U.S.-Russian Relations under Bush and Putin

Interviewee: Marc Grossman
Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, 2001-2005

Interviewers:
Paul Behringer,
Post-Doctoral Fellow, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University
Benjamin Feinstein,
Research Assistant, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University

Date of Interview:
October 5, 2021

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 with any corrections, suggestions, or questions.

Citation
Marc Grossman, interview by Paul Behringer, Benjamin Feinstein, 5 October 2021. "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 post-doctoral fellow with the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University.

FEINSTEIN: My name is Ben Feinstein. I'm an undergraduate researcher at the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University.

GROSSMAN: And my name is Marc Grossman. I'm a vice chairman of the Cohen Group in Washington, D.C.

BEHRINGER: And can you begin by describing your background on U.S.-Russian relations and your roles in the George W. Bush administration?

GROSSMAN: I have, in my career, some connection to U.S.-Russia relations. I had the honor to serve as the assistant secretary of state for European affairs in the [Bill] Clinton administration. During the George W. Bush administration, I was the undersecretary of state for political affairs. And so, while not my main responsibility, I had a considerable amount to do with U.S.-Russia relations, certainly as it had to do with Afghanistan, as it had to do with Iraq—as is in your questions—as it had to do with some arms control questions. And then finally, although outside of the scope of your questions, I had a lot to do with U.S.-Russia relations when I was recalled to the State Department in 2011-2012 to be the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. [I'm] not a Russian specialist by any stretch of the imagination. And you'll recall that, while I was the assistant secretary of state for European affairs [in the Clinton administration], there had been a separation in the bureau, so the Russia work

was mostly done by Ambassador[-at-large for the former Soviet Union] Steve Sestanovich. And so, my connection there was through another bureau.

BEHRINGER: And do you have a feeling for, what were the various schools of thought as the Bush administration took office in relation to its approach to Russia?

GROSSMAN: As the administration took office [00:02:00], I [don't think] there was particular clarity about what would happen with Russia. I think the people who came to power in that administration were skeptical of Russia. Their backgrounds told them to be skeptical of Russia.

And that's why—I don't mean to jump ahead here—but that's why, on September 11, people were quite astonished by the initial Russian response to the aftermath of September 11 and the offers that came from Putin and others in Russia to support the United States and help the United States.

While skepticism would have been the main philosophy up to September 11, as many things did, things changed on September 11.

BEHRINGER: So then in June 2001, President Bush and Putin meet for the first time in Slovenia. Were you at that meeting, and did you have a view of Putin at that early stage?

GROSSMAN: No, I was not at that meeting, and my view of Putin at that stage was, again, that we were doing a lot—that's my recollection—we were doing a lot with Russia after 9/11, and in particular, of course, was setting up all of the facilities and the requirements that were necessary to pursue the military effort in Afghanistan. And of course, those countries in Central Asia, although independent countries, were clearly required to consult with the Russians

about any answers they were giving us to military questions. And so that was really my focus at the time.

BEHRINGER: In Slovenia, one of President Bush's [00:04:00] main outcomes of that meeting was that he told the Russians that the U.S. was going to withdraw from the ABM Treaty.[1] Do you know what the Russian response to that was? And, in general, why did the Bush administration move ahead with withdrawing from the ABM Treaty and embarking on missile defense?

GROSSMAN: The Bush administration concluded that the technology had changed substantially since the ABM Treaty was signed. That given nuclear proliferation, missile proliferation, countries like Iran, who weren't [an issue] in the ABM Treaty, that it was time to move on from that treaty. I think the Bush administration believed that the treaty had outlived its usefulness, that circumstances in technology had changed substantially, and that it was time to do something different.

I think that there was a hope—my recollection is—there was a hope that, in withdrawing from the treaty, that we could do something with the Russians on missile defense. In other words, people recognized that they [the Russians] would be opposed to the withdrawal from the treaty. They would be opposed to and worry about missile defenses in Europe targeted at them. And I think there was a thought in the Bush administration that it would be a very good thing if, with Russia, [and] with some other countries, these [missile

[1] The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

defense] efforts would be joint efforts. And again, Ben can check on that, but I think we talked about that in public.

BEHRINGER: So sticking on missile defense here for just a second, and arms control, what was the general attitude of the Bush administration toward arms control summits in negotiations with Russia, and what did you think personally about their approach? And this is specifically relating to the following year, in 2002, Bush and Putin [00:06:00] signed the Moscow SORT treaty on arms control.

GROSSMAN: I think the attitude was mixed, like it was in a lot of things in that administration. There were lots of different views, as you will know from your interviews. I [worked] for [Secretary of State] Colin Powell, who was a believer in arms control, in arms control negotiations—in both the philosophy of arms control and the requirement to negotiate because it was a channel, because it kept a conversation going, and because fewer nuclear weapons were better than more nuclear weapons.

And so, in our life [at State], our leadership was very clear that arms control was a good thing. Its process was good, and its outcomes [could be] good. I think, among those of us who were senior, I was probably an outlier on the ABM Treaty. I happened to agree that it had outlived its usefulness and we could do something different. Secretary Powell and [Deputy] Secretary Armitage very much disagreed with that. They were the bosses, so I understood my chain of command. But I think, generally, the State Department played its role in being for the process and for arms control outcomes.

BEHRINGER: And then, less than three months after the first meeting between Bush and Putin in Slovenia, 9/11 happens. How did 9/11 change the relationship, and what sorts of steps did Washington take to reciprocate Moscow's support of the war in Afghanistan?

