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U.S.-Russian Relations under Bush and Putin

Interviewee: A. Elizabeth Jones

Special Advisor for Caspian Energy Diplomacy, 2000-2001
Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia, 2001-2005

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[**Begin Transcription**]

BEHRINGER: My name is Paul Behringer. I'm a post-doctoral fellow at the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University.

MILES: My name is Simon Miles. I'm an assistant professor at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.

JONES: My name is Beth Jones, A. Elizabeth Jones. I'm a retired Foreign Service Officer, was in the Foreign Service for not quite 40 years. And I now do a variety of other things.

BEHRINGER: Thank you for being with us today, Ambassador Jones. Can you begin by describing your background in U.S.-Russian relations and your roles in the George W. Bush administration?

JONES: So, I grew up in the Foreign Service. My father was a Foreign Service Officer, and he was assigned to embassy Moscow from 1960 to 1962. I was 12 to 14 years old at the time. And my mother was determined that we all learn Russian—I have three sisters. So on the first year we were there, I went to the local Russian school on Saturdays since the American school, we went Monday to Friday. So then I got to know some of the kids in the class that I would be with, and I got used to hearing Russian as it was spoken in school, plus I had a tutor every day and that kind of thing. Then the second year I went full time to the Russian school and had a variety of very interesting, fun experiences.

And from there we were assigned, my father was assigned to West Berlin just after the wall went up. So we spent a lot of time hearing about and understanding Soviet things about West Berlin and how to get into East Berlin and going on the autobahn between occupied Berlin—still occupied by the Western powers—and West Germany. Then I kept my Russian going. I went to a school in [00:02:00] Berlin, a German school—my second

German school—that taught Russian as one of the regular classes, because they were the ones that were taking the kids who were coming across the wall or coming across the canal or whatever, who were learning Russian in East German schools. And so that's—I kept my Russian up that way, continued it through university, joined the Foreign Service.

In the Foreign Service, I spent most of my time in the Middle East, not in the Soviet Union—the former Soviet Union—but, because I had Russian, I often spoke with the Russian diplomats and got along with them and tried to keep my Russian up that way. In terms of my career, I didn't really do things with the Soviet Union or Russia until I myself was posted in West Berlin as a foreign service officer and worked closely with [00:06:00] my Russian counterpart, as well as my French and British counterparts, on various things having to do with the Four Powers Agreements in Berlin.

I guess the next time I spent any time on Russia matters was when I was special assistant to Secretary Warren Christopher—that would have been early 1993 to late 1994, for 18 months. And, of course, that was under the Clinton administration, and we spent quite a bit of time, involved in many trips either to Russia or to meetings with, then, Boris Yeltsin. And getting ready for all those meetings, I spent a lot of time with my colleagues who were working on Russia matters in the State Department and in the national security agencies.

[00:04:00] The next time I guess would have been when I went to Kazakhstan as ambassador in 1995. It was, of course, a very new country, former Soviet country. I brushed up on my Russian to go there, used Russian the entire time I was there because very few Kazakhstanis spoke English at that time, and spent quite a bit of time either with the Russian ambassador, talking to him about various issues, or occasionally helping the

Kazakhstanis sort themselves out with the Russians, and at one point went to Moscow with the Kazakh energy minister to make sure that—he thought that, if I was there, he would get a better deal from the Russians, that they wouldn't try to be difficult with him. And he got what he needed.

I spent some time with Russians then, but then the most intense time, of course, was both when I took a job as the Caspian energy officer, and so we spent a lot of time working with the Russians on Caspian energy issues and went to Moscow several times for those meetings, and then as assistant secretary for Europe and Eurasia I worked intensively on Russia matters within the George W. Bush administration. So there's—yeah, so that's it.

BEHRINGER: And then just to dive right into the events of the administration, during the first meeting between presidents Bush and Putin in Slovenia in June, 2001, the two presidents established a strong rapport. What was your view of Putin at this time?

JONES: [00:06:00] Well, at that point Putin was very new, as, of course, was George Bush. We didn't really know how things were going to develop. I was working, of course, for Colin Powell as secretary of state. And we had set up the meeting, that there would be a very brief one-on-one, basically, meeting with interpreters for the two presidents, and Colin Powell would meet with his Russian counterpart, I was in that meeting. And we expected to then go into a broader meeting to go through the whole set of issues that we needed to go through. And that meeting didn't happen. Didn't happen. Didn't happen. Didn't happen. And we kept being told that the two presidents were still out on the walk and having their meeting. We got through a huge number of issues, mind you, with the foreign minister.

But the view that we had then was a little bit of a blank slate with Putin, but out of that we developed quite an understanding at the time of the kinds of things that were—the kinds of things that he did. So, for example, he put on a big show of being very religious, which was very attractive to President Bush. He had learned to speak some English, and so a lot of the walking around outside was done in English with Putin, so the interpreters weren't there.

There was a brief meeting that included the national security advisor, so Condi Rice was in on some of it, but not a lot of it. And one of the times that I saw Condi Rice completely flummoxed—Dan Fried may have told you this story—we're all sitting there at the press conference in Slovenia, and President Bush says that he's invited Putin to visit him in Crawford. And Condi Rice happened to be sitting right in front of me in the press conference, and she audibly gasped because she had no idea—because I would've thought [00:08:00] maybe she knew and just, I was the only one that didn't know, but no.

But the interesting sort of backstory or "P.S." for that story is that, when the Russians came, it was agreed that it would be in November, et cetera. Now mind you, 9/11 had happened in the meantime, but in any case, when the Russian delegation—there were two parts of it. The Russians said, "It's great that the president has invited our president to his home in Crawford, but we can't have an official visit without it being in Washington. There has to be part of it in Washington, and he has to be received at the White House, or it will come across that he's being downgraded in some way." And as much as we tried to explain that very, very few people had been invited to Crawford, that it was a great honor to be invited to the president's personal home, the Russians didn't buy it at all. And so we said, "Okay, fine. We'll do part of the meeting in the White

House," which we did. But the other part too was when the Russian delegation, the protocol people and security people, went to Crawford with our protocol team, and they were shown the president's house and where the Putins would, what room they would have, and how big the ranch was, et cetera, et cetera, they spent an hour or two going through everything, through the place. And then the chief of protocol turned to the American chief of protocol and said, "But where's the real house?" It was way, way, way too rustic. There was no gold plate anywhere, and they couldn't believe that this was the cool place that Putin was going to be an entertained at.

BEHRINGER: And did you actually get to go to Crawford as well? Were you there for that meeting?

JONES: Yes, indeed. It was quite the show. There were several things that happened. First, Mrs. Putin arrived in a sequined top. She was wearing jeans—I mean, the whole deal [00:10:00] was to wear jeans, right? She was wearing jeans and she wore a sequined top that was sequins of the American flag, which I thought was extremely kind and interesting and a little bit funny. But the other thing—a couple of things happened. One, I could see that she was over by herself. We were in the living room, and drinks were being served, and it was the Russian delegation, the American delegation. And she looked alone over there, and I could see that Mrs. Bush was looking a little nervous about the whole thing, 'cause she saw the same thing too. So I walked over to her and trying to think along the way, "Okay, what do I say to her?" and came up with something in Russian and got something going between her and Mrs. Bush so I could leave them to have a conversation, got an interpreter to come over, so that they could so that they could at least have a pleasant couple of minutes.

But the other fun thing that happened was I was talking with the Russian political director who was not really my counterpart, but often was my counterpart, but really was the counterpart of the undersecretary for political affairs. But in any case—and that was Marc Grossman. Marc wasn't at the meeting. I was. And so I was talking to [Georgii] Mamedov, and the two presidents were over by themselves talking. And I said to him, I was pointing to the two presidents, “What do you think about all this?” He said, “I'm having a very hard time getting used to any kind of spontaneity or flexibility.” He said, “You have to understand—in my career, every word of every meeting with any American president was decided in detail way ahead of time, and there was never any deviation from it at all. The idea that the two presidents are over by themselves talking about God knows what is [00:12:00] horrifying to me, although I know I have to get used to it.” I thought that was a very honest comment for him to share.

