

# USA-Russia: Hitting the Same Gate, or Playing One and the Same Game?

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The Russian-speaking media in the United States was too dexterous to announce that the results of the recent meeting between Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush were of but little significance, but within the 24 hours that followed the media made an about-face. On July 2, Gusinsky's RTVi, the only TV channel representing the "Russian America" in Kennebunkport was still savouring gastronomic peculiarities of the events on the sidelines of the meeting, calling it "the lobster summit."

Due to the lack of concrete information, the cameramen repeatedly zeroed in on the landscape Vladimir Putin had called "fantastic", showing the transparent mirror-like serene flatness of the water at the Bushes' summer retreat, whereas friendlier fantasy could give a cue about a totally different development of the proceedings of the fish party. Speaking at a briefing George W. Bush began by congratulating Vladimir Putin, "for being the only person that caught a fish."

These words could become a symbolic announcement of the event that followed "the lobster meeting". The Russian president showed he was able to direct the course of strategic relations of the world's big powers to a different area, doing his fishing, as it were, in clean water.

Such an open and honest approach (as an alternative to trying to catch fish in muddy waters) that could raise Russia's relations with the United States and Europe to a new height was exactly what the Russian president spoke at the briefing, even though journalists seemed to prefer not to take heed of that. "There is nothing to expect from the lobster meeting between Bush and Putin: they would just agree not to agree." That was a heading of a story, in which the information portal Newsru.com, also owned by Gusinsky, presented the results of that meeting. But next morning the U.S. State Department made its official announcement of the "historic" agreements made by the two presidents. While at Kennebunkport Putin and Bush approved a document that columnists and commentators have already dubbed Putin's "overtaking of the political initiative" and even Russia's "political victory." The Russian-U.S. joint "Statement on Nuclear Energy and Non-Proliferation: Joint Activities" that envisages extensive partnership in peaceful use of atomic energy and strengthening IAEA control of the use of nuclear technologies, was signed by Condoleezza Rice and Sergei Lavrov. In accordance with the agreements it was decided to promote assistance to the "third world" countries in the construction of nuclear power stations, refusing to give such assistance to "rogues." The agreement in no way infringes on the Russian-Iranian joint activities in Busher that do not violate IAEA standards. Official Russian representatives clearly stated as much at a briefing in Washington.

Another proposal Vladimir Putin spoke about at the Kennebunkport briefing, even if it would not prevent NATO missile defence systems in Poland and the Czech republic, could divert public opinion in America and Europe to a standpoint that would be more favourable to Russia. The essence of Putin's proposal is the development of the idea of joint use of radar in Gabala, Azerbaijan suggested that the Russian missile defence system deployed near Armavir in southern Russia can be to share, a single centre for exchange of information in real time in Moscow and a similar centre (also operating in real time) in Brussels can be created, a re-start of the dialogue and wide-range consultations both along the lines of "Russia-NATO" and UN Security Council can be effected and an entry of other European nations into this new programme of the collective security can be secured. All these measures would exclude the need to deploy elements of the U.S. anti-missile defence system in Poland and the Czech republic. George Bush called the proposal Vladimir Putin made in Kennebunkport "it is very sincere, it's innovative, it's strategic", but backed up immediately saying that "Poland and the Czech republic need to be an integral part of the anti-ballistic missile system." To some degree Bush's obstinacy can be understood. What he was offered was in essence a proposal to give up centuries-long policies pursued by the Atlantic bloc members, who seek the "Balkanisation" of Russia, using the technology of overtaking the spheres of influence in the post-Soviet space. Putin's proposals were like a call to give up shady practices of playing the game referred to as "new world order." The troubled background here still is the fact that nothing else but the issues that were never off the present-day agenda were not discussed at the current meeting (based on the information media provided). These primarily include problems that have to do with the traditionalized policies of "Balkanisation" – the status of Kosovo and solutions to the "frozen conflicts" in Abkhazia, North Ossetia, the Transdniester republic and Nagorno-Karabakh, which the U.S. NATO partners try to tie with the ratification of CFE treaty with an eye at forcing Russia to discard the sphere of its political influence without engagement in a battle over it.

