



## Interview With Thom Shanker of The New York Times

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC  
July 11, 2006

**QUESTION:** As the person in the Administration who has probably spent more time studying Russia than anyone else, as a person who probably knows the President's thinking on Russia better, the theme of this story is, sort of, help me fill in the blank: President Bush lands in St. Petersburg Friday thinking what about Russia?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Right.

**QUESTION:** And he meets President Putin thinking what about the Russian President?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, first of all, what about Russia? And the President has had a view going back to the time of the campaign that there were a few relationships that would be important to the ability to get things done in the world, and I think Russia is clearly one of those relationships. Russia has a lot of influence in the world and we have been working very hard and the President's worked hard to make Russia a good partner for the United States. And I think that remains the principal view, the principal goal, is that Russia and the United States can be partners.

I think in many areas we've had a very good partnership and so I think he will be thinking of how much we've achieved on the counterterrorism front, where you barely had any cooperation between the United States and Russia prior to September 11th and now considerable cooperation. I think he will think about and to be able to expand on the cooperation that we have on issues of proliferation, whether it is some of the work that we are doing with Russia as both being members of the nuclear club, the interest that Russia has had in the global nuclear energy project, the work that we're going to be doing to negotiate a so-called 123 Agreement to be able to have commerce with Russia, civil nuclear cooperation with Russia, work that we want to do on nuclear terrorism.

I think that whole complex of the continuing work out of Nunn-Lugar that we've done with Russia. I mean, I think this is sometimes a kind of understated and perhaps underappreciated area of tremendous development since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ability to work with Russia to secure nuclear materials and to work on proliferation and the areas that are -- would diminish proliferation risks. So he would certainly think about that. I think he would think about the fact that we've had good cooperation with Russia on Afghanistan and increasingly on Iraq.

So the degree to which we have fulfilled the desire to have Russia be a partner, even in the work that we're doing on Iran or on North Korea in the six-party talks, it's really quite remarkable. Obviously we'd like that partnership to be deeper, and the deepening of that partnership of course depends on Russia's still incomplete internal transition. And there there are -- it's a mixed -- a more mixed picture. And on the one hand, Russia has made enormous progress from where it started from where the Soviet Union was in individual freedoms, the ability of people essentially to govern their own lives in a way that would have been unthinkable 15 years or so ago. But the underdevelopment of Russian institutions like a free press, and a *duma* that can really act independently in the judiciary. And I know I've heard the President say that it's not an issue of President Putin, it's an issue of institutions that can make certain that successive Russian presidents respect the boundaries between government and the individual, respect the need for an independent judiciary and you only do that for institutions.

But I know, too, that he very much values his relationship with President Putin. They have an easy relationship where they can talk about anything -- even the hardest of subjects. I was looking -- Steve Hadley was asked yesterday, well, why would he raise these issues of democracy privately. Well, because when you raise them privately, you can have a really candid discussion about where the Russians are going, where they think they're going, why we have concerns. But you can only do that if you've got a really good personal relationship and they do have a good personal relationship. So I think that's how -- that's the sort of construct. The partnership is good and we've had a lot of good work that we're doing. And it could deepen should Russia's transition, internal transition, move toward -- in a more democratic direction.

**QUESTION:** Relationships between great powers are never linear, of course. But I think there's been some fairly dramatic turns since the President's first comment where he looked into Mr. Putin's eyes and saw his soul to the Vice President's speech which was very harsh, although it was just a couple of paragraphs there. Was there a moment, Madame Secretary, where you or the President sort of saw something or heard something that took you aback and said we need to think again? I'll share with you -- someone told me that for you it was President Putin's speech after the Beslan massacre where there was a lot of steel in his language sort of unexpectedly. Is that true or --

**SECRETARY RICE:** No. After the Beslan massacre, I would have been probably steelier. You have, you know, three hundred Russians killed by a terrorist, most of them children, in a school. What President of what country wouldn't get up and talk about the need to be strong? No, you're right, it's not linear and it always has elements of good and elements of difficulty because they're big, complex relationships. Russia has its own interests and Russia's going to pursue those interests and I don't think anybody denies that. There've been a series of things that have been troubling and I would -- I don't think there is a moment in time; it's just that there are a series of things and --

**QUESTION:** So not the Ukraine and the gas cutoff and not the Khodorkovsky trial?

**SECRETARY RICE:** No, just a series of issues over time that have raised concerns about the direction that Russia is going: Khodorkovsky raising concerns about the independence of the judiciary, for instance, or politically motivated prosecutions or, yes, the Ukraine cutoff raising questions about the use of energy as a political weapon.

The NGO law, which we worked very, very hard on, raising concerns about whether or not civil society was going to develop in a fruitful way. But through all of that, the ability to continue to work together on a whole variety of plains. Probably the place that we've had the -- some difficulty or maybe even the most difficulty is, yes, there are strong Russian sensitivities about their neighborhood. Yet, when it came time for American forces to be in Afghanistan and to use bases, we've done it.

**QUESTION:** But that was undone in some ways at least by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which I know was quite shocking to, I'm sure, you and your colleagues.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the Shanghai Cooperation Council gave its views. I don't think it was the Shanghai Cooperation Council that was our problem with Uzbekistan. It was President Karimov who was our problem with Uzbekistan.

