

The President's News Conference With President Boris Yeltsin of Russia in Moscow

April 21, 1996

Russia-U.S. Relations

President Yeltsin. Dear members of the press, ladies and gentlemen, our discussion with the President of the United States of America lasted sufficiently long, about 5 hours, and in substance became the continuation of the discussions that were started within the G-7, issues which we discussed within the 8, and today's meeting also to a great extent coincided. First of all, this was security; regional stability was also discussed in the bilats.

I think that today's discussion gave a rather large contribution to the successes of the G-7 in Moscow in the security area—discussions of a whole series of issues on nuclear security and how to move ahead on START II, to strengthen the ABM Treaty of 1972. We now have rather good schedules on what Russia has to do, what the United States has to do by October of this year.

We've reached progress on European security as well. In May, we have an important meeting which should be dedicated to reviewing the CFE Treaty and forces in Europe. We agreed to work in this area and to concentrate more in the future on the wording of the treaty itself. You'll probably have questions at this.

Our two countries as cosponsors of the Middle East peace process we discussed in great detail. We discussed the situation in Israel and Lebanon. They were discussed also at the meeting of the 8 and now the ministers of foreign affairs of our countries are continuing talk. We're constantly in touch with them, and today we summarized a bit on some of the decisions reached.

Russia and the United States play a key role in the settlement in Bosnia. Our peacekeeping troop units are working very well. We have to reinvigorate this and aim it at nonmilitary aspects of the settlement, such as holding elections, providing for human rights, and rebuilding the destroyed areas.

I want to especially underscore here the fact that the elections do not interfere with the long-term cooperation between our two countries. I mean, our Presidential elections do not stand in the way. Our policies allow us to speak about

various issues and we have a practice now and a tradition with Bill to hold normal, regular meetings whenever we meet, and whenever we make comments to each other and react to each other's statements. This is as any family would have it. There are sometimes comments made to each other—these issues at least have no ideological nature whatsoever. The United States and Russia are great powers. It's not just for us to get involved with big global issues, but we look out for our own interests.

In today's meeting, we have defined more carefully our policies, our tasks. We have established on the basis of equality—we've added the words "on the basis of equality" in our cooperation, which is in consistence with the interest of our two countries. And in the majority of cases, the lion's share of cases, others support both us and the United States in all of this. Our partners all have interest and see interest in the positive development of U.S.-Russia relations. They view our relationship as a factor which promotes international cooperation. This is very good.

Next week, I'm going to China. There, I plan to touch upon many of the issues which we discussed yesterday and today in Moscow. I'm counting on understanding from the Chinese.

I want to say that I'm very pleased with my discussion with the President of the United States, and I hope that Bill will also express his points of view, how he assesses our meeting today.

Thank you, Bill.

President Clinton. Thank you very much, President Yeltsin.

Ladies and gentlemen, just a few years ago the mere fact of a meeting between the American and Russian Presidents was news. But this is my 3rd trip to Moscow as President and my 10th meeting with President Yeltsin. So now the news is no longer that we are meeting, but instead what we're meeting about and what is being done for the benefit of our people.

After this meeting there is much to report. First, let me thank President Yeltsin for initiating and then hosting yesterday's nuclear summit. It is fitting that this summit was held in Mos-

cow. For 3 years, the President and I have worked together in trying to make the world a safer place by reducing the nuclear threat that all our citizens face. Because of those efforts, Russian and American missiles are no longer pointed at each other's cities or citizens. We've both made deep cuts in our nuclear arsenals by putting START I into force. And we'll make even deeper cuts when the Duma ratifies START II.

We've worked with Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakstan to dismantle nuclear weapons on their land. And yesterday, with other world leaders, we took important steps to make nuclear materials more secure so they don't fall into the wrong hands, to make the civilian use of nuclear power safer, and to strongly support the passage of a comprehensive test ban treaty this year.

The United States and Russia are also working together to promote peace in the world's most troubled regions. The President and I reviewed the situation in Bosnia, where our troops are serving side by side to help its people rebuild their land and their lives.

As cosponsors of the Middle East peace process, we discussed the terrible outbreak of violence in Lebanon and northern Israel. We agree on the need to secure a cease-fire to stop the violence, and as all of you know, our foreign ministers are both in the region as we speak. The best way to prevent violence from returning is to continue implementing the agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and to secure a comprehensive peace in the region that includes Lebanon and Syria.

The political and the security partnership between our nations is strengthened by our growing commercial ties. We've worked hard to take down the old barriers to trade and to investment. Thanks to President Yeltsin's leadership, 60 percent of Russia's economy is now in the hands of its people, not the state. Inflation has been cut; democracy is taking hold. Since 1993, trade between the United States and Russia is up 65 percent. And the U.S. is now the largest foreign investor in this great nation. That's helping to create more good jobs and new opportunities in both our countries.

