

Remarks Following Discussions With President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia
and an Exchange With Reporters in Kennebunkport
July 2, 2007

President Bush. First, I'd like to congratulate President Putin for being the only person that caught a fish today. I wanted to congratulate the President for being the only person that caught a fish. It was a fine catch. Secondly, I welcome you to my family home.

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—of 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 our—the relations with countries like Iran and North Korea. We had a very long, strategic dialog that I found to be important, necessary, and productive.

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

President Putin. 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—

President Bush. A team effort—

President Putin. —and we let it go to the captain of the boat—[laughter]—

President Bush. Very thoughtful of you. [Laughter]

President Putin. —the 42d President of the United States. [Laughter]

President Bush. That's right.

President Putin. 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 the 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 a second, please. Please. Tony.

White House Press Secretary Tony Snow. Deb Riechmann [Associated Press].

President Bush. Deb, yes.

Iran/Missile Defense System

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 6 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 Russians' attitude in the United Nations. I have been counting on the Russians' 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.

Q. But are you—[*inaudible*].

President Bush. Hold up a second, please. You're more impatient than I was.

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 you want to say?

Iran

Q. Well, I still would like to know—

President Bush. Oops! 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 track. Recently, we've seen some signals coming from Iran with regard to interaction, cooperation with the IAEA. Mr. Solana also brings us some very—some positive data and information. I think all of this would contribute to further, substantial intercourse on this issue.

Missile Defense System

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 this question—[*inaudible*].

President Bush. Yes.

Q. And what role of European countries do you see in this cooperation? And if it is no breakthrough in the foreseeable future, maybe it's a time to make a pause? Thank you.

President Bush. Yes, 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—very constructive and bold strategic move, and that is: Why don't we broaden the dialog and include Europe, through NATO and the Russia-NATO Council? I don't know if you 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 the parties to this consultation could be expanded through the European part—countries who are interested in resolving the issue. And the idea is to achieve this through the forum of the Russia-NATO cooperation—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. But 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 online.

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 if it would—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 interested partners or parties in Europe.

Mr. Snow. Caren Bohan [Reuters].

U.S.-Russia Relations/Democracy in Russia

Q. Thank you. Mr. President, 6 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 trou-

bled 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 G-8 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 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 this 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 dialog, in our contacts with President Bush, we always discuss these things, and he says it frankly and straightly, and we are always constantly engaged in the dialog 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.

President Bush. Yes.

U.S.-Russia Relations

Q. Also, since, for you both, this is your final year in office, what do you think—

President Bush. Not mine. I got more than a year.

Q. Yes.

President Bush. Anyway, nice try. [Laughter]

Q. But since 2008—

President Bush. Yes.

Q. —elections year for both of you—

President Bush. Right.

Q. —do you believe that—are you going to meet after you are not Presidents any more? Or is this your final meeting?

President Bush. Yes, 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 dialog on all issues related to 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. It's—for those old Russian hands who remember what it was like, there's an amazing transformation taking place. Is it perfect in—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.

Vice President Richard B. Cheney

Q. Is Cheney a member of the executive branch?

President Bush. I didn't hear you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:28 p.m. at Walker's Point. President Putin referred to European Union Foreign Minister Javier Solana Madariaga; Cable News Network talk show host Larry King; and former Central Intelligence Agency Director George J. Tenet. President Putin and some reporters spoke in Russian, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Statement on Granting Executive Clemency to I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby July 2, 2007

The United States Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit today rejected Lewis Libby's request to remain free on bail while pursuing his appeals for the serious convictions of perjury and obstruction of justice. As a result, Mr. Libby will be required to turn himself over to the Bureau of Prisons to begin serving his prison sentence.

I have said throughout this process that it would not be appropriate to comment or intervene in this case until Mr. Libby's appeals have been exhausted. But with the denial of bail being upheld and incarceration imminent, I believe it is now important to react to that decision.

From the very beginning of the investigation into the leaking of Valerie Plame's name, I made it clear to the White House staff and anyone serving in my administra-

tion that I expected full cooperation with the Justice Department. Dozens of White House staff and administration officials dutifully cooperated.

After the investigation was underway, the Justice Department appointed United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois Patrick Fitzgerald as a special counsel in charge of the case. Mr. Fitzgerald is a highly qualified, professional prosecutor who carried out his responsibilities as charged.

This case has generated significant commentary and debate. Critics of the investigation have argued that a special counsel should not have been appointed, nor should the investigation have been pursued after the Justice Department learned who leaked Ms. Plame's name to columnist Robert