BEHRINGER: That's fascinating. And going back to the Slovenian meeting for a moment—so just after the Slovenia meeting, if I understand correctly, there was a policy review of U.S.-Russian relations that you were involved in. Is that accurate? And could you talk about what—

JONES: That is accurate. That is indeed what happened. I will tell you though that I wasn't as intensively involved as my deputy assistant secretary was, Steve Pifer, partly because I had so many other countries that I had to be paying attention to, and there was a huge uproar with the Balkans at the time, as you may remember. So I was spending a lot of time on that. But the basic outline of the policy review was a lot of arms control stuff, which Steve Pifer was extremely good at, and I wouldn't have been able to deal with that particularly well in any case. But the issue was, the set of issues were, what do we do about the various

arms control agreements? What's the next step for any of them? And Steve was working on that. But we were also working a lot on economic reform issues. That was a big element of what we thought the bilateral relationship should consist of, and that had been a big part of what had gone on with Yeltsin under the Clinton administration. So those are the main issues that I remember particularly from that period. And then, of course—we'll get to this—of course, then 9/11 happened in the middle of all that. That was another big piece of the development of the U.S.-Russia relationship at the time.

BEHRINGER: Sure. Can you actually go right into—Well, sorry, first [00:14:00], since you brought up arms control, one of the things that the presidents talked about in Slovenia was withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and the Russians seem to have registered their displeasure but perhaps didn't protest very hard. But why did the Bush administration end up withdrawing from ABM and pursuing missile defense? And what was your own view of missile defense?

JONES: So, there was a [00:16:00] view within several members of the Bush administration that the primary, if not sole, reason that they wanted to get into office was to get rid of the ABM Treaty. And I didn't understand the depth of that goal, or the intensity of that goal, until much later, and I was talking with J.D. Crouch and he said, "Basically, there's no reason for me to be in the administration anymore. We did what we came to do for several of us." That was him. It was Cheney, it was Feith, Wolfowitz, that whole crowd. But, at the time, I'm not sure how—my impression at the time—let's put it this way—my impression at the time was that we might still be able to talk them out of abrogating the ABM Treaty and talk them—meaning the Pentagon, the Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz, Feith crowd—and we being Colin Powell and Rich Armitage.

So I, at the time of Crawford, didn't—I didn't worry about it that much, partly because I was so intensely involved in everything that happened with the Russians after 9/11 [00:16:00], so I was kind of focused on those more immediate issues. But, like I say, I didn't understand the intensity of the attitude about the ABM Treaty and sort of any treaty that particularly Cheney thought hamstrung the United States in doing anything that it wanted to do with our own arms control kinds of issues.

So the trip that I particularly remember being the ABM Treaty trip was in December. It was December of that year—I've forgotten when it was, but it was sort of mid-December. And I went with Powell on that trip to Moscow. It was the end of a different trip. But we ended up going to Moscow, Berlin, Paris, and London to formally advise the ABM Treaty partners that we were going to step out of the treaty and were giving them the six-month notice. I was in the meeting with Secretary Powell, with Putin in the Kremlin, and I remember, vividly remember, as Colin Powell explained that this is what we're going to do, and Putin said, "Obviously, I can't tell you what to do, but I need something to replace it. This treaty and the arms control treaties are what gives us a place at the table as a great power. And when you take that away, it's a very big loss for us, and I want something to replace it." And Powell said [00:18:00], "I will figure out what that is and we will absolutely do that." And he did. It was a very anodyne kind of statement that John Bolton hated. But we negotiated through Ken Brill in Vienna so that it was something that the Russians could accept.

MILES: So can I just ask you to zoom out a little bit? You've mentioned that there are some players here who have let's say some fixed ideas on some policy issues relevant to Russia, especially vis-à-vis U.S.-Russian arms control. Can I ask you just your impression

especially in the early years of the administration of kind of the intellectual lay of the land, so to speak? Are there people with really strong views on what to do vis- à -vis Russia, or is Russia a lesser policy issue? And of course I'm sure the advent of the wars in Afghanistan and then Iraq has some dispositive impact here, but just the intellectual landscape on Russia.

JONES: As I remember it, it was—benign might be too positive, but it wasn't negative. And it was partly because Putin was so new, and we had been able to forge good relationships with Russians in various sectors of the economy and the political life during the Yeltsin years. And so we knew Russians. We had relationships with them, and Mamedov, the political director, had been around forever, and they were well-known and Colin Powell as secretary of state was very, very well known to the Russians from his various [00:20:00] roles in the U.S. government and in the military. I went to a meeting with him once with some very senior military, retired Russian, former Soviet military generals. And they talked about the Fulda Gap and all the years that they spent looking across the borders at each other with terrible things in mind, and they laughed and drank vodka, and they had a grand old time. So it was almost collegial, let's put it that way. And the stroppiness, the severe stroppiness that we get from Putin now was not in evidence at all then.

Now, there was still kind of an anti-Soviet vibe around among the Cheney crowd, that group, but it didn't manifest itself particularly, right away. It only manifested itself in terms of, we must, must, must, must get out of the ABM Treaty, so we can do Star Wars and we can do this and we can do that. But even as we were getting out, abrogating the ABM Treaty, we still were having quite a collegial, cooperative relationship with the Russians because of 9/11. It didn't turn out that they gave us very much, but there was a

lot of happy talk and a lot of meetings and a lot of, "Oh yes, yes, we're going to share this. Oh yes, yes, we're going to share that." And then they didn't. And it wasn't until we got more into the Iraq War period [00:22:00] that things started getting much more difficult, really. It got a little bit difficult over Georgia, when we did some—I can get to that story, that was with Trubnikov. But that was a little bit later on, but you might want to do the 9/11 stuff first.

BEHRINGER: Yeah, let's go ahead with 9/11. What types of things did they offer to help with, and what did the United States offer in return? How did that affect the relationship?

JONES: So Putin, as you know, was one of the first people to call President Bush to offer condolences over 9/11. And Rich Armitage, the deputy secretary of state, had had an ongoing bilateral sort of working group with Trubnikov, deputy foreign minister over Central Asia and things of mutual interest. So we got hold of Trubnikov almost immediately after the Putin call. We probably did it through Sandy Vershbow in Embassy Moscow to say, "We'd like to come talk. We think that there—this happened to us. We don't know how it happened. Obviously, we had an intelligence failure. Maybe you can help us. Can we come see you? We'd like to bring a large delegation of all of our experts who might have anything to discuss with their counterparts in Moscow. And we'd like to come right away." So 9/11 happened on a Tuesday, and we were on a plane on Friday going to Moscow. It was one of those little planes—we flew right over the towers, the twin towers. You could still see the smoke. It was terrible.

Anyway, we went to Moscow. We had the head of the Counterterrorism Center at the Agency [00:24:00]. We had a very senior person from Defense Intelligence Agency. We had various people from the military because at that point, we were already talking

about how do we get equipment, military equipment into Afghanistan for whatever the retaliation is going to be about what happened? And before we left, Armitage—who had had a big meeting with all of the people who were going to participate—and Armitage said, "I want you all to get full clearance for everything that we know about—what we know about what's going on in Afghanistan. What are the Taliban doing? How did bin Laden get there? And who are these people who did this? What is it that we think we want to do in Afghanistan? How are we going to get stuff in? Everything that you think you want to talk about or ask for, get it cleared so it's releasable to Russia, so it can be still top secret, but it can be rel-Russia." And they did. So we go into the Osobniak, one of the foreign ministry office buildings—really a fancy house—in downtown Moscow, and our entire delegation is lined up on one side of the table. The entire delegation of Russians is on the other side of the table, with the big mortar boards, tons of, many stars on the shoulders and everything. And we had a whole thing worked out about how to do it, and Trubnikov said, "Please," to Armitage, "You go ahead." So each of the head people—the CIA's counterintelligence person, the DIA person, the Army person, all of them—made a presentation about what they knew, what they didn't know, the questions they had, and how much they looked forward to hearing [00:26:00] from their Russian counterparts, and hoped we worked together, et cetera, et cetera. And that took maybe, I don't know, probably took an hour and a half, and there were no questions in the meantime.

And so Armitage turned to Trubnikov and said, "Please, we are very eager to hear your questions, what you think happened, what you know, so that we can begin sharing the information." There was dead silence. There was total silence. Not even Trubnikov would say anything. And finally, Armitage said, "Maybe we should have a short break,"

which is what happened. And then he went to Trubnikov—I was there with him—and said, "What the hell? We came, we have spilled our guts." It was really heavy-duty secret stuff that we were telling them about what we had, where, and all this kind of stuff. And Trubnikov said, "You got to understand something. If we get something like that for free, we don't think it's real. We haven't paid for it. We haven't worked for it. So nobody believes you."

