



Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia
Master's Degree Programme
in Comparative International Relations

SPS/06

Final Thesis

**The Clinton administration's support to
Russian President Boris Yeltsin, 1993-1996**

An Assessment of the Clinton Administration's objectives and expectations for its
support to Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his reelection in 1996

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Academic Year

2021/2022

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ABSTRACT

Quando George H.W. Bush iniziò il suo mandato di Presidente degli Stati Uniti nel gennaio 1989, la Guerra Fredda era ormai giunta al termine. Per la prima volta dalla fine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, si aprì un dibattito: rispondere alle spinte isolazioniste e ritirarsi dall'impegno internazionale, o consolidare il proprio ruolo di leadership mondiale. Bush si mostrò subito fortemente persuaso dalla volontà di trarre vantaggio dal declino sovietico, diffondere i valori liberali e promuovere un sistema commerciale globale. Di conseguenza, questi concetti influenzarono significativamente la nuova politica estera statunitense, pronta a sostituire quella di "contenimento" della Guerra Fredda. Agli inizi del suo mandato, l'amministrazione Bush sembrò sposare categorie piuttosto "wilsoniane," spingendo pubblicamente per un'apertura democratica ed economica dei Paesi del centro ed est Europa. Man mano, però, l'approccio internazionale di Bush diventò più pragmatico e realista. Ciò si manifestò specialmente nel concetto di "Nuovo Ordine Mondiale." In seguito all'invasione del Kuwait da parte di Saddam Hussein il 2 agosto 1990, la priorità di George H.W. Bush fu subito quella di ristabilire lo *status quo ante*. Violare i confini di un'altra nazione era inaccettabile e la sua amministrazione avrebbe preteso il ritiro delle truppe irachene e il ripristino del governo kuwaitiano. Nel "Nuovo Ordine Mondiale" concepito dall'amministrazione Bush, tutti i Paesi del mondo - inclusa l'Unione Sovietica - erano chiamati ad agire collettivamente per garantire il rispetto della legge internazionale, anche se questo avrebbe significato intervenire militarmente. Era un mondo in cui tutti i governi, guidati dalla leadership statunitense, avrebbero lavorato coralmemente per il consolidamento di un ordine fatto di regole e principi condivisi. In seguito all'intervento dell'esercito americano, seguendo lo spirito conservatore che permeava la sua politica estera, Bush non cercò un cambio di regime in Iraq e dichiarò vittoria quando le truppe di Saddam Hussein rientrarono nei confini iracheni. George H.W. Bush di fatto aveva stabilito un nuovo ordine unipolare, in cui l'Unione Sovietica, seppur coinvolta simbolicamente nelle questioni internazionali, non metteva in discussione la leadership degli Stati Uniti. Dunque, seppur un internazionalista, alla fine del suo mandato, Bush si dimostrò un reazionario. La sua amministrazione non tentò mai di dominare gli eventi e le sue politiche all'estero erano spesso reattive, piuttosto che attive, con l'obiettivo ultimo di garantire stabilità internazionale. Inoltre, Bush diede prova di guardare perlopiù agli equilibri di potere tra le nazioni nelle sue decisioni di politica estera, evitando di imporre forzatamente un modello economico o di governo di stampo americano.

Quando Bill Clinton fu eletto Presidente nel novembre 1992, molte cose della sua politica estera restarono in linea con l'approccio del suo predecessore. Nonostante la promessa elettorale di spingere ai margini le questioni internazionali e concentrarsi sui problemi interni, anche Clinton si dimostrò un internazionalista. Come Bush, l'amministrazione Clinton sosteneva che l'intervento degli Stati Uniti nelle questioni estere fosse fondamentale per garantire prosperità economica, pace e sicurezza a livello internazionale. Clinton continuò l'impegno di Bush nel promuovere il libero commercio, che culminò con la ratifica del NAFTA nel dicembre 1993. Tuttavia, il sostegno al libero scambio e al consolidamento del mercato libero, nel caso di Clinton, si basava su un concetto più ampio. Infatti, l'amministrazione Clinton forgiò il concetto di "Democratic Enlargement" come sostituto della politica di "contenimento" della Guerra Fredda. Seguendo questo principio, gli Stati Uniti avrebbero dovuto fondare il loro intervento all'estero sull'espansione della zona democratica nel mondo. Il concetto di democrazia di Clinton, tuttavia, era intrinsecamente legato all'istituzione del mercato libero. Dunque, per costruire un sistema democratico bisognava prima garantire che ci fosse un'economia di mercato. Ciò significava che Clinton avrebbe promosso la creazione di "market democracies." Solo questo avrebbe portato prosperità economica, pace e sicurezza nel mondo, ovvero gli obiettivi dichiarati della politica estera clintoniana. Di conseguenza, a differenza di Bush, l'amministrazione Clinton si dimostrò molto più propensa ad intervenire – anche militarmente – per favorire la creazione di "sistemi democratici" all'estero.

Questo approccio fu particolarmente evidente nelle relazioni russo-statunitensi a partire dalla nomina di Clinton come Presidente degli Stati Uniti. Subito, nei primissimi mesi al governo, l'amministrazione Clinton si dichiarò impegnata nel garantire il "successo democratico" in Russia. Secondo l'ottica dei membri dell'amministrazione, questo avrebbe significato necessariamente sostenere il passaggio da economia di stato ad economia di mercato, iniziato dal governo Yeltsin. Infatti, se la Russia fosse riuscita a cementare un'economia di mercato ed un sistema democratico, l'intero sistema internazionale – *in primis* gli Stati Uniti – ne avrebbe trovato giovamento. Per prima cosa, questo avrebbe portato una maggiore prosperità economica, data dall'apertura di un nuovo mercato a investimenti e scambi commerciali. Inoltre, avrebbe aumentato la sicurezza internazionale tramite la riduzione della minaccia nucleare e il controllo sul livello delle armi e truppe convenzionali. Da ultimo, seguendo la teoria secondo cui i governi democratici non entrano in conflitto tra di loro, la democrazia in Russia avrebbe diminuito le possibilità di situazioni ostili a livello internazionale.

Il Summit di Vancouver nell'aprile del 1993 fu il punto di partenza di tale impegno. Gli Stati Uniti annunciarono l'invio di \$1.6 miliardi alla Russia per sostenere le riforme di

liberalizzazione economica e politica di Yeltsin. Inoltre, nei mesi successivi, Clinton – consapevole che gli aiuti americani non fossero sufficienti – lavorò per ottenere il sostegno dei Paesi del G-7 e delle istituzioni finanziarie internazionali. Infine, i Paesi del G-7 impegnarono un pacchetto di \$24.8 miliardi nell'aprile del 1994 – di cui \$1.8 miliardi erano ulteriori aiuti bilaterali dagli Stati Uniti – e un secondo programma di \$3 miliardi a luglio del 1993. Mentre l'assistenza bilaterale dagli Stati Uniti era destinata perlopiù a sostenere i programmi di privatizzazione in Russia, gli aiuti delle istituzioni finanziarie internazionali erano volti a governare il tasso di inflazione – molto elevato a causa della liberalizzazione dei prezzi - e le politiche monetarie russe. In aggiunta, un altro campo in cui l'amministrazione Clinton lavorò assiduamente con il governo Yeltsin nel primo anno di mandato fu il disarmo nucleare e il controllo della vendita di armi russe a Paesi terzi.

Nel frattempo, la Russia stava attraversando una grave crisi istituzionale. Una disputa tra Yeltsin e il Parlamento russo si protrasse da mesi quando arrivò al limite nel settembre 1993. Il 15 settembre 1993, il Presidente russo Yeltsin firmò un decreto in cui sciolse le camere del Parlamento - disattendendo la Costituzione – e indisse un referendum per l'approvazione di una nuova costituzione fortemente presidenzialista e nuove elezioni legislative per il rinnovo del parlamento a dicembre di quell'anno. Molti parlamentari si opposero, definendo le misure prese dal presidente un tentativo di colpo di stato e rifiutandosi di lasciare la sede del Parlamento. La crisi si inasprì fino a quando, il 4 ottobre 1993, Yeltsin ordinò il bombardamento del Parlamento russo, la cosiddetta “Casa Bianca.” Nel corso della crisi, Clinton non smise mai di esprimere il suo supporto a Yeltsin e, nel momento di maggior difficoltà per il Presidente russo, supportò il passaggio di una nuova iniziativa bilaterale pari a \$2.5 miliardi. Infine, il 12 dicembre 1993, la nuova costituzione stilata da Yeltsin fu approvata tramite referendum, e rafforzò significativamente i poteri del presidente. Inoltre, nello stesso giorno si tennero le elezioni parlamentari, le quali, invece, si rivelarono una sconfitta per Yeltsin. Ora una buona parte del parlamento era occupata dagli oppositori di Yeltsin e delle riforme economiche messe in atto dal suo governo. A seguito delle elezioni, il Presidente americano temeva una cosa sola: che il processo di riforma economica in Russia, guidato dalla sua amministrazione e dalle istituzioni finanziarie internazionali, subisse una battuta d'arresto.

Tuttavia, nel corso degli anni 1994 e 1995, l'amministrazione Clinton spostò la sua attenzione dagli aiuti economici alla Russia a questioni di sicurezza nazionale considerate più urgenti. Per prima cosa, Clinton si trovò a fronteggiare la questione dell'espansione NATO. Le relazioni con la Russia erano fortemente coinvolte in quanto un'espansione ad est della zona NATO avrebbe incontrato l'opposizione di buona parte della classe politica russa. Inoltre,

un'altra crisi inclinò le relazioni americano-russe, ovvero l'inasprimento del conflitto in Bosnia ed Erzegovina.

Ciononostante, nel 1996 le elezioni presidenziali in Russia resero urgente per l'amministrazione Clinton ricreare il rapporto di "partnership" russo-americano che aveva caratterizzato il primo anno di mandato. La rielezione di Yeltsin era considerata fondamentale per la prosecuzione delle riforme di apertura economica e politica russa. Tuttavia, le possibilità di venire rieletto per il Presidente russo sembravano molto basse. Infatti, era diffusa l'insoddisfazione popolare legata alle difficoltà economiche e sociali prodotte dai programmi di liberalizzazione e alla campagna militare iniziata in Cecenia nel dicembre del 1994. Di conseguenza, il Presidente Clinton promosse un programma di sostegno piuttosto esteso. La sua amministrazione decise di allentare la tensione dovuta alla questione NATO. Promise quindi a Yeltsin che per tutto l'anno delle elezioni non ci sarebbero state dichiarazioni pubbliche rispetto a quali Paesi e quando sarebbero stati ammessi nella NATO. In aggiunta, il Presidente americano ignorò l'orribile campagna militare iniziata da Yeltsin in Cecenia nel dicembre 1994. Non solo, Clinton si spinse anche ad annunciare pubblicamente il suo supporto a Yeltsin rispetto al conflitto ceceno, definendo legittime le operazioni militari russe. Inoltre, assicurò la partecipazione di Yeltsin al G-7 che si sarebbe tenuto nella primavera del 1996, così da innalzare il suo prestigio internazionale. Allo stesso tempo, l'amministrazione Clinton si assicurò che le riforme economiche russe restassero in moto, così come le politiche di disarmo. Infatti, in seguito alle elezioni parlamentari russe del 1995, l'opposizione interna era molto più forte e vari "riformatori" russi non facevano più parte del governo. Il sostegno clintoniano si concretizzò particolarmente nel marzo 1996, quando spinse il Fondo Monetario Internazionale a fornire \$10.2 miliardi di aiuti al governo russo in concomitanza con la notizia che Yeltsin aveva preso in considerazione il posticipo delle elezioni. Infine, il 3 luglio 1996, al secondo turno delle elezioni, Yeltsin fu riconfermato Presidente della Repubblica Federale Russa, riuscendo a prevalere sul leader del Partito Comunista.

Questo lavoro di ricerca vuole far luce sulle premesse e aspettative dell'amministrazione Clinton nel fornire il proprio sostegno a Yeltsin. In secondo luogo, intende esaminare la valutazione della stessa amministrazione Clinton rispetto ai risultati dei programmi di assistenza, vista l'evoluzione economica e politica della Russia in quegli anni. In questo senso, la consultazione di documenti governativi statunitensi recentemente resi pubblici – insieme allo studio della storiografia – è stata fondamentale. È emerso che gli storici concordano su alcune questioni. La prima, come sinora illustrato, è che il sostegno dell'amministrazione Clinton alle riforme economiche in Russia nel 1993 è stato massiccio e che questo è cresciuto ancor di più

nel 1996, prendendo forme diverse. In secondo luogo, c'è concordanza nel ritenere che alcune scelte del Presidente russo mostrassero tendenze antidemocratiche, come lo scioglimento del Parlamento russo e l'uso delle forze militari contro l'opposizione, la guerra in Cecenia e l'intenzione di posticipare le elezioni nel 1996. Infine, molte analisi della politica estera dell'amministrazione Clinton collegano la perseveranza nel fornire supporto a Yeltsin – nonostante queste evidenti tendenze antidemocratiche – alla necessità di consolidare l'apertura economica in Russia. Questo sembrerebbe indurre a considerare la retorica clintoniana “ipocrita”, se si considera la strategia di “Democratic Enlargement” alla base della sua politica estera. Tuttavia, le fonti primarie utilizzate per questa ricerca hanno permesso di evidenziare le premesse fondamentali dell'approccio dell'amministrazione Clinton. La prima è che la cementazione di un'economia di mercato coincidesse automaticamente con il successo economico di un Paese. La seconda è che democrazia e mercato libero fossero due concetti inseparabili. Di conseguenza, nel corso del primo mandato di Clinton, Washington non espresse mai – né pubblicamente né privatamente – titubanza rispetto al percorso democratico in Russia. Infatti, le politiche di apertura economica di Yeltsin sostenute con costanza dall'amministrazione Clinton erano considerate l'unica strada per il consolidamento della democrazia russa. Così, la rielezione di Yeltsin fu considerata un successo. La retorica dell'amministrazione Clinton era pertanto sincera: incorporata nella definizione di democrazia clintoniana c'era una specifica idea di economia, per cui non ci poteva essere ipocrisia nel sostenere la democrazia, alla luce del fatto che questa veniva fatta coincidere con il capitalismo. Per concludere, si nota che tanto le premesse quanto i risultati di questo lavoro di ricerca restano contestabili e aperti ad essere oggetto di studio e discussione.

INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. foreign policy and the relations between the United States and Russia inevitably changed. Particularly during the first Clinton administration (1993-1996), the two countries developed a noticeable degree of collaboration and proximity. In fact, under the Clinton presidency, the United States provided significant assistance to the Russian government, which was implementing policies to establish a market economy, and cooperated on matters of international security. At the same time, Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin developed a close personal relationship. Consequently, as the first Russian democratically elected President seemed to be pushing the country towards growing economic liberalization and showed willingness to comply with U.S. foreign policies, the Clinton administration's support endured.

This thesis aims to assess the objectives of the Clinton administration's support for Yeltsin's government and their subsequent evaluation of the results of such strategy, particularly regarding Russia's evolving economic and political conditions. Specifically, through the examination of recently disclosed U.S. government documents from the first Clinton administration's era, as well as the study of historians' contributions, this work will illustrate the Clinton administration's strategy culminating with the reelection of Yeltsin in 1996 and show the U.S. premises, expectations and responses to Russia's political and economic evolution in those years. The ultimate objective is to recenter the narrative of the Clinton administration's support to Yeltsin's reelection – which has only appeared as short observations in larger works about USA-Russia relations or NATO enlargement – on the specificity of Clinton's backing of Yeltsin. Two moments were particularly relevant to understand such support: the initial assistance to Russia in 1993 and Clinton's later approach before the Russian presidential elections in 1996. Furthermore, to fully comprehend Clinton's strategy toward Russia it was necessary to look back to what happened between the demise of the Soviet Union and the inauguration of Bill Clinton as President of the United States in January 1993. Finally, 1994 and 1995 also constituted a transitional phase for Clinton's foreign policy and set the basis for his approach to Russia in 1996.