GROSSMAN: I think it changed the relationship for the short term in that President [00:08:00] Putin, or whatever [office he held] at the time, was I think one of the very first people to call President Bush, to speak out about this attack on the United States.

One of my great memories of that day, of 9/11, was being in touch with Sandy [Alexander] Vershbow, who was our ambassador to Moscow at the time. You will recall that we increased the DEFCON after the attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington D.C. One of my jobs was to try to convey to Sandy, to the Russians, that this increase in DEFCON was, of course, not targeted at them, that we were doing that for our own reasons. And we sent him a [written] message, but Sandy then asked me to call him on an open line and say these things, hoping that the Russians would hear us having these conversations. So that's a very clear memory of mine from that day.

I think people were amazed, actually—I'd use that phrase—at how quickly and how openly the Russians were in sympathy with what had happened to us and were prepared to support the next steps. And as you'll recall, those next steps were a very substantial effort throughout Central Asia to get ready to move American forces and then to act in Afghanistan.

When you asked me, what might have been done to [reciprocate in some way], you may think that we made a mistake [by not doing more to reciprocate], and maybe we made it across a wide range of countries. I think the general philosophy was that we had been attacked by terrorists, that those countries and institutions [00:10:00] like NATO and others that supported the United States while we were down—that this wasn't a transactional set of questions. That they did so in their interests, I'm not naive, but that our job wasn't to reward them for this. And if you think later into Iraq, this [really does become] a mistake, when it comes to Tony Blair. So, Tony Blair supports the United States in Iraq, and all he wanted was that we do something for him on defense trade and do something for him on the Middle East, and we didn't do either thing. But my recollection of those months after 9/11 was our view was, we were down. People helped us. They did it for their own reasons, but we weren't in the business of saying, oh, well, here's five things we can do for them. Again, you may look back on that and say, not a good choice, but that's my recollection.

BEHRINGER: And can you talk a little bit more about how specifically Russia offered to help, and what you thought of some of their assistance—like, for instance, the intelligence cooperation that they offered?

GROSSMAN: I think we were glad for most everything that they did offer, but I think you have to step back here. Again, take yourself out of the transactional thought. [What] we were looking for, in the days after 9/11, was essentially a universal recognition of what had happened and a universal [00:12:00]

sympathy for the 3000 people who had died and a universal commitment to fighting terrorism. And so, if I look back, and we think about the UN Security Council resolutions that come almost immediately after 9/11—well, we wanted the Russians to vote for those things, as we wanted the entire Security Council to vote for those things.

Again, here we are 20 years later, and we're much more rational about all this today. I think as you write and think about this that you have to relive a little bit the emotion that was involved, and how important it was emotionally that countries around the world said, we are in solidarity with the United States of America. And this doesn't last very long, but it was extremely important in those first few weeks and months—number one.

Number two, I think—and again, I was probably looking down the soda straw here from your point of view, but I think the biggest thing the Russians did for us in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was clear the way for the Central Asian countries to say "yes" to the basing and to the staging that we asked them to do. You look back, we asked enormous things of those Central Asian countries—very large numbers of American forces, very large numbers of equipment to be stationed there, basing. So, again, my small recollection of this is that the biggest thing besides solidarity and the Security Council that the Russians did for us was to [00:14:00] clear the way for Central Asian states to say yes.

FEINSTEIN: And to ask a quick follow-up about that—on a big-picture level, there was clearly cooperation on the overall strategy in Afghanistan. Did you ever get a

sense in your working with the Russians that there was hesitation or perhaps a lingering distrust [on] oversharing operational intelligence? Many of the other subjects that we've talked to have discussed an unwillingness, perhaps, among some officials on both the American and Russian sides to share information that was needed, and I'm wondering if you ever got a sense that that was getting in the way of lasting cooperation.

GROSSMAN: That's a great question. I don't really know the answer to that, although—and now I'm going to bleed into the time that I was the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, where I worked very closely with the Russians. I think you all have to—again, maybe this is an emotional question as well—they got beat there, and [one reason] they got beaten [was] by [our support of their enemies]. I think that one of their hesitations on the sharing operational lessons [from Afghanistan] was, it was a defeat for Russia. This is, "Oh, gosh, we helped beat you there and now we'd like to put your face in it again. We'd like to have you relive all of that for us." So, I think a lot of hesitation on the Russian side in that regard was, "Thank you very much. We did this. [We were defeated], and could you please not drag us through this mud again?"

BEHRINGER: And moving to Iraq for a little bit—so, in late September 2002, you traveled to Moscow and discussed a UN Security Council resolution on Iraq which would authorize harsher terms for [00:16:00] Iraq's cooperation with weapons inspectors. Can you just, in general, talk about your efforts and the Bush administration's efforts to work with Russia on Iraq, to bring them

onboard, and whether you remember the Russians expressing their opposition to the invasion or anything like that?

GROSSMAN: The only thing I can remember is it must have been part of a larger trip that I was taking. I don't think I went to just Moscow. I think I went—it was one of those eleven-countries-in-nine-days kind of trips. And if you tell me I went to Moscow, I believe you, because I can't remember where else I went on that trip either. But I believe it was one of those two-countries-a-day trips.

