defined their interests in the direction of the West and against Russia. And that we were also doing a dress rehearsal for an effort to destabilize Russia itself. And I think if you say what resulted in the break between what was heading towards a very cooperative relationship between the United States and Russia—

notwithstanding Iraq—it was the color [00:40:00] revolutions, the near abroad, and how that changed Putin's view of the United States and what we were doing.

And that then brings you to Wehrkunde.<sup>4</sup> And if you look at it in that context, then Wehrkunde does not come as such a surprise. It did surprise us that Putin would go so public in that way. It did surprise us. And the president sent me to Moscow to meet with Putin, “to find out what he had on his mind.” And I met with him for about an hour and a quarter. And had an experience like other people did from then on. Putin sat on a raised dais. I was a little down below, of course, and he had a stack of three-by-five cards and they were his grievance cards. And he would start, and he would read off a card and talk about a grievance, about how the United States had taken unilateral advantage of Russia in X. And then he would flip and he'd go to the next card. And he got about a half or two-thirds of the way through his cards before we ran out of time. And I tried to respond as best I could to give an American and Western perspective. It's a little bit of a disadvantage, you know, he's a head of a government and I'm just a staff person to the president of the United States.

So it wasn't a fair fight, but I did the best I could. And at the end he puts a rubber band around his cards, comes off the dais, comes up to me, and says, “Give my best to President Bush and I will receive you any time you come to Moscow. I'll

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<sup>4</sup> Here and elsewhere, Mr. Hadley uses the original German name for the Munich Security Conference.

be delighted to see you.” So I didn't really know what to make of it. I didn't really know what to make of it. [00:42:00]

I'll give you—is there any way some of what I give you could remain off the record for a time, or not public for a time?

BEHRINGER: Sure. Yeah, I think we could work out—we could do something like that for sure. We can hold back some of the interview.

HADLEY: Alright, so this is the piece I'd like to hold back.<sup>5</sup> And I'm not going to identify who said this, but a senior American, former official who met frequently with Putin, over the entire period of Putin's presidency so far, recounted to me a conversation that he had with Putin, where Putin said to this person—“You know, I explain”—having gone through his grievances with that person—“You know, I explain all these things to President Bush and President Bush always says to me, ‘Okay, I've got it, I'll fix it’.”

And he said, "President Bush doesn't get it. I don't want him to fix it. I want him to understand." And I think that's a telling point. And I think if I have a criticism of us, we were into too much, "Yeah, we're going to fix it. Yeah, we're going to fix it." And we were not enough into saying, "We really need to understand what's going on."

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<sup>5</sup> After the interview, Mr. Hadley later allowed this portion to remain on the record.

And I would add to that bit of understanding a conversation that I think happened at Sochi, but I can't swear by it. But Putin is there, I can see it now. We're in a little sort of music room, almost. Putin is there. Bush is there. I'm there. [00:44:00] Condi's there, I don't know who else is there from the Russian side. I don't know whether it's Lavrov or Igor Ivanov or Prikhodko, but we're going over the checklist, which you probably know was an effort to get a series of initiatives of cooperation, have cabinet-level ministers, U.S. and Soviet—U.S. and Russian, partner together, each doing reports to the two presidents every quarter. Think about that. Unthinkable we would do that now, but that's what we did. And Putin was saying to Bush, "The most constructive thing you've done is the checklist." And this is something that came out of that dialogue, White House-Kremlin dialogue I talked about. He says, "That was really constructive." And then he says to Bush, "You know, I think the only two people in our administrations that want improved U.S.-Russian relations are you and me." And he said, "I can't describe to you the kinds of things that come up to me for my approval that are directed against the United States. You wouldn't believe the kinds of things that people ask me to approve." And at that point in time, we had some intelligence about what those things were. Some of which have subsequently come to fruition and come to public knowledge. And I think that tells you a lot.

So when people say, "Well, it was NATO enlargement, it was, things the United States did that 'lost Russia' and 'alienated Putin'." I don't think that's true. I



think a lot of it was internal politics within Russia over which we had little control. But I do think the one thing [00:46:00] that also was most telling—you know, his critiques of missile defense and NATO enlargement got more and more acerbic the longer it—as time went on. I think what really set him off were the color revolutions and the threat from the near abroad.

BEHRINGER: We're running a little short on time. But I want to ask a couple other questions. The point you made about understanding—that Putin really wanted the United States or President Bush to understand Russia rather than fix the problems is interesting, especially in light of the fact that Secretary Gates and Secretary Rice were both—had such deep knowledge of Russia. I'm wondering, was there a difference in approach between Secretary Gates and Secretary Rice on Russia? And how did their expertise affect the administration's approach to Russia?

