

Bush and Putin as Leaders

The Ties that Bind

Jonathan Becker

Soft Skull Samizdat Publication No. 1

**Soft Skull Press
Brooklyn NY 2006**

(c) 2006 Jonathan Becker

Published by Soft Skull Press, Inc
55 Washington St. Suite 804
Brooklyn NY 11201

US President George W. Bush will soon depart for St. Petersburg, Russia, where he will be hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin at the annual G8 meeting. Much is being made of the visit in the light of the deteriorating state of freedoms in Russia and US/Russian tensions over issues such as Iran's nuclear program and attempts to establish Western leaning democracies in Georgia and Ukraine. In his recent visit to Lithuania and Kazakhstan, no less an expert than Dick Cheney criticized Russia for taking steps backwards on democracy and human rights, and chastised it for using energy as a "tool of intimidation" and "blackmail." Some in the U.S. are calling on Bush to cancel his trip or at least to publicly upbraid his increasingly authoritarian colleague. However, those hoping for President Bush to launch a new Cold War are likely to be disappointed. U.S./Russian affairs are built on the foundation of enduring bonds that link the two unlikely soul mates.

Strong personal relationships are not unusual in the context of U.S./Russian (and US/Soviet) relations. For example, Ronald Reagan built a genuinely close rapport with the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin's relationship was such that then-candidate George W. Bush criticized the U.S. president for having a policy towards a person instead of a country. But it is clear that Bush has gone one step further: to comprehend the Bush approach to Russia one needs to understand that the Putin/Bush ties run deep, perhaps deeper than between any previous U.S and Russian/Soviet leaders, and it is these ties that prevent a serious rupture in U.S./Russian relations.

So what makes the relationship work so well? The answer lies not only in some broad notion of friendship, but in a surprisingly similar leadership style, a common sense of purpose, and a comparable approach to governance. These factors help to explain why the leaders hold each other in such high esteem. They also reveal why the United States and Russia both face threats to democratic institutions at home and receive so much criticism abroad. The irony is that

fifteen years after the end of the Cold War, America and Russia are undergoing a form of convergence, but rather than Russia adopting liberal democracy and a market economy, as so many had predicted, the United States may be moving closer to a more traditionally Russian notion of “managed democracy,” in which executive authority reigns and the rights of citizens take a back seat to the needs of the state.

Bush and Putin: Best of Friends

On the surface of it, they make an odd couple. Bush is a member of a powerful and privileged family, the grandson of a senator and the son of a president, a man who was, by his own admission, unfocused and ill disciplined until his mid thirties when he found God, quit drinking and used his father’s connections to jump into the lucrative businesses of oil and sport, and then to the family business of politics. Putin, on the other hand, is from relatively modest means, but a man of great discipline, a Judo master who made a dramatic climb from a relatively obscure KGB posting in East Germany to serving then-Leningrad mayor Anatoly Sobchak, and then on to the Kremlin where he returned to the spy game before Boris Yeltsin plucked him from relative obscurity to become his prime minister and successor. Bush is a brash cut-up, while Putin is more cold and calculating. Putin speaks German and is reputed to study English two hours a day. Bush traveled abroad rarely prior to becoming president and often finds English challenging. Bush also was extremely skeptical of Putin early on, dismissing him with the statement: “Once a KGB man, always a KGB man.”

Yet, evidence of a robust Bush/Putin relationship is manifest. After their first meeting in Slovenia in June of 2001, Bush famously professed: “I looked the man in the eye. I was able to get a sense of his soul... I found him very straightforward, trustworthy.” Soon after the 9/11 attacks, Bush hosted Putin at his ranch in Crawford, TX, and again spoke of seeing Putin’s “heart and soul,” before

declaring that in Texas “you only invite a good friend to your home.” Not long after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Bush had Putin, who opposed the attack, over to Camp David for a weekend of fun and talk while French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who also opposed the war, were effectively *personae non grata*, banished to the dustbin of old Europe. After this meeting in September 2003, Bush was gushing, calling Putin a “good friend” and a “guy” with whom one could have a good time, and declaring of Putin “I love him, believe it or not.”

