

MESSAGES CLINTON SHOULD DELIVER AT THE U.S.-RUSSIAN SUMMIT

President Bill Clinton is planning a positive, "feel-good" summit with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on October 23, 1995, in New York City. This event takes place as an intense parliamentary campaign is underway in Russia which ultimately may cast a shadow over Boris Yeltsin's political future and imperil U.S.-Russian relations. Popular support for Russian nationalist leader General Alexander Lebed and the recent Communist victory in the Volgograd local elections indicate that the tide of Russian political opinion may be turning against Boris Yeltsin.

U.S.-Russian relations are too important to waste on a "feel-good" summit. The President needs to be preparing the ground for what could be a challenging period in U.S.-Russian relations. He needs to get down to business, not only dealing with such issues as Bosnia and NATO expansion, but positioning the U.S. for a time when Boris Yeltsin may no longer be president of Russia.

America's Russian Challenge. Russia's recent outcry over the NATO bombings in Bosnia exposed a former superpower in search of an identity and led by an increasingly combative political establishment. Russia's foreign policy is becoming more anti-Western, as evidenced by the opposition to NATO enlargement, the planned sales of nuclear reactors to Iran, and threats to breach the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty. Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev has been weakened by intrigues and is about to be dismissed by President Yeltsin. Suspicion of the West is growing in Moscow. Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, presidential foreign policy advisor Dmitrii Ryurikov, General Evgenii Primakov, head of the foreign intelligence service, and General Alexander Korzhakov, ubiquitous Chief of the Kremlin guard, all tend to be anti-Western and against reform. They also are in positions of major influence over Yeltsin's foreign and security policies.

Yeltsin's Political Weakness. Yeltsin's internal position is precarious. His public approval ratings hover between 9 and 15 percent, and his chances of winning a presidential bid do not look bright. The polls consistently show that several Russian politicians, such as Lebed and Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of the YABLOCo party, would be able to defeat him in an election. Two "centrist" parties were launched in May: Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin's Our Home Russia and Duma Chairman Ivan Rybkin's Accord. The first is polling around 10 percent, and the second has yet to get off the ground. According to high-level Russian sources, some in Yeltsin's circle are considering canceling the presidential elections altogether. Thus, Yeltsin and his team could be swept away by a cadre of anti-Western nationalists if the presidential elections slated for the summer of 1996 actually take place. Alternatively, Yeltsin could be rendered more prone to a coup if he fails to hold the elections and undermines his remaining legitimacy.

President Clinton needs to take stock of the new winds blowing in Russia. He must prepare U.S. policy for the likelihood that Russia may be on the verge of a major political crisis. At the New York summit, the President should:

- ✓ **Support democracy and free-market principles rather than particular Russian leaders.** Clinton's unwavering support of Yeltsin, particularly in the wake of the October 1993 attack on the Russian Supreme Soviet and the Chechnya operation, have already cost the U.S. a great deal of goodwill among both Russian nationalists and reformers. The chances are good that Clinton or the next American President will have to

deal with a new set of players in Moscow. The U.S. cannot afford to appear partisan. Clinton should be firm in expressing American support for democracy, elections, free markets, and individual rights in Russia. He should play down his support for the personal political fortunes of Boris Yeltsin.

- ✓ **Proceed with caution in bringing Russian peacekeepers to Bosnia.** While the U.S. should support a sustainable, long-term peace settlement in Bosnia, it is too early to negotiate the specific details of Russia's military involvement in a peacekeeping operation. Nevertheless, President Clinton should declare that, in principle, the Russian armed forces will be welcome to support peace in Yugoslavia, but only if American troops are committed to the peacekeeping mission.¹ Clinton should be careful not to jeopardize NATO's operational control over the entire peacekeeping mission. Russian troops could play a positive role in such important tasks as mine-sweeping, logistics, and communications. In these areas, the Russian military could cooperate with its NATO counterparts. However, Clinton should not agree to integrating Russian troops into the NATO command and control structure. This leaves open the possibility of a Russian "occupation sector" inside Bosnian Serb territory. The presence of Russian troops on the ground could prevent further NATO air strikes in the event the peace treaty collapses.
- ✓ **Reaffirm that NATO enlargement is not directed against Russia.** Many in Moscow are expressing deep concern about NATO expansion. The summit is a good opportunity for President Clinton to make clear to Boris Yeltsin and the Russian people that the North Atlantic alliance harbors no hostile intentions toward them. While NATO enlargement will occur, Russian participation in the Partnership for Peace and Moscow's dialogue with Brussels should be expanded simultaneously. NATO enlargement will expand the zone of peace and stability in Europe. Such a zone is in the interests not only of Europe, but of Russia, Belarus, and other countries of the former Soviet Union as well.
- ✓ **Oppose a unilateral breach of the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty.** The Russian military is threatening a unilateral breach of the CFE treaty. Specifically, Moscow insists on reviewing upwards the limits it imposes on the number of tanks and cannon permitted on the ground. President Clinton should oppose such an asymmetrical approach. These issues can be renegotiated within the framework of the treaty. If Russia remains determined to deploy more treaty-limited equipment on its southern flank, then the U.S. should seek a *quid pro quo*—relief from the 1972 ABM Treaty, which is impeding the U.S. ballistic missile defense program.
- ✓ **Offer incentives to cancel the sale of nuclear reactors to Iran.** The radical regime in Tehran has launched a bid to acquire nuclear weapons and has ordered two nuclear reactors from Russia. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not support this sale, which could endanger both Russian and Western security. The deal is being promoted by the powerful atomic industry ministry (Minatom) and its chief, Viktor Mikhailov. Iran, with its formidable oil and gas resources, does not need nuclear power. If Tehran wants an additional source of electricity, Russia could sell electrical power from its own ample resources. In addition, to compensate Russia for the lost reactor sales, the U.S. could increase its Russian uranium import quota or cooperate in building safer nuclear reactors on Russian soil.

This is not the time for a "feel-good" summit with the Russians. Although the President's time with Boris Yeltsin is limited, he has enough time to deliver some important messages, not only to Yeltsin, but to all of Russia and the world. The U.S. is still committed to democracy in Russia, but that cause no longer has a single human face. At the New York summit, President Clinton should be looking ahead, preparing the ground for what may well be a rocky road in future U.S.-Russian relations.

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¹ See John Hillen, "The Risks of Clinton's Bosnia Peace Plan," Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 262, October 10, 1995, and John Hillen, "Conditions for Sending U.S. Troops to Bosnia," Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.* No. 66, October 11, 1995.