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President Bush Meets with President Putin of Russian Federation

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PRESIDENT BUSH: I wanted to congratulate the President for being the only person that caught a fish. A fine catch. Secondly, I welcome you to my family home.

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And we had a good, casual discussion on a variety of issues. You know, through the course of our relationship there have been times when we've agreed on issues and there's been times when we haven't agreed on issues. But one thing I've found about Vladimir Putin is that he is consistent, transparent, honest and is an easy man to discuss our opportunities and problems with.

We talked about nuclear security and made great strides in setting a foundation for future relations between the United States and Russia in dealing with the nuclear security issues. We talked about our bilateral relations, we talked about the relations with countries like Iran and North Korea. We had a very long, strategic dialogue that I found to be important, necessary and productive.

And so I welcome you, Vladimir. Thanks for coming.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: (As translated.) I would like to congratulate us with the good work done.

First of all, I would like to thank the hosts for their invitation. And President Bush for this invitation. Indeed, we had a very nice fishing party this morning. We caught one fish, but that was a team effort, and we let it go to the captain -- (laughter) --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Very thoughtful of you. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT PUTIN: -- the 42nd President of the United States. (Laughter.)

As for the negotiations, negotiations were very substantial. We discussed basically the entire gamut of both bilateral issues and international issues. George listed practically all issues that we've touched upon. And I was pleased to note that we are seeking the points of coincidence in our positions and very frequently we do find them. And I'm very grateful to the Bush family for this very warm, homey atmosphere around this meeting, and we appreciate it



very much.

I do believe that we have to learn something from the older generation. And the attitude shown both to me and to the members of my delegation was way beyond the official and protocol needs. And, additionally, we had an opportunity to have a look at this part of the United States, a fantastic place. We've seen the warmth and the very positive attitude of the people around here and use this opportunity to say to them that we appreciate their warmth and we are grateful for their very warm reception of us.

Mind you, the fish that we caught, we've let it free. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT BUSH: A couple of questions. Tony, you going to call on them? Hold on, please. Please. Tony.

Deb, yes.

Q Mr. President, I have a question for either one, or both of you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Either one of us, okay -- or both of us.

Q Both of you. For you, sir, were you successful in getting President Putin's support for tough sanctions, like cargo inspections against Iran?

PRESIDENT BUSH: We spent a lot of time talking about the Iranian issue, and we both agree -- excuse me, go ahead. We spent a lot of time talking about the Iranian issue. I am concerned about the Iranians' attempt to develop the technologies, know-how to develop a nuclear weapon. The President shares that -- I'm a little hesitant to put words in his mouth, but I think he shares that same concern. After all, this is an issue we've been talking about for about six years.

And I have come to the conclusion that when Russia and America speaks with, you know, along the same lines, it tends to have an effect. And, therefore, I appreciate very much the Russian attitude in the United Nations. I have been counting on the Russian's support to send a clear message to the Iranians, and that support and that message is a strong message, and, hopefully, we'll be able to convince the regime that we have no problems with the people in Iran, but we do have a problem with a regime that is in defiance of international norm. And so we discussed a variety of ways to continue sending a joint message.

And, by the way, one other issue that I didn't mention in my opening my comments that I think you'll find interesting is that President Putin proposed a regional approach to missile defense; that we ought to work together bilaterally, as well as work through the Russia-NATO Council. And I'm in strong agreement with that concept.

That's all I've got to say, Deb. Have you got something else?

Q Well, I still would like to know --



PRESIDENT BUSH: You just got wedged out, sorry.

Q I still would like to know if you're far apart on how tough the sanctions should be.

PRESIDENT BUSH: We're close on recognizing that we've got to work together to send a common message.

Q Okay.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: So far, we have managed to work within the framework of the Security Council, and I think we will continue to be successful on this front. Recently, we've seen some signals coming from Iran with regard to interaction, cooperation with the IAEA. Mr. Solana also brings us some positive data and information. I think all of this would contribute to further, substantial intercourse on this issue.

Q -- Mr. Putin made a proposal for anti-ballistic missile cooperation between Russia and the United States. And you called it "interesting." In which direction your cooperation? And what's wrong with European countries using this calculation? And if it is no breakthrough in the foreseeable future, maybe it's a time to make a (inaudible)? Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thanks. It's more than an interesting idea, it's an idea that we're following up on through consultative meetings, which we've started. And as I told you, the President made a very -- I thought a very constructive and bold, strategic move, and that is why don't we broaden the dialogue and include Europe, through NATO and the Russia-NATO Council -- I don't know if want to expand on that, or not.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: Oh, I have to answer that, too? As President Bush has already said, we do support the idea of the continued consultations on this score. At the same time, we do believe that the number of parties to this consultation could be expanded through the European countries who are interested in resolving the issue. And the idea is to achieve this through the forum of the Russia-NATO Council.

But our proposal is not limited to this only. We propose establishing an information exchange center in Moscow. We've agreed on that a few years back; it's time now to put this decision into practice. This is not yet all. A similar center could be established in one of the European capitals, in particular, in Brussels, for example. This could have been a single system that would work on line.

In this case, there would be no need to place any more facilities in Europe -- I mean, these facilities in Czech Republic and the missile base in Poland. And if need be, we are prepared to involve in this work, not only the Gabala radar, which we rent from the Azerbaijanis -- if necessary, we are prepared to modernize it. And if that is not enough, we would be prepared to engage in this system also a newly built radar, early warning system in the south of Russia.

Such cooperation I believe would result in raising to an entirely new level the quality of cooperation between Russia and the United States. And for all practical purposes, this would lead to a gradual development of strategic partnership in the area of security.