The first chapter of this thesis will examine the evolution of U.S. foreign policy after the end of the Cold War when George H.W. Bush was tasked with finding a new approach that would supplant the previous "containment" strategy. Indeed, these four transitional years proved functional in understanding Clinton's later approach to foreign affairs and Russia specifically.

The second chapter will explain how U.S. foreign policy evolved once Bill Clinton became President of the United States. It will report the convergences and similarities with the former approach to foreign affairs, highlighting Bush's legacy on Clinton's foreign policy thinking. But, more importantly, it will focus on Clinton's main contribution, namely the strategy of "Democratic Enlargement" and its foundation on Clinton's own conception of "democracy." As a matter of fact, his administration's particular signification of democracy strongly impacted their approach to Russia and was fundamental in understanding the consistency of their support throughout the years.

The third and fourth chapters will concentrate on the Clinton administration's relationship with Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Specifically, 1993 saw a strong U.S. commitment to assisting the ongoing economic reforms in Russia. Then, in 1994 and 1995, the U.S.-Russia relations experienced a setback due to the question of NATO enlargement and Russia's marginalization in the decision-making processes of critical international crises. Finally, in 1996, Clinton's assistance resumed with full force with the proximity of the Russian presidential elections. Within this framework, the study of newly disclosed U.S. government documents of 1993 and 1996 permitted the thorough examination of the intentions and expectations of the Clinton administration's assistance in those two years. In addition, it proved fundamental in identifying not only the reasons behind their support for President Yeltsin's reelection but also their assessment of the results of such an approach given Russian economic and political evolving conditions. So far, historians and analysts who have studied the Clinton administration's foreign policy and Russia's domestic politics have agreed that Yeltsin often showed undemocratic tendencies: through the disbandment of the Russian Parliament and the shelling of the Russian White House in 1993, the military operation in Chechnya and the intentions to postpone presidential elections due to his low poll ratings in 1996. There is also agreement that, given Clinton's consistent commitment to advancing democracy in Russia, the U.S. President and his administration's rhetoric was tinged with hypocrisy. Following this view, their continued support was mostly aimed at ensuring the consolidation of a market-based economy in Russia. Nevertheless, this work will attempt to prove that the accusations of hypocrisy are questionable through the consultation of recently disclosed U.S. government documents from the Clinton administration's era and the existing literature on the matter. What will emerge is that, throughout the Clinton administration's first term, there was never public or private hesitation about whether their policy in Russia would bring about "democratic success." On the contrary, the Clinton White House officials shared a firm conviction that their support to Yeltsin - despite some "bumps in the road" - was the best way to achieve their vision

of democracy in Russia. Notwithstanding, the results of this research remain disputable and open to being an object of study and discussion.

Chapter 1

The remaking of American foreign policy post-Cold War and U.S. – Russia relations in the aftermath of the Soviet dissolution, 1989-1992

1. A renewed foreign policy: the Bush administration’s approach to the liberalization processes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union

When George H. W. Bush was inaugurated President of the United States in January 1989, the Cold War was at its ending point and the debate on American international engagement was gaining prominence. For the first time since World War II, the elimination of the Soviet threat seemed to give the United States an option: retreat from the world or take advantage of this new global condition and reinforce American leadership. On the one hand, the American public, burdened by what was perceived by many as economic decline, was calling for the prioritization of internal issues. On the other hand, the newly elected Bush administration was strongly persuaded by notions of global responsibility. At the same time, however, what came to be a central characteristic of their foreign policymaking was caution and patience, prioritizing reaction - rather than action - to world events.

Outside the political realm, the dissolution of the bipolar confrontational order originated celebratory victory talk even before the official extinguishment of the Soviet Union. In 1989, Francis Fukuyama published an essay titled “The End of History?” predicting the end of ideological conflicts and the definitive success of political and economic liberalism. At the dawn of the new decade, Fukuyama claimed:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.¹

The social upheavals about to unfold in Eastern Europe and China seemed to strengthen this thesis and contributed to originate a new discussion on the so-called “unipolar moment”. As a matter of fact, moving closer to the formal breakup of the Soviet Union, neoconservative

¹ F. Fukuyama, “The End of History?”, *National Interest*, n. 16, Summer 1989, p. 3.

analyst Charles Krauthammer, in 1991, was writing that the world system immediately after the Cold War should become unipolar. “American preeminence,” he illustrated, “is based on the fact that it is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself.”²

All these suggestions ultimately merged into the new foreign policy thinking outlined by George H. W. Bush. The starting point for defining a new foreign policy was the recognition that the United States was, in fact, in a remarkable position. In 1989, if not the only superpower capable of shaping global events, the United States was, at least, in a condition of ascendancy. President Bush strongly supported this view and firmly believed that “the twenty-first century would be America’s.”³ In addition, the historian Kristina Spohr noted that Bush was convinced that the United States alone was not only capable of providing stability to the world order through its leadership but could also seize the moment “to spread America’s liberal values across the world and push for the creation of a new, truly global trading system.”⁴

Furthermore, throughout his years in government, it was clear that a distinct set of principles and values guided the President. George H.W. Bush was a conservative internationalist. He endorsed the United States engagement in the world, especially with the Cold War coming to an end, but never attempted to shape events. He was also a realist. In his view, the United States was a force of good in the world. However, his government had an obligation to prioritize the balance of power rather than trying to impose an American-shaped political and economic system forcibly. The words of Condoleeza Rice - director of Soviet and East European Affairs in the National Security Council from 1989 to 1991 - effectively summarized the Bush administration’s approach. She noted that

there are those who would draw a sharp line between power politics and a principled foreign policy based on values. This polarized view, you are either a realist or devoted to norms and values, may be just fine in academic debate but it is a disaster for American foreign policy. American values are universal. People want to say what they think, worship as they wish, and elect those who govern them; the triumph of these values is most assuredly easier when the international balance of power favors those who believe in them.⁵

² C. Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 70 n.1, 1990/1991, p. 24.

³ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square: How Bush, Gorbachev, Kohl and Deng Shaped the World after 1989*, New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2019, p. 70.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ C. Rice, “Promoting National Interest”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 79 n.1, January – February 2000, p. 49.

In other words, the United States was not going to force international developments, but - through its leadership - the world would inevitably undergo major favorable changes, such as the growth of democracy and the spread of free markets among states.

This form of realism with an idealistic outlook was strikingly evident in George H. W. Bush's main contribution to foreign policy thinking beyond the Cold War: his conception of a New World Order. The expression had already been used in 1988 by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. According to historian Vladislav Zubok, Gorbachev, in his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, on 7 December 1988, had

proposed a new world order based not on ideology, but on the "all-human interests" of cooperation and integration. This was a rejection of the Cold War order based on antagonism between the USSR and the USA and their respective allies. It was also a rejection of the Marxist-Leninist world view, based on "class struggle" and the inevitability of communist triumph.⁶

Although Bush and his team did not start publicly expressing their idea of a new world order until well into 1990, with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the U.S. President was rather aware of the changes occurring in the world at the time he was taking office. He rapidly demonstrated to have a vision early in 1989 when he delivered several speeches embracing the revolutionary developments in Central and Eastern Europe. At such initial phase of his administration, it was quite easy to detect words and categories fairly Wilsonian. In other words, the American role in the new world seemed to be guided mainly by a general commitment to democratic idealism.

The President delivered his first foreign policy address on 17 April 1989 at the Hamtramck City Hall, Michigan. On this occasion, he declared:

The West can now be bold in proposing a vision of the European future. We dream of the day when there will be no barriers to the free movement of peoples, goods, and ideas. We dream of the day when Eastern European peoples will be free to choose their system of government and to vote for the party of their choice in regular, free, contested elections ... And we envision an Eastern Europe in which the Soviet Union has renounced military intervention as an instrument of its policy.⁷

⁶ V. M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union*, London, Yale University Press, 2021, p. 135.

⁷ G. H. W. Bush, "Address to Citizens of Hamtramck, MI", 17.04.1989, George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, Digital Footage, <https://www.youtube.com/@TheBushLibrary/videos> (from now on GBDPL Digital Footage).

Through these words, President Bush plainly expressed American hope and support for political and economic liberalization in Eastern Europe as well as condemned any potential violent retaliation on the part of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Bush highlighted the triumph of liberal values at the Coast Guard Commencement Ceremony on 24 May 1989, when he completed the public delineation of his administration's plan towards Europe.

Today I want to speak to you about the world we want to see and what we can do to bring that new world into clear focus. We live in a time when we are witnessing the end of an idea, the final chapter of the communist experiment. Communism is now recognized, even by many within the Communist world itself as a failed system. [...] But the eclipse of communism is only one half of the story of our time. The other is the ascendancy of the democratic idea.⁸

Besides being somewhat idealistic, the initial rhetoric utilized by the Bush administration was fairly proactive - in other words - pushing towards the direction they wished to see. As his concept of a New World Order was taking shape, however, Bush's foreign policy approach came closer to a new brand of "1990s internationalism which was closely attuned to a keen awareness of the limits of American power."⁹ At the end of his presidency, it was clear that his decisions in foreign policy were strongly driven by caution and conservatism, as opposed to what first transpired from his rhetoric.¹⁰

Concerning the Soviet Union, the Bush administration had dedicated the first months in office to preparing a review of the American-Soviet relationship.¹¹ Once the review was concluded, on 12 May 1989 at Texas A&M University, President Bush announced the administration's new approach toward the U.S.S.R., particularly advancing his intention to move beyond containment.

⁸ G. H. W. Bush, "Remarks at the United States Coast Guard Academy Commencement Ceremony in New London, Connecticut", 24.05.1989, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu> (from now on APP).

⁹ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 86.

¹⁰ M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero: Gli Stati Uniti e il Mondo 1776-2011*, Bari, Edizioni Laterza, 2011, p. 421.

¹¹ G. Bush, B. Scowcroft *A World Transformed*, New York, Vintage Books, 2011, pp.104-105.

We are approaching the conclusion of a historic postwar struggle between two visions: one of tyranny and conflict and one of democracy and freedom. The review of U.S.-Soviet relations that my administration has just completed outlines a new path toward resolving this struggle. Our goal is bold, more ambitious than any of my predecessors could have thought possible. Our review indicates that forty years of perseverance have brought us a precious opportunity, and now it is time to move beyond containment to a new policy for the 1990s - one that recognizes the full scope of change taking place around the world and in the Soviet Union itself. In sum, the United States now has as its goal much more than simply containing Soviet expansionism. We seek the integration of the Soviet Union into the community of nations.¹²

These speeches of April and May 1989 showed the whole ambition of Bush's foreign policy. According to Spohr, only a few months into his presidency, Bush's administration had already demonstrated to have hope and vision.¹³ He endorsed the spread of self-determination in Eastern and Central Europe and called for the defeat of totalitarianism. Moreover, he contended the superiority of "free societies" and markets and the necessity to include the Soviet Union in such international structure. Ultimately, on a theoretical level, his statements about peace, freedom, and democracy had significant implications for the conception of the United States' leading responsibility in the world.

However, as mentioned, when it comes to seeing how Bush's theoretical approach applied to world events, many historians and analysts do not hesitate to accuse Bush of lacking a full-fledged foreign policy strategy, attributing his administration a hesitant and passive character. As scholar Michael Mandelbaum reported in *Foreign Affairs*:

The revolutions in Eastern Europe ended the Cold War by sweeping away the basic cause of the conflict between the two great global rivals: the Soviet European empire. They did so on George Bush's watch, a term that seems quite appropriate. As the revolutions occurred, he and his associates were more spectators than participants - a bit confused, generally approving, but above all passive.¹⁴

Scholar Michael H. Hunt also notes in retrospect that Bush's own prudence could be partially explained by the presence of external restraints: a "yawning federal budget" and a lack of public

¹² G. H. W. Bush, "Commencement Address at Texas A&M University", 12.05.1989, GBDPL Digital Footage.

¹³ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 105.

¹⁴ M. Mandelbaum, "The Bush Foreign Policy", *Foreign Affairs*, vol.1 n.1, 1990/1991, p. 5.

support for foreign aid.¹⁵ As a result, Bush did not push for immediate and substantive economic aid either to help the new Eastern European governments or President Gorbachev, who was facing major internal difficulties at the time. Moreover, an excessively enthusiastic reaction to the democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe was perceived as potentially harmful, as it could jeopardize Moscow's level of tolerance with the risk of a violent reaction.¹⁶ In this regard, the historian Mary E. Sarotte adds:

As the president put it, Poland and Hungary should not “expect a blank check” from the West but instead “must help themselves.” [Secretary of State] Baker also told his Soviet counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze, on September 21, 1989 that “we do not desire to stir up things up or ferment [sic] unrest.” Instead, Washington would “try to assist Poland and Hungary in moving their economies towards more of a free market system.” The Bush administration sought a slower pace of change, one that would not trigger reversals.¹⁷

At the same time, President Bush and his close decision-making circle were conscious of the great opportunities of the “new European architecture” - as defined by Secretary of State James Baker.¹⁸ First, the revolutions were seriously challenging the existing global order and shaking the relationship between the West and the East, particularly between the United States and the Soviet Union. Secondly, Bush also comprehended that, to engage in this delicate phase, they needed a great deal of cooperation and diplomacy with his Soviet counterpart, which could represent a chance to build a peaceful relationship for good.¹⁹ Soon, however, Bush's goodwill with regard to the Soviet Union was tested. As a matter of fact, embracing the process of liberalization in Europe in 1989 unequivocally meant dealing with the status of Germany, which was still divided into two separate countries. The reunification of Germany could have severe repercussions for Gorbachev's hold on power, and since the Soviet President had so far demonstrated to be a great partner for the United States, Bush's objective was to absolutely

¹⁵ M. H. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained a Welded Global Dominance*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2007, p. 261.

¹⁶ M. Mandelbaum, “The Bush Foreign Policy”, p. 6.

¹⁷ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*, New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2021, p. 80.

¹⁸ J. A. Baker III, Memorandum for the President, “My Meeting with Shevardnadze”, 04.05.1990, Secret, National Security Archive, Virtual Reading Room, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/virtual-reading-room> (from now on National Security Archive), NSC Scowcroft Files, Box 91126, Folder “Gorbachev (Dobrynin) Sensitive 1989.

¹⁹ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, pp. 1300-1303.

avoid weakening his internal standing. Even so, on this occasion, Bush was less willing to stand on the sidelines. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 implied exploring more active ways of “projecting U.S. power and influence into Eastern Europe” and soon, American policymakers “focused on NATO as a vehicle to achieve this end.”²⁰

2. From theory to practice: Bush’s management of the reunification of Germany and the evolution of the North Atlantic Alliance

In the following months, the President of the United States was about to demonstrate all his cautious, pragmatic conservatism while making the U.S. strategy prevail in his effort to shape Europe. As the Berlin Wall fell, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) leader - Helmut Kohl - immediately focused on integrating former East Germany into reunified Germany. Soon, he started talks with the Soviet Union and Western countries. Bush’s central concern within this framework was preserving the North Atlantic Alliance and ensuring united Germany’s membership. In fact, his administration’s biggest fear at the outset of 1990 was that Kohl would negotiate his country’s reunification with Gorbachev in exchange for German neutrality.²¹ This indicated, as noted by Sarotte, that “Moscow, thanks to its legal and military hold over Germany since World War II, still possessed - despite its declining power in 1990 - the ability to undermine the established order of West European security and transatlantic relations.”²² Hence, in the first months of 1990, the Bush administration directed all their diplomatic energy on securing the status of a unified Germany within NATO.

