



U.S.-Russian Relations under Bush and Putin

Interviewee: Pavel Palazhchenko

Chief English Interpreter for Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, 1985-1991

Interviewer:

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[Begin Transcription]

GREK: Could you tell us a little about your career, focusing on your participation in the Soviet-American negotiations? And when George W. Bush became president in 2001, what kind of work were you doing by that time?

PALAZHCENKO: I have been involved in the Soviet-American negotiations since 1981, when negotiations on missiles began. I can mix [them] up—they have been mixed up for years. In general, when negotiations began on intermediate and shorter-range missiles—if I'm not mistaken, this was [19]81—I spent what is called "call-to-call" in these negotiations until the day when the United States began deploying medium-range missiles in Europe, and the Soviet Union withdrew from these negotiations. The negotiations were unsuccessful, but, of course, a lot of experience was gained. Then I took part in other negotiations, and in 1985 I started working at the highest level. Then I began working with Foreign Minister [Eduard] Shevardnadze when he met with Secretary of State [George] Shultz in Helsinki in the summer. This was the first meeting. Then I worked with Shevardnadze when he came to Washington in September 1985—he had a conversation with Reagan. And then the summits began. I worked at all these Soviet-American summits up to 1991, before the Moscow summit, Bush's visit [00:02:00] to the Soviet Union. Then, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I left the civil service, although I was offered to stay in the civil service at the Foreign Ministry [of the Russian Federation], but I did not return to the Foreign Ministry. [Before that]—I then [had] worked in the apparatus of the



president of the USSR—I of course remained [formally] on the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but did not [actually] return to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And since 1992 I have been working here in the Gorbachev Fund. Well, he wasn't here then. By 2001, when George W. Bush took over as president, I was working here as the head of international relations and press contacts. And I still work here. That's sort of the picture [of my career].

GREK: How would you assess Gorbachev's legacy for Soviet-Russian relations, starting in 1991? How did he fail, what base did he leave upon exiting, and how did it change during the nineties?

PALAZHCENKO: You mean Russo-American relations, yes?

GREK: Yes.

PALAZHCENKO: Yes. He left a base on which it was possible to continue to work. This is not only an agreement on nuclear weapons, on a radical reduction in nuclear weapons. Let me remind you that this is the CIS agreement,¹ this is the START Treaty—the first START.² But no less important are the so-called presidential initiatives to radically reduce tactical nuclear weapons and short-range nuclear

¹ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) agreement, which formally dissolved the Soviet Union and replaced it with a commonwealth of former Soviet republics. Often called the Minsk Agreement, it was signed by Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine on 8 December 1991 and adopted by several other former republics on 21 December 1991 in Alma-Ata (now Almaty), Kazakhstan.

² The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I; in Russian abbreviated as SNV-I), signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in July 1991. START II was signed in 1993 between the United States and Russia but never went into effect because of the George W. Bush administration's decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (AMB) Treaty in 2002. In 2010, the United States and Russia signed the New START agreement (in Russian, SNV-III; the formal English title is the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms).



weapons, including naval nuclear weapons and nuclear artillery. A very quick process began of withdrawal of American nuclear weapons from [00:04:00] Europe, from Germany, from other countries.

The arms legacy is, of course, colossal. But there was also a new element in addition to these agreements, which has always existed, but not on such a large scale, of course. A certain element of trust has appeared. It, of course, could not be complete—no one took anything on faith, no one relied on trust as such. But, of course, this element appeared, and this element was reinforced by the fact that it was also possible to avoid aggravation during the unification of Germany, which went at a very fast speed, and during the crisis associated with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the annexation of Kuwait. This here is the legacy, which was missing, perhaps, one element. Indeed, Gorbachev understood this and strove to ensure that this element was created and built: this is large-scale and lasting economic ties. This, perhaps, was not the case. And there was hope that on the basis of the already new relations, which were fundamentally different from what Gorbachev inherited in 1985—there was a hope that on this basis it would be possible to give the relations greater dynamism, including in this commercial-economic sphere, which, of course, well, it is not—it is an obligatory element, in my opinion, in relations between states, although it is not something that guarantees that these relations will not have problems, crises, et cetera. This is how I would characterize Gorbachev's legacy, which he left [00:06:00] to the Russian leadership.



GREK: During the nineties, how would you describe how this legacy developed? Maybe in the plan you were, say, satisfied how one of the—the way economic relations developed, for example?

