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Ivan Grek

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September ,

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This transcription has undergone a verification process for accuracy, according to the strictest practices of the academic and transcription communities. It offers the CPH's best good faith effort at reproducing in text the subject's spoken words. In all cases, however, the video of the interview represents the definitive version of the words spoken by interviewees.

Normal speech habits—false starts, incomplete words, and crutch words (e.g., you know)—have been removed for purposes of clarity. Final transcriptions will conform to standard oral history practices. Editors will conform all transcription quotations to the Center for Presidential History's final edition.

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Gleb Pavlovsky, interview by Ivan Grek, September , U.S. Russian Relations under Bush and Putin Collective Memory Project, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University !

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GREK: When George W. Bush became president in 2001, what kind of work did you do and how did you come to your position?

PAVLOVSKY: I had been an adviser to the head of the presidential administration for political planning. I was already doing so by that time for a long time, since 1996.

GREK: At the time of the beginning of relations between the Putin and Bush administrations, at the time of the transition, what schools of thought existed in the field of international politics? What did you think about Russian-American relations?

PAVLOVSKY: Well, it would be somewhat ambitious to talk about the schools of thought. It was a period of such—quite a long period, from the beginning of the 90s, a period of absence, in general, of a significant influence of different intellectual platforms on politics., they simply diverged.

In 1991, when the Union collapsed, various communications between the scientific community and the government also collapsed. At the same time, there were quite a few people who had



Kremlin either, it didn't really matter—well, they looked and looked. That is, the task was not to cause rejection, because in Europe there was already a bad attitude toward Russia. It had already taken root because of the war in Chechnya, which was going on at that time.

GREK: Do many people talk about the personal chemistry between Putin and Bush that developed then in Slovenia?

PAVLOVSKY: Well, it did not develop in Slovenia, it did so on September 11



GREK: Shortly before September 11, there was another important event—the US withdrawal from the treaty on limiting missile defense systems. Did this somehow affect the course of the Kremlin?

PAVLOVSKY: This, of course, did not mean anything good for Moscow. We reacted



PAVLOVSKY: Well, you know, between September 11 and the Iraq War, the attitude toward America completely changed, precisely during this period. Before the Iraq War, this is the zenith of Putin's pro-American policy and the zenith of pro-Western policies in general. This is the period when NATO membership was really discussed. After 2003 it, as it were, was not [00:14:00] completely rejected, but it became somehow unimportant, it began to move to the periphery.

So 2001-2002 is a certain state of Putin-Bush romantic love, from which the parties expected completely different things, so they did not understand. Russia, for example, was sure that America, after what Russia did—after support—which was



course—then, accordingly, everything—all this chemistry—disappeared, was, in general, forgotten, although the relationship was very close and continued.

Well, there are also bureaucratic problems, because, as it was, the structure of the presidential departments was very different between Russia and Washington, and it was not clear who should interact with whom, so there was some kind of difficulty, even of a bureaucratic nature. So, at that time we were intensively discussing, considering, and developing the idea of a military alliance with America and some kind of, what seemed generally, a trifling favor—the recognition of Russia as, as it is called, America's closest ally outside the military bloc. There is such a format, a concept [00:18:00], in my opinion. Israel and a few other countries belong to it. Well, but even that didn't happen, we didn't even get that, so, of course, interest in the war with Iraq began to fall. And it turned out that we were invited to participate in this war without any legal basis, without the support of the United Nations and at our own expense. As Sergei Shoigu told me then: "It's like this: I'm both paying and getting fucked." In short, this is, as it were, already the moment of the deployment of troops, against which we had objected several times. We had informed Bush several times that we do not support this war and will not participate in it. The head of the administration did it, and Putin did it too.

But I think that during this period a bad thing happened, namely: Putin fell in love not so much with Bush as with his style, with his style of presidency. And [00:20:00] I think that he received a bad lesson, consequently, from this gentleman.



GREK: Can you clarify a little bit?

PAVLOVSKY: Well, so to speak, the Bushist concept of world politics, as a policy from a





help of Karl Rove, created for a short time, but nevertheless created, the impression of total control over the power of America—both chambers became his and so on.

All this



to understand this. His team—well, Graham probably understood, but others did not understand this at all, what it was about. That is, the interest in friendship disappeared, so it was necessary to try something else.

This was a very gentle speech. It, in general, could be called velvet. Munich—it was generally full of compliments to America. It's just that the abnormal state of the then-public scene suggests that it was perceived as rudeness. Look, read it—it is very politely said that a one-sided policy is not good. Even that was then, as it were, unacceptable to say—now Europeans—European leaders express themselves more harshly.

So it was a speech delivered at the right time in the right way. Another thing is that Putin did not have an alternative, he had not yet seen an alternative, and still believed that the United States as a whole was on the right course. When, [00:36:00] once in 2007, I think, in the summer, I ask him, “It is clear that we are trying somehow carefully to restrain the United States, but what about NATO?” He says, “And where else to join? Of course we will join NATO. Well, not now—later, on some other terms, under a different administration.” Well, at that time he still held this—that is, before the crisis, the financial crisis, which, of course, from the Kremlin's point of view, showed that, so to speak—as Buffett said then, “The tide





We ourselves are internationalists, we do not need others. And later, this is more likely a kind of impression of remembering the rosy years of detente with Nixon and Ford, as of a piece.

Now, one cannot say that Reagan was such a favorite of the Kremlin. That is, it did not play any important role. Yes, in the Kremlin in general, within the framework of American dogma, there were some symptoms, so traumatic, that yes, it's probably better to come to an agreement with one person—the president. They generally have high expectations from a private understanding, a personal understanding. Usually, the Republicans played such a role—the Republicans had strong presidents, but that's it. It's unclear what it's all about, to be honest, based on some kind of—these are more expert tales.

GREK: Yes, and about the role of the personality of a strong president, we come to the last question. [00:48:00] Are there fundamental principles, institutions, or counterinterests in U.S.-Russian relations that prevent the emergence of friendship, even with personal contact between leaders?

PAVLOVSKY: I think that the basis of these difficulties is the absence of real relations at the same time on the economic, on the human and on the political level. We are too far away. We have nothing to share except stolen secrets. Therefore, I am ready to assert that there is not one person in Russia, not one—not only the leaders of the Kremlin—not a single person has ever understood American politics, even at the state level. Even at the state level. They understood Chinese policy to a greater



extent than American policy. American policy is a dark forest—it is too complicated for us to understand.

Well, there are reciprocal structures of misunderstanding on the part of the United States. There is a well-known statement to everyone—however, I don't remember which American [00:50:00], it was not the president, of course—it was the American ambassador to Tsar Nicholas I, the most reactionary, one might say. And after shaking [Nicholas I's] hand, he said, "That was a strong democratic handshake." Now, this is very similar to Bush's eye contact—a strong democratic handshake.

America is not understood in Russia, and I think there is even no school of study—the study of local American politics, for example. That is what American populism is, not modern, but everlasting, so to speak. We also have—Tocqueville, I think, was only translated in the 1990s. That's why there have always been—all support for politics was built around relationships



played a role here, which also turned out to be disadvantageous for the Union in the end.

And so you can endlessly enumerate, endlessly. The Soviet Union really had an international policy, had international interests, and they, of course, clashed with the American ones. But Russia, in fact, has no international policy and no international interests, which he [Putin] does not want to admit. Therefore, when you have phantom goals, phantom interests, then they will constantly clash with something, and you will ascribe some significance



ordered systems, this annoys him, in particular because he himself, of course, is an anarcho-nihilist. He values his freedom so much that any strict management