

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

### **Interviewee: William Hill**

Head of OSCE Mission to Moldova (1999-2001; 2003-2006)

### **Interviewers:**

Paul Behringer,

Senior Fellow, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University

Ivan Grek,

Deputy Director, The Russia Program, George Washington University

### **Date of Interview:**

September 5, 2023

### **Editorial Note and Disclaimer:**

This transcription has undergone a verification process for accuracy, according to the strictest practices of the academic and transcription communities. It offers the CPH's best good-faith effort at reproducing in text the subject's spoken words. In all cases, however, the video of the interview represents the definitive version of the words spoken by interviewees.

Normal speech habits—false starts, incomplete words, and crutch words (e.g. “you know”) have been removed for purposes of clarity. Final transcriptions will conform to standard oral history practices. Editors will conform all transcription quotations to the Center for Presidential History's final edition.

Please contact the editors at [cphinfo@smu.edu](mailto:cphinfo@smu.edu) with any corrections, suggestions, or questions.

### **Citation**

William Hill, interview by Paul Behringer and Ivan Grek, 5 September 2023. "U.S.-Russian Relations under Bush and Putin" Collective Memory Project, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University.

-----

**[Transcription Begins]**

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

GREK: My name is Ivan Grek. I'm a co-director of the Russia Program at the George Washington University.

HILL: And I'm William Hill. I'm currently an associate at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., but I spent a considerable time in the U.S. government and international organizations, especially the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe].

BEHRINGER: Thank you so much for joining us today, Dr. Hill. Could you begin by describing your background with the OSCE and the U.S.-Russian space and how you got involved in U.S.-Russian relations, your background, things like that?

HILL: Okay. Well, I started as an academic. I arrived at college [Harvard] not knowing whether I would major in history or physics. I took a course my first semester from Richard Pipes on Imperial Russian history. And he made Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and others so fascinating that I just decided to major in history, decided to concentrate on Russia. And I ended up—I got an undergraduate degree with him, and Edward Keenan was my thesis advisor at Harvard. And then I studied and got a Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley, where my advisors were Nick [Nicholas] Riasanovsky, Martin Malia, and Reggie Zelnik.

And I got into government. I had been undecided on career, whether I would be an academic or wanted to work in government. I was interested in the Foreign Service from early on. I chose to go through academia, but my final year in graduate school I spent at Leningrad University—1971–72 [00:02:00]—on the U.S.-Soviet Young Faculty/Graduate Student Exchange, and while we were there, [then President Richard] Nixon, of course, visited the Soviet Union, signed the SALT I Treaty,<sup>1</sup> and he came up to Leningrad for one day. And there was a small American consulate there—only four officers—and the White House advance team didn't have enough Russian speakers, so they hired a few of us graduate students, American graduate students, including myself, to interpret for the White House.

And so I—having gotten to know Foreign Service people in Leningrad and then having worked intensively with the White House for a couple of weeks before the Nixon visit, I was interested in government work. Nonetheless, I went off, taught at Virginia Tech, University of California-Santa Cruz, a year at Harvard, but I decided that I wanted to travel more than I would be as an academic. And so, I asked a couple of my friends what I would have to do to work on the Soviet desk in the State Department. They said, join the Foreign Service. And so I did.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks were a series of negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, which led to several agreements designed to curtail the nuclear arms race. The first round of talks (SALT I) produced agreements signed by President Richard Nixon and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev on 26 May 1972. For the first time, Washington and Moscow agreed to place limits on ballistic missile deployments (known as the Interim Agreement) and anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems (the ABM Treaty). In June 2002, the George W. Bush administration pulled out of the ABM Treaty.

I began work in the government, and one of my first tasks was helping to shape—at a very low level—the U.S. response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. And then I moved out to Moscow, Embassy Moscow, in 1981, where I did both consular work and in the political section, including contacts with Soviet dissidents. I then moved on to work in Yugoslavia. While I was in Yugoslavia, I first came in contact with then-CSCE.<sup>2</sup> Staffers from the U.S. Helsinki Congressional Commission visited, and I ended up first working with the CSCE as a member of our delegation at the Vienna meeting, which opened in 1986, where I was [00:04:00] our head-of-delegation's advisor on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. And then I've had a string of assignments that have had things to do with Eastern Europe, Russia, the Soviet Union, and the OSCE. But one of the things that's been a constant thread is Soviet, and then Russian, affairs and multilateral diplomacy, especially political-military affairs.

And so I got my start a long time ago in the Soviet era, moved into the Russian era, and finally ended up where my final position with the State Department was two terms as the head of the OSCE mission in Moldova, sent by the U.S., seconded by the U.S. to the OSCE and sent out there as the head of an international mission in Moldova.

So I've seen Russia, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and these areas from many different angles, and I've worked both inside the U. S. government but also outside of it as an international diplomat, which has given me—I like

---

<sup>2</sup> The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), also known as the U.S.-Helsinki Commission, was established in 1976 to monitor and work to improve human rights in Eastern Europe.

to think anyway—it's given me a lot of different perspectives, having seen some of the same geopolitical, political, and military-security issues from a number of different angles.

BEHRINGER: That's a great summary of a quite deep background in the subject matter here. So, to jump right into your position as head of OSCE's mission in Moldova—I believe from June 1999 to November 2001 and then again from January 2003 to July 2006—could you speak to OSCE's role in bringing about a settlement between Moldova and Transnistria? [00:06:00] Did the U.S. views of the frozen conflict there evolve between your first and second terms? And how did that affect U.S.-Russian relations overall?

HILL: Sure. The conflict in Moldova was one of several that sprang up around the periphery of the Soviet Union when the USSR fell apart. And generally, these had to do with territory, places where internal borders in the Soviet Union didn't match ethnic divisions. In the case of Moldova, it was more a case of some linguistic-ethnic differences—a larger Russian-speaking population on the left bank in the Transnistrian region—but also control over resources and what the fate of the region would be after the Soviet Union fell apart. Would it [Moldova] be independent, or would it become part of Romania?

In any case, the CSCE/OSCE sent missions to a number of these former Soviet states where there were these internal conflicts. There was a mission to Georgia, a mission having to do with Nagorno-Karabakh—actually, we hoped to have a peace conference between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which was thwarted by the outbreak of major hostilities in 1992—Ukraine over Crimea.

And Moldova was one of the most classic conflict resolution missions out of the 19 field missions that OSCE, at one time, had mounted. And the mandate of the mission was to participate as the major international actor, along [00:08:00] with regional mediators Russia and Ukraine, and [to try] to find a way to overcome the secessionist conflict and get an acceptable way for the Transnistrian region to rejoin an independent Moldova. The settlement talks began in 1993. The OSCE mission was deployed in April of 1993, and it's been there ever since. Of course, the attitude, the nature of the conflict in Moldova has changed considerably over the course of years. It's still a separatist conflict, but the issues between the two sides—Moldova proper [in] Chisinau and Tiraspol, [the de facto capital of] the Transnistrian region—have changed over the years. And so have the approaches of the mediators and international actors involved.

Early on, the OSCE determined and all of those involved accepted the premise that Transnistria should be a part of Moldova, but it should have a special political status, which would guarantee the rights and privileges of the local residents. At first, this status was thought to be some sort of broad autonomy. And indeed, in 1997, Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov engineered a memorandum on general autonomy, the so-called Moscow Memorandum, signed by Russia, Transnistria, and Moldova, which would have called for some sort of autonomy [00:10:00] of Transnistria being integrated back into Moldova. The Transnistrians resisted, and by the early 2000s, both the OSCE—I had a hand in this in initially suggesting the possibility to first

[Moldovan] President [Petru] Lucinschi and then [Moldovan] President [Vladimir] Voronin that they might want to look at some sort of federalism, some sort of federal solution. And, after some thought and debate in 2002, in my absence—during the interlude between my first and second terms—Voronin accepted the premise and tried to move forward with negotiating a federal relationship between Moldova and the Transnistrian region, also including the autonomous region of Gagauzia that would result in a political solution.

Both the OSCE mission and the OSCE but also the U.S. supported a federal solution to the problem. It's not surprising. We're a federal country. We tend to be supportive of our version of federalism. The problem that arose in Moldova is that there's more than one type of federalism. First of all, federalism was very unpopular among significant portions of the population, especially [the] Romanian-speaking population in Moldova because of the Soviet legacy where the Soviet Union was allegedly a federation, but it really wasn't. The states in republics of the Soviet Union had the right to secede, but really they didn't. And they had the right to run their local affairs, but they didn't, because they were run from [00:12:00] Moscow. And so a lot of Moldovans remembered this and thought that a federal solution would be a way for Moscow to manipulate and continue to run Moldova.

This was not helped by the separate Russian initiative under the deputy head of presidential administration, Dmitry Kozak. The memorandum that Kozak negotiated had serious flaws in it in terms of the structure of the

federation that was postulated that would have allowed Transnistria to have a veto, not only [on] anything that was planned on their territory, but a veto on any legislation or policy measures that were envisioned for the country as a whole. And this, along with articles that were introduced rather late in the game about a long-term Russian military presence, caused, eventually, President Voronin to decline to sign the memorandum that he'd been negotiating for six months or more. And there was a lot of disruption, a lot of finger-pointing, a great upheaval in the mediation process in which the [OSCE], Russia, and Ukraine were involved as mediators. And eventually, other solutions were proposed. The Ukrainians came up with a plan in 2005, which was basically a version of autonomy. The negotiation process was expanded in 2005 formally to include the U.S. and the European Union as observers, from which we got the 5+2 talks, which still exist to this day.<sup>3</sup>

And, [00:14:00] as I left, relations between Russia and the West and between Moldova and its Transnistrian region were deteriorating during the course of 2006. And there have been a number of twists and turns since that time that I can get into. I was involved from a distance in track-II [diplomacy] and advisory capacity, but basically, during my terms there as an American diplomat seconded to the OSCE, that was the trajectory—I arrived at a time when hopes for implementing an agreed solution on autonomy were gradually failing. The sides and the mediators turned to a federal solution, upon which

---

<sup>3</sup> The 5+2 talks refers to the negotiations involving the two “parties to the conflict,” Moldova and Transnistria, and mediators Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE, “plus” the European Union and the United States as observers.



we basically had agreement, but we couldn't implement the agreement, and eventually it was rejected in 2003. And then things gradually began to fall apart from 2004 on. This happened locally, and it's mirrored in the larger U.S.-Russian relationship. Right around then is the real turning point in my view of the broader relationship between the U.S. and the rest of the West and Russia.

