

September 23, 1994

THE RUSSIANS ARE BACK: YELTSIN'S AGENDA AT THE U.S.-RUSSIA SUMMIT

INTRODUCTION

Russian President Boris Yeltsin will visit Washington September 27-29 for a summit meeting with President Bill Clinton. Yeltsin's position at home is now more secure than it was at the time of the last U.S.-Russia summit at Moscow in January 1994. The Russian economy, though still quite weak, is relatively stable. Inflation is about 5 percent a month, less than half of what it was at the beginning of the year. The transition toward a market economy continues, and the rule of law is gradually taking hold.

Domestic politics are increasingly stable, too. Though little was accomplished during the elected legislature's first session, relations are much better now between the executive and legislative branches of government, the government and opposition political policies, and—most important—the federal authorities in Moscow and regional governments throughout the Russian Federation. Ultrnationalist and neo-communist forces seem to have lost the broad popular support demonstrated during the December 1993 parliamentary elections. These forces rarely offer effective opposition to the mainstream parties and the government.

In foreign policy, Yeltsin has shown himself to be equally adept at managing competing and often contradictory forces. Despite often xenophobic opposition at home, he has joined NATO's "Partnership for Peace" and completed a timely withdrawal of Russian troops from Germany, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Baltic states. Yeltsin has also taken a leadership role in the so-called Contact Group of Russia and four NATO allies in searching for a comprehensive solution to the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. In doing so, he has applied pressure on traditional Serbian allies in both Yugoslavia and Bosnia, thus demonstrating his desire to establish a new system of collective security in Europe and to enhance Russia's international image.

Keeping Russia as a key player in international politics will be Yeltsin's main goal at the Washington summit. He will press President Clinton to recognize Russia's special

role in world affairs, asking for special consideration of "Russian interests." As Russia gradually stabilizes, it is slowly reasserting itself in international politics. This newfound confidence and strength will be exhibited on the Russian side of the conference table. At the Washington summit, Yeltsin can be expected to:

- ✓ **Ask** for American recognition of a Russian "sphere of influence" in the Commonwealth of Independent States;
- ✓ **Offer** his cooperation with the U.S. on countering the proliferation of plutonium and nuclear-related materials;
- ✓ **Seek** American endorsement for his concerns about the treatment of ethnic Russians in the Baltic states;
- ✓ **Persuade** Clinton not to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia and to remove economic sanctions against Serbia;
- ✓ **Request** that NATO membership for Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe be delayed;
- ✓ **Deliver** the message that Russia is making substantial progress toward reforms;
- ✓ **Solicit** continued American support for Russian economic and political reforms;
- ✓ **Call** for a formal annulment of the 1973 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which links trade with emigration;
- ✓ **Ask** for Most-Favored-Nation trade status for Russia;
- ✓ **Invite** American private sector investment in and technical assistance to the Russian economy;
- ✓ **Obtain** pledges of additional U.S. funding for strategic weapons dismantling and destruction;
- ✓ **Press** for revisions in conventional forces treaty restrictions on the size of the Russian army;
- ✓ **Insist** on a more active role for Russia in the Middle East peace process;
- ✓ **Refute** American demands for a cessation of Russian intelligence operations in the U.S.

A MATURING U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONSHIP

Russian-American relations have undergone a transition since the Vancouver summit in April 1993. Romantic notions of partnership based on the euphoria at the end of the Cold War have given way to the reality that the two nations have interests which, while sometimes complementary, are nonetheless based on very different geopolitical, strategic, historical, economic, and cultural considerations. Moreover, Russia's disappointed

hopes for a vast flow of American economic aid that never came have cooled the U.S.-Russian relationship. There is now a belief in Russia that there is very little the United States can do to help with the Russian transition to democratic capitalism.

The cooling of U.S.-Russia relations has raised tensions somewhat. Even some moderate politicians, including Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, have taken to "bullying" the U.S. on foreign policy. It appears that the U.S.-Russian relationship is no longer a top priority for Russian foreign policy makers. They have concluded that, rather than trying to achieve active U.S. support for its own foreign policy, Russia should instead strive for a certain "benign neglect" by which Russia will gain a freer hand in international politics and economics.

Regardless of what is said or done at the summit, it will not have the historic significance of U.S.-Soviet summits during the Cold War. It instead reflects a desire by both sides to establish regular contacts between the heads of state of the two most powerful and influential nations on earth. Yeltsin understands that the relationship is growing stronger and deeper and knows that this will be accompanied by areas of both cooperation and confrontation.

Nonetheless, for Yeltsin's political fortunes, it is important that he not be seen as a "puppet in the hands of American imperialism," as is often charged by his ultra-nationalist and neo-communist opponents. With the pending 1996 Russian elections, a successful visit to the U.S. will help cement Yeltsin's position as a crafty statesman with a serious international reputation and close personal relationship with other world leaders.