PALAZHCENKO: Well, I followed what was happening, although I was already outside the civil service—I did not deal specifically with these issues, but I also followed [them], because Mikhail Sergeevich [Gorbachev] often traveled to the United States. He had a lot of invitations from universities, from various corporate organizations to give lectures. He traveled more than once. He had meetings with the presidents of the United States, both with [Bill] Clinton and with [George W.] Bush, then with [Barack] Obama. Well, at least for me, it was necessary, of course, to follow how the relationship was developing. And besides that, of course, I still had an interest. I was seeing that relations were, in general, on the downslope. Of course, something was being done, and it is impossible to deny the achievements, which in the nineties really existed. Well, this is, first of all, cooperation in the elimination of nuclear weapons within—in part, the Nunn-Lugar program—but above all, within the framework of the agreements that Gorbachev signed. It was mutual cooperation, in my view, it was quite equal, except that, under the Nunn-Lugar program, it was an agreement, in general, on support, on assistance to Russia from the U.S. side. But, in general, in the sphere of nuclear weapons this was mutually beneficial [00:08:00] and equal cooperation. This is a great achievement.



Cooperation in space, it should also not be forgotten—it was real, it produced a lot. The work of the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission. Then somehow the Bush administration decided that it did not really want to deal with this mechanism; it was suspended. I think that here Russia probably did not do everything it could have to preserve this mechanism in some form. And of course, this allowed—I have don't have the numbers, but it allowed us to secure some shifts in the sphere of trade and economic relations. So, most importantly, it was at the level of, let's say, "people-to-people," at the public, popular level. There was mutual sympathy. Not everyone, maybe, but it existed. And at the bureaucratic level, too, in my opinion, there were on the whole fairly good relations. They arose between the American [presidential] administration and the American bureaucracy, including not only the administration, but also Congress, departments, et cetera, and the Russian bureaucracy. It was evident.

But at the same time, things were happening that moved the relationship, as I said, down an incline. First of all, of course, in the political sphere, we failed to truly understand each other and work out [00:10:00] a common line on Yugoslavia. The Dayton Agreements were perceived by us, including the participants in the Yugoslav process, as humiliating for Russia, because the diplomat who led this process, Ambassador [Richard] Holbrooke, completely, demonstratively did not pay attention to the Russian position. And furthermore, of course, Russia was counting on the fact that, despite Milosevic's position—which was by no means



attractive to everyone in our country—it would still be possible to work out some solutions more favorable for the Serbian side. Certain historical, psychological, and other moments took a toll. None of this had happened.

And then the Kosovo crisis, which, it seems to me, has already driven a decisive nail in this whole story, because, of course, Russia, like many others, perceived the bombing of Belgrade and the decisions that were gradually imposed on Serbia as extremely humiliating for the country, which formally, of course, is not our ally, but sits somewhere in our hearts—both in the hearts of Serbs and in the hearts of Russians, we have some historical ties. This psychological moment, of course, was completely ignored by the Clinton administration and NATO, and [Secretary of State] Madame [Madeleine] Albright and [Secretary General of NATO] Javier Solana did not take this moment into account at all. By the way, I followed this closely—it was possible [00:12:00] without bombing, in general, to oust the Yugoslav Army, the Serbian army from Kosovo by political means. All this was taken extremely hard. I am not inclined to such historic, heartfelt affairs, but I must say that I could not help but feel that this is not correct, this is wrong. And I think that it was then that in the minds of a significant part of the Russian elite, including Putin, who already then was not the least of them, this idea arose, namely, “if Americans can do this in another country, then why can’t we solve the Chechen issue by force in our own country, in Russia?” I think [the turning point happened] then, well, it was during the Clinton administration.



At the same time, they agreed on something about missile defense, on some definitions, but it was clear that in order to build the basis, for some future agreement, perhaps the separation of strategic and non-strategic missile defense, negotiations were underway. So they seemed to be going well, some colleagues who once worked on it told me. But at the same time, it became clear that here on the whole a tendency that was unfavorable toward us was transpiring, in the opinion of the Russian military. And finally, NATO enlargement. The expansion of NATO was perceived painfully in Russia from the very beginning. But another factor also affected it, namely the fact that the administration was not looking for any creative, let's say, imaginative [00:14:00] ways to soften it for Russia. The Founding Act, which was signed thanks to the heroic efforts of [Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny] Primakov—if you look at it now, it is still not enough psychologically to soften this blow. And the problem of how to calm Russia down, in my opinion, was not raised—well, with the exception of the Founding Act, but, of course, some other measures were also needed.

