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THE U.S. AGENDA AT THE MOSCOW SUMMIT: NATIONAL SECURITY AND RUSSIAN DEMOCRACY

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INTRODUCTION

President Bill Clinton will meet President Boris Yeltsin of Russia for the sixth time at the Moscow nuclear safety and security summit on April 19-20. In addition to the United States and Russia, the G-7 states and Ukraine will participate in the summit. The heads of state will discuss nuclear reactor safety, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and nuclear terrorism. Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin also will meet separately to discuss a broad range of bilateral issues. This will be their last official meeting before Russian voters cast their ballots in the June 16 presidential elections. Clinton's counterpart faces an uncertain political future, and so do U.S.-Russian relations.

The United States has a stake in the outcome of the Russian presidential elections. The most desirable result—a pro-Western democratic reformer in the Kremlin—is very unlikely. The worst-case scenario will be the victory of hard-line communists led by Gennady Zyuganov. In the December 1995 elections, communists, nationalists, and their allies captured over 46 percent of the popular vote for the Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament).¹ A communist takeover will turn Russia back in time, to central planning, human rights violation, re-militarization, and aggressive foreign policy.

Boris Yeltsin today draws criticism from many Russian democrats. He backtracked on the program of radical reforms he spearheaded in 1991-1993. He looks and acts increasingly authoritarian and at times, erratic. Free market and democratic reforms in Russia have stalled. Until recently, Yeltsin was trailing the most popular candidate, Communist Party leader Zyuganov, by at least 5 percentage points. According to the latest polls, Yeltsin is closing the gap, running almost neck-and-neck.

Another dangerous contender for the presidency is Vladimir Zhirinovsky, an anti-American ultra-nationalist with a penchant for political surprises and a strong track record in the elections. Victory for Zyuganov or an increase in Zhirinovsky's influence would gravely endanger any hope for democracy and market reforms surviving in Russia. A communist or a nationalist at Russia's helm could place that country, with its considerable military power, on a collision course with the United States in Central Europe or the Middle East. Thus Yeltsin increasingly looks to be the lesser of two evils, and on that basis merits qualified U.S. support.

¹ See Ariel Cohen, "The Duma Elections: Russian Reformers Beware," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 443, December 29, 1995.

Russian-American relations have been deteriorating for some time. Russia has been drifting away from the West, as demonstrated by disagreements over the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the START II nuclear arms treaty, and the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. There also have been differences over the sale of Russian nuclear reactors to Iran, the sale of weapons to rogue Third World regimes, and the continuing brutal war in the breakaway republic of Chechnya.

President Clinton should not sweep these disagreements under the rug at the Moscow Summit. Nor should he cave into Russian demands in the hopes of boosting Yeltsin's chances in the June elections. This would be seen by many Russian voters as unacceptable meddling in Russian internal affairs and a sign of American weakness or naiveté. Moreover, even a modest endorsement of Yeltsin's bid for the presidency would further alienate the many Russians who dislike Yeltsin. An endorsement could backfire, providing Yeltsin's opposition with political ammunition to attack him as an "American puppet."

Therefore, at the Moscow summit, President Clinton should:

- ✓ **Be firm** in expressing American support for democracy, elections, free markets, and individual rights in Russia, discouraging both Yeltsin and the hard-liners from seeking anti-democratic solutions.
- ✓ **Voice strong support** and American commitment for independence, sovereignty, and the territorial integrity of the New Independent States (NIS).
- ✓ **Denounce** the atrocities in Chechnya which have led to heavy loss of civilian life.
- ✓ **Oppose** the sale by Russia of nuclear reactors to Iran.
- ✓ **Support** NATO expansion, making clear that it does not threaten Russia.
- ✓ **Avoid** negotiating on arms control issues.

THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF YELTSIN AND U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

A dark cloud hovers over President Yeltsin's election prospects. His political platform is murky. Critics say that he has abandoned democratic principles and policies in favor of populism and political survival. The war in Chechnya, severe economic difficulties, and rampant crime and corruption have drastically eroded the popularity of his administration. Polls show Yeltsin's approval ratings are barely in the 15-20 percent range. While his entourage insists that the elections will take place as scheduled, many in Russia question whether they will, or whether the vote count will be fair.

Yeltsin today is not the popular democrat the world watched in admiration as he overturned the Soviet Union in 1991. He is presiding over the return of hard-line Soviet *nomenklatura* to top positions of power. He has lost the support of many Russian reformers, and is pursuing a foreign policy that is increasingly confrontational with the U.S. and the West.

President Clinton has placed personal relations with Boris Yeltsin above U.S. policy objectives. As Yeltsin's popularity plummeted, Clinton fed the flames of Russian resentment toward the U.S. by giving the Russian president unequivocal support, especially after the cannonade of the Russian Supreme Soviet in 1993 and the beginning of the Chechen war in 1994. As a result, the U.S. is now perceived by many in the Russian political elite as partisan and uncritically supportive of Yeltsin's faltering policies. The Clinton policy has endangered the ability of the U.S. to maintain a relationship with democrats in Russia who oppose President Yeltsin.

ARMS CONTROL: NO COMPROMISES ON AMERICAN SECURITY

While the announced agenda of the multilateral summit on civilian nuclear safety was not to cover arms control, Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin decided in the fall of 1995 to add a bilateral Russian-American summit during President Clinton's Moscow visit. The addition of the bilateral summit could tempt the Russians to raise issues related to arms control that were not on the agenda for the multilateral summit and which the U.S. side will be unprepared to address. These may include:

- ✓ **Amendments to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.** The Russians may press their demands to amend the ABM Treaty so that the treaty's restrictions extend to the now-unrestricted development and deployment of defenses against short-range missiles. The Russians also may demand that Russia and other former Soviet republics be established as treaty successors to the Soviet Union. Congress has expressed its interest in amending the treaty to ease restrictions on developing and deploying defenses against long-range missiles, and Russia may inquire about these congressional plans.
- ✓ **Negotiations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).** Russia may inquire about the Clinton Administration's plans to conclude a CTBT this year.
- ✓ **Ratification of the 1993 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II (START II).** The Russian Duma has yet to consent to the ratification of START II, which cuts U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals to 3,500 deliverable warheads each. Russian representatives may press the U.S. to accept either changes in START II itself or limitations on U.S. arms not covered by START II in order to gain acquiescence of the Duma.
- ✓ **Ratification of the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).** The U.S. Senate has not yet ratified the CWC. The Russians may inquire if the U.S. will ratify this treaty, which bars the development, stockpiling, and deployment, as well as the use, of chemical weapons by participating states.

The Clinton Administration should make it very clear to the Russians that it will not negotiate on arms control issues at either the multilateral or bilateral summit in Moscow. Arms control negotiations should take place only at forums established specifically for addressing these issues. Mistakes of historic proportions can be made at *ad hoc* arms control negotiations. Therefore, arms control issues should not be raised by the U.S. delegations during the Moscow visit.

If representatives from Russia or other states raise these arms control issues during the Moscow visit, U.S. representatives, including the President himself, should have prepared responses in the form of unilateral statements to foreclose any negotiations on the relevant subjects. U.S. representatives should state explicitly to their counterparts that the unilateral statements are not subject to further discussion in the Moscow talks.

THE MOSCOW SUMMIT AGENDA: SUPPORTING U.S. INTERESTS

To support U.S. interests at the Moscow summit, President Clinton should:

- ✓ **Be firm in expressing American support for democracy, elections, free markets, and individual rights in Russia**, discouraging both Yeltsin and the hard-liners from seeking anti-democratic solutions to Russia's problems.

The U.S. should develop a Russian policy based on the support of ideas and interests, not on the fate of individual politicians. The U.S. should support democracy and free markets, as well as political forces advocating these ideas. Yeltsin is the elected president of Russia and was a key figure in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet communism. Today, however, some of his policies and his personal style are controversial, and his popularity is low. There are many other democratic reformers, including former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, presidential candidate Grigory Yavlinsky, and human rights activists Sergei Kovalev and Yelena Bonner, who disagree fundamentally with Yeltsin's policies on economic reform and Chechnya. Clinton would be well-advised to meet with these pro-Western reformers to demonstrate his support for the democratic and free-market path for Russia.

- ✓ **Voice strong support and American commitment for independence, sovereignty, and the territorial integrity of the New Independent States (NIS)**. The President should make clear that furtive or bullish attempts to extend Russian domination in the "near abroad," especially in the Ukraine and the Baltic states, would result in American countermeasures across the spectrum of the Russian-American relationship.

The U.S. should oppose Russian attempts to impose a sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union. Moscow is attempting to re-establish its "sphere of influence" in neighboring regions that were once a part of the Soviet Union. Recent evidence of this is the customs union created with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan on March 29, 1996, and the Commonwealth of Sovereign Republics, known by its Russian acronym SSR, signed with Belarus on April 2, 1996, in Moscow. While these agreements were largely voluntary, the Kremlin may employ a combination of economic, diplomatic, and even military means in the future to achieve integration of what Moscow calls its "near abroad"—the Baltic States, Ukraine, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. The U.S. should not endorse the creation of a Russian sphere of influence in the CIS, as President Clinton reportedly did in a recent conversation with Boris Yeltsin.²

Preventing the emergence of a Russian empire in the lands of the former Soviet Union should be a top Western priority. Yet the Clinton Administration until recently was very tolerant towards Russian assertiveness in the "near abroad."³ The Clinton Administration also has been too slow to recognize the importance of countries in the region other than Russia. For example, without Ukraine, the Russian empire cannot be recreated and will have only limited access to the heart of Europe. Ukraine's independence is an important Western interest. Azerbaijan controls vital oil and gas reserves, while Georgia is situated in a strategically crucial location in the Caucasus.

² Stefan Halper, "Yielding National Interests to Political," *The Washington Times*, April 5, 1996, p. A17.

³ A welcome change was the speech delivered by Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Ky'iv (Kiev) on March 15, 1996, in reaction to the Duma resolution to restore the Soviet Union.

- ✓ **Denounce the atrocities in Chechnya which have led to heavy loss of civilian life.** The President should call for a cessation of hostilities in Chechnya and an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mediation effort in the conflict.

The U.S. should support a negotiated solution to the Chechen war that would keep Russian territorial integrity intact, but also recognize the aspirations of the Chechen people for autonomy. Overt Russian military action in Chechnya began on December 12, 1994, when the army marched on the capital city of Grozny. The city was destroyed by a brutal aerial, tank, and artillery assault. Since the start of the campaign, over 30,000 people have been killed, scores have been wounded, and more than 400,000 became refugees. Until now, the Russian army has failed to find a military solution to the Chechen problem, which resulted in a political disaster for Yeltsin. Yeltsin's critics in Moscow have said that a secret order was given to the Russian troops in Chechnya to destroy the civilian population of villages that support the rebels. The cease-fire declared in summer 1995 collapsed. On March 31, 1996, Yeltsin called for yet another new peace plan and a negotiated solution.

- ✓ **Oppose the sale by Russia of nuclear reactors to Iran.** The U.S. should offer the Russians an alternative deal that would sidetrack the reactor sale to Iran. One possibility is a modernization program to upgrade the safety of the dangerous and obsolete Russian nuclear reactors. If Yeltsin refuses, the U.S. should retaliate by cancelling the \$1 billion in Export-Import Bank credits to lease civilian aircraft to Aeroflot.

The Russian-Iranian nuclear reactor deal must be a higher priority at U.S.-Russian summits. The Clinton Administration did not highlight this issue sufficiently at the 1995 Clinton-Yeltsin summits, passing it to the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission, which failed to find a solution. This is a serious mistake. The Islamic regime in Tehran is buying two Russian-made nuclear reactors capable of producing plutonium that can be enriched to become weapons-grade raw material for atomic bombs. Russia is interested in selling even more reactors to Tehran. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has opposed this sale, believing it could endanger both Russian and Western security. But the sale is going through anyway, primarily because of pressure from the powerful Ministry of Atomic Industry (MinAtom), headed by Victor Mikhailov, and because of the short-sightedness of Russia's top nuclear industry officials. If Tehran wants an additional source of electricity, Russia could sell electrical power from its own ample resources.

- ✓ **Support NATO expansion, making clear that it does not threaten Russia.** Moscow should not have veto power over NATO's decisions to add new members. The U.S. should support NATO enlargement, but keep the door open for Russian participation in the European security dialogue.

The Clinton Administration has paid lip service to the issue of NATO enlargement to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, but has done very little to make it happen. Some observers accuse the Administration of promising Russia not to expand NATO in 1996 in exchange for cooperation on peacekeeping in Bosnia. NATO enlargement is aimed at wiping the results of Yalta and the Potsdam post-World War II division of Europe from the map. If these countries do not join NATO, they will be left in a strategic gray zone which Russia may try to exploit.

The U.S. should make a political commitment to bring Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and possibly Slovakia into NATO. The 1994 Contract With America stipulated that NATO enlargement should be a high U.S. national security priority. Russian and Western military experts need to discuss the contingencies of expansion, to make it more transparent, and if need be, to assuage Russian fears.

—for example, an agreement on nuclear reactor safety —may prove too high. The American people have seen too many summits in which the vaunted results served merely to disguise unilateral concessions on arms control that harmed the nation's security.

The President must also be careful not to justify any agreement that emerges from the summit on the grounds that it will strengthen Boris Yeltsin. In fact, the President should not under any circumstances appear to interfere in Russia's electoral politics. Clinton should support Russian market and democratic reforms, not individual presidential candidates. He should welcome continuous integration of Russia into the international economic, investment, and information networks. He can acknowledge the pain of democratic and market reform, but call upon the Russian people to join the outside world from which they were separated by communist dictatorship for 70 years. By following this agenda in Moscow, President Clinton will be able to promote both U.S. national security and Russian democracy.