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Clinton-Yeltsin One-on-One
Hyde Park, NY
October 23, 1995
11:30 a.m.-1:35 p.m.
Note takers: Talbott, Ryurikov

(At outset, during opening pleasantries, President Clinton suggests taking jackets off -- "This is a working meeting, after all." A waiter brings in a tray of drinks. Yeltsin downs in a single go a large tumbler of soda water.)

WJC: One thing we did outside when we talked to the press coming in -- and that we should continue to do -- is prove the newspaper pundits wrong. They want to write about a big blow-up. Let's disappoint them. We've accomplished a lot together. We've all but ended the possibility of nuclear war...

BNY: (interrupting) Yes, and we've ended the Cold War.

C: And on Bosnia, we've worked together to achieve a peace that cannot come about unless the U.S. and Russia work together.

Y: I'm grateful to you for creating the conditions for this important discussion. All the world --in the former Yugoslavia and in Europe but everywhere else, too -- is counting on us. I come here with a sense of opportunity. But I also came with a lot of anxiety. Everything will depend on what you and I agree to. We can't let our partnership be shattered by a failure to agree. We have to find some sort of compromise -- a little from your side, a little from mine -- and then we can shake on it, right here. We need to end the discussion today with an agreement. If we don't agree, it'll be a scandal.

C: I agree. But before getting to specifics, I'd like to talk about a general concern that I have and that has been causing me some anxiety, maybe along the same lines as your own. I'm concerned

about the misinterpretation -- perhaps on both sides -- that every disagreement we have is the beginning of the end, or maybe the end of the end, of our ability to work together. Some people aren't too sorry to see this happening, or to present things that way. For example, I have the feeling that when discussion of Bosnia and NATO is taking place, there are forces in the U.S. and in Russia that exaggerate the problems between us because they need for those problems to be there. It's partly old habits dying hard, partly pure politics.

We have extremist elements in our Congress who are unhappy that, with the end of the Cold War, they don't have a big enemy to kick around any more. They need, emotionally, to have an enemy out there in order to conduct their lives and define our foreign policy agenda.

And I have the feeling that in your country, when we're having legitimate discussions about how to live in the post-Cold War world, some people believe we want to deny you access to your proper place in world affairs, or access to markets, or other aspects of the role you want and deserve. There's no truth to that suspicion. It's certainly not what I want.

Y: You're right, but it's not just that. In general, those people say, "Yeltsin has sold out to the U.S. and to Clinton -- Yeltsin and his government are pandering to the West and forgetting about the East." That's what our extremists are saying.

C: Well, we've got to deal with this together. We've got to make the forces of freedom and democracy strong, beat back our nationalists and extremists, who did so well here in the 1994 elections.

Y: Yes.

C: So I understand the general problem. It's a bigger problem for you than for me because Russia has been invaded twice in the past two centuries. During the Cold War, there were two nuclear superpowers, two ideologies; you were clearly in charge in one giant camp of nations.

That was, in some ways, a simpler time. In this new era, we've got to work together; we've got to find a way to use our influence cooperatively, to solve common problems that will, if we're not careful and smart and cooperative, sweep across the world.

Y: I am so glad to hear you say all this, Bill, because I have to say: somehow in the past two months, we've gotten off track. It's not a problem between the two of us personally. There are no personal grudges between us, no personal mistrust. But our countries, our governments have started to work on opposite sides of too many issues. We've been pulling against each other rather than pulling together. Somehow we have to restore our personal rapport as the driving force in the relationship. Otherwise, we'll have a difficult outcome. Your enemies and my enemies sense what's been happening, how it's been going wrong, and they're taking advantage of it, to your detriment and to mine, with an eye to '96.

C: What we both have to do is project strength at home, but at the same time project a genuine sense of stability in the U.S.-Russian relationship and in the world. We have to restore the people's sense of confidence and calm about how we're managing our relations.

Y: It's very important that we do this together. We've got to consult with each other on important decisions, so that people know that we don't mistrust each other; that we're in constant touch with each other; that we're consulting each other.

C: I agree with that. If we can just get through this period, I hope that by early next year you'll get credit for your economy getting better. My experience is that there's a delay before people feel the results of economic improvement. But between now and then, we've got to steady things out.