The President and I also discussed areas in which we have differences, as he mentioned. The flank issue of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty is one of them. But we are working hard to find a solution to that that is acceptable to all parties prior to the review conference

in May, and I can say with confidence that we did move closer to that goal today.

We also made important progress in distinguishing between antiballistic missile systems that are limited by the ABM Treaty and theater missile defenses which are not. As a result, we'll send our negotiators back to Geneva next month with the aim of concluding an initial demarcation agreement this June.

From St. Petersburg to Moscow, these last 3 days have allowed me and our entire American delegation to see the richness of Russia's past, the achievements of its present, and the promise of its future. I want the Russian people to know how much the American people support Russia's commitment to democracy and to reform. We've learned from our history that building a thriving democracy is not easy or automatic, but Russia is making dramatic progress, as evidenced by the Duma elections last December and the coming Presidential elections this June.

This is a time of real possibility and opportunity to make our people more prosperous and more secure. The United States wants a strong, stable, and open Russia, to work with us as equal partners in seizing those opportunities and turning the challenges of a new era in the common solutions.

Thank you.

President Yeltsin. Thank you. Please, questions.

U.S. and Russian Elections

Q. A question to both Presidents: To what extent do the elections in Russia and the United States in November define the U.S.-Russian relation today? Thank you.

President Clinton. Who will go first? I'll go first. Well, I think all elections have consequences, and so the relationship will be defined obviously by these elections in important ways. The United States supports the direction that Russia has taken in building a vibrant and open democracy and in moving toward an economic reform which would put more of the economy in the hands of the people. And we now see, after some very difficult years, some real progress being made. And we look forward to being a good partner in that effort, as well as in making our countries more secure and ending the nuclear threats and in finding ways to work together to solve other problems around the world.

Two great nations like ours have a lot of common interests for the future, and I would hope no matter what happens we'll be able to pursue that. But I don't think we should be under any illusion that people run for office on platforms that they intend to implement and, therefore, all elections involve choices and have consequences. And so the people of Russia and the people of the United States will have to come to grips with that and make their own judgments, as great democracies do.

President Yeltsin. I, too, would like to answer since the question was to both Presidents. I have to say that with every meeting with the President of the United States, our relations improve. Not a single meeting has yet been empty. It always has given us not only to our countries, to our peoples, but all of us some sort of a positive.

Undoubtedly, also, yesterday's meeting of the 8 has given a lot, and today's meeting with the President, since the meetings touched upon a large variety of issues and problems, bilateral, international in nature where issues came together, coincided, et cetera.

But I just wanted to tell those who in the press and in the media have already tried to tally up the score and say, "Well, they especially really contrived this whole meeting in Moscow in order to help the President of Russia, President Yeltsin"—that's not so. This was planned a long time ago; way back in Halifax we had statements to this effect. And no questions which have to do with any kind of mutual obligations or tie-ins to the elections both here or in November in the United States—we did not have any tie-ins, any mutual obligations to each other, especially material or financial. We gave no assurances, any deals. We were here open, honest. So don't suspect here—suspect us in any way, a meeting such as the 8 or a meeting of two Presidents of two great nations.

Q. In Sharm al-Sheikh it was reported that you told President Yeltsin that you would support his reelection bid with positive U.S. policies, and that you asked him for help with clearing up some negative issues such as the poultry dispute. Was there a—did you talk about politics today? I mean, what were your political discussions? And how do you both think that a meeting like this helps you with voters?

President Clinton. First of all, let me clear up the report from Sharm al-Sheikh. What I said in Sharm al-Sheikh and what I believe is

that the best politics is to do the right thing and advance the interest of our people. I did bring up that trade dispute, just as I have brought up a dozen or more trade disputes with other leaders all around the world. That's a big part of my job now, and I think I did the right thing.

Today at our luncheon, the President gave me a brief overview of what he thought—quite brief—was the present lay of the land with the elections coming up and again said that he was trying to do his job, that he wanted to do his job. And I told him I thought that producing concrete results for the people by doing your job was the best thing to do politically. So that's the—which is essentially what I also said when we talked at Sharm al-Sheikh.

Whether these things have any benefit or not, who knows? You know, most of our people are—most democracies all over the world are people preoccupied with problems at home, somewhat skeptical about foreign policy. But I can tell you this: Because of this nuclear summit the people of Russia and the people of the United States are going to have a more secure future. And that's what's important. And because of the meeting we had today, we're much closer to resolving a couple of very important issues that relate to our ability again to make the world a safer place: the CFE Treaty, the demarcation between antiballistic missile systems and theater missile defenses, and a number of other areas in which we need to cooperate for the safety and for the future of our people.