Bush’s love of Putin is not unrequited. Putin was the first foreign leader to speak to the president after the 9/11 attacks. Putin also broke diplomatic protocol by all but endorsing Bush’s reelection in the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign. Less than a month before the election, Putin helped justify Bush’s signature policy in Iraq by suggesting, even to the surprise of his own foreign policy team, that Russian intelligence services had information that proved that Saddam Hussein’s regime had planned attacks on U.S. soil. Putin also declared that international terrorists were seeking to prevent Bush’s election to a second term, and asserted that if they did, it would “give an additional impulse to [them] and their activities, and could lead to the spread of terrorism to other parts of the world.”

Even in recent times, when U.S./Russian relations appear to have been fraying and lesser officials occasionally take pot shots at each other, the friends remain on good terms. A little more than a year ago, at their meeting in Moscow for the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, the two leaders had a photo-op turn into a buddy movie, as Putin took Bush for a spin in his vintage 1956 Volga, even letting the clutch-challenged Bush drive. The trip was so much fun that after the leaders returned they disappeared again, with Bush declaring “I’m having so much fun we’re going for another lap.”

The relationship is so secure that one wonders whether, after both are out of office, the two will travel the world doing good deeds, like Bush’s father and former President Bill Clinton or, alternatively, if Putin might help Bush get

back to his energy roots with a sweetheart deal similar to that given to his other buddy, former German President Gerhard Schroeder, who now heads a pipeline consortium controlled by the Russian energy giant Gazprom.

Common Leadership Style: Men in Flight Suits

Presidents Bush and Putin have reputations for leadership styles that emphasize strength and decisiveness. These reputations were cultivated to distinguish them from their predecessors and to help people forget the unusual way both ascended to office.¹ For Putin, this meant helping Russians forget the ruin of the Yeltsin years that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was a period in which Russians not only had to endure the collapse of their empire, their relegation from Superpower status, tremendous financial hardship, and an ensuing identity crisis, but they also had to reconcile themselves to a president, Boris Yeltsin, who drank too much, became increasingly isolated, physically frail, and erratic in his behavior. Putin established himself as a Russian leader of a different type. He was portrayed as hard-working, cunning, athletic, and relatively abstemious, a Judo expert who could hold his own on the world scene.

The challenge facing Bush was not as great. The US had, after all, enjoyed peace and prosperity during the Clinton years. However, Bush parlayed his differences with Clinton into a major electoral asset. While Clinton was bright, but undisciplined in both his decision-making and sexual relations, Bush repeatedly vowed to “restore dignity to the Oval Office” and wore his religious conviction on his sleeve. While his opponent in 2000, Vice President Al Gore, was labeled a flip-flopping waffler (just as John Kerry would be four years later), Bush emphasized his core values and consistency. After the 9/11 attacks, he made it clear that there would be no repeat of Clintonian feebleness in response to terrorism. He would win the “war on terror.”

In projecting strength, both leaders have exercised a fair degree of tough talking. For example, Putin, an unknown new prime minister, effectively introduced himself to the nation by declaring vulgarly that Russian forces would “soak” Chechen terrorists “in the shithouse” and show no mercy. When Russian diplomats were recently killed in Iraq he also did not mince words, stating that Russian special forces would “find and kill” those responsible. Bush has demonstrated similar bravado, indicating that he wanted Osama bin Laden “dead or alive,” and issuing a now infamous challenge to the Iraqi insurgency to “bring it on.” If Putin’s assertion was meant to indicate that the weakness of the Yeltsin years was over, Bush’s was to embody the swagger of a leader with Texas “roots.”