YELTSIN'S OBJECTIVES AT THE WASHINGTON SUMMIT

Clinton will meet an increasingly confident Boris Yeltsin when he welcomes him to Washington on September 27. The spirit of cooperation and the close personal relationship between the two men was best demonstrated during the closing joint press conference after the summit of the world's leading economic powers in Naples last July. During the conference, Yeltsin reacted angrily to Clinton's interpretation of Russia's agreement to withdraw its military from Estonia. Despite the appearance of disagreement concerning the withdrawal timetable, neither leader gave ground. The Russian withdrawal was completed in August without incident.

Similar signs of independence should be expected in Washington. Yeltsin will have a variety of foreign policy and economic objectives; he knows some will be challenged by Clinton, while others will contribute to cooperation between the U.S. and Russia. At the summit, Yeltsin can be expected to:

Ask for American recognition of a Russian "sphere of influence" in the Commonwealth of Independent States. From Yeltsin's perspective, Russia has vital national security interests in maintaining stability on its borders. Moscow views the political, economic, and social processes in the adjacent newly independent states (NIS) of the "near abroad" as having a direct affect on Russia's own stability and security. Politically stronger and with a better economy than the majority of its new neighbors, Russia nonetheless lacks, Yeltsin believes, adequate political and economic leverage to influence the situation there. Much of Russia's interference in the "near abroad" is intended to increase this leverage.

Yeltsin is not interested in the "internationalization" of the conflicts in Tajikistan, Moldova, Chechnya, Abkhazia, and elsewhere through an active involvement of the U.N. or the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), to say nothing of NATO. For their part, these organizations have shown little desire to involve themselves in many of these dangerous and faraway conflicts. By contrast, Russia wants to conduct peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in several regions at once. Often, these operations are based on a formal mandate from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the loose organization of twelve republics of the former Soviet Union. In reality, though, these are typically unilateral Russian activities.

Yeltsin believes that the U.S. is open to the idea of Russian peacekeeping in the "near abroad." The Clinton Administration has sometimes taken a hard line; U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright visited a number of the NIS in September 1994 and called for a withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova. However, other developments suggest to Moscow that the U.S. government is revising its attitude toward the Russian peacekeeping in the NIS. A joint U.S.-Russian peacekeeping exercise in early September at the Totsk military training facility was interpreted by many security experts in Moscow as tacit American support for Russia's involvement in peacekeeping. Moreover, comments made by Albright at the end of her trip were reported in the Russian media as "a new endorsement of Russia's right to send troops to the former satellite states for peacekeeping missions."¹ Said Albright: "So long as Russia abides by the international peacekeeping principles, their mandates are creative and they follow through on them, it is an appropriate thing for them to do." She declared that "The United States is very comfortable with this."²

In Washington, Yeltsin will declare that Russian peacekeeping missions create international and regional stability. He will urge the U.S. not to oppose Russian presence and operations along the borders of Russia. Yeltsin will want Clinton to give *de facto* recognition to Russian security interests in the "near abroad," and he will seek a special mandate for peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in those countries. He will probably refer to American activity in Haiti as a similar example of a great power protecting its vital national interests in its own neighborhood.

Offer his cooperation with the U.S. on countering the proliferation of plutonium and nuclear-related materials. President Yeltsin knows that there is great concern in the U.S. about the safety and security of nuclear facilities in Russia and other NIS countries. He will be prepared for extensive discussion on this issue and is expected to describe for Clinton the Russian security measures designed to stop any proliferation of nuclear materials and weapons abroad. Yeltsin would welcome further cooperation with U.S. regulatory and security agencies regarding nuclear non-proliferation.

Nonetheless, Yeltsin is sure to refute allegations of the corruption and poor security at nuclear weapons sites and reactor installations. Citing the recent German apprehensions of Colombians, Spaniards, and Zairians in possession of radioactive material, he may assert that no firm evidence exists as to the reported cases of missing or exported

¹ An interview with Albright appeared in *The Moscow Times*, September 7, 1994.

² *Ibid.*

nuclear substances and will challenge what he sees as the dubious facts reported by the media.

Seek American endorsement for his concerns about the treatment of ethnic Russians in the Baltic states. The civil rights of ethnic Russians living in Estonia and Latvia is a sensitive political issue for Yeltsin both internationally and domestically. Moscow sees the citizenship restrictions imposed by the respective governments on Russian minorities as little more than outright social and political discrimination against non-natives. Many of these Russians are post-World War II immigrants who have been deprived of any right to obtain local citizenship.

Yeltsin's opponents from both the left and right frequently criticize him for failing to take adequate steps to protect the civil rights of the Russian minority in the Baltics. In response, Yeltsin signed a series of agreements in July and August 1994 with the heads of the Baltic states regarding the rights of retired servicemen. This paved the way for the Russian military pull-out at the end of August. There is much doubt in Moscow, though, that the agreements will be ratified and adhered to by the Baltic governments.

