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age—we were brought up during the Cold War. And based on the educational institutions in which he studied, it was obvious that America is his tribal enemy, a hereditary enemy. And this does not then



everyone immediately remembers that it was President Bush who looked into the eyes, not Putin. And that means by that time Putin had a long-established peculiarity—I came across this with him directly just this year—he always took the form of an interlocutor, and it was quite obvious that he was trying to charm, recruit,



President Bush—for him Yeltsin was nobody: “Who’s that?” He practically never communicated with him. And for him it was like a new Russian tsar. And it is clear that, for Bush, the interests of America were important, and not the interests of Russia or anything else there.

So, the Yeltsin-Clinton relationship—I watched them closely because I was in the President Yeltsin’s pool, and because Clinton was here. They were the same—they were people of the last century, they were just betting on the fact that personal relationships, and not interests, can influence something. For Putin, personal relationships are very important, but not in the Yeltsin-Clinton-type sense. In this sense, it is very important for Putin to be treated as an equal—for Yeltsin it was not necessary.

And the way Bush behaved in Slovenia, in particular—Putin was satisfied, and he maintained about Bush—even after the departure of President Bush from office—he maintained such very, I would say, good memories about him. And after he left, once, at a meeting with the editors-in-chief where I participated, at a closed meeting, Putin said that “Bush never deceived me. If he said ‘no’, then it was ‘no’. If he said, ‘I’ll think’, then it was ‘I’ll think’, not ‘no’. If he said ‘Yes’, it meant ‘yes’, even if his administration objected.”

So we asked him, just at the changeover, the departure of Bush—it was 2008. So, Putin also resigned from the presidency—I’ll just remind you, he became prime minister. There was a meeting—it was probably somewhere in April 2008.




“Bush never deceived me.” No, it was April 2009. Bush had already left, so, keep in mind, when we spoke to him, the Georgian War had already passed, and he said, “Bush never deceived me!” So, that is, they had developed a kind of chemistry, but





VENEDIKTOV:



and, since we communicate with him and had been communicating, and communicated very closely with him, we also understood what this means—we, of course, criticized it. It is from the point of view of destruction, a blow to the general security system—not a specific treaty, but the general security system of the structure that Gorbachev, Reagan and Bush built.

GREK: Did it somehow merge with the NATO agendas?

VENEDIKTOV: Of course, of course. In general, it should be recalled that *E*

came into being after Gorbachev's decree. And, in this case, we are Gorbachev's grandchildren and Yeltsin's children, well, in the sense of a free press. And there are not so many of us left in Russia. And so we understood that we were growing up at the moment when the world kind of—the Cold War ended, we appeared at that moment. And it seemed that cooperation was becoming possible, including in the field of security, including in the field of weapons.

And the destruction of this story, well, this is how it was: We perceived it as against the course of history, the reverse course of history. Well, yes, we talked about it carefully, discussed it, I naturally met with the defense ministers. As it was at the beginning of the destruction, of course, we also criticized our own government, it goes without saying, in terms of the destruction of the security system, as well as the U.S. government and any other government that destroyed the system. This is how journalists worked.



GREK: Some colleagues have suggested that it was exactly the withdrawal from this treaty that launched the process of building supersonic missiles, which were revealed in the form of animations in 2018.

VENEDIKTOV: Of course not. You need to understand the psychology of President Putin, his team. Yes, when I say President Putin, this is his team, these are people of the Cold War, these are people, I repeat, who are, “You are the Yumba-Zumba tribe, and we are the Zumba-Yumba tribe—we are hereditary enemies, yes, natural opponents, rivals, enemies,” whatever. And so the arms race began, yes, under Putin, because his team sees it that way. And the Americans were engaged in supersonic systems,



GREK: Less than three months after the first meeting in Slovenia, September 11 took place.

What was the reaction of the Russians? How



GREK: The next important event was the color revolutions—Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan.

What do you think of these revolutions? How and why did they happen? And how, in your opinion, did the Kremlin take it?

VENEDIKTOV: Well, you put it like this—what I think, and what the Kremlin thinks. I'm not Putin's press secretary. Well, we really talked about it a few times. As far as I understand, Putin is absolutely sure that color revolutions are the work of our “Western colleagues,” as he says—in fact, the American administration, any, R



considered their zone of influence—these are the former republics of the Soviet Union, first of all—not only Arabian, but



VENEDIKTOV: Well, the majority of Russians did not notice it. And they do not know these NGOs with whom President Bush met—it is not very interesting for them, except for Putin, yes, except for the president.

No, it was a destructive meeting from the Kremlin's point of view, because who is the NGO? What's this? There is a president elected by the people, there is a parliament elected by the people, there are students at MGU [Moscow State University] or at MGIMO [Moscow State Institute of International Relations]



the withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, the invasion of Iraq, the expansion of NATO, but at the same time, American officials still believe that President Putin does not understand the true reason for these steps and believe that the differences could either be indirectly resolved or could be negotiated. How did you react to the performance in Munich? What do you think Putin was trying to do at this moment? Do you agree with your colleagues' assertion that the differences were not significant enough to react to them? And in principle, how would you rate the popularity of this performance in Russia?



peculiar to him, his team. It was uncomfortable for him, it did not reflect his views, he believed that Yeltsin had conceded to the Americans step by step: Europe, the republics of the Soviet Union, the "southern underbelly" and so on.