In this context, it is worth noting that one common object of both presidents’ verbal barbs is the press, particularly when it questions executive prerogatives. Putin has lashed out at the Russian media for showing excessive sympathy to the Chechen side of the conflict and shown shown no concern for reporters captured or killed in the battle zone. Once, in Brussels, upon being questioned by a French journalist about civilian casualties in Chechnya, he not only aggressively lectured the reporter on the evils of Islamic extremism, but also invited him to Russia to undergo a special form of circumcision in which afterward “nothing else will grow.” Bush has shown a similar predisposition, albeit without such colorful imagery. He has made it clear that he does not believe that journalists represent the public, and has taken numerous opportunities to berate journalists for their shortcomings. He all but accused the *New York Times* of treason for revealing a secret government program to track the transfer of money through overseas banks and asserted that the newspaper’s disclosures “make it harder to win this war on terror.”

In spite of their criticism, neither president is beyond using the media to reinforce his image of strength. Americans are familiar with President Bush’s made-for-television *Top Gun* moment, in which he eschewed the convenience of a helicopter to don a flight suit and “help” pilot an S-3B Viking to the deck of the

USS Abraham Lincoln. The gushing press responded in kind, with the supposedly hard-edged Chris Mathews, for example, referring to Bush that night as a “high-flying jet star,” offering “amazing display of leadership.”² Few know, however, that Bush was following in the footsteps of President Putin who, while acting president in 2000, donned his own bomber jacket and pilot mask to fly in an Su-27 from Krasnodar to an airport just outside of the Chechen capital of Grozny. Images of an energetic Putin sitting in the co-pilot’s seat, which look remarkably similar to those of Bush on the flight deck, dominated Russian television that day, less than a month before the presidential election.³

Both leaders are also extremely secretive and rely on an inner circle to guide them. Both also demand total loyalty and can be brutal with those who cross them. Putin, very much in the Russian style, has tended to rely on old friends either from his days in the KGB or from his time working with his mentor, St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak. Of the large number of KGB officials in his government, he said openly: “I have known them for many years and I trust them. It has nothing to do with ideology. It’s only a matter of their professional relationship.” Bush relies on a very tight group of advisers to guide him, including Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and political guru Karl Rove. He listens to presentations by cabinet members, although he tends not to ask questions, nor does he read long reports, keeping his counsel for the few people who matter.⁴ Like Putin, he demands absolute loyalty. As Andrew Sullivan has argued, “[f]ierce loyalty is a prerequisite for serving Bush...loyalty matters far more than being right or being competent.”⁵

Both presidents also have attempted to cultivate reputations for being straight shooters, and appreciate that quality in others. Certainly, it is a value that they cherish in each other. In speaking of Bush, Putin has stressed that “[o]n no occasion did he deceive me or mislead me. He always does as he says, and in that respect he is a reliable partner.” Bush has echoed similar views, describing Putin

as “trustworthy” and stating during their 2005 meeting in Bratislava that “[t]his is the kind of fellow who when he says yes he means yes, and when he says no he means no.” For Bush, as for Putin, this is the ultimate compliment.

Common Purpose: The War on Terror

If there is one issue that unites George Bush and Vladimir Putin, it is their commitment to fight terrorism. Both presidents are identified with the fight against terror, and their leadership credentials depend completely on that fight. Many of their decisions flow from and are justified by it. The fight with terror also drives their self-images as leaders with a transcendent purpose.

The battle against terror in the form of Chechen separatism vaulted Putin from being just another in the line of Boris Yeltsin’s prime ministers, the fifth in eighteen months, to his successor as Russian president. One of Putin’s first actions as prime minister, and his signature policy, was the launch of the second Chechen war. As he put it, “[m]y mission, my historical mission—and this will sound lofty, but it’s true—consisted of resolving the situation in the Northern Caucasus.” For him, the battle in Chechnya was not just an isolated separatist conflict, but the primary test for the Russian state, which needed to re-assert itself after fifteen disastrous years that began with Gorbachev’s perestroika policies. It was thus his primary challenge as Russia’s leader and, in his view, it is what the Russian population expected of him. As he put it, “In my opinion, the active support of our actions in the Caucasus is due not only to a sense of hurt national identity but also to a vague feeling . . . that the state has become weak. . . . And it ought to be strong.” The war, and the terrorist actions associated with it, have been tremendously costly, particularly in terms of civilian casualties. Nevertheless, Putin has stuck to his guns and steadfastly eschewed all compromise or any serious form of negotiation with the “bandits.” He has vowed to pursue the conflict until all armed Chechen rebels are “scattered and destroyed.”

