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***Finding Innovative Ways to Keep the Peace***

## **Russia's Putin Agrees to Discuss President Bush's Strategic Approach**

A surprising thing happened in Italy this week: Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to join President Bush in exploring a new strategic approach to U.S.-Russian relations. In a joint statement, Putin and Bush “agreed that major changes in the world require concrete discussions of both offensive and defensive systems.” While President Putin most recently has been a vocal opponent of U.S. plans to build a missile defense system, his admission that today’s world requires a new approach to U.S.-Russian relations based on interrelated issues of offensive and defensive systems is encouraging. This is the same approach President Bush has been advocating — and Democrats have been criticizing.

Much will be said about these consultations. However, perhaps the best sources of information for understanding the time-frame and component pieces of the consultations are the transcripts of press briefings from President Bush and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice while in Europe earlier this week. This paper quotes from those transcripts.

President Bush’s and Dr. Rice’s statements clarify what these consultations are to be — strategic planning conversations between two nuclear powers — and what they are not — lengthy arms control negotiations harkening back to the constructs popular during the Cold War. The U.S.-Russian consultations are new and innovative and transcend Cold War Mutual Assured Destruction thinking. The discussions are about advancing mutual security interests in a multi-polar world.

### **On the Time-Frame**

Condoleezza Rice is in Russia this week to work out logistics for the discussions, which are to take place at the ministerial level. In her words, “The next couple of months will be important. I’m going to try to . . . set a schedule, if you will, of consultations at the ministerial level — not arms control negotiations, but consultations and discussions. . . .” Since these are not arms control discussions, progress is expected to be relatively quick.

As for the agenda, Dr. Rice stated that she will “listen to the Russians on what they have in mind for these consultations, so that we have a sense of how they see the agenda unfolding. I do think that

we want to get a good sense of the topics and subject matter that both sides want to put on the table as we go forward.”

## **Discussions and Next Steps**

President Bush commented further on the need to wrap up these discussions quickly, and what the next steps would be:

“I can understand why he [Putin] wants time, and I’m going to give him some time. But I also want to emphasize to you that time is of the essence. . . . It is time to begin the research and development, which we have yet to do, [as we’ve been] constrained by the ABM Treaty, to determine that which is feasible.

“. . . Since I feel it so strongly, if we can’t reach an agreement, we’re going to implement [a limited missile defense system]. It’s the right thing to do. It’s what I told the American people we’re going to do. It’s what I’ve explained to our allies we’re going to do.”

And as Dr. Rice said:

“We’re not putting a time limitation on this, but I think we’ve also made very clear that the treaty itself is so constraining that as we move to a more robust research, development, testing and evaluation program, we do not want to be in the position of being constantly accused of violating the [ABM] treaty. It is a very restrictive treaty.

“. . . We would like the freedom, when we have something that enhances America’s security, and the security of our allies, and the security of our forces, to be able to move forward with it. And that’s the strategy.”

## **On Breadth of the New Relationship**

As conceived by President Bush, the new relationship between the United States and Russia would be broader than the traditional Cold War construct of strategic nuclear issues; it would be, as Dr. Rice explained, “an entirely different kind of relationship with Russia.”

Specifically, she cited the following areas where U.S. and Russian interests coincide, expressed in the Joint Statement, as the basis for a new relationship:

“. . . I think that they are making some progress on what the elements of a new strategic framework might entail, including discussions of defensive systems, although there’s not yet agreement as to what form that would take, given the constraints of the ABM Treaty. But also that offensive reductions are a part of it, the non-proliferation efforts

are a part of it, that discussions on terrorism are a part of it. So I think that what they've really moved forward on is what [should be] the elements of a new strategic framework, and I think also, a kind of openness to the fact that a new strategic framework is a good idea."

Dr. Rice emphasized that these discussions were not a return to the old days of lengthy arms control agreements. Instead, they are more appropriately designated as planning talks:

"As to what that means, how this gets enshrined . . . it is strongly our belief that the arms control treaties of the past between the United States and the Soviet Union reflected a highly abnormal relationship between the two adversaries, where everything else was zero-sum, and the only thing on which they could agree and cooperate was to keep each other from annihilation. So we don't see the need for a treaty regime here. We would really rather do something that looks more like defense planning talks. . . ."

In these defense planning talks, the U.S. and Russia would, "look at what is required for each side to insure itself, and according to Dr. Rice, ". . . we understand that the Russians may not even see exactly the same threats that we see, because they have a different history and a different geography. That's okay."

## **The Components of a New Relationship**

In advancing a more constructive relationship with Russia, the new strategic approach includes deployment of limited missile defenses that do not pose a threat to Russia. President Putin himself apparently conveyed as much to President Bush during their meeting. According to Dr. Rice, "To the degree that the Russian leadership understands that this is not aimed somehow at undermining the Russian strategic deterrent, we think that's a very good thing, and so we welcomed President Putin's comments and his reiteration of those comments yesterday."

As explained by Dr. Rice, the United States plans to deploy a limited missile defense system against several, not hundreds, of nuclear weapons. This system is vastly different from the days of the Cold War when the thinking was that offensive forces needed to be maintained at levels large enough to overwhelm defensive systems. Dr. Rice further explained this inter-relationship as follows:

"The way they [offense and defense forces] are related is that they are both elements of a new way of security, which is lower levels of offensive forces on lower stages of alert, so that there's less danger of accident, or unauthorized release, [with] missile defenses aimed at specific limited threats. . . ."

## **Consultations with Other Nations**

As the United States begins to implement its strategic approach, Dr. Rice makes clear that a host of countries will be consulted:

“Everybody, including the United States, believes that it is better to do this cooperatively, and that the Russians, as the other signatory to the ABM Treaty, need to be consulted in a special way. But the President has also made clear that he does intend to consult with other interested countries. We’ve already consulted with a number, and I think you will see consultations intensify with other countries that have a particular interest — other nuclear powers, China, for instance.”

At the same time, the Administration recognizes the need to consult with Congress: “The Senate obviously has a role to be consulted,” said Dr. Rice, who assured the press that ongoing consultations will continue and intensify as the discussions with Russia progress.

## **Going Beyond the ABM Treaty**

While the United States recognizes the need to build a cooperative relationship with Russia, Dr. Rice also related the Administration’s strong commitment to move forward on missile defense and beyond the restrictive limits of the ABM Treaty:

“We consistently said that we don’t think the way to approach this is to line in, line out the treaty, where we say this test requires that change in the treaty, because the treaty is so restrictive. And our view is that we need to move beyond it. We need to get flexibility for a robust testing and evaluation system [which] is going to run afoul of this treaty. There’s just no doubt about that because, just to give you an example, everybody’s favorite potential system is a sea-based system of some kind because of its flexibility. And in fact it would clearly not threaten the Russian deterrent. You can’t test a sea-based system in an ABM mode. There are just too many limitations.”

As President Bush stated forcefully and unequivocally:

“But make no mistake about it, I think it’s important to move beyond the ABM Treaty. I would rather others come with us, but I feel so strongly and passionately on the subject about how to keep the peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that we’ll move beyond, if need be.”

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[All above quotes are from White House Office press releases, entitled: “Readout to the Press Pool on the Bilateral Meeting of President Bush with President Putin of Russia” by Dr. Rice, 7/22/01; “Press Conference by President Bush and Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi,” 7/23/01; and “Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice,” 7/23/01.]