

A book I am writing on healing US Russian relations.

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**Understanding the 1990's:
Conditions in Russia at the outset of the Yeltsin in
Clinton administrations**

By Scott Bennett

“I see Russia and the United States – which was the modern world's first democracy – developing a very special relationship, and I hope I can play a role for my country in Washington like that Franklin played for his in Paris. For Russian democracy to succeed, we need help. I love the United States.”

--Russian ambassador Vladimir P. Lukin as quoted in the Los Angeles Times April 9, 1992

In an embarrassing contrast to the reception Boris Yeltsin earned in the United States, President Clinton delivered an uninspiring speech to a half-empty Duma during a visit to Moscow June 5, 2000.

In an historic joint session of Congress June 17, 1992 Russian president Boris Yeltsin was interrupted by nine standing ovations as he described a country “devastated” by seven decades of communist rule. “We have no right to fail in this most difficult endeavor, for there will be no second try, as in sports. Our predecessors have used them all up. The reforms must succeed.”

The Russian people, however, are more resilient than Yeltsin predicted, having survived the failure of “reform” and the nation's complete economic collapse in 1998. Today they are hoping for a second chance.

After 75 years of communism Russians yearn to become what they called a normal country in addition to displaying enthusiasm for the American model of democracy in free markets. Russians wanted broad and close ties to the United States. This was apparent not only

an opinion polls, were strong relations with America registered as a top priority, but also in a general fascination with American pop culture. American clothing, films, and music surged in popularity, particularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In early 1992, over 70% of Russians surveyed were viewers of the soap opera Santa Barbara. Russia's RTR television network estimated the audience for the program to be 80 million. Nor was Russian popular fascination with America and western culture limited to television programming. According to the Russian Mill Press ministry, the best selling book in Russia in 1992 was Margaret Mitchells gone with the wind followed by Edgar Rice Burroughs Tarzan of the apes. Western artists dominated pop music charts. The Beatles accounted for two of the top three selling albums of the year, as the white album and Abby Road ranked first and third, respectively. In Moscow movie theaters, gone with the wind at the largest ticket sales of any foreign movie. Russians were obviously enamored of things American – both material goods, such as McDonald's hamburgers and Levi's jeans, and western governmental and economic institutions. Such interest gave the United States an unprecedented opportunity to assist the Russian people in their transition from communism to free enterprise and democracy.

Russian foreign and defense policy return rushes foreign policy reflected the overwhelming goodwill of Russia's citizens toward the United States in 1992. The rhetoric of Russian government leaders was positive. President Yeltsin speech on January 31, 1992 with the United Nations in New York – which is so often been the site for showdowns between the United States and the Soviet union – was remarkable:

“Russia considers the United States and the West not as mere partners but rather as allies. It is a basic prerequisite for, I would say, a revolution and peaceful cooperation among civilized nations. We reject any subordination of foreign policy to pure ideology or ideological doctrines. Our principles are clear and simple: supremacy of democracy, human rights and freedoms, legal and moral standards.”

Later in the year, Russia supported US efforts in the UN Security Council for sanctions against Libya for its terrorist activities, as well

as condemnation of the government of Yugoslavia for its interference in the Civil War in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The support was essential to American attempts to isolate both Tripoli and Belgrade.

Russia's rejection of its former communist ideology and foreign policy, and its emphasis on the universal values of democracy, human rights, individual freedom, and public morality, went well beyond Gorbachev's comparatively timid "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy. It was not too much to hope that the spirit of brotherhood between the US and Russia forged in the battle against fascism during World War II would supplant decades of Cold War antagonism.

There were dozens of other agreements, including a charter for American – Russian partnership and friendship that laid out an ambitious plan for cooperation in preventing and limiting international conflicts, a statement on joint work to develop a missile warning system, and agreements on non-proliferation, information, space, and investment. The spirit of the times was captured by the extraordinary reception president Yeltsin received when he called for closer US Russian cooperation in the address he gave during the night June 1992 visit to joint session of Congress. Saying Russia was "extending its hand of friendship to the people of America" he invited America "to join Russia in partnership in the quest for freedom and justice in the 21st-century."

Investment, not aid: President Bush and president Boris Yeltsin leave the stage after meeting with business executives in Washington well when Yeltsin was in the United States for summit. "In effect", New York Times of foreign affairs columnist Thomas L Friedman wrote at the close of the June 16–17 summit, "these two days mark the moment when the currency of American Russian relations shifted from war heads to dollars. Period. Period the importance of the economic agreement signed today, offering most favored nation trade benefits to Russian exporters, export credits, a taxation treaty, insurance to American companies wanting to invest in Russia and a treaty to govern mutual investment, is that they promote what will really transform the Russian economy: not foreign aid, but private investment. One thing American officials have learned from the experience of Poland is that while western aid is necessary for

transformation to a free market, "Friedman continued, more is necessary. "There is no capitalism without capitalists, and unless Russia is opened up to investment, unless state owned industries are privatized quickly, unless the ruble is made convertible and unless there is a modicum of internal stability to attract foreign businesses, no external aid package will be enough." Clinton administration officials, however, attempted to rely on aid, neglecting the prerequisite for its effectiveness, the creation of a market economy.