BEHRINGER: I definitely want to get into that turning point in a little bit. But first I wanted to ask you, who did you deal with most often on the Russian side? What were the negotiations like? Do you have any stories from negotiating with them? You mentioned Kozak, but who are the personalities involved, and what was it like to negotiate with them?

HILL: Yeah, you know, the whole thing—I'll get back to this. This will be a recurring theme. Moldova is important to the Russians. It was a part of the Russian empire since 1812, [00:16:00] but even then, if you go back further, Moldavia had Russians in it.<sup>4</sup> Russia was the protector of the Orthodox against the Turks in this region. One of the earliest Russian writers, [Antioch Dmitrievich] Kantemir, was originally hospodar [ruler] of Moldavia in the early 18th century. So the Russians have been there for a long time, and this is an important region to Russia. And we in the United States just don't understand this. We look at it as a small country. There are much more important things to us. And we've never understood the importance that Moscow attaches to it.

---

<sup>4</sup> Moldavia refers to the historical region constituting present-day Moldova and part of Romania. It was one of two principalities (along with Wallachia, also in Southeastern Europe) that merged to create the modern state of Romania in 1861. In 1940, the Soviet Union carved the present-day borders of Moldova out of territory ceded from Romania and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Certainly, I could see that because of the Russians I dealt with. The two most prominent—in mid-2000, President [Vladimir] Putin appointed former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov as his special representative for Transnistria. And I dealt personally with Primakov for a year and a half, from mid-2000 until I left in 2001. And we had a close relationship. I had his cell phone number. I could call him up, and he talked with me, and he worked closely with me. I was a mid-level American diplomat. I had a nice title, but I was nowhere near where Primakov had been in the hierarchy. He was the level of importance that Russia attached to Moldova, and I, I think, accurately reflected the level of importance that the U.S. attached to Moldova.

The same thing [when] Kozak came in. In early 2003, Voronin asked me about a federal solution and wanted to know if the OSCE could support it. I told him I thought we could, and he told me he was going up to Moscow to talk with Putin, and he told me he was going to ask Putin to appoint a special representative, [00:18:00] because, as he said, MID, the Russian foreign ministry, was useless and wasn't doing anything.<sup>5</sup> And so he did, and eventually in mid-2003, first [Alexander] Voloshin—he's the head of the [Russian presidential] administration—showed up, and then a couple weeks later, Kozak showed up and started working with the Moldovans. And I met Kozak indirectly in the sense that the Russians were working on this. They wanted to keep this in a bilateral channel. Voronin had met with Putin. Putin took his request and sent Kozak down, but he envisioned that the Russians and the

---

<sup>5</sup> In Russian, MID stands for *Ministerstvo inostrannykh del*.

Moldovans would just work together, cut a deal, and everybody else would be then presented with a fait accompli.

And they almost got away with it. But we found out [that] the Moldovans were leery about this—the guys in Chisinau—and the Transnistrians too, because they both were suspicious of Moscow trying to orchestrate a deal at their expense. And so first the Moldovans and then the Transnistrians introduced me to Kozak and to the work he was doing. The Russians were not forthcoming locally. So I called up. I met Kozak, and I found him to be both open and engaging. We met a number of times. Again, we had each other's cell phone numbers, and as he got closer to finishing his job, we talked regularly on the phone as well as meeting a couple of times. We can get into more detail—it's in my book.<sup>6</sup> I urged him to work with us. He said the Moldovans wanted to work bilateral with the Russians. The Moldovans told me that the Russians wanted to work bilaterally. In any case, it was too bad, because we were working on very similar documents but with some key differences that we might have been able to iron out had we been able to work together.

But again, Kozak is an important guy. [00:20:00] He was the equivalent of National Security Advisers [Condoleezza] Rice or Steve Hadley at that time in the U.S. government—clearly at the top, and this was an initiative coming from the president. George W. Bush probably knew where Moldova was. But

---

<sup>6</sup> William H. Hill, *Russia, the Near Abroad, and the West: Lessons from the Moldova-Transdnistria Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

the level that the U.S. was dealing with it at the time was the deputy assistant secretary of state who was, at that time—Steve[n] Pifer may have left, and it might have been John Tefft. They each had that portfolio at a time. Or, in the National Security Council [NSC], Dan[iel] Fried's deputies were doing the day-to-day stuff. I met with Dan when talking about Moldova, when talking with the White House about it.

Anyway, these are Russians I met with. I met regularly with, first, the Russian delegations in Vienna. I went up there a lot. I met with two Russian ambassadors, Alexander Alexeev and then Alexei Borodavkin. Both of them then became deputy foreign ministers. Dealing with the Foreign Ministry, I dealt with deputy foreign ministers. Most commonly, the guy who had our area was [Vyacheslav Ivanovich] Trubnikov. [Vladimir Alekseevich] Chizhov, who then became long-term ambassador to the European Union, was another deputy foreign minister who had the Western portfolio. And they ended up fighting between each other over who would run the stuff.

I also dealt regularly with the Russian military at a senior level. [Lieutenant General] Valery Yevnevich, the commander of the OGRF, OGRV,<sup>7</sup> the Operative Group of Russian Forces in Tiraspol, had permission [00:22:00] to meet with me without getting permission for individual meetings as most of the Russian military had to do when they met with foreigners. So I met Yevnevich a lot, and we worked together very productively in getting rid of a lot

---

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Hill mentions both English and Russian acronyms for the same force here. The OGRF refers to the Operational Group of Russian Forces, a translation from *Operativnaia gruppa rossiiskikh voisk* in Russian.

of weaponry and equipment in the Transnistrian region. And in the Ministry of Defense in Moscow, my working contact was the deputy minister of defense for logistics, the *upravlenie tyla*, [General] Vladimir Il'ich Isakov. And he had me a number of times up to his headquarters. We met down in Moldova. But I signed an exchange of letters with him that allowed us to help to finance and monitor the Russian withdrawal of equipment and weaponry from Moldova. We did a lot with him, so these were regular contacts.

I saw the Russian ambassadors in Moldova, and indeed the one who was there during my first term, Pavel Fedorovich Petrovsky, went on to become *chef de cabinet* for [then Minister of Foreign Affairs] Igor Ivanov. Petrovsky and I—he played tennis and golf. There are no golf courses in Moldova, but he played tennis with me. He found out I played tennis everywhere I've gone, so we played tennis together. He found that I could beat him pretty handily in singles, but what he really liked—he got me to play as his doubles partner, and then he would get the junior members of the Russian embassy to play against us, and he loved it, because with playing with me as his partner, he could beat all the junior diplomats in his embassy. And so we knew each other, we worked very closely.

The next guy who was there came in during the [00:24:00] first part of my second term, Yury Antonovich Zubakov. [He] went on after that to work on the Security Council [of the Russian Federation]. We got along very well. We established a personal relationship. He wasn't a tennis player, but he was a nice

enough guy, and other American diplomats had worked with him. And I used to see him all the time.

The next Russian ambassador—the last one there who was there during my tenure—was Nikolai Ryabov. And Ryabov was—well, it was funny. Alexei Borodavkin once told me that Kolya Ryabov was somebody that you scared little children with.<sup>8</sup> He said, “If you're not good, Kolya Ryabov will come after you.” He'd actually worked in Transnistria with the Transnistrians during the time of the initial fighting. He had served in Lithuania and the Czech Republic as Russian ambassador, and his reputation preceded him. Again, I didn't have as close a relationship with him, but we got along.

And then finally, the two Russian negotiators who were Foreign Ministry, doing the day-to-day stuff—Aleksandr Sergeevich Novozhilov, who was there during my first term, had, like many of the Russian diplomats who came back to work in the CIS, the SNG<sup>9</sup>—they'd been in Africa, and the Russians pulled a lot of Africanists out to work in this area. Novozhilov worked for a couple of years. And then, sadly, he got his reward, his ambassadorial assignment, to Bratislava at the end of his term in 2003, doing Moldovan stuff. [00:26:00] But then he died suddenly before he could take up the post.

The other representative who was there during the rest of my second term was Valery Mikhailovich Nesterushkin, who, interestingly enough, I found out he had started his career as being an attaché, basically the personal

---

<sup>8</sup> “Kolya” is the diminutive of “Nikolai,” used by family and friends.

<sup>9</sup> SNG is the Russian acronym for *Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv* or the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

assistant—the last one in [Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei] Gromyko's office, and the first one in [Foreign Minister Eduard] Shevardnadze's office. An interesting character, and somebody who could work for both Gromyko and Shevardnadze successfully.

But the negotiators—the real center, I found, were in the special reps in the presidential administration and working for Putin. I worked at a fairly high level with Russian diplomats—Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Defense, and other negotiators. But the two that stood out, Primakov and Kozak were the guys that really ran policy for Moldova when they [the Russians] wanted to do something, and still this is a subject where policy is really made, and as far as I can tell, in the work I've done with Track II with Moldova and keeping in touch with the Russians, this has been the area where the Russians still tend to formulate policy and then dictate it to the rest of the Russian government for implementation, is in the presidential administration.