“Only one thing can be effective in such circumstances—to go on the offensive,” he said. “You must hit first, and hit so hard that your opponent will not rise to his feet.” Chechnya can only be won on his terms and his terms are strict.

President Bush’s response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 has defined him as president and will define his legacy. The summer before the attack, the Bush presidency appeared to be drifting, with news media stories focusing on the president’s general detachment from the actions of governance and the vast amounts of vacation time he was spending. However, 9/11 changed all of that. According to *Time* magazine’s Michael Duffy, on that day Bush privately told people that he was chosen by the grace of God to be the leader of the United States at that moment.⁶ His decisions since reflect that certitude: he has tended to rely far more on the beliefs of ideologues than the views of seasoned experts or the facts on the ground. His response to the attacks, the ever-expanding “war on terror,” has driven his foreign policy, including the war in Iraq, justified many of his domestic decisions, and served as the centerpiece of his re-election campaign in 2004. Bush sees the “global ideological struggle” with radical Islam as the successor to the Cold War and, like Putin, shuns any signs of compromise. As he put it, “[t]he enemy is never tired, never sated, never content with yesterday’s brutality. . . . This enemy considers every retreat of the civilized world as an invitation to greater violence.”

His commitment and certitude have also led him to take a more unilateral approach to US foreign policy than at any point in recent memory. As Bush sees it, as long as he is in charge, the US will not “lose its nerve” in the most important fight of modern times, and anyone who questions his actions, be it members of Congress or the press, is aiding and abetting the enemy. This also means that he finds a close ally in Vladimir Putin. As he stated in a joint news conference with President Putin in September 2003, “Russia and the United States are allies in the war on terror. Both of our nations have suffered at the hands of terrorists, and both of our governments are taking actions to stop them.”

Implicit in the statement is a belief that both leaders have a special understanding of the meaning of terrorism and their special mission to quash it.

Common Approach to Governance: All Power to the Executive

If the war on terror is the policy that drives and unites Presidents Putin and Bush, a commitment to the supremacy of the executive branch gives them a shared approach to governance. The wars on terror have no doubt given pretext for the assertion of executive authority, but for both presidents the commitment to executive superiority reaches far beyond that.

Three terms sum up Putin's approach to governance: "managed democracy," "dictatorship of the law," and the "*vertikal*" (vertical power). Taken together, they mean that Putin has taken the Yeltsin-era constitution, which already places inordinate authority in the presidency, to an extreme. Russia will have a strong state, the state will be controlled by the president, and potential challenges to the state, whether they emerge from wealthy "oligarchs" or from upstart governors, will be crushed. Putin is unapologetic in this regard, as he said in his millennium speech "Russia will not become a second edition of, say, the U.S. or Britain, where liberal values have deep historic traditions. . . . For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly to be got rid of. Quite the contrary, it is a source of order and the main driving force of any change."

Managed democracy, as its name suggests, implies significant limits on political freedoms, something which is far more akin to authoritarianism than democracy. In the political sphere, it has meant that the state and its allies have taken control over all major national television stations, which now serve to promote the policies of the president and that television and other so-called "administrative resources" have been manipulated generously to ensure the re-election of Putin and the election of his loyal majority parliamentary party, Unified Russia.

