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**Editor's Note:** The following news conference was not received by the Office of the Federal Register for publication in the appropriate issue. The following is the text of the President's news conference, designated No. 125.

## The President's News Conference in Moscow, Russia

*April 20, 1996*

***The President.*** I would like to begin my remarks by thanking President Yeltsin for his leadership in first initiating and then hosting this conference. The work that we all did here in Moscow, for me, is a part of my most important duty as President, increasing the safety and security of the American people.

At this nuclear summit, we have done that by reducing the grave dangers posed by nuclear weapons and the materials used to build them. The steps we have taken here today and the foundation of cooperation we've set for the future will make not only the American people but people all over the world more secure.

First, we resolved to complete a true zero yield comprehensive test ban treaty this year. Never before have all our nations joined as one and embraced this goal which would ban any nuclear explosion, including weapons test explosions. American leaders since Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy have sought a comprehensive test ban to help stop the spread of nuclear weapons and to strengthen the security of the United States and nations throughout the world.

Today, because of the progress made here in Moscow, we are closer to this goal than at any time since the dawn of the nuclear age. Our work will speed progress on the treaty which we hope to sign in September at the United Nations. With more hard work we can soon see the day when no nuclear weapons are detonated anywhere on the face of the Earth.

In this time of rapid technological change and increasingly open borders, one of the greatest dangers we face is the possibility of nuclear materials falling into the wrong hands. Today we agreed to work together more closely than ever to prevent that from happening. We will strengthen safeguards on fissile materials and components that might be used to build a bomb. We have created a joint program to fight trafficking in these materials by dramatically increasing cooperation among our nations' law enforcement, customs, and intelligence authorities.

Preventing the spread of nuclear material is a global problem that demands global cooperation. We want to enlist others in this effort as well. Already Ukraine has endorsed the program adopted here. We invite other nations to do the same and to join us in this crucial work.

We also took steps to make the civilian use of nuclear energy safer. The 10th anniversary of Chernobyl is only a few days off. We're determined to do more to increase reactor safety and prevent another tragedy from happening. We reaffirmed our agreement with President Kuchma to close Chernobyl by the year 2000, and we'll work to end the dumping of nuclear materials in oceans.

All our efforts here have been driven by a single principle: When we use nuclear energy, our first and highest priority must be safety.

From the beginning, it has been a crucial goal, a central goal of my Presidency to further reduce the nuclear threat. I'm proud of what we've achieved so far. Because of my agreement with President Yeltsin, for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age,

no Russian missiles are targeted at United States cities. We secured the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, froze North Korea's dangerous nuclear program, cut existing nuclear arsenals by putting the START I treaty into force, and cleared the way for even deeper cuts by ratifying the START II treaty. And we persuaded Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to give up the nuclear weapons on their soil.

There is more we must do. In this new era of possibilities we do have real opportunities to make all our citizens safer, but we know there are real challenges there as well. This important summit has put these issues of nuclear safety at the top of the international agenda. Today, we took yet another step back from the nuclear precipice. We must not rest until these dangers have been reduced, until the cloud of fear has been lifted, until we can feel safe that the power of the atom is being used to benefit human life and not imperil it.

### *Support of Russian Denuclearization*

***Q.*** Mr. President, even with the millions previously pledged by the United States, Russia is still said to be many years away from being able to properly guard nuclear materials and facilities. This summit, however, is producing no new financial pledges to such programs and instead is producing more paper agreements of the type Russia's already been slow to comply with. How confident can you be in Russia's will—in its financial goals to carry out the agreements it's signed, particularly if it has——

***The President.*** Well, first of all, we do have some funds set aside for this purpose that have not been fully drawn down. And secondly, in terms of the United States and Russia, we've been working on this issue for better than 2 years now, and I can say that in the last year we have seen a substantial number of specific things being done by the Russians to increase nuclear safety here. So I think there has plainly been movement, I think they're clearly moving in the right direction.

Let me state furthermore that this is a global problem. Russia is not the only country in the world that has this problem by a long shot. And if you read this document, it is clear that the document will only have meaning if we act on it, but the unusual thing about this document compared with past ones is that this is, as far as I know, the first time that these eight nations have agreed together to do very specific things to try to control the trafficking in nuclear materials, which is something we're all very concerned about. And given the rise of terrorist networks and the interconnections through computer technology in the world, it is all the more important.

But this situation with regard to Russia is better than it was a year ago. There are still funds that can be drawn down. And as specific things come up, if we can't fund them, I think that we'll be able to find the funds available. I am not worried about the money on this aspect of this large issue that we've been talking about.

Go ahead, Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press], you're next.

### *Iran*

***Q.*** Mr. President, after the Summit on Nuclear Safety, President Yeltsin said that Russia is going to go ahead with its sale of nuclear technology to Iran, a state that you consider a terrorist nation. Do you still consider this sale a bad idea, and does it undercut this whole summit?