In Washington Yeltsin will urge Clinton to pressure the Baltic countries on Russian civil rights. He will remind his American counterpart that Russia has met Latvia and Estonia halfway by withdrawing its troops and expects its neighbors to reciprocate by honoring the agreements it has signed.

Persuade Clinton not to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia and to remove economic sanctions against Serbia. Yeltsin feels confident that he has been a faithful partner with the U.S., France, Great Britain, and Germany in the so-called Contact Group, formed in the spring to resolve the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. He has pressured Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic to influence the Bosnian Serbs into accepting the Contact Group peace proposal, which was made in July.

Nonetheless, Yeltsin opposes a U.S. plan to lift the arms embargo on the Bosnian Serbs. In this, of course, he is joined by Contact Group partners in London and Paris who, with troops on the ground in Bosnia, do not wish to see an escalation in the bloodshed. Yeltsin is under pressure from domestic opposition groups who are angered by Yeltsin's leaning on Serbia. He would not welcome direct military action against the Bosnian Serbs that might be seen as a rebuff of Russia in the Contact Group.

At the same time, Moscow thinks a relaxation of economic sanctions on Belgrade is justified. From Yeltsin's perspective, Milosevic did what he had been asked to do by pressuring Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic to accept the Contact Group proposal. That Karadzic did not revealed the growing rift between the two Serb leaders.

Request that NATO membership for Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe be delayed. Yeltsin agreed to participate in NATO's outreach program to the former Warsaw Pact, known as the Partnership for Peace (PFP). He did so hoping to arrest a rapid expansion of the alliance to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as full members. Russia also fears the more remote prospect of other European countries, including the Baltic republics and possibly Ukraine and Belarus, joining NATO. Defense Minister General Pavel Grachev, speaking on September 8 at

a security conference in Copenhagen, acknowledged that "Russia's response to the NATO extension will be painful."

Yeltsin's decision to join the PFP elicited often virulent anti-NATO debate in Russia. The Russian public is still skeptical about NATO, having little knowledge of its objectives and functions and still affected by Cold War stereotypes of American foreign policy. Bearing the popular sentiment in mind, Yeltsin will probably tell Clinton that NATO expansion is unnecessary until the PFP itself has proven to be workable and productive.

Deliver the message that Russia is making substantial progress toward reforms.

Politicians in Moscow are careful observers of the debate in the U.S. regarding the progress of reform in Russia. Great play is given to accusations from both the American left and the right about the failure or the backlash effects of the reforms. These charges are seen as a thinly veiled attack on Yeltsin himself in favor of other Russian politicians or actors.

Yeltsin must thus convince Clinton that the economic and political reforms are having an impact. He is expected to tout his government's successful efforts to cut inflation by more than half, increase industrial production by aggressively privatizing inefficient state-owned businesses, and reduce crime and corruption.

Solicit continued American support for Russian economic and political reforms.

This goes hand-in-hand with the previous objective. Yeltsin recognizes the great moral authority of the U.S. around the world. He has used with some effect previous expressions of U.S. support for his government to burnish his own image at home. Moreover, explicit assurances of support for Russian reforms by the U.S. facilitate Moscow's dealings with such crucial international economic institutions as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the G-7, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or GATT.

Call for a formal annulment of the 1973 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which links trade with emigration. Most of this legislation's provisions were suspended by former President George Bush several years ago. Nevertheless, its very existence continues to be seen by policy makers in Moscow as a Cold War anachronism that signals U.S. mistrust of Russia. Russian officials raise this issue at every opportunity with American government leaders. Speaking to a delegation of American Senators headed by Patrick Leahy (D-VT) on September 6, Foreign Minister Kozyrev insisted that Russia does not need direct economic aid from the U.S. It wants instead an "equal economic partnership." This was an implicit reference to the continued existence of such discriminatory legislation as the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. Yeltsin and other Russian leaders view it as a matter of national pride to get the Jackson-Vanik Amendment annulled, and it can be expected to come up in private talks between the two presidents.

Ask for Most-Favored-Nation trade status for Russia. Yeltsin knows that he will benefit more from trading with the U.S. and the rest of the industrialized world than from any amount of foreign aid. But trade is hampered by high tariffs that would be greatly reduced if Russia were granted Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) status. Denial of MFN to Russia is a holdover from the Cold War. Yet, President Clinton in June extended MFN privileges to the People's Republic of China. Yeltsin will challenge Clin-

ton to offer Moscow, where an elected government rules, the same trading status enjoyed by Beijing.