BEHRINGER: That's quite a diverse cast of characters and different roles and things.

And before we dig into some of the details, since you served as the [00:28:00] chief of the Moldova mission at the end of the Clinton administration and in the Bush [administration], I wanted to get your thoughts on the Clinton administration's approach to Russia and view of the OSCE's role in particular—how did that differ from the way that the Bush administration viewed the situation?

HILL: Events, to some extent, dictated what happened. The Clinton administration when I went out there in [19]99 and then, through much of 2000, was one of

disillusionment. [Russian President Boris] Yeltsin faltered and then left. Putin came in, and Putin basically played a waiting game with [President Bill] Clinton, so they were not able to get anywhere near as close to him as they had been to Yeltsin.

But the last year of Yeltsin had been somewhat difficult and a disappointment. It was hard in Russia. Yeltsin was sick. He was under attack from those who were—for corruption investigations of the family. They successfully got rid of Primakov, but Yeltsin was looking for somebody to defend him.<sup>10</sup> And then, finally, the NATO war against [Serbian President Slobodan] Milosevic, against Serbia and Montenegro, was just devastating—the Russians were really bitter about that, and we can get to that again. But in terms of dealing with NATO, that had far more effect on Russian attitudes to NATO, at least as I saw it and as Russians talked to me about it, had much greater effect than NATO enlargement or other stuff or bilateral U.S. policies.

[00:30:00]

I went out to Moldova, and I remember Tom Graham and Carlos Pascual both saying to me, “Thank God you're going out there. Keep this quiet so this doesn't mess up too,” because things were just not going well.<sup>11</sup> And they

---

<sup>10</sup> In January 1996, Primakov was elevated to minister of foreign affairs. As foreign minister, Primakov sought to reverse Yeltsin's liberal and pro-Western foreign policy. Two years later, he became prime minister and became the country's most popular politician, widely viewed as the likely presidential successor to Yeltsin. As prime minister, he refused to quash the impeachment proceedings against Yeltsin. In May 1999, days before the failed impeachment vote, Yeltsin fired Primakov as prime minister. Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), xv, 6–7.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Graham, a former Foreign Service officer, was then a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In 2001, he joined the Bush administration as the associate director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. From 2002 to 2007, he served as director and then senior director for Russian Affairs on the NSC. See Thomas Graham, interview by Paul Behringer, Simon



managed to put stuff together, get through the [November 1999] Istanbul Summit, and get stuff done with Adapted CFE and the Charter [for] European Security that the Russians wanted and a broad statement.<sup>12</sup> So that worked.

[The year] 2000 was the political time, political campaign, filling time. The initiative was really, where I was, was with the Russians. Primakov came out. He had his own hopes for what he was going to be able to do with Moldova. But Clinton was—I was back in the U.S. a number of times, and it was, at least what I was dealing with, by far from the primary concern. What I saw—the major concern with the Clinton administration in 2000 was the war in Chechnya, and that was pretty awful. Clinton and Gore had, after the Monica Lewinsky impeachment, the relations were not good there, but in the administration, I think both Clinton and Gore, [for] different reasons, were convinced that, during the First Chechen War, they had given Russia too much of a pass on how the war was being waged by the Russian military. So they were much harder on Russia in 2000. And the Russians—they may have behaved

---

Miles, 19 March 2021. "U.S.-Russian Relations under Bush and Putin" Collective Memory Project, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University, <https://www.smu.edu/Dedman/Research/Institutes-and-Centers/Center-for-Presidential-History/CMP/US-Russian-Relations-under-Bush-and-Putin/Thomas-Graham>.

Carlos Pascual served in the Clinton administration as senior director for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia on the NSC and then was ambassador to Ukraine from 2000 to 2003.

<sup>12</sup> The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) was signed in 1990, limiting conventional forces deployments for both NATO and Russia in Europe to reduce the risk of breakout of a conventional war. The Adapted CFE was written in 1999 and adjusted the treaty for the breakup of the Warsaw Pact and expansion of NATO. Russia ratified the Adapted CFE (along with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine), but the United States and other NATO members refused to ratify it until Russia withdrew its forces from Georgia and Moldova. In December 2007, Russia suspended its implementation of the original CFE Treaty. In May 2023, Moscow announced its withdrawal from the treaty altogether. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/cfe#:~:text=CFE%20members%20signed%20an%20adaptation%20agreement%20in%201999,with%20a%20system%20of%20national%20and%20territorial%20ceilings>.

exceedingly badly, but they had a real enemy. The problem with that [00:32:00] was that the Russian military may have been guilty of many things, but the Chechens were not good guys either, and they had a number of real enemies, and we know now—the Russians told me this at the time, that they had folks from al-Qaeda and others in there, Islamic radicals, and we know now that a lot of that was not self-justification. It was real.

So anyway, Clinton ended up—it was a difficult relationship, and then Bush tried to put it back together. But again, looking from afar, I'd say Russia was not the most important thing for the Bush administration coming in in 2001, even before 9/11. And after 9/11, when people like me talked to Washington from the field, they saw everything through the prism of 9/11. Putin was pretty smart and realized that. He was the first guy to call. He did a lot to help out, and I think he hoped to get more out of it than he ended up getting, which may be one of the reasons for his disillusionment. We can get to that. The Bush administration put relations on a better footing, but it just really wasn't at the top of the list. And they didn't want to put—if you look at the Moscow Treaty, they put no effort into it.<sup>13</sup> No verification measures, no details, just sort of, “Oh, well we'll reduce a bit,” taking the situation for granted, getting out of the ABM Treaty. [00:34:00]

There was a good personal relationship with Putin that lasted a long time. But I would say that they did not really build a solid relationship with

---

<sup>13</sup> The Moscow Treaty, also referred to as the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), was signed by Presidents Bush and Putin in 2002.

Russia. There were things that were done that probably needed to be done, should be done—the NATO expansion in 2002,<sup>14</sup> the NATO-Russia Council<sup>15</sup>—but I think a lot of the senior people in Washington at that time looked more [at] that as keeping the relationship with Russia quiet, managing that relationship so they could do what was really important, which was going after, first of all, al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, and increasingly, the push to go after Saddam Hussein and Iraq. And that, just to me, was the overriding factor in the Bush administration, and that really colored everything for a long, long time, actually, during a large part of the administration.

Then, when Russia started getting frustrated, the Bush administration, the second administration—it was ideological from the beginning—but it turned more overtly ideological, and the U.S. support for the color revolutions really was something that Moscow could not put up with. To my mind, that was the other element of Bush policy, even more than the arms control stuff or the war in Iraq, that Putin really and his colleagues couldn't stomach.

BEHRINGER: That's a great overview of the [00:36:00] major issues that we're going to get into in the Bush administration here. To pivot back to Moldova and OSCE for a second, you mentioned briefly the Adapted CFE treaty. What did you

---

<sup>14</sup> In 2002, the Bush administration and NATO decided to move forward with the “big bang” round of expansion, as it was colloquially known, and in 2004 NATO formally admitted Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia into the alliance.

<sup>15</sup> In 1997, Russia and NATO signed the Founding Act, which established the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council “as a forum for consultation and cooperation.” In 2002, this was upgraded to the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). NATO temporarily suspended the NRC after Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008. In 2014, NATO cut off “all civilian and military cooperation with Russia” in response to “Russia’s military intervention and aggressive actions in Ukraine, and its illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea” ([https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_5090.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_5090.htm)).

think of the decision for the U.S. to refuse to ratify the treaty before Russia fulfilled its commitments? Were you arguing for earlier ratification? Who was arguing against it? And if you could start by just telling us what it was that was the main issue at stake here?

HILL: It's complex, because the original CFE treaty—Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe—was negotiated at the end of the 1980s, when the Soviet Union still existed and when the Warsaw Pact still existed, and it was basically a way of demilitarizing, ending the conventional military standoff between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in [the] center of Europe. And it reduced the number of tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, fighters, and attack helicopters held by all the members of these alliances. The problem is, by the time it entered into force in 1992, it was obsolete, because the Warsaw Pact had fallen apart. And the quotas that applied increasingly as states like Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia sided with the U.S. and then entered NATO—their quotas under the original treaty were still assigned to the Russian side, the Warsaw Pact side, but they were basically—the Russians considered them aligned against Russia.

So, from the very beginning—we undertook with the Russians, we told them as we ratified, the treaty entered into force—almost from the very beginning, it was [00:38:00] implicit with the Russians that we would have to renegotiate the treaty or the regime governing conventional weapons in Europe. And that's what the adapted treaty was about. We really negotiated two revisions to the treaty. There was one in 1996, the Flank Agreement, which

we reached with the Russians because under the original CFE treaty, there were limitations on the movement of Russian troops within the territory of the Russian Federation itself, because there were limits on how many assets, weapons, and troops could be on the flanks, either bordering on Turkey or bordering on Norway. And so we negotiated an agreement which allowed the Russians to augment their stationed forces. This basically allowed them to fight the war in the North Caucasus. It was a cooperative [agreement].

But the other thing was that we really needed some way of limiting arms in Europe that was not tied to the old alliance structure that had vanished. NATO still existed, but more countries were coming into NATO, and the Warsaw Pact was gone, and the security situation vis-à-vis Russia was very different, and Russia's perception of the security situation and threats in Europe was also evolving. The other thing was that you might ask, "Why did we need an adapted treaty or anything updated at all?" Because the level of conventional arms in Europe during the 1990s fell way below the treaty limits. We were not close to any of the treaty holdings that any of the countries had had in Europe during the Cold War and at the levels that were governed by the original CFE Treaty. For example, the U.S.—we sent massive [00:40:00] forces out of Europe to the [Persian] Gulf in the First Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, and these forces never came back to Europe. They then went straight back home from the Gulf. And so we cut by more than in half our forces in Europe and continued to cut them. All of the other countries in Europe cut

their forces dramatically, most dramatically Germany, but lots and lots of others—they were way down.

