



Russia's Strong Partnership with the United States

Alexander Vershbow, Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Current U.S. Ambassador to South Korea

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Following are excerpts of an interview conducted by Mary B. Warlick of the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, April 25, 2007

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Having worked on all the different Cold War issues it was very exciting to arrive in a Russia that was literally a different country than the one I worked on and studied during my academic years, a country that had achieved freedom and democracy and was developing a strong partnership with the United States. One of the first things that I had to deal with on my watch was the aftermath of 9/11 and the Russian reaction and the quick response by President Putin in offering his support and helping to facilitate our military operations in Afghanistan, certainly added to the sense of optimism. A difficult issue that was on the agenda at that time was the U.S. decision that the ABM treaty had outlived its usefulness and that we were going to exercise our options to withdraw from the treaty. We were able to find a soft landing in that case and to move forward to negotiate the Moscow treaty, which is as everyone knows, the agreement that provides for the deepest reductions in history in strategic nuclear weapons.



The embassy worked very closely with the American Chamber of Commerce to try to promote business dialogues so that the growing opportunities in Russia for American businesses could be realized and of course President Putin himself launched a very positive series of economic reforms in his first years that began to give people real hope that a fully fleshed-out market economy was finally taking route in Russia. So those were very heavy days and I think we saw the solidarity between our two peoples grow even closer through sharing experiences such as the terrorist attacks that befell Russia.

But I think with the war in Iraq and the sharp disagreements over that, some of the fault lines that were still present in the relationship began to become more apparent...

One of my own personal priorities was the issue of HIV/AIDs, the evidence that was available to experts not only in the United States but in Russia itself, signaled that a potential pandemic was unfolding in Russia... The other big issue for the embassy and for the U.S. government under this administration has been trafficking in persons. Russia had a serious problem that they wouldn't initially fully acknowledge, both internally but also as a source country for trafficking to different parts of the world.

I think it's definitely true that we had a case of unrealistic expectations. That maybe that Americans are always a little bit too optimistic based on our own history and our ability to change rapidly over the years, that we were perhaps underestimating the tenacity, the durability of some of the underlying factors in Russian society and the Russian mentality that made the kind of broad-gauged partnerships based on shared values and shared interests a little bit unrealistic at least in the short-term.

I think we need to continue to do everything we can to expand exchanges, especially among younger people to get more Russians studying in the U.S. but also to get more Americans to study in Russia. I was very pleased to be able to open roughly 20 American corners in Russian regional capitals and I think that's an indispensable tool for the embassy and our consulates to be able to have a platform even if they can't have a permanent presence in these regions, to have a platform where people can come and learn about America, attend language workshops, or meet with visiting lectures and now they can do some of that through Digital Video Conferencing.

I think on these issues of democracy and human rights where the Russians feel that we have no right to hector them, we have to calmly say that these are permanent issues in the American-Russian relationship, whether they like it or not, because it goes to who Americans are as a nation, but it also goes to the question of public and congressional support for the cooperative relations that both of us want to build.

I regret that so much of the potential for the relationship still hasn't been realized. But if both sides are determined, then we can do it, but it starts with tying our peoples more closely together and then improving our ability to not only speak to each other but to understand each other.

And I think even with the negative trends that we have seen in recent years with respect to Russia's democratic institutions, it's still a free society, still an open society with people who can travel and stay connected with the outside world and I think that gives me some hope that the pendulum won't swing too far in the wrong direction and that it will begin to swing back as a younger generation begins to take charge.

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