So it seems to me that that's what we ought to look at. Have we done the right thing or not? Are people going to be better off or not? Are they going to be safer or not? Is the future going to be brighter or not? That is how I think that we would both wish to be judged. And I think it's a great mistake to put too much of a political spin on this since typically, at least, foreign policy does not play that big a role in voting patterns. But it's very, very important to how people live and what kind of future we have.

President Yeltsin. I agree with President Clinton that the discussion was on the go constantly, during the breaks. And just as before, we said we have to have an equivalent partnership of the two countries. We have to support this relationship and help each other, all the Presidents, just like we support each other as countries, as people. And this is only natural. Now, as

far as any specific issues having to do with campaigns and helping each other in campaigns in specifics, there was none.

Now, the second part of the question, Bill didn't touch upon the second part—I don't know, maybe he or I can maybe respond and say that the production of fowl which came from the United States was—there was one batch that was stopped and held up by our health service. After that we quickly got together. We set up a commission; let the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission figure it out, get into the details in the poultry question. And they did and they were convinced that, yes, there was some violations. Those violations were taken care of, and now trade once again has been reestablished and it's back to normal.

Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty

Q. You've already spoken about European security. Can you tell us a little more in detail specifically what the CFE Treaty—how it was touched upon, and the limitations on the flanks, please, if you would?

President Yeltsin. The question of European security has a lot of aspects, including NATO. So I don't think that we've got to lay all of these issues out to you at this very moment and how they relate to the central question, but more specifically and in detail we discussed the issues of the limitations on the flanks, since this really has to do with our direct interests on the Caucasus and in the northwest of our country near Kaliningrad.

But the way it turned out was that in Germany when we were moving our forces back to Russia, the closest way to go was to Kaliningrad. And so we saturated Kaliningrad with our troops and forces and equipment, and the whole oblast—really a lot of saturation—and went beyond the limits that were provided for in the CFE Treaty itself.

Also another situation here is the Caucasus because, as you know, what we have there, because of the situation in Chechnya—right now it's not bad, so what we're doing is implementing my plan on finding a settlement in the Chechnya problem. And things are going according to plan the way it's been approved. Nonetheless, there is a concentration of conventional forces, tanks and things; in some cases it varies from what the CFE Treaty may be calling for.

So President Clinton, at my request, very carefully reviewed with his advisers and specialists, and they went and decided that temporarily we would be given the opportunity to, within the overall framework of the overall total numbers, to do some movement of forces on the territory. Of course, the conference in May is going to finally decide that. But they expressed their opinion, and once again, this issue has been discussed. There was one question to us that we move from one site a part of our equipment. We didn't argue; we're going to move it. And in short, there really is no question for discussion remaining. We hope that around May 15, when the conference is held, this treaty is going to be adjusted somewhat and everything will be fine.

Chechnya

Q. President Yeltsin, you just mentioned that things were going according to plan in Chechnya. But there are other reports that hostilities there continue and human rights groups are complaining still about the behavior of Russian forces. I wonder, for President Clinton, what do you say to those who believe that the United States has not been firm enough, hasn't been critical enough, and that even now the criticism is muted specifically because the United States is anxious to see President Yeltsin reelected?

And for President Yeltsin, what would you say to those who believe that your call for a cease-fire was motivated largely by short-term political interests?

President Yeltsin. In your question you made a couple of errors right off the bat. First of all, you said that the United States is seeking the reelection of President Yeltsin. I have different data. Second, military actions in the Chechnya region are not going on. No military operations are being carried out from March 31. It's another matter—some bands are still running around. Out of 22 regions of Chechnya, 19 of them have signed agreements. In three, there are still—the bosses there are still the bands; they're still in charge. And in fact, it's true they are making life difficult for a lot of people.

But I repeat again, there are no military operations now underway. A state commission has been set up headed by Chernomyrdin; contact has been established with Dudayev through intermediaries. The intermediaries we have,

Shaimiev, Orlov—we have people like that, King Hassan II, the King of Morocco, who have agreed to act in the role of intermediaries and to talk to Dudayev, to influence him from the point of view of negotiations only on one question that he is not in agreement with, in other words, that the Chechen Republic from our point of view—and this is an absolute—must be and will remain within Russia.

President Clinton. Let me make two brief points. First of all, I think the record will reflect that the United States has consistently supported a political solution to the Chechnya crisis and offered its support for that. And when President Yeltsin made his announcement on March 31st, we supported that.