The other thing that the CFE Treaty had were mechanisms for transparency and confidence building. There were data exchanges, obligatory visits, snap visits to bases in other countries. The Russians could ask to visit American bases in Europe, or we could ask to visit Russian bases, and they had to let us in. We had all sorts of mechanisms of keeping track of one another and building confidence. It was collaborative and cooperative, and it was a regime that everybody really wanted to keep, because we had a good relationship in the '90s, and this was part of making Europeans in general feel much more secure against the further re-outbreak of war, surprise attack, or anything like that.

So we started negotiations on adapting the treaty in early 1997. I know a bit about it, because I actually wrote the first draft of the adapted treaty that was then negotiated in Vienna, the Joint Consultative Group<sup>16</sup> on the margins of the OSCE. And the Russians wanted this too. One of the other reasons the Russians really wanted it is that the original treaty covered territorially the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and the countries in NATO at the time. When the Soviet Union fell apart, because of international recognition and other things, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania [00:42:00] were never party to the original CFE Treaty. So here were countries that, in the late '90s, were clearly

---

<sup>16</sup> The Joint Consultative Group, formed in 1990, is the organization within the OSCE responsible for questions related to the CFE Treaty, such as resolving ambiguities in interpretation, answering technical questions, and examining disputes in implementation. <https://www.osce.org/jcg>

going to get into the EU and probably get into NATO, and they weren't covered by any arms control regime whatsoever. And if you look at the Baltics, Estonia [is] 90 miles from [St.] Petersburg, which is the major economic hub of Russia out into Europe. So the Russians really wanted an adapted treaty to get the Baltics included, all territory included, and [get a handle [on] on NATO deployments, because it was going to be really important to the Russians to be able first to try to limit NATO deployments in countries bordering them but also to be able to inspect them and keep track of them.

So we negotiated the adapted treaty, and it was adopted at Istanbul in November of 1999. It had a very complicated system of limits on national holdings of every country that was a signatory and also on regional holdings, so groups of countries in certain regions—their totals of arms couldn't add up beyond certain limits. It was a real negotiating work to do it, because it was a very complex scheme. And also, it included the Baltics.

[It was ] also important to many of the countries that had been in the Warsaw Pact. The original CFE Treaty did not contain any provision for host-country agreement to the deployment of military forces on their territory, because it was assumed that the countries of the Warsaw Pact, there was agreement on the deployment of forces; the countries in NATO, there was agreement. So we didn't get into it, because it was basically an inter-alliance agreement. Although it was signed by [00:44:00] individual states, it was an agreement between alliances. Over the 1990s, those countries that broke away from Russia, or the Soviet Union, very much desired a provision for host-

country agreement to foreign military forces. In particular, a number of countries, the newly independent states out of the Soviet Union—Ukraine and Moldova and Georgia were among the most important of those states—three of the original GUAM states.<sup>17</sup> Look at the countries where Russian forces remained after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and those are countries that really wanted host-country agreement, because they wanted to get the Russians out. And so we made ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty contingent upon the Russians reaching agreement with the Georgians on the withdrawal of forces and, in Moldova, on the actual withdrawal of the Russian forces from Moldova.

And by 2005, we had gotten the Georgian problem settled, but there was never agreement on Moldova, because the Russians have first a small peacekeeping detachment there dating from a formal agreement between Chisinau and Moscow, [signed on] July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1992, but they also have the remnants of the Soviet 14<sup>th</sup> Army, the operative group of Russian forces that was basically there, after 1992, to guard the arsenal that would have provided weapons for Soviet forces on the southern front of World War III in Europe, if that had ever been fought. There had just been enormous amounts of arms stored in Moldova, in particular the Transnistrian region. To put pressure on the Russians to withdraw from [00:46:00] these countries was something that

---

<sup>17</sup> GUAM states refer to Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. The grouping comes from the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, an economic and security group between the four states (along with Uzbekistan, starting in 1999) that started in relation to CFE negotiations in 1996. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/military-cooperation-between-georgia-ukraine-uzbekistan-azerbaijan-and-moldova-guam>



these countries were lobbying us hard to get, for help. We had helped get the Russians out of the Baltics, which had been finished by 1994. Georgia, Moldova, others wanted us to help get the Russians out. The Ukrainians reached agreement in 1997 on the [Russian] Black Sea Fleet, which covered the problem with Ukraine, but Ukraine had a formal provision in its constitution preventing deployment of foreign forces in Ukraine, except for this Black Sea Fleet exception.

So, for good or for ill, in last-minute negotiating, we got Russian agreement to include commitments to withdraw from Moldova and Georgia as part of the deal in the ACFE [Adapted CFE]. And then it became an article of faith, more and more hardcore in the West and in the United States especially, and in the countries bordering Russia, that the Russians had to get out of Moldova, had to get out of Georgia, had to fulfill these Istanbul commitments before we would agree to ratify and enter into force the ACFE treaty.

When Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania entered NATO in 2004, the question became more acute, and it became sharper and sharper. Through 2003, we'd been working successfully with the Russians, and I worked with the Russians for a massive withdrawal of ammunition from Moldova during 2003. So we were still working productively towards the Istanbul goals in 2003, [00:48:00] and after that fell apart—disrupted [by] the Rose Revolution in Georgia and [Georgian President Mikheil] Saakashvili becoming more assertive, and the Kozak Memorandum failing in Moldova—the question of ACFE, the Baltics entering NATO and not being covered by the CFE Treaty, the issue of

staying in CFE and fulfilling the commitments, became more acute. But nonetheless, Moscow continued to stay in the treaty for a long time. It wasn't until the late 2000s that they suspended their participation, but they stayed in the treaty, and then, finally, some seven or eight years later, they withdrew formally from the treaty.

The value of the treaty—of the draft treaty and of the original treaty during their lifetimes—was as much for the transparency and confidence, for the data exchange and inspections, as it was for the restraint on levels. And even now, we're just getting back to Cold War levels in some areas in Europe because of the war in Ukraine. It was an important agreement because it's so complex. It's very esoteric, and a lot of American officials, most Americans, have no idea what it was, and its importance is undersold, both because of events and because it was so effective. The level of conventional military holdings fell so dramatically in Europe that nobody worried about war in Europe for over 20 [00:50:00] years. And the functioning of the CFE Treaty's inspection and data exchange transparency measures helped to keep that situation, keep things tranquil, keep people confident that, indeed, there is no danger in Europe. Which is why the Russian buildup and then the wars in Ukraine in 2014 and then the expansion in 2022 came as such a shock to Europe and why Europe is playing catch-up now in terms not just of supplying military equipment to Ukraine but in terms of military production, because, to a great extent, Europe had disarmed, and the CFE treaty provided a guarantee that that disarmament was not dangerous to security.

BEHRINGER: I wanted to pivot now to give you several of the broader policies from the Bush administration and get your reaction to them as an official in Eastern Europe at the time. To back up, the first meeting between President Bush and President Putin famously takes place in Slovenia in 2001. Do you remember your reaction to the meeting in the moment?

HILL: Yeah. I was working closely with Primakov at the time. We were down in the weeds, engaged with beating up on the Transnistrians who were resisting Russian efforts to get their military equipment out of Moldova by the end of 2001. I didn't pay a lot of attention to the details. I talked with the Russians about it, but they were happy, we were happy with it, and locally I didn't see a lot that affected me immediately. And I have to say my attitude to that [00:52:00] was pretty parochial. I was engaged locally in details that weren't particularly important to the summit level, but it was a positive push.

What it was for folks like me and Primakov is it gave us license within our governments to come and say, "Hey, listen, we're working with the Russians. We need to do this, we need to push this, we need to get this money, we need to get this done, we need to send this person." And I was successful. That summer, I mean, my mission for what we had to do in terms of inspecting and dealing with the Russian withdrawal—I was drastically understaffed and so, indeed, Washington—State Department, Department of Defense, in particular, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, that had a bunch of military [personnel]—sent me a whole bunch of people in the late summer and fall of 2001 in order to beef up, to help the Russians conduct their operations

destroying equipment or shipping it out of Moldova in time to make the first of the deadlines set by the Istanbul Summit. They had to get their treaty-limited equipment out by the end of that year. And they did, for the most part. We gave them an extension on some other stuff—the 2002 deadline, the Porto meeting in December of 200[2].<sup>18</sup> But basically, we were working with them, working hard. And that summit, the Ljubljana Summit, helped with that. It was basically a positive thing.

If you want to go in—I didn't hear [it directly but] I've seen the video of, "I've looked in his eyes and got a sense of his soul."<sup>19</sup> I mean, individual leaders speak *ex tempore* sometimes [00:54:00] and go places where their staffs are horrified. And I think, from what Condi Rice and Bob Gates said afterwards, clearly they listened to this and said, "Oh my God, why did he say that?" Putin put on his best face for him, and it was effective, and it wasn't, at that time, necessarily a bad thing. It set the stage for then Putin to be very helpful after 9/11, and we worked closely on a number of things well into the decade. So not the first and the last encounter between senior leaders where one or both of them will simply wander off where their people are just not prepared or think it's unwise. But for the time, I didn't think a lot about it.

---

<sup>18</sup> OSCE, "Tenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council," Porto, 6–7 December 2002, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/f/40521.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> The exact phrase, stated in a press conference, that President Bush said was, "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy. We had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul; a man deeply committed to his country and the best interests of his country." <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010618.html>.