When it comes to Kyrgyzstan, we have base negotiations going on right now. And at least the Russians said, well, you know, they just -- they, of course, through the Afghan war and the fight on terrorism, there would be no problem. But it's an area of sensitivity and we understand that.

But our view has been and we've had this conversation with the Russians, this isn't a zero-sum game in Central Asia. It's not a zero-sum game with Georgia. We can

have good relations with these countries. They can have good relations with these countries and we can all benefit from those good relations. When it comes to -- so there are these series of things and that did lead to concerns about where Russia is going.

But I would just put the Vice President's speech in context. The Vice President's speech brought together a number of things that we had been saying for some time. We had consistently raised the issue of the energy issue -- the energy -- use of energy politically, we consistently raised the problem of civil society development. These are things that in the free press, these are things that had been on the agenda for some time, so they came together. This wasn't somehow a moment at which U.S.-Russian relations took a different turn and I think we've been pretty steady in keeping the relationship on track.

**QUESTION:** As a student of Russian history, is it fair to say that President Putin is wrestling a long-term issue, which is a great power that is still very insecure?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Look, it's what President Putin is struggling with and we, the United States, believes that the answer to that is to enhance and strengthen democratic institutions and that's the conversation that we constantly have. And that's the worry that rather than dealing with the complexities of Russia through the strengthening of democratic institutions that there will be a tendency to fall back on old habits. That's really the knot of it because Russian history is a history of having swung fairly wildly between chaos on one hand and authoritarianism on the other. That's really kind of the three hundred years of Russian history. And the hope is that Russia is going to finally find that middle, which is kind of the controlled chaos that we call democracy, where the institutions discipline the society and give everybody access, but everybody plays within a set of rules and, you know, that's the great hope for Russia. And if Russia can find that place and if Russia can integrate more in the institutions, the Western institutions in which those values are embodied, it's going to be an enormous win for international peace and security.

**QUESTION:** Is that the message that you brought to the Administration because clearly some of the more -- I don't want to use the word conservative or right wing -- but there are critics out there, even the Republican Party, who say President Bush has gone soft on Russia, but you described a very thoughtful way to integrate them in the world. So is that your contribution to the debate?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, I don't think -- it's a little hard to say it's mine or anybody else's. I don't think that it's one that anybody would quarrel with. It's, to most of us, pretty obvious that if the choice is trying to isolate Russia or trying to integrate Russia, that integration makes better sense because Russia is a big factor in international politics. You're not going to isolate Russia. And what I've never understood is how it improves the chances for democratic development in Russia to try and isolate Russia from the very institutions in which democratic values are practiced and reside.

And so, you know, as the President once said not too long ago, you know, I'm not going to give up on Russia. And I think that's what that expresses that this is a long process. And you know, there've been a lot of disappointments. You know, I think we're all disappointed in the NGO laws, we're all disappointed in the absence of independent electronic media. You know, there's some disappointment that sometimes Russian rhetoric about the neighborhood -- the Russian neighborhood -- seems to be exclusionary. Those are all disappointments.

But in history, it's important to keep an eye on long trends. And I think what the President has been able to do is patiently and respectfully to engage President Putin on these issues. And it used to be, you know, that when you -- in the old Soviet days you would say something about human rights in the Soviet Union and you'd get a lecture on, you know, minority rights in the United States.

**QUESTION:** Or Leonard Peltier from Wounded Knee being in jail.

**SECRETARY RICE:** We got those lectures. You were there. You know what it was like. And you don't get that anymore. You get a serious discussion of where Russia is going. So while -- yeah, there have been a lot of disappointments, but it's also -- you have to keep moving forward.

**QUESTION:** During the presidential debates, then-candidate Bush criticized the Clinton-Gore group for embracing Chernomyrdin and Yeltsin and that sort of thing. There are people who now say that President Bush is doing the same thing by personalizing a relationship with the whole country through one man, which is President Putin. Is that a fair criticism?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, I think that -- I think that's wholly unfair. I mean, I think that the President understands and speaks of the U.S. relationship with Russia all the time; the promise of that relationship, the problems with that relationship. When it's going well, as it does on an issue like nonproliferation or frankly on Iran where I think we've got reasonably good cooperation right now, to when it's going badly as it did in the early stages of Iraq and he has always stayed focused on this as a relationship.

When he talks to people about Russia he is first and foremost interested in not what is Vladimir Putin's agenda, but what is Vladimir Putin's agenda for Russia. In other words, where is he taking Russia and how does that help him understand how to engage President Putin. But I've always thought that it is a different matter to become too wrapped up in your personal relationship and to therefore believe that you -- that everything's kind of a personification, that the relationships have that somehow personification of that person.

It's quite a different matter to say you want to have a good personal relationship so that when you call somebody up on the telephone to ask something hard or to discuss something difficult or to get a sense for where that country is going, that you've got a good enough personal relationship that you can do it. And so cultivating a good personal relationship doesn't mean losing sight of the fact that Vladimir Putin is first and foremost the President of Russia who is going to defend Russian interests.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

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