And yes, the effort was to try to bring consensus on the Security Council to the UN Security Council resolutions. Again, I go back here to Secretary Powell. So, if you think about Secretary Powell, if you were talking to Secretary Powell today, what would he tell you? That one of the great success stories of the First Gulf War was that there was support from the Security Council. That this was done by Security Council resolution, that the world was behind us. And so, our job, given to us by the president, but certainly by Secretary Powell, was to try to recreate, as best as we could, the same kind of international backing for a possible—September 2002, remember—invasion of Iraq and do everything that we could. So my recollection is that was a trip I took all over Europe to make this case—why we were considering it, what the Iraqis had done, why it was necessary—and seeking peoples' support. [00:18:00]

BEHRINGER: And at this moment—so it's fall 2002—were you still mostly focused on Afghanistan, or had you pivoted to bringing the Europeans onboard with Iraq?

GROSSMAN: That's a great question. I think [the latter]. I think I had pivoted then, in this this set of issues, to working on trying to square up the allies and the

Russians and others so that we could get this properly to the Security Council, get a proper vote in the Security Council, so that if we had to take action in Iraq, it would be authorized by the Security Council, and we would have shown that we had put the maximum effort into this in case it didn't work out that way. Because you'll remember that, from our view, Security Council resolution [was] desirable, but not necessary.

BEHRINGER: And Russia famously ends up joining France and Germany in opposing the invasion. Was it something that the Russians continued to bring up in your discussions with them, both perhaps at the time, but even later when you come back into service in the Obama administration? Was Iraq something that they continued to point to as a problem in the U.S.-Russian relationship?

GROSSMAN: No, not to me, anyway. That'd be a different answer for France, but for Russia, not to me.

BEHRINGER: I wanted to ask about [00:20:00] NATO next, and perhaps let's start with the big question, to what degree was NATO expansion an issue for the Russians? The Bush administration went forward with the "big bang" approach to expanding NATO. What was your view on that and how it affected the Russian perspective?

GROSSMAN: Yeah. I was a big supporter of it. I had, as the assistant secretary of state for European affairs, managed the first of those rounds of NATO expansion, and, as the undersecretary for political affairs, while everybody else was doing Iraq, I worked on these things. And so, I was in favor of it. I was in favor of the "big bang."

At that time—and again, you may think that looking back, this is a misjudgment—but looking back, the messages that we got from the Russians were, this is okay, we're not going to oppose this. And that's especially true on the Baltic states, where I had a particular interest. The Baltic states, as you know, having been forcibly brought into the Soviet Union, for 50 years, the policy of the United States was non-recognition. I thought that was one of the great policies of the United States of America, consistent principles, and the idea that, once these people were free, that they could make a choice to join whatever alliance they want, consistent with OSCE and CSCE,[2] I thought that we had a moral obligation. If they wanted to choose to join NATO, good.

It was my impression—and again, you may look back and say I was wrong about this—it was my impression at the time that the Russians weren't very concerned about this, that they understood that NATO was going to expand. We offered [00:22:00] them the opportunity, theoretically, to be members as well. I think I testified [in Congress] to that. And so, I was pretty calm about it, actually, and not overly wrought over [it]. I think what's happened now since—and there were people at that time—Tom Friedman, George Kennan, who said, "Mistake, mistake"—I recognize that. My answer to them then and now was, I didn't believe we should leave these people in no man's land, in the borderlands, one, and two, they had a right under OSCE and CSCE to choose the alliance they wished to be part of.

[2] The Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

I think what's happened since—and again, just as you write and think about this—I think President Putin now, and a lot of people now, have changed the terms of that debate, and they weren't so bothered about it at the time. Now, it's a great way to beat up the United States and to draw distinctions between allies and to try to draw wedges inside the alliance. And so that's what they've decided to do now, which is, I think they were blind to their position at the time.

So, I may be a dinosaur here, but I can't work up very much guilt over bringing these countries into NATO either while I was in EUR or [while] I was in P.[3]

BEHRINGER: No, that's really interesting. And so how genuine, or how realistic was the offer for Russia to join NATO, and what was their reaction? Did you sketch that out, how that would work?

GROSSMAN: No. We just felt it was important, especially in the first round—I know it's not the first round ever, but in the first round [00:24:00] there, in the Clinton administration, in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic—we felt that it was important, to go back to the [phrase from the George H. W.] Bush administration, which I adopted as my phrase also in EUR . . . if you were going to have a Europe "whole, free, and at peace," you needed to mean that. And the Ural Mountains weren't necessarily the answer to the question of what's whole and what's not.

[3] The Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs and the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, respectively.

And so, I think Secretary [of State Madeleine] Albright and I felt that, if you believed in "whole, free, and at peace," then you had to believe in "whole, free, and at peace." And if you believed in that, then it was at least theoretically possible that the Russians could find a way to be part of NATO. And that's what the NATO-Russia Council was about. Now, I didn't think it was ever going to go any farther than that, but in . . . testimony before the Senate, especially because they had to approve the change in the [NATO] treaty, [we said there was] there was a theoretical question—if they knocked on the door, and they wanted to become NATO members, would you open the door? Well, sure, [if they met NATO's requirements].Did I ever believe they were going to? No, but those are two different questions.

BEHRINGER: I have a quick follow-up, and then I think Ben has another question on NATO. Since you mentioned it, the NATO-Russia Council—what was the innovation there that the Bush administration developed on that, and how effective was it?

