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BEHRINGER: My name is Paul Behringer with the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University.

FATA: My name is Dan Fata. I'm a former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Europe and NATO from 200 to 200 .


BEHRINGER: And would you begin by describing your background on U.S.-Russian relations and then talk a little bit more about what your role entailed in the Bush administration?

FATA: Sure. My involvement with Russia started in the late nineties when I was a think-tanker, first at the American Enterprise Institute and then at the Council on Foreign Relations. My job then was as an analyst, covering the war on the Balkans, when I was at American Enterprise Institute,



see the first round of NATO enlargement, and there was a lot of effort that was being undertaken between the [Clinton] administration and the Russian government, which was then the [Boris] Yeltsin government, as well as the think-tank community about really thinking about what a relationship with Russia could be, should be, and how to allay Russian fears about NATO enlargement. So that's where I cut my teeth.

I would then work on Capitol Hill as a senior staffer in both the House and the Senate on the [00:02:00] Republican Policy Committee in both chambers, and I was the policy director for [the] National Security and Trade [committees]. And at that point, NATO enlargement was still going on. /11 had happened. There was [a lot of activity and thought on] how we were partnering with Russia on everything



Russia touched my portfolio quite immensely. And then in January of 200 , I assumed responsibility for Russia and Eurasia and the Caucasus as well. So, at that point, Russia was a day-to-day issue for me to manage in my portfolio.

BEHRINGER: And you had the unique experience of serving as a policy advisor and director in the House and Senate before joining the administration. I was wondering if you could talk about Congress's role in U.S.-Russian relations during this period a little bit?

FATA: Sure. As I reflect on that, there are a couple areas in which Congress was either interested or involved. One was the response to /11. And as the administration was looking at how we were going to go about and execute the war in Afghanistan, but also to keep America safe, there were a lot of cooperative agreements that were being undertaken with friends, allies and then others, i.e., Russia, as to how we would come [00:04:00] to common understanding on going after terrorists and then turning terrorists over. So there was a lot of interest from the congressional side as to whether Russia was a partner with us. And at that point the Beslan attack had already happened, and there was a lot of common cause between the U.S. and Russia.



The second aspect that Congress looked at, of course, was arms control, and both of my bosses in the House and the Senate, so Congressman Chris Cox [R-CA] in the House, and then Senator Jon Kyl [R-AZ] in the Senate, were proponents of two things—one, democracy, and two, a strong arms control policy. And at that time, even as we talk today, the U.S. and Russia are really the only two bound by most agreements—China was not discussed, and it makes it complicated now. But it was everything from about missile defense to START [the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] to New START. What kind of reductions could we honestly accept, and what would we hold Russia's feet accountable for? Could we get out of the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty? So there was a lot of discussion on the Hill just about that aspect. And for anybody who's worked on those issues, there is a certain expertise that's out there that grew up in the Cold War, that was very active, that was constantly engaging my bosses as well as coming up to brief members and such on what responsible arms control, missile defense policy looks like. So those are the two big areas, in addition to democracy, that Congress was involved in.

BEHRINGER: [What did you think about pulling out of the] ABM Treaty, which the Bush administration did early in the term?

[§] Following the earlier START I II and III agreements and entering into force in this agreement was formally named Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms



FATA: I supported the move. I thought it was the right move, [00:0 :00] given that where we were seeing the proliferation of threats—North Korea, Iran, at the time we believed Iraq, and other things—that we needed to be able to have the ability to defend the United States. I wasn't involved in those. That was [before] my time in the DoD [Department of Defense], so I wasn't involved in the DoD negotiations with the Russians on that. I would be involved in later ones, as part of the questions that I think you put for me to consider, including what would happen after 200 . But overall, I think there was a pretty good level of support, at least amongst the Republican caucus, for pulling out of the ABM Treaty based on the reasons that we thought: that there was a proliferation of ballistic missiles by state actors around North Korea, but also we couldn't quite tell at that time—again, hindsight is 20-20—whether non-state actors were going to be able to get their hands on something.

BEHRINGER: The war in Afghanistan and Russia's cooperation there—when you came into the Defense Department in 200 , what was the Defense Department's relationship with Russia, or how did they see Russia's cooperation on Afghanistan at that point?