I know that, for example, [then-Ambassador Jack] Matlock proposed to rename NATO to the “Partnership for Peace,” with different levels of membership.³

³ 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). Fifteen of the signatories have become part of NATO since joining PfP (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82584.htm). 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



It also seemed to me that Russia could have created some kind of association with NATO with one, so to speak, important exclusion from, let's say, the membership system. Namely, Russia certainly does not need all NATO countries to consider an attack on it [Russia] as an attack on themselves. This, by the way, is [Article 5]. Russia, of course, does not need this. And in all other respects Russia could well join some new organization, part of which would become the traditional NATO. This is how it was possible. But at the same time, the Partnership for Peace was made completely separate, and Russia did not participate there. And in general, in all these cases related to NATO, Russia was sitting on a small stool, as it were—this, too, despite the fact that this agreement was good, and our military, who participated in this, still remember this, that we had a very good interaction within the framework of the Founding Act. But psychologically, this did not sufficiently soften the blow that the Russian [00:16:00] elite felt as a result of the rather rapid process of NATO enlargement. And, of course, it was a great disappointment when, under Bush, our Baltic neighbors were included in NATO, and [they] began to talk seriously about the membership of Georgia and Ukraine. In my opinion, the psychological moment, the moment of resentment, which almost became the core of Russian policy toward the West, including the United States, was not taken into account at all.

GREK: When Putin came to power, what were your expectations?

actions in Ukraine, and its illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea”
(https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50090.htm).



PALAZHCENKO: I had no expectations. I didn't have any serious expectations. I didn't know what would happen. I remember I met Tom Graham.⁴ I remember that I was then working part-time at the UN as a simultaneous translator, and at the beginning of 2001, though until September Tom had not yet taken any position in the administration, but we met with him. I don't know how it was set up, but I had his phone number, [if I remember correctly]. And we met with him. And we said that at the helm of both countries are people who do not have much foreign political experience, and therefore it was very, very difficult to expect something. Inside the country, here it was a little different, many happened to have expectations. Many, including my friends, who mostly adhere to such democratic views, had expectations that Putin, as they say, would continue the glorious work of Yeltsin. Here I had other expectations—I happened to have the [00:18:00] expectation that he would consolidate the authoritarian elements of the Yeltsin regime, and that is exactly what happened.

GREK: In June 2001, Bush and Putin met in Slovenia, and the famous meeting took place—

PALAZHCENKO: I remember very well, yes.

GREK: How would you rate this meeting? And could you compare this personal relationship of Putin and Bush and the chemistry between Gorbachev, [H.W.]

⁴ Thomas Graham became the director and then the senior director for Russian affairs on the National Security Council from 2002 to 2007.



Bush and Reagan? And, in principle, did you have any feeling that personal contact at the presidential level could start to change something?

PALAZHCENKO: Well, first of all, I must say that I cannot evaluate chemistry, because I was never present at their [Bush and Putin's] contacts. To evaluate chemistry, of course, you need to see how it really looks. But I would like to say as a preface that Gorbachev took some part even in the preparations for this meeting. In May, he was in the United States. And then a meeting was arranged for him with Colin Powell at the State Department, and then at the White House. In the White House, such meetings are always choreographed. The choreography was such that Gorbachev meets with Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser. Vice President [Richard] Cheney walks in five minutes later, and Bush walks in 20 minutes later. That is, it was not a meeting in the Oval Office. The Oval Office is for something else. Well, it always seemed to the Americans that they should not put Gorbachev on a pedestal too much, because Yeltsin might be offended. In this case it was Putin [the Americans didn't want to offend]. That's how this conversation was. The conversation turned out to be quite informative. And after that [Gorbachev] asked me to write it down. On the basis of this recording, we made a telegram, I ran [00:20:00] to the embassy, and this telegram was sent to Moscow. Well, I think that, given the relationship then between Gorbachev and Putin, [the telegram] lay on the table not only for [Igor] Ivanov, who was then the minister of foreign affairs, but also for Putin. The meeting made a good



impression, but, of course, nothing supernatural was said. Bush did not say when, they had not yet agreed on the date of this meeting, and where it would be, but said that he would very much like to meet with Putin. He said that he expects a productive relationship. He did not refer to his dad, but it was evident that, first, they were familiar with Gorbachev, because when Gorbachev was in the United States in 1992, he met with [President George H.W.] Bush and [Secretary of State James] Baker, and then there was a lunch, and I participated in this dinner, if I'm not mistaken, if I remember correctly, George Bush's son also took part, who later became George Bush Jr. in our country—he is not called that there. In America, he is not called "Junior." So they [George W. Bush and Gorbachev] knew each other. The conversation was good. Certain expectations were expressed. And although, I repeat, the elder Bush was not mentioned, these agreements were mentioned, which existed and were in force then between the Soviet Union and the United States. In general, this established good momentum.