GROSSMAN: You have to go back to the Clinton administration. I don't remember what it was called. But Strobe Talbott, who was really the leader on Russia at that time, was looking for a way to get the Russians connected to NATO in some fashion. As you recall, he was extremely effective, up to a point, of getting them [the Russians connected] as we were operating in Bosnia—that's a whole other story. But [00:26:00] in the Bush administration, I think people were—again, especially Secretary Powell and Ambassador Armitage[4]—people were

[4] Then Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage.

looking for a way to keep a conversation going with Russia, and the NATO-Russia Council was, first of all, something that we wanted. We thought the Russians [also] wanted it. And in terms of alliance management, it was very important to a large number of allies, not least Germany, that there be an institutional, systematic way to have the Russians participate in the conversation at NATO. And it's clearly laid out about what was not in the competence of the NATO-Russia Council and what was not vetoable, what was not discussable. But they came pretty far into the conversation. You think about, the Russian ambassador at the time was sitting at the table at those NATO-Russia Council meetings with NATO.

FEINSTEIN: Thank you for that. And if the Russians, as you said, weren't voicing an outright opposition to the very idea of NATO expansion, did the Russians ever voice opposition to what the specifics of that expansion would entail as in more troops being deployed to bases in Eastern Europe and a feeling of Russia perhaps being surrounded, or did those discussions not come to the table as those events were transpiring in 2003, 2004 and onward?

GROSSMAN: As I think back on it, you have this whole conversation of, what did Baker[5] promise or not promise? Again, you will come to your own conclusion. I would argue to you, we were not reckless at this. We didn't bring [00:28:00] the three Baltic states into the alliance—at that time. Times are different today—so again, you have to make sure, as you think about this and write about this, that you remember what the difference is between today and the time. We didn't

[5] James A. Baker III, the secretary of state during the George H. W. Bush administration.

push American troops forward, NATO troops forward, into the new members at that time. I think we were rational, and we were careful, and we were not provocative in terms of deployments and those things.

Now, did we look to make those countries integrated into the alliance system? Absolutely. Were there sales—Poland, for example, aircraft? Yes. Did we try to find ways to exercise together? Of course. Because they're not half NATO members, they're NATO members. And don't forget, from the perspective of the United States of America, we've now given them the most solemn guarantee any country can give another, which is to come to their defense. That's what Article V is all about. So, I thought we were quite prudent in the way we managed their integration into the alliance in the immediate aftermath of their becoming NATO members.

Now today, you have a different question, right? The Russians have annexed Crimea. They've invaded Eastern Ukraine. . . . And so now you have the deployments that move forward and are more forward than I would have ever imagined. But those are not things that NATO initiated. Those were responses to Russian activity. Now, you could say to me, "Oh, well, those were all responses to NATO expansion." [00:30:00] I don't believe that.

BEHRINGER: And also, during this time, 2003-2004, the color revolutions break out in Georgia and Ukraine. What was the Bush administration's role in supporting the revolutions both before and after they happened? And how do you think the Russian reaction to the revolutions affected the U.S.-Russian relationship?

GROSSMAN: I can answer this in three ways, all three probably not very helpful to you. Number one, again, as you think about this time, there was, I think, a lot of Ukraine fatigue. People had invested an enormous amount of time and energy in Ukraine. The Ukrainians, of course, were early and very courageous adopters of getting rid of their nuclear weapons. A big success to the United States and to the Clinton administration. But I'll tell you, since I was our equivalent of the political director when I was the under secretary, I would go sit in Germany, and people would say, "So what are we going to do in terms of policy toward Ukraine?" And nothing seemed to have worked. Nothing seemed to stick in Ukraine. So, there was a lot of mystery about Ukraine and fatigue about Ukraine. So, I can remember the Orange Revolution as a matter of excitement, but I don't really remember what it was we did in particular because people couldn't quite figure out what to do with Ukraine that would be positive in the long term.

The Rose Revolution, I think, really [00:32:00] caught people's attention, mostly again because people have always felt that Georgia was a special place, and a lot of that comes from Shevardnadze,[6] from him having been in Moscow, and then moves to Georgia to be a senior person in his country. And there was a lot of affection for Shevardnadze through Secretary Baker on. And I think I do remember visiting Georgia—whether it was before or after the revolution, I can't remember. I was in a small little aircraft. I think I went to Turkey, and

[6] Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister and then president of Georgia.

then I went over to Georgia. I had lunch or dinner with Shevardnadze. So a lot of attention, emotional attention got paid to Georgia.

The Russians viewed, obviously, the Rose Revolution in the most negative terms because they acted to try and see it defeated and, if I'm right, still have forces there that divide Georgia as a state. So, [it's] pretty clear how they felt about it.

BEHRINGER: That's really interesting. And I have a question about Colin Powell visiting Tbilisi in January 2004, but I think what I want to ask is more general, which is, do you remember how Secretary Powell—when he met with the Russians, how did his meetings with the Russians go? And then, if you could compare his approach to the Russian issue to Condoleezza Rice's.[7]

GROSSMAN: I can't answer the second question. [00:34:00] Secretary Rice asked me to stay a couple, three months until Ambassador Burns[8] was on his way, until I needed to get into the retirement course. So, I don't know the answer to that question. And she, of course, herself—she's a Russian expert and studied Russia, so she wasn't asking me for much advice, believe me, on that question. I think you'd have to ask that question to Ambassador Burns. I just don't know.