***The President.*** No. Yes, it's a bad idea; no, it does not undercut the summit. I think it's a bad idea because we're against any nuclear cooperation with Iran for one simple reason: We believe they're trying to develop a nuclear program, notwithstanding what they may say to the contrary.

The defense that Russia has made is that they're simply giving them the technology that we propose to provide to North Korea. The difference is, we are moving North Korea down on the scale of nuclear capacity in a cooperative effort that, so far, North Korea has fully kept its word on. We are moving down, and we are dismantling a nuclear threat.

In the case of Iran, they are moving up in their nuclear capacity even though what Russia proposes to transfer itself cannot be used to develop a nuclear weapon. And we just don't believe that there should be any

nuclear cooperation with a country who's trying to develop a nuclear program.

We don't need any more states with nuclear capacity in this world to make weapons. We don't need that. So that's our position.

Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, CNN].

### *Judicial Appointments*

***Q.*** Mr. President, while you've been here, Senate majority leader Bob Dole delivered a major speech in Washington criticizing your record on fighting crime and your record in appointing what he describes as "liberal judges." I wonder if you'd care to respond to Senator Dole.

***The President.*** Well, I will respond at greater length after I get home. I do not—since I do not believe—I like the old-fashioned position that used to prevail that people didn't attack the President when he was on a foreign mission for the good of the country. It has been abandoned with regularity in the last 3½ years, but I don't think that makes it any worse a rule.

I will just say this: Senator Dole voted for 98 percent of the judges that I appointed, and the rating systems for judges, going back to the Eisenhower administration by the American Bar Association, indicate that I have appointed the best qualified judges of any President since Mr. Eisenhower was in this job.

And my record on the crime issue is quite clear, and I'll have a chance to reaffirm it next week when I get back and we sign the antiterrorism bill.

Brit [Brit Hume, ABC].

### *Middle East and Irish Peace Process*

***Q.*** Mr. President, events from Lebanon to London—there have been setbacks for the peace efforts in which you have invested yourself and your prestige. I wonder if you may now feel that settlements you might have thought were almost within your grasp are now slipping away from you?

***The President.*** Well, if these peace efforts were easy, they would have been concluded a long time ago. And I never expected the road to be completely straight. I will say this: I had a good talk with Prime Minister Major today about the Irish peace process. The United States supports all-party talks and supports the elections that the Irish and British Governments have proposed as a vehicle to get to them. We strongly believe, I personally strongly believe that the cease-fire should be reinstituted. I believe that's what the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland of both traditions want. And we'll keep working toward that end. I think we've got a chance to see that process succeed.

With regard to Lebanon, I had a long talk with Secretary Christopher this afternoon. He is in Syria now; he will see President Asad this evening. He will also have contact with the other foreign ministers that are there. And we're going to do the best we can to get this back on track. We have got to get the cease-fire. And we need to restore something like what existed in 1993, before it was broken a few days ago.

### *Middle East Peace Process*

***Q.*** Mr. President, to follow up on that, a few hours ago, I guess it was, President Chirac was very optimistic about the prospects for a cease-fire, saying he thought that it was possible that could happen today or tomorrow. Do you share that optimism, first of all? And secondly, do you think that there is any life left at all in the overall peace process after what has been happening over the past 10 days?

***The President.*** Oh, yes. I don't think if—I think what happened in the past 10 days happened because there is life in the peace process. I think the resumption of the rocket—the Katyusha rockets, was a direct attempt to drive a stake through the peace process, through the heart of the peace process. I don't think this is very complicated.

I think Hezbollah did what they did, and I think they have probably been very pleased in a tragic way that the Israeli reaction included the misfiring of certain shells that killed all those civilians because that's what they want to do. They want to kill the peace process. And I think the fact that they want to kill it shows that there is still life in it. And so I do believe that. This is a difficult period.

Now, in terms of—President Chirac and I talked about this extensively today, and as

I said, the Secretary of State will have contact with the two European foreign ministers and the Russian foreign minister who are in Syria. He will then see President Asad, and he will then—I expect that he will probably go back to Jerusalem tonight, sometime late tonight.

But I have found that predictions are not particularly useful, so I don't want to voice optimism or pessimism. I do want to say that there are two things we have to do here: We have got to get a—we have got to stop the violence, but we also have to get some sort of understanding that will enable the people of Lebanon and the people who live in the northern part of Israel to go back to a normal life.

And my heart really goes out to them. The people who live in southern Lebanon are basically caught in a political web that is far beyond their ability to control. And so I hope to goodness we can give them back the elements of their life, so they at least have the security of peace in the next—for the indeterminate period. But if we can do that, I think the peace process can be put back on track.

Yes, Rita [Rita Braver, CBS]?