And Armitage said, "Well, okay, fine. But we do have a little bit of a problem, which is that your foreign minister is going to be meeting with President Bush in the Oval Office *today*, in like six hours because of the time change. And he's going to want to know the result of our meeting, because that's one of the reasons we set it up this way, is so we could have this discussion, and then there could be a follow-up discussion between the president of the United States and the foreign minister of Russia. So what's the deal? He said, "I need to make a call or two." And he said, "Let me work on this for a little bit, and then let's have lunch, and we'll reconvene this afternoon." So, okay.

So the upshot was that he went to Putin, told him what had happened [00:28:00]. And Putin said, "Okay. Tell Ivanov"—I think it was Ivanov then—"to tell the president that we're with him, that we'll help." And, apparently, we'd learn later, there'd been a big fight among a lot of the senior Russians with Putin over that, because they didn't want to help. And he said, "No, no, let's help. Let's see, let's go with this."

And so that was the instruction that then Trubnikov got to give to his team so that they could say a few things in the afternoon after our lunch, and we had a perfectly nice lunch. Sandy Vershbow, the American ambassador, was there, and I think the Russian ambassador had come over from Washington. And in the afternoon they just said, "We're

not prepared to discuss any of this now, but let's form different working groups"—within this, U.S.-Russia Counterterrorism Working Group is what we renamed it—"and we will come back to you."

So one of the main arrangements, of course, was between the CIA and various of the Russian intelligence agencies. It was basically run through the Embassy, through the station. But also Frank Taylor was the director of counterterrorism at the State Department, and his counterpart was a guy named [Zamir] Kabulov, and they met very regularly. And Frank was—and often I'd participate in the meetings as well—and Frank would offer all kinds of information about what we knew about this, and what we knew about that, and what we knew about the guys in Hamburg and what we—et cetera, et cetera. And he never got anything really from Kabulov at all. But it meant that we had a [00:30:00] reason to meet. We had a lot of conversations. We had—Bush was very good about phone calls with Putin, which is a big thing for the Russians, as we now know—when, ever since Obama didn't do phone calls with Putin, [laughter] we know that was a big deal.

BEHRINGER: And I think there's been this narrative that has emerged on the Russian side that the United States didn't give enough in return for the help that the Russians gave in Afghanistan, and the picture you're presenting is very interesting: that they were not so forthcoming at first. But is there any reason that they should be disappointed about cooperation on terrorism efforts? Does that narrative have any basis in reality? Why do you think that they were supposedly disappointed in—

JONES: It's a made-up story, frankly. The one thing that they can say that they did for us, which we needed to have done, is they gave us overflight approvals to get flights into

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan because we needed to overfly Russia. So they did do that, but otherwise they didn't do anything else. They didn't participate in any way. All of the work—I ended up doing a tremendous amount of the work of getting those approvals for use of Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan and the airport in Bishkek, and then the little one in Dushanbe as well. It was my office and my guys who negotiated all of those agreements with each of those countries, et cetera. But it was up to us to get the overflight approvals, and we did. But they gave zero—I mean zero—intel help.

And it was a little unclear why [00:32:00], because we knew that Putin was terrified of Muslims. We could see that from the way he handled Chechnya. And so we knew that there was no love lost really for the guys who had perpetrated 9/11. But that's a much newer story. They didn't say that kind of thing at the time when I was working on it, that was not one of the issues.

What they were upset about when I was working on them was NATO enlargement. That was a totally different thing. They could easily say, "we gave them overflight clearances so they could get stuff into Afghanistan, and then they turned around and enlarged NATO." I mean, okay. They could say that. But there wasn't anything that they needed that we didn't give them other than—well, let me take that back. So we did continue to put the—my lack of arms control experience is showing here—whatever it was that we wanted to put in Warsaw or in Poland, we went ahead and put in, we were talking about doing some in Azerbaijan as well. And we continued with that, and they kept saying, "No, no, no, you're surrounding Russia with that." And we kept saying, "It's to protect Russia and everybody else. It's not against you. It's to protect

everybody." But that talking point never went over very well. I used it a lot, but it never worked.

BEHRINGER: You brought up getting those agreements for overflights through Central Asia. Can you talk a little bit more about, given your experience as ambassador in Kazakhstan, the role that Central Asia plays in U.S.-Russian relations?

JONES: Ah. The Central Asians [00:34:00]—when they became independent, each developed a little bit differently. They had a different idea about themselves, even though the U.S. treated them all the same, at the time. And they became quite independent of Russia. They were much more independent of Russia than, to a degree, than some of them are now. Uzbekistan was particularly not amenable to having any kind of Russia overlord situation. And even the Kazakhstanis, who were very pro-Russia—they'd all gone to MGIMO[1] together, they'd been in the military together or, whatever it was, they all knew each other really well—but once they were independent, they got so they knew exactly the kinds of things that they wanted to do on their own.

But a guy like Nazarbayev picked his fights extremely carefully with the Russians. So he didn't fight with them too much over if they wanted to have a particular oil and gas property, for example. But at the same time, he was very careful to balance it out and make sure that the Italians and the Americans and the Japanese and the Indians also got good properties as well so that, as the prime minister told me one time, so that the U.S. could be a tripwire for when the Russians came across the border—which I explained was not going to happen, but anyway.

[1] MGIMO is the Russian acronym for the Moscow Institute of International Relations.

So when I say Nazarbayev picked his battles carefully, he fought back on paying reparations for the ecological damage at the space station in Karaganda. He was careful not to let the Russians have the coal mines, for instance. Things like that. Plus, Tokayev especially, as the foreign minister, worked very, very hard—this is more the Chinese, but it applies to the Russians [00:36:00] as well—to close down, or to make formal agreements on every little part of the border between Kazakhstan and China—and to a degree with Russia, but that was more settled—so that the Chinese in particular couldn't say, oh, well there seems to be some discrepancy here, so we'll just come across this border and take over part of Kazakhstan. They were very nervous about that.

But that was typical of how they all behaved. The Azeris, for example, very much wanted to do things their own way, wanted to be sure that the Russians weren't trying to tell them what to do in terms of exporting of gas. So when we proposed the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, and the Russians kept saying, "No, no, no," 'cause basically they wanted to control the export of oil out of Central Asia, which they were able to control through CPC[2] until Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan was built. And the Azeris said, "No, we're going to go ahead. We like this. We want to be independent." And same thing with the Georgians. Georgians were a different story, though, especially when Saakashvili came in. But that was later.

BEHRINGER: Yeah. And next there's three things unfolding at once. There's the Iraq War and NATO enlargement and the color revolutions are all unfolding in the same time frame. So I guess let's take Iraq first. Were you involved in the effort to convince the Russians to support the invasion of Iraq?

[2] Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC).

JONES: Yes, in the following respect. The British in particular, but also the French, wanted to have a Security Council resolution that would authorize their participation in something in Iraq, because none of them was particularly convinced that Iraq was [00:38:00] a culprit. And, frankly, neither was the State Department. We all had been—I happen to have been working on Iraq and Iran almost exclusively before I took over the Europe-Eurasia portfolio when Powell came in, so I knew that the intel that we had on Iraq, on Saddam Hussein and what he had and where the weapons were and where the palaces were—that all the intel that the Bush administration was touting was all stuff that we had had two years previously. There was nothing new. And we also knew that there had been some progress by the UN inspectors. Although when poor Secretary Powell had to go to the UN to explain what we knew and had George Tenet swear on a stack of Bibles that everything that he was being given to say was accurate, it turned out it wasn't accurate, and the skepticism the State Department had about all of that was valid.

Anyway, but before all of this, Powell had been—and Bush—had been persuaded by Tony Blair that he needed a Security Council resolution, or actually a second Security Council resolution in order to attack Iraq. And so Colin Powell spent hundreds of hours on the phone with his Russian counterpart negotiating the Security Council resolution language that would permit this to happen, and they did negotiate it. And it was one of the more interesting negotiations for me to watch. I wasn't involved in the negotiation—I'd hear about every word change—but it was all Colin Powell with Igor Ivanov on the phone for that one. And, of course, as you know, that second Security Council resolution wasn't passed in the end [00:40:00] because the French didn't like it and were able to persuade the African members of the Security Council to vote against it.

So there's a fun story that goes with that one, too—Have you been told that story?

BEHRINGER: No.