Then there was a meeting in Ljubljana, [Slovenia,] and here I cannot say that I am able to appreciate their chemistry. I only know that from the outside—well, everyone knows that Putin has done everything possible, I think, to create such chemistry, [00:22:00] including by connecting [with George W.] Bush's father. You know that later they had such a meeting for the three [of them], if I am not mistaken, here in Sochi or somewhere there. And in every possible way, of course, President Putin tried to use this personal element—he really wanted to.



For various reasons, it seemed to me that it didn't work. It didn't work because the United States, under [George W.] Bush, had set goals for itself. And although they were ready in terms of other aspects of relations to look for some opportunities with Russia, these are the goals that they set: namely, to continue the process of NATO enlargement and to withdraw from the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty in order to create a free hand in this area. They did not deviate from these goals. Here, as they say, "they rested their horns and did not move away." For Putin, this was, of course, a big surprise. He believed that not only because of personal relations, but thanks to the steps that he took toward the United States—which, in general, were not even negotiated, just spontaneous, as far as I understand—the president's decision to withdraw our electronic database intelligence from Cuba, to render all possible assistance in the transfer of American, [00:24:00] as far as I know, not weapons, but various other material and technical means to Afghanistan, when the Afghan epic began. These steps were advance steps on the part of Putin, they were not the result of any complicated negotiations, mutual concessions, or trade. And the United States, as Putin suggested, should respond to these steps with something. And he did not see such a response.

GREK: You have already mentioned the withdrawal from the anti-missile defense treaty, which also took place in 2001, which was unilateral by the United States. Did you participate in building this complex architecture?



PALAZHCENKO: Well, not missile defense. This was before me. This was signed under Brezhnev. I did not work with Brezhnev. From 1987 on, I no longer worked in the translation department, but in the [foreign affairs] administration of the United States and Canada, I was the deputy head of the department of military-political problems, and of course, I was aware of this and in the course of negotiations on missile defense, which were conducted by [my] contacts, I participated in some private discussions and these were informal. At that time, Steven Pifer worked as an adviser in Moscow. We discussed this with him without any obligations, we sketched ideas. So I certainly am aware of the ABM Treaty, too, I know its essence, and also other treaties. Of course, this is a pivotal element; it is clear. It was impossible to just pull it out like that. I do not know how it was discussed at the diplomatic level [00:26:00] before the U.S. withdrew from the ABM Treaty, but I suspect that they talked like this: "We decided to leave, and we will leave." This is their manner. And the same thing happened with the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty, absolutely the same thing.

As for the ABM Treaty—if you now look from the height of the past 20 years, there was absolutely no need for America to withdraw from it. You could have signed an additional protocol, deployed those 60 interceptors in Alaska, and agreed that the parties would clarify the treaty through additional protocols of any kind. Nothing happened. It's not like they built this "Astrodome," so to speak, an impenetrable dome. They didn't. So why withdraw? It was of course



psychologically—again, I keep coming back to psychology—a blow for Russia.

Well, as Putin said, we reacted with restraint and so on. Well, I guess. Putin even once said, "What's so ugly about the Trump administration's withdrawal from the INF Treaty?" They withdrew from the ABM Treaty. Look up that quote. When they withdrew from ABMT, they honestly said: "We don't need this treaty, we're getting out." And here they were accusing us of breaches and so on.

Well, I think there was no need for this. As you know, the ABM Treaty had first one protocol, then another protocol—at first there were 200 interceptors on two opposition zones, then they agreed that there would be one opposition zone. Well, you append any other opposition zone. Write a memorandum of agreement on further negotiations if you had to build something there against Iran, which of course nobody in Moscow [00:28:00] believed in, but they were ready to talk. Then just—well, it was done that way. In my opinion, it could have been done in another way, and every time this resentment was not taken into consideration. The resentment that was building up against the U.S. and the resentment that was also based on the feeling of such traumatization in connection with the collapse of the USSR. Russia is the only republic today that is experiencing this trauma. Out of 15 republics, we are the only one. The resentment has been building up. And when one thing resonates with another, then again, psychologically it is a very bad atmosphere to talk about. I have the impression that with all the powerful analytical apparatus the U.S. has with regard to Russia, including in the State



Department, in the embassy, I know many of these people, but this was not taken into account at all. And in Russia this was perceived as such a contemptuous, humiliating attitude towards Russia. I think it is extremely exaggerated, extremely exaggerated. I think you have been screwing yourselves with all this, including NATO, missile defense.