Invite American private sector investment in and technical assistance to the Russian economy. Yeltsin is unlikely to ask for any government-to-government economic aid, but he will likely request Clinton's help in encouraging private investment in the Russian economy. The Russian president will claim credit for having improved the investment climate in Russia, albeit by means of presidential decree more than by legislative achievement. He will point specifically to his program for privatization, which has turned more than 80 percent of the economy over to the private sector.

At the same time, Yeltsin is sure to praise the U.S. technical assistance in providing training, consulting, and commercial expertise for Russian executives. Kozyrev highlighted this assistance as a key element in the success of the privatization process when he spoke to U.S. Senators on September 6. Yeltsin would eagerly accept any offer Clinton might make regarding further technical training and assistance.

Obtain pledges of additional U.S. funding for strategic weapons dismantling and destruction. While eschewing direct economic assistance, Yeltsin may well ask for additional help in the costly process of dismantling huge stocks of nuclear, chemical, and conventional weapons. Yeltsin's domestic opponents are quick to turn the issue of dismantling Russian weapons against Yeltsin in order to disparage his foreign policy and impede the arms control agreements. Citing his own domestic opposition, which claims the U.S. is offering too little in this area, Yeltsin is likely to ask for an expansion of the so-called Nunn-Lugar program of safety, security, and dismantlement support. Nunn-Lugar funds of \$400 million each year will be portrayed as much-appreciated but insufficient for the job that must be done. He may also cite such additional assistance as critical to Russian implementation of the START II nuclear weapons reduction agreements, which the parliament has yet even to ratify.

Press for U.S support for Russia's proposals on the revision of conventional forces treaty restrictions on the size of the Russian army. Russian Defense Minister General Grachev recently stated that he would like to increase the amount of conventional weaponry, including tanks and artillery pieces, in certain military districts of Russia. He is prevented from doing so because of limits imposed on Russia in the multilateral Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which was signed by NATO and the former Warsaw Pact countries in November 1990. Grachev argues that Russia faces a new geopolitical and strategic situation that is quite unlike that of the former Soviet Union, which negotiated the treaty. Since the limits for the armed forces in the northern and southern reaches of the Russian Federation were negotiated by the former Soviet Union during the Cold War, many Russian security officials no longer wish to be bound by the treaty's restrictions. In particular, the CFE Treaty limits the number of weapons Russia can use to deal with border skirmishes in both the Leningrad and North Caucasus Military Districts.

Yeltsin can be expected to ask for U.S. support for modifications of the CFE Treaty. Russia has lodged a formal request for such changes before the treaty's governing body in Vienna.

Insist on a more active role for Russia in the Middle East peace process. Yeltsin has dispatched a special envoy, Ambassador Victor Posuvalyuk, to Middle East capitals to learn what role Moscow can play in the peace process. The mission is consistent with Yeltsin's desire to be seen as a great power making constructive contributions to peace in such world hot spots as the Balkans and the Middle East. It is also likely that he would like to outdo the role played by the U.S. in staging the famous Israeli-Palestinian "handshake." He could do so by exerting influence on Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, which might lead to Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations.

When in Washington, Yeltsin is likely to outline a proposal for more active Russian involvement in this volatile region. He may refer to the work of the NATO-Russia Contact Group in the Balkans as a model that could presage closer U.S.-Russian cooperation in the Middle East.

Refute American demands for a cessation of Russian intelligence operations in the U.S. The espionage case against former CIA employee Aldrich Ames has provoked demands from Washington that Moscow certify the cessation of Russian intelligence activity in the U.S. These demands have been accompanied by expectations that Russia identify current and former intelligence agents. It seems probable that this issue could emerge during the summit in Washington.

If so, Yeltsin will surely reject such demands by referring to continued U.S. intelligence activities in Russia. He will also point to joint efforts regarding terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, and nuclear non-proliferation activities, all of which validate a strong Russian intelligence-gathering capability. Nonetheless, Yeltsin might agree to some measure of cooperation on espionage cases that have already been exposed, such as the Ames case. He might also consider assisting in those cases that Clinton identifies as posing grave danger to the U.S. government itself. In any event, he will certainly welcome the continued interaction between the American and Russian security agencies on a wide range of issues.

CONCLUSION

Boris Yeltsin comes to Washington much stronger than in past summits. The economic and political crises that bedeviled him in the past are subsiding, and the Russian president is feeling more confident than ever before. This new-found confidence will assert itself in his meetings with Bill Clinton. Yeltsin will ask Clinton to recognize Russia's national interests in ways that may make the American president uncomfortable. As he does so, Yeltsin will be pressing the outer limits of the U.S.-Russian relationship. How far Clinton is willing to go to assuage Yeltsin will help decide not only the political fortunes of Yeltsin back home, but the basic character of the U.S.-Russian relationship for the remainder of Clinton's presidency.

Evgueni Volk
The Heritage Foundation Moscow Office