

The Executive Memorandum

The Heritage Foundation

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10/7/94 396
Number

RUSH!

CLINTON'S WASTED SUMMIT

President Clinton passed up an opportunity to advance United States-Russian relations at his recent meeting with Russia's President, Boris Yeltsin. Although both sides billed the summit as an unqualified success, the harmonious-looking publicity shots snapped at the White House were misleading. Problems downplayed and even ignored at their talks will come back to haunt both presidents the next time they meet.

Failure to Oppose Russian Interference in Neighbors' Affairs. The honeymoon phase in Moscow-Washington post-Cold War relations is over, and Russia's "big brother" nationalism is reasserting itself. Under the name of "peacekeeping," Russia is trying to carve out a sphere of influence for itself in the non-Russian areas that used to make up the Soviet Union. The U.S. should be more than merely "concerned"—a phrase used by some Clinton officials—about Russia's ambitions in the so-called near abroad. It should be opposing them. While the U.S. might not be able to stop Russian attempts to establish dominance over its neighbors, it should not be Russia's silent partner.

While some "uneasiness" about Russia's actions was reported by the White House, Clinton failed to deliver a resounding "no" to the idea of unilateral Russian "peacemaking" actions in the former empire. Clinton also failed to tell his guest that Russia may not decide whether Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary can be accepted into NATO.

In the past, both President Clinton and United Nations Ambassador Madeleine Albright have expressed their acceptance of Russian peacemaking in the former USSR "under certain conditions." Such activities cannot be condoned by the international community unless they are conducted through the appropriate international channels, such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the United Nations, or Clinton's new framework for expanding NATO, the Partnership for Peace. The arguments of "realism" advanced so prominently by defenders of the Clinton Administration's inaction regarding the Russian sphere of influence must be rejected outright. Spheres of influence were a staple of 19th and early-20th century diplomacy. The squabbling they caused led to two world wars. On this account alone, the Russian quest for domination of its neighbors should be opposed.

In his address to the U.N., Yeltsin claimed hegemony for Russia on the grounds of "blood ties" between the peoples of the Russian Empire (and the former Soviet Union), the plight of the ethnic Russians or "Russian-speakers" abroad, and Moscow's economic interests. None of these justify violations of international law or Russia's support of ethnic separatism in Moldova, Georgia, and elsewhere. These republics have the same rights of sovereignty and independence as any other member of the United Nations.

Leaking Nukes. President Clinton also failed to highlight U.S. concern regarding the spread of Russian nuclear technology. For example, he could have demanded Russian disclosure of the wide-scale nuclear technology transfers to North Korea in the early 1990s. This would have helped the U.S. better track the flow of nuclear materials to would-be terrorists. Terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad, or profiteering criminals such as the Cali drug cartel, could cause enormous instability if armed with weapons of mass destruction.

In the post-Cold War era, unauthorized transfers of arms and high-tech leaks to potential terrorist groups and pariah states are a threat to U.S. security. At the summit, little progress was reported on stopping the hemorrhage of ex-Soviet nuclear material, technology, and personnel to rogue states, terrorists, and international

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crime syndicates. Other measures that should have been taken at the summit, but were not, include: greater U.S.-Russian cooperation on boosting the physical security of Russia's dilapidated nuclear facilities, updating nuclear inventories, controlling the activities of nuclear scientists, and blocking the buying and selling of nuclear materials and technology.

What Arms to Iran? One summit success was Yeltsin's promise of no additional arms contracts between Moscow and Tehran in the future. But the Russian president refused to disclose the nature and volume of arms supplies to Iran, and declared that he would honor contracts as far back as 1988. It would help to know what systems and capabilities already have been supplied, and whether there were any "roll-over" provisions in the contracts that will allow the Iranians to continue buying weapons on a monthly basis. If so, any contracts they now have with the Russians are virtually open-ended.

Little Help to U.S. Investments. Clinton also failed to use the summit to press for continued economic reform in Russia. Instead, the Yeltsin administration received high marks for what has been achieved so far. However, the ruble's 33 percent plunge during the last four months, from 2,000 rubles to a dollar to 2,668 rubles to a dollar, signals that there is little investor confidence in the Russian economy. Only by making Russia attractive to foreign investment can the country be pulled out of its present economic morass.

American businessmen who met Yeltsin may have succeeded in getting across the message that Russia's current high tax rates drive away investors. But this is only half of the problem. Russia needs a stable and a business-friendly legal system that will grant certainty and predictability to the foreign ventures. This important issue was not addressed in the summit at all.

The U.S.-Russian relationship is now mature and stable enough for the two presidents to speak candidly to each other about disagreements. Cooperation on areas of mutual interest is fine, but President Clinton should have raised a yellow flag of caution on issues of U.S. concern. Sweeping problems under the rug will not make them go away. In fact, they will surely return, probably worsened, at the next summit. Only then will Americans learn the full extent of the missed opportunities at this Washington Summit.

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