HADLEY: Remember they were Soviet specialists. And that's different. It's the same, but it's different. And we're dealing with a post-Soviet Russia. And I just remember—in the Bush administration, I was the DOD representative on arms control.<sup>6</sup> And I cannot tell you the difference between sitting with Soviet arms control negotiators and Russian arms control negotiators.

There was a man named Obukhov who headed the Soviet arms control discussions. He would talk endlessly [00:48:00]. And I thought it was just the

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<sup>6</sup> Here Mr. Hadley was speaking about his work in the George H.W. Bush administration.

translation or because I was dumb—I never understood what the heck he was talking about, but he would go on and on. And it was part of the Soviet filibuster of the arms control.

They're replaced by a whole new generation of people in under the Russian Republic, if you will. And they talk in concrete details in the way you can understand. And Condi and Bob probably would say they were not Soviet specialists, they were Russia specialists, but they spent their careers studying the Soviet Union. And while there's a lot of continuity, there's also some difference. I think, though—so one of the things you had to do, if you were a Soviet specialist is always ask yourself, “What is the same?” but also, “What is different?” And maybe what Putin was saying was we weren't understanding enough about the difference. And the real challenges Putin faced trying to get Russia through the post-Soviet period.

But I do think their background made them skeptical. And I think, quite frankly, skepticism was warranted. It comes to the issue of NATO enlargement. One of your questions is why did we go with the “big bang” of NATO enlargement? Well, one, it was because the countries of Eastern Europe were desperate for it because they distrusted where Russia was going to end up. And they wanted the security of being part of NATO and having suffered for 40-plus years under Soviet oppression, how could you say, “No, no, you can't be part of the West. [00:50:00] You can't be part of NATO. You can't be part of Europe.” So we responded to that.

But second of all, it was also a view that, you know, we were not sure where Russia would end up, and remember, 2000 was a pretty free and fair election. And every election since has been worse in Russia and the oppression as increased. And I think it was a very legitimate hedge against Russia going wrong to bring those countries into the West and the EU and NATO. And I think history suggests that we were smart to have done it.

MILES: Can I—sorry, Paul—can I just sneak one last question in here? I know Paul was going to be very gracious. Before our time wraps up, can I just ask you how you would rate the Bush administration's response to the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008? How well do you think the crisis was handled? And did you think that the U.S. could have done more in support of the Georgians after that escalated?

HADLEY: I have said publicly that I thought we should have done more. Having read a memo now that we did in 2008 about our Russia policy, it was more robust than I thought it was. So I think—and by the way, I have a little more time if you need it, I don't want to impose on your time, but I'm not up against the clock. And I think this is important.

MILES: We do too.

HADLEY: I think we did, I say, in retrospect, better than I thought, having gotten back into it. The most important [00:52:00] thing of course was—this is a long story, but I'll try and make it short. Basically, the road was open from where the Russian

troops were to Tbilisi. They could have moved at any time. And I think the only reason they didn't was something that Condi Rice did, which you all know about.

Lavrov had three goals—I think it was three—of Russian intervention in Georgia, which we could have lived with. And at some point, once things are going their way and the road to Tbilisi is open, Lavrov says, "We've got a fourth goal, which is the regime and Saakashvili have to go," at which point Condi says, "I'm going to go out to the press right now. And I'm going to announce to the world that Russia has an additional goal. And it is to overturn a democratic elected government." And Lavrov said, "Wait a minute, I told you in diplomatic confidence." And Condi said, "When you're talking about overturning a democratic government, there's no such thing as diplomatic confidence," and she went out and so announced. And that, plus the Sarkozy mission, which we sponsored and supported—which I think they handled rather poorly in terms of the agreement they reached. But we thought if we tried to negotiate something, it would make it all a big-power confrontation. And so we backed Sarkozy. And I think that effort—those two things together—saved the democratically elected government of Georgia.

So at that big picture, I think we succeeded. Then the second question was—our strategy was to prevent Russia from getting any long-term advantage [00:54:00] in Georgia—so, to frustrate their objectives in Georgia. And I think if you look at the map after the agreement was reached, Russian troops ended up

basically where they started. They ended up after the intervention where they were before the intervention. That is to say, in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia. They were there before the invasion. They were there after the invasion. So I think we denied them realistic gains in Georgia, which was our first objective.