Even though the Russian Foreign Ministry refers to the issues of de-freezing of inter-regional conflicts as "artificially tied" to the problems of the CFE treaty, the main strategies NATO follows are exactly their opposite. Moreover, **the North Atlantic alliance documents indicate that the bloc aims at the "Balkanisation" of the post-Soviet space by way of overtaking influence in the territories of the currently frozen conflicts and their follow-up internalisation along the Yugoslavian lines** are set down in black and white. For example, a special report titled "The New North Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region", prepared by the German Marshall Fund of the United States on the occasion of the NATO summit, already refers to Black Sea and South Caucasus (Transcaucasia) as a "new Euro-Atlantic borderland plagued by Soviet-legacy conflicts." And the "region of frozen conflicts is evolving into a functional aggregate on the new border of an enlarging West." Azerbaijan and Georgia in tandem, the report notes, provide a unique transit corridor for Caspian energy to Europe, as well as an irreplaceable corridor for American-led and NATO to bases and operation theatres in Central Asia and the Greater Middle East.

According to NATO experts, "Ukraine is in many ways an extension of those corridors. Moldova forms 450-kilometre long sector of NATO new borders. Soon to be the EU's border as well." As the report goes on to state, the "political and security order in this new Euro-Atlantic borderland is now at stake." The authors of the report argue that NATO act decisively as "the outcome will in large measure depend on settling the frozen conflicts on terms consistent with Western values and interests in this region" to ensure stable

functioning of the energy and military corridors “safe from Russian or proxy military pressure”. They speak of the need to transfer the territories of non-recognised post-Soviet states “under the jurisdiction of international law” to be controlled by international observers from NATO, EU and other organisations.

The report titled “A New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region” gives much food for thought. The first question that arises is why the Russian peace-makers are in the regions of “frozen conflicts” at all, if these are now the “Euro-Atlantic borders”? Have we wasted not enough time yet? These problems should be solved without delay.

The report was prepared in 2004, and at the 2007 Congressional hearings in the United States last spring it was stated on the issue of the frozen conflicts that there was nothing more to wait. If so, it was quite logical to invite a group of Russian lawmakers to Washington on the eve of the meeting between presidents Putin and Bush with an eye to find out whether they can be influenced (given the new “timing”).

On June 21 a joint session of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. Congress and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian State Duma took place in Washington. The top issues on the agenda were suggested by the U.S. side. They included the verification of the positions of either side on the Conventional Force in Europe treaty (CFE), the independence of Kosovo, “the frozen conflicts” in the Transdniestrian republic, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as human rights in Russia. In fact, there was nothing to discuss, as both Russian and U.S. representatives had already expressed their opinions that at times were totally opposing opinions many times over.

Still the scenario of the meeting between U.S. congressmen and Russian MPs worked out in Washington was broken up. The Russian lawmakers proved to be both in any way better prepared to discuss the issues on the agenda, and they demonstrated their precious skills of keeping good manners, coolly fending off the attacks of the American colleagues. In the end U.S. public, trained to respond to political news in the format of sports programs could clearly see “who scored better, and who was the loser in the game.”

And to think that it all began so well for the Americans. Theirs was the turn to make the first move, and Tom Lantos, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress, who just a few days before had made statements about president Putin’s “unbelievable stupidity”, began his speech evidently attempting to gull the Russian MPs by his bombastic words of love of Russian literature, music and ballet and speaking of Russia as one of the “great civilisations.” He thought it better to forget all about his recent pronouncements about the U.S. victory in the Cold War, giving the microphone to “his distinguished colleague and friend” Konstantin Kosachev.

Starting as an urbane duel, the session climaxed in turning over to the theme of the “frozen conflicts” and the status of Kosovo. Natalia Narochnitzkaya, a State Duma deputy, a doctor of sciences (Hist.) made her presentation as primitive as possible, explaining to the congressmen the ABCs of geopolitics and the methods of “Balkanisation” used in for Serbia and Kosovo. As for the “mass ethnic cleansing” Serbian authorities allegedly resorted to

Narochnitzkaya asked the U.S. congressmen to recall the results of a well-known independent investigation of common graves, which discovered in particular that the deceased “in ethnic mop-up operations” died in different years and even epochs, and the remains were brought from different places to be buried in the newly prepared graves.

Narochnitzkaya summed up her speech before U.S. congressmen claiming Kosovo's independence from Serbia and supporting Albanian separatists: "You are creating an enclave of the militant Islamism in the heart of Europe."