FATA: Great question. When it came to Afghanistan, it was clear, on the surface, that Russia wasn't doing anything to obstruct or get in the way of the execution of the mission in Afghanistan. I think, when you pulled back the covers or you just



operating in the region. So I think, if you look at any of the [00:0 :00] countries in the region, the Russians had a pretty good intelligence operation. They were doing a lot of minding of what we were doing.

There were some that believed and—I guess we can't prove it through this dialogue here—that the Russians also were helping with the drug trafficking, with the opium and the opioids, which again was financially fueling the Taliban and other movements. And, frankly, the Russians had had experience in Afghanistan before. And again, I can't prove it in this mechanism in which we're talking right now, but there was the belief that the Russians were going around telling Afghans—and of course, Afghanistan was made up and is made up of different tribes—that the Americans aren't going to stay here for long. And so in some ways, undermining our role.

The Russians never played a direct role. There were more than 0 nations



Soviet Union, including Russia, that would allow them to develop a relationship with NATO of their own choosing. Nothing imposed by NATO on them. It would be a relationship of their own choosing. Some could embrace to do a lot, some could embrace to do a little, but it would be up to them. And so, in the late nineties, you see the Partnership for Peace really serve as the mechanism by which Poland, [the] Czech Republic, and Hungary would become the first post-Cold War



them as well. And this was a way to work with Russia to allay fears that this was really meant [00:14:00]

[REDACTED]

a manifestation of “Let's find a way to work.” And if you recall history—Putin would become prime minister in [1] , and then he would become president. Yeltsin would exit stage. So Putin was the big man on campus for all things Russia, and Bush had just come in. And I'm not trying to say anything negative about the president, because I have nothing but respect for him, but he was relatively new. Putin had been about one year into the job before him. And so I think there was a genuineness about President Bush's [00:1 :00] approach towards President Putin, that he's someone we can work with. And that was prior to /11, and I think post /11, this desire to work together on a variety of fronts just increased.


So by the time I entered the Pentagon in 200 , a lot of this had been in place, and the Putin that we would see in February of 200 hadn't quite yet reared his head. So we were still on the cooperative phase. The Iraq War had been about a year and a half underway by the time I joined the Pentagon. The second round of NATO enlargement had fully happened, where now the Baltics, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria had now joined, so now 10 members of the former Warsaw Pact, former Soviet Union, if you will, had now joined. The [Iraq] war was underway. Russia's economy wasn't doing so well. So that would set the stage for what would come later. But as I entered the Pentagon, you had that history about Partnership for Peace, about [the] NATO-Russia Founding Act, about the NATO-Russia Council, about President Bush's desire to work with him [Putin]. And that really was how the relationship was viewed as, “How can we find areas of constructiveness?”



BEHRINGER: And how did you view the NATO-Russia Council? Did you think that it did what it was supposed to do, or was it worth all the trouble of going through?

FATA: The NATO-Russia Council was absolutely worth having. I found, and I still find, that we needed that mechanism to be able to talk with Russia. The reality I think was, at that time—and I still believe there are NATO [00:1 :00] folks, and U.S. and European thinkers and maybe even officials, that believe Russia's ultimate home resides in the West. That Russia's orientation is not eastward, it's westward. And so I think the NATO-Russia Council served a purpose in being able to engage the Russian leadership again.

It took place at a time when Putin was relatively new. He appeared to have a vision for Russia and a desire to improve Russia. On his border were now 10—or what would become 10—nations that were in NATO,



There were divisions. So to your question, “was it all that helpful?” Look, there were divisions. I think up until when the NATO-Russia Council was suspended in 2014, there were divisions about how much leniency [00:20:00] can we or should we give Moscow, because NATO enlargement was not popular amongst the Russian people—not only just the Russian leadership, but the Russian people. It was seen by many as threatening. And, of course, Moscow had a role in portraying it that way. But I think there was an acceptance—this is by some, not the Eastern European leaders but the Western European leaders—that maybe we should slow down enlargement. Maybe we should take Russian considerations into our thinking. Are there other adaptive or constructive measures that we can have with Russia? So [the NATO-Russia Council] served many purposes by having it.

BEHRINGER: And you mentioned that the Baltics were brought in 2004. And in 200 , Russia begins to use its leverage in the energy sector against Ukraine and Georgia. And then in 200 , there's that big cyberattack against Estonia. What steps did the Bush administration and the Defense Department in particular take to support NATO allies in Europe more broadly against the energy and the cyber tactics?