Gorbachev’s initial position was firm. As Sarotte reports: “‘the most important thing,’ Gorbachev pronounced, ‘is that no one should count on the united Germany joining NATO.’”²³ Baker subsequently spoke directly with Gorbachev in a summit in Moscow on 9 February 1990, where he asked whether Moscow would accept a unified Germany if NATO pledged not to move “one inch further” to the east.²⁴ Gorbachev answered that there was “nothing terrifying

²⁰ J. R. Shiffrin, “Deal or No Deal? The end of the Cold War and the US Offer to Limit NATO expansion”, *International Security*, n.4 vol.40, Spring 2016, p. 42.

²¹ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 113.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ivi*, 119.

²⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, “Memcon with USSR President Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, Moscow, USSR”, 09.02.1990, Unclassified, National Security Archive, Box 38, p. 6.

in the prospect of a unified Germany,” but “any extension of the zone of NATO would be unacceptable.”²⁵ Nevertheless, over the months, the American diplomatic machine managed to depict the German inclusion into NATO as a security reassurance for the Soviet Union itself. Germany outside of NATO, it was argued, could trigger the re-emergence of nationalistic sentiments and power ambitions.²⁶ Eventually, on 12 September 1990, the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany was signed, and the two German governments agreed that, after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from the country, German forces integrated into NATO military structures could be stationed in the territory of former East Germany, while foreign forces were not allowed.²⁷ In exchange, the Soviets received a formal commitment from Germany to profoundly reduce the levels of conventional armed forces and provide them with considerable financial assistance.²⁸ This was a big win for the Bush administration, which managed to assert the United States as the preeminent power in Europe by keeping united Germany tightly anchored in an American-led security system.

Although several analysts observe that, during the negotiations over German reunification, there was no formal commitment to renounce eastward NATO expansion in Europe, other historians highlight that, in that same context, Americans had promised to abandon NATO enlargement as a concession to the U.S.S.R. While this matter remains contentious, Stephen Flanagan – a member of the U.S. State Department’s Policy Planning Staff from 1989 to 1995 - asserted that “enlargement of NATO to Central and Eastern Europe was not an objective or in the political calculus of senior U.S. policymakers when the negotiations for German unification began.”²⁹ Instead, he ascribed the successive American shift towards a NATO expansionist policy to pressures coming from the new European democratic leaders and to a

²⁵ Ibid. and M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 139.

²⁶ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 139.

²⁷ Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, 12.09.1990, United Nations Archives (UNA) – Treaty Series, vol. 1696, n. 29226, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201696/volume-1696-I-29226-English.pdf>.

²⁸ S. J. Flanagan, “NATO From Liaison to Enlargement: A Perspective from the State Department and the National Security Council 1990–1999”, in D. S. Hamilton and K. Spohr (eds.), *Open Door: NATO and Euro - Atlantic Security After the Cold War*, Washington, DC, Foreign Policy Institute/Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins University SAIS, 2019, p. 97.

²⁹ Ivi, 109.

mounting fear of revanchism as further instability arose in the Soviet Union.³⁰ On the other hand, scholar Joshua Shiffrinson argues that the focal point of U.S. policymakers was ensuring that the Atlantic Alliance would remain the central provider of European security.³¹ In fact, at the time, the countries of Western Europe were seeking to create an independent European security system within a project of tighter European integration. This development worried Washington because the United States risked losing its full influence and preeminence in the European continent.³² In other words, Shiffrinson concluded that the United States, through a favorable unipolar environment, used NATO as a useful vehicle for U.S. ambitions “to hedge against (1) Russia’s potential resurgence, and – particularly in 1991–1992 – (2) the possibility that Western European states might otherwise find opportunities to craft an alternative European security structure that would undermine NATO and challenge the United States’ dominance in European security.”³³ Moreover, he added:

enlargement may have helped the United States structure European security affairs in ways that promoted other US interests—for example, the spread of democracy and the growth of free markets. The consequences here should also not be overstated. By the Cold War’s end, democracy and free markets already enjoyed widespread appeal in much of Europe, as highlighted by the policies adopted by Eastern European states following the 1989 revolutions; US backing for NATO enlargement did not cause these phenomena. Still, US support for NATO’s expansion may have reinforced the international antecedents that allowed these trends to continue. [...] Although NATO enlargement appears to have been neither necessary nor sufficient for democratic and free-market growth after the Cold War, it may have thus worked at the margins to promote non-security US interests and made it easier for the United States to project political influence.³⁴

In conclusion, the Bush administration’s foreign policy in Europe showed elements of conservatism concerning the attention that was given to Gorbachev’s hold on power. At the same time, however, it also demonstrated distinct ambitions of U.S. global leadership.

³⁰ Ivi, 99.

³¹ J. R. Shiffrinson, “Eastbound and down: the United States, NATO enlargement, and suppressing the Soviet and Western European alternatives, 1990-1992”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, April 2020, P. 819-820.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ivi, 841.

³⁴ J. R. Shiffrinson, “NATO enlargement and US foreign policy: the origins, durability, and impact of an idea”, *International Politics*, March 2020, n. 57, p. 359.

3. A renewed foreign policy: the Gulf crisis

Besides managing the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe and the reunification of Germany, another big foreign policy issue for the Bush administration began with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990. Taking advantage of the internal tumult in the Soviet Union and the simultaneous American effort to rectify its power in Europe, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait to gain control of its natural resources and, in such a manner, facilitate a position of leadership among the Arab countries. Immediately, restoring the *status quo ante* in the Gulf region became George H.W. Bush's priority. The path that President Bush decided to take included the familiar attributes of prudence and conservatism he had revealed before. At the same time, however, he showed unprecedented decisiveness and clarity concerning the definition of the objectives and how they should have been pursued.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Bush exposed the position of the United States: the Iraqi invasion was unacceptable, and they would not settle for anything less than the withdrawal of the Iraqi troops and the restoration of the Kuwaiti government. As National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft wrote in an overview memo to the President immediately after the beginning of the crisis:

I am aware as you are of just how costly and risky such a conflict would prove to be. But so too would be accepting this new status quo. We would be setting a terrible precedent - one that would only accelerate violent centrifugal tendencies - in this emerging "post-Cold War" era.³⁵

Hence, as the diplomatic effort evolved, it became increasingly urgent for the Bush administration to demonstrate that such acts of aggression would not be ignored under their leadership in the emerging international system. The new order had to be principled and opposed to aggression through collective action. In other words, as indicated by Spohr,

the successful management of the conflict could assert US leadership in the post-Cold War environment, act as a catalyst for international cooperation against aggression, and lay the foundations for a new global system that was more stable and guided by shared values and laws.³⁶

³⁵ G. Bush, B. Scowcroft *A World Transformed*, p. 607.

³⁶ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, pp. 1300-1303.

For this purpose, Bush attempted to build a collective international response that would entail close cooperation with the Soviet Union. Soviet compliance was, in fact, fundamental to constructing the legitimacy of the intervention and, at the same time, resulted extremely suitable to U.S. planners for developing the “New World Order” vision.

The Gulf crisis was just the first test of the post-Cold War order. Now that the Cold War-caused stalemate within the United Nations was loosened, President Bush was determined to use the Security Council to guide a multilateral response. By the morning of 2 August 1990, the Council voted in favor of Resolution 660, condemning the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Saddam Hussein’s forces to the position in which they were stationed on 1 August 1990.³⁷ The resolution was a significant achievement: it was the first time since the beginning of the Cold War that the Soviet Union had voted in alignment with the United States.³⁸ Still, continued cooperation with the U.S.S.R. was crucial, not only because it retained veto power within the Security Council but also for its symbolic significance in completing Iraq’s political isolation, especially considering Moscow’s traditional alliance with Iraq.³⁹ In a private, bilateral meeting between the President of the United States and Soviet President Gorbachev in Helsinki on 9 September 1990, Bush recalled stating:

The world order I see coming out of this is U.S. and Soviet cooperation to solve not only this but other problems in the Middle East. The closer we can be together today, the closer the new world order...I want to work with you as equal partners in dealing with this. I want to go to the American people tomorrow night to close the book on the Cold War and offer them the vision of this new world order in which we will cooperate.⁴⁰

Gorbachev allegedly responded: “You should not doubt that our position is firm. We have condemned Iraqi aggression and supported the UN.”⁴¹ However, he added, “there must be some kind of arrangement to manage this new order. You have taken the main burden of dealing with

³⁷ Security Council Resolution 660, 02.08.1990, United Nations Security Council Resolutions, Research Engine for the United Nations Security Council, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/660> (from now on UNSCR).

³⁸ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 728.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 729.

⁴⁰ G. Bush, B. Scowcroft *A World Transformed*, p. 680.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 681.

Iraqi aggression.”⁴² It was clear that, even though the two powers were collaborating, they had different expectations of the new order.

Once President Bush went back to the United States, he addressed a joint session of Congress on 11 September 1990, declaring:

We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times, our fifth objective - a new world order - can emerge: a new era - free from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.⁴³

It was on this occasion that the idea of a “New World Order” was ultimately delineated. It was a world where shared values of justice would guide countries to act collectively under the United Nations auspices in order to oppose violations of international law.

The picture became more complex in the following months, however, as the Soviet Union, despite being committed to backing the United States-led diplomatic effort, started to explore independent bilateral peace initiatives with Iraq to enhance its international standing. Nevertheless, Bush rejected every peace settlement proposed by Moscow. It was becoming clear that the Bush administration was only willing to achieve a solution to the crisis on their own terms. The approach adopted in Washington was simply that “any compromise would be equivalent to failure.”⁴⁴ In this regard, the historian Zubok reported that even Anatoly Chernyaev - principal foreign policy advisor to Gorbachev - concluded that “the war had buried the new world order of Gorbachev’s dreams” - depending on the idea of two pillars - and in conversations with the Soviet President “both agreed that the Soviet Union had to accept the position of junior partner of the US or perish.”⁴⁵ Through his rhetoric, Bush meant to stress a

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ G. H. W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit”, 11.09.1990, George H. W. Bush Digital Presidential Library, Textual Archives, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/> (from now on GBDPL Textual Archives).

⁴⁴ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 815.

⁴⁵ V. M. Zubok, *Collapse*, p. 524.

vision of concerted action chiefly directed by the United Nations, where no country would prevail over another.⁴⁶ De facto, however, by dismissing all Soviet proposals and accepting developments exclusively on their terms, the Bush administration ultimately asserted the reality of only one superpower and its leadership. Furthermore, as the international coalition liberated Kuwait in February 1991, Bush affirmed:

No one country can claim this victory as its own. It was not only a victory for Kuwait but a victory for all the coalition partners. This is a victory for the United Nations, for all mankind, for the rule of law, and for what is right.⁴⁷

In conclusion, the Gulf crisis had set the framework to publicly establish the principles of a New World Order based on collective surveillance of the functioning of the rule of law. At the same time, President Bush and Brent Scowcroft claimed that through the management of the Gulf war, they were trying to “extend a strategic vision beyond the crisis.”⁴⁸ The goal was to establish a model where aggression was inadmissible and to be countered multilaterally under the United States leadership.⁴⁹ At the very end of his presidency, in a speech at West Point, George H.W. Bush summarized this view, including the conditions for the use of force:

The United States can and should lead, but we will want to act in concert, where possible involving the United Nations or other multinational grouping. [...] But in every case involving the use of force, it will be essential to have a clear and achievable mission, a realistic plan for accomplishing the mission, and criteria no less realistic for withdrawing U.S. forces once the mission is complete.⁵⁰

Moreover, several analysts have observed how the initial tinge of idealism progressively disappeared throughout Bush’s presidency. For example, American foreign policy analyst (and future Deputy Secretary of State under the Clinton administration) Strobe Talbott had criticized Bush’s management of the Gulf crisis:

⁴⁶ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 811.

⁴⁷ “After the War: The President, Transcript of President Bush’s Address on End of the Gulf War”, *The New York Times*, 07.04.1991.

⁴⁸ G. Bush, B. Scowcroft *A World Transformed*, pp. 900 – 901.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ G. H. W Bush, “Address at West Point”, 05.01.1993, Miller Center, of the University of West Virginia, Presidential Speeches, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches> (from now on MC).

Desert Storm turned out to have been about real estate after all; by drawing a line in the sand and then staying on the one side of that line himself, Bush had reaffirmed that US foreign policy was primarily about lines on a map. [...] Bush was, quite simply, uncomfortable with ideology, liberal or conservative, as the basis for any policy, foreign or domestic. While unquestionably and internationalist, he saw himself as a pragmatist; he never had his heart in the cause, or in the concept, of intervention on behalf of democratic and humanitarian principles. This left him and the country he was trying to lead with a dilemma: the US had, in the past, always needed an overarching rationale for its engagement abroad, and it would almost certainly need one in the future. In mobilizing his fellow citizens to go to war against Saddam Hussein, Bush had suggested that what was at stake were standards, championed by the US but applicable to all humanity, about how governments should govern. But in the way he ended the war, he repudiated that principle. More important, he gave his countrymen no coherent or compelling alternative. He left them in confusion over exactly what they had been fighting for in the Persian Gulf, hence over what America's role should be in the post-Cold War world.⁵¹

Referring to Bush's abstention from advancing regime change in Iraq, Spohr adds that

it was the president's firm belief that the US had a unique responsibility to foster a new post-Cold War order organized around the twin principles of "democratization and market economics, but also around strengthened international institutions and universally agreed rules of international behavior. [...] By contrast Bush and his fellow managers of the 1989-91 post-Cold War transition had kept their eyes on the global balance – tempered by hopes of building a freer, more prosperous, and more open post-Wall world.⁵²

4. The position of Russia within Bush's foreign policy

Between 1989 and 1990, Soviet power was becoming increasingly decentralized as many republics within the Union were fighting for independence. Russia was no exception, and in the summer of 1990, the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian SFSR passed a declaration proclaiming the state sovereignty of Russia.⁵³ From then on, the Bush administration had to deal with two separate but strongly connected entities: Russia and the Soviet Union. The foreign policy that President Bush adopted towards the U.S.S.R. in this period is emblematic of his conservative tendency. Bush and his team never chose policies that would willingly harm

⁵¹ S. Talbott, "Post-Victory Blues", *Foreign Affairs*, n.1, vol. 71, 1991/92, pp. 68 – 69.

⁵² K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, pp. 1327-328, 1332.

⁵³ "Russia Republic Declares Sovereignty", *Los Angeles Times*, 12.06.1990.

Gorbachev's hold on power or threaten the Soviet Union's existence. On the contrary, they wished to preserve the *status quo*. There were multiple reasons for this approach. First, Gorbachev had demonstrated to be a tremendous partner to the United States and the West.⁵⁴ In fact, he had rendered concession after concession, particularly regarding the German question and the management of the crisis in the Persian Gulf.⁵⁵ In addition, officials in the Bush administration were anxious about radical regime change, especially after the conflicts had erupted in Yugoslavia and given Gorbachev's unstable internal standing.⁵⁶ Indeed, as he increasingly pushed for political and economic liberalization, "hardline communists" harbored a deep sense of discontent.