### *Russia and Iran*

***Q.*** I wanted to go back to the question that Terry asked you earlier. You said that you didn't think that Russia's cooperation with Iran on sharing of nuclear technology undercut what happened here today. And then you seemed to lay out all of the problems that that would lead to.

***The President.*** No, what I mean——

***Q.*** I wasn't quite finished. I wanted to ask if you didn't think that that might also lead to some skepticism about the entire relationship between the United States and Boris Yeltsin when he seems to persist in doing something that seems so clearly against the interest of not only the United States, but the rest of the world as you see it.

***The President.*** No, because on balance, we've gotten a lot more progress out of this nuclear relationship with the Russians than this one setback would indicate, number one. And number two, he didn't say one thing and do another here. I mean, he publicly said what they were going to do, so there's no evidence of dishonesty on the part of the Russian position whatever.

I just think they're wrong. But if you compare that action, which I disagree with, with Yeltsin's detargeting the missiles, with putting START I into effect, with his support for START II, with his willingness to accelerate further our reduction and mutual efforts to reduce the nuclear threat, with the support that he's given us for the indefinite extension of the NPT, with the work that they have done with us to increase the security of nuclear materials in the last year—when you add up all the things that have been done and the things that Russia has committed to do in this treaty going forward, including supporting the zero yield comprehensive test ban, supporting the effort to end ocean dumping, supporting the convention on radioactive waste management, the answer is, this one thing that I strongly disagree with does not come close to outweighing the benefits that we've gotten out of this relationship.

As I said, there are—Russia is not the only country that believes that they're just giving Iran the same technology that we've already approved for North Korea in terms of generating nuclear power. The difference is we're bringing North Korea down; they will bring Iran up by some marginal capacity to deal with and understand nuclear technology and continue to build toward nuclear capacity. And, we believe, notwithstanding what they say to the contrary, that they want to have the ability to produce weapons. So we think it's a very serious thing.

### *Russian Elections*

***Q.*** Mr. President, I know you don't like to comment on the Russian Presidential elections other than to say that the U.S. supports those who are in favor of democratic reform, but based on that policy, I wonder if you could explain your thinking and rationale for meeting tomorrow with the leading Communist candidate at a reception.

***The President.*** Well, yes. First of all, the last time I was here I met with a representative group of political leaders across all the parties and had a joint discussion—I didn't have any individual bilaterals—because Russia is essentially a multiparty state. And so, I'm going to do that again tomorrow. But

that's not inconsistent with our position that in democracies, we believe the people have to make their own decisions, and we will honor the decisions that they make.

In the countries that have essentially two-party systems, when I go to a country I virtually always meet with the leader of the opposition. And that's not just my policy; that's been the policy of the American President over a long period of time.

So anybody who is playing by the rules here, the democratic rules, participating in the democratic system, is entitled to do it under the Russian Constitution, and I'm going to meet tomorrow with—the Ambassador invited a number of people here from the different political parties, and I'm still not sure who is coming and who is not. But I will meet with those who come and let them say whatever they want to say, and I'll ask them a few questions.

***Q.*** Do you consider that a way of keeping the door open?

***The President.*** Absolutely not. It's not opening a door or closing a door, it should be—there is no significance to that in terms of this election process in Russia. This is something I do everywhere. When I go to other countries and I meet with the heads of government, when there is one clear head of an opposition, I meet with the opposition. In this case, Russia is an emerging democracy with a lot of different parties.

The last time I was here, I had a good talk with eight or 10 different leaders from around Russia, including leaders of other parties in the Duma and a couple of governors, heads of other provinces, or oblasts. And so that's what I do, and I'm going to do it again tomorrow.

George [George Condon, Copley News Service]?

***Q.*** Mr. President, have the Russian economic and political reforms reached a point where they are essentially irreversible, or are they sufficiently fragile that the election of the wrong person here would bring us back to an adversarial state, or even a resumption of some modified form of the cold war?

***The President.*** I believe that when you—what did Nelson Mandela say—the most important—one that Nelson Mandela says—the most important election is the next election, or—no, Aristide said that the most important election, when a country becomes a democracy, is the second election.

What I believe is that the Russians have established a pretty vigorous democratic system already. And if they have another Presidential election that's a free and fair election with a significant amount of participation by the voters, I think every time you do that, it makes the path of democracy stronger and a reversal less likely.

There is clearly more room for differences of policy on economic and on foreign affairs matters, but I believe that the growth of free enterprise in Russia and the beginnings of people, ordinary people feeling the economic benefits of it, plus the need that any great country has today for attracting capital from around the world through the international financial institutions and through private investments, are going to be at least strong incentives to maintain at some pace a direction toward economic as well as political reform.