It has also meant that electoral laws have been altered to make it more difficult for potential opposition parties to become elected in the future. Substantial limits have also been placed on civil society, including onerous registration requirements for non-governmental organizations that could challenge the government. These and other steps are designed to ensure that Russia will avoid the popular uprisings that led to the removal of old-guard governments in the “colored” revolutions of Ukraine (orange) and Georgia (rose).

Dictatorship of law essentially boils down to the selective application of legal principles, often the tax code, to eliminate potential rivals. It has been particularly effective in being wielded against those from the private sector who deign to interfere with the actions of the state. Dictatorship of law has ensured that the likes of Vladimir Gusinsky and Mikhail Khodarkovsky have been, respectively, exiled and jailed, and that the state has stripped them of their media and energy assets.

The *vertikal* has seen the further centralization of power through the emasculation of Russia’s system of federalism. The process began in the year 2000 with the creation of seven “super-regions,” overseen by presidentially appointed plenipotentiaries, to oversee the activities of the governors and legislatures in Russia’s eighty-nine territorial units. The process accelerated after the Beslan tragedy when Putin implemented a “reform” to ensure that that henceforth governors would no longer be popularly elected, but named by Moscow (subject to nominal approval by regional legislatures). To top things off, governor after governor then appeared on state-run television to stress how wise the decision was to ensure that they no longer be elected by the people. Such is the state of affairs in managed democracy.

If Putin uses dictatorship of law to emasculate potential rivals, Bush uses unique legal interpretations, which are seemingly cooked up in the basement of the conservative Federalist Society, to arrogate to himself powers unheard of in

U.S. history. The philosophy of the Bush administration, as is so often the case, was best articulated by Vice President Dick Cheney, who declared, “I believe in a strong, robust executive authority, and I think that the world we live in demands it.” This philosophy has led to a number of actions that, in the words of Elizabeth Drew, have made the executive “less accountable than at any time in modern American history.”⁷

The administration asserts that the primary sources of executive supremacy rest in the president’s power as commander in chief, under Article II of the Constitution, and Congress’ *Authorization for Use of Military Force* (AUMF), passed in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, which calls for “the use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States.” The scope of actions which the Bush administration believes is justified under current circumstances knows no bounds. According to a white paper issued by the Bush’s Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, the combination of Article II and AUMF “places the president at the zenith of his powers,” granting him “all that he possesses in his own right plus all that Congress can delegate.” Since the “war on terror” is, almost by definition, limitless in terms of time and space, this interpretation means that according to the White House, President Bush and future presidents will be at the apex of their powers in perpetuity.

This Bush approach has permitted broad assertions of executive authority that have undermined the legislative branch and paved the way for violations of fundamental rights of citizens and non-citizens alike. The list of *known* activities justified by the force of Article II and AUMG includes, but is not limited to: the indefinite holding of American citizens without a hearing, charges, or a trial; the detention of non-U.S. nationals in Guantanamo Bay and in “black sites” throughout the world without any form of due process; the approval of activities which are prohibited by the Geneva conventions, including torture; the “extraordinary rendition” of terror suspects to third countries where they receive

barbaric treatment; and, the creation of a program under the National Security Agency (NSA) which, without court approval, allows the monitoring of phone conversations and emails of thousands of citizens.⁸ All of these have been conducted with no, or absolutely minimal, Congressional oversight and without Congress's express approval.

The NSA case is particularly instructive, because in this circumstance the president had a tool that would permit such activities under the Congressionally-mandated Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. However, he chose to reject this option. His contempt for oversight by the legislative branch was exhibited in the limited way that congressmen were brought into the picture: rather than seeking legislative support for the program, or even consulting with the full intelligence committees, the administration briefed a handful of lawmakers about selected parts of the program, did not seek their approval, and prohibited them from consulting staff or counsel, or sharing the information with colleagues, including members of the intelligence committees. As Pennsylvania Republican Arlen Specter put it succinctly, the administration's briefings did "not constitute a check and balance."