I was living in Moldova, and with what I was doing with Russia, I was living in a Russian media environment. So you have to remember, I had already gotten a real heavy dose of Putin and of people around Putin. And at that time, the Russians really liked Putin. When he became president, most of the Russian officials, almost all of the Russian officials that I knew, were really happy. Whatever their bent—liberal, conservative, whatever—they were really happy to have him as president, and that lasted for quite some time, because he was looked at as decisive, capable, intelligent, well prepared, many things like this. And so I looked at it, and Bush saying this about [00:56:00] Putin, I don't remember a strong reaction about it. I remember being happy that we had the push to do what I was doing. Now, if that was too much in the weeds, so be it. I still look at it and say, I've seen other presidents—our own and others—say things that have been far more stupid or damaging than that. But, overall, just relatively positive as those things go.

BEHRINGER: And one of the things that the Bush administration did in that first meeting was to officially inform the Russians that they were pulling out of the ABM Treaty. What was your view of that decision and then missile defense in general, that strong push from the Bush administration for missile defense?

HILL: I see that you talked with Beth Jones [Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs A. Elizabeth Jones]. I don't know exactly what she said about [Under Secretary of Defense for Policy] Doug[las] Feith and OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] policy, but I come from that view. I have nothing against missile defense. It might be epitomized by [the following story]: some

three years earlier, shortly before I went out to Moldova, I was playing golf at a golf course down south of Virginia, and my son and I got put in a foursome with two guys from the Ballistic Missile Defense office—and I had been working for the Department of Defense, seconded. And so we got talking, and they were asking me about the missile defense, my views [as] a State Department guy, and I told him I was basically supportive of what they were doing there. They got big smiles, and I said, “Of course, before you talk about deploying it, [00:58:00] I want to make sure that it'll work,” and I watched their faces fall.

[George W. Bush's Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld ran an initiative in the '90s on the missile defense gap—basically, a long project that called for more missile defense. And I belong to that school of American officials—I look at it and say, “There's nothing wrong with this, but we had a perfectly good agreement that was working. It didn't prevent research. Why the hell we had to go and tip over the apple cart before we had something that we were really sure of, something that we could provide a really good explanation for, and that would not upset a relationship that was basically in good shape?”

You have to remember that, in 1992, with the U.S. and Russia, we said that we weren't going to target each other anymore. And we became, partners and friendly. The missiles that had been targeting us and our missiles targeting Russia never went away. They were always there. We didn't eliminate all of them. So the potential danger never left. We were existing in great measure on mutual trust. And what the repudiation of ABM, the way Bush did it—what

that accomplished, I think, was to erode some of that mutual trust. And in that sense, I think it was harmful. Missile defense—if it could work, great. But we had an arrangement where it wasn't necessary with the Russians, that whatever we were deploying was not going to stop a Russian attack on us, and we told that to them [01:00:00] as if that should make them [less suspicious], but what we did is we destroyed a bit of trust. And that was one of those steps in the erosion of confidence between the two countries. That's how I look at it.

BEHRINGER: And you mentioned that you thought Kosovo was maybe the biggest problem with the turn in U.S.-Russian relations, or eroding that trust—bigger than NATO expansion. I was wondering, what was your view of NATO expansion? What did you think about the pace of it, the “big bang” expansion?

HILL: I turned into a proponent gradually. I was involved in NATO from—'91-92, I was the director for CSCE in the State Department, and I was in the general office and bureau that handled NATO affairs, and the NATO desk officers and directors sat right around me. And so, for a long time, I heard—and participated indirectly—but heard first the debate, “Should we keep NATO?” With [President] George H.W. Bush, it was probably a foregone conclusion, but there was a real discussion of why it was good to have it. And, from the very beginning, we started getting, as early 1990, 1991 especially—former East European Warsaw Pact allies, and then former Soviet states [asking], “Can we join NATO?” And people are sitting there [01:02:00]—nobody had really given serious consideration to it, or very few had, and very few did during the remainder of the H.W. Bush administration.

But Clinton came in with a bunch of guys from [the] RAND [Corporation] who had been thinking about it and were convinced that expanding NATO was the way to transform Central Europe. And I looked at it, having come out of the six or more years dealing directly with the growing crisis in Yugoslavia, then the Balkan Wars, I looked at it as, what could we do to stabilize Central Europe? And I'm an historian, and if you look at the history of Central Europe—Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria—between 1918 and 1941, it's not a pretty picture. By 1939, they're all fascist or proto-fascist. The democratic experiments have really failed in all of them. And they have long-term enmities between each other as well as with Russia.

In 1988, I visited Hungary and Romania during a time when hostilities were brewing between the two over Transylvania as the Warsaw Pact is starting to disintegrate. We were worried about what [Secretary of State] Warren Christopher called a security vacuum in Central Europe. And as the debate began over NATO enlargement, [01:04:00] I was persuaded by the argument that was made especially by Ron[ald] Asmus, [F. Stephen] Steve Larrabee, and others—especially in my book, I use their *Foreign Affairs* article, because it was a convenient statement of the general argument, general line that we need to somehow encourage a successful transition in Central Europe.<sup>20</sup>

And when people like [Secretary of Defense] Bill Perry, [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General John Shalikashvili] come up and say, “What about Russia?”

---

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Asmus, Richard Kugler, and F. Steven Larabee were senior analysts at RAND when they coauthored “Building a New NATO,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72 (September-October 1993), 28–40. Asmus would go on to become deputy assistant secretary of state for European Affairs in Clinton’s second term.



the answer was, basically, we can do both. We'll do our best to make it palatable to Russia. And there were lots of twists and turns. I was around on the other side of the world for two years as some of this process was going [on], but I came back in mid-1996 to work on the Adapted CFE treaty, but I was also engaged in security aspects of NATO enlargement and the relationship with Russia. And we basically conducted both a dialogue on expansion, continued to the vote on enlargement in April of '97, but also a negotiation with the Russians that culminated with the so-called NATO-Russia Charter. And, to my perception, that worked. The Russians weren't really happy with it, but they got things out of it and things that they could use for domestic critics, and things that limited the hard security fallout from expanding the territory of and the number of members [01:06:00] of NATO.

The thing that really, I think, had a greater effect on the Russian military and then the Russian political establishment was a process that is little remarked in NATO or in Western circles and experts on NATO. But NATO today, even the NATO in 1997, was not the NATO that existed during the Cold War, and by the 2000s, it was very different. Until 1992, through 1992, NATO had never deployed to a third country. NATO troops sat in Germany and in other countries, conducted exercises in that country, but manned defensive lines. It was only in Yugoslavia, starting in 1992–93, in a bigger and bigger way, NATO went out-of-area with the NATO exclusionary zone around Sarajevo; the air CAP [combat air patrol] over former Yugoslavia; then participating in the peacekeeping, running the peacekeeping force; and then the NATO war against

Serbia [and] Montenegro in 1999; and then finally NATO deployment to Afghanistan post-2002.

NATO developed an expeditionary capability—both an expeditionary ideology in a sense, or at least provisions in official NATO documents that allowed for NATO military activities [01:08:00] outside of NATO countries that were not defensive, whether peacekeeping or war-making, and NATO engaged in such operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and then Afghanistan.

So the Russians—especially after the second wave [of NATO expansion], they look [and] NATO is not only expanding, but its troops are engaged in military operations in third countries, sometimes in making war against these third countries or elements in these third countries. And, to my perception, this conditioned the basic Russian attitude towards NATO as much as the act of political expansion. Including Russia to the extent we could—in PfP,<sup>21</sup> and the [Permanent Joint] Council, and the NATO-Russia Council—including Russia in the dialogue were good steps. But you can't get around the problem that, if NATO is a political and military alliance that is not only defensive but explicitly adopts a posture that it can and will conduct peacekeeping or peacemaking operations in third countries—[this] was something that I think really made the Russians sit back and think about this. They still worked with NATO closely—joint exercises, other cooperation—well into 2013, but they're looking at this,

---

<sup>21</sup> Partnership for Peace (PfP), which Russia joined, was officially established in 1994. According to NATO's website, PfP enables “participants to develop an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation, and the level and pace of progress” ([https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_50349.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm)). Fifteen of the signatories have become part of NATO since joining PfP ([https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_82584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82584.htm)).

and if you look at it from the perspective of somebody who's not in NATO, it's [01:10:00] bound to be disconcerting.

And then the thing that this goes with is the color revolutions, where the U.S. and our allies are going in full-throat and supporting participants, supporters, parties in these color revolutions. Okay, you're giving political support, you're giving money to NGOs. When does NATO follow? And this is something—[General Valery] Gerasimov's famous speech to the Moscow Security Conference, 2014, he makes the connection. It hadn't really happened, but he says, “This is what NATO does. It does all these color revolutions”—he included the entire Arab Spring—and he looks at it and says, “This is the first thing. First thing, they support a color revolution, then they send the troops in to firm it up.” Some of it's invention, but some of it is the development of both the political posture and the military capabilities of NATO led easily to this kind of conclusion, whether fully justified or not, by Russian security officials, especially those in the military or the FSB that are given responsibility for the physical defense of the country.<sup>22</sup>

BEHRINGER: I wanted to go to the color revolutions next, so that's a perfect segue.

And I wanted to ask if the OSCE had any role in any of the events surrounding them, and then what was your advice at the time? You're in the region. What are you telling the Bush administration about how they should react to these color revolutions and what should be the policy?

---

<sup>22</sup> The Federal Security Service, or *Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti* (FSB) is Russia's internal security and counterintelligence agency, the primary successor to the Soviet-era KGB.