JONES: So Colin Powell had a morning meeting with all of the assistant secretaries and undersecretaries, and during the time that this was being negotiated, he would come in—and Walter Kansteiner was the assistant secretary for Africa and extremely good, really good—and Powell would come in and say, "Well, Walter, we are not sure, we're not getting the right answers," from whichever the Africans were on the Security Council, "and so I need your help." So Walter'd say, "Well okay, I'll call all the foreign ministers and see what we can do." And so the next day, "Well, Walter, what about the foreign ministers?" He said, "Well, I'm going to have to go to the prime ministers, because I'm not getting the right answer from the foreign ministers. They're too cowed by the French." So he went to the prime ministers, and they were kind of squishy too. And the next day Powell asked him about that, "Oh, well, maybe now I've got to go to the presidents." "Oh my God. Okay. So we'll go to the presidents." And then he'd say, "Mr.— , no I think you have to go to the presidents." So they had all this conversation. And then the fourth day, Secretary Powell says, "I'm not so sure that the presidents going to—" and Walter just said, "You know what, we're going to have to go to the witchdoctors now." Still didn't work. But that was the story. And not "the story." I heard him say it.

BEHRINGER: And then—

JONES: And then he tried to get the witchdoctors to get the vote turned around, and that didn't work. [laughter]

BEHRINGER: And then, on the other hand, the French and the Germans and the Russians bind together against anything happening. And there's the famous formulation of, "punish

France [00:42:00], ignore Germany, and forgive Russia" afterward. Can you talk a little bit about how the invasion of Iraq affected the U.S.-Russian relationship, and was it something that that your counterparts in Russia constantly brought up when you met with them? Was it a big irritation in the relationship?

JONES: It was an irritation in the relationship, but, for a period of time, the entire discussion was getting the Russian ambassador out of Baghdad and how to get his convoy safely through what was going on there at the time—I forget the timing of it exactly, because the war obviously had already started, and we had been working with the Poles there, who were our protecting power, on getting them out safely, getting others out safely. And we explained to the Russians which route they had to [00:40:00] take and what they would find along the way and gave them safe passage. And we advised all the units along the way that this convoy was going to be coming through.

Well, for whatever reason, the Russians decided to go a different way. And then, oh my God, surprise, they get caught, with some Iraqi something or other and get stuck. Luckily, they weren't killed. But it was—that's one of my main god-awful memories of that whole period.

But was it an irritant? It was something that we all lived with all the time as something that was very difficult to manage. But at the same time, there was so much else going on [00:44:00]. That's my recollection. We were constantly dealing with what was going on in Georgia or what was going on in Ukraine or what was going on in the Balkans that I don't have an overwhelming recollection of spending all my time on Russia and Iraq. I spent a lot of it on a ton of other stuff, too. I spent a huge amount of time on

negotiating to get the troops into Iraq to start with, through Turkey. That was a whole big story, but that's a different subject. It's a different country.

BEHRINGER: Absolutely. And so, in 2003, the invasion happens. Also in 2003, there's the color revolutions, kick off first in Georgia, and then 2004 Ukraine and then 2005, I believe, in Kyrgyzstan. Would you differentiate between the revolutions in terms of their significance, and can you talk a little bit about what the Bush administration did and didn't do in supporting the revolutions during and after?

JONES: The Rose Revolution, the first one, in Georgia, was—let's put it this way. We had been working on the problems that Shevardnadze was having for a long time. And Shevardnadze—things were getting much, much worse there. Shevardnadze had a two percent approval rating. The opposition was vocal, was respectable, pretty much. And there were all kinds of difficulties—the details of which I actually don't remember—that involved setting up the election commissions and getting the agreements in place for free and fair elections in Georgia. And I went there several times [00:46:00] to talk to Shevardnadze about the kinds of things that would help sort out the problem in terms of participation on the election commission. Spent a lot of time talking to Saakashvili and various of the other opposition leaders about the kinds of things that they thought were going on and kinds of things they thought they needed in order to say that they thought this was a free and fair election, et cetera. But then we could see that things—that we weren't able to persuade Shevardnadze, things were going from bad to worse.

And so we came up with the idea that, let's find somebody whom Shevie really admires and might listen to, who could have a Dutch uncle talk with him. And we picked Jim Baker. And he agreed to do it. I went with him on a tiny plane with a couple of other

people, Fourth of July weekend. And he had a long, detailed conversation with Shevardnadze. On the plane, on the way over, he said, "Let's come up with a better plan other than just these talking points." And we came up with a sort of—I've forgotten, it was like thirteen agreements, or—eleven items that we wanted the president and the opposition leaders to agree to in terms of how the election commission would be formed and how the election would be conducted. And Baker talked Shevie into it and then asked me to stay to talk the opposition into it—Baker had talked to the opposition, had presented it to them, and they were still fiddling around with it. So I stayed a couple of extra days and got the thing agreed. So the election happens, there are all kinds of things that go wrong. Again, I've forgotten the timings exactly, but at one point it was clear that [00:48:00] Shevie needed to go and was inclined to go, but it was a little unclear how to make it all happen.

And so Powell calls up his Russian counterpart and explains—and he'd been talking to him all along about what we're trying to get done there, actually; we were very much into the whole transparency thing—and he said, "I think you need to go down there and help us persuade Shevie to leave office because the opposition is prepared to take over, they won the election," or I can't remember exactly what the details were now. And so he went. Powell found him having dinner with Putin and a couple of other people at a Georgian restaurant in Moscow. He was many sheets to the wind by the time he landed in Tbilisi, according to the American ambassador, who was close by. But he went to the parliament, talked everybody into standing down for a minute, for a little bit, so that Shevie could resign. They agreed to guarantee his safety, and he talked Shevie into resigning, and that's what happened. So that was a very big, positive development in the

U.S.-Russia relationship at the time, which got much more complicated over Abkhazia and various other things. But that was a big thing that Powell was able to manage.

So on that one, that was a very distinct situation, i.e., the election, and a very distinct—it was clear what was needed to be done and how to get that done. And then, of course, we did a lot of work with [Saakashvili][3] afterwards [00:50:00] on helping him set up his presidential office and working with him on, how do you get transparency, how do you fight corruption, and all these kinds of things that—anyway, it worked, sort of, for a little while.

Now the difference with Ukraine—and again, the very, very first trip I made as an assistant secretary was to Kyiv with Senator Lugar for the—let's see, it would have been, would it have been the 20th anniversary of independence? The 15th? I can't remember. Anyway, whichever the independence thing was, we went for that ceremony. And in my conversation with Kuchma—it was Kuchma then—and Luger's conversation—we'd worked this out—we, again, talked about free and fair elections, which were going to happen four years later, or almost four years later. And he said, “It's a bit too early to talk about elections now.” And I said, “No, it's not. It's exactly when we talk about free and fair elections, because you have to get it all set up. You've got to get the institutions in place. You've got to people understanding what is corruption and what’s corrupt and what's not corrupt in terms of elections and electioneering,” et cetera, et cetera.

Anyway, so we had been working on that for a very long time. The embassy worked on it. Whenever any of us went to Kyiv, if it was Armitage or Secretary Powell or

[3] Amb. Jones says “Shevie” here, though she is clearly referring to Shevardnadze’s successor, Mikheil Saakashvili.

me or Condi Rice, if she went—I can't remember if she did, probably she did. We had lots of meetings on exactly how to have an election and how to make sure it's free and fair and all that kind of thing. So in a way it was the same kind of set of ideas as in Georgia, but the situation in Ukraine was so different, because Kuchma was so much involved with the Russians, and the Russians were—they cared a lot more about Ukraine and what happened in Ukraine than they [00:52:00] cared about what happened in Georgia, as you can imagine.

So, as the Orange Revolution developed in Kyiv, we had many more of the Europeans involved—in particular, the Poles, the EU, and one of the Baltics, I think the Lithuanians, it was—who had particularly good relationships with various of the senior Ukrainians and would go there on a fairly regular basis to talk them into behaving properly and not having the election be a complete mess, et cetera. And we, the U.S., were very involved in talking to that group—the Poles, the EU, the Lithuanians—and then it was the U.S. and Canada were not involved in the regular discussions with the Ukrainians—you know, when they had those little meetings, when they'd go to Kyiv, but we all collaborated every day on: okay, what statement needs to be made? Which one of us is going to make the statement? Should it be the group coming out of Poland and the Baltics, or is this the time for Solana of the EU to make the statement, or is it the U.S.'s time to make the statement, or should the Canadians make the statement? And we had it all very orchestrated throughout working again with our ambassadors in Kyiv who could help us orchestrate it extremely carefully to make sure that as soon as X happened, Canadians would make a statement. And then the EU would take it a little bit further, or

the U.S. would take it a little bit further than that. So that—and that went on for weeks until, finally, Kuchma left.

