

Q&A, Yekaterinburg, Russia

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Q: (Indistinct) and secondly, is there any concern about your security because of Iraq?

Mrs. Clinton: I don't have anything to add to what the President and other members of the Administration have been saying over the last two days, especially the President's statement yesterday, and I have no concern about travel at all.

Q: Mrs. Clinton, the media here in Russia have been suggesting that you are not getting a realistic view about the lives of women and children in the countries you are visiting. Are you concerned at all that you are getting a distorted view of the lives of women and children?

Mrs. Clinton: I don't pretend at all that I am getting a full view of what is going on in the places that I am visiting. I can't get out and spend the time that I would like to, so I don't get into people's homes, into their work places or spend time with them informally. But I do get a chance to go into a lot of different settings, and over the years I have learned to evaluate and assess I think pretty carefully. I feel that I always learn something, and I come away with information about what is going on in a society, despite the obvious obstacles to my being able to feel that I am truly seeing everything that I would see if I was not accompanied by all of you and I were just on my own. I think that for me it is always a good learning experience, even though you discount a lot of what you experience because of the circumstances under which I have to travel.

Q: There have been recent reports coming out of Washington about the Russian government, which is referred to as a bandit government and corrupt, especially in its professional life. What is your assessment of that and will it have any effect on programs?

Mrs. Clinton: I am going to ask the experts to comment on that. But I don't think that there is any reason to worry about our AID programs or about our investments in Russia. I am seeing a lot of positive changes, even in the years that I have been coming here, which is only three or four now. I think that when we look at what obstacles Russia is overcoming and facing, and how far it as a country has come in just six short years, I think remarkable progress has been made. Now are there going to be problems in any human society that will have be eliminated or be faced in development? Difficulties that people will go through, moving through difficult transitions? I think that goes without saying. If you look at our history or that of any advanced democracy today, and you can see that there are lots of difficulties along the path that have had to be overcome. So I don't think that we should expect Russia to be able to bypass all the problems that other countries, including our own, have had to go through. And I personally am quite encouraged by a lot of the progress. But I am going to ask Ambassador Collins, Ambassador Morningstar, or Ambassador Courtney if they would like to comment.

Amb. Collins: If I can say just a word about the crime and corruption question. The first thing

that I would like to point out is that the leadership of this country itself, including President Yeltsin, has identified the criminal and crime problem as a real priority. This is not a bandit government; that is something that we would not agree with. There are problems with crime. Six years ago, seven years ago, the entire ~~judicial~~ ^{judicial} system of this nation came apart; they are trying to put it back together again. It is going to take time. The question is how they are dealing with it. The first and most important thing is that they have recognized it as a problem that they have to work on.

Amb. Morningstar: Let me just say we don't live in a perfect world. Certainly our systems incrementally are better off doing it than not doing it. Our aid doesn't go directly in cash payments to the government of Russia but goes to programs. It seems to me that working on tax reforms, for example, we are better off doing it than not doing it. The work that we do in connection with partnerships and exchanges, we are certainly much better off doing it than not doing it. Helping to finance small businesses out in the Regions, again we are better off doing it than not doing it. So we have to look at things on an incremental basis, understand that nothing is perfect. We have to keep working at it, stay engaged.

Amb. Courtney: Our assistance programs and other efforts are designed to increase transparency in the economy. Precisely what we are doing in the assistance effort is designed to improve the overall quality of government and transparency and to correct these problems.

Q: (Indistinct) Despite our objections, the Russian government has passed a law restricting the free choice of religion. Some critics say that (indistinct)the partnership is beginning to fray between Russia and the United States.

Mrs. Clinton: Is that a criticism or a concern?

Q: What would you say?

Mrs. Clinton: I don't think it is a concern. I have a very different view of that. I think it is maturing; I think that our relationship is strong. We have a positive ground for communication. Not only between our leaders but increasingly between many sectors of society. So I think we are moving into a new phase which is a good sign for the relationship. Do I think personally that there should be more attention to how we can help Russia in this transition? I do. I think we should be focussing on effective assistance and investment that can make a difference. We spent trillions of dollars in the Cold War. Now that we no longer are posed against one another, I think we should do all we can to assist Russia to become as successful as possible. For me that includes not only government to government relationships but business to business relationships, citizen to citizen relationships. What I have chosen to do is to highlight all of those many activities that make up the stuff of democracy, and that create relationships between people and help them to learn from each other how to improve their own lives and give them a reason to have a stake in the future of a democratic society. There is always room for improvement. There will always be the need for constructive criticism about how we can work together better. But I am very encouraged by what I have seen. I think that our relationship is very strong.

Q: Indistinct

A: I think that in the countries we visited there are very real signs of progress. Are there grounds for criticism? Yes, and I and the people traveling with me raised concerns in private meetings. But at the same time, I think in the conversations we had and in the interchanges we had not only with leaders but with other members of the society, I got the sense that there has been progress. There is an awareness of the goals being pursued and a clear understanding of where people are falling short and how to remedy that. Americans are very impatient people. I just wish that we would all take a step back and just think. If we were living in a society that just seven years ago forbade us to practice our religion, to vote to elect our leaders, to travel freely, to own property, and all the other totalitarian prohibitions that people in these countries, including the leaders, had to exist with and the mindset they created. And suddenly that disappeared. I think if you take a longer, historic view, rather than a short term perspective that is fueled by our impatience by what we would like to see happen, what has occurred in six years is rather remarkable. What I would like to see is more understanding and support and encouragement for the changes we want to see in all of these countries and more assistance and investment from America both publicly and privately. We should applaud what has been done, while at the same time keep stressing the changes that have to be made in order for people to continue on the path of reform which they have started. So it is a balancing act, but most of life is. I don't think that there is an absolute yes or no answer when you look at whether these countries are achieving what we would want them to achieve, unless we put it into a historic context.

Q: One thing you haven't talked about is the most obvious - environmental degradation.

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I have talked about it. You are right that I haven't given it the same emphasis that I have some of the other issues. In part, it is just a question of what you emphasize and what you don't. In the meeting with women leaders I had in Almaty, we talked about the environment and the effect on health problems. But it isn't meant to be any kind of omission. It is just a matter of what we could do with the limited time we had.

Q: Is it because the environment is too broad an issue or too complicated?

Mrs. Clinton: No, no. There are a million things that I would like to talk about, if I had more than the limited time I was given. I would like to go to sites and talk about that. But at both health centers I talked about the environment, although not as much as I would like to have.

Q: As you finish up this trip, were there any disappointments in what you saw here. Projects that were disappointing; things that you will focus on changing.

Mrs. Clinton: No, not in that sense. I guess my disappointment would be, as the young woman at the university earlier this afternoon said, I wish more Americans, both in decision-making positions and throughout our society would have more information of and understanding about what is taking place in these countries. I think if we did have more exchange and more information so that people could draw a broader context about what is occurring, there would be more understanding of and support for a lot of the assistance and investment which I think we

should be making in these countries, because I think it is not only in their interest but in our interest.

Q: Do you think the President should speak more about this?

Mrs. Clinton: I think he speaks about it quite a lot, and many members of his Administration speak about it all the time. I don't think it is not spoken about. In the meetings in preparation for this trip, I received copies of many speeches by my husband or members of this Administration talking very specifically about what we should be doing.

Q: So why don't Americans get the message?

Mrs. Clinton: I don't know. Maybe that is a question for all of you to answer. I have read the speeches. I have heard Jim Collins, Dick Morningstar, Strobe Talbott. I have sat in audiences when they have made these points over and over again. I rarely see those events on television or read about them. It's not as dramatic as talking about some of the problems. It is not as dramatic as having the popular movies paint pictures of what is going on in these countries. Very gripping, but not necessarily accurate. I think it is just the difficulty that we in the United States have in covering foreign affairs issues and assistance in a broad based way so that more Americans get the news that all of you are here covering today. I think it is a real problem for us. The United States has a major leadership responsibility. It has to be difficult for people in our country to know what decisions have to be made if they can't get the information. I have heard many executives in our broadcast media and in the publishing world tell me that foreign news doesn't sell. I think it is a problem of our society. How we get information that will enable us to make good decisions. Maybe if you have anything to add.

Ambassador Morningstar: I will give you an example. I bet very few of you know that Congress in fact has increased the amount of assistance to the NIS in this year's appropriation. It went from \$625 million to \$770 million dollars, we actually asked for \$900,000. But getting any kind of increase is really remarkable, given the present climate on the Hill. That is because this Administration, including the President, pushed for more assistance to the NIS. There will be more money for Russia this year. There are still earmarks imposed. I don't think there is enough for Russia but there will be an increase.

Mrs. Clinton: I want to thank everyone.

Q: Can you tell us were you had your first kiss with the President?

Mrs. Clinton: Only when I know you better.

Q: (Indistinct)

A: She had asked me several times in the conversations I had with her over the past four years to come here. She and her husband talked about it with such fondness that I really felt it was a large part of their lives, although they hadn't lived here since 1985. They met here and they

married here, raised their family here. She pointed out the houses she lived in as we were driving around. I think it is a natural tendency when you feel strongly about a place to want to share it somebody. So when we started planning this trip we said that we would do it if it would fit with her schedule. She rearranged her schedule because she wanted to meet me here; to take me to some of the places, the restaurants. I think it is a very personal sign of friendship.

Mrs. Clinton: Thank you so much.

Q: (Indistinct)

Mrs. Clinton: You would be surprised at the number of speeches that the President has made on America's role in the world and specifically on foreign policy issues; the speeches that the Vice President and others in the Administration have made. I don't argue with your point at all that, certainly starting with Congress after the 1994 elections, there was much less interest. But that I think is beginning to change too. I am actually seeing an upsurge of interest among members of Congress about all parts of the world. I'm hopeful that that will come around. I was told that of the Congressmen in the session starting in January, 1995, a hundred of them never had a passport. They had never been outside of the United States. I know that the State Department, the NSC, and the White House used to set up briefings for members of Congress about Russia, or pick another issue anywhere in the world, and members would not attend. I think from that point two and a half years ago to now, we have made a lot of progress. The President and the White House and people in the State Department really worked hard to interest members in visiting places, to meet other leaders.

Q: (Indistinct)

Mrs. Clinton: It is somewhat like the criticism of the leaders of this country not accomplishing everything as quickly as we would like. Everything takes time. Especially living in a time where there is an increase in the pressure of time sensitive events, with twenty-four hour news cycles. There are a lot of things going on; it puts a lot of pressure on people. If you just take a slice of what is happening you might get a distorted view of what is going on longer term. Now three years is not a long term, but in that time I have seen in members of Congress much more interest. All of this takes more work than I think it should. And I'm sure you agree from your perspective. But keep doing the best you can to get the information out. Raise people's interest and lets just try to build a constituency. There is no doubt that the end of the Cold War led to what can be called the collapse in opinion leaders interest in foreign affairs. There have been a lot of public opinion surveys in the last couple of years that show that Americans at all levels of society just basically didn't pay attention. We were left with this kind of vacuum that you had to refill, that you had to make them take interest. You had to try to emphasize investment and trade, which is not only a good substantive policy but also a way to get people interested in what goes on outside our borders. There is a lot that is being rebuilt in terms of the architecture of American foreign policy over the last six or seven years. I am encouraged looking at it over a slightly longer term.

Thank you very much.

End of Transcript.