You know, no one knows—no one can predict the future, but I think on balance, the Russian people have been about the business of defining their greatness as they look to the future and not to the past. And if their greatness lies in freedom of expression of their people and of their accomplishments rather than their ability to either dominate others or have themselves dominated by a strong central, autocratic state, that whatever election results come out, the future will probably be all right.

But this country just kind of got started on this a few years ago, so I don't know that any of us know the future. I can just say that the United States supports the democratic movement in Russia and we support economic reform, and we believe the country has enormous talent and enormous resources, and if it can get through this difficult period of transition with forward-looking leadership, that it will be a prosperous, strong, invaluable member of the world community in the future. And it all depends upon how the Russian people, ultimately, through their democracy, decide to define their greatness.

***Q.*** Mr. President, that answer could let some people believe that you don't think there's really that much difference between

the reelection of Boris Yeltsin and the election of Gennady Zyuganov. That isn't what you believe, is it?

***The President.*** I believe that that's the story you want to write, one way or the other. [*Laughter*.] And the right, the correct position for the United States is not to become involved in any direct way.

I have had a good relationship with President Yeltsin. He has done a lot of good things in terms of removing the nuclear threat from the world and in terms of increasing the security of the Russian people, the American people, and others who are affected by it. And we have worked together to get international financial institutions to support Russia's economic transition because it's been a very difficult thing. And everyone knows of that relationship.

But it is not right for the United States or for any other country to tell people how they should vote. That's what democracy is about. How would you like it and how would you be affected by it if leaders of all the other countries in the world showed up in the United States between now and November and said vote for President Clinton or vote for Senator Dole? Most Americans would say, "Well, I hope we'll be friends when this is over, but I don't much care who you think I should vote for. I believe I'm smart enough to make that decision for myself."

That's the only point I'm making. You should read nothing into this one way or the other except the fact that the United States and Russia, in my view, have a big obligation to their people to continue to be allies, to have a constructive relationship, to resolve as many of their differences as possible and to move forward together into the future.

Our soldiers are side by side with IFOR in Bosnia today. We have done a lot of things together. And my specific belief is that neither the President of the United States nor anyone else has any business telling the citizens of Russia in any kind of explicit way how they should vote. Yes, there will be consequences to the votes they cast, and they will be able to sort out those consequences. And sometimes voters are right about what the consequences are of their votes, and sometimes they're not. And that's not only true in Russia; that's true in the United States and lots of other places.

But our business is to support a certain direction, to reaffirm our own values, our own interests and the terms on which we want to engage Russia in partnership. That's our business here. The business of the Russian people is to be good citizens in a new democracy and become well-informed and make up their own mind and go and vote and chart their own destiny. And that's what they're going to do.

### *Criticism From Home*

***Q.*** Mr. President, at any of the tables that you've been sitting at in your three stops this week, have you felt undercut as a leader because of the criticism from home, the political criticism from home?

***The President.*** No. Not at all.

### *Assistance to Russia*

***Q.*** Mr. President, I represent one of the newspapers, and we see all around us, in Moscow even, children starving, some of them dying. What are we going to do? How can you help us? We hear that there is assistance coming from the United States to help our children. Where is this assistance going? We don't see it. It's disappearing. Can you tell us anything about what we can do? Help us work our way through this thing. But we see the money just disappearing. Please.

***The President.*** First of all, most of the direct aid that the United States has given to Russia has been in the area of dealing with the aftermath of the cold war. And we put a lot of resources into helping bring down the nuclear threat so that Russia would be able to find other resources to deal with the human problems of the people.

Secondly, we have recently worked very hard to qualify Russia for very large sums of funds through the international financial institutions, which should be beginning to flow now.

Thirdly, we are working on what specific things we can do in addition to that to, both on our own and through international cooperation with other countries, to deal with some of the most urgent humanitarian problems. Just yesterday, for example, when I was in St. Petersburg, I had a conversation about

what we could do to help to get more humanitarian aid to benefit the Russian children in some specific areas of problems that have been outlined.

So I know this is frustrating to you because the economy collapsed so much and it's not totally recovered. But I believe that the economy is getting better and that, because of that, more aid will be able to flow now. And I think that if you can stay on the course of reform, I believe that there will be marked improvements in the next couple of years. That's what I believe.

But I also think, as a practical matter, that I and other world leaders who want to support Russia need to examine much more specifically some of the humanitarian problems that we could alleviate at what is a relatively small cost to ourselves with a huge benefit to the people of Russia.

Peter, do you want to translate that? Did you understand? Can you hear me? Peter, are you going to say that in Russian, or not? Do we need to do that? Oh, it's simultaneous.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 125th news conference began at 7:07 p.m. in the Radisson Slavjanskaya Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine; Prime Minister John Major of the United Kingdom; President Jacques Chirac of France; President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria, and President Nelson Mandela of South Africa.