HILL: Basically, the OSCE had to be neutral because authorities from, Ukraine—for example, the Orange Revolution—[former Ukrainian President Leonid] Kuchma is represented in the [01:12:00] OSCE. The Russians are represented, others are. We were basically supportive, because certainly the Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution were in the direction of support of democratic standards, anti-corruption, and the like, and these are principles that we had been supporting. Officially, American and Western NGOs were deeply involved. The countries were not formally involved in supporting them, but I think certainly we welcomed the results.

The Rose Revolution, interestingly, occurred the same weekend that the Kozak Memorandum crisis came to a head. In fact, Shevardnadze was carried out of the parliament the same night that I was acquainted with the articles in the Kozak Memorandum about the military presence and sent them off to colleagues in The Hague, in Brussels, and in Washington.<sup>23</sup> And so I followed that, but, indirectly.

I first heard about it later, from a senior Western official who visited Georgia in January of 2004 and came back, and he had dinner with me—this is somebody from the Council of Europe, [a] senior official.<sup>24</sup> He was also engaged in human rights concerns in Moldova—but at dinner, he says, “I’m going to stop now,” and he says, “I want to talk to you as an American and not as an

---

<sup>23</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze became the leader (first as chairman of parliament and then as president) of the newly independent state of Georgia. He ruled until 2003, when he resigned amid the Rose Revolution.

<sup>24</sup> The Council of Europe is a human rights organization with 46 member states.

OSCE official.” And he said, “You've got to do something about this guy, you've got to restrain him,” [01:14:00] because Saakashvili was full of himself, and he was going to pull Adjara, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia back into Georgia very quickly. The Russians sent [Foreign Minister] Igor Ivanov down to help him out. The Russian reaction to the Georgian Rose Revolution was not hostile immediately, and they actually helped Saakashvili get rid of [chairman Aslan] Abashidze in Adjara, but his demands for reintegration of South Ossetia and Abkhazia rapidly became too much for the Russians, and the relationship turned really hostile during the course of 2005–2006. Saakashvili tried to take South Ossetia back by force in 2006, for the first time, and by 2008, they [the Russians] just laid a trap for him, because they were fed up with him.

A lot of my colleagues will say, “Oh, well, the Russians occupied South Ossetia and Abkhazia.” And I tend towards another view on that. I had met the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, when he was a member of the Helsinki Group in 1983. I saw him in 1991 while the [civil] war was going on in South Ossetia. And what has never really been fully recognized, even in Georgia, let alone outside, is Georgia or Tbilisi's part in the original wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where they adopted a policy of Georgia for the Georgians, restricted local languages, restricted [01:16:00] schools, tried to drive some of them out, and they just opened up possibilities for Russian troops that were still there—well, when they started, they were both still part of the Soviet Union, and then the Russians misused these genuine popular revolts against Georgian rule of Ossetians and Abkhaz in order to force Shevardnadze to join

the CIS, and, basically, then they tried to use the existence of these conflicts as a way of ensuring favorable Georgian policy towards Russia. So by the time Saakashvili comes to power in '03-04, it's very complex. He pushes harder than the Russians were willing to give. My impression was that they were willing to work with him to a certain extent, but they weren't willing to give him what he wanted, which was true Georgian sovereignty. And it ended up in the war of '08.

In Ukraine in '04, it was a—it's remarkable—a genuine popular revolt, and the Russians have just never understood that Ukraine, much more than Russia, has successfully built a civil society, and the civil society revolted against the stealing of the election in the fall of '04, when the Russians advised Kuchma to clamp down on the [protests in] Maidan [Square], and Kuchma was smart enough to refuse, and so it ran its course. They had a new election, one that was observed more rigorously, and [opposition candidate Viktor] Yushchenko won. This had to be a devastating political defeat for Putin, because he'd actually campaigned for [Yushchenko's opponent Viktor] Yanukovich in Ukraine in the fall of '04. [01:18:00] Yushchenko and Putin managed to get on the same page by December '05 on Transnistria, at least ostensibly, but the Russians and Ukrainians then had a falling out over gas and then over trade out of Transnistria in early '06, and there were constant difficulties.

And the Russians basically believed that we, the West, engineered these. And we did give money to National Endowment for Democracy, IRI, NDI,

others, Soros Foundation, you go through—they all worked in Ukraine, they worked in these other countries.<sup>25</sup> And a number of them were active in Russia. And so the Russians looked at this and said, “Okay, this is hybrid warfare against us or against those on our periphery, and this is how the West does things.” It took a while, but this is basically the view I’ve gotten from the Russians is, “Of course you guys supported these, and of course you guys helped engineer these,” and you’d say, “Well, the people did this.” This is something Russian authorities, at least under Putin, have, from almost the very beginning, really been unable to see is that there can be self-generating independent civil society organizations in Russia. Some of them get support from the West, but really the initiative comes from Russians and not from Western intervention. But the Western support for the color revolutions, certainly, was something that really worried the Russians.

The other thing about the Russian attitude [01:20:00] is we always—well, most Western observers, certainly in the U.S.—to this day do not fully appreciate the significance the Russians attached to the rejection of the Kozak Memorandum at Western urging. And the other thing is, the Russians consider this—[Russian President Dmitry] Medvedev said it most clearly following the war in 2008, where he said, “This is an area of Russia’s privileged interests.”

---

<sup>25</sup> The International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) are two U.S. government-funded nonprofits associated with promoting liberal values, elections, and good governance abroad. The Soros Foundation, founded by billionaire George Soros, began supporting civil society groups in Hungary in 1984 and from there spread its operations to other East European countries and the former Soviet Union. In the 1990s the Soros Foundation established the Open Society Institute to carry out this work. In 2010, it was renamed Open Society Foundations.

Didn't use “sphere of influence,” but he might as well—what a sphere of privileged interests is, it's a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of something like this.

But I remember, at the Maastricht OSCE meeting, I was sitting across the table from Igor Ivanov when we were talking about Moldova, and Ivanov was beside himself with rage. [He made] a long diatribe, the gist of which, he said, “In Yugoslavia, you intervene, you stop things, you did it. We didn't like it, but we didn't stop you, we didn't oppose you. We accepted it, we worked with you. And yet here we have something in our territory, in our area. We get a settlement, and you wreck it.” The Russians clearly have this view—“This is yours, this is mine, and what's *nash* is—you need to let us run this.”<sup>26</sup> And these color revolutions are a real violation of this sense [of] the Western penetration of these former Soviet, former Imperial Russian, territories is something that they find very hard to accept. It's a combination of a perception of a security and political threat and of a post-colonial syndrome that [01:22:00] it's just theirs, and we don't belong there, that we're there by their sufferance.

Vyacheslav Trubnikov, about six months after the failure of the Kozak Memorandum, talked to me. I talked to him about the treaty they had with Moldova. I said, “It's a bilateral treaty. You are excluding us.” And he said, “No, no, we would let you participate. There was a tremendous space, *ogromnyi prostor*, for Western participation in this.” It was just that the Russians were going to run it, and it was going to be with Russian permission. And this is where you get to, to my mind, where the real conflict is. It's not about other

---

<sup>26</sup> In Russian, *nash* means “ours.”



things so much. It's about these countries, where we consider them fully free, fully independent, and sovereign, and the Russians consider them still neo-colonies, or they're part of a sphere of influence in which Russia should have an important-to-determinative word, and that is just hard to get around.

BEHRINGER: And earlier in the interview, you mentioned that there's this turning point—I think you said around 2005–2006, so coming off of Iraq and then the color revolutions, President Bush's own rhetoric becomes more soaring. But then also in the second Bush administration, you've got these self-styled pragmatists—[Secretary of Defense] Robert Gates, [Secretary of State] Condoleezza Rice, [National Security Advisor] Stephen Hadley—trying to work with Putin on economic cooperation, from their point of view, and missile defense. Could you talk a little bit about why this was such a pivotal moment and why their approach didn't end up working in the end?

HILL: At the risk of the logical error post hoc, [ergo] propter hoc—we went into Iraq [01:24:00] [on the basis of their having] WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. We get no WMD. You note how Iraq changes in '04–05 to bringing democracy to the Middle East and democracy to Iraq. And if you read Bush's second inaugural [address]—I use that in my book, because it's such a wonderful statement—several of the political ambassadors, not the least [Stephan] Minikes in Vienna, pointed it out to me, “Read this. This is the real statement of what this administration wants.” It's a manifesto that we're going to bring democracy to countries in the world that don't have it. And excuse me, but I put Condi especially in that. She may have written the realist article in *Foreign*

*Affairs* during the campaign of 2000,<sup>27</sup> but she certainly was in on the “we’re-supporting-democracy” [line of thought].

I think it’s hard for us as Americans to understand how ideological we are—not just how we appear to them, but how ideological we are. The rest of the world will tell us, and we say, “No, but we’re right. Democracy is the best system. Therefore, you should have it.” Only if you stand back from this—and really, it’s hard to divorce yourself, because we grow up in a culture that teaches us this from the very youngest, and so we don’t tend to understand how anybody could see this as a threat when we come out and say, “We’re going to bring you democracy,” and especially those that we classify as authoritarian rulers, where these are bad guys who should go anyway.

By the time you get to the second Bush administration, because of what’s happened in Iraq—this is in American DNA anyway, [01:26:00] and it’s not necessarily a bad thing, but when it starts to become the driving force of your foreign policy, it can have blowback. And that’s where, especially if it isn’t considered, if you’re doing it on the fly after you’ve gotten deeply involved in the Middle East and gotten into a quagmire. As it happened, it acquired a more global approach. And you saw this in NATO. We went into NATO, and we get NATO statements on this. But the approach to Russia, the whole—by ’05, Bush is meeting democracy activists from all of these countries, and we’re supporting

---

<sup>27</sup> Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 79 (January-February 2000), 45–62.

democracy activists in Russia and other stuff, and the Russians are looking at this and thinking, “Where is this going to end?” At least some Russians are.