And our second objective was to make them pay a strategic price—to show them that net-net, what they lost was more than what they could have gained, even if they had succeeded. Because our mantra was, if they get away with Georgia tomorrow, it will be Ukraine. And the day after that it'll be the Baltic states. And if it's the Baltic states, it's Article Five and war with NATO. We don't want to go there.

So we basically threw the relationship into the toilet. And we had just signed a 1-2-3 agreement—a nuclear cooperation agreement—which was the result of four or five nuclear cooperation initiatives. We suspended the 1-2-3 agreement, Bush withdrew it from approval—I think from ratification for the United States Senate. We had had a very robust set of military engagements with Russia, both bilaterally and under the NATO-Russia Council or whatever we called it at that time. Those were stopped, and seceded. We basically—having spent almost eight years building a whole network of relationships with Russia, agreements with Russia [00:56:00]—we put all of them on hold and stopped them all.

And we got our NATO and other allies to do the same. And we really brought the relationship to a halt to try to make the point of, you can't be part of these 21st

century initiatives with the West and still do the kinds of 19th century actions as you did in Georgia. And we also, as you may remember, delivered humanitarian assistance in military aircraft to make the point that Russia could not be certain that we would not get militarily engaged. We moved Navy ships into the Black Sea. We took the Georgia, either battalion or brigade—I don't know which—very well-trained, that was in Iraq, I believe, or Afghanistan—we brought, we airlifted it back for the defense of Georgia. We had Admiral Mullen talking to his Russian counterpart all the time. So I think we had a military deterrence piece, notwithstanding the much-reported conversation in the Sit Room<sup>7</sup> about, do you want to go to war with Russia over Georgia? We injected the military uncertainty there.

So I think we saved the regime. Russian troops ended up back where they were. We restored the status quo ante. We made a strong message to Putin and to Russia that you couldn't have good relations with us and do this kind of stuff. The only thing we didn't do—the only thing we didn't do—which has now become everybody's favorite instrument—was economic and financial sanctions. But, heads up, remember: this is [00:58:00] the summer of 2008, and we're heading into the greatest financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression. And we're going to start imposing sanctions? So that's the only thing we didn't do. And if you

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<sup>7</sup> Situation Room.

think about it, we didn't need to, because the financial crisis of 2008 did that for us. [laughter]

So I think we did okay. And I think I've been actually over the years, been unduly apologetic for the Bush administration. I actually think we did pretty well.

BEHRINGER: You mentioned the much-reported story about the Situation Room. I was wondering if you wanted to—if it's been reported correctly or if you'd like to tell it from your point of view?

HADLEY: Assuming I remember it accurately—you know, memories tend to embellish things—but there was a lot of very aggressive talk around the Situation Room table about what we should do with respect to Russia going into Georgia. And my concern was that, inadvertently, people were setting up the president—that I was worried that there would be a series of press leaks or memoirs where people would say, "Well, you know, I told the president we had to be tough on the Russians, but, you know, I couldn't convince him." Nobody fails, in their own memoir, to take a position that fits their after-the-fact vision of themselves.

And so I wanted to protect the president against that. So I said, "Mr. President, I think you need to poll your cabinet secretaries [01:00:00] and advisors and see whether any of them are recommending the use of military force against Russia in Georgia to prevent Russian actions there." And the president looked at me like I had lost my mind, and I think he thought I was advocating the use of U.S. military force against Russia over Georgia.

And so—having reacted to his disbelief—I said, "Mr. President, I just think it's important for the historical record for it to be clear whether any of your advisors are recommending that you use military force against the Russians in Georgia." And the president, being no fool, understands exactly what I'm doing and says, "Thanks Hads, let's go around the table."

And to his credit, the vice president—my recollection is—was the first one up to saying, "Mr. President, I am not recommending the use of military force against Russia over Georgia," which I thought was good—and as we went around the table, everybody else took the same position. And I think it protected the president from recollections after the fact that might've not been accurate.

So that's what happened. That's why I did it. And I think it's what you do as a national security advisor. Your job is to protect your president.

BEHRINGER: Do you have time for a couple more questions?

HADLEY: I do.

BEHRINGER: Okay. Thank you very much. Just a few things we didn't quite get to. One of them was—I wanted to ask about perhaps the precipitating [01:02:00] event to the Georgia conflict, which was the Membership Action Plan statement that went out that didn't give MAP to Ukraine and Georgia, but said they will at some point become part of NATO. Can you talk a little bit about how that kind of compromise statement came together, but also was this viewed inside the administration as a



real achievement or were people disappointed that it didn't go far enough or that it went too far? How did that kind of play out in the administration?