Kyrgyzstan was different. That happened as I was leaving, so I can't really speak to [00:54:00] what we did other than it was gonna have another color and we thought, oh God.

BEHRINGER: I mean, in—

JONES: Actually, it was the Tulip Revolution, they called it the Tulip Revolution, didn't they?

BEHRINGER: That's right. Yeah.

JONES: So not really a color, but anyway—like a flower, like rose.

BEHRINGER: That's true. So, it's interesting that in the Georgian case you had a really close involvement with the Russians in dealing with that. But in the Ukraine case, it seems like there wasn't much. What types of communications was the administration having with the Russians as this is all was going on the European—

JONES: Regular. Every time we had an event where somebody was going to make a statement, I would tell Secretary Powell about it and Dan Fried so that everybody knew, everybody was involved in how we were orchestrating it. And at various points, we would say, "Okay, Mr. Secretary, here are a couple of things that would be a very good idea for you to call your counterpart and go through: here's what we're trying to accomplish, here's what the stumbling blocks are, that this isn't meant to be anti-Russia, it's not anti-Russia, it's not anti-anything. It's pro-people making a choice." And sometimes we'd have our Pentagon colleagues call their counterparts.

There was one night when we were very worried that that the Ukrainians had ordered troops out. And the reason we thought that was that our defense attaché had

been up looking around. It was snowing, and he could see tracks in the snow, leaving the area where he knew that the troops, the city troops, were bivouacked. And so, the ambassador called me, John Herbst called me, and said, “Oh my God. Oh my God. Get Colin Powell [00:56:00] on the phone. We think they're gonna go and start shooting people in the Maidan.” So I got hold of the secretary—it was a Sunday night—and he, of course, “Absolutely, place the call.” So I did. And when you do it, you did it very clearly on an open line. I called the American ambassador there, John Herbst, and said, “Secretary Powell would like to speak with General whoever-it-was”—I think it was the defense minister he was trying to reach—"about his concern about”—and I went through the whole thing as though I was giving the talking points— “his concern about the possibility that troops might be used against their own citizens. And of course, you know with all the training we've been doing, the military is meant to be in service of the people, not in service of the state. And so Secretary Powell would like to have a conversation about this with the defense minister.” And the defense minister wasn't available, and he couldn't make the call, and on and on and on.

But every time we had a phone call, we were very careful to repeat everything that we—that Colin Powell would say if he were to have that conversation so that we were sure they were getting the message, even if they decided they didn't want to take the call. And sure enough, about an hour later, they saw the tracks in the snow of the vehicles returning. So that was cool. And of course, telling Secretary Powell what I was doing, and I said, “I'm sorry to keep you up late, but the call isn't coming through, but I think we're making the point.” [laughter]

BEHRINGER: And then also in Ukraine, then there's the election with Yanukovych and Yushchenko. [00:58:00] How much coordination did the United States have with the candidates as—obviously the Russians are backing one candidate pretty hard. And the view from the Russian side is that the United States was backing Yushchenko, but just for the record, what types of involvement is the United States—

JONES: So here's how we do it. We spend a lot of time really talking to the people who are setting up the election commissions and the people out in the provinces who are setting up the infrastructure for the votes to take place. And then we talk with a lot of people about what's fair in terms of campaigning, and what's unfair in terms of, you know, the state is giving only the government candidate broadcast time, for instance. And we would talk to all of the candidates. So we talked to—lost her name.

MILES: Timoshenko.

JONES: Timoshenko. We talked to her plenty of times. We talked to anyone who was a candidate to make sure that it was clear—including the Russian-supported candidate—to make sure it was clear that we weren't supporting any particular candidate. We were supporting a process, a process that was transparent and that was free and fair and a process that had been chosen by the Ukrainian people and was overseen by the Ukrainian legal system and judicial system so that it could be demonstrated to be free and fair. And the interesting thing was, partly because of a lot of the training that we did and the EU did, 'cause, of course, the EU was doing a lot of work with the Ukrainians as well on this kind of thing, [01:00:00] there was a very clear understanding among the citizens, the public, about what is free and what isn't. And as—there was a steel potentate that bought up all the election equipment in one of the provinces—I forgotten the details of it—but it

was considered a very corrupt thing, and that guy got put on a can't-ever-get-a-U.S.-visa system. But that's how we tried to do it, is talk through the systems that needed to be in place and how the oversight should work and that kind of thing.

So when it was clear that in that election that the election officials in various of the provinces knew pretty well how many people had come to the polls and had a pretty good idea of basically how everybody was going to vote, and when the vote tallies were then publicized in Kyiv from the Central Election Commission and were quite different, that was when the uproar started. Because they knew. They knew that the numbers were being manipulated. And it was only from certain of the okumants, certain of the provinces.

BEHRINGER: Yeah. And so we have Ukraine happening in 2004. The other major thing that happens, which had been developing for a couple of years was, for a while, was the expansion of NATO, which you mentioned earlier. Can you talk a little bit about why the Bush administration elected to go with a big bang approach and what your personal view of that was? [01:02:00]

JONES: If anything was the biggest irritant with Russia, it was this: it was that NATO still existed was a big enough—was a big problem. So one of the things we did very early in my time was we said, "Okay," and when I was talking to my Russian counterpart, said, "You know, what is it that bothers you the most about NATO?" And they said, "You're surrounding us." And I said, "Well, we're not, but okay. How would you like the meetings to take place?" "Well, you know we always have a separate meeting, and we're not really part of the group. So we want to be part of the group." So we said, "Okay, well, we'll seat you in alphabetical order, rather than just as a guest, whenever there's a NATO

meeting." "Okay." And then we came up with the NATO-Russia Council so that there would be a more sort of robust discussion at NATO meetings that involved the Russians. And this had a reflection in the OSCE,[4] and the minister was there as well, in terms of the way the Russians wanted to be treated, et cetera. And we kept trying to accommodate that and do it in a way that made sense.

But the small—the first enlargement of NATO had already taken place by the time I took over the Europe-Eurasia Bureau. And so the discussion was, was there going to be another expansion? And it was pretty well agreed that there would be another enlargement. But the question was, how many? And we decided, my sort of senior team said, rather than just have a theoretical discussion, let's have a set of criteria that we can all agree on that we will measure the candidates by to decide who is going to be invited to attend. And we came up with a whole set of criteria, got it agreed at NATO, because it couldn't be just us deciding all of this, but it was clear that [01:04:00] we had much more interest in making this work well, rather than just work, than many of our other colleagues did. The British—I think the British were inclined to a big bang. The French maybe a little bang, but they wanted to have Croatia in, and we weren't sure that Croatia could meet the criteria. Anyway, we came up with fourteen, fifteen sort of things that each country had to be able to do or agree to in order to be invited to attend.

And there was a team that involved two of my DASS—three of my DASSes,[5] and a couple of people from the Pentagon—I think that was it—to go around and have very detailed meetings with each of the candidate countries about what the criteria were, and

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[4] Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
[5] deputy assistant secretaries of state

what they had to do to meet them, and what the timeline would be, and all of that. And that was very carefully monitored. It was carefully explained. It was carefully detailed. We briefed Congress on it because we wanted to make sure that, whatever we did decide, Congress would agree to, because they had to approve the revised treaty. So, as it came time to make the decision about was it going to be large or small, basically the decision was, it can be as large as we as we think the countries can qualify. And so it wasn't a decision to be large. It was, we will see who qualifies. And it turned out seven qualified.

MILES: So as we've talked to people, they've indicated that there were varying degrees of approbation for that, and the varying perspectives on the wisdom of that choice. What was—

JONES: The choice [01:06:00] that we'd have criteria or the choice of those seven?

MILES: Actually both. There are some people who have said, we should have just let it basically anyone, just open the door, and, within reason, we should have kind of—and then, there's some who've said, it should have been fewer and so on and so forth. So I'm wondering what your perspective on that is.