The idea that Bush's commitment to executive supremacy is solely derived from the demands of the war on terror and the balance between safety and security is belied by his reliance, since the start of his administration, on the hitherto obscure notion of the "unitary executive." As Elizabeth Drew has argued, "[t]he concept of the unitary executive holds that the executive branch can overrule the courts and Congress on the basis of the president's own interpretations of the Constitution."⁹ This is the moral equivalent of a *vertikal* for the federal government, with the executive at the top of the pyramid and the separation of powers obliterated. What this means in practical terms is that President Bush, instead of vetoing bills (something he has yet to do in his nearly six years in office), issues "signing statements" which are included in the *Federal Registrar*, a compendium of U.S. laws. In the signing statements he uses often opaque language which adds

up to the notion that it is the executive, not the legislative branch, which defines the intent of laws and which determines the level of Congressional oversight of any action that concerns the executive. In all, he has issued more than 750 such statements. Perhaps the most egregious example of this was the signing statement for the McCain amendment that banned “cruel, inhuman or degraded treatment” of POWs. In the words of a protest letter signed by former government officials of both parties, the signing statement meant that the President “may or may not be bound” by laws enacted by Congress.¹⁰ After learning of a similar signing statement on amendments to the Patriot Act that required the FBI to report to Congress uses of its powers to search and seize records, Senator Patrick Leahy argued that the president “appears to believe that he can pick and choose which laws to obey and need never submit to Congressional oversight.” He also accused Bush of making “a radical effort to reshape the constitutional separation of powers and evade accountability and responsibility for following the law.”¹¹

Discussion

Presidents Bush and Putin value and trust each other enough, and see the world through sufficiently similar lenses, that one can be confident that the ties that bind them together will stay in place over the remaining years of their terms and perhaps beyond. The unfortunate reality is that their similar policy styles, their shared mission to fight terrorism, and their mutual assertion of executive authority have done more than just unite the leaders, they have caused considerable damage to democratic institutions in their countries and their countries’ reputations abroad. This is ironic, given that both repeatedly spout a rhetorical commitment to democracy.¹²

One should not lose perspective here. Russia under Putin is not democratic. Decision-making flows from the top and simply cannot be challenged either by the courts or the legislature, or questioned on television. Should Putin

decide to alter the constitution and run for a third term, or change the shape of government so that, henceforth, he becomes the prime minister in a parliamentary system, he can do so relatively easily. In the United States, on the other hand, Bush's actions can and have been curbed. Be it Franklin Roosevelt's attempt to pack the Supreme Court or Richard Nixon's use of security services to spy on his enemies, the American system has a way of righting itself. This happened recently when the Supreme Court ruled that Bush's tribunals for Guantanamo detainees were illegal. Bush has also had difficulties getting his legislative priorities to move through Congress, something Putin has not had to face. Moreover, now that Iraq has gone bad, he is also regularly excoriated in the press, contributing to his low popularity rating. He will also certainly be out of the White House in 2008. In short, U.S. democracy may be under threat, but it has not crumbled.

Yet that does not let President Bush off of the hook for his actions. His unilateral assault on the rights of Congress, which is in some ways reminiscent of his unilateralist foreign policy, was not necessary. Global terror clearly threatens the United States, but President Bush could have achieved many of his policy aims without ignoring the separation of powers. His actions, particularly the signing statements, demonstrate that his approach to governance is not simply a response to the terrorist threat, but derives from a governing philosophy more akin to Vladimir Putin than to James Madison. In the name of certitude, or perhaps because of his belief that he has been "chosen" for this moment, he has approached key decisions without the benefit of input beyond his close circle or oversight from elected officials. This has been to the detriment of the democratic process and contributed to poor policy decisions and execution, as the war in Iraq has amply demonstrated. His poor example has also dealt a blow to one of his signature foreign policy goals, the export of democracy. As one Russian journalist stated, "Here in Russia the authorities are always eager to borrow from the worst elements of western experience."¹³ Bush has provided plenty of bad examples to follow and, if Congress and the courts do not step in, American democracy will suffer lasting damage.