HADLEY: So, we had a number of sessions in the Oval Office—it was an unusual way that we got into this discussion—but there were a number of conversations in the Oval Office as to whether the president and whether the United States should back MAP, Membership Action Plan, for Ukraine and Georgia. A lot of back and forth, a lot of division within the president's advisers on that issue.

One, were Georgia and Ukraine ready for membership in terms of both their military preparedness, their meeting NATO standards, their commitments to the values that are inherent in the NATO Alliance—all kinds of questions about that. Would it be provocative to the Russians? Could we defend them if we're going to extend an Article Five guarantee—all the discussions that you would expect. And, the end of the day, the president decided we would go for MAP, and there was a long set of conversations, primarily with the Germans, who were opposed. And I spent a lot of time with Christoph Heusgen, who was the National Security Advisor for Angela Merkel, seeing if we could come up with a compromise. [01:04:00] And we couldn't.

So we went into the Bucharest NATO summit, and Bush made it clear that he thought we ought to have MAP for Georgia and Ukraine. And both Sarkozy and Merkel said they did not think either country was ready for membership, not now and maybe not ever. And the question then was, “What to do?” You have discord.

So, there is a lot of back and forth, and a lot of the Central and Eastern European countries feel passionately that MAP should be extended to Georgia and Ukraine. And the question is, "What to do?" So at one point Angela Merkel, who's in this lime green jacket, gets up and goes to the back of the room to where there are a set of chairs and sits down with the heads of state and government or foreign ministers of the various Central and Eastern European countries to talk about this issue. And, of course, the only common language they have is Russian. So there's the German chancellor and all these Central and Eastern Europeans going back there to discuss what to do in Russian, and President Bush says, "Condi, go on back there." So, Condi, of course, who also has Russian—so she goes back and sits down [next] to Merkel.

So there you have it: the German chancellor in this lime green jacket and the American secretary of state, a black woman, conversing in Russian with all these men in suits who are the heads of government and foreign ministers of these Central and Eastern European countries. It's a complete hoot. And so they're negotiating language and they come up with language and they bring it back and Condi shows it to the president, the president says, "I can buy it."

So they give it to Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who is the secretary general of NATO [01:06:00] at the time. And he reads it and it does not give them MAP, but it is extremely forward leaning in expressing the view that the destination of Ukraine and Georgia is membership in NATO, which provokes [Gordon] Brown, the prime

minister of the UK—and it's alphabetical order in English, so the United States is here and the UK is the next one over. And [Gordon] Brown<sup>8</sup> leans over to George Bush and says "Well, I don't quite know what we just did here. I know we didn't give 'em MAP but I'm not sure we didn't just make 'em members." And that's a fair statement, I think, of what came out of that conversation.

I think that what we did not adequately appreciate or handle particularly well was—I think it was either later that afternoon or the very next day—your question suggested it was the very next day—Putin came to meet with the—I guess it was the heads of government summit. And Putin comes in and sits down and Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, in a pretty unvarnished way, rehearses what has been done with respect to Georgia and Ukraine. And I suspect Putin did not—he did not react to it. He didn't pound his shoe. He didn't give us Wehrkunde II, but I suspect it was a bit of a humiliation and probably was not something we handled particularly well.

And there's this old debate: If we had given them MAP, would it deter Putin in Georgia and Ukraine? [01:08:00] Or if we had given them MAP, would it actually have incentivized Putin to intervene so that they wouldn't have been able to move to MAP, to actual membership. And nobody really knows. Nobody really knows.

MILES: Do you have an opinion on what the answer to that question is? A personal opinion?

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<sup>8</sup> Here Mr. Hadley accidentally says "George Brown" instead of "Gordon Brown."

HADLEY: I think, given the statement, it wouldn't have made much difference. I think Putin thought that Georgia was heading that way and was looking for an opportunity to stop that train, and Saakashvili gave him a pretext and he took it. I have said—I have said since that if the day should ever come when Georgia or Ukraine or both are ready for NATO membership and NATO should decide that they should be made members, it shouldn't be MAP or anything else, they should just do it. With almost no notice, it just is done. And that way you don't give Putin a chance to game it.