This scenario made it especially hard for the Bush administration to provide the right amount of attention and legitimation to the new Russian government guided by President Boris Yeltsin. When Secretary of State Baker visited Moscow in March 1991, he noted for Bush that "Gorbachev was positively neuralgic," calling Yeltsin "unstable," obsessed with "populist rhetoric," and with dictatorial ambition.⁵⁷ However, Baker added, referring to Yeltsin: "Anyone who could turn hundreds of thousands of people out on the street was someone the United States needed to cultivate."⁵⁸ "And so," Spohr reports,

when Yeltsin sent Baker a note upon his arrival in Moscow, asking to talk privately, the Secretary of State – after checking with Bush – went ahead. Gorbachev got wind of this, however, and hit the roof, eventually preventing the meeting from going ahead. Baker considered the incident 'symptomatic of the complex relationship between Gorbachev and Yeltsin', but he also felt that it illustrated the 'fine balance we had to maintain between them.'⁵⁹

The Bush administration's approach to the Russian government started to change only with Yeltsin's official election as President of the Russian Federation on 12 June 1991.⁶⁰ When Yeltsin visited Washington a few days later, it seemed that Bush had finally accepted him as

⁵⁴ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose: US Policy toward Russia after the Cold War*, Washington DC, The Brookings Institution Press, 2003, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 957.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ivi, pp. 957-958.

⁶⁰ D. Remnick, "YELTSIN ELECTED PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA", *The Washington Post*, 14.06.1991.

an international partner.⁶¹ Russian historian Vladislav Zubok reports that Bush told Yeltsin: “I am the US President and Gorbachev is the USSR President and so we will deal with each other. But that does not mean that we cannot do business with you.”⁶² However, Bush made sure to counterbalance his positive statements with clarity about his full support for Gorbachev. The following day, speaking on the phone with the President of the Soviet Union, Bush said:

We worried frankly that there might be a difference so broad between you [Gorbachev and Yeltsin] that we might be in a delicate situation. But as your Ambassador undoubtedly reported, I made it very clear that you are our man. That is my obligation, and I am personally pleased to work with you as President of the USSR.⁶³

Moreover, on the day of Yeltsin’s official visit to the United States, the White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater had highlighted that Washington’s “relationship has been with the central government of the Soviet Union for the past forty-some years, and that’s the way it will remain. So, there will be no change in that relationship.”⁶⁴ President Bush also presented his version of how he was trying to work with both Yeltsin and Gorbachev without delegitimizing neither of them. In his memoirs, he wrote:

In the remainder of our talk that afternoon, Yeltsin said everything we wanted to hear when it came to reform, and he cast himself as Gorbachev’s equal in political stature. Sensing that he was challenging the center’s role as the main conduit of foreign policy for the Union and the member republics, I tried to strike a balance between support for this new president and for the center. I explained to him over and over again that we would treat him with respect and wanted to do as much business as possible; but I could not undermine Gorbachev.⁶⁵

Offering the appropriate consideration to the democratically elected Russian government while strengthening the Soviet center became even more complicated moving toward the end of the summer. It was becoming more evident that deep disaffection pervaded the highest ranks of the political and military domains in the Soviet Union. As President Bush arrived in Moscow

⁶¹ V. M. Zubok, *Collapse*, p. 587.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, “Telephone Conversation with Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union”, 21.06.1991, Secret, GBDPL Textual Archives, p. 1.

⁶⁴ M. Dowd, “Yeltsin Arrives in Washington with Conciliatory Words about Gorbachev”, *The New York Times*, 19.06.1991.

⁶⁵ G. Bush, B. Scowcroft *A World Transformed*, pp. 923-924.

for an official visit on 29 July 1991, he was set for separate meetings with Gorbachev and Yeltsin. The talks with the President of the U.S.S.R. focused on Western assistance for the economic liberalization programs that Gorbachev was implementing.⁶⁶ On that occasion, Bush comforted Gorbachev:

I wanted Mikhail to realize that we would support him as far as we could. I spoke about bilateral economic issues and possibilities of trade and cooperation. We needed to see visible progress, with US companies working with the Soviets. One success, one big project, could release billions of dollars of private investment.⁶⁷

Yet, as of the meeting with President Yeltsin, Spohr records that the Russian President refused to participate in an expanded bilateral meeting with Gorbachev and other republic presidents.⁶⁸ Again in his memoirs, Bush asserted that “it was clear that his first priority was protecting the notion of Russia and the Soviet Union being treated as equals in their dealings with the United States.”⁶⁹ However, the U.S. President kept reassuring Gorbachev.

‘This was an illustration of the challenges you face,’ Bush told Gorbachev. ‘He always wants to get equal status with you. I want to assure you that from our side we will not take a single step that would complicate your situation. We believe in you and trust your intentions.’⁷⁰

Nonetheless, the real challenge arrived the following month with the attempted coup on Gorbachev. The eight plotters, including Soviet vice-president Gennady Yanayev, KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov and Interior Minister Boris Pugo, attempted to halt the process of economic liberalization and stop the signing of the Union Treaty promoted by Gorbachev.⁷¹ The treaty, which had been negotiated for months, would have given the republics more rights and prerogatives within the Soviet federation.⁷² However, they immediately met strong resistance from the democratic forces led by Boris Yeltsin, who, in this

⁶⁶ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 976.

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 935.

⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 977.

⁶⁹ G. Bush, B. Scowcroft *A World Transformed*, p. 935.

⁷⁰ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 977.

⁷¹ M. Dobbs, “The Coup Attempt Mikhail Gorbachev Barely Survived in 1991”, *The Washington Post*, 30.08.2022 and V. M. Zubok, *Collapse*, p. 478.

⁷² *Ibid.*

context, succeeded in presenting himself as the symbol of democratic change. Consequently, the attempted overthrow of Gorbachev, failing to reinstall an authoritarian rule, involuntarily prompted international support for Russian President Yeltsin. Historian Zubok reports, “Yeltsin had flip-flopped: from being a major destroyer of the Soviet constitutional order he had transformed into its main defender.”⁷³ Only a few days after the coup attempt, Gorbachev said to his principal foreign policy advisor Chernyaev: “You know, in this situation, I count on Yeltsin. He will not give up, he will not yield to them.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, from that moment on, the Bush administration, believing that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapsing, had no choice but to work closely with Russian President Yeltsin on urgent transitional matters.

The most pressing issue for Bush was managing the transfer of nuclear weapons from the U.S.S.R to the successor Republics.⁷⁵ According to scholars Goldgeier and McFaul, everyone in the administration was advancing their propositions from a realist perspective. Hence, they were particularly concerned about the balance of power. However, there was a clear split over policy prescriptions.⁷⁶ Secretary of State Baker was the leading proponent of keeping a single nuclear power, which would have implied concentrating all Soviet nuclear weapons in the hands of Russia. Following his line of reasoning, in such an unstable and divided environment, it was in the best national interest of the United States to avoid leaving significant nuclear arsenals scattered across Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.⁷⁷ In other words, he predicted the risk of incurring into a “Yugoslavia with nukes.”⁷⁸ On the other hand, the Pentagon and other officials in the White House, including National Security Advisor Scowcroft, believed that the United States was best secured with nuclear weapons diluted among multiple powers.⁷⁹ There was, in fact, widespread fear that Russia might return to an autocratic system with imperialistic ambitions, and, thus, it was better to have the balancing of other regional powers.⁸⁰ Eventually, Baker’s line of unified command and control prevailed, and in the following months, he conducted a vigorous diplomatic endeavor vis-à-vis the implicated Soviet republics. Eventually, on 23 May 1992, Baker met with the Foreign Ministers

⁷³ V. M. Zubok, *Collapse*, p. 742.

⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 751.

⁷⁵ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 41.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ K. Bradsher, “Noting Soviet Eclipse, Baker Sees Arms Risks”, *The New York Times*, 09.12. 1991.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, pp. 41-43.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

of Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to sign the Lisbon Protocol to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), which officially stated that only one nuclear power would remain from the dissolution of the Soviet Union.⁸¹

Nonetheless, another security matter was crucially urgent to the Bush administration in the fall of 1991. That was advancing arms control before the definite Soviet crackup. The strategy adopted by the Bush administration, alongside the Pentagon, was proposing a series of unilateral arms control initiatives and, subsequently, calling on the Soviets to do the same.⁸² Even amid the disintegration of the Union, Bush reported being careful about undermining Gorbachev's authority. Therefore, before announcing the arms initiatives to the public, the U.S. President phoned Gorbachev for feedback.⁸³ Shortly after that, Bush called Yeltsin. In this respect, Bush wrote in his memoir:

I worried about signaling both Yeltsin and Gorbachev. We did not want to undermine Gorbachev, but neither did we want to neglect a rising Yeltsin - clearly the future lay with him. I thought arms control still came under Gorbachev's responsibility, and he was sensitive to the precedent I was setting, and to the political stature of Yeltsin I was recognizing. When I told him I was trying to call Yeltsin to brief him and asked that he tell Yeltsin himself if I couldn't reach him, there was stony silence on the phone.⁸⁴

5. The Bush administration's (timid) support of the Russian transition toward a market economy

Concerning economic reform, President Yeltsin had demonstrated willingness to carry out harsher economic measures – compared to Gorbachev's programs - when it came to the Russian transition into a market economy. In the fall of 1991, Yeltsin appointed Yegor Gaidar as deputy prime minister in charge of economic reform.⁸⁵ Gaidar was one of the first to fully embrace the “Washington consensus,” which included the implementation of policies such as the sharp reduction of the state-run economy, privatization, liberalization and deregulation, fiscal

⁸¹ Protocol to the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, 23.05.1992, United Nations Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/?ln=en> (from now on UN Digital Library).

⁸² G. Bush, B. Scowcroft *A World Transformed*, pp. 992-993.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 994.

⁸⁵ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 65.

discipline, and balanced budget.⁸⁶ As reported by Zubok, on 23 September 1991, Gaidar's team produced the first draft of a document entitled "Russia's Strategy in the Transition Period."⁸⁷ Yeltsin's authority, the document state, "is still sufficient for the conduct of a stabilization policy." If his authority was wasted, the situation would evolve in favor of conservative opposition.⁸⁸ As a result, Gaidar tried to implement his comprehensive economic package – later defined as "shock therapy" – all at once.⁸⁹ The package included the immediate liberalization of prices and trade, and government restraint on spending and money printing to achieve macroeconomic stabilization. Once this had been accomplished, they would have proceeded with a full-scale privatization program.⁹⁰ To make this possible, however, the Russian government was expecting substantial assistance from the West, which seemed to move slower than the revolutionary events in Russia.⁹¹ At the same time, the Soviet economy in 1991 was in free fall, with millions risking starvation.⁹² As highlighted by Goldgeier and McFaul, "given this set of circumstances in the fall of 1991 and early in 1992, the door for Western engagement and influence in remaking the Russian economy and polity was wide open."⁹³ Nevertheless,

in addressing issues of economic assistance to the Soviet Union and Russia, President George H. W. Bush remained true to his basic ideological orientation on international affairs. In his view, managing relations between states was the business of world statesmen. Trying to influence the affairs within other states was not. Just as Bush had little inclination to push democratization within the Soviet Union and then Russia, he aspired to play only a limited role in Russia's transformation from a command economy to a market system.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Y. Gaidar, "Lessons of the Russian Crisis of Transition Economies", *Finance and Development*, June 1999, pp. 6-8.

⁸⁷ V. M. Zubok, *Collapse*, p. 963.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 65.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Y. Gaidar, "Russia's Transition Experience", in T. Besley and R. Zagha (eds.), *Development Challenges in the 1990s: Leading Policymakers Speak from Experience*, The World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 64.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 65.

⁹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 84.

Furthermore, “until the Soviet Union collapsed formally in December 1991, the Bush team delayed in engaging the Russian government, meaning that more than four months were lost at a moment when time was moving very rapidly.”⁹⁵

As a matter of fact, throughout the fall of 1991, the Bush administration focused primarily on controlling Soviet nuclear weapons. As the State Department was working on negotiations on security issues, the Secretary of the Treasury Nicholas Brady and Congress rigorously opposed broad economic assistance to the Soviet Union and Russia.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the Bush administration continued to make Western assistance contingent upon debt restructuring, and refused to concede Gaidar and his team a “stabilization fund” in support of their economic reforms.⁹⁷ Only in November 1991, President Bush announced \$1.5 billion in food assistance to the Soviet Union, and, a month later, the U.S. established “Operation Provide Hope,” which merely delivered humanitarian aid.⁹⁸

With the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the beginning of the U.S. presidential campaign in 1992, American foreign policy towards Russia changed to some degree. Notably, Bush’s Democratic rival in the elections campaign, governor of Arkansas William Jefferson Clinton, raised some harsh criticism. The lack of large-scale economic support, Clinton argued, had demonstrated that the Bush administration was detached from the fate of the people living under the former Soviet rule while missing paramount opportunities to secure a peaceful and economically stable international environment.⁹⁹ Furthermore, in his piece “Post-Victory Blues” published in *Foreign Affairs*, Strobe Talbott argued that the Bush administration “operated from the principle that the stability of relations among states was the ultimate international good.”¹⁰⁰ The “corollary” of this was that “change, even if fueled by the yearning for democracy,” could be “dangerous” if it threatened “stability.” It was for this reason - Talbott claimed - that Bush had been “initially quite forthright” in his “support for President Gorbachev’s attempt to preserve the essential structure of the Soviet Union.”¹⁰¹ Criticism also

⁹⁵ Ivi, p. 73.

⁹⁶ V. M. Zubok, *Collapse*, p. 1100.

⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 1106.

⁹⁸ K. Bradsher, “U.S. Planning \$1.5 billion in Food Aid to Soviet Peoples through Moscow”, *The New York Times*, 21.11. 1991 and J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 76.

⁹⁹ M. Cox, “The Necessary Partnership? The Clinton Presidency and Post-Soviet Russia”, *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, n. 4 vol. 70, Oct. 1994, p. 639.

¹⁰⁰ S. Talbott, “Post-Victory Blues”, p. 66.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

came from former Republican President Nixon. In a memorandum of March 1992 titled “How to Lose the Cold War,” he contended that losing Russia would be a far more devastating issue in the 1990s.¹⁰² The memo, which circulated privately before a conference to which he was invited concerning “America’s changing role in the world”, was a fierce attack on the Bush administration’s timid support for Yeltsin.¹⁰³ “American assistance has been largely symbolic,” “if Yeltsin failed,” claimed Nixon, “the prospects for the next fifty years will turn grim.”¹⁰⁴

As a result, on 1 April 1992, the Bush administration announced that they would contribute to a \$24 billion international aid program offering about one-fifth of the total. Moreover, in October 1992, Bush signed the FREEDOM Support Act into law, which authorized the United States to provide assistance to the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.¹⁰⁵

In conclusion, while the Bush administration showed an aggressive and fast-moving approach on the security side, the economic issue was overlooked. This shed light on their reluctance to advance change within other countries, even when deeper engagement could have entailed securing the democratic turn and economic liberalization of Russia. In fact, no one in the administration ever demonstrated a serious intention of promoting policies that would guide Russian internal political and economic structure. Furthermore, Bush showed all his conservatism as he supported Gorbachev until the very end of the Soviet Communist Party’s rule, refusing to deal with Russia as an equal partner until the official collapse of the Soviet Union.