Secretary Powell—as I've said throughout, he believed in diplomacy and he believed in keeping conversations going, and he believed in talking to people. And I think he worked really hard—and I guess it was mostly [with] Igor Ivanov, was his counterpart during that time. He was assiduous and worked hard at that relationship—not out of friendship particularly, but

[7] Condoleezza Rice was national security advisor and then Powell's successor as secretary of state.
[8] R. Nicholas Burns, Grossman's successor as under secretary of state for political affairs.

because he was the secretary of state of the United States of America, and the Russian foreign minister was a really important person in the world. I think Powell was a meticulous, an assiduous maker of the effort to keep conversations going, and to consult. Powell really believed in the word "consultation," and he understood the difference between consultation and letting somebody else tell you what to do. But he believed in consultation. So, he would often, at the end of the day—we had a wrap up every day, and he'd been on the phone to four or five foreign ministers. He is that kind of a person.[9]

BEHRINGER: Ben, did you have [00:36:00] anything else you wanted to follow up with from the first Bush term here? Or if you want to jump in with the Turkey elaboration, we can do that now, too.

FEINSTEIN: For sure. I can do either. So, from what I can tell, according to a May 2001 press statement that you, Ambassador Grossman, made on Turkey, it appeared to be a European trip to gather conceptual support for the idea of withdrawing from the anti-ballistic missile defense treaty and placing interceptors somewhere in Europe. The details weren't concrete at that time, given how early it was. And I think that our original intent in the question was, given your past experience as ambassador to Turkey and your familiarity with the region, if Turkey played any special role in the U.S.-Russia relationship at that time that's of note or, more broadly, how the United States negotiated and consulted with European allies as it was getting ready to abandon the ABM treaty?

[9] Former Secretary of State Powell passed away on 18 October 2021, less than two weeks after this interview was recorded.

GROSSMAN: Yeah, thank you. That does help with some recollection, too. So, the specific answer to your first question—what role was Turkey playing in U.S.-Russia relations? Not very much, to my recollection. If you told me I went to Turkey, it was to talk about the interceptors and where they might be. As you know, at Incirlik [Air Base], there had been [radars] there [during the first Gulf War], which were [directed toward] Iran. So, in terms of the relationship with Russia, probably not much.

My recollection now of that trip, thank you, is that [00:38:00] the effort was to explain how the technology had moved along, what the new threats were, how you had to adapt to them, what a new missile defense regime would look like. And the other thing that you allow me to remember was that we also—and I think I made this proposition in Russia; I'm really sure that I did—there was an industrial cooperation piece of it as well. I went to Russia, and I'm sure I talked to them about the joint research and joint production of missile defense equipment to show really that this was about Iran and about threats from the Middle East and that we were prepared to work with the Russians on joint industrial cooperation in these questions. I believe you will find that near that same time, Rich Armitage went to India and made the same offer to work with the Indians on a joint effort to produce actual equipment to carry out this redeployment or reconceptualization of missile defenses. Does that do a little better in answering the question?

FEINSTEIN: Yes, sir. Absolutely. And just out of pure curiosity, why was India chosen as a potential second partner in the manufacturing of these systems and not a country like China, which also voiced strong opposition to the withdrawal?

GROSSMAN: You might check that. I think Rich may have also gone to Beijing. The reason India was so interesting was because India was—well, two reasons. One is, following President Clinton and certainly President Bush, [00:40:00] and you see it moving forward now, there was a recognition of the growth of the importance of power in India. If you think about their technological capacity, it's huge. Indian scientists, Indian computer people, the Indian defense industry. And so, we thought to ourselves, aha, if we're going to pursue a policy that tries to bring India and the United States closer together, here's a great way to do that. Here's a great way to add to that agenda.

BEHRINGER: And I have—sorry, Ben, did you have anything else?

FEINSTEIN: No, you're good. Go ahead.

BEHRINGER: I have a couple of follow-ups while we're on missile defense, if we could just stay there and talk about how things developed a little bit later. Given some of these consultations—and in 2007 Secretaries Gates and Rice became pretty involved in trying to negotiate some type of cooperation, and the Russians offer radar in, I believe, Azerbaijan—why do you think that cooperation over missile defense ultimately didn't happen?

GROSSMAN: Because I don't think the Russians ever trusted us that these things wouldn't be turned on them, and, to Ben's point, exactly the same with China. And I think the Chinese even feel it more acutely because they had, at that

time, less capacity. But I think if you put yourself in a Russian general's uniform, and now you sit, and you think, "Yeah, okay, these people come and talk, talk, talk to us. And there's all these suddenly new missile defense [00:42:00] installations all over the . . . place. And what's it take to move the missile over here from over there?" So, I don't think the Russians ever trusted that we wouldn't find a way to build into the capacity some way to weaken them. And, you know, they're believers in mutually assured destruction. They believe in this. And so, I don't think they ever trusted that we wouldn't find some way to turn this to our advantage if we needed to.

BEHRINGER: And do you remember what the Europeans' view of missile defense in general, of the idea of the interceptors and radar in Poland and the Czech Republic—how did the Europeans view that, but also how did they view bringing the Russians on board? Was that an important priority for, say, the Germans, or—?

GROSSMAN: Sure. So, bringing the Russians on board is always an important priority for Europeans. They live there. They share that geography. So, it's always important. And that's one of the reasons that we tried so hard to do so. And that's, in alliance management—not just the NATO alliance, but of individual allies—these are important things. Again, if you looked at my travel schedule for the four years I was the undersecretary of state for political affairs, on missile defense, on Iraq, on changing our deployment structures in Germany, I must have done these kinds of 11-countries-in-nine-day trips maybe once or twice a year. Because this is the important thing. And you add to that the

Middle East. I took a trip all through the Middle East, and where was the place I went afterwards? [00:44:00] I went to NATO, and I explained what we were doing in terms of that effort as well.