Our military keeps talking about missile defense. I ask them, "Look, [the Americans] withdrew then, what about now?" - "Well, they built this, they built that." This is rubbish. It has no effect on our retaliatory strike potential. Well, as Viktor Ivanovich [Esen]⁵ will tell you when you talk to him, I hope, that right after the withdrawal of the U.S. from the ABM Treaty they took out of their cabinets and computers the old Soviet designs for hypersonic weapons, for all those "Thunderbirds," for all those other weapons that [00:30:00] Putin announced in 2018 and began their accelerated development.⁶ When in the course of some preliminary contacts our ambassador told [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld: "You understand that we have to respond somehow, right? We will do some things there." Of course, he did not say what they would do. Rumsfeld calmly began, "Do what you want. We [don't need to] discuss what you will do," and so on. And so it began. "Well, you'll have to talk to a specialist." I am just saying what I heard from

⁵ Viktor Ivanovich Esin is a retired general who served as the chief of the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces (RSVN, Raketnye voiska strategicheskogo naznacheniiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii). From 1998 to 2002, he also served in the Russian Federation Security Council, where he focused on non-strategic nuclear weapons.

⁶ The 9M730 Burevestnik (or Thunderbird) is an Russian experimental, nuclear-powered and -armed cruise missile in development. It is reputed to have global range, and was one of five new weapons, including hypersonic missiles, that President Putin unveiled in 2018.



competent people, it's no secret—it's really developments still from the Soviet period. And they were, of course, on a new technological basis, and these weapons now exist, they really do.

GREK: An important psychological moment was 9/11.

PALAZHCENKO: Well, yes.

GREK: The terrorist attack, yes.

PALAZHCENKO: Putin called first. Here Gorbachev and I watched the towers collapse, et cetera. Yes, of course, Putin called first. By the way, Gorbachev immediately wrote a letter to the *New York Times*, which was published, where he wrote that the attack on the United States and also on the whole world, and on democracy, and all the same—it would not be possible to shake these foundations. As he wrote, "I am sure that these foundations will not be shaken." And of course, in our country it was accepted absolutely correctly by serious people, that it is necessary to cooperate against terrorism, et cetera. There was a certain layer of people already then, who reacted in much the same way as some Arabs—they clapped their hands and rejoiced. It was not a very large stratum. Basically, there was a lot of sympathy and a desire to help.

GREK: Do you mean in the [Russian] government bureaucracy?

PALAZHCENKO: In the bureaucracy, no. [00:32:00] In the bureaucracy definitely not, I think. Well, maybe there were some people like that, but the atmosphere was such that only absolute marginal people dared to talk about it [the attack as a good



thing], and these are people who, at the bazaar level, are interested in world events on the internet or elsewhere. So the main reaction why Putin went to assist the United States in the material and technical supply of their NATO troops in Afghanistan is because the people also had a desire to somehow help the Americans. But I repeat, neither this step, nor the withdrawal of the base from Cuba, was received by the United States with particular gratitude, let's say, because they said, "Thank you," back and forth, but concrete gratitude in the form of some steps that—even psychologically, they did not meet Russia halfway.

GREK: The next important moment was the Iraq War. And some colleagues say that Putin and Bush really agreed on everything, and everything else was a kind of façade, that they understood everything among themselves, how the war was going on and how events would develop further. How would you react to such a statement? What do you think the Iraq War has become for Russia?

PALAZHCENKO: It seems very unlikely to me. It seems to me that the Iraq War simply added even more resentment towards America, that America did not take into account the positions of not only Russia, but also other countries, that America behaves like a master, so to speak, in the world, does not listen to anyone, all the more so, [00:34:00] does not listen to Russia. So to me, this conspiracy that they agreed on everything seems very strange. It is another matter that after this war, right up to Putin's Munich speech, it seems to me, Putin was ready to react relatively politely. This, in my opinion, is the most realistic position. He expresses



his disagreement, expresses his dissatisfaction, but he does not change the general strategic course toward seeking some kind of agreement with the United States.

This is so, it remained. And psychologically, all this put pressure on him, so this is the theory that they agreed there, et cetera—well, I don't know. I don't know who is telling you this, but I doubt it very much.