6. The Russian sentiment towards the U.S. within the newly established Yeltsin government

Even before the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Russian government had conceived a precise international posture for Russia, especially regarding its relationship with the United States. This approach was particularly evident in President Yeltsin’s own positions about Russian standing in the world and those of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Kozyrev. Their guiding principle concerning the developing

¹⁰² D. Schorr, “How to Lose the Cold War”, *The New York Times*, 10.04.1992.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, pp. 1051, 1066.

relationship with the Bush administration was to construct a “strategic partnership” between Russia and the United States.¹⁰⁶ This mainly consisted of favoring “integration or association” with the “political West,” which would have gradually led to forming a community of democratic states.¹⁰⁷ In this framework, the United States was envisaged as an equal partner, fundamental in assisting Russia’s transition toward democracy and the market economy.¹⁰⁸

In December 1991, President Yeltsin sent a letter to the North Atlantic Coordination Council (NACC), which gathered the Allies and former Warsaw Pact adversaries to develop cooperative ties. The letter was read in front of the participants of the inaugural meeting on 20 December 1991 and stated that the Russian leadership considered “these relations to be very serious” and wished “to develop this dialogue in each and every direction, both on the political and military level.”¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Yeltsin wrote: “Today we are raising a question of Russia’s membership in NATO, however regarding it as a long-term political aim.”¹¹⁰ *De facto*, Yeltsin had just expressed Russia’s desire to join NATO in the future.

Moreover, at the beginning of the new year, Yeltsin spoke at the United Nations for the first time since the demise of the Soviet Union and declared that his Russia now “considered the United States and the West not as mere partners but rather as allies.”¹¹¹ In this regard, Spohr notes that even though Gorbachev had been highly cooperative with Western countries, Yeltsin “seemed to be moving completely into the Western orbit.”¹¹² She continues,

whereas Gorbachev had repudiated the idea that his country was now embracing ‘Western values’ – insisting on the two superpowers meeting halfway, as it were, ideologically – Yeltsin [...] was emphatic

¹⁰⁶ N. N. Petro, “Legacy of Containment: Reshaping US Foreign Policy toward Russia”, *Harvard International Review*, vol. 19 n. 4, Fall 1997, p. 38.

¹⁰⁷ A. Zagorsky, “Russia and NATO in the 1990s”, in D. S. Hamilton and K. Spohr (eds.), *Open Door: NATO and Euro- Atlantic Security After the Cold War*, Washington, DC, Foreign Policy Institute/Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins University SAIS, 2019, p. 462.

¹⁰⁸ *Ivi*, p. 463.

¹⁰⁹ T. L. Friedman, “SOVIET DISARREY; Yeltsin says Russia seeks to Join NATO”, *The New York Times*, 21.12.1991.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹¹ “Text of Boris Yeltsin’s Speech to the U.N. Security Council with UN-Summit”, *AP News*, 31.01.1992

¹¹² K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 1031.

about his commitment at home to political freedom and human rights and, internationally, to cooperation, disarmament and peace.¹¹³

This was certainly one of the first major steps in shaping the new Russian foreign policy. However, the Bush administration was not ready to reciprocate and declare an alliance with Russia. Secretary of State James Baker, in his memoir, remembered the Russian President asking President Bush, on 1 February 1992, at their meeting in Camp David:

‘Are we still adversaries or not?’ ‘No, we are not,’ the President said. He gave Yeltsin the final draft of the joint declaration I had discussed with the Russian President in Moscow. ‘This moves us away from the old era.’ The statement proclaimed a new era of U.S. and Russian ‘friendship and partnership’ and declared a formal end to more than seventy years of rivalry. Yeltsin was eager to add to the statement that the relationship had moved to one of allies, but the President was reluctant to go that far. ‘We are using this transitional language because we don't want to act like all our problems are solved, he said.¹¹⁴

Together with Yeltsin, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kozyrev also strongly supported the “Atlanticist line.” This means he advanced a Western-centered transformation of Russia based on a solid relationship with the United States and NATO. Again, according to Spohr,

the aim of Yeltsin’s government, as stated by his foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev, was to ‘enter the community of civilized countries of the northern hemisphere’. According to him, Russia had the opportunity now to ‘progress according to generally accepted rules’ which were invented by the West.¹¹⁵

Moreover, Kozyrev claimed that Russia had to take distance from its Soviet past and join the community of democratic countries on an equal stand. In his article on NATO enlargement, he argued that

the new Russia had to make a determined effort to overcome its isolation from the most prosperous democratic countries, which was not determined by any treaty and simply represented the bad legacy of the Soviet past. And the inherited Russian hostility towards NATO was a key political barrier on its way

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ J. A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War & Peace, 1989-1992*, New York, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995, p. 625.

¹¹⁵ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 1076.

to join the club of great nations to which it belonged by dint of its size, economic potential, history and culture.¹¹⁶

As stated, Kozyrev went even further by assuming a common cultural European heritage. Russia was ready for radical change and needed Western assistance not only because of its willingness to transform into a fully democratic country with a market economy but also because the Russian nation was founded on European culture.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, according to Kozyrev, while seeking to establish a strategic partnership with the West, it was fundamental for Russia to institutionalize this relationship. Generally, in the first years of the 1990s, Russia had almost no space in the decision-making process regarding international issues. In this respect, Russian researcher Zagorsky claimed that to be a member of Western organizations, such as the World Bank, the IMF, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the G7, was “from the very beginning on the agenda of Russia’s Western policy.”¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, seeking the full integration of Russia with the West was challenged domestically. One of the main opponents of Kozyrev’s “Atlanticistic line” was the Russian ambassador to Washington, Vladimir Lukin. He asserted that Russia should have provided the same amount of attention to other potential partners, particularly China.¹¹⁹ Moreover, Yevgeniy Primakov – future Minister of Foreign Affairs - criticized Kozyrev’s foreign policy while he was Director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service.¹²⁰ He claimed that Kozyrev had undercut Russia’s national interest by “attempting to join the West at any price.”¹²¹ As reported by Ambrosio in his article for *European Security*,

¹¹⁶ A. Kozyrev, “Russia and NATO Enlargement: An Insider’s Account”, in D. S. Hamilton and K. Spohr (eds.), *Open Door: NATO and Euro- Atlantic Security After the Cold War*, Washington, DC, Foreign Policy Institute/Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins University SAIS, 2019, p. 450.

¹¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 451.

¹¹⁸ A. Zagorsky, “Russia and NATO in the 1990s”, p. 463.

¹¹⁹ J. Steele, “The Bear’s Necessities: Now the Cold War is over, Russia must decide who its friends are in the new and increasingly volatile world”, *The Guardian*, 04.01.1993.

¹²⁰ T. Ambrosio, “Russia’s Quest for Multipolarity: A Response to US foreign policy in the post-Cold War era”, *European Security*, vol. 10 n .1, Spring 2001, p. 53.

¹²¹ *Ibid*.

Primakov vocally subscribed to the view that Russia must '[find] herself as a great power' and should play a crucial role in the international system: 'Russia in her transition from the bipolar world to the multipolar one should play the role of a counterweight to the negative trends that are appearing in international affairs. In the course of this transition not all power centers, determining this multipolarity, have yet formed. And somebody [namely the United States] wants to dominate in this situation.' Multipolarity as a corrective to American hegemonism constituted a fundamental part of what some have called the 'Primakov Doctrine'. This did not require direct confrontation with the United States, but rather the creation of a more equal relationship between Moscow and Washington in which Russian interests would be respected and the Americans would be constrained from acting unilaterally.¹²²

Thus, towards the end of the Bush administration and the beginning of the Clinton presidency, there was a clear split in Russian foreign policy concerning the United States. The "Atlanticist line" advanced by Kozyrev started to be challenged by a multipolar vision of the world. According to this view, Russia should have embarked on developing relations with rising China and its other neighboring states.¹²³ In other words, as Spohr notes, "after a brief flirtation with the USA," Russian foreign policy moved during 1992 and 1993 towards a more "geographically balanced approach." In particular, with that came a "growing appreciation of the value of a mutually beneficial relationship with Beijing."¹²⁴

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ A. Zagorsky, "Russia and NATO in the 1990s", p. 461.

¹²⁴ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 1285.

Chapter 2

The evolution of U.S. foreign policy under Clinton, 1993-1996

1. The definition of foreign policy priorities and the Clinton administration's conception of "democracy promotion"

During the presidential electoral campaign in 1992, Bill Clinton stressed particularly the need to focus on domestic issues rather than foreign policy matters. Indeed, in this context, one big criticism that Clinton moved towards the Bush administration was having devoted excessive attention to foreign policy while, following his view, the country was undergoing major economic difficulties.¹²⁵ For the purpose of the campaign, this concept was simplified effectively by Clinton's political strategist James Carville, when he forged the slogan "it's the economy, stupid."¹²⁶ The intention was to delineate the future approach of the Clinton presidency: listen to the "homeward bound public opinion,"¹²⁷ move away from the reactionary logic that – following his perspective - still permeated President Bush's internationalist vision and define new, limited conditions for American engagement in the world.¹²⁸ As reported by scholars Stacie Goddard and Ronald Krebs,

A 1993 Pew study found that, while a majority of the general public hoped the United States would take an active role in global leadership, only 10 percent wanted the United States to maintain a role as the "single world leader." Most wanted it to be only as active as other states. The vast majority wanted the United States to either maintain or decrease its military spending. United States elites across the spectrum also seemed suspicious of primacy. In that same Pew study, only 7 percent of Council on Foreign Relations members thought the United States should aim to be the sole world leader¹²⁹

¹²⁵ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 86.

¹²⁶ M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, pp. 427-428.

¹²⁷ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 90.

¹²⁸ M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 427.

¹²⁹ S. E. Goddard & R. R. Krebs, "Legitimizing Primacy After the Cold War: How Liberal Talk Matters to US Foreign Policy", in N. P. Monteiro and F. Bartel (eds), *Before and After the Fall: World Politics and the End of the Cold War*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 142.

However, despite having highlighted his intention to focus on internal social and economic concerns, once elected President of the United States, Bill Clinton was inevitably confronted with the need to craft a foreign policy strategy. As mentioned, he aimed to take distance from George H. W. Bush's conservative approach to international issues. Thus, the former governor of Arkansas inherited the task of finding a new underlying concept that would establish itself as the definitive successor of the Cold War's containment strategy.¹³⁰

During the first presidential debate in October 1992, confronting President Bush and the independent candidate Ross Perot, Clinton had presented what would have become - under his leadership - the U.S. foreign policy priorities in the emerging post-Cold War environment. First and foremost, his administration was going to minimize the global commitments that had been undertaken during the Cold War, especially regarding military spending and military permanent stationing overseas.¹³¹ Secondly, Clinton stressed the importance of economic competitiveness on the international level, which he was going to promote by sustaining globalization and free trade.¹³² And lastly, he made a commitment to the promotion of "democracy" and "human rights."¹³³ These last two elements did not seem to deviate so much from his predecessor's foreign policy line. Nevertheless, once President, Clinton's own conception of democracy promotion shaped the U.S. foreign policy of the mid-1990s quite differently from what had been done in the very first years of the decade.

Clinton's concept of democracy building was strictly connected to individual freedom. In a democratic system, a country's citizens had to be able to appoint their government through free and fair elections periodically and have human rights such as freedom of information and expression ensured. However, more importantly, they also had to be able to live in an open market system. Throughout the Clinton administration's first term, the most prominent policymakers often defended the primary necessity to promote and consolidate "market democracies." As a result, they placed the real emphasis of democracy promotion on market restructuring. As noted by researchers Barbara Ann J. Rieffer and Kristan Mercer, the growing federal budget of the 1990s provided to the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, which in 1999 reached \$925 million, "was designed 'to jump start the political and

¹³⁰ Ivi, p. 136.

¹³¹ "THE 1992 CAMPAIGN; Transcript of First TV Debate Among Bush, Clinton and Perot", *The New York Times*, 12.10.1992.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

economic transition to market democracies.”¹³⁴ Furthermore, the budget of the U.S. government for the 1999 fiscal year included clauses that forbade the appropriation of funds if the recipient government “was not making the progress in implementing economic reforms based on market principles and private ownership.”¹³⁵ On the other hand, the budget did not prohibit appropriation in case of emerging “authoritarian” or “illiberal” tendencies.¹³⁶

This conception of democracy had a significant impact on the Clinton administration’s planning of a foreign policy strategy. Democracy promotion was incorporated on the front line of Clinton’s foreign policy vision as a mutually reinforcing objective alongside U.S. economic and security interests. As historian Douglas Brinkley argues, the concept of “Democratic Enlargement” defined by the National Security Council in the first months in office - and later endorsed by President Clinton – “rejected the more expansive view that the United States was duty-bound to promote constitutional democracy and human rights everywhere; as a politically viable concept, enlargement had to be aimed at primary U.S. strategic and economic interests.”¹³⁷ For instance, Brinkley continues,

Asians in general took a vastly different view of what constituted democracy, preferring to emphasize social order over individual rights. Under enlargement, America’s chief concern in Asia would therefore be free market access - the rest, for the most part, would be left to sort itself out.¹³⁸

First, the emphasis on establishing free markets was rooted in the belief that “consumer-oriented middle classes with the desired appetites for American products” would nourish the United States’ economic well-being.¹³⁹ Moreover, the spreading of “open-market democracies” would ensure security and peace. Again, free trade was at the heart of democracy promotion. President Clinton was not the first U.S. President to push for the establishment of free trade zones. However, according to Brinkley, “it was Clinton who advanced the view that democracy would prevail in the post-Cold War world through trade pacts as much as ballot boxes.”¹⁴⁰ Then undersecretary of commerce for international trade Stuart Eizenstat synthesized the concept

¹³⁴ B. A. J Rieffer & K. Mercer, “US Democracy Promotion: the Clinton and Bush administrations”, *Global Society*, vol. 19 no. 4, October 2005, p. 393.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ D. Brinkley, “Democratic Enlargement: the Clinton Doctrine”, *Foreign Policy*, no. 106, Spring 1997, p. 117.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 125.

effectively. Democracy promotion under the Clinton presidency made “perfect sense.” “In the Cold War the concept was containment,” she continued, “now it’s to enlarge the scope of democracy. It’s all about widening market access.”¹⁴¹ Ultimately, the establishment of democracy would foster international peace. Following the democratic peace theory, democracies conflict with one another.¹⁴² The German philosopher Emmanuel Kant had set the intellectual roots of this foreign policy theory, and Clinton and many of his foreign policy team welcomed Kant’s idea.¹⁴³

In short, the Clinton administration’s foreign policy planning aimed at fostering the underlying conditions of prosperity and peace – with the United States being the guarantor of security frameworks and integrated international economies – in which democracy would thrive. Thomas Carothers contends that “the guiding concept was the integration of political, economic, and security goals.”¹⁴⁴ For this reason, concerning the approach to Russia, democracy promotion encountered “substantial limitations and tensions in practice.”

Supporting democracy became a policy of supporting Yeltsin [who was pushing for economic liberalization], which put the administration in some awkward spots - such as downplaying large-scale Russian human rights violations in the first war in Chechnya, lauding a presidential election in 1996 marked by significant flaws, and alienating various parts of the Russian democratic political spectrum not closely associated with Yeltsin or with favored groups of reformers. Still, the U.S. commitment to bolstering Russian democracy was real and occupied the attention of senior policy makers.¹⁴⁵

2. The changes and continuities in American foreign policy under the Clinton administration: commitment to globalization

In Clinton’s first year of presidency, the advancement free trade was among the greatest concerns of his foreign policy. During the presidential campaign, Clinton had already defined

¹⁴¹ Ivi, p. 127.