So, I grew up in this system—I served at NATO [as a young officer] and was the assistant secretary for European affairs. And so for me, it was a natural thing to stop in Brussels on the way in, stop in Brussels on the way out. Because the more the Europeans understand what it is that you're doing, the better, for one. Two—again, I go back to the emotion of this, if you'd allow me—NATO takes its first decision to invoke Article V on the 12th of [September].[10] This was a really important thing to me. . . . That's why, when I speak today about Afghanistan, I always remind people of the casualties suffered by people like Canada and Poland and Denmark and Norway because I think these are important things to remember.

BEHRINGER: Ben, I think you had a follow-up question to something else?

FEINSTEIN: Yes, sir. Jumping back to more of the first term, given that a lot of your focus was the developments in Iraq—a narrative that we've heard expressed from other subjects was as the Iraq War intensifies and goes from what we thought would be a quick invasion and brief rebuilding period to a prolonged occupation, was there ever a sense that you got that the conflict there was taking focus away from Russia, perhaps? Whereas, even if our individual actions towards Russia weren't meant in bad spirit and weren't necessarily

[10] Here Ambassador Grossman accidentally says "November." NATO began discussing invoking Article V on 12 September, the day after the 9/11 attacks, but did not formally invoke it until 4 October.

taken as that, was there perhaps a lack of focus on the strategic alliance at any level, or do you feel that we were able to balance the issue fairly well?

GROSSMAN: Well, my answer to your question is to quote from Colin Powell. Why? "Iraq sucked [00:46:00] all the air out of the room." Period. And so, you can ask that question about any of our main foreign policy paths—Russia, China. When I think about my time there—so you're right to say I spent a lot of time on Iraq, but mostly what I did was I tried to find those things that were really important that nobody else was paying attention to. So, I [worked on] Plan Colombia, a huge effort by the United States of America to support the Colombians. Billions of dollars, huge effort. And [people at my level in the interagency were] left basically on [our own to manage this]. . . . Because everyone was doing Iraq. We talked about it before—basically, I [helped manage] the second round of NATO expansion. So yes, the president said, "Yes, yes, go do that," but, you know, they were just interested in my accomplishing this task because they were doing Iraq. And I can only imagine what life must've been like if you were in African Affairs or Southeast Asian Affairs. So, don't forget that what Powell said was, among the reasons he opposed the invasion was that it would suck the air out of every other thing. And that's just what it did.

FEINSTEIN: And in your personal experience as undersecretary, did you find parts of that lack of focus on some of your initiatives liberating in a sense of giving you more room of action, or did you find it frustrating in a sense of depriving you of some of the capital that you needed to move forward?

GROSSMAN: I would say 90 percent, I was in the former category. They said to me, "Marc, [00:48:00] Columbia is really important. Plan Colombia is really important. . . . Go do this." And I will say on Plan Colombia, the two or three times I needed President Bush to do something on Plan Colombia, he did it. Same with Colin Powell. So again, I want to be clear here, I wasn't out freelancing, but for big, important things, I found it quite liberating, yes. But I understand the chain of command, and again, when I needed help, I got it.

BEHRINGER: I know that you mentioned that you passed the baton, but I wanted to ask one specific question about things that happened in the second term, which was the conversations over extending the Membership Action Plans [MAP] to Ukraine and Georgia and the decision at the 2008 summit in Bucharest not to extend them the MAP, but to say that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO. We've heard differing opinions about the effects of that decision. Do you remember what you thought at the time, and do you think that the failure to extend MAP to Georgia and Ukraine left them vulnerable to attack? Or do you take the opposite view that it was a provocation for the Russians to get started on that?

GROSSMAN: My view at the time was, I would have gone forward with the MAP. I would not have connected it to any future decision about whether they would or wouldn't become members. That, to me, was an error. I don't have all the information, but from an outsider, [00:50:00] I thought to myself, "Wait a minute. That's a promise—what are they saying? That's a check you can't cash." Because there's a lot to be done, including ratification by the Senate. And it

seemed to me by that time that, at least in the American public, in general, Ukraine and Georgia were not going to become members of the alliance. And so to say that to them was untrue and unfair. But I would have given them a MAP, a Membership Action Plan. A lot of countries waited a long time. If that would have been provocative to the Russians, so be it. But I think what was provocative was to say, and, oh, by the way, this is going to end up in membership. And I think that was a mistake.

I also think that, by 2007, Putin had already started to reframe this narrative: "Oh, it's really bad, oh, NATO expansion terrible, surrounds us," because, don't forget that—again, I'm not a Russia expert here, and I'm about to prove it—but it seems to me that, for the first part of Putin's reign, his deal, his social contract with the Russian people was, I'll get rich, you'll get rich, and it'll all be great. And then oil prices go down, and they got a lot of problems, and the economy falters. So Putin needs a new social contract, and his new social contract is, I'll keep getting rich, but we're back on the world stage, and you'll really like that. And Russians clearly do like that. In every public opinion poll you see in Russia, Russians like having a voice in the world. Russians like being seen as a great power. They like that, as Russians. And so I think—this is my view—that Putin pivoted, and he said, [00:52:00] "Oh, this economy thing isn't going as well as it should. I'm not making everybody rich anymore. So I have to change the narrative." And the new narrative is, we're back on the world stage. And that's what the Munich speech was about. And that's what this whole re-narrative of, "Oh, NATO expansion, pointed at us, terrible, terrible"—Crimea,

Ukraine, their whole behavior—Syria. I think it's all of a piece, [but] the Russian people say, he's our guy.