While the USSR had bought 3000 tanks in 1991, Russia was slated to purchase only 30 in 1992. Altogether spending on military hardware was cut by 80%.

1992 is an election year, Republicans and Democrats work together to pass the freedom support act. Had this legislation been properly implemented during President Clinton's terms, it would have provided for much better conditions in Russia in for a more positive US-Russian relationship.

President Yeltsin vowed that Russia would not sell weapons to countries under UN sanctions. Yeltsin also decreed that the defense ministry should be permitted to sell all excess property other than weapons and ammunition in order to raise funds.

Whereas the Soviet Union had devoted itself chiefly to the maintenance and expansion of its military and empire, the new Russia – at least in its early days – was committed to channeling its enormous potential into the construction of a free enterprise civilian economy.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the newly pro western orientation of Russia's foreign and military policies also had consequences for the mission of the Russian military, as political leaders reevaluated its fundamental purposes. At the end of 1992, Boris Yeltsin identified the top priorities of the Russian army as preventing war, conducting demilitarization, converting military enterprises to civilian purposes, and reducing troops strength. The Russian military was to be oriented primarily toward its own internal restructuring and downsizing.

As President Clinton took the oath of office on January 20, 1993, the Russian government was completing the foreign policy concept of the Russian federation, an authoritative statement of its goals, which – as issued in final form five days later – announced that the conclusion of the Russian American alliance was the formal objective of Russian foreign policy. There was no hint of the dramatic deterioration in the US Russian relationship in the anti-American Russian military and foreign policy that were to come.

US Russia policy at the outside of the Clinton administration

At the outset of the Clinton administration, the bush administration and Congress had put in place the necessary tools for the United States to assist the Russian people in their historic transition from communism to free enterprise. In the same way that America's former enemies, Germany in Japan, had become friends, allies, and significant US trading partners, it appeared that so too might Russia and the new nations of the former Soviet empire. The bush administration's Russia policy during the closing days of Gorbachev's government had been one of cautious engagement – supporting freedom, but avoiding potentially counterproductive steps such as the large scale and fusion of cash into a system in transition. As early as 1990, the United States had begun to provide limited assistance to the Soviet union to show support for reform. Before the final collapse of the Soviet union in December 1991, the Bush administration took several steps to prevent adverse social consequences from thus far peaceful revolution, including signing an agreement to extend normal trade relations to all of the republics of the Soviet union, providing nearly \$1.2 billion in food aid and agricultural credits, and extending medical assistance.

The caution and reserve of the Bush administration, was which was apparent to Russian observers at the time, compared favorably to the approach of its successors – particularly in terms of the positive results it produced.

On the strategic front, President Bush in 1991 announced several significant initiatives, including the elimination of US short range nuclear weapons, the stand-down of strategic bombers and ICBMs slated for destruction under the Smart agreement, and a proposal to

eliminate ICBMs with multiple war heads (eventually a key part of Start2). The administration continued this approach in 1992, taking important steps to reduce tensions while protecting America's strategic interests.

Support for freedom

The most important bush administration initiative a 1992 was the freedom for Russia and emerging Eurasian democracies in open markets bracket freedom bracket support act. During a difficult US election season, the bush administration successfully pushed this path breaking legislation through a Congress controlled by the opposing party, despite unusually strained relations between Congress and the executive branch. "During my tenure," said Richard Armitage, former coordinator for US humanitarian and technical assistance, "I communicated directly, often, and in great detail, with the appropriate committees of Congress. I wanted very much to have the advice of key members and staff and share with the Congress my sense of just how daunting the task and doing the effects of 70 years of communism would be. We reach, I think ,a bi-Partisan consensus."

A newly free people

The rapid transformation of Russia from a closed, militarized, state run society to a pro western, the democratic, freethinking nation presented the United States with the most significant foreign-policy opportunity since World War II. But Russia's new freedoms were neither complete nor secure. At the end of 1992, is Russian stood on the ashes of the Soviet system, they looked hopefully toward America and the world not for charity, but for inspiration.

How President Clinton, the new leader of the free world, would address this opportunity, and whether Russia's new leaders would stay the course of dismantling the Soviet communist state, hang in the balance.