FATA: Again, you're going to hear me r



Putin or whoever was flexing their muscle and demonstrating their leverage that they had over those two countries in terms of energy was not surprising to us. Doesn't mean it was welcomed, and it didn't mean there wasn't a resulting set of conversations that took place between the United States and Russia as well as the United States and our European Union partners about that. But we saw it as a sort of a reflex—look, I'm a fan of both Saakashvili and Yushchenko, so when I say it was a reflexiveness to some of their more bombastic comments and anti-Putin comments, it was accepted that, okay, we're starting to see inklings of who this—meaning Putin—is.

With regard to the attack on Estonia, though, that did catch us flat. I would make two comments. One, I don't think we responded as well as Estonia expected. And I think that's because, two, at the time, it was the first time something like that had happened, and therefore it was hard to figure out the forensics of it. Was it the Russian state? Was it a Russian-backed group? And for years leading up to that, there had been a discussion in NATO about whether a cyberattack against critical infrastructure would be considered an Article 4 violation—so Article 4, meaning if there's an attack on one, it's an attack on all. And would a cyberattack against critical infrastructure, a financial network, anything like that constitute an Article 4 [00:24:00] invocation? Therefore, NATO [would have] to come to the defense.

And I recall at the time, in the lead-up to the attack—again, just as we're having writ large this conversation—it came up at the 2007 Riga Summit. The



French and a couple others said, “N



Middle East launch. But Russia wasn't buying it, or if they did buy it, they still used it as a negotiating tactic. [00:2 :00]

By mid-to-late spring of 200 , following Putin's February 200 Munich speech, in the either late-March or early-April [200] trip that Secretary Gates, Ambassador Edelman, and myself made to Moscow, where Gates sat down with Putin, the two-pluA



It's called Gabala. And they said, "Look, if you're not going to get rid of the Poland and Czech Republic sites, then allow us to have a plugin to this common picture, and let us use this radar down in Azerbaijan." [00:30:00] And the reality is we sent a team to Azerbaijan to go check it out, and it was very antiquated, very antiquated technology. And ultimately we would say no during the process of these two-plus-two talks, that it doesn't work. They were going to operate the Gabala radar. They said we can have U.S. folks there, but they wanted folks inside the Poland and the Czech Republic facilities, to which both those countries said, "No way, we've already had Russians on our territory. We're good. No more."

And so in hindsight, we made a mistake. We made a mistake by saying no to the Gabala radar. We probably could have negotiated whose personnel was going to be on what. But as I looked back at this just a few years after I left, I really thought—and I've had this conversation with fellow Bush folks—that, [in] my view, Russia was trying to find a way to work with us on this missile defense system so that they could either sell it to the Russian people or make it not look like a strategic loss. And even as crappy as the Gabala radar was, we just should have said yes. We never had to turn it on. The Russians probably knew how bad off it was. But it was their way of saying, "Look, you're about cooperation, let's cooperate." And we said no. Would that have changed anything that happened afterwards? I have no idea. But we may have made a tactical mistake by not accepting the Gabala radar into this "greater" system to therefore show cooperation.



Let me provide one more bit of context for that. So in 200 —it would be one of Rumsfeld's last trips to Europe [00:32:00]—I joined him in a bilateral [negotiation] with his counterpart, Sergei Ivanov—so the Russian defense minister, former KGB lieutenant general. There were many parts that were classified, but in that discussion, what we heard was that Russia was very concerned about the proliferation of ballistic missiles to its south and to its east—so Iran, Pakistan China, North Korea—and it was not concerned about its western border, meaning NATO. [Ivanov] said, “W



BEHRINGER: [President Putin delivered a now-famous speech at the Munich Security conference in February 200]. So, given what you just said about missile defense [00:34:00]—first of all, were you there for the speech?

FATA: I was.

BEHRINGER: And can you give us your recollection of how it unfolded. And then, were you surprised by it? Do you view it as a turning point in the relationship? It sounds like there were still room for this ambiguous, “cooperate in some areas, stand up to the Russians in other areas” framework, for lack of a better term, that the Bush administration had been working with here. How did you view the Munich speech that way?

FATA: I was there. It was Secretary Gates's first European trip having become SecDef. When he took over, he immediately went to Iraq and Afghanistan, but this would be his first Europe trip. So his first European defense ministerial. I had been in the job for 1 months at this point, had done multiple trips. I think at that point I had done, I don't know, eight trips with Secretary Rumsfeld, eight or nine trips. I would ultimately do a little more than 20 between both secretaries. But it was his first. The way DoD reorganized itself, I had just fallen under [Assistant Secretary of Defense] Peter Rodman. It would be Peter's final trip. Peter would retire.