¹⁴² J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 89.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ T. Carothers, “The Clinton Record on Democracy Promotion”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, no. 16, September 2000, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Ivi, pp. 2-3.

the spreading of free trade as one of his foreign policy priorities, and, once in office, the U.S. President proved quite successful in his commitment to globalization. His biggest achievement came on 8 December 1993, when he signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into law.¹⁴⁶ The objective to liberalize regional economies had already been delineated during the George H.W. Bush's era.¹⁴⁷ As a matter of fact, the Bush administration had intensively conducted negotiations with Canada and Mexico to define the NAFTA and supported the Australian initiative to institute the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).¹⁴⁸ President Clinton continued along the same lines, dedicating his first year in office to a "hard-fought battle" to gain the support of a strongly divided Congress – and, subsequently, the Senate – on the matter of NAFTA ratification.¹⁴⁹ Clinton "threw his weight behind ratification" and won the support of a large part of his party, which had constituted most of the opposition.¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, the establishment of a free trade area between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada was largely backed by Republicans, whose vote ultimately proved decisive.¹⁵¹ Before the two Chambers favored the Agreement, Henry Kissinger had also expressed his favor for ratification. He argued that NAFTA would not have simply established a sweep reduction of international trade barriers, but, most importantly, it would have set the basis for the "architecture of a new international system."¹⁵² He was referring to a new global structure where the rising nationalism that had followed the end of ideological bipolarism could have been countered by the promotion of popular governments and open international trading systems.¹⁵³ Clinton's own vision seemed consistent with this reasoning: the remaking of the global architecture in the post-Cold War era had to be firmly rooted in a vigorous faith for the benefits of globalization and democratization.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, as reported by historian Michael

¹⁴⁶ W. J. Clinton, "Signing of NAFTA (1993)", 8.12.1993, William J. Clinton Digital Presidential Library, Digital Footage, <https://www.youtube.com/@clintonlibrary42/videos> (from now on BCDPL Digital Footage).

¹⁴⁷ K. Spohr, *Post Wall, Post Square*, p. 1212.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ J. Gerstenzang and M. Ross, "House Passes NAFTA, 234-200: Clinton Hails Vote as Decision 'Not to Retreat'. Congress: Sometimes bitter debate over the trade pact reflects hard-fought battle among divided Democrats. Rapid approval is expected in the Senate", *The Los Angeles Times*, 18.11.1993.

¹⁵⁰ M. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy*, p. 272.

¹⁵¹ M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 430.

¹⁵² H. Kissinger, "NAFTA: CLINTON'S DEFINING TASK", *The Washington Post*, 20.07.1993.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ M. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy*, p. 272.

Hunt, right before the Agreement gained the support of the House of Representatives in November 1993, Clinton had declared: “No one has shown how a wealthy country can grow wealthier and create more jobs unless there is global economic growth through trade.”¹⁵⁵ Referring particularly to the case of the United States, President Clinton – at the signing ceremony of the NAFTA in December 1993 – predicted that the trade act would “create the world’s largest trade zone and create 200.000 jobs in the country by 1995.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, alongside economic growth, promoting globalization would have positively influenced social issues. According to the U.S. President, the environmental and labor side agreements would have also made NAFTA “a source for social progress as well as economic growth.”¹⁵⁷ In short, following the Clinton administration’s view, the elimination of trade barriers would necessarily generate economic and social prosperity. In addition, Clinton asserted that the ratification of NAFTA could set an example for other countries to follow, and he described leading this development as being fundamental to the national security of the United States and international peace at large. Economic growth would have weakened nationalistic forces and created international alliances. Again, at the signing ceremony of the NAFTA, the President stated:

Already the confidence we've displayed by ratifying NAFTA has begun to bear fruit. We are now making real progress toward a worldwide trade agreement so significant that it could make the material gains of NAFTA for our country look small by comparison. Today we have the chance to do what our parents did before us. We have the opportunity to remake the world. For this new era, our national security we now know will be determined as much by our ability to pull down foreign trade barriers as by our ability to breach distant ramparts. Once again, we are leading. And in so doing, we are rediscovering a fundamental truth about ourselves: When we lead, we build security, we build prosperity for our own people.¹⁵⁸

Furthermore, in the archives of the Clinton White House, the “benefits of globalization” are described as being tightly entangled with “democracy promotion.” The Record of Progress of the Clinton Presidency states that “while globalization is inexorable, its benefits must be harnessed to advance our objectives of democracy, shared prosperity and peace.”¹⁵⁹ Again,

¹⁵⁵ Ivi, pp. 272-273.

¹⁵⁶ W. J. Clinton, “Signing of NAFTA (1993)”, 8.12.1993, BCDPL, Digital Footage.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ “The Clinton Presidency: A Foreign Policy for the Global Age”, The Clinton White House Archives, The Clinton - Gore Administration: A Record of Progress,

consistently with the previous Bush's era, the Clinton administration viewed U.S. leadership as essential, particularly in shaping an international realm where democracies can thrive, and economic progress with it. The Record reveals:

The way for America to exercise its influence today is to build with our democratic partners an international system of strong alliances and institutions attuned to the challenges of a globalized world, to ensure this system is genuinely open to all who adhere to clearly defined standards, and to be ready to stand up for those standards when they are threatened.¹⁶⁰

Coherently with their commitment to economic globalization, the Clinton administration reached their second significant accomplishment in the first half of 1994. That was finalizing the Uruguay Round, a decade-long negotiation process on the liberalization of international trade which notoriously led to the replacement of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) with the World Trade Organization (WTO). On 15 December 1993, all negotiating issues were finally resolved, and, on 15 April 1994, the 123 participating governments signed the deal.¹⁶¹ Hoping to complete the Uruguay Round more rapidly, President Clinton had signed legislation that extended fast-track procedures to the GATT Multilateral Trade Negotiations. On this occasion, on 2 July 1993, the President had reaffirmed once again his administration's conviction that free trade would lead to prosperity for the United States and all countries under their guidance. Clinton had stated:

Completion of the Uruguay Round would provide a major boost to the world economy at a time when it is crucially needed. As the world's leading exporter - and the world's most open economy - the United States stands to benefit significantly by reducing trade barriers and opening markets around the world for manufactured goods, agricultural products, and services. We remain committed to completing these important negotiations this year, and we will encourage our trading partners to make their contribution to bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion.¹⁶²

<https://clintonwhitehouse5.archives.gov/WH/Accomplishments/eightyears-index.html> (from now on The Clinton WH Archives).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ "The Uruguay Round", World Trade Organization, About WTO, Understanding WTO: Basics, <https://www.wto.org/index.htm>.

¹⁶² W. J. Clinton, "Statement on Signing Legislation Extending Fast Track Procedures for the GATT Multilateral Trade Negotiations", 2.7.1993, APP.

Although it contradicted the isolationist tendency of the American public, the U.S. political establishment's newfound enthusiasm for the perks of globalization was only going to grow deeper approaching the new millennium. In fact, these ideas were notoriously collected by the *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman and, in the 1990s, gained exceptional prestige in foreign affairs circles.¹⁶³ To feed confidence on globalization, Friedman not only highlighted the beneficial power of free markets but also reaffirmed the idea that a globalized international environment was the successor of the previous bipolar order. As reported by historian Michael Hunt, Friedman wrote: "Globalization is not just a trend, . . . not just an economic fad. It is the international system that has replaced the cold-war system. And like the cold-war system, globalization has its own rules, logic, structures and characteristics."¹⁶⁴ Moreover, Friedman advanced the claim that globalization elevated the importance of the U.S. leadership. According to Hunt,

Americans occupied a special place in his vision of globalization. They were, in the first place, "the prophets of the free market and the high priests of high tech." They were also the caretakers of the emerging global regime. As the only surviving superpower, the United States had to serve as the leader and stabilizer of the new system. The U.S. destiny was now to champion not just the political ideals that had dominated previous decades but an entire way of life that was inexorably taking over the world.¹⁶⁵

In conclusion, the Clinton White House demonstrated a deep conviction that the integration of the world's economy was instrumental for the U.S. own prosperity. What is more, the Clinton administration agreed that it would have a positive effect on global prosperity and stability.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, creating a global economy was functional to the advancement of U.S. interests, as well as values, because it was seen as being deeply connected to the promotion of democracy and peace.¹⁶⁷ As a result, historian Hunt notes that President Clinton, throughout his presidency, remained greatly concerned with free markets and that "resolving trade disputes [...] would prove the single consistent foreign policy thread running through the Clinton years."¹⁶⁸ Scholars Michael Cox and Doug Stokes confirm that the "NAFTA vote set the foundation of a

¹⁶³ M. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy*, p. 274.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ "The Clinton Presidency: A Foreign Policy for the Global Age", The Clinton WH Archives.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Hunt, *The American Ascendancy*, p. 273.

presidential record that was to be distinguished by its commitment to both bilateral and multilateral free trade policies.”¹⁶⁹

3. The changes and continuities in American foreign policy under the Clinton administration: commitment to “democracy promotion”

While the commitment to international economic liberalization was largely a continuation of Bush’s foreign policy, President Clinton’s emphasis on promoting “human rights” and “democracy” proved to be the most defining element of his foreign policy vision. In fact, on this matter, the Clinton administration’s foreign policy deviated significantly from his predecessor’s conservative internationalism.

Historians seem to unanimously consider the concept of “democratic enlargement” the pillar of the Clinton administration when it comes to foreign affairs. In a notable speech entitled “From Containment to Enlargement,” on 21 September 1993, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake – key Clinton administration’s foreign policy player alongside Secretary of State Warren Christopher – delivered the first comprehensive delineation of the concept. He declared:

Throughout the Cold War, we contained a global threat to market democracies; now we should seek to enlarge their reach, particularly in places of special significance to us. The successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement – enlargement of the world’s free community of market economies. [...] I see four components to a strategy of enlargement. First, we should strengthen the community of major market democracies [...]. Second, we should help foster and consolidate new democracies and market economies [...]. Third, we should counter the aggression – and support the liberalization – of states hostile to democracies and markets. Forth, we need to pursue our humanitarian agenda, not only by providing aid, but also by working to help democracy and market economics take root in regions of greatest humanitarian concern.¹⁷⁰

Again, it is clear that the desired globalization of market economies was not an end in itself, but it was tightly associated with democracy promotion. In other words, according to Lake’s presentation of the Clinton administration’s foreign policy vision, enlargement not only referred

¹⁶⁹ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 91.

¹⁷⁰ A. Lake, “From Containment to Enlargement”, 21.9.1993, Unclassified, Bill Clinton Digital Presidential Library, National Archives, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us> (from now on BCDPL National Archives) Collection Finding Aid, Box 1. p. 6.

to an expansion of free trade and market-based economies around the world but intrinsically comprehended the advancement of democratic governments. The United States' engagement in the world was to be instrumental in the expansion of the democratic perimeter, and, on top of that, the Clinton administration had to conduct such engagement relying on "Woodrow Wilson's most profound insights."¹⁷¹ These included the belief that the United States' own security was dependent on the nature of foreign regimes.¹⁷² Therefore, Lake continued, they had an obligation to "promote democracy and market economics in the world" because it would protect their "interests and security."¹⁷³

Subsequently, President Clinton integrated the concept of "democratic enlargement" in his address to the United Nations General Assembly on 27 September 1993. On that occasion, he embraced interventionism in the name of democracy, market economics, and humanitarian reasons. However, he added to the concept of engagement the need to act multilaterally under the U.S. leadership. The President stated:

The United States intends to remain engaged and to lead. We cannot solve every problem, but we must and will serve as a fulcrum for change and a pivot point for peace. In a new era of peril and opportunity, our overriding purpose must be to expand and strengthen the world's community of market-based democracies. During the cold war we sought to contain a threat to the survival of free institutions. Now we seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those free institutions. [...] We will work to strengthen the free market democracies by revitalizing our economy here at home, by opening world trade through the GATT, the North American Free Trade Agreement and other accords. [...] We will work to reduce the threat from regimes that are hostile to democracies and to support liberalization of nondemocratic states when they are willing to live in peace with the rest of us. [...] And we must pursue our humanitarian goal of reducing suffering, fostering sustainable development, and improving the health and living conditions. [...] On efforts from export control to trade agreements to peacekeeping, we will often work in partnership with others and through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations.¹⁷⁴

Hence, through this speech, President Clinton upheld the main elements related to "Enlargement". Moreover, he mainly shed light on two other cornerstones of his

¹⁷¹ Ivi, p. 5.

¹⁷² M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 428.

¹⁷³ A. Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement", p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ W. J. Clinton, "Remarks to the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly", 27.09.1993, APP.

administration's foreign policy: its humanitarian character and its predilection for multilateralism. On these matters, Cox and Stokes assert that the critical task for the Clinton administration was to set the conditions for both diplomatic and military engagement.¹⁷⁵ The humanitarian condition for the U.S. engagement abroad originated from notions of "assertive humanitarianism" advanced by numerous spokespeople of the Clinton administration.¹⁷⁶ Multilateralism was also a key factor for the U.S. intervention, at least at the beginning of Clinton's presidency. The conception of "assertive multilateralism" derived mainly from the contributions of Madeleine Albright, a former member of President Carter's National Security Council and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations during Clinton's first term (she would later become the Secretary of State). According to scholar James D. Boys, "her concept was that if the United States no longer had the political will nor the resources to act as a global policeman, it was in America's interests to form coalitions to do so."¹⁷⁷ Quoting Albright's words, Boys also adds that, however - in acting with others - the United States should have led "in establishing goals and ensuring success."¹⁷⁸ However, having asserted the United States' search for leadership in multilateral ventures, Boys also clarified that "this did not preclude unilateral action in self-defense or in defense of vital interests."¹⁷⁹ In fact, in that same speech at the United Nations on 27 September 1993, President Clinton had also added that it was a U.S. preference to act multilaterally.¹⁸⁰ However, they must not have hesitated to act unilaterally in case of threats to the U.S. national interests or those of their allies.¹⁸¹ Moreover, as the importance of prioritizing multilateral interventions remained consistent in Clinton's foreign policy throughout his administration, this concept underwent many adjustments. For instance, the feasibility of "assertive multilateralism" was severely undermined by a failed U.S.-led humanitarian and military campaign in Somalia in 1993. Consequently, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff advanced a remarkably restrained version of "assertive

¹⁷⁵ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 86.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ J. D. Boys, "A Lost Opportunity: The Flawed Implementation of Assertive Multilateralism (1991-1993)", *European Journal of American Studies*, n.7 vol. 1, Spring 2012, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ M. Albright, *Madame Secretary: A Memoir*, London, Macmillan Press, 2003, p. 176.

¹⁷⁹ J. D. Boys, "A Lost Opportunity", p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ W. J. Clinton, "Remarks to the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly", 27.09.1993, APP.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

multilateralism” based on a case-by-case assessment to restrict American international engagement.¹⁸²

4. From theory to practice: the application of the Clinton administration’s foreign policy vision

The Clinton administration proved their commitment to a foreign policy vision inspired by the defense of “democracy and human rights promotion” right upon taking office in 1993. As a matter of fact, they immediately decided to intervene to restore the Haitian democratically elected government, which a coup d’état had overthrown on 29 September 1991. Two months after Clinton’s inauguration, on 16 March 1993, the U.S. President invited the exiled President of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, to the White House, in order to publicly express his own support for restoring democracy in that country. He also presented what actions his administration had undertaken for that purpose, specifically imposing economic sanctions, and advancing diplomatic efforts vis-à-vis the new Haitian military regime.¹⁸³ At the press conference during the visit of President Aristide, the U.S. President declared:

To those who have blocked the restoration of democracy, I want to make it clear in the strongest possible terms that we will not now or ever support the continuation of an illegal government in Haiti, and that we want to step up dramatically the pace of negotiations to restore President Aristide under conditions of national reconciliation and mutual respect for human rights with a program of genuine economic progress.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 86.