BEHRINGER: And just to follow up on that—so do you think that Putin himself changed over the course of his first two terms, or since his first two terms, or was it more of the case of the Bush administration, or just Americans in general, misjudged him, his intentions when he came to office, as someone they could work with and possibly reform some of the corruption or whatever in the Russian system? In other words, did he change, or was he always this guy?

GROSSMAN: That's a great question. I have to say, probably because he was a KGB person, he was always that person. I have no idea. I don't know about the corruption. Again, what are the facts? Who knows? But I bet he's taken a lot of money. Was he thinking about taking a lot of money when he was at the KGB office in East Germany? . . . But it seems to me that, if you're at the top of the Russian system, the opportunity is clearly open to you, so he took advantage of it. So, I don't know.

And the other thing is, again, I think it's—maybe I have this bias: so, I was a diplomat. [00:54:00] With certain clear exceptions, I think it's okay to start your conversation or relationship with the thought that you can have some conversation with this person, that you can do some business with this person. I think that's all right. And again, I don't say that a hundred percent of the time. Clearly, there are people you wouldn't want to, as the British say, "have a barge pole near." But for Bush and Putin, if you're [President] Bush . . . I think it's all right if you sit down for the first time and say, "I'm going to let

him prove to me that we can't do this. And my assumption is, at least in the beginning, we can. And if it turns out not that way, so be it."

BEHRINGER: And one of the narratives that [has] come out of the Bush administration or Bush's relationship with Putin is, despite this good rapport that the two leaders had together, the relationship ended up in a bad place at the end. But I was wondering if you could comment on what is it like when the two leaders have a good relationship and prioritize relations with each other, as someone who works in the State Department and or as a diplomat—what kind of effect does the good relationship at the top have on your ability to get things done?

GROSSMAN: I think, generally, it's a positive. When I was the ambassador to Turkey . . . George Bush 41 had a fantastic relationship with Turgut Özal, who was both prime minister and president during the time I served [00:56:00] in Turkey, both [as] the DCM[11] and the ambassador. Was it helpful that Bush 41 had a great relationship with Turgut Özal? Absolutely. A hundred percent, all the time. So, in my case, generally, it was great. Perhaps, though, if you were the ambassador to Turkey while [Donald] Trump was president, and he had this great relationship with [Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan and was rowing contrary to American policy, maybe then it's not so great. So, I'm going to give you the great diplomatic answer. It depends. It depends on who's doing what and what the interests of the two countries are.

[11] The deputy chief of mission

One of the things I think that's interesting that I really learned—and you'll wonder why it took me so long—but that I really learned when I was negotiating with the Taliban, is there's a huge difference between empathy and sympathy, right? That you have to empathize with the person that you're sitting across from, but you don't necessarily have to be sympathetic to them because that's a matter of national interest. But there is some utility to being empathetic, to have some empathy and to say, "Well if I was in this guy's shoes, what would my life be like?" or "If I was in her shoes, what's it like when she goes back to report to her bosses?" And I think that's okay. It's perfectly fine. So I think for leaders to have good relationships is important when that helps you—and mostly it does—move the policy of the United States of America forward.

BEHRINGER: That's a great point on empathy. I tell my students that about doing history as well—the difference between empathy and sympathy there. I have one more question, but I wanted to see if Ben has anything else he wanted to ask.

FEINSTEIN: Yes, I have two. [00:58:00] So I think first of all, talking about the relationship at the top and how things below that didn't seem to quite click for a variety of reasons, and then on the note of national interest and acknowledging the reality that the United States at this time [has] a lot of different balls in a lot of different courts to deal with, do you think there realistically was anything we could have done terribly differently through this era to improve the relationship? Or do you think that this was just the natural

development of it? And if this is how it was, this is how it is, if that makes sense.

GROSSMAN: Yeah. Remind me of your first question?

FEINSTEIN: I think it was all one question, just in the sense of, if the relationship at the top was as good as it was, but then for a variety of reasons, things didn't click, what realistically could have been different, or was this just the momentum of the times?

GROSSMAN: So I'll divide that into two because there's maybe an interesting answer to the first part. So don't forget here, as you think about this and write about this and study this, that the Bush administration 43, at least in the first four years, there was all-out [bureaucratic] war below the president of the United States between the NSC, the State Department, the Defense Department, and the vice president's office.

And so, one of the answers to your question is that President Bush and President Putin had this relationship—I was never part of it—but let's say, as you describe it, it was good, and they could talk to each other. Terrific. But when President Bush turned around and said to his national security team, "Okay, I just had this conversation with Putin, and here's what we're going to do," [01:00:00] it started another one of these wars. . . . [H]e couldn't ever count on his national security team to do what he wanted.

And so, I think in this case, responsibility belongs not to President Bush and President Putin. They were doing what they thought was right. It belongs to the [disciplined] execution that was lacking. . . . And again, as you think

about this and write about this, don't forget that below decks, there's hand-to-hand combat going on, on everything.

In terms of what we could have done differently, I think probably, in the end, Powell was right and I was wrong about the ABM Treaty. There was probably some other way to do that. And also again, I think we—I don't believe it's as bad as people now paint it, but there's no question that, after 9/11, it was with-us-against-us, and the world doesn't work that way. And it took us—and David Ignatius, the great *Washington Post* columnist, he has this phrase, which I think is right, that 9/11 . . . completely "pushed everybody's gyroscope over." And I feel this. I feel that's true. And it took some time for the gyroscopes to come back [01:02:00] to what you might or might not consider to be the center. And so, we did do for-us-against-us, and we do have this gyroscope pushed over, and we did invade Iraq. And so, it didn't end up so great, both because Russia was changing and because we had been attacked. And I just think, as you consider these questions, it's important to—again, a little of the empathy question and sympathy question. You don't have to have sympathy with us at that time, but I think there's some empathy to be given to 3000 dead, an attack on the Pentagon, and the shock to the system that it was.