BEHRINGER: I think I just have a couple more questions. One is—they might be relatively quick. One is moving back to Iraq. There was this report in 2006 that Russia had leaked U.S. war plans to Saddam Hussein ahead of the invasion. And I was just wondering if you—and at the time, in this report it said that you were going to look into these allegations, but that boycotting the G8 summit, which was upcoming, [01:10:00] was not the right move at that time. I was wondering if you remember if anything became of these allegations, if you found out what the source was, and, also just in general, was there ever a sense that Russia was actively working to hamper U.S. policy in Iraq as opposed to just diplomatically objecting to it?

HADLEY: I don't have any recollection of the allegation about the leaking of the war plans. Again, to say that I have no recollection doesn't mean I didn't know it at the time, doesn't mean that it isn't true. It's just that I have no recollection and I don't

have any recollection of the Russians actively working against our military operation there. But again, I say, I just don't have any recollection of it.

BEHRINGER: Sure. And then I think my last question is going to be a general one, which is just, do you think that U.S. officials—

HADLEY: Can I say one other thing?

BEHRINGER: Yes, sure.

HADLEY: On that issue, just in terms of context, I was sort of thinking: so when we did the Gulf War, I remember going with Jim Baker to meet with the Russians and we met with the man who was then the head of the Russian—of the Soviet general staff. And I remember him making a briefing to us of how we had fought the first Gulf War in 90-91 and how the Russians really had gone to school on that. So not only were they not intervening or frustrating us, they were just—it was a [01:12:00] world-class intelligence opportunity for the Russians—for the Soviets.

Secondly, remember in the aftermath of Afghanistan, the Russians really facilitated our military operations in Afghanistan for a long time with an air bridge and all the rest. So I would be surprised if we saw sort of active intervention in any way with respect to Iraq, it just wasn't where they were at that point in time and how they approach these matters.

Also remember, we went to Geneva before the invasion of Iraq and Jim Baker, using Howard Graves, who was his military assistant, sketched out to the Iraqis exactly how we were going to run the war because we wanted to make the

point: it was going to be a war that he had not seen—to which he would have no defense, because we were trying to get him to agree to accept the offers that were made for him to leave and avoid the war altogether.

So getting people to know what our war plan was, was part of our war plan to try to deter the war, recognizing that if it came to fighting it, we didn't think anybody was going to be able to frustrate us anyway. Does that make sense?

BEHRINGER: Yes. Yeah, thank you very much for that answer. And I think my last question is just generally about there's kind of this debate over whether Vladimir Putin has always had this plan to consolidate power in Russia and to restore Russia's role on the international stage by intervening in his near abroad. [01:14:00] I was wondering if you feel that the people in the Bush administration—generally, was there a misjudgment about Putin's desire to make progress on democracy and human rights? In other words, did he change over the course of the Bush administration, or was he always the same guy?

HADLEY: I don't think he was always the same guy. I think he's—you know, he came completely unprepared, really, to be prime minister and then president. I think was as surprised as much as anybody that Yeltsin turned to him for prime minister, and surprised to find himself as president. And I think he's been learning for the last 20 years. I think his views have changed.

Remember he's not really very strategic, I don't think, but I think he is really opportunistic and entrepreneurial, and he's very cunning about seeing tactical

opportunities, taking advantage of them initially with very limited investments, seeing what kind of opposition he gets, and, if he doesn't get a whole lot of opposition, he then increases his investment. That's kind of his pattern. And I also think he's also been—again, the color revolutions in the near abroad, I think was a huge learning experience to him. Also, he's clearly developed his ideas about what Russia is and the role Russia can play in the world. I don't think he had that in 1999 or 2000. I think that's something he's come to.

Remember, he's also been fed all this ridiculous Russian [01:16:00] intelligence that—we have some sense of what he's been fed for 20 years, and it's not great. I also think he learns a lot from Xi Jinping, and I think Xi Jinping learns a lot from him. I have said to American intelligence officials—the kinds of conversations I think they have between them, too, which is, "You need to understand the Americans are the problem. They're a threat to your regime. They're a threat to my regime. That's what Ukraine was about. That's what Hong Kong was about. This is an effort—Americans don't accept the legitimacy of either our regimes and we need to be opposing Americans, both at home and abroad."

I think that's the narrative that they share. I think they talk about it. And I think in some sense, I suspect they've shaped their views, and at the strategic level, I suspect Xi has done more shaping of Putin than Putin has done of Xi. But again, that's speculation on my part, but I think it might be right.

BEHRINGER: Simon, do you have anything else you'd like to ask?



MILES: I don't want to keep imposing on your time. This has been really just fantastic.

HADLEY: Good. It's been fun.

**[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]**