As for the Europeans, well, it's their choice; each and every country will have to decide whether it wants to be part of the system or not. But it would be clear to even a layman, if a country doesn't decide in a strategic partnership, this choice would determine the position of any country both in economic terms and on the political arena in the final analysis, in the long term.

Therefore, I'm confident that there will be interstate partners or parties in Europe.

Q Mr. President, six years ago, you seemed to have formed a bond with President Putin, when you said you had gotten a sense of his soul. Do you still feel that you trust him? And how troubled are you by the political freedoms -- the state of political freedoms in Russia?

And President Putin, do you appreciate advice from Washington about democracy in Russia?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Here's the thing when you're dealing with a world leader, you wonder whether or not he's telling the truth or not. I've never had to worry about that with Vladimir Putin. Sometimes he says things I don't want to hear, but I know he's always telling me the truth. And you don't have to guess about his opinions, which makes it a lot easier to do -- to find common ground.

And so you ask, do I trust I him? Yes, I trust him. Do I like everything he says? No. And I suspect he doesn't like everything I say. But we're able to say it in a way that shows mutual respect.

Take missile defense. He just laid out a vision. I think it's very sincere. I think it's innovative. I think it's strategic. But as I told Vladimir, I think that the Czech Republic and Poland need to be an integral part of the system. And the only way I know how to find common ground on complicated issues is to share my thoughts, and that's what he does with me. And so I've had a very constructive relationship.

Obviously, you know -- I'll let him talk about his view of democracy, but I will tell you, at the G8 in St. Petersburg, he did a very interesting thing. You might remember the dinner when you said, anybody who has got any doubts about democracy, ask me questions. And I remember part of my discussions with him about whether or not the -- you know, how -- the relations between the government and the press, you'll be amazed to hear. He strongly defends his views, and you can listen to him yourself, right now. But ours is a relationship where I feel very comfortable bringing up and asking him why he's made decisions he's made.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: Speaking of common democratic values, we are guided by the idea and principle that these are important both for you and for us. In the last 15 years, Russia has undergone a very serious transformation. It has to do with changes in the political system and in the economic system, as well.

Of course, it has considerable social repercussions and consequences. All of these taken together has determined the way our transition and our society has been developing and forming. Even in the, shall we say, sustainable democracies, mature democracies, we see basically the same problems, the same issue that they have to deal with. It has to do with the relationship with the media; it has to do with human rights and the right for private life being beyond the control of the government and the state. If you remember how Larry King tortured the former CIA Director, you would also understand that there are some other problems and issues, as well, in this world. (Laughter.) And I cannot even repeat all the things that were said then.

We have common problems. And we are prepared to listen to each other. The only thing that we would never, never accept is these tools -- this leverage being used to interfere into our domestic affairs to make us do things the way we would do not see fit. In our dialogue, in our contacts with President Bush, we always discuss these things and, as he says, it's frankly and straightly, and we are always constantly engaged in the dialogue geared to making things better in Russia and elsewhere.

I do not always agree with him, but we never engage in paternalism. We do not assume mentors' tone. We always talk as friends.

Q Mr. President, how do you evaluate the relations between Russia and the U.S. right now? Are they in crisis or not? And what is the legacy you are planning to leave to your successor? Also, since for you both this is your final year in office --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Not mine. I've got more than a year. Anyway, nice try. (Laughter.)

Q Since 2008, election year for both of you, do you believe that -- are you going to meet after you are not Presidents any more, or is this your final meeting?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: I do believe that our relationship developed normally, not bad, and they are being strengthened every time we meet. And the relationship between Russia and the United States is entirely different than that between the United States and the Soviet Union. And we are not -- we do not look at each other through the sights of our weapons systems. And in this, I fully agree with my colleague, President Bush.

As for the future, as I already mentioned, we are now discussing a possibility of raising our relations to an entirely new level that would involve a very private and very, shall we say, sensitive dialogue on all issues related to the international security, including, of course, the missile defense issue.

If this is to happen, I would like to draw your attention to this. The relations between our two countries would be raised to an entirely new level. Gradually, our relations would become those of a strategic partnership nature. It would mean raising the level of our -- and improving the level of our interaction in the area of international security, thus leading to improved political interaction and cooperation with a final effect being, of course, evident in our economic relations and situation.

Well, basically, we may state that the deck has been dealt, and we are here to play. And I would very much hope that we are playing one and the same game.

PRESIDENT BUSH: I think we'll see each other in Australia. Secondly, I know we'll be talking on the phone, because there's a lot of issues that we are working together on, which is part of the legacy of this relationship, and that is that it's in the U.S. interest to keep close relations with Russia; and that when it comes to confronting real threats, such as nuclear proliferation or the threat of radicalism and extremism, Russia is a good, solid partner.

Russia has made some amazing progress in a very quick period of time. One of the first conversations I had with Vladimir Putin was about Soviet-era debt. This is a country with no debt. It's got solid reserves. It's a significant international player. It's got a growing middle class. For those old Russian hands who remember what it was like, there's an amazing transformation taking place. Is it perfect from the eyes of Americans? Not necessarily. Is the change real? Absolutely. And it's in our interests -- in the U.S. interests to have good, solid relations with Russia. And that's what Vladimir and I have worked hard to achieve.

And we're going to go continue those relations with a lunch. So thanks for coming.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: Of course we will continue our relations in the future. Today's fishing party demonstrated that we have a very similar -- we share the same passion -- that is, passion.

Q Is Cheney a member of the executive branch?

PRESIDENT BUSH: I didn't hear you.

END 1:00 P.M. EDT

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