You say that there are some who say we should have been more openly critical. I think it depends upon your first premise; do you believe that Chechnya is a part of Russia or not? I would remind you that we once had a Civil War in our country in which we lost on a per-capita basis far more people than we lost in any of the wars of the 20th century over the proposition that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for, that no State had a right to withdraw from our Union.

And so the United States has taken the position that Chechnya is a part of Russia, but that in the end, a free country has to have a free association, so there would have to be something beyond the fighting, there would have to be a diplomatic solution. That's what we have done.

But we realize this is a very difficult problem. And we have—President Yeltsin said today in our private meeting he wanted a diplomatic solution. He specifically asked me to do a thing or two that he thought might be helpful to him in securing a peaceful resolution of this and an end to the fighting and a real reconciliation between the people of Chechnya and the rest of Russia. So I intend to do what he requested in that regard, and I will continue to try to advocate an end to the violence and do what the United States can to support a resolution of this.

Russia-U.S. Relations

Q. As a whole, how do you assess the progress in the field of security, including the issue of ABM? And how is this going to affect the future of equal partnership between Russia and the United States?

President Yeltsin. The word “equal” or “on an equivalent basis”—when we first signed the first treaty we weren't around, that word wasn't around. And it occurred later, because we saw some sort of discrimination practiced against Russia. And that's why the word “equal” or “on an equal basis in all respects”—that's what appeared.

Now, as far as security, we discussed in detail these issues. And in general, of course, for some time we're not going to be forcing the widening of NATO at our request. President Clinton promised this and somehow to influence his colleagues.

I believe that, in fact, it will be thus for a while. Then gradually maybe we ourselves will find, together with NATO, a relationship, maybe to come up with an agreement that, let's say, no country will be allowed to enter NATO, let's say, without Russia's agreement, and then maybe only through a consensus will be NATO changing. In other words, there is a variety of solutions for this problem, but we yet have to work on this.

We talked about it in detail, but, look, we're not going to be sitting here giving you everything exactly in detail what we did for 5 hours. We're going to have a 5-hour press conference then.

President Clinton. A brief comment on the two issues President Yeltsin mentioned. The United States has within it some people who have had questions about the ABM Treaty to which we're a signatory. I believe the United States should keep its treaty commitments. I think if we expect Russia to keep its treaty commitments, we have to keep ours. Not so long ago I vetoed a defense bill passed in the Congress because I thought it would have put us out of compliance with the ABM Treaty.

What we have to do now, because the ABM Treaty does not prohibit the development of theater missile defenses, is to define clearly what the lines between the two are, both regular velocity and high velocity theater missile defense. We made real progress here in doing that. And I'm convinced that if we do this in an open way that has a lot of integrity, that requires—where no one can question our commitment to the ABM Treaty, I think we'll all be just fine on this, and I think it will work out very well.

With regard to NATO, our differences are well-known, but I think it's also worth pointing

out that as with other aspects of this relationship, they have been clear and open, there have been no surprises, and from my point of view there have been no changes.

I will say again: My goal is for a democratic, undivided Europe. The world has been caused a lot of trouble in the last 1,000 years repeatedly because of the divisions of Europe, number one. Number two, my goal is to see the United States and Russia over the long run develop a strong, equal partnership of two great democracies, freedom-loving countries that define their greatness in terms of their values and their example and the achievements of their people and not the domination of other nations. And I believe that we will find a way to work that out that's consistent with the position I've taken on NATO.

And so I feel—I believe that as this thing goes along we'll find answers to that. And so my position hasn't changed about NATO, but I do not in any way, shape, or form mean any threat to the security of the long-term legitimate interests of Russia there. And the more important thing is—by the way, practical thing—is the progress we have made here with the ABM theater missile defense issue. That's a very significant advance for both countries in resolving a real, as opposed to an imagined, security problem.

President Yeltsin. One minute, I didn't respond to part three of that second question on the ABM.

The thing is that, really, we did have at one time differences when the U.S. side began to develop its own system beyond the ABM. And we expressed our surprise at this. And when Bill Clinton became President we agreed solidly that we are going to abide by the ABM Treaty. And for all this time, all the times we've met, we've had never any doubts, and we've had never any claims or questions to each other or any doubts that this treaty is in any way going to be changed or modified or changes introduced or anything like that.

It's another matter now that, as Bill Clinton said, that we've got to, simply from the technical point of view, have that demarcation between strategic and theater nuclear systems. But that's being carried out now by our specialists and experts, U.S. experts. And that will be fulfilled to not the detriment of either the United States or the Russian Federation.