JONES: So one of the things that was very important to me was that I be able to explain to anybody who asks why it was that XYZ country was asked to join. And I wanted especially to be able to explain this to the Russians, because they were constantly, constantly harassing me and everybody—but any meeting I had with any Russians, it was always, "Oh my God, oh my God, NATO enlargement." And I would say things like, "So in the Baltic states, one of the requirements is that the Russian-speaking populations have, that their children still be permitted to go to Russian-speaking schools. What have you done to make sure that happens?" And they had no answer. One of the set of criteria is that

newspapers in Russian, Russian-language newspapers, be permitted to continue in the Baltic states, which they knew perfectly well the Baltics didn't want to do. But we said that there should not be discrimin—that minorities should not be discriminated against. In the Baltic states it was the Russians. In others it was the Roma, et cetera. So it was a criterion that wasn't just because of the Baltic states and Russia. It was a criterion that had to apply to everybody no matter who their minorities were. And plus, we thought too—and I think we were right about this—that if we had this whole set of criteria, that it was much easier to explain to the Congress why we had done what we had done. And it would be much more difficult to say, [01:08:00] "But, but, but, but, but, but—my favorite—my constituency is from Croatia, and we want Croatia in." And I would say, you know, "Croatia didn't qualify, for the following nine reasons."

Now, one of the criteria was that I think it was over 50 percent of the population had to want to join NATO. Well, that didn't work with a couple of countries, like Ukraine, for instance. Anyway, it's true that we got into—there were very detailed fights within this group, within the administration, about has X country really qualified on criteria number seven, or whatever it was? And we fought it out on the basis of facts. We said, "Well, this is what the requirement is. This is what we know has happened. This is the legislation that's been passed. This is the implementation of the legislation that has worked or not worked," whatever it was.. And so we were able to—this is something I really wanted to argue for. I really wanted to argue for, we can substantiate our choices.

MILES: So the bottom line—do you think it was the right choice to expand NATO so far east that, in the case of the Baltics, it was touching Russia's borders?

JONES: Say that again. Why was it, why—

MILES: I'm asking your opinion. Bottom line, do you think it was the right choice?

JONES: Yes.

MILES: Do you think it was a good policy to—

JONES: I thought it was a—

MILES: —expand NATO up to Russia's borders, including in the Baltics?

JONES: Yes. I was in the camp that thought Russia should get over itself. [laughter] To say that they were threatened by the Baltic states was just such bullshit. [01:10:00] And I kept reminding the Russians that they hated the fact that Poland was invited to join, and then they ended up with this fabulous economic relationship with Poland that they never would have had otherwise. And I kept saying, "Tell me what's bad about that. You can't tell me anything bad is going to happen to you as a result of this. And by the way, what we're requiring are all kinds of things that you say you want for Russia too," in terms of civil society kinds of things, which they then didn't do, but never mind.

I just wanted to be able to make those arguments with a straight face and with full enthusiasm. And of course, we made the decision—well, we made the proposal internally after we studied, did a whole thing about, who's met the criteria and who hasn't? What will they still need to do to do it? And we had a whole timeline sorted out because we had to get it agreed within the U.S. government. We had to get it agreed within NATO. We had to take it to Congress, and we had to make sure it got voted. So we had a big rollout that we had to do, including I went to all kinds of places in the United States, so did my colleagues, to speak to American groups, American citizen groups, about why we thought that this was a good idea, so that there wasn't some kind of undercurrent of, oh my God, this is terrible, and then we wouldn't get the vote that we wanted out of the Senate.

MILES: I like your term of the Russians get over themselves. I don't know, Latvia has got 6,500 men in uniform. That's pretty [inaudible] scary.

JONES: They could not explain to me how they were going to be threatened by [01:12:00] Lithuania joining NATO. Please. Nor could they explain to me how they were going to make sure the Lithuanians kept Russian newspapers—unless it was NATO making them do it, by the way.

BEHRINGER: And you mentioned Russia promising to do all this stuff on civil service, on civil society that they didn't do. In the first administration, how much did the Bush administration push Putin on democracy and human rights issues?

JONES: We pushed them quite a bit. My idea always was that we have to decide if we actually want to get a change. Do we want to change behavior, or do we just want to make ourselves feel good? And the difference is, if you want to change behavior, you need to be quiet about it. If you want to make yourselves feel good, then you go broadcast all the mean stuff you were saying to the Russians. There's a time to do that, mind you, probably, as we've seen. But—and Colin Powell agreed with that philosophy of—not that I persuaded him to. He was of that philosophy as well. And whenever he met with Putin or Ivanov, he was always talking about treatment of people and rule of law and that kind of thing. Now remember, the whole Khodorkovsky thing was going on at the same time. And I still remember—this was in the same meeting with the ABM Treaty—and Powell had to mention the Khodorkovsky thing, and Putin said, “Well, you jailed all the Enron people, so I can jail Khodorkovsky.” [01:14:00] And he said—

MILES: How’d that go down?

JONES: So Colin Powell said to him— and fortunately, our interpreter understood what he said—he said, "There's a very big difference. I don't think you call Khodorkovsky your friend, a close friend of yours, but the heads of Enron were all very good friends of the president of the United States, and he had to see them do the perp walk." I thought, oh God, he's never going to get that. But the interpreter had grown up in the Bronx, so he knew what a perp walk was, and he translated very nicely. [laughter] But yeah, that was his—you know how, in this recent interview that that they did with Putin, and the journalist said, "You're very good at what-about-ism." And I thought of that, exactly that comment from him: "What about the Enron people?"

BEHRINGER: And that segues nicely into Russia's—at the same time he's cracking down on the oligarchs, Russia is also resurging economically, price of oil spiking and everything. And first of all, it seems like that was an unforeseen occurrence, Russia's quick resurgence there. Did anyone foresee that in the administration?

JONES: I'm not sure that—I'm not sure I can answer the question, because it would mean going back to say, did anybody ever write that that could happen? And I imagine it probably did. But the thing that was important to us as we're working on all this stuff is that as Russia is [01:16:00] financially, economically more stable and more prosperous, we're thinking that they'll be more comfortable with themselves and more comfortable in the world and feel freer, feel more free to loosen up internally and let people travel and that kind of thing, which of course they then did. So my recollection is, I thought it was a good thing that that sort of anxiety, that element of anxiety was gone, that they didn't have to worry so much about that. Now, the whole issue of the *Sale of the Century* already having happened—you know, the Chrystia Freeland book—and then what I used to say is that

the oligarchs—Putin started getting rid of the oligarchs in order to replace them with Kremlin oligarchs, i.e., his pals, and they all did the same thing. They all were still oligarchs. They were just his oligarchs instead of ones that weren't necessarily in his support group.

And the part of it that gets complicated has all happened much more recently, with the heavy-duty sanctions over Ukraine and all that kind of thing, where the Russians had to become self-sufficient, and that self-sufficiency has added a level of arrogance that we didn't have to deal with.

BEHRINGER: One of the—

JONES: On Putin's part, that we absolutely didn't—it just wasn't—that isn't what was happening at the time. We had much more conversations. I wasn't in this conversation, but Steve Pifer was, it was a very early one where there was a meeting [01:18:00] in Latin America somewhere, and I can't remember why, but Putin and Bush met there. This was after Slovakia. And there were already some things, anti-democratic things happening in Russia, and one of them was that that Putin was going to appoint the governors from now on. They could no longer be elected. And so that was—we did some talking points about, for the president to say, "That's one of the things that makes us nervous about permitting the people to make political choices. You're letting them make economic choices, but what about the political choices?" And Putin, as you know, is extremely good at taking the conversation and talking forever and then leaving no time for a response, but in this case, President Bush did respond and he said, "You know, I wish I could appoint the governors too." Geez. [laughing] Does not help get the point across very well. Oh dear. Anyway, the things that happen.

BEHRINGER: And one of the ways that Russia was becoming more assertive abroad was using its weight in the energy sector. I think I read that you were involved in talks in 2004 in Georgia to restart the construction of the BP pipeline there?

JONES: Yes.

BEHRINGER: I was wondering—

JONES: That was the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan. BP was building it. Yeah.

BEHRINGER: I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about those negotiations and how Russia figured into the Georgians' hesitancy, what were the issues on restarting that pipeline?

JONES: The Russians didn't figure in that at all. It wasn't the Russians that they were concerned about. They had—part of the pipeline was going through some communities that were in an uproar [01:20:00], and so Saakashvili was very nervous about that. But even more importantly, what happened was Saakashvili, when he came in, stopped the construction of the pipeline, because he assumed that it had—that it was a Shevardnadze corrupt deal, and he thought that he should stop it because it had to be done wrong. And that was a very big lesson for me, because it was clear to me that BP had not been talking to the opposition leaders or anybody in the parliament about BTC and what it was about and all of the work that had been done with it. I was involved in, as the American Caspian energy diplomacy person, that I'd been involved in getting the environmental approvals and getting the bank approvals and getting the legal approvals, but the host government agreements and the intergovernmental agreements for all of the pipeline—for the pipeline all the way from Azerbaijan to Georgia through into Turkey.