What happened next should be seen. Polite smiles disappeared from the faces of the congressmen. Forgetting about good manners in the absence of counter-arguments they began to raise their voices and to use non-parliamentary rhetoric. "This is slander," - stormed Eliot Engel (NY) known for his support of America's biggest community of ethnic Albanians in the district he controls during the elections. "Milosevic was a bloody executioner, as everyone knows," - committee chairman Thomas Lantos echoed him (an U.S. press published quite a few articles, pointing at his sponsors among the Albanian community in the United States).

Literally a couple of months before the joint Congress-Duma session the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives hearings "The outlook for the Independence of Kosovo" were held. One of the "laymen" was Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. In both Yugoslavia and in the former USSR republics Burns engaged in what is known in the United States as "conflict management". Speaking at the hearings Thomas Lantos said: "The United States stands foursquare for the creation of an overwhelmingly Muslim country in the very heart of Europe." Nicholas Burns, who is a member of the ecumenical lodge of the order of St. John (this information is to be found on the web site of the U.S. State Department) reminisced about "the two-edged sword", a symbol of the secret weapon of NATO in Europe, which in its time gave its name to operation "Gladio."

The script of the April 17, 2007 hearings on Kosovo at the U.S. Congress can be found at the web site of the U.S. Administration ("[www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)"). It will amaze you how maniac are the backstage "demiurges" in their confidence of having the right to do to nations and history what they please. For one, Nicholas Burns is convinced that "the time has come" and Kosovo's independence is inevitable. Tom Lantos, who likes to reason about "Serbia's bright future when it will be invited to NATO, and then - EU", calls declaration of independence of Kosovo "liberation from the burden" and "a rainbow at the end of the path."

More than once the issue of relations with Russia was raised during the hearings. The backstage "demiurges" are confident that Russia would not resort to its right of veto in the UN Security Council or would refrain from voting. U.S. congressmen are very concerned about "helping Russia to save its face." According to Burns' instructions, granting independence to Kosovo should be regarded as "a unique situation", whereas independence of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, the Transdniester republic or Nagorno-Karabakh is absolutely out of the question. What the congressmen offered in exchange for Russia's consent to the solution of the Kosovo issue they think correct was not much - just easing some pressure on Russia over human rights and democracy, the "restraint" over Russia's assistance to Iran in Busher plus some statements about the absence of intentions to violate Russia's territorial integrity. To make what he was saying more convincing Nicholas Burns quoted a telephone conversation with Serbia's prime-minister Voislav Costunica he had had earlier, when he told the man: "You lost Serbia eight years ago."

What can be added to this? Maybe, mentioning that not all in the United States share the position of those lobbying the independence of Kosovo. Two times at the hearings Tom Lantos prevented California's congress member Diane Watson from speaking her mind on the issue. "What makes the Kosovo situation so unique, if there are dozens of such unique

situations around the globe, yet I do not see the United States advocating the independence of Somaliland from Somalia, the independence of Taiwan from China, nor the independence of Kurdistan from Iraq or Turkey... If the goal of our strategy in the Balkans is to promote ethnic cooperation and reduce conflict, it seems a singularly misguided strategy..." – said Diane Watson, but she was prevented from finishing her speech. Finally, Nicholas Burns lost his temper and explained to the participants of the hearings: what makes the Kosovo situation unique is the fact that for the last 8 years 1,500 troops have been stationed in that province, at an annual cost of \$250 million. And he added, for Moscow to hear: "We should encourage the Russians to do the right thing and to allow Kosovo to become independent...we should remind the Russians that we have done the heavy lifting – our troops, our money, our involvement with Europe, and that no matter what happens the day after, no matter what the vote is, what the results of the voting are, we will be there..." Reading the scripts of emotional speeches other U.S. citizens made at the Congressional hearings, for example Dan Burton (Indiana), who said that the unilateral use of force in a conflict leads to a catastrophe, and the speeches of the "female opposition", including Diana Watson (California), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Florida) or Ms Bean, a public figure from Illinois, one concludes that there are people in the United States to talk to and with whom to make agreements. They are our potential partners, who can at least give us hope that – to quote Vladimir Putin – "we are playing one and the same game."

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