GREK: How do you see the sources of the beginning of the era of color revolutions in the post-Soviet space in Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan? What was it? A proposal for the collapse of the Soviet Union? Western conspiracy? And what did it become for the relationship between Russia and the United States?

PALAZHCENKO: I would not call it a continuation of the disintegration. Decay is decay. What happened, happened. Then everything depends on what is happening in individual countries. Everything happened in different countries in different ways.

If we talk about color revolutions, then Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, if I'm not mistaken, Serbia, and perhaps that's all, are being summed up under this heading.⁷ And in other republics everything was completely different. Naturally, there were no color revolutions [00:36:00] in the Baltic states. They did without them in Moldova, but for other reasons, nevertheless, I believe that the Baltics and Moldova—there have been several times, even in Moldova: the rotation of power, the change of power. Well, regarding elections, there is no doubt that in the last

⁷ Serbia is not generally included in the “color revolutions.”



elections, the president of Moldova lost. Well, the republic is very poor, it's difficult, but nevertheless, there it goes like this. And probably, this is how it should, in general, go because there are many things that are not the same as in other republics. There was nothing of the kind in Azerbaijan, because, apparently, as in some other republics, there is no appropriate cultural and historical basis for democracy to take hold; therefore, people of the past era took power rather quickly. Well, they behave differently, of course, but, in general, there could not be any color revolution there either. What other republics to take? The Central Asian ones? There were no color revolutions either. The attribution of the Kyrgyz events to the color revolutions is a little doubtful, but it can be attributed, possibly. So, I don't see any Western conspiracy here, and, in general, the scale of this phenomenon, in my opinion, is greatly exaggerated.

What do all these countries have in common? What they have in common is that a protest begins with election rigging. I think that this happened to the greatest extent in Ukraine. To a lesser extent [00:38:00] in Georgia, we see that there was also falsification. And most importantly, a new generation of Georgian youth has already grown up, in particular, their heads are hot, and now [former President Mikheil] Saakashvili and other politicians have come forward, who, by the way, grew up under [former President Eduard] Shevardnadze. But at the same time there was an attempt, of course, Shevardnadze's vertical [of power] did not happen, but there was an attempt to set the vertical and on the lower floors of this



vertical, of course, there they cheated with the elections, this is clear. And then another revolution took place.

That is, first the Orange Revolution, then the Rose Revolution, the change of power in Kyrgyzstan, which does not entirely, I repeat, fit the formula of a color revolution. Well, Serbia is not here at all. To say here that there is some systemic activity of the West in organizing this revolution—this suggests that the West is engaged in falsifications, et cetera. So, in my opinion, this is a factor—if that's what it is, it is greatly exaggerated. In what sense is it [a factor]? Well, of course, the West sympathizes with those trends and those phenomena that, in its opinion, can lead to the advancement of democracy—well, democracy, as the West sees it. I understand that this probably sounds a little naive, but nonetheless. In this sense, yes, there is sympathy. The second thing that unites not only these color revolutions, but in general, the events in the countries of the former [00:40:00] Soviet Union is that, in any case, until recently, the Western model is attractive to new generations of citizens and voters. Now this can change for various reasons—Trump's four years, and the painful phenomena that are taking place in Western Europe, and in connection with migration there, et cetera. We see that even in Central Europe, Poland, Hungary, to some extent the Czech Republic, this causes rejection. And the model that they have been guided by throughout the nineties is already becoming less attractive. But I repeat, until recently, and maybe still, in general, of course, the Western model is attractive to many, including in those



countries where color revolutions took place. In this sense, we can talk about the role of the West. In that sense, yes.

GREK: How do you think the Putin administration perceived these revolutions?

PALAZHCENKO: Not in my opinion, but everyone knows that they believe that this is a conspiracy, that they believe that all this is organized by some Western district committee or city committee, and this opinion is now extremely deeply rooted. Extremely durable. It is impossible to shake it. And this is one of the foundations of the conviction that the West is hostile to us. There are other basics as well. In particular, there are some documentary foundations—now NATO has already enshrined in its documents that it considers [00:42:00] Russia as a threat, and therefore as an enemy, et cetera. But at the core, I think, is the belief that has developed over the past 15–20 years that the West is weaving the threads of a conspiracy in the interests of weakening Russia through instability through color revolutions, et cetera. This conviction is extremely strong.

GREK: President Putin made a famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, where he criticized the United States as a destabilizing power, “disregarding the basic principles of international law.”