In many ways one may feel far more sympathy for Putin. Bush inherited a country that has had a couple hundred years experience of some form of democratic governance, while Putin's Russia had less than a decade. When Putin came into office in 1999, the country appeared in dire straits. It had just suffered an economic meltdown. Only six per cent of Russians thought that the country was headed in the right direction while seventy-one per cent thought it was moving in the wrong direction (thirteen per cent thought it was not moving at all). Russia's transition from Communism was so difficult that between 1995 and 2000, more than fifty per cent of people thought "life like this cannot go on any longer."¹⁴ The talk at the time among Russian experts was of a weak or even potentially failed state. Now, the ship appears to have been righted. Russia has experienced several years of economic growth and growing national pride, and Putin remains relatively popular, at least for now.

Clearly centralization under Putin has gone way too far and crippled hopes that Russia could consolidate democracy in the near future. It is also likely that the country will, one day, pay dearly for authoritarianism and its concomitants of corruption and bad governance, particularly if the price of oil ever drops significantly. Indeed, an ever-greater stench of corruption emanates from the Kremlin. Putin, no doubt encouraged by the current and former KGB and military personnel whom he relies upon for advice (the so-called *siloviki*), has also made some major missteps in foreign policy, such as cutting off Ukraine's gas supply. This has done significant damage to Russia's reputation as a reliable energy supplier and, like many of Bush's unilateralist actions, led to much criticism abroad for his heavy-handed approach. However, one should still not forget that the challenges he faced when he came into office were immense. Had Bush been president of Russia, one wonders whether he would have behaved any differently.

In spite of the recent tensions between the US and Russia, the ties that bind Putin and Bush run deep, and no diplomatic unpleasanties will undermine

them. When Bush looked Putin in the eye back in 2001, he saw more than a trustworthy soul, he saw a kindred spirit, a man with whom he could share both a friendship and a mission. That will not change.

About the author

Jonathan Becker is Dean of International Studies and Associate Professor of Political Studies at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. He has written a book entitled *Soviet and Russian Press Coverage of the United States: Press, Politics and Identity in Transition* (Palgrave) and published several articles focusing on news media in Russia and around the world. You may contact him at jbecker@bard.edu.

Notes

1. Putin became acting president when Boris Yeltsin suddenly resigned in December, 1999. Bush's election was only sealed after a Supreme Court decision that determined the outcome of the vote in the state of Florida.
2. <http://mediamatters.org/items/200604270005>, downloaded July 5, 2006.
3. In 2005, he repeated the performance on a long-range bomber, observing first hand as the plane practiced a missile launch.
4. See Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neil* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 2004.
5. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2088-1367568,00.html>, downloaded July 5, 2006.
6. Michael Duffy, "Marching Along," September 1, 2002.
<http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101020909/abattle.html>
7. Elizabeth Drew, "Power Grab," *New York Review of Books*, June 22, 2006, p. 10.
8. As conservative activist and sometime Bush adviser Grover Norquist stated, "They're not trying to change the law; they're saying that they're above the law and in the case of NSA wiretaps they break it."
9. Drew, "Power Grab," p. 10.
10. www.constitutionproject.org
11. Bob Egelko, *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 7, 2006, www.sfgate.com
12. For example, at the recent Russia Day celebrations, Putin declared: "Thanks to that choice, we live and work in a democratic state and a free society where the main value is a person and his free spirit." Bush's second inaugural was entirely devoted to the issue of democracy. He stated among other things that "[i]t is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."
13. Committee to Protect Journalists, *Attacks on the Press in 2001: A Worldwide Survey by the Committee to Protect Journalists*, Richard McGill Murphy ed., (New York: Committee to Protect Journalists) 2002, www.cpj.org.
14. John B. Dunlop, "Sifting Through the Rubble of the Yeltsin Years," *Problems of Post Communism*, vol.47, no 1, January/February 2000, p. 13.