

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Interview With Sergey Brilev of Rossiya TV

May 6, 2010

Mr. Brilev. President Obama, thanks so much for having me here.

The President. Thank you very much.

World War II/Contribution of the Soviet Union

Mr. Brilev. I've got several important issues in Russian-American bilateral relations, which we will, of course, discuss. But first, let me come back to the events which happened 65 years ago. Now, Russia is, of course, a country which lost more than 20 million people; Russia proper, 70 percent of the losses of the USSR. And it's self-sufficient to say Second World War and Russia. But it's also an important issue here. What do you tell your children, for instance, about the Second World War?

The President. Well, we have personal connections. My grandfather fought in World War II. He was part of Patton's army. And my great uncle, my grandmother's brother, was one of those who liberated Buchenwald, and so obviously, those memories are very important. And the May 9th commemoration in Russia is so important because it reminds us of the extraordinary sacrifices that the then-Soviet Union made and the strength of the alliance between the U.S. and the Russian people.

In fact, our current Ambassador in Moscow, Ambassador Beyrle, his father briefly fought with the Soviet Army. He was part of U.S. operations there, was captured, escaped into the Soviet Union, and ended up fighting with the Soviet Union Army for a time. And that, I think, symbolizes how the joint allied efforts helped to defeat fascism, and it is one of the most important military alliances of all time.

Counterterrorism Efforts/Nuclear Arms Reduction/Russia-U.S. Relations

Mr. Brilev. Now that we are into reset, given today's certain responses, which are the common enemies of today?

The President. Well, obviously, terrorism is one of them. Immediately after the tragic events in Moscow, I called President Medvedev and pledged that the United States would work in any way that Moscow thought made sense in helping to find the perpetrators of this terrible act.

We just recently had an attempted terrorist act in New York, and it's a signal, I think, that whether these activities are happening in Moscow or they're happening in New York, that countries have to work together to make sure that these terrorists are apprehended, that their networks are destroyed, that their sources of financing dry up.

And no single country is going to be able to do that on their own; countries are going to have to work together. And that is something that I'm very much looking to increasing cooperation between the United States and Russia.

Beyond that, though, I think it's important to recognize that the whole concept of reset between U.S. and Russian relations is not just on issues of security. We have a lot of security issues that we have to discuss. Obviously, I'm very proud of the START Treaty and our efforts to reduce our nuclear arsenals. But one of the things that President Medvedev and I have

discussed is how can we really ramp up our commercial, our trade, our economic ties. How can we help to promote the innovation agenda in Russia? What are we doing around high-tech industries that can produce jobs and raise standards of livings for both the Russian people and the United States? And that's an area where I think you're going to see a lot of work and a lot of cooperation.

One of things we're very excited about is we set up a Presidential commission with 16 active groups on everything from energy to high-tech. And I recently extended an invitation to President Medvedev to visit the United States in late June. And one of the things we hope he's going to be able to do is not just visit Washington, but also travel, for example, to Silicon Valley and see how the connections between universities and venture capital and business has been able to create some of the extraordinary inventions that all of us use today.

Ratification of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

Mr. Brilev. Now that you mentioned the START Treaty, when are we going to ratify it? And what are the chances?

The President. My hope is that we ratify it this year on our side and——

Mr. Brilev. During this Congress or after the election?

The President. Well, I'd like to see it happen before the election. Obviously, it's technical, and I think it's appropriate for the Senate to examine it, but we're going to be putting forward the text of the treaty, the annexes, all the necessary materials before the Senate in short order. And our hope is, is that they will be able to review it quickly and recognize that this is an important step in the efforts of both the United States and Russia to meet our obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to lower our stockpiles, at the same time as we work together to hold other countries accountable on obligations regarding the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Iran/North Korea/Global Adherence to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Principles

Mr. Brilev. Well, that was the point actually of signing the treaty, to save money and also to convince the rest of the world. But then after what Mr. Ahmadi-nejad had to say this week, are we convincing the rest of the world?

The President. Well, look, I think Iran and North Korea are two special cases. I think most countries around the world have recognized that the core principles of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the NPT, would say that countries are—that have nuclear weapons should try to reduce their reliance on nuclear weapons, that countries that don't have them should forgo them, and that everybody has the right to peaceful nuclear energy. That principle has been embraced by a lot of countries. And there are countries like South Africa, for example, that had gone fairly far down the path of developing a nuclear weapon and decided this didn't make sense for us.

North Korea and Iran are two outliers, countries that have insisted on flouting international rules and U.N. Security Council resolutions, aren't cooperating the way they need to with the IAEA. And so I've been very heartened by the cooperation that we've seen so far between the United States, Russia, the other members of the P-5-plus-1, in terms of imposing the kinds of pressure and sanctions that are necessary to get Iran to choose a more responsible path that will lead it back into the heart of the international community.

NATO-Russia Relations

Mr. Brilev. Having signed the treaty, and having carried out several other things within the reset framework agenda, we have achieved a better mutual understanding. How can you convert it into something of a substance in such particular area as European security? Because also, NATO is a solution for those countries which are in, but NATO is not a solution for self-sufficient countries like Russia. What's to do be done there?