And so, having done [the Munich Security Conference] multiple times, I explained to the secretary what to expect: “Sir, you're going to be in this big room in the Bayerischer Hof in Munich. If you're at the podium, when you look, as you look to your right, you're going to see the U.S. delegation. You're going to see our



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[we find] the secretary—cool as a cucumber. He's waiting for me and Peter. And he said, “So what did you guys think?” And so, in pure deference, I let Peter go first, and then I offered my comments, that basically was, “Look, we didn't see this one coming. Me, Toria, and Kurt—we let Washington, let our counterparts, know. I let Ambassador Edelman know what was going on.” So Peter says, “So, sir, do you need us to redo your speech?” And Secretary Gates looked at us and notes [00:42:00] that he had been taking on his little note card there. And he said, “What do you think of a response like this?” And it was, “One cold war is enough. We don't need a second one.” And Peter and I looked at each other. “Sir, that's perfect.” He goes, “Yeah, we don't need anything rewritten.” And he would stick with his speech, and that's the line he would deliver. And yeah, it's hard not to get emotional about it because—talk about being a proud American. I was a proud American when the secretary delivered that because he lowered the temperature in the room. Instead of adrenaline pumping, the endorphins now started to set in, and it left a calm, because the secretary was an adult here. He had lived a life of deal”



the fact that there's nobody out here recognizing—or even protesting or whatever—Yeltsin, I think really struck a chord with the secretary. So again, [the] secretary would go back, would talk with the president, would talk with Secretary Rice, and that would lead ultimately to the two-plus-two to try to figure out, based on what Putin said in Munich, and then what happened when we went out to Moscow, “Is there still a way in which we can find [00:4 :00] cooperation and constructive engagement?”

BEHRINGER: Maybe, in the time we've got left, you could talk about the Russian invasion of Georgia—where you were when you heard the news, how the Bush administration responded, and your analysis of the Bush administration's handling of that crisis in the summer of 200 .

FATA: Sure. So with regard to the August, 200 invasion of Georgia by Russia, one of the decisions that came out of the April 200 Bucharest Summit was not that Georgia and Ukraine would be extended what was called Membership Action Plan, so that one next step below NATO membership, but instead, the decision was that both countries would be the recipients of a rather forward-leaning statement brokered by Germany, by Chancellor Merkel, and the words said, “Ukraine and Georgia will one day become members.” So very forward-leaning. No timetable on it, but very forward-leaning.

And so, in the lead-up to the Bucharest Summit, I was the senior-most policy person in the Defense Department that actually believed that this Membership Action Plan made sense for Georgia and Ukraine, because there were



movements that were taking place—democracy, c



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So off I went. I brought a EUCOM

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okay.” Mark and I walk in at eight o'clock. In the SecDef suite, [the secretary] has a very small table that can seat about three people. The secretary's sitting there. And there's the chairman of the joint chiefs, General Rodriguez, my boss; the DoD chief of staff; a



I will tell you that, as we watched the Russian advances in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the secretary got on the phone, as did the chairman [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen], with their [Russian] counterparts, and they were assured that there would be no advances on Tbilisi. Once we saw [the Russians were in fact doing] this, they both called their counterparts back and said, “You lied,” to which there was [the response], “We need to protect Russian citizens. They're in danger.” So you would hear that line again in 2014 [in Ukraine]. You would hear it now in 2022 [in Ukraine]. And so, long way of saying, all this ties back to the February 2007 speech where Putin laid out how he viewed America, how he viewed Russia, where Russia was being wronged, where his red lines were. And I think, as we look at lessons learned, Putin will tell exactly what his intentions are.

Our problem has been that we haven't wanted to believe it, because, for all the right reasons, we were still operating under President Bush's philosophy that he [Putin] is someone that we can work with. And I don't fault the president at all, and I was party to it, but the reality is it took us too long to realize Putin means what he says, and he likes to telegraph things. He will tell you, “Look, if you do this, it's a red line. If you do this, I will act in Syria. If you do this, I will act in Ukraine.” And again, our Western view is we don't want to believe that he will actually do it, because we believe that he values the relationship with us as much as we want to believe we need that relationship with Russia.



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