¹⁸³ “Situation in Haiti”, *C-SPAN, Report Video Issue*, 16.4.1993, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?38817-1/situation-haiti>.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

The most significant diplomatic achievement came with the signing of the Governors Island Accord between President Aristide and the leader of the *de facto* governing military junta Raoul Cédras. The agreement, signed under the auspices of the United Nations, established the necessary steps for the peaceful return of President Aristide to Haiti and the restoration of his government. In exchange, it requested the suspension of all sanctions and the implementation of international financial assistance, as well as granted an amnesty for all of those who had been involved in the coup.¹⁸⁵ However, as the peaceful conditions set to restore Aristide's government continued to be disregarded between 1993 and 1994, the Clinton administration imposed new sanctions and - given the "continuing deteriorating situation" - eventually called for military intervention.¹⁸⁶ On 31 July 1994, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 940 authorizing the member states to form a multinational force in order to end, by any means necessary, the military leadership in Haiti and restore the "legitimate authorities of the Government of Haiti."¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Resolution established the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) that would assist the restored democratic Haitian government in the following months.¹⁸⁸ The decision of the U.N. Security Council to intervene constituted a big win for the Clinton administration, which had dedicated considerable effort to obtaining the U.N. "mandate" to lead the multinational force and end the military regime of Cédras.¹⁸⁹ Eventually, the United States contributed to the mission with a large contingent of 20.000 troops to carry out the combat operation, which, after Cédras' resignation, was substituted, on 19 September 1994, by a "peace-keeping and nation-building operation."¹⁹⁰ The Haitian intervention included all the elements of Clinton's foreign policy vision. Firstly, this case manifestly showed the Clinton administration's commitment to "promoting democracy." Not only Aristide's government was the legitimate Haitian government, but its restoration deserved military intervention. Secondly, the military effort needed to be conducted multilaterally under the United Nations auspices. Lastly, intervention in the name of "democracy" was further legitimated by advancing humanitarian efforts and was accompanied by economic and financial

¹⁸⁵ "Accord de Governors Island", 03.07.1993, United Nations Peacemaker, Document Retrieval, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/HT_930703_Accord%20de%20Governors%20Island.pdf.

¹⁸⁶ "Haiti: Restoring a Democracy", BCDPL National Archives.

¹⁸⁷ The Security Council, "Resolution 940", 31.07.1994, UN Digital Library.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, pp. 429-430.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. and "Haiti: Restoring a Democracy".

assistance under U.S. guidance. *De facto*, after intervention, the Haitian economy was placed under the management of the IMF and the World Bank.

Nevertheless, most historical accounts do not attribute the same level of success and coherence to the US-led mission in Somalia. On the contrary, they often refer to it as a big failure of the Clinton administration's management of foreign affairs. Right after the overthrow of Somalian President Siad Barre in January 1991, the United Nations became immediately involved in the country to respond to the next humanitarian crisis.¹⁹¹ Then, as the power struggle between Interim President Ali Mahdi Mohamed and General Mohamed Farah Aidid developed into widespread violence and caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians, the United Nations intensified their action. As a result, on 24 April 1992, the Security Council adopted Resolution 751, establishing a U.N. operation in Somalia (UNOSOM). The operation mainly provided additional humanitarian relief and monitored the previously agreed ceasefire between the parties through unarmed observers.¹⁹² Despite all efforts undertaken by the United Nations, the humanitarian relief operations struggled to reach the population in need, and, over the summer and fall of 1992, the situation continued to deteriorate. On 3 December 1992, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 794, authorizing the deployment of a multinational force with the purpose of facilitating the humanitarian action.¹⁹³ Hence, the United States had already resolved to intervene militarily during Bush's presidency. Leading the U.N. multinational force in Somalia had been strongly recommended by the U.S. military under the leadership of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, and later endorsed by President Bush with the expectation it would only last a few weeks.¹⁹⁴ Instead, Operation Provide Hope was inherited by the incoming Clinton administration and protracted throughout their entire first year in office. According to historian Del Pero, the intervention in Somalia, at first, did not seem to bear many risks: it was generally approved by the domestic and international public opinion, it did not seem to have specific operational difficulties, and the United Nations authorized it dictating the involvement of all member states.¹⁹⁵ However, things

¹⁹¹ "Somalia: UNOSOM II", The United Nations, Peace and Security, Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unosom2backgr2.html>.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ The Security Council, "Resolution 794", 3.12.1992, UN Digital Library.

¹⁹⁴ S. Recchia, "Pragmatism over Principle: US Intervention and Burden Shifting in Somalia, 1992-1993", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 43 n. 3, 2020, p. 342.

¹⁹⁵ M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 430.

turned out differently in practice. The U.S. – led mission was soon involved in a complex conflict with multiple militias, which culminated in October 1993 with a battle on the streets of the Somalian capital Mogadishu, ending with the death of eighteen American soldiers and about a thousand Somali combatants.¹⁹⁶ The specter of Vietnam was awakened, and President Clinton announced the withdrawal of all American troops, to be completed within six months. In the wake of the Somalian disaster, the U.S. President spoke to the nation, declaring:

Let's start by remembering why our troops went into Somalia in the first place. We went because only the United States could help stop one of the great human tragedies of this time. A third of a million people had died of starvation and disease. Twice that many more were at risk of dying. Meanwhile, tons of relief supplies piled up in the capital of Mogadishu because a small number of Somalis stopped food from reaching their own countrymen. Our consciences said, enough. [...] We saved close to one million lives. And throughout most of Somalia, everywhere but in Mogadishu, life began returning to normal. Crops are growing. Markets are reopening. So are schools and hospitals. Nearly a million Somalis still depend completely on relief supplies, but at least the starvation is gone. And none of this would have happened without American leadership and America's troops.¹⁹⁷

Then, referring to the steps they would take in the future, the President announced the withdrawal of the American troops, which was to happen gradually. He added:

If we were to leave today, we know what would happen. Within months, Somali children again would be dying in the streets. Our own credibility with friends and allies would be severely damaged. Our leadership in world affairs would be undermined at the very time when people are looking to America to help promote peace and freedom in the post-cold-war world. And all around the world, aggressors, thugs, and terrorists will conclude that the best way to get us to change our policies is to kill our people. It would be open season on Americans. That is why I am committed to getting this job done in Somalia, not only quickly but also effectively. To do that, I am taking steps to ensure troops from other nations are ready to take the place of our own soldiers. [...] Now we will intensify efforts to have other countries deploy more troops to Somalia to assure that security will remain when we're gone.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ W. J. Clinton, "Address to the Nation on Somalia", 7.10.1993, APP.

In short, Clinton highlighted the prime humanitarian nature of the Somalian intervention. In face of a “great human tragedy,” the United States were compelled to intervene. However, this time, the humanitarian condition was not depicted as merely a means to achieve the bigger objective of democracy and a market-based economy but as an objective itself. Moreover, Clinton stressed the necessity of U.S. leadership: it was not only needed by the Somali population to experience real relief but by the international community at large, which needed guidance for the promotion of international peace and freedom in the post-Cold War era. However, given the operation’s failure, the U.S. leadership could not risk being undermined. This would spoil the envisioned international role of the United States. Rather, the U.S. troops had to withdraw, transferring responsibility for humanitarian efforts to their allies. Thus, despite the intervention was initiated under the auspices of the United Nations, making it a multilateral effort for humanitarian reasons, President Clinton strongly defended the envisioned growing, and unrivalled, role of leadership of the United States in the emerging post-Cold War world to the detriment of the humanitarian objective. Eventually, the reversals in Somalia constituted a setback for “assertive humanitarianism” and “assertive multilateralism,” and the following foreign policy choices of the Clinton administration were heavily marked by these events.¹⁹⁸ As outlined by Del Pero, the U.S. intervention from that moment on was to be much more selective, and in-site military action was to be delegated as much as possible to local allies.¹⁹⁹ Conditions for U.N. peacekeeping operations were also redrawn. In fact, through the Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 25, drafted in May 1994, the President stated that U.S. troops would support U.N. operations only if risks were ‘acceptable’ and objectives clear.²⁰⁰

The U.S. response to the events in Rwanda was the most tangible consequence of the Somalian disaster. According to Stokes and Cox, “the Rwandan genocide of 1994 proceeded with a minimum of attention from either the UN or the USA.”²⁰¹ In fact, the systematic elimination of the Tutsi population at the hands of the Hutus, which caused the death of about one million people, happened under the international community’s passive watch.²⁰² This time, the United States refused to guide a multilateral mission, *de facto* abdicating from their envisioned role of leadership and expecting the United Nations and European countries to

¹⁹⁸ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 86 and M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 431.

¹⁹⁹ M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 431.

²⁰⁰ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 86.

²⁰¹ Ivi, p. 92.

²⁰² M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 431.

engage forcibly in their place.²⁰³ However, this did not happen and the U.S. relative non-involvement, and a widespread international stasis, eventually allowed a major tragedy.

Recently, U.S. declassified documents have revealed that U.S. diplomats on the ground were in contact with Washington to describe what was happening in Rwanda, as reported by *Foreign Policy*.²⁰⁴ In August 1992, Joyce Leader – U.S. Embassy’s deputy chief of mission in the Rwandan capital Kigali – had written a diplomatic cable to Washington, warning that Hutu extremists with connections to Rwanda’s governing party were believed to be advocating the elimination of ethnic Tutsis.²⁰⁵ Moreover, once the Clinton administration had already taken office, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Prudence Bushnell affirmed that top policymakers continued to pay little attention to the events leading up to the genocide in Rwanda.²⁰⁶ In fact, other warnings had been disregarded. Again, according to *Foreign Policy*,

in August 1993, Bacre Waly Ndiaye, a U.N. human rights researcher from Senegal, produced a troubling report about the prospects of genocide. And on Feb. 25, 1994, following a visit to Rwanda by Belgian Foreign Minister Willy Claes, the Belgian Foreign Ministry sent instructions to its United Nations envoy to explore how to strengthen the U.N. peacekeeping mission.²⁰⁷

However, the Somalian disaster had cast a long shadow, and the Clinton administration’s foreign policy line seemed to have taken a turn.²⁰⁸ The United States, in particular, opposed direct military intervention and the deployment of a large-scale U.N. peacekeeping mission, only expressing support for humanitarian relief efforts.²⁰⁹ Eventually, there was neither strong nor immediate multilateral action to end the atrocities that were taking place in Rwanda. In the aftermath of the crisis, President Clinton, delivering the U.S. apology to the victims and survivors of the genocide, stated the United States share of responsibility in an effort to reaffirm his desire for multilateral approaches under the American leadership. He declared:

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ C. Lynch, “Exclusive: Rwanda Revisited”, *Foreign Policy*, 05.04.2015.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 92.

²⁰⁹ “Rwanda”, BCDPL National Archives.

The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy as well. We did not act quickly enough as the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe havens for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their name: genocide. [...] We owe to all the people in the world our best efforts to organize ourselves so we can maximize the chances of preventing these events, and where they cannot be prevented, we can move more quickly to minimize the horror. [...] So, let us work together as a community of civilized nations to strengthen our ability to prevent and, if necessary, to stop genocide.²¹⁰

In short, the President's words did not deny his administration's previous lack of concern for how the events had developed. Despite their objective of "human rights promotion" and "democracy building," they opted not to intervene. Nevertheless, in the wake of the crisis, it became fundamental to rebuild American credibility to preserve the administration's foreign policy vision and reassert their prospect for the U.S. leading role in the world.

Concluding, most historians also attribute the same degree of hesitancy to the Clinton Administration's approach regarding the conflicts in former Yugoslavia. According to Cox and Stokes, Clinton's early Bosnian policy continued along the same lines drawn by the previous Bush administration.²¹¹ This means that the Clinton administration's policymakers showed the same "unwillingness to accept the need for direct US involvement."²¹² The European powers and the United States, first under George H.W. Bush and then under Bill Clinton, initially agreed that the conflicts in former Yugoslavia were a "European situation" to be handled by European countries.²¹³ Furthermore, Del Pero highlights that, as the war was spreading to Bosnia and the violence escalated between 1993 and 1994, officials in the Clinton administration had different opinions on how to handle the situation.²¹⁴ On the one hand, Vice-President Gore, National Security Advisor Lake, and Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright pushed for more decisive action. On the other hand, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell were in favor of avoiding any U.S. engagement.²¹⁵ The result was a "non-policy,"

²¹⁰ W. J. Clinton, "Remarks to Victims and Survivors of the Genocide in Rwanda", 25.03.1998, BCDPL Digital Footage.

²¹¹ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 92.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ L. Hartwell, "Case Analysis. Conflict Resolution: Lessons from the Dayton Peace Process", *Negotiation Journal*, October 2019, p. 445 and M Cox, D Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 92.

²¹⁴ M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 431.

²¹⁵ Ivi, p. 432.

with the Clinton administration opposing the Vance-Owen plan drawn out as a solution to the conflict during the Bush era – which envisioned the establishment of ten ethnically-defined and self-governing provinces - and the United Nations failing to guarantee peace through the peacekeeping mission carried out by European troops.²¹⁶ In 1993, NATO started to support the U.N. peacekeeping mission through air attacks, while the Clinton administration continued to play a marginal role, providing little more than a diplomatic effort.²¹⁷ Things started to change sensibly only after the massacre in Sarajevo on 5 February 1994. Furthermore, the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995 at the hands of the Bosnian-Serb troops constituted a watershed for the U.S. minimal engagement, and paved the way for the Dayton Accords of November 1995.²¹⁸ The Agreement, reached on 15 November 1995 in Dayton, Ohio, dictated the establishment of the sovereign Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, composed of the mainly Croat-Bosniac populated Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian Serb-controlled Republika Srpska, and was the first peace settlement after over three years into the Bosnian war.²¹⁹ Concerning the military sphere, the Accord replaced the U.N. peacekeeping mission (UNPROFOR) with a NATO-led multinational peace-enforcement force (IFOR), ending the “dual-key” arrangements that had previously characterized the UN-NATO operations.²²⁰ Furthermore, IFOR was given a clear mandate of a year and would replace the 20.000 U.N. peacekeeping forces with 60.000 NATO troops, including 20.000 U.S. soldiers.²²¹ Also in this case, the specter of Somalia played its role.²²² The rise of nationalism to the detriment of democracy and peace, the notorious and severe violations of human rights and the subsequent humanitarian crisis, did not seem to justify the risk of leading a sweeping and decisive intervention. Instead, for the first three years of the Bosnian war, the management of the issue was assigned to equally hesitant European countries. Factually, once again, the United States struggled to lead on defending democracy, peace, and prosperity, fearing to undermine that same role of guidance for enlarging market-driven, democratic governments so central to the envisioned Clinton administration’s foreign policy.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ L. Hartwell, “Case Analysis. Conflict Resolution”, p. 446.

²¹⁸ Ivi, p. 447.

²¹⁹ R. Caplan, “Assessing the Dayton Accord: The Structural Weaknesses of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 11 n. 2, 2000, p. 217.

²²⁰ Ivi, pp. 217-218.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² M. Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero*, p. 432.

5. Principles and facts in comparison: how the Clinton administration's foreign policy evolved throughout their first term

The application of the Clinton administration's foreign policy might seem to have grown away from its theoretical premises. "Democratic enlargement," "assertive humanitarianism," and "assertive multilateralism," throughout Clinton's first term seemed to progressively lose their applicability to international crises. Yet, at the same time, these concepts managed to remain the principles on which the U.S. intervention was justified, and the U.S. global leadership asserted.