The President. Well, President Medvedev has put forward some ideas about a new security architecture in Europe. We're examining them. I take them very seriously. But I think that the most important thing at this point is to work with the institutions we have to see if we can rebuild the trust that for some time had been lost.

So for example, I have been supportive of NATO-Russia consultation in a much more systematic way than has been observed over the last several years.

My sense is, is that all the parties in Europe, all the members of the NATO alliance, want to have a strong, cooperative relationship with Russia. There are certain core principles that we think have to be observed within that cooperative framework: a respect for territorial integrity of internationally recognized borders, a belief that a country's core sovereignty includes its ability to choose how it allies itself, a rejection of the notion of spheres of influence—whether it's U.S. spheres or European spheres or Russian spheres.

Within those broad principles, though, if you look—going back to your earlier question—the real threats against Russian well-being or U.S. well-being to a large degree are at this point much more aligned than they've ever been. It has to do with nonstate actors. It has to do with the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It has to do with environmental catastrophes. It has to do with an integrated economy in which if you see a crisis in Greece taking place that can affect world markets. These are all issues in which cooperation rather than antagonism are the order of the day.

And I think President Medvedev recognizes this. I've been very impressed with him. I think he is a strong leader, a good man, very thoughtful. I find it very easy to do business with him, and I think we've established a relationship, a real trust that can be hopefully bearing fruit in the negotiations and conversations that we have in years to come.

National Economy/International Financial System

Mr. Brilev. I'll use this opportunity now that you mentioned Greece and the economic crisis. I had a free day yesterday preparing for this interview, so I went fishing to Maryland. I met someone called Dave Shelby, I think, the captain of the boat. I caught a 24-pounder—*[laughter]*. He said to me that he's got 30 percent less clients—well, then, of course, the fuel is up a dollar per gallon. And I was comparing his economic comments with my position, and strangely enough and luckily enough, I can actually afford more things in America these days because of the ruble which is so stronger than the—comparatively than euro and dollar were meant to be.

Where do you see the dollar, given the circumstances with the global economic crisis? Would you like to see a weaker dollar—although it doesn't sound nice for the American public, but still? Internationally speaking, a stronger dollar? Where are you?

The President. My basic principle is to focus on the fundamentals of the economy. We have a market-based mechanism for determining the value of currencies. I think that if we have a strong U.S. economy, we're going to have a strong dollar. And obviously, we've just gone through a very difficult period; the whole world has. We've seen stabilization, and the U.S.

economy is slowly strengthening in ways that, I think, if you'd asked a year ago, we might have said that it was going to take longer than it has for that stabilization to take place.

I am very concerned about what's happening in Europe. But I think it is an issue that the Europeans recognize is very serious. Greece is taking some very difficult measures; at least, they've put forward a plan that calls for difficult measures. And if we can stabilize Europe, that will be good for the United States and that will be good for Russia as well.

But the key point today is the degree of integration among all economies. That's why I have said, and the United States is actively pursuing, the belief that the G-20 framework is so important, that we have to recognize that China, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, all these countries that traditionally have been viewed as on the periphery of economic decisionmaking, they are now at the core—India—are huge economies. And what happens there is going to impact us in the same way that what happens in Moscow or New York is going to impact them.

Mr. Brilev. The G-20 shall indeed substitute the G-8?

The President. Well, my belief is, is that there's going to be a transition period, but that the G-20 represents the economic framework of the future.

Adoption of Russian Children

Mr. Brilev. Lastly, so lucky to be in front of the U.S. President, but still I have to ask one last question: the adoption issue. Well, I do not support those who say, "Well, Americans killing Russian children." This is not the case. Absolute majority of the children adopted from Russia have their lives here. Even more important is the fact that more and more Russians are adopting Russian children in Russia. In fact, there are more Russians than Americans these days doing such things. But then, still, 17 kids have been killed—or, well, died in this country. It is an issue, especially after this American woman sent Artem Saveliev to Russia. What's to be done?

The President. Well, first of all, obviously, what happened with the small number of children who have been adversely affected is terrible. And we can't minimize what's happened. As you point out, there have been tens of thousands of Russian children adopted by U.S. families. The overwhelming majority are leading happy, healthy lives. But ultimately, the policy has to be what's best for children, whether they're living in Russia or they're living in the United States.

What we've done is to set up a bilateral discussion between our State Department and counterparts in Russian to find out how do we create an agreement in which children are protected. And I think that's ultimately the goal. And as the father of two children, obviously, it breaks my heart to think about children who have been vulnerable, have probably already gone through difficult situations and then are subjected to even more difficult situations in the past. But as you point out, I think it's also important to recognize that in the overwhelming majority of cases, adoptions are the absolute best thing for the child. And we want to make sure that we preserve the best of the system while eliminating these abuses.

Mr. Brilev. Mr. President, thanks so much, indeed.

The President. I enjoyed it. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:50 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to his great uncle Charles Payne; U.S. Ambassador to Russia John R. Beyrle; and President Dmitry A. Medvedev of Russia. Mr.

Brilev referred to President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran; and Artem Saveliev, an 8-year-old Russian boy who was sent back to Russia by his American adoptive mother, Torry Ann Hansen. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 8. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

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