Here is Putin in Munich in 2007—this is, in fact, the real Putin of 2007. This is how he was thinking without the Yeltsin legacy, as he was already seeing it. This is not my conclusion—these are just those people who, the ministers who were in the delegation, who were with Putin all three,



VENEDIKTOV: Look, Medvedev simply



is he? Who is this? And Medvedev managed to establish some kind of contact and find common points. The New START treaty showed it. I won't talk about anything else, but the New START treaty showed it. Of course, this was a different policy—precisely because it was a different policy toward America, he lost his seat as president. He lost his candidacy, I would even say, for the presidency and was sent back to prime minister, and then in general—.

GREK: Just the same, Medvedev has largely been



terrorism from there—that is, there will be no threats from there. I'm responsible for this. Give it to me, don't go there. I am responsible for this. Let China take Southeast Africa, Asia, you take whatever you want with Europe.” Well, that was his idea.

I just told him then that Reagan said that "Yalta—never again.”



the anti-Hitler coalition. It was not laid down, it was handwritten, meaning his vision, it is the vision right now.

Now, let's get back to Georgia. If we proceed from what I said, it's true: Georgia is part of the legacy of the Soviet Union, so there, like Ukraine later, others got in there, from his point of view (see the color revolutions), Americans, Europeans got in there—it doesn't matter who, but at least the Chinese, yes, "This is mine, this is my area of responsibility, you stepped on my foot." So they climbed, climbed, climbed, and then, as you know, there are territories, conflict territories, frozen conflicts—




responsibility. Whoever got in, we defend everything—this is ours, we defend our border like this. Try to get in now if the Taliban go to Uzbekistan—this is our territory, in the sense of our mental territory, this is his vision. His vision, in contrast to, perhaps, the Reagan administration—I don't know about Bush—it's territorial. There were borders—here there were pillars, and here is a step, like in a long jump, the step does not count, and there—it



Michael] McFaul—he was there, and who else was there? [U.S. Ambassador Bill] Burns was there—the current director of the CIA. He [Putin] expounded on this for 45 minutes. Actually, I know this from Lavrov and from McFaul, so it's true. Two opposing sources—it's true!

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GREK: Well, to stay somewhat chronological in this period and return to the previous statement about McCain: What do you think, would the Republicans would have been more comfortable for the Kremlin?


VENEDIKTOV: Look, he respected McCain very much. I had several—well, at least two—conversations with Putin about McCain. I also knew and met McCain, so I told him, and he told me how McCain behaved in captivity, and I learned from him—from Putin—that when McCain was tortured—can you imagine, he called the pilots of his squadron there, and, it turns out, there were members of the baseball team, his school team, family. And [Putin] says, "How would you and I behave if the



when Obama won—“Who is this?” A weak one has arrived, well, it’s not clear. Of course, he is weak, so we will force him! And they did...


GREK: And what do you think, cumulatively, if we take the entire period of relations between the two administrations: Did the Bush administration manage to read Putin as a person, as a political leader? Do you think the Kremlin understood or read Bush?

VENEDIKTOV: The Kremlin understood and read Bush exactly and manipulated this administration, because, if you take the Bush period of 2001-2008, yes, we see how Russia became stronger, we see how Russia took risks—the Georgian campaign, see for yourself, it was risky. We did not know what obligations the Bush administration had in relation to the Saakashvili administration, but also



missiles and non-nuclear missiles in Europe, and in fact it is impossible, but in terms of design it is possible. Well, as he sees it, it is simply impossible, it is pointless to blow hot air. It was possible with Brezhnev, yes, and it was possible with Clinton, but not with Putin.

And that's why I say that they did not read it. But because many people think, including in the administration—when I was last in the States, in 2016, it was still the Obama administration. I spoke with many there, I spoke with [then Deputy Secretary of State Anthony] Blinken then, yes—so everyone is sure that it is Putin who is so cunning. Yes, he is so cunning, but at the same time he has a basis from which he will never set foot. It is a) his own understanding and b) understanding that his people share basic things because they are hereditary enemies. Here is the story of hereditary enmity—you can put up with enemies, conclude a truce, even divide the spoils, do something together, but these are still enemies—originally



understands this, well, Normandy Format²—I mean, nor [former French President Francois] Hollande—they simply do not understand.

It's just about something else—for him it is not a tactic, for him it is the basis. I could not explain this to a single American ambassador, except for [Alexander] Vershbow. Because when Vershbow asked me, “How do I explain the relationship between Putin and Medvedev to my President Bush? He does not understand.” “Alexey, can you somehow explain? I don’t know how you can explain something to Texans.” I said, “Well, here, you can say Putin is Batman, and Medvedev is Robin.” And Vershbow wrote it in a telegram, which got leaked on WikiLeaks, and although my name was crossed out, redacted, nevertheless, this telegram was read here. First, I was informed that Medvedev was dissatisfied with me because of this, and second, at a meeting with Putin, the prime minister, he said, “Listen, I know that you wrote this, I had to watch three movies to understand what you meant.” Batman [and] Robin! Well, how to explain the relationship to an American—Batman and Robin! I still think so, you know? This story is exactly about that. Because how do you explain to President Bush who it is? Here! This is the actual story! That’s why I still don’t like [Wikileaks founder Julian] Assange. [crosstalk]

But here it was obvious, quite obvious that I got to the point, because both



to Ambassador Vershbow because this is what he conveyed, and I realized that President Bush, he does not understand. How can



administration. The administration, any American administration, thinks that it will be this, and Putin thinks from what it will Russia. It seems to me that this is a very important thing.

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