So as soon as we saw that Saakashvili had stopped construction on the pipeline, I went to Tbilisi and sat down with them and went through all of the detail and all of the work that had been done by the international community, including—the EU had participated, The U.S. had participated, U.S. EXIM[6] had participated, all kinds of trade and development agencies had participated. I said, "None of that could have been done if there was any corrupt deal on this at all." And that part of the arrangement was for— part of the arrangement with communities along the route of the pipeline was to assure that those communities would get the work for the clearing of the area, the construction, the security afterwards and all that kind of thing. And then we took Saakashvili to see where the pipeline was being done, how it was being done, had a community meeting [01:22:00], and the community said, "Yes, yes, we've been told we're going to get jobs. Yes, yes, the people are here to do that," et cetera. So we were able to turn him around on that. But that had nothing to do with the Russians. That was all, he was sure [Shevardnadze][7] had pocketed a lot of money for it.

BEHRINGER: Okay. You left the administration in 2005. Was that before or after Bratislava? The meeting—

JONES: That was after.

BEHRINGER: After, okay.

JONES: I went to Bratislava, yeah.

BEHRINGER: You went to Bratislava? I would love to hear some stories about that. We're running a little short on time. Can you—

[6] Export-Import Bank of the United States

[7] Here Amb. Jones says Saakashvili, but means Saakashvili had been sure that Shevardnadze "had pocketed a lot of money for it."

JONES: I'm okay with time if you guys are.

BEHRINGER: Okay. That's great. Great.

JONES: My thing says it's going to 4:30, that we have two hours.

BEHRINGER: Yeah. We usually try to keep people to an hour and a half, just because we want to be polite—

JONES: No, I've got time. I've planned it.

BEHRINGER: —but, if you've got time, we'd love to finish through. Okay. In that case I guess let's—

MILES: Let's hear some stories about Prespor.

BEHRINGER: Yeah. What do you remember—

JONES: About Bratislava. Well, by that point, things were pretty difficult with the Russians. We weren't getting any cooperation on the counterterrorism stuff. They were pissed off about NATO enlargement. Khodorkovsky was still in jail. The color revolutions were underway, and they were mad about that. I've forgotten—we'd had a go-around with the Russians about the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia by then. They were doing a variety of things to be difficult with the Georgians and with Saakashvili there. The invasion hadn't happened yet. That happened after I retired.

And so we had quite a list of things for President Bush to talk about with Putin, and [01:24:00] we carefully briefed him up on it, including to talk about various civil society issues. And I don't remember too much honestly about the details of the meeting itself, but I remember in particular the press conference afterwards, when—I can't remember what the lead-in was—but the question was freedom of the press in Russia, and Putin said, "Well, I don't know why you're talking about freedom of the press in

Russia. The White House had—" Oh, God, what's the name of the American journalist who—

BEHRINGER: Dan Rather?

JONES: "The White House had Dan Rather fired," he said. And, to me, that was—I forget, President Bush handled it very well—but to me that was indicative of how badly Putin was briefed, or in what a strange way he was briefed, that that he thought these kinds of—that this is what happened, that George Bush had Dan Rather fired because he had done a bad story about his draft situation. But it was one of those—my recollection also—I wasn't in the meeting with the president and Putin, but I was in the side meetings with Secretary Powell—and the Russians were really scratchy then. We were on a downhill slide by then in terms of the relationship and the kinds of things that one could talk about.

And I mean they had a list [01:26:00] of grievances. There were some Russian sailors that were in jail in Los Angeles, and they became as important to get out as Khodorkovsky, and stuff like that. And so there was this sort of—and the Russian ambassador leaving Iraq. That's still—they wanted to bring that up every time, to the point I did one more trip after Colin Powell left, before I retired, with Condi Rice, and was in a meeting with the Russians, with her, and she just, again, just shook her head. She said, "My God, can't we get past any of this stuff?" I said, "I guess not, it's just going to be part of the routine. We've got to go through all the grievances, and then maybe we can get to the substance."

MILES: It's interesting you mentioned that, cause we've heard that from a lot of people, that, right, like the cost of doing business was to go through the airing of grievances and then

hopefully there was time left to talk about something that mattered, whether that was, as you said earlier, Putin doing these extremely long-winded spiels, or, at the sub-presidential level—

JONES: Right. And it was really tough to deal with that. And President Bush wasn't a particularly patient person, and he didn't like being treated that way. And so—

MILES: So in your assessment, was this a negotiating tactic? Was this simply a frank expression of views? How do you make sense of this, some would say, counterproductive behavior, pattern of behavior?

JONES: [01:28:00] I developed a philosophy, I guess, or an idea, just call it an idea, about why Putin ended up behaving the way he did, at least toward us. And that was, after 9/11, he said all the right things, was going to cooperate, even if he didn't really. But he also could see that the international community, particularly the Europeans, weren't ecstatic about the United States going into Iraq. Afghanistan was one thing. But when, you remember—well, you probably don't remember, but you probably read about it—the number of people in the streets, huge demonstrations all over Europe about the U.S. going into Iraq, and we just said, President Bush just said, we're going to do it anyway. And there was really no consequence to the U.S. for that. We didn't lose a relationship. As I used to say at the time, "We've got all the Europeans in the streets against us, but we've also agreed with the Europeans on enlarging NATO. So we can do two things at once."

And my belief is that Putin took a look at what Bush did—that he did something that nobody liked at all. He did it anyway, and there was no consequence. And so he thought to himself, "I think I'll take a page out of that book and do the same thing." And I

think that's what he's doing, even now. And he's right. There isn't a consequence, really, that affects him.

MILES: Right, yeah, that doesn't affect him in his position.

JONES: Yeah.

MILES: So Bratislava goes terribly. Steve Hadley has called it “a real low point” in the relationship. To what extent was this [01:30:00] surprising to you, that things were, at this juncture, really going quite poorly in the relationship and, if at all, to what extent maybe should it have been surprising?

JONES: I wasn't surprised, partly ’cause it was so gradual and we could see it—there was a little step all the way down. We could point each thing that went wrong. And those who, that are very sort of, didn't like the administration or were pro-Russian in some way or another, they always pointed to NATO enlargement and the ABM Treaty as the problems. And they're right. That those were the two things that really got Putin upset. And I thought the ABM Treaty was an own goal on our part. It was absolutely unnecessary. And as much as Colin Powell tried, he couldn't prevent it from happening. In the end, it didn't matter that much, but still, it was what started Putin thinking, “They're not really my friends.”

And then, with NATO enlargement, he was completely convinced. Now NATO enlargement, I think—in both cases, he's looking at his—at the *nomenklatura*, he's looking at the elites who are upset with him that he isn't getting Russia back, that he's lost Russia's position in the international community with losing the ABM Treaty, that he's not a big boy at the table anymore. And that was really exacerbated under Obama for, in some ways [01:32:00], understandable reasons. On NATO enlargement, like I said

before, that it should not have been such a big problem for the Russians, but they turned it into one that damaged their psyche in some way that they just couldn't get past.

MILES: So as you are leaving the administration, is this also when you leave the Foreign Service, in ’05?

JONES: That was—yeah, well that's the first time I left. I came back. But yes, that was the first time I retired.

MILES: As you are looking ahead to a second—just thinking about now the second Bush mandate—do you sense a change in how Russia is going to be approached coming? Do you sense that now U.S. policy is going to be meaningfully different in the second Bush administration based on the events of the first?

JONES: I didn't see it. I thought it was getting worse. And there was one thing that happened that I thought was particularly badly handled, and that was going to a NATO summit and the U.S. pushing for Georgia and Ukraine to get NATO membership, and other NATO members saying no. I mean, Colin Powell would never ever have permitted us to go to a summit without pre-agreement with all of our allies on what was going to happen. That would never have happened. And neither country would have made the criteria that we had set up for that. Neither one—they weren’t even close.

MILES: As we saw in 2014, right? [01:34:00] When the Ukrainians—

JONES: Yeah. They weren't close. And so I thought that was a huge own goal. Huge. And it didn't help us. It didn't help us with Europeans at all, and it really damaged us with the Russians, because they could see that we were no longer in charge of NATO.