As the events in Somalia and Haiti were unfolding in the first year of Clinton's presidency, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake clarified the administration's premises and conditions for engagement. In his speech entitled "From Containment to Enlargement," in September 1993, he pronounced the United States' general commitment to the enlargement of democracy and markets while highlighting the need to consider the specificity of each international crisis. "How should the United States help consolidate and enlarge democracy and markets?,"²²³ he asked. Then, he continued,

The answers are as vary as the nations involved, but there are common elements. We must continue to help lead the effort to mobilize international resources [...]. We must be willing to take immediate public positions to help staunch democratic reversals, as we have in Haiti, Guatemala, and Nigeria. We must give democratic nations the fullest benefits of integration into foreign markets, which is part of why NAFTA and the GATT rank so high on our security agenda.²²⁴

In other words, the Clinton administration intended from the beginning to affirm their leadership by guiding collective efforts and taking public stances but considered the need to apply different tactics to every crisis. This attributed pragmatism to their responses to global challenges but, at the same time, assigned an arbitrary character to their foreign policymaking. As Strobe Talbott, soon-to-be Deputy Secretary of State, wrote in a private letter to Warren Christopher on 2 January 1994,

²²³ A. Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement", BCDPL National Archives, p. 9.

²²⁴ Ibid.

It has become a part of the conventional wisdom that it will be difficult (though not impossible) to dislodge that we don't really have a worldview; that we're reactive, intellectually timid; that we have a bunch of policies and objectives, but they don't hang together as a part of a single Grand Design, at least not one deserving capitalization.²²⁵

This was particularly evident in their commitment to humanitarian relief. The humanitarian agenda was a big part of the strategy of enlargement. As Lake declared, the U.S. "humanitarian actions nurture the American public's support for [...] engagement abroad. Humanitarian efforts also can stimulate democratic and market development in many areas of the world. Ultimately, the world trusts our leadership in that broader effort."²²⁶ But, he added,

we must bring other considerations to bear as well: cost; feasibility; the permanence of improvement our assistance will bring; the willingness of regional and international bodies to do their part; and the likelihood that our actions will generate broader security benefits for the people and the region in question. While there will be increasing calls on us to help stem bloodshed and suffering in ethnic conflicts, and while we will always bring our diplomacy to bear, these criteria suggest that there will be relatively few intra-national ethnic conflicts that justify our military intervention. Ultimately, on these and other humanitarian needs, we will have to pick and choose.²²⁷

The two different approaches that the Clinton administration decided to undertake regarding the Somalian and Bosnian scenarios are emblematic. "The conflict in Bosnia deserves American engagement," Lake declared in 1993,

it is a vast humanitarian tragedy; it is driven by ethnic barbarism, it stemmed from aggression against an independent state; it lies alongside the established and emerging market democracies of Europe and can all too easily explode into a wider Balkan conflict. [...] But while we have reasons to engage and persist, they do not obliterate other American interests involving Europe and Russia, and they do not justify the extreme costs of taking unilateral responsibility for imposing a solution.²²⁸

²²⁵ S. Talbott, "Letter to Warren Christopher", 02.01.1994, Unclassified, U.S. Department of State – Virtual Reading Room Documents Search, <https://foia.state.gov/Search/Search.aspx> (from now on US Department of State) Doc. No. C06835979, p. 6.

²²⁶ A. Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement", BCDPL National Archives, p. 11.

²²⁷ Ivi, p. 12.

²²⁸ Ivi, pp. 12-13.

On the other hand, Somalia was different, and before it turned into a disastrous mission, Lake contended: “In Somalia, President Bush engaged our forces to help end a murderous famine. He correctly concluded we could create a secure military environment for humanitarian relief at a reasonable cost and risk.”²²⁹ Subsequently, he concluded, “I believe strongly that our foreign policy must marry principle and pragmatism. We should be principled about our purposes but pragmatic about our means.”²³⁰

This concept extended to the multilateral premise as well. On this matter, Lake declared:

It is beyond debate that multilateral action has certain advantages: it can spread the costs of action [...]; it can foster global support, as with our coalition in the Gulf War; [...] and it can succeed where no nation, acting alone, could have done so [...]. But for any official with responsibilities for our security policies, only one overruling factor can determine whether the U.S. should act multilaterally or unilaterally, and that is America’s interests. We should act multilaterally where doing so advances our interests – and we should act unilaterally when that will serve our purpose.²³¹

Moreover, concerning the use of force, President Clinton asserted the necessity to select the means and level of U.S. military involvement in an official report of 1994. “The costs and risks of U.S. military involvement must be judged to be commensurate with the stakes involved,” he wrote, especially in light of the events in Somalia, “our military engagement must be targeted selectively on those areas that most affect our interests.”²³² The U.S. President continued:

When deciding whether to support a particular UN peace operation, the United States will insist that fundamental questions be asked before new obligations are undertaken. Most UN peacekeeping operations do not involve U.S. forces. On those occasions when we consider contributing U.S. forces to a UN peace operation, we will employ rigorous criteria. [...] Improving the ways the United States and the UN decide upon and conduct peace operations will not make the decision to engage any easier. The lesson we must take away from our first ventures in peace operations is not that we should forswear such operations but that we should employ this tool selectively and more effectively²³³

²²⁹ Ivi, p. 13.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ivi, pp. 13-14.

²³² W. J. Clinton, “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement”, July 1994, Dudley Knox Library, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1994.pdf>, p. 10.

²³³ Ibid.

Therefore, the Clinton administration favored a case-by-case approach, making the concepts of “democratic enlargement” and “assertive multilateralism” lose applicability moving towards the end of Clinton’s first term. Yet, these same principles managed to remain a consistent and solid basis for the legitimation of the Clinton administration’s foreign policy.

The expression “Democratic enlargement” gave way to a new formula, namely “Engagement and Enlargement,” whose meaning was delineated in a report entitled “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement” by President Clinton in July 1994. Its publication followed the Somalian failed intervention, the Rwandan genocide, and the exacerbation of the conflict in former Yugoslavia. Still, the U.S. premises for engagement abroad remained unquestionable. In the preface of the report, President Clinton proclaimed:

Our nation can only address this era’s dangers and opportunities if we remain actively engaged in global affairs. We are the world’s greatest power, and we have global interests as well as responsibilities. As our nation learned after World War I, we can find no security for America in isolationism, nor prosperity in protectionism. For the American people to be safer and enjoy expanding opportunities, our nation must work to deter would-be aggressors, open foreign markets, promote the spread of democracy abroad, encourage sustainable development and pursue new opportunities for peace.²³⁴

Therefore, the idea that engagement through the promotion of democracy and the liberalization of economics and trade was fundamental for U.S. national interests strongly persisted. Furthermore, Clinton reaffirmed the need for American leadership:

American leadership in the world has never been more important. If we exert our leadership abroad, we can make America safer and more prosperous [...]. Without our active leadership and engagement abroad, threats will fester and our opportunities will narrow.²³⁵

Again, to engage multilaterally abroad was essential, but more was needed in order to secure the U.S. security and prosperity. The U.S. leadership was described one more time as essential, despite the non-involvement in Rwanda and Bosnia.

In sum, a case-by-case approach to international crisis was premised in the Clinton administration’s foreign policy vision since the beginning of their first term. Moving forward, President Clinton confirmed the continuity of “democracy” and market-based economy promotion as the pillar of his administration’s national security strategy but in expressing the

²³⁴ W. J. Clinton, “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement”, p. ii.

²³⁵ Ivi, p. 1.

conditions to achieve this end, he took a more selective stance.²³⁶ As reported by scholars Cox and Stokes, throughout Clinton's first term, the conditions for engagement abroad seemed to increasingly be based on the "domestic overspill" from "regional conflict, alliance obligations, and demonstrable U.S. economic interest."²³⁷ Especially after his administration's management of the crises in Somalia, Rwanda and Yugoslavia, the U.S. engagement needed to be more prudent.

6. Clinton foreign policy's consistency and divergence from Bush's approach

Cox and Stokes – commenting on Clinton's foreign policy – assert that the Clinton administration's engagement in the world resembled that of George H.W. Bush for many aspects.²³⁸

Both presidents in the 1990s were fundamentally internationalists. They contended that the United States engagement and leadership were fundamental and constituted an ample opportunity for the country in the post-Cold War era. According to Stokes and Cox, the Bush's conception of a New World Order and Clinton's "democratic enlargement", "engagement and enlargement", "selective engagement", "assertive humanitarianism" and "assertive multilateralism" were all notions aimed at keeping the U.S. interventionism in place after the fall of the bipolar international order.²³⁹ In practice, both Presidents showed commitment – although to different degrees – to the benefits of globalization, supported the liberalization of regional economies, and intervened in international crisis, in the name of the rule of law or democratic enlargement and humanitarian relief. Not only, as argued by scholars Goddard and Krebs,

in the post-Cold War period, US policymakers legitimated a strategy of primacy by arguing that maintaining American hegemony was essential for sustaining a resilient liberal order. The Cold War, they admitted, had prevented that liberal idyll from fully flourishing around the globe. Only under America's

²³⁶ Ivi, p. 19.

²³⁷ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 86.

²³⁸ Ivi, p. 94.

²³⁹ Ibid.

aegis could it now reach its universal potential, and only America's continued hegemony would allow it to endure²⁴⁰

Furthermore, in order to legitimize such primacy,

the United States was facilitating the provision of consensus public goods – international cooperation, free trade and investment, peace, and democracy. However, these public goods were costly, and someone had to pay for them. If the United States was a hegemon, it was a supremely beneficent one. United States hegemony, which ensured that that country had wealth and power to spare, was thus necessary for liberal world order. Second, the rhetoric of the common good also sustained US hegemony by delegitimizing, and allowing the forceful repression of, challengers. It presumed that the constituent members of the international community agreed on what goods were public and what interests were common. If the global public good was obvious to any reasonable, well-intentioned political actor, then advocates of different visions were irrational (not reasonable) or selfish, if not evil. As those who would do harm to the good of the global public, they could be branded its enemies, and therefore legitimately become targets of coercion, or even violence, in its name²⁴¹

This second aspect was particularly true for the Clinton administration's approach, which drew a precise line between the countries that agreed to be part of the market-based, "free community of states," and the countries that deviated from this U.S.-set model. National Security Advisor Lake in 1994 wrote for *Foreign Affairs*:

Our policy must face the reality of recalcitrant and outlaw states that not only choose to remain outside the family but also assault its basic values. There are few 'backlash states': Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya. For now, they lack the resources of a superpower, which would enable them to seriously threaten the democratic order being created around them. Nevertheless, their behavior is often aggressive and defiant. The ties between them are growing as they seek to thwart or quarantine themselves from a global trend to which they seem incapable of adapting.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ S. E. Goddard & R. R. Krebs, "Legitimizing Primacy After the Cold War", p. 144.

²⁴¹ Ivi, pp. 144-145.

²⁴² A. Lake, "Confronting Backlash States", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 73 n. 2, Mar-Apr 1994, p. 45.

Therefore, the United States presented itself, at least theoretically, as a leader in the promotion of a more peaceful, secure, and prosperous international environment. However, that environment did not have a global reach, as it only included the countries that followed the U.S.-set rules for prosperity and peace, namely the establishment and consolidation of market-based and democratic systems. All other systems were “defiant” and needed to be confronted.

Moreover, Clinton’s and Bush’s foreign policy lines demonstrated “considerable unity of purpose.”²⁴³ Bush’s foreign policy is seen as containing a predominant conservative tendency. In fact, the Bush administration had expressed the superiority of “democracy” and “free markets,” endorsing the self-determination of Central and Eastern European countries. However, they never actively pushed for a radical political and economic change in those countries, fearing to destabilize the international balance of power. On the contrary, they always prioritized stability. Even while showing global ambitions, for example through seeking NATO consolidation and enlargement in the European continent, they sought to protect Gorbachev’s hold on power. In addition, not only democracy but also the rule of law promotion was subclassified by power politics. As a matter of fact, the need for collective international responses to breaches of international law, envisaged in the Bush administration’s “New World Order” conception, was never taken so far as to try to change any country’s internal economic and political structure. On the other hand, Clinton is seen as having been more inclined to actively seek change and act on the premises of “democracy and human rights promotion.” His administration carried out military intervention in Haiti to restore the democratically elected government of Aristide. Moreover, they led the U.N. multinational force in Somalia with a significant contingent of troops. In conclusion, even after the failure of the Somalian mission and their hesitancy in intervening in Bosnia and Rwanda, the Clinton administration continued to justify and legitimize their engagement in the world primarily in the name of “democracy promotion” and the protection of “human rights,” seeking political and economic change in the countries where they were intervening.

²⁴³ M. Cox, D. Stokes, *US Foreign Policy*, p. 94.

Chapter 3

The Clinton administration's initial approach to Russia in 1993

1. The Clinton Administration's policy planning regarding Russia: the road to Vancouver

Ever since Clinton's inauguration in January 1993, the newly formed administration devoted significant attention to the definition of a new policy plan toward Russia that would supplant the previous Bush administration's agenda. Concerning relations with Russia, National Security Advisor William Anthony Lake, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Secretary of Defense Les Aspin were among the most influential actors in the new Clinton team.²⁴⁴ However, they did not get to define foreign policy priorities by themselves, as Clinton's old friend Strobe Talbott acquired the role of "most important advisor on all matters relating to Russia."²⁴⁵ As soon as he became President, Clinton created a new position at State Department and nominated Talbott Special Advisor to the Secretary of State and Ambassador-at-large to the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union, which *de facto* transferred to Talbott primary foreign policy responsibility on all issues regarding Russia.²⁴⁶ In addition, President Clinton himself always kept a significantly high level of personal involvement in matters regarding U.S.-Russia relations.

From the very beginning, Russia ranked high on foreign policy priorities for many reasons. First, there was a shared sense of urgency and opportunity regarding the U.S. role in assisting the Russian reform process among all prominent Clinton foreign policymakers. As Goldgeier and McFaul note, "in sharp contrast to Bush and his advisers, it was Russia's internal transformation that became the central focus of Clinton and his team in the first years of their administration."²⁴⁷ The Bush administration had advanced timid aid programs, supporting the Nunn-Lugar nuclear dismantlement program and winning congressional approval for the FREEDOM Support Act.²⁴⁸ The new Clinton team underwrote these programs but "wanted to

²⁴⁴ Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, pp. 354-355.

²⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 357.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 89.

²⁴⁸ Ivi, pp. 91-92.

expand the U.S. effort immediately and dramatically.”²⁴⁹ As a result, when Clinton submitted his first budget for congressional approval in April 1993, bilateral assistance to Russia and other newly independent states had almost doubled to \$704 million compared to what the Bush administration had proposed a year before.²⁵⁰ In addition, in those very months, Russia was undergoing a serious political crisis which could jeopardize the ongoing economic and political liberalization. Lastly, on April 3 and 4, 1993, the first summit between the newly elected U.S. President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin was scheduled to take place in Vancouver, Canada.

Before the summit, two public speeches by President Clinton and Secretary of State Christopher became highly representative of the emerging U.S. foreign policy towards Russia. First, on 26 February 1993, Clinton pronounced his address to the Centennial Celebration at American University in Washington DC entitled “American Leadership and Global Change.”²⁵¹ The speech focused mainly on the envisaged American foreign policy goals under his leadership, and Russia immediately appeared to have a special place. There, he declared that the U.S. would pursue the “enduring objectives of peace and prosperity, of democracy and human dignity.”²⁵² The United States - to achieve these objectives – could not retreat into isolationism. Instead, the new administration perceived an obligation to keep the United States engaged internationally. Given the assumption that democracies do not engage in conflicts against each other, the new Clinton administration had to foster the emergence and consolidation of democratic governments to ensure global security. Moreover, in their view, free trade played a fundamental role:

as philosophers from Thucydides to Adam Smith have noted, the habits of commerce run counter to the habits of war. Just as neighbors who raise each others barns are less likely to become arsonists, people who raise each others living standards through commerce are less likely to become combatants. So if we believe in the bonds of democracy, we must resolve to strengthen the bonds of commerce.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 92.