PALAZHCENKO: But is there this phrase that the United States is a destabilizing power? At the expense of disregard for international law, yes, it was.

GREK: “Destabilizing” is not in quotation marks.



PALAZHCENKO: Come on. This is why here I would not immediately say the Munich speech—I read it, I did not like everything in it—but it seems to me that the turning point in this speech was exaggerated, that this is a direct turning point. No, this is a summing up of the results of the revolution that took place within Putin as a result of trauma and resentment toward the West, which has been accumulating all these years. And then it began to intensify, including because, in spite of this speech, somehow it had to be taken into account in politics. Despite this speech, the West stubbornly continued, including declaratively insisting on its previous policies. Well, in Georgia we saw how it ended, because, I think, it was Saakashvili's big miscalculation. He believed that A) he would be able to quickly end the subordination of North Ossetia; with Abkhazia he had no such plans. And B) that the West would support it. [00:44:00] His support from the West was very relative, and he could not finish it quickly.

I was with the delegation of the Council of Europe, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe in North Ossetia literally a week after the end of hostilities. And toward us—we passed the Roki Tunnel—artillery tractors were driving toward us, tanks returning to Russia, and the withdrawal of Russian troops began. As soon as it became clear that the Roki Tunnel was working, Saakashvili apparently had no intentions or, perhaps, the strength to block this tunnel. How can you block it? You need to bombard it. And very large forces were transferred through this tunnel, which quickly resolved this issue there.



But why did Saakashvili go for it? He is a very intelligent person. He turned out to be a fool. You know, "a clever head is given to a fool." It turned out he was a fool, that he went ahead in vain He didn't need to have done that. But why? Because everywhere at all NATO meetings they said, "Georgia will be a member of NATO. Ukraine will be a member of NATO. " And psychologically, it seems to me, it disorientated him. I think this is really the turning point, not the Munich speech. After the Munich speech, it was still possible—I said then, I don't remember who [the Americans] sent [to Putin]. [then U.S. Ambassador Alexander] Vershbow, I think. Well, he went through all the elements of the Munich speech there. Well, he went on and on. But there was no question that now our relationship would collapse, et cetera. There was no question about it. And I myself also thought, "Well, yes, he came to perform."

Well, there was also a lot [00:46:00] in the Munich speech. And there was a lot in the answers to the questions. Including also the desire to negotiate. "Now," [Putin] says, "President Yushchenko is sitting here. We came to an agreement with him after lengthy negotiations. Let's all do the same like this," It [the agreement with Ukraine] was on the expense of gas. "—let's solve those issues one, two, three. Let's fight terrorism together." In general, there was a colossal enthusiasm then among our elite that we would straighten out our relations with the West, with regard to the United States, on the basis of a joint fight against terrorism. Putin said this. I have always thought that this is not a sufficient basis. Well,



nevertheless, everything is there. I would not [have made counterterrorism the basis of cooperation].

GREK: Colleagues from the States say that they were surprised by the appearance of such a speech, and what they thought was an overreaction, because on the issues—

PALAZHCENKO: Overreaction to Putin. Quite possibly, and then there was an overreaction on the part of first Saakashvili, who heard that Georgia would be a NATO member, who saw that, under Defense Minister Ivanov—Putin was then president—Russia withdrew its troops from the base in the Tbilisi region without a sound. Well, he decided that, “Let me now connect North Ossetia. Everything will be fine there. Abkhazians will be in North Ossetia—in South Ossetia,” excuse me, I’m always mixing it up—“I will incorporate South Ossetia, return it to the bosom of mother Georgia. There, then, everything will be amazing. Abkhazians will begin to envy [the Ossetians] and return themselves.” Well, what happened, happened. After all, he had built an economically very successful system at the time, [00:48:00] so he had such hopes. Primitive thinking, in my opinion, but it worked. And then came an overreaction. I understand what it is, an overreaction, so to speak. “Ah, that’s Putin’s fault, he overreacted.” I partly agree with this, but why should this cycle continue, it seemed to me, and of course, one must always take consider following major historical traumas. Somehow, they did not immediately understand this. I mean the entire Russian elite and the new generation of the Russian elite, did not immediately understand that this is a great historical trauma



for it, like the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is necessary to take into account the psychological moment much more in relations with this country. All the time it seems to Russia that it is being offended, humiliated, nothing is being taken into account, they smile, but they do everything in their own way. There is a grain of truth in such a resentment. It's impossible to build a foreign policy on resentment, but there is a grain of truth in it—that's my opinion.

