EARTH TO SPACESHIP PUTIN

The White House is becoming increasingly concerned about Pootie-Poot. He actually said point-blank to one of Bush's key advisors: "Mr. Bush is in no position to criticize me on my actions towards the Russian press - look at how he fired Dan Rather."

Besides the typical Russian chip-on-the-shoulder defensiveness, Putin sees everything now, this advisor told me, "through the lens of Russian imperialism." In any conversation with him, "you can't shut him up. He's become a motor-mouth of endless complaints."

What did shut him up, at least for a reflective moment, was this White House message: "You have to decide which side you are on - ours or not. Someday you are going to be in a world of trouble with all that empty land in Siberia, and all those Chinese right next to it. When that someday comes, you are going to need friends very badly. Something to consider…"

Straight-from-the-shoulder talk rather than perfumed diplomatese. Let's hope Putin wakes up.