Y: That's right. And I know that late in '96, you'll have a similar dilemma. In the meantime, we have to work in unison to help each other in next year's campaigns. Otherwise, Congress and

the State Duma will take advantage of our differences. They'll say in Russia, "Yeltsin can't conduct a strong foreign policy."

I'm very grateful for the strong support you've given me.

C: I've supported reform in Russia because we have an opportunity that hasn't been presented to any of our predecessors -- to create an undivided, peaceful, integrated Europe, to address common problems.

Y: I agree. I still think that the major thing here is, we can't lose continuous contact for even one day. You decided to bomb Serbs. You didn't consult with Yeltsin -- that's not good. You can't complain about any action I did without consulting with you, at least I can't think of any time I didn't consult with you on something really important to you. The entire country and all the politicians jump to the conclusion that you and I are on different tracks, that you're making decisions on your own, that we're not in touch. We can't permit this to happen. We have to stay in touch with each other beforehand. Only after we've taken a joint decision can anything important happen. We can't create the perception that we're making decisions on anything important without consulting with each other.

C: In general, I agree, Boris; we've got to stay as closely in touch as possible. That doesn't mean we'll always agree, but it does mean we should make sure we understand each other. But on Bosnia, let's review the circumstances...

Y: (interrupts) Do you want to do this later when we talk about Bosnia, or do you want to do it now?

C: Let's start with Bosnia now.

Y: OK.

C: Our air strikes against the Serbs were covered by UN resolutions that you were part of; the London Conference was a key factor, and you were part of that. Part of what was decided there

was the automaticity of the threat of force. All that was part of why I didn't call, though perhaps I should have.

But let's talk about where we go from here. Let's divide this into two parts. First, our obligation to the rest of the world to achieve the peace --we have to emphasize to the world that first and foremost interest is how to make peace. We've got to take this burden off the people of the Balkans and of Europe. So the first question is, how to make peace?

Y: (interrupts) I'd like to outline general scheme for how to do that. I'm in constant touch with Chirac, Kohl and Major via telephone and letters. They don't work against you. We also don't want to work against you. I discussed this with Chirac and he said, "If you agree with Clinton, then I agree, too." Here's what I propose:

In Phase 1, we could have a conference of the three Yugoslav Presidents in Moscow to discuss the principles and the importance of the cease-fire. There would be no documents. Then in Phase II, they can come to the U.S. for what I guess you could call "proximity love-making," which means more detailed work on the practical issues. Then in Phase III, they go to Paris; in Phase IV to London to talk about refugees or whatever John Major seems to have in mind. In Phase V, they could return to Moscow in March for an overall assessment of implementation. Also, let's be sure to find a role for the Germans.

The key thing here is to coordinate the pressure on the Yugoslav leaders from various countries and groups. We've got to put them in a single embrace from all of us.

As for implementation of the peace, we should each have an area of Bosnia we're responsible for. Russia would have its own area, probably where the Bosnian Serbs live. And our troops would be under an American general. We're agreed to that. But not under NATO -- under an American, okay, but not under NATO.

C: Boris, let's take these issues one at a time. If we're going to have a peace conference in Paris, it's important to have something in London and in Russia, too. I agree that the Germans should also have a role. I'm happy that Ivanov will be with Holbrooke next week. They're doing well together. They're both strong negotiators, working well toward the same goal.

I have no problem with a meeting in Moscow on the 30th -- I like the idea of you getting them in a room and shaking your finger in their faces and saying, "You guys go to Ohio and negotiate seriously there, and meanwhile observe the cease-fire." But the problem, Boris, is that Izetbegovic and Tudjman don't want to come. There's a problem with Izetbegovic's health, and Tudjman has a problem with his elections.

Y: I talked with Tudjman and said, "Let's meet in Moscow," and he said OK. Milosevic is ready. I ask you to put pressure on Izetbegovic.

C: I'll see Tudjman and Izetbegovic tomorrow, and I'll do what I can. I'll try to get this done. But there could be a real problem with Izetbegovic. I just don't know. I'll do my best.

Y: (waiter brings in another tray of juices and soda water) Shall we have a drink? Is there any beer? (POTUS sends the waiter out for beer.)

C: The main thing is to have a major meeting in Russia in the next month. I submit to you that I support having an important meeting in Russia in the next month.

Y: Very good. I'll use this information on Milosevic.

