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## President Welcomes Russian President Putin to the White House

The East Room

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VIDEO Multimedia

President's Remarks

[view](#)

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you all. Please be seated. I'm pleased to welcome my friend, Vladimir Putin, back to the White House. We just had a constructive meeting and a candid conversation. I told the President how much I enjoyed visiting Russia earlier this year, and how much I'm looking forward to going back to Russia for the G8.



I also thanked President Putin -- Vladimir -- for Russia's offers of assistance in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It meant a lot to know that you cared enough to send critical supplies, and our country really appreciates it. People are going through some tough times down there, and I think it lifts their spirits to know that not only Americans, but Russians care about their future.

We've got a strong ally in Russia in fighting the war on terror. You know, it was about four years ago that our country got attacked; one year ago, there was Beslan, both of them brutal attacks, both of them attacks by people who have no regard for innocent life. And we understand we have a duty to protect our citizens, and to work together and to do everything we can to stop the killing. That's why we hold office.

And I appreciate you very much, and your understanding of this war on terror. We also understand that we've got to work to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We understand the stakes that people who kill in cold blood, if they have weapons of mass destruction, will kill in cold blood on a massive scale. And I want to appreciate you for your understanding, and thank you for your understanding of that.

We both signed the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, which was a positive statement by the world. We discussed our efforts to work together in Iran and North Korea. We both -- we have the same goal: We don't want the Iranians to have nuclear weapons and we don't want the North Koreans to have nuclear weapons. We talked about ways to achieve those goals.

We talked about the need to improve nuclear security. This year we reached a milestone in nonproliferation cooperation by completing the conversion of 10,000 Russian nuclear warheads into peaceful fuel for U.S. power reactors. And I appreciate very much that sense of cooperation. That's good for the world to see.

We talked about our economic relationship. Russia has got a growing economy. We have products that they want, and they've got products that we want -- like energy. And it's necessary for us to have a good economic relationship, one where we resolve our differences in a wise way. I told Vladimir that I'm very interested in seeing if we can't get -- complete the negotiations for Russia's entry into the WTO, the World Trade Organization, by the end of this year.

As we strengthen our economic ties we'll work to advance freedom and democracy in our respective countries and around the world. Russia has been a strong partner of the United States, and will be an even stronger partner as the reforms that President Vladimir Putin has talked about are implemented -- rule of law, and the ability for people to express themselves in an open way in Russia.



I don't know how many visits we've had. I haven't been counting them because I've run out of fingers on my hands, but there's been a lot. And every time I visit and talk with President Putin I -- our relationship becomes stronger. And I want to thank you for that. Thank you for coming to the White House to visit. Welcome.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: (As translated.) Thank you very much. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, first and foremost, I'd like to thank the President for the invitation to visit the White House. And at the outset, allow me to relate the words of most sincere compassion and support to the American people with regards to the strikes of Mother Nature that's Katrina Hurricane, which caused the death of many human lives, and caused serious destruction. Believe us, we are sincerely and genuinely having the feeling of compassion with that tragedy, with you.

Russia, in the very first hours after the tragedy, proposed its support. Of course, this aid is in no comparison with the scale -- the plan which was laid down yesterday by the President of U.S. to restore that part of the ct. But that was sincere support, and we wanted to shore up morally the people which they currently need most -- that's medications, that's the first need objects. And I must say, these events, to the entire world, have become a serious lesson not only for the U.S. It's not an accident that we have paid a lot of attention today and while we had meetings in New York, since it's a global catastrophe. Global, absolutely global catastrophe, which must make us think.

And today I told it to George, to ourselves in Russia, we, too, will draw our conclusions regarding organization activities of services related to averting such catastrophes with efficient response to the similar catastrophes which are, indeed, of a global nature. This is precisely why we've discussed these tragic events and our cooperation as regards averting of this -- catastrophe -- infectious disease, and so forth. I'm sure if we pool our effort, then our activities will become more efficient.

In general, the qualitative new level of interaction between our two countries allows to efficiently address these breakthrough strategic tasks in many spheres of our interaction. And today's meeting was another confirmation of that. The traditional, high priority subjects of our interaction is anti-terrorist cooperation of U.S. and Russia. We have agreed to enhance the bilateral coordination, including on the level of the working group to combat terrorism.



Hereby, we believe that special attention should be paid to a joint effort to avert terrorist activities, generally, and of course, with the possible use by terrorists of weapons of mass destruction. You know that a relevant decision has been adopted in New York, in the United Nations organization.