MILES: So do you think that's what emboldened Putin? I think it's the next day or it's maybe a day or two after that same summit—I just don't remember the exact timeline of this—where he basically starts floating Russian territorial claims to Crimea—

JONES: Yeah.

MILES: —where he says, "The transfer was legally iffy," or I forgot what the pretext was.

JONES: I do too. It doesn't mean that that's connected, that he wouldn't have done it if that hadn't happened. But yeah.

MILES: Yeah. Of a piece.

JONES: So I couldn't understand it. I could not understand why the NATO-niks allowed that to happen because the NATO-niks that I worked with would have slit their wrists before they would have permitted that to happen, to go to a summit without full agreement.

MILES: So you mentioned Colin Powell would have never allowed this to happen. Of course, Condoleezza Rice is secretary of state now—not now, at this time—and one thing that's always interesting to me is that there's actually, at the very top levels of the Bush administration, there's so much—I was going to say Russia expertise—but maybe really it's Soviet Union expertise in some senses, such as Rice with her deep background in Soviet military general staff stuff, Gates too, other figures as well. I guess [01:36:00] my question is simply, do you have any thoughts on what the impact of, for example, having, while you were there, a national security advisor and then a secretary of state who had a lot of deep background in the region, command of the language, and so on and so forth?

JONES: Here's what—I know I used to, I wondered about that a lot, because when she was, when Condi Rice was national security advisor, we didn't agree with her a lot on how to deal with the Russians. And, in funny ways, it was just sort of off in my view. Sometimes it was

too harsh, sometimes it was too giving, and I finally thought, "Well, maybe if you have only academic experience with Russia, you don't actually know how to deal with these guys." And one of the things that I firmly believe is that they are bullies, and that the best way to deal with a bully is to be very direct right back and take no crap from them.

Now, I saw—I was with her in one meeting with Russians, and she handled it completely well. There was no question about it. She did a great job, without question. But, at other points, her instinct was not what I would have expected. And I think the difference was that Colin Powell had decades of dealing with these guys in—what's the right word?—on practical matters, how do we get something done? And Dr. Rice hadn't had to do that very often until she was in a very senior position in government. [01:38:00] And maybe that's the difference.

BEHRINGER: From an administration standpoint, do you feel like too much of the relationship was delegated to her rather than State—

JONES: No.

BEHRINGER: —or do you feel like that was properly arranged in the first administration? In other words, was she kind of the point person on Russia because of her experience and proximity to the president, or was that more—

JONES: She wasn't. No, Colin Powell really was, because he was the one with the relationships. Now, he was second-guessed all the time by all those guys, but he was the one who was always on the phone with Ivanov and with various of the others. Condi probably was on the phone with whoever the national security advisor was at the time, but I didn't have—it didn't come across to us that she thought she was in charge of the relationship, not at

all. And I never got that from Dan[8] either. I was the one upfront talking to the ambassador. I was the one going to the meetings with Colin Powell. Sometimes Dan came too, but I never had the sense that she thought she was in charge of it.

Well, it was mostly because she tried very hard not to be in charge of anything. She was very careful to—I heard her say it in a National Security Council meeting, that she was the executive secretary of the National Security Council and that it was up to everybody else to agree among themselves, rather than that she was in charge of making them agree. And it was kind of a problem, actually. It was very difficult. We had some very, very, very difficult times when we had trouble getting the Pentagon and the Joint Staff to agree to something that had been agreed at a National Security Council meeting. [01:40:00] It was hard.

BEHRINGER: Unless you wanted to give more—I don't know if there was a story there that you wanted to share or not about the specific policy, but if not, I have a—

JONES: There was nothing on specific policy. There was one point—. That involved the Iraq War, when I know Colin Powell thought that we had a particular plan agreed with the White House on how to deal with a Security Council resolution to go into Iraq, and Cheney made a speech in August before then that messed up the plan, and nobody knew he was going to make the speech. And the speech involved trashing Russia too.

BEHRINGER: Oh, okay.

JONES: What's the point? Anyway. Yeah. But those things happened. Let’s see.

BEHRINGER: So I have one more question and then I think Simon, I’ll give Simon the last question. So I found, in 2007 interview with Charlie Rose, you mentioned that the Bush

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[8] Daniel Fried, then senior director for European and Eurasian affairs at the National Security Council.

administration, the White House in particular, could've done more to get Jackson-Vanik repealed and move forward on that issue, which was also a sticking point that seems like kind of an easy win that could have happened. But I was wondering if you could just elaborate on that a little bit. What could the White House have done to push that forward a little bit better?

JONES: Their leg affairs[9] people could have called the Congress for us. That's all it would have taken. But then they didn't do it. It was weird.

MILES: Why?

JONES: It was for them an esoteric issue. It wasn't top of their list. They were much more involved in domestic issues. But we could not get them to [01:42:00] do this one at all. And I'm pretty sure Dan tried hard, too, Dan Fried. But that's not the first White House that's refused to call the Hill about a foreign policy matter that was important. [laughter]

MILES: So maybe just by way of wrapping up—Looking back on, not just your years in the administration, but maybe on the whole administration—and I know we've really focused in our conversation today on the events with which you have a personal connection, but feel free in answering this to expound. Don't be bounded by those years. What's the story of U.S.-Russian relations during the George W. Bush administration? Is it a story of a missed opportunities? Is it a story of squandered opportunities?—and that could be squandered by either side, just to be clear. Is this a story of self-delusion about this young, promising, new Russian leader and the ability to make common cause? Is this like a Sisyphus story of, it was just never going to work, and we broke our backs trying to make something that couldn't happen, happen? What's your big takeaway on these years?

[9] The legislative affairs staff at the White House.

JONES: My big takeaway is that we were talking past each other much more than we understood that we were. And that just because we thought we had very good, very logical arguments didn't mean the Russians were going to believe 'em. And I certainly didn't appreciate that. I thought if, the more I could argue, the more I could bring them around. And part of the delusion, to a degree, was [01:44:00] these long discussions took place over nice dinners, things like that. It wasn't angry, mean conversations. But we just could not get through to them, and they couldn't get through to us that they felt threatened, even when we knew there was nothing actually threatening them.

And so, for instance, I, for one, I didn't care about the Star Wars stuff and basing some of the things in Azerbaijan and Poland, but, if we hadn't done that, would that have made that big a difference? I don't know. Maybe not, but I think we set ourselves up badly with the ABM, with ending the ABM treaty. I think that really—that to me was what's what started the decline. And it was taken as such a serious thing by the Russians that it couldn't be repaired. We did come up with a replacement agreement, but it wasn't the same thing.

MILES: Yeah.

BEHRINGER: Sorry, just one more question, following up on that. Do you think that the Americans misjudged Putin, or did he change over his first term to become more authoritarian and less open to cooperation with the world?

JONES: One of the things—and I'm not sure, because one of the things that we know Putin is trained in is how to recruit people. And I think he did a really good job of recruiting us, recruiting George Bush. And [01:46:00] we didn't understand that that's what was happening until he started doing the kinds of things that he did, and he got away with it.

There was nothing we could do about it. We could not change his behavior. And that's what we now know. We haven't found the lever to change his behavior. I can't tell you the hundreds of discussions we had of, where are the levers? What are the levers? How do we change his behavior? What will influence him? What's the best way? With Shevie, we found Jim Baker. Well, we didn't have a Jim Baker with Putin.

MILES: Is there such a lever, do you think?

JONES: I don't—well, the only lever that I know of is, make Russia great again, honestly. I don't mean to be weird about it, but that is absolutely the lever and there isn't anything that the U.S. can do to make that happen other than to disappear, you know? So long as we're around and we're doing what we do, he's never going to feel comfortable as, I think, as getting back to greatness. What will be very, very interesting is what happens tomorrow, in Geneva. Biden is a very patient person. He's a very different person from the from the last—well, he's different from Trump, he's different from Obama, he's different from Clinton and Bush—and closer to Clinton, probably closer to Clinton in terms of how he will deal with Putin. But Clinton had it easy.

MILES: Yeah. [01:48:00] You just had to deal with Yeltsin's drinking.

JONES: Yeah. Which was, he didn't care.

MILES: I think that's—Paul, I think that's our questions, right?

BEHRINGER: Yeah. We got everything. Thank you so much for being so patient with us and—

MILES: This was fantastic.

BEHRINGER: —this was just a great discussion.

JONES: Great questions. I enjoyed it.

MILES: Thanks. So did we.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]