Russian Elections

Q. The two Presidents: Both of you today have talked very optimistically and hopefully about U.S. and Russian relations. But again to return to the elections, if the Communists were to win in this election, do you believe that this close relationship can continue? And particularly to Mr. Yeltsin, do you believe your Communist opponents are in fact a different kind of Communists than the ones whom you helped put out of power and the party that you once walked out of?

President Yeltsin. I have nothing to think here on this score. There's nothing to think about because I am sure that I will be victorious.

President Clinton. Well, my answer's irrelevant. [Laughter]

Should we take one more? Do you want to take one more?

President Yeltsin. One more question. One more question each—you and I, each side, one more question.

Nuclear Testing

Q. Boris Nikolayevich, a question to you: Have you discussed the issue of banning nuclear testing, and is there any difference of opinion on nuclear testing?

President Yeltsin. Yes, this issue was discussed yesterday at the meeting of the 8, since the topic was, after all, nuclear security, and everything there, practically speaking, starts with nuclear materials and testing. So when we talked about testing, banning testing yesterday, I will say that we had a very, very loyal discussion, a pleasant talk. All, to the very last one, agreed that this year we've got to sign the treaty on banning and testing in any size of tests forever and forever.

But not all nuclear states participated at yesterday's meeting of the 8. Now, with the others we're going to have to do a little work, especially with China. Well, that's why we, the leaders of the states, and that's where members of the 8 which decide these big political issues and other issues in order to somehow move forward and make progress on these big issues and to reach agreements and to prepare accords with other states. And we're going to be attempting to do that. I have got the conviction that we are going to find an agreement and, after all, I think we will be able to sign this year.

President Clinton. I'll just make a brief supplemental remark there. We have all agreed to

go with the so-called Australian language, which is a strict zero-yield comprehensive test ban treaty. That is the only kind of treaty that can give the people of the world the certainty that they really are seeing the end of the nuclear age of the big weapons.

Some other countries want to kind of leave a big crack in the door for so-called peaceful tests or experimentation. And we all believe that we just have to try to persuade them to our way of thinking. I think the biggest and most important issue now is trying to persuade the Chinese to adopt the position that we have adopted. And I suggested on behalf of the 8 that we ask President Yeltsin to take this issue up on his trip to China. He agreed to do that, and the rest of us agreed to do our best as well to support that and try to persuade the Chinese that this is the right course for the future. And I have every hope that we can succeed.

Assistance to Russia

Q. Mr. President, the U.S. assistance to Russia after communism fell has been a fraction of what the Marshall plan did for Europe to help rebuild Europe after World War II. With many Russians questioning whether capitalism and democracy have really made their lives better, do you feel that the West has missed a historic chance to help Russia? And if you're reelected next year and there's a new Congress, do you foresee anything more ambitious in the future?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, the short answer to your question is no, I don't think that the West has missed an historic chance. The present Congress I think has underestimated the impact that a relatively small amount of investment assistance in other countries can have, not just in Russia but in other places in the world. And so I think that's a mistake. I think not paying our U.N. dues is a mistake, not investing in the International Development Association is a mistake.

But let me ask you—you compared this to the Marshall plan. There are some things that

are quite different. For one thing, we are now the largest—the United States is the largest private investor in Russia, and the flow of private investment is much broader and quicker than it was at the end of World War II. For another thing, the United States has strongly supported the multi-billion-dollar aid package coming out of the international financial institutions, which were not available to do those things, again, as a part of the Marshall plan on anything like this scale. Thirdly, even though our assistance to Russia has dropped in the last couple of years, the Nunn-Lugar funds are still helping the denuclearization movement, and funds that I asked the Congress to adopt in the '93-'94 timeframe, those funds have by no means all been used up. That is, they're still awaiting specific projects. So money has been appropriated for investment here that can still be invested here as the projects come on line.

So our commitment to the economic revitalization of Russia is very strong. And I would point out that I believe Russia has privatized a higher percentage of its economy than any of the other countries of the former Soviet Union. And the economic problems that Russia has endured began before the Soviet Union disappeared. And we see the economy coming back now, and I think that things are going in the right direction.

I do believe that the United States and the rest of the advanced economies should continue their commitment to investment and to support democracy and economic reform. I don't think we should let up. But I think it's a mistake to say that a historic opportunity has been missed, because a great deal has been done.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 121st news conference began at 2:42 p.m. in the Executive Office Building at the Kremlin. President Yeltsin spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. In his remarks, President Yeltsin referred to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia, President Jawhar Dudayev of Chechnya, and President Mintimer Shaimiev of Tatarstan.