I grew up—in my Foreign Service career, there'd been attacks on embassies. . . . People had been killed in terrorist attacks. So maybe I was a little more ready for this—not 3000 people, but that terrorists are bad, and they kill people. But the vast majority of people who served in government, the vast majority of Americans, had never been exposed to this before. We'd had

Nairobi, we'd had Beirut, we'd had murders and killings, but I think for the country, this was a big, enormous shock. And, as Ignatius says, people's gyroscope took some time to get back up, back to center.

FEINSTEIN: That's extremely interesting, and I certainly see your points about empathy and perhaps it was an issue of timing as much as it was different circumstances. And I think, for my second follow-up, I'd like to probe your mind a little bit about Russia's human rights situation, if you ever ran into that, given that in '03 and especially '04, after the [01:04:00] Beslan school siege—did Russia's human rights record and the deteriorating situation of rights there ever affect the relationship in a substantial way? Or was it something that the diplomatic apparatus and the leaders were able to push down somewhat?

GROSSMAN: I think it became an important point of conversation, as your question noted, whenever they were together in Bratislava. The United States of America believes in human rights as a part of our foreign policy. And it was not just the job, but the obligation of people to talk about these things. And we talked about them in Russia, and we talked about them in Turkey, and we talked about them all around the world. People don't have to like it, but that's part of being an American representative abroad and being an American representative, which is that that's part of the requirement. And I don't mean requirement in some disparaging way. I think it's one of the reasons that makes America different is that this is important to us.

If you said to me, "Did human rights become the driving factor of the relationship between the United States and Russia?" No. But was it a bigger

part of the conversation in the second Bush administration, Bush 43 administration, than in the first? I would imagine so. And again, as you think about this, don't forget here the Congress. Don't forget the need of the administration to pay attention to what the Congress is thinking. On human rights, generally, Congress is, I think, historically—you can see it today—the Congress is farther out on that question. [01:06:00]

So again, just one of those things that, if you try to put yourself in the mind of those of us who had responsibility, the inputs to that responsibility very much include public opinion, and public opinion as expressed through the Congress and the congressional committees. We always tell young Foreign Service officers, the Congress is not *another* branch of government. It's an *equal* branch of government, and they have their say, and their say is really important.

FEINSTEIN: Absolutely. Thank you so much. And I think that Paul had another question, if you're ready for that.

BEHRINGER: Yeah. I think we've gotten through all the questions we wanted to get through, but since we've got you here, if you have some time, and just one question on your role when you came back into government with Afghanistan—what was your role? And then, if it had anything to do with Russia, if you can comment on how Afghanistan, the United States and Russia—how that triangular relationship changed between when you were in office in the Bush administration and when you came back?

GROSSMAN: Well, on Afghanistan in particular, I can't remember enough really to give you much guidance beyond what I did about how it was in Bush 43. I know a lot about it, how it was in 2011, 2012. As you recall, Ambassador [Richard Holbrooke had been named the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He did two amazing things while he was still alive—many amazing things while he was still alive in that job, but two [01:08:00] that really carried over—three.

One is, he really organized the international community to support Afghanistan, and he worked really hard at this and developed what was called the Contact Group, which I think by the time I inherited it, it was 50-some countries—the majority of whom were Muslim countries, interestingly—to be a support effort for Afghanistan, and it was a great accomplishment. And secondly, he went around, and he said, "Okay, so the United States of America has nominated a special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and you should too," to all kinds of countries. And the Russians did. And the Russians nominated Ambassador [Zamir] Kabulov, who was long experience in Afghanistan. And he's still their special representative. Think of that. Think of how the United States, you know, we've had like 17, he's still the Russian s-rep.[12] And so, when Dick [Holbrooke] died, and I inherited this job, one of the great inheritances was this contact group and the group of s-reps, other s-reps.

I made it my job in my early point to reach out to Ambassador Kabulov. We talked a lot. Whenever there were these meetings internationally, we

[12] Special representative

always would sit down together and make sure we would try to go down the same path because, I wasn't so interested in what he could do for me today, but I was pretty sure that if we ever succeeded in getting the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan to negotiate, which was my other job, that the role of Russia in closing that deal and then guaranteeing that deal and supporting that deal were it ever to come about would be crucial. [01:10:00] And that Kabulov knew a lot about Afghans, Central Asians—he was a real expert. So, I tried to take as much advice from him as I could, learn as much as I could, keep him as on-side as best I could because they [the Russians] were going to be crucial to the endgame in Afghanistan were [we] able to produce it.

I went to Moscow a number of times during that period. We were friendly as much as we could be. He was very gracious, hospitable to me. I think he probably thought we were naive in trying to negotiate with the Taliban the way we were, but that's the way we were doing it. And I appreciated him. Let's just leave it there. He gave us space. He gave us space to try to pursue our objective, so I appreciated him. I think I must've been in Moscow two times, maybe three, during those two years. And as I say, in every one of these international meetings, he and I sat down together. If we didn't agree all the time, we at least tried to make sure we understood where each of us was coming from.

[END OF AUDIO/VIDEO FILE]