It takes a while, because there are many good aspects, working aspects to the relationship. But ultimately, especially both Rice and Gates had and have considerable residual mistrust of Russia as an authoritarian state stemming from their study of Russia and work with Russia in the Soviet period. I knew Gates when he was in CIA, and I remember battles that State INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] had over how to interpret things the Soviets were doing, and—I don't want this to be too pejorative, but they tend to look [01:28:00] with suspicion at Russia. And so they looked [with] suspicion, I think, with Putin.

The Gates response to the Munich speech, you know, that “he looks in his eyes and he sees KGB”— [his] later response. The initial one was good. Just, “We've had one cold war. That was enough.”<sup>28</sup> Leave it, and let him blow off steam, and then go and see what's really behind it. They may have thought of themselves as pragmatists, but Rice moved over from NSC to State for the second administration, brought with her a whole host of folks that had been working with her, especially on Europe, the so-called baby DASSes [deputy

---

<sup>28</sup> At the time, in response to Putin's speech in Munich, Gates said, “One cold war was quite enough,” <https://www.dw.com/en/us-defense-chief-to-putin-one-cold-war-was-enough/a-2344298>. In his memoir, Gates wrote that he privately told his colleagues “that I'd looked into Putin's eyes and, just as expected, had seen a stone-cold killer.” Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 168–69, Vice President Richard Cheney wrote in his memoir, commenting on the first meeting between Bush and Putin, “When I looked into his eyes, I saw an old KGB hand.” Richard B. Cheney and Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), 326. The late Senator John McCain (R-AZ) often used the following line during his campaign for president in 2007–08: “I looked into Mr. Putin's eyes and I saw three things -- a K and a G and a B.” Jackie Calmes, “McCain Sees Something Else in Putin's Eyes,” *Wall Street Journal*, 16 October 2007, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-WB-3322>.

assistant secretaries of state]—[Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Daniel] Fried and the crew that had been working with him. And they were hardline. And they were looking to other parts of Europe, other than Russia, and [were] relatively supportive of other parts of the former Soviet Union and Europe and relatively suspicious of Russia. So they can point to things they tried, and there were things they tried with the Russians, but I think the Russians picked up on some of that too and couldn't get through. It was a more ideological administration. And I think things like pushing for the MAP [NATO Membership Action Plan] for Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 was a real indication of this. This was not practical politics.

BEHRINGER: Yeah, I wanted to go there next. So what did you think of the ultimate compromise that came out [of the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest] where they're not quite offering MAP, but they're also saying [01:30:00] [Georgia and Ukraine] “will be part of NATO” at some point in the future?

HILL: Worst of all possible worlds. It's a message [to Russia]: attack now, because sometime in the indeterminate future, they'll have Article 5, but they don't now.<sup>29</sup>

We never should have gotten into that, because I just still don't understand to this day—and I've heard people talk about it—I don't understand how the White House could not have understood the depth of French and German opposition to offering membership to Ukraine and

---

<sup>29</sup> Article 5 of the NATO Treaty states that an attack on one member of the alliance will be treated as an attack on all members, triggering a collective security response.

Georgia. And I can't understand, first of all, how they didn't know that, or how, knowing that, they still decided that they would go ahead, that it was a good idea, because you're splitting NATO. NATO has to make that decision unanimously, and something that—it required a hell of a lot more spade work. The polls in Ukraine did not show it as being very popular. Saakashvili had, in the fall of 2007, conducted massive reprisals against opposition in Georgia, so even by NATO's own standards of democratization in the NATO [Enlargement Study we did in 1995], they didn't fit a number of the criteria. Why we pushed ahead—it was foolish, because it guaranteed Russian opposition, but it also disrupted the alliance.

And then the effort to paper over with this statement—“Well, we won't do it now, but eventually they will”—thrown out as a sop to Georgia and Ukraine [01:32:00] is also a message to Russia—“act now while you can.” And certainly in Georgia, I think they were inclined anyway to do that. Putin tried at Sochi, which came almost immediately after the summit in Bucharest—he tried to explain to Bush why there was a problem with Ukraine and Georgia. But Putin's historical arguments—it's something that just did not resonate with anyone in the American delegation. “You're talking about Russian history, imperial history. No, no, these are free countries, and we have a statement, OSCE in 1990 and other OSCE documents that states can make their own security arrangements.” And so we just pushed ahead with that. And the Russian answer to that is—the other OSCE document that [Russian Foreign Minister Sergey] Lavrov loves to quote: “You cannot have security for one at the

expense of other states.” And therefore, “We’re going to ensure our own security in Georgia by making sure that they don’t do anything here.”

It [was] just a really counterproductive step, and it strikes me in terms of counterfactual that there were a number of things we could have done for Georgia and Ukraine while talking with the Russians that would have been less threatening but supportive, stabilizing, and other things. Saakashvili—harder to say, because Saakashvili didn't listen. Truly, almost everyone that I know claims that they told Saakashvili not to attack, [01:34:00] that the Russians would come back at him. Everyone claims that that's what they told him, and yet he didn't listen.

BEHRINGER: Also, in 2008—I wanted to get your view [given] your background in the Balkans—the impact of Kosovo and the move to recognize Kosovo independence. How big of an impact did that have? Did you—would you have supported that, those types of things?

HILL: Kosovo became—well, the first thing, as a Balkan expert, I've known since the 1980s when I served in Yugoslavia that Kosovo was ostensibly part of Serbia, but that no Serbs were ever going to go down and live there, and that eventually—the Serbs in private would tell me, even the high Serbian officials would say, “Kosovo is lost. It's all Albanians. No Serbs want to go live there among all those Albanians.” The question was how to get there. And you probably weren't going to get there without some violence—although who knows.

After the war in '99, the Russians helped us get Milosevic to settle, and part of the deal was UN Security Council Resolution 1244, recognizing Kosovo

as part of Serbia-Montenegro. So the Russians have this deal in the UN, UN Security [Council], as close to an international law as you can get. And so they're part of the peacekeeping, they're part of the deal. They try to sweeten their part of the deal or violate it by the march to Pristina early on. But anyway, they're in it and supposedly politically, Serbia and Kosovo are supposed to be negotiating some sort of relationship.

After demonstrations in [01:36:00] Kosovo in 2004, Western diplomats and leaders start to talk about possible independence for Kosovo. And this talk was known—the way it affected me, I'm in Transnistria and Moldova, and the Transnistrians are saying to me, “Kosovo can get independence, why can't we?” And I would say to them in diplomatic meetings and publicly, “No, the cases are very different. This is not a precedent, what they're doing in Kosovo.” But it is a precedent. It's so obvious.

But we convinced ourselves—first [Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General to Kosovo] Kai Eide, the Norwegian who did the first report in '05, [whom I have] known for a long time, and then Nick Burns [Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns], who I knew—both come in and say, “The way to solve the security here is to make Kosovo independent.” And we talked with everybody. The Russians are against it, so we just excluded them, and we excluded the UN, and so we gave the UN functions to the EU, and NATO takes over the security functions, which it has anyway. The Russians are out. And we recognized Kosovo.

While I was still in Moldova talking to the Moldovans and the separatists, I manfully maintained the diplomatic line: “This is not a precedent. This is different.” But I have to say, I’m looking at it and saying, “This is a step, that if you do this unilaterally, where you have committed in the UN Security Council to the Russians for a very different solution—if you just ignore that commitment and recognize, you’ve established a precedent for the Russians. They are going to use it.” And what you should do is read the Russian [01:38:00] documents recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia from August of 2008. They mimic, they copy what the West wrote about Kosovo in February of 2008. It’s very clear.

Again, this is one of those things that I think the result for Kosovo was something that was preordained. You’re going to have to get there somehow, eventually, because the Serbs and the Albanians will not live together in the same state, and it’s not going to be possible to force them, so you have to find some way of making the divorce acceptable to everybody that’s involved. And the Russians and the Serbs were hanging tough. My question is, could we have gone on a lot longer with simply an unrecognized Kosovo, but basically separate from Serbia, run by international organizations, but not Serbs there, and no fighting between them, and the Russians engaged in talks? And the talks may be annoying and fruitless, but certainly, the Russian proverb that “a bad peace is better than a good quarrel” is certainly applicable here, in my mind.



It's just something that clearly I could see on the horizon that, by the way we did it, that we're simply giving license to the Russians to abrogate some UN and other commitments they've made and then say, you did this and so you've shown that this precedent holds. And they dreamed up a lot of legal gobbledygook to justify what they did with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but it ultimately comes [01:40:00]—the way we handled Kosovo had a lot to do with it, unfortunately. I wish we could have found a better way, and a way of hanging on longer and working towards a more gradualist solution that provided less opportunity or motivation for mischief on the part of the Russians.

BEHRINGER: And then of course, in 2008, war does break out in Georgia. Do you remember where you were when the war broke out?

HILL: Yeah. I was teaching at the National War College at the time. My former deputy from the mission to Moldova, a guy named Ryan Grist—a Brit who had worked for me for several years in Moldova, and he'd been my deputy in his last posting in my mission. He was the deputy head of OSCE mission in Georgia when the conflict broke out. And as a matter of fact, he was in Tskhinvali along with several OSCE mission members who were being shelled by the Georgians. This is how I know that the Georgians started it. They actually started the main phase of the hostilities. There had been sniping going on for about a month. You could see this conflict building. And Saakashvili tried, in the middle of one night, tried shelling Tskhinvali and moving troops in to take South Ossetia—overwhelm the Russian peacekeepers and take Tskhinvali before the Russians

could get in. He was unsuccessful. They [the Russians] got through the Roki Tunnel, and the Russians got their forces in, and the rest [01:42:00] is history.