GREK: Yes, here it is, you named one of the fundamental principles, apparently, which prevents an agreement—that is, there is no understanding of psychology.

PALAZHCENKO: The psychological factor.

GREK: Yes, the psychological factor. And what do you think—was it possible, given the recent relationship between Bush and Putin, and, in principle, is it possible to use the personal relationship between the presidents within the framework of Russo-American relations to overcome some fundamental principles, so to speak? And what, in principle, other fundamental problems could be identified in relations between the two countries?

PALAZHCENKO: Well, of course, [00:50:00] the fundamental problems now—it is a complete collapse of trust. This is a fundamental problem. It is, of course, impossible to solve this problem solely through personal relationships. When Gorbachev and Reagan met for the first time in Geneva, Reagan began with this whole invective about not only the Soviet Union and its foreign policy, but also Marxism–Leninism, that this is an aggressive ideology that wants to subjugate



other countries, subjugate the whole world, that it is Communism which destabilizes the global situation, et cetera. Gorbachev replied, "You know, we are not here to discuss Marxism–Leninism. Let's discuss those problems, plus nuclear problems, which are now very acute and which need to be solved." And the fact is that at that time in Geneva, with all the acuity of the discussions, a personal element was defined, it began to flicker in their relationship. But this personal element develops, it brings it part of the way, but a certain measure of confidence is possible only if the issues that undermine the relationship are simultaneously resolved. We signed a treaty on medium-, intermediate-range missiles, agreed in Reykjavik on the main parameters for reducing strategic installations, and withdrew troops from Afghanistan. And, well, I believe, the United States played a certain role, making it clear to the Mujahideen that they should not use the withdrawal of troops to shoot the exiting soldiers. [00:52:00] I was there too.

These issues were constantly resolved. Then we proved that we can cooperate in an acute situation, connected with the unification of Germany, et cetera. Then a really definite element of trust emerges. But this is what's said about personal relationships: we sit down, go to the sauna there, et cetera. No. No, Yeltsin tried it without neckties, et cetera. By themselves, personal relationships do not work.

One example of personal relationships and personal relationships with each other that I consider historic, and which influenced Soviet-American relations,



that I can cite, is the role of Margaret Thatcher. Margaret Thatcher never, not one centimeter, deviated from the common Western position on all issues. On disarmament, she took a position even more, let's say, negative than the American position. She once said that "Europe will not stand a second Reykjavik," because already then we had agreed to eliminate all American medium-range missiles that were deployed in Europe. She believed that this is an important element, a strategically connecting element. Linkage is like that—some other word in English was then used, but it was precisely the connecting element of Europe and America. So on some issues, on the nuclear issue, Thatcher took an even tougher position than the United States and did not depart from the general Western position, and, nevertheless, she played a very large role because she believed that Gorbachev seriously wants to change the country. She carefully read and discussed with prominent specialists about the history of Russia and the Soviet Union Gorbachev's speech [00:54:00] at the Plenum of the Central Committee at the beginning of 1987, from which, in fact, the real *glasnost* and real *perestroika* began. And she said, "Gorbachev admits that the system needs to be changed. Gorbachev is a real reformer, and we must work with him." And this is what she constantly said, including talking to Reagan, supporting this Reaganist tendency to seek agreements. There were different people around Reagan, but those people who played a decisive role in moving toward agreements—this is Matlock, this is [then National Security Advisor] Colin Powell, this is, first of all, [then Secretary of State]



George Shultz—these people, too, to some extent perceived them [U.S.-USSR relations] personally. That is, not just to negotiate with the Soviet Union, but as Thatcher said, "to negotiate in order to support Gorbachev." This is a unique case where the personal factor has played a role.

I can also cite other cases, but this was already in somewhat different conditions—in particular, the personal relationship that had developed between Baker and Shevardnadze [during the George H. W. Bush administration]. Baker also began with a desire to deal a little tougher with the Soviet Union—it seemed to him that in his old age Reagan had become so sentimental, trusting, too trusting of Gorbachev. But here he is in May 1989, he arrives in the Soviet Union, meets with Gorbachev, meets with Shevardnadze. Shevardnadze invites him to his apartment. It was a very good conversation. They talked about a lot, including about things that were not related to the subject of negotiations, and gradually, rather quickly, personal relations arose between them, which, in my [00:56:00] opinion, played a role. So, of course, there are examples of the importance of personal relationships, but of course, personal relationships alone will not go far. That's, then, in conclusion, what I would like to say.

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