Significant attention was paid to the subject of nonproliferation, and here we have discussed the North Korean problem and the Iranian nuclear dossier. And I must say that our positions are very close with the American partners here. We will continue to coordinate our work. On our part, I'd like to point out, that the potential of diplomatic solutions to all these questions is far from being exhausted, and we'll undertake all the steps necessary to settle all these problems and issues, not to aggravate them, not to bring them to extremalities.

We have in detail discussed other crisis-related situations in the world, and I must say that on all these issues, our foreign policy agencies are in touch constantly.

We have discussed also the upcoming meeting of the G8 group, and I'm thankful to George for some of his recommendations. We will continue with our partners to be in touch, closely coordinating preparation of this event and working out the agenda, so that the meeting of G8 in the Russian Federation be organized at high level quality, but also would take the torch and uphold it, and also bring some fresh breath as regards the relevance of all the subjects as they are considered by our countries and the entire world.

We also discussed today the situation of the post-Soviet Union space. Our countries have joint interests in maintaining stability and economic prosperity of this vast territory. The position of Russia is well known. We come out for the consistent advancement of integrational process within the frameworks of this community of independent states, with respect to sovereignty of all our neighbors, their own right, without pressure from outside, to choose their mode of national development. And we will coordinate our activities with all our partners on that one.

In the course of negotiations, we have also assessed the course of fulfillment of all -- of instructions given on Russia-U.S. relations, and I'd like to point out the economic ties and this development President just mentioned, the fact that we have mutual interest towards each other, including as regards the growing Russia economy and in the sector of energy. We have discussed that in detail.

Basically, this is always the subjects of our bilateral meetings. We have vast reserves to further develop our economic interaction, and, first and foremost, as regards energy dialogue, high technologies, space research, and you know that over the past years a lot has been done both by U.S. and the Russian Federation in this area jointly.

We have discussed the possibility of accession of WTO by Russia. We discussed that in further detail, and I'm very thankful to the President of the U.S. for understanding of our interests during the negotiation process, and I hope that at the expert level, too, our specialists will be able to ultimately find some practical solutions. Even if the questions they have to coordinate are quite a few, but the positive dynamics is there, and I would like to express the hope that it will result in specific outcomes.

And in conclusion, I'd like to underscore one more time that we are convinced with the President that the firm basis of the Russia-U.S. partnership should be based on the broad ties of our societies, citizens, civil societies. And after this meeting in the White House we will have a chance to talk with the leaders of the American companies. And I hope that those meetings will also be of help and be useful, since we will discuss specific projects of participation of major U.S. companies in the Russian economy, first and foremost, in the energy sphere.

And I'd like to thank, one more time, the U.S. President that even if very difficult situation is known right now, where Mother Nature has revealed itself, well, he has found it possible to materialize our agreements and this meeting has occurred, even if it was clear that constantly with his mind he is out there, with his thoughts, with those people, with those problems. But, still, it was possible to run through the entire agenda. We have discussed all the questions there. We have agreed on the immediate steps in future, as regards to interaction between U.S. and Russian

Federation. And I hope this will be a good impulse for our cooperation in all those spheres I have just enumerated.

Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT BUSH: We'll take two questions a side, starting with Terry.

Q Mr. President, with billions of dollars flowing out of Washington for hurricane relief, some Republicans are worried that you're writing a blank check that will have to be paid by future generations. Who is going to have to pay for this recovery, and what's it going to do to the national debt?

PRESIDENT BUSH: First of all, for our citizens who haven't seen what I've seen -- you've seen what I've seen -- it's -- we lost a lot of life and a lot of property. I mean, the area destroyed by the storm is the size of Great Britain. And we've got whole towns just completely flattened, just wiped out. And one of our great cities, New Orleans, is -- a lot of it is underwater. And by "underwater," I mean water over the rooftops. And those homes will be destroyed. Thousands of people won't have homes. And so this is an enormous task to help the region start growing again.

One of the commitments that I made last night is for the federal government to fund a significant portion of the infrastructure repair and rebuilding; in other words, our bridges and our roads. Our schools, the water systems are ruined, the sewer system is ruined. And I meant that when I said we will do that. Part of the recovery is to make sure there's an infrastructure that works.

Yesterday in New Orleans, for example, the Mayor was so thrilled that a portion of New Orleans, the French Quarter, for example, has got lights and sewers -- you can't drink the water, but the sewer system works. In other words, he's beginning to see some life. And it just reminded me that as we can get the infrastructure up and running as quickly as possible, get the debris cleared, get the infrastructure up and running, then life will begin.

And so, you bet, it's going to cost money. But I'm confident we can handle it and I'm confident we can handle our other priorities. It's going to mean that we're going to have to make sure we cut unnecessary spending. It's going to mean we don't do -- we've got to maintain economic growth, and therefore we should not raise taxes. Working people have had to pay a tax, in essence, by higher gasoline prices. And we don't need to be taking more money out of their pocket. And as we spend the money, we got to make sure we spend it wisely. And so we're going to have inspectors general overseeing the expenditure of the money.

Our OMB will work with Congress to figure out where we need to offset when we need to offset, so that we can manage not only to maintain economic growth and vitality, but to be able to spend that which is necessary to help this region get back on its feet. So it's a big role for the federal government.

There's a big role for private sector. And that's why I call for economic growth zones, an economic enterprise zone. Look, there's not going to be any revenues coming out of that area for a while anyway, so we might as well give them good tax relief in order to get jobs there and investment there. It makes sense. The entrepreneurial spirit is what's going to help lift this part of the world up. So we've got a -- I started laying out the outlines of a plan, and it's one that we want to work with Congress on.

Q What will it cost?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, it's going to cost whatever it costs. We're going to be wise about the money we spend. I mean, you're -- we haven't totaled up all the bridges and highways, but I said we'll make a commitment to rebuild the infrastructure, and to help rebuild the infrastructure. We're also spending money on -- \$2,000 a family to help these people get back on their feet. There's a variety of programs. The key question is to make sure the costs are wisely spent, and that we work with Congress to make sure that we are able to manage our budget in a wise way. And that is going to mean cutting other programs.

Do you want to call on somebody?

Q The Russian-U.S. relationship largely is based on your good personal relations. In year 2008, you both will cease to be Presidents. So have you laid any guarantees so that U.S.-Russia relationship could go on not worse than it does right now?

PRESIDENT BUSH: That's a good question.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: Are they already firing us? We still want to work. (Laughter.) To be serious, well, I might say that guarantees of the positive development of the U.S.-Russia relations are based on the mutual interests to develop such relations between the two countries, with their steps, leaders can either help such an objective process of development, or be an impediment. We try to do whatever it takes to support this process. So far, we are responsible, and will continue to do so.

PRESIDENT BUSH: For example, we will leave behind some legacies -- the Moscow Treaty, which commits both countries to reducing our nuclear warheads; trade. In other words, as our countries and different companies begin to invest -- companies begin to invest in both countries, that leaves behind a legacy that will be hard for future governments to undo. There's kind of a strategic dialogue, we get in habits sometimes and the idea of setting a way for governments to talk to each other at different levels of government is a good legacy.

And so, we do have three more years, which I found out is a long period of time. And we'll be able to do more together that people -- that future governments will view as a way to move forward to keep the peace, and to be -- to deal with big issues in a complex world.

Steve.

Q Last night you said that greater federal involvement and troops may be required in future disasters. Could you elaborate on that a little bit? And were you able to convince President Putin on the need to send Iran to the Security Council? Sorry to do a two-part.

PRESIDENT BUSH: No, that's -- hit me with a two-part question.

First, on Iran, we agree that the Iranians should not have a nuclear weapon. That's important for people to understand. When you share the same goal, it means, as you work diplomatically, you're working toward that goal.

Secondly, I am confident that the world will see to it that Iran goes to the U.N. Security Council if it does not live up to its agreements. And when that referral will happen is a matter of diplomacy. And that's what we talked about. We talked about how to deal with this situation diplomatically.

The first part of the question was -- oh, was how to deal with disasters.

Q Federal involvement in disasters.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes. I don't want to prejudge the commission's -- what do they call it, the bipartisan commission that is set up in Congress. I don't want to prejudge their findings. But I do think they ought to seriously consider the fact that there are -- a storm, for example, of a certain category, which will require an overwhelming response by government that can only be provided by, say, the United States military through NORTHCOM, because of its ability to muster logistical -- logistics and supplies so quickly. And that's what I want Congress to consider. And I think it's very important that Congress consider this.

It's important for us to learn from the storm what could have been done better, for example, and apply that to other types of situations -- such as a pandemic. At the U.N. I talked about avian flu; we need to take it seriously. I talked to Vladimir about avian flu; I talked to other world leaders about the potential outbreak of avian flu: If avian flu were to hit this country, do we have the proper response mechanisms? Does the federal government have the authorities necessary to make certain decisions? And this storm will give us an opportunity to review all different types of circumstance to make sure that the President has the capacity to react. And that's what I was referring to. I wasn't drawing any conclusions; I was just suggesting that this be a matter of debate and discussion with the bipartisan commission that is going to be set up there, with Democrats and Republican senators and congressmen.

PRESIDENT PUTIN: With regards to the Iranian subject, I might as well say that the our position is very clear and understandable. We support all of the agreements on non-proliferation, which includes Iran and others, fully, and we've always, in this regard, been open with our partners, transparent completely. And yesterday in the meeting with the President of Iran, we directly told him so. And, of course, we are against the fact that Iran would become a nuclear power, and we'll continue to do so in future, under any circumstances.

Now, as regards as to how we can control the situation, there are many ways and means to do so. We wouldn't like our -- steps could bring us to a situation similar to that one in the Korean Peninsula. We're in touch with all the partners in the process with the European-3, with the U.S. We have understanding of what we need to do, and I hope that our activities will be coordinated and will bring positive results.

Once again, yesterday I heard from the Iranian leader a statement that Iran does not seek to acquire nuclear weapons. That's the first thing I wanted to share with you.

Now -- and if you allow me, today, this way or the other, still we'll come back -- and for quite a while, I guess, in future, too -- to the fact of this horrible catastrophe, which was passed on to the soil of the U.S., having to do with this Hurricane Katrina. If, George, you don't mind, I would come back to this first question, which relates to the fact that we are taking away money from the future generation pockets. In the Soviet Union, for many decades, we lived under the motto, we need to think about the future generation. But we never thought about the existing, current, present generations. And at the end of the day, we have destroyed the country, not thinking about the people living today.

Therefore, of course, yes, we need to spend money. There is no two ways about it. And I believe that both U.S. and we in Russia, and in other countries of the world, we've been analyzing, all of us, what has transpired, how the state and the bodies responded to the current events. Many of us will draw their conclusions as regards restructuring the activities of the relevant services and bodies of the state which ought to minimize the repercussions of such catastrophes.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Final question.

Q The question to Mr. President of the United States. Mr. President, while talking in the United Nations organization, you, probably conscientiously -- talking about the strive for the road to democracy -- mentioned such countries as Afghanistan, Iran, Georgia, Ukraine, and Iraq. Do you believe the situation politically in this country is similar?

And to you, Mr. President, since we're talking about it, what is your assessment, in Iraq and in Ukraine, please? Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Let me make sure I understand your question. Do I believe the country in -- the situation in our country is similar to their countries?

Q You spoke at the United Nations about the strive for democracy --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Right.

Q -- and you --

PRESIDENT BUSH: I remember that.

Q And you mentioned Georgia, Ukraine, Iraq, Afghanistan -- just do you think the situation in these countries is similar?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Oh. Well, no, I think they're all different. I think, as a matter of fact, democracy tends to reflect the cultures and histories of each different country. I do think, though, they're bound by some common principles -- one that governments that are elected by the people tend to respond to the people; that they've got minority rights and rule of law. But they're all on different stages of the development of democracy.

Democracy just doesn't happen; it grows, it takes a while. It's the experience of our country. It's the experience of the Russian Federation. I mean, democracies take on the customs and habits of the particular people, and they mature. And so they're at different stages. I mean, clearly, Iraq is a struggling democracy. But one thing is for certain: the people have made their mind about what they want. They want democracy: 8.5 million Iraqis went to the polls, see, and they've got a constitution that's been written. It wasn't written under bayonet or under the barrel of a gun -- it was written by people from different factions of the society that have come together. And it will be voted on soon. And then there will be another election. So this is an emerging democracy and it's different from a more mature democracy.

Q Can I follow up?

PRESIDENT BUSH: No. (Laughter.) Got to keep order and discipline. Right, Steve?

PRESIDENT PUTIN: On the last question about Iraq and Ukraine -- on Iraq, we are aware of the situation in Iraq. Unfortunately, we are facing constant violence, and that relates to known factors having to do with the upcoming referendum on constitution there. I believe that if it will be possible to get constitution, this will be a good, strong step forward to achieve stability in that country.

In my opinion, it will be only possible if the main political forces, ethnic groups, will get a sense that it's their own constitution. If this document will be confirmed, agreed upon by the overwhelming segments of the population, if the current leadership makes a strong case and convinces population that this constitution is satisfactory to all, if it will maintain territorial integrity, will take into account the interests of major minority groups, then it will be a real step forward in settlement. And we hope very much that will occur.

Now, as regards Ukraine, well, what can be said here? The political crisis, as I said recently in Berlin, the situation is under control of the President.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Good job. Thank you. Good job.

END 3:29 P.M. EDT

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