I remember that, and it's a great tragedy, because it's one of those things that—it didn't have to happen. It was not a happy solution, not a happy situation. Georgia was not in control of territory that was recognized as part of Georgia, but they weren't fighting. There was traveling back and forth and commerce between them. They were talking. It's something [where] you can point to it, and you can say, well, yeah, this is not resolved. And it's a sore, but it's a political sore. It's not a military destabilization. The same thing with Abkhazia, a little bit less so.

The war—the Russians just changed the whole calculus. And now, God knows how Georgia will ever get these places back—if anyone there really wants to go back to Georgia, because you have, as opposed to Transnistria, you have real ethnic differences that were part of the difficulty. Abkhazia—the Abkhaz and the Georgians have had difficulties with each other for at least a couple centuries. Just a tragic situation, because, as ineffective as the political negotiations at the time seemed to be, they were at least ongoing, and having the political channels open and no hostilities gave you an opportunity, at least at some point in the future, for diplomatic initiatives, and that's gone now.

[01:44:00] You've had ongoing EU talks between Georgia and Russia and the entities. They're basically not going anywhere, and it's a far more militarized standoff than it was in 2008, when this all happened.

BEHRINGER: To wrap up a little bit, the presidents, Bush and Putin, have this famously strong rapport even, it seems like, almost until the moment that the invasion of Georgia happens. You mentioned the meeting in Sochi where, right after the NATO summit, they paper things over. Did the personal relationship obscure the Bush administration's view of what was important to Russia, and did they misjudge Vladimir Putin from the beginning? Or do you think Putin changed between 2001 and 2008?

HILL: Putin has changed drastically over time. And I remember seeing him when he was first appointed prime minister and then during the election campaign, and when he was first elected in 2000. And he was very nervous, ill at ease, clearly uncomfortable in a high and public position, and he's grown into that, and he's developed. I know what Angela Stent and Fiona Hill [01:46:00] will have told you about him from having seen him at the Valdai meetings every year<sup>30</sup>—but you look at him, and he's turned from this awkward bureaucrat thrown, thrust into big politics into a potentate that everyone—they spread the carpet in front of him and suck up to him. And this staying in power, being in power and going through things—getting into an environment like this can change somebody. I think it clearly has left him more detached and less cognizant of some aspects of reality.

At that time, I think he came in with Bush, hoping—Putin, from what I can see and from what I heard from those around him—he came in hoping that

---

<sup>30</sup> The Valdai Discussion Club began in 2004 as an opportunity for Russian and foreign officials, scholars, and business people to exchange views on Russia's foreign policy and role in the international system. President Putin attends the gathering every year.

he could build a constructive, cooperative relationship, close relationship with the West, in particular with the U.S., because we are the most important to them. And I think by 2007, clearly the Munich speech shows he's getting frustrated. And he's frustrated on a number of things. We haven't talked about it—one of the things that got him, he supported our war in Afghanistan against al-Qaeda, but in his mind, he could not get support from us for his struggle against the Chechens. We didn't allow him to do what he wanted in the Kodori Gorge across in Georgia to chase them in there. We put American troops, actually, in Georgia in 2002. We didn't support them [the Russians]. We gave asylum and allowed what they called Chechen leaders of terrorist bands to travel in the West. [01:48:00] Mid-level to senior officials from the State Department met with them in—not in the State Department, but informally in Washington. But the Russians knew all this.

This is really what's behind his [Putin's] outburst after Beslan. Because 300 school children get killed on the opening day of school, and his outburst is motivated, because he thinks, "Here, I've been helping Bush with allowing Americans to bring the stuff into Afghanistan through Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. And this is what I get. They can't even allow us [to] or arrest for us some Chechen officials wandering around Europe and the U.S. raising funds and raising support for a terrorist war against us in the south." And the rights or wrongs of it, whether the individuals were accurately identified—but the Russians repeatedly asked, and we safeguarded certain individuals from them, and that built his resentment. And yeah, this is one of the things that—he's

looking at that, and gradually you can see him thinking more and more that “Russia gives all these things, and we're not getting anything back from the West.”

If you read the description of the long speech that he gave [to President Barack] Obama when they met—Obama went in 2009, and they met for a breakfast, lunch, whatever. They met on the roof of the new Ritz Hotel there in Moscow. And Putin went for over an hour before any American could get a word in, a litany of grievances to Obama. And Obama's listening to this, saying, “What is this?” [01:50:00] Putin has the continuity. He's seen all of this go and grow, and he's gradually developed the conviction that I think is different. He came in thinking he could work with the West, and he's gradually developed a conviction—“The West will just promise you all sorts of stuff and then either not fulfill them or do other stuff.” And one of the greatest things was just after that—the 2011 UN vote on Libya and then what we did with [Libyan leader Muammar] Gaddafi. And Putin—that's what really convinced him, I believe, with a number of people, to come back and take the presidency back from Medvedev. And his attitude on this—I've heard this from other Russians—is, “This is what you guys in the West do. You take a vote, we give you a vote on something that's supposed to be moderate, you go in and wreck everything, and you just can't be relied on.”

I think Putin has gone through this, and he was at a stage of this, where, at Munich, he both denounced the West, but he said George Bush was his friend and a decent man. He's not all the way, he's caught between. But [there

are] tremendous resentments that Russia is just being excluded, not listened to, is giving cooperation and concessions and not getting anything back. In the West, the Bush administration—we were so focused on other things, and then we were then focused on the abuses of the Russian regime. And indeed, democracy shut down during his [Putin's] second term. And this was, NGOs were started to [be] restricted, independent political thought, [Russian journalist Anna] Politkovskaya is assassinated, [former Russian FSB officer Alexander] Litvinenko is assassinated. [01:52:00] The security services are coming back. I could see myself. The Russian commander that I used to be able to meet in a cafe and have coffee or beer with alone—the last time I saw him in '06, he was commander of Russian peacekeeping forces, and the only time we were able to talk individually was walking between buildings when we could get away from the giant entourage of security guys he had around him. The security services, civilian and military, all returned with a vengeance and a traditional mistrust of especially the West and especially of Americans.

And we could perceive that, and it gave support to hardliners, those in the United States who were inclined to be mistrustful of Moscow, because they were mistrustful of Moscow in the '70s and '80s. And so we also started to revert towards a default position that was more suspicious, less cooperative, less collaborative, and less understanding of Russian desires.

And it's epitomized that Medvedev makes this proposal in 2008 to change the European security architecture. And the proposal itself, the treaty that they proposed, is just god-awful. But I talked with the Secretary General,

Marc de Blichambaut, of OSCE, others in our delegation out there in Vienna, who were thinking we should take advantage of this and talk with them about some of the things we'd like to do and draw them out on what they would like and see if we can get anything out of this. And the response instead was, [01:54:00] both Condi's response, and then [Obama's Secretary of State] Hillary Clinton later, was, "Well, we like the current security architecture." Maybe we do like the current security architecture, but when you look at it that way, you more or less ensure, sooner rather than later, that Moscow is going to try to work against it.

And that's what they're doing now. It [was] maybe not inevitable from that time, but it's that kind of—that, by the end of the Bush administration, we're going through stuff and trying stuff with them, but, when it doesn't work, the attitude is, "Well, that's the way they are, and they're just reverting to type, Soviet type," rather than say, well, is there any other way, another angle, or [are] there other things we can do? And it's sad to see that, because in the late '90s and early 2000s, there was a great deal of openness and considerable potential for cooperation in Russia. And for many different reasons that has just steadily disappeared, and now we're at a stage where it's at least as bad or worse than it was when I first went to Russia as a diplomat in the early 1980s.

BEHRINGER: Yeah. This has been really terrific and insightful. Thank you so much for spending so much time with us. Was there anything else we didn't cover that you wanted to go into?

HILL: I can't think of anything right now. Something may occur to me, but I think that's—over the broad stretch, some things are [01:56:00] more general. One of the hardest things to do is to get a senior political leader to understand the political and historical context in which a senior counterpart in another country operates. We do a lot of mirror imaging, and it often doesn't work. And it's very frustrating when you see it, when a response from one side is something that is expected and reasonable within their context, but we take it a very different way. And I think there's some of that, that Bush—he had a clear view of what he needed to do, especially after 9/11, and a clear ideology. And I don't think we ever understood how our operations on their periphery and our ideology affected the Russians.

I'll end with one. I had a research assistant when I was writing my book on European security.<sup>31</sup> He was a young Russian at GW [the George Washington University], a graduate student, and I was talking to him about all this, and I'm talking about how human rights was very important to a number of individual American politicians that I knew. And he looks at me—and this is a young man who'd been an avid Medvedev supporter, disillusioned when Putin came back in—and he looks at me, says, “You don't mean you guys really believe [01:58:00] that.” And I said, “Well, yeah, they do.” And even somebody like that, well-disposed to the West, looks at us and takes it in mirror imaging, “This has got to be a ploy. It's got to be a political ploy in order to win

---

<sup>31</sup> William H. Hill, *No Place for Russia: European Security Institutions since 1989* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).



advantage or to improve their political position inside a country. They can't really just care about free elections or something like that.”

And it's in this sense that the two ships miss each other by default. And so that actually getting them to meet and semi-understand one another is to my mind—those are really great diplomatic achievements. And in that sense, I don't want to sell Bush, in particular the Bush people, short, but they were really looking in other ways that I've indicated, and one somehow at times wishes we could have those eight years back and work on them again. And I know that I wish, I think they wish, that they could do a little bit more in August of 2001 in terms of investigating terrorists in the U.S. But there are many things like that that you just look at and say, “Wow, we understand it better now and hope it helps us in the future.”

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]