

**Global Security/Russia-U.S. Relations/
President-elect Dmitry Medvedev of
Russia**

Q. My question is—first to both Presidents—you mentioned that yesterday and today you summed up the 8 years of your cooperation. I would like to ask you, if you assess your work, have there been more pluses or minuses? And please tell me, what have you achieved, and what concrete things will be bequeathed to your successors? Do you think the world has become a safer and more secure place? And how has the U.S.-Russian relationship influenced world politics?

And my question to the United States now—to the President of the United States now—you have met President-elect today—Dmitry Medvedev. You talked about the impression you have of him. I would like to ask you, did you discuss the schedule of your further exchanges with him in the course of this year—for the remaining part of this year?

President Putin. Okay, I will start answering. Has it become better, or has it become worse? We always want to have more of a good thing, and we shouldn't forget that the—as we say, the better is the worst enemy of the good.

Let us remember the world on the brink of a nuclear disaster during the Caribbean crisis, and now let us look at the U.S.-Russia relationship today. A crisis like the Cuban crisis would not be possible now; it would be unthinkable. I agree with George when he said that Russia and the United States no longer consider each other as enemies. At a minimum, they look at each other as partners, and I believe this is very important.

Of course, a lot of outstanding issues remain. It is true that we do have disagreements on some sensitive areas of our cooperation, but at the same time, we do have enough strength to search for solutions. And as our meeting today has shown, we are capable of achieving positive results—that is, on the whole—in counterterrorism, in fighting proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology, of fighting the drug threat. All of these create a reliable platform

for cooperation, not only between Russia and the United States but a platform that contributes to ensuring international security.

If we mention on top of that our economic cooperation, we can state that in the past 8 years, we have been able to improve the relations between our two countries and in the world as a whole.

President Bush. Yes, I agree with that answer. And secondly, I spent—I told President-elect that I would see him in Japan at the G-8, and that's the only scheduling matters that we discussed. And I'm going to finish out my term—my time with Vladimir, and then I'll turn my attention to the President when he gets to be the President. But the first time I suspect we'll meet will be in the scheduled meeting in Japan.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:07 p.m. in the Press Center at the Bocharov Ruchei. President Putin and some reporters spoke in Russian, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

**Statement on the Death of Charlton
Heston**

April 6, 2008

Laura and I are saddened by the death of our friend Charlton Heston. Charlton Heston was one of the most successful actors in movie history and a strong advocate for liberty.

Widely acclaimed for his long, award-winning film career, he also had a profound impact off the screen. He served his country during World War II, marched in the civil rights movement, led a labor union, and vigorously defended Americans' second amendment rights. He was a man of character and integrity, with a big heart. For all these reasons, in 2003, I was proud to award Charlton Heston the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civil honor.

Our prayers are with his wife, Lydia, and the entire Heston family during this difficult time.

Remarks on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement

April 7, 2008

Thank you. Please be seated. I want to thank the members of my Cabinet for joining me here today. Madam Ambassador, thank you for coming. I appreciate those who support free trade and fair trade for joining us on this important occasion.

In a few minutes, I will sign a letter to Congress that will transmit legislation implementing the United States free trade agreement with Colombia. This agreement will advance America's national security interests in a critical region. It will strengthen a courageous ally in our hemisphere. It will help America's economy and America's workers at a vital time. It deserves bipartisan support from the United States Congress.

During the 16 months since the Colombia free trade agreement was signed, my administration has worked closely with the Congress to seek a bipartisan path for considering the agreement. We held more than 400 consultations and meetings and calls. We led trips to Colombia for more than 50 Members of the Congress. We've worked closely with congressional leaders from both parties, including the Speaker, Leader Hoyer, and Chairman Rangel, Minority Leader Boehner, Ranking Member McCrery, and Senators Baucus and Grassley.

On May 10th last year, my administration and congressional leaders concluded a bipartisan agreement that provided a clear path for advancing free trade agreements, including the agreement with Colombia. As part of that agreement, we included the strongest labor and environmental provisions of any free trade agreement in history. Those provisions were negotiated with and agreed by, by the leadership of Congress—like the Democratic leadership in Congress.

For the last 16 months, we've worked with congressional leaders to set a schedule for the consideration of the Colombian free trade agreement. While we'll continue to work closely with Congress, the need for this agreement is too urgent, the stakes for our national security are too high to allow this year to end without a vote. By statute, Congress has 90 legislative days to complete ac-

tion once I transmit a bill implementing this agreement. Waiting any longer to send up the legislation would run the risk of Congress adjourning without the agreement ever getting voted on.

Transmitting the agreement is neither the beginning nor the end of our cooperative efforts but, instead, an important milestone. My administration is eager to work with members from both parties to make sure the vote is a positive one. Congress needs to move forward with the Colombian agreement, and they need to approve it as quickly as possible.

Approving this agreement is urgent for our national security reasons. Colombia is one of our strongest allies in the Western Hemisphere. They are led by a very strong and courageous leader, President Uribe. He's taken courageous stands to defend our shared democratic values. He's been a strong and capable partner in fighting drugs and crime and terror. And he's delivering results. The Colombian Government reports that since 2002, kidnappings, terrorist attacks, and murders are all down substantially, as is violence against union members.

Despite this progress, Colombia remains under intense pressure in the region. It faces a continuing assault from the terrorist network known as FARC, which has seized hostages and murdered innocent folks, including Americans, in an attempt to overthrow Colombia's democracy. Colombia also faces a hostile and anti-American regime in Venezuela, which has met with FARC terrorist leaders and deployed troops to the Colombian border as a means of intimidating the Colombian Government and its people.

President Uribe has stood strong against these threats. And he has done so with the assurance of America's support, because his fight against tyranny and terror is a fight that we share. President Uribe has told Members of Congress, as me—and me as well, that approving the free trade agreement is the best way for America to demonstrate our support for Colombia. People throughout the hemisphere are watching to see what the United States will do. If Congress fails to approve this agreement, it would not only abandon a brave ally, it would send a signal throughout the region that America cannot