

Bush, aides 'grossly misjudged Putin'

By Jonathan S. Landay | McClatchy Newspapers

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Bush and Putin no longer such good friends


How the relationship between U.S. President George Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin has soured:

2001

June 16 Bush meets Putin for the first time at summit in Slovenia; says it's time to move beyond Cold War attitudes

Sept. 19 In wake of 9/11 attacks, Bush and Putin aides meet in Moscow; agree to broad counterterrorism cooperation

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Source: BBC, AP, White House, MCT Photo Service
Graphic: Lee Hultberg, July 2006



Bush and Putin at the Bush's family estate in Kennebunkport, Maine, July 2007

2002

May 25 Bush and Putin agree to cut nuclear warheads by two-thirds at Moscow summit

May 28 NATO-Russia Council signed; gives Moscow equal voice on counterterrorism, peacekeeping, arms control

Sept. 27 Putin, Bush meet at Camp David; say they are allies in war on terror; Iran should not develop nuclear weapons

Oct. 6 Putin warns that U.S. risks creating haven for terrorists in Iraq

2003

March 18 Russia, France, Germany criticize U.S. war with Iraq

June 1 Bush, Putin meet in Moscow; say ties not damaged by differences over Iraq War

June 22 Putin says he'll keep selling nuclear technology to Iran despite U.S. objections

Sept. 27 Putin, Bush meet at Camp David; say they are allies in war on terror; Iran should not develop nuclear weapons

Oct. 6 Putin warns that U.S. risks creating haven for terrorists in Iraq

2004

March 14 Putin re-elected with 71 percent of vote; U.S. worries about limits on democratic freedoms

Nov. 2 Bush re-elected with 51 percent of vote; Putin says "international terrorism had a goal of frustrating Mr. Bush's victory in the election"

2005

Feb. 24 Bush tells Putin of his "concerns" about Russian democracy at Slovakia summit

Sept. 17 In Washington, Bush, Putin say Iran shouldn't become a nuclear power

2006

June 4 Putin says he'll retaliate if U.S. pursues missile defense plan in Europe

Oct. 7 Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya murdered in Moscow

Oct. 12 Putin chilly toward Bush aides in missile talks

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WASHINGTON — The Bush administration's failure to win Russia's consent to install U.S. missile defenses in its European backyard and a growing list of other disputes suggest that President Bush and his aides have misread the man whose "soul" Bush thought he'd divined when they first met six years ago.

Bush's strategy on Russia assumed that Russian President Vladimir Putin embraced democracy, wanted integration with the West and sought a "strategic partnership" in which Moscow would acquiesce to U.S. policies such as NATO expansion. Feuds could be resolved through the close personal relationship that Bush believed he had with his Russian counterpart.

Instead, fueled by record oil and natural gas prices and resentment of what he lambasted in February as Bush's "almost uncontained hyper use of force," Putin has led global opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq, hosted Palestinians on the U.S. list of terrorist groups, sold anti-aircraft missiles and other arms to Iran and stymied Bush's drive to tighten U.N. sanctions on the Islamic republic for refusing to suspend uranium enrichment.

The Kremlin has steadily increased spending on defense modernization and revived symbolic long-range aerial reconnaissance patrols toward U.S. and European airspace.

Putin also has threatened to re-target Russian nuclear missiles at Europe if Bush deploys U.S. missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic, declared his intention to trash treaties that eliminate a class of nuclear missiles and limit conventional military forces in Europe and compared the United States under Bush to Germany under Hitler.

The U.S.-Russian tensions are a far cry from June 2001, when Bush declared after his first meeting with Putin in Slovenia that he'd looked in the Russian leader's eyes, found him "trustworthy" and "was able to get a sense of his soul."

Bush and his aides "grossly misjudged Putin," considering him "a good guy and one of us," said Michael McFaul of Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

The former KGB officer created that illusion partly by appearing to share Bush's political and religious convictions, standard tradecraft employed by intelligence officers to recruit spies, he said.

"Putin . . . is a brilliant case officer," said Carlos Pasqual, a former senior State Department official now at The Brookings Institution, a center-left policy organization in Washington.

What many experts regard as the real Putin — a hard-line, derisive Russian nationalist — was on display Friday as he greeted visiting Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates ahead of talks that failed to break the impasse over missile defense and other key security issues.

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After keeping the U.S. officials waiting for 40 minutes, Putin mocked their mission in front of reporters and television cameras.

"Of course, we can sometime in the future decide that some anti-missile defense should be established somewhere on the moon . . .," he said.

U.S.-Russian tensions, already at their highest since the end of Cold War, could worsen in coming months, fanning new regional instability.

If the United States unilaterally recognizes the independence of Serbia's ethnic Albanian-dominated Kosovo province over Russia's objections, Putin may respond by backing Serbia's annexation of northern Kosovo, igniting an ethnic Albanian backlash.

The Kremlin also could recognize the independence of separatist enclaves in the pro-Western former Soviet republics of Moldova and Georgia, encouraging Serb nationalists in Bosnia-Herzegovina to revive a succession drive that ended in 1995.

U.S. policy came to pivot on Putin even though Rice, the administration's top Russia expert, had lambasted former President Clinton for being overly cozy with the Russian leader's predecessor, Boris Yeltsin.

Despite their emphasis on promoting democracy, Bush, Rice and other U.S. officials said little about massive human rights abuses in Chechnya, Putin's gradual rollback of democratic and economic reforms and his suppression of Russia's independent media.

The 2001 al Qaida attacks in New York and Washington led to unprecedented security and intelligence-sharing cooperation between the United States and Russia, which was struggling to contain a costly Muslim guerrilla war in Chechnya.

"We wanted him on our side in the global war on terror," said Pasqual.

Putin backed the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, including America's use of bases in former Soviet republics, and acquiesced in the U.S. withdrawal from a Cold War treaty prohibiting the deployment of anti-ballistic missile systems.

Emerging from years of financial chaos that had hobbled its military, Russia quickly concluded a 2002 nuclear arms reduction pact mostly on Bush's terms.

Putin, however, began to sour on the relationship as Bush promoted the inclusion of former Warsaw Pact nations in NATO and supported the elections of pro-Western governments in the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.

U.S. officials refused to accept "that the Russians do have an interest in what they call their 'near abroad,'" said a former top State Department official who requested anonymity to speak more freely. "The Russians would have differences of opinion with us, and we would not acknowledge that we had differences of opinions."

ON THE WEB

The text of Friday's [U.S.-Russian news conference](#) in Moscow.

The English text of [Russian President Vladimir Putin's Feb. 10 speech](#) to the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy.

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PatriotGame: This assessment of yours is 1000% correct. These criminals for profit have completely defrauded the American voter, taxpayer and true believer in anything that is Honest, Just, or True. They need to all be tried for Treason! Their (all those in collusion with this Regime) abject FAILURE to uphold any of the oaths that they have sworn to uphold in The Constitution plus an ongoing assault on The Bill of Rights make them completely guilty of all crimes they could be charged with until the end of