C: Now, let me try out on you an idea a lot of my people don't agree with. Strobe here probably thinks it's a nutty idea. I believe the formal signing should be in Sarajevo. Think about it. The 20th century began in Sarajevo with a terrible war starting there; let's have the century end there with the signing of a peace.

Y: I suppose the problems are practical ones --having to do with the security of such an event, right? Well, I won't dismiss it out of hand.

C: Well, just think about it. Anyway, I agree that we can announce that there should be a meeting in Moscow within the next month if at all possible.

Now, on implementation: I understand your problem about having your troops under NATO command. I want you to let me explain my problem so you'll understand why American troops must be under NATO command. In February '93, I said that if we could make peace in Bosnia, the U.S. would send its troops to help implement the peace.

Y: We want to do so too.

C: Yes. Now, here's my problem. The only way I can sell this to my people and to Congress is to do it as the leader of NATO.

In Somalia, U.S. troops were under UN command and we lost some men. It was the worst moment of my presidency...

Y: (interrupting) Here's how to divide it up: Russian troops in one sector under a Russian general; U.S. in another under NATO.

C: Not a good idea, Boris. First, We don't want this to look like Germany after World War II. Second, we may have to be in a position of having all to enforce the peace against all the parties. There will be sporadic violence. In that case we'll have to deal with it even-evenhandedly: that could mean, Americans versus the Bosnians; Russians against the Serbs.

Y: But not through NATO. The Russian people have an allergy against NATO.

C: OK, but we still have to plan for the worst. Say we send some soldiers to Tuzla because they've got the necessary training, equipment, and so on. We may have to deal with violations by all three sides. The perception that all the

forces are evenhanded is critical. That means there has to be unity of command. One way to do that would be to have your forces integrated into a single NATO-led operation, with a high ranking Russian general working with NATO. You'd still have your own authority as the Russian units' commander-in-chief, just as I've had my authority over our troops. But it would have to be a single, unified operation.

Now, if that's too hard for you, another option would be to take Russia out from under NATO control. We could do that if Russia took on the jobs of heavy airlift and reconstruction nationwide, also mine-clearing. Then any combat would be incidental to their assigned and agreed tasks.

Y: (Takes a piece of paper and starts doing a version of the Grachev Option organization chart, with parallel structures.) Look: an American general over the whole thing with NATO and Russia separate beneath him. It doesn't matter who the general is. You've got this General Powell who's very popular, I gather. Maybe he could do it.

C: I tried to explain why two separate forces doesn't work. Do you understand our Option II?

Y: Yes, I understand. The problem with it is that it puts us in a subsidiary, secondary role.

C: No, you'd be in a crucial role. These are functions that are crucial to the success of the operation. Another thing, if they are doing things that contribute to the reconstruction and development effort, the world community can help pay.

Y: Okay, I see. But what's wrong with putting Russian generals and units under the U.S. general, and then have a separate force for NATO?

C: It won't work. It destroys unity of command.

Y: Well, then I'll lose, personally, in '96 because Russia will be under NATO.

C: Let's not give up. Let's work on this. But let me ask you this, Boris: as a minimum, will you

agree to send two battalions in to do reconstruction, airlift and mine clearing?

Y: Yes, I agree. But let's get Perry and Grachev together in the next two or three days.

(They break for lunch. Over lunch, the President restates, for the delegations, what Yeltsin has agreed to: at a minimum, Russia will provide two battalions to do reconstruction, airlift and mine-clearing in a liaison relationship with NATO. Yeltsin confirms, with two caveats: one that the Russian contribution not be described as "support" but as a "special operation"; and that Secretary Perry and Minister Grachev make a good faith effort to agree to Yeltsin's "maximum," i.e., a larger Russian force independent of NATO.)

2nd conversation

Y: On CFE (a subject that he had not allowed to come up at lunch), we fell into a trap here. Because of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the flank limitations have changed radically. We do not seek any benefits or advantages. The CIS makes the numerical limits very confused. I realize you've supported me on changing the flank limits. I ask you to confirm now that you'll continue to move in this direction -- which is especially important, since we face in November what we call in Muslim parlance a "circumcision."

C: (laughs) Let me tell you my hopes on CFE. As you know, I feel you're entitled to some relief. You asked me to get you a fix to the map; I've done so. With America leading the way, NATO put together a proposal that meets your basic needs. It wasn't easy to work this through the Alliance, but we did. Now we're waiting for your reply. And time is a big factor here. We've got to get this problem solved by November 17.

(Yeltsin has Ryurikov go get the map that Mamedov had tried and failed to produce at lunch.)

Boris, do you understand? I believe you should have relief, and I've worked to get it for you. But we need to resolve this by November 17 so every other country accepts the principle.

(Desert Wine is served)

Y: I don't like that. It's too sweet.

C: The red wine we served at lunch was made on the Russian River in California. That was in your honor.

Y: Oh, I liked that!

C: A family descended from Russians is making it.

Y: (Refuses the desert wine.) May I have a little glass of cognac? (Note taker is dispatched to try to find some. Fails.)

C: I'm pleased with the progress on nuclear materials. Al Gore and Victor Chernomyrdin have done a good job.

Y: Yes, that will help a lot for the Moscow conference for next spring.

C: Right, so let's release the statement, OK?

Y: All right, but maybe my people should look at it first.

C: Your people have already agreed to the text. It's just the release that's been a problem.

Y: Okay. No problem. (He says this in English.)

C: Now, on reactor sales to Iran, there, too, Gore and Chernomyrdin are working a difficult, important problem, and they're doing a good job.

Y: We'll close this question once and for all. We've told you that we're going to close the mines, the centrifuge and technology, so it's finished.

C: There's still work to do. We're concerned about expertise -- we're worried that the Iranians, using your expertise, will try to develop nuclear weapons.

Y: We won't help them do it.

C: Let's let Gore and Chernomyrdin keep working on this.

Y: (First frowns, then brightens up.) You know, Bill, this formula -- Gore-Chernomyrdin -- is so fashionable, so much to the liking of other countries, that they all want to copy it.

C: Yes, it's good because Al and Victor can get into greater detail but still make political decisions at a higher level.

Y: Yes, and they also have more time to drink wine and vodka than we do.

C: We should commit ourselves to trying to get START II ratified this year.

Y: We will ratify it. That means we need to go to work on START III.

I passed through Paris on my way here and Chirac told me he would reduce the number of tests they are going to conduct to three.

C: Do you think you and I can agree to a zero yield test ban for next year?

Y: Yes, absolutely. We'll sign it. And I'll try when I'm in China to talk them into it too.

C: That's great. I'm seeing Jiang Zemin tomorrow and I'll speak to him about this and tell him you and I have talked.

Y: If we don't pool our efforts on these nuclear problems, we won't solve any of them. What we should do is establish a commission -- not a Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission -- but one with Velikhov on our side and some distinguished scientist on your side and have them deal with all these nuclear problems including the elimination of warheads.

Last, Bill, I want to say that our partnership remains strong and reliable. Even on tough problems, like Bosnia, we'll find solutions. Our partnership is the most valuable thing to

us. Not only do we need it, but the whole world needs it. You and I might leave the scene, but what we have accomplished together will survive as our legacy. This is the main theme that we must develop between us: We're together, Bill and Boris. (My s toboj -- Bill i Boris)

C: If we can do that, it will be more important than any of the specifics. In the book that I gave you at lunch, I wrote an inscription saying that I hoped we could make permanent the partnership between our countries that we started in World War II but that was interrupted for nearly half a century. The American people like the Russian people. They like exchanges and business deals with Russia. We have a businessman in Arkansas who spends half of his time in Russia. We've got to make this relationship work. Like a marriage or a friendship, it takes a lot of nurturing and patience and a determination to get over the hard spots. This meeting has helped us do that.

Y: That's right. Contrary to the pessimistic forecasts, both in your country and mine, it's been a very good meeting. It's preserved the partnership, for the good of our children and our grandchildren.

Y: Now our people have to get down to work. (K rabote!)

On their way to the exit, POTUS remembers that he promised over lunch to get Yeltsin some cowboy boots that will fit him -- unlike the beautiful Texas boots that Bush gave him at Camp David, that were too small. POTUS asks Yeltsin to take off one of his shoes so he can compare sizes. POTUS and Yeltsin exchange right shoes -- and the fit is fairly close. They joke about wearing each other's shoes to the press conference, but Shevchenko, the Russian protocol chief, in a near panic, persuades Yeltsin not do it, whispering to his boss, "Boris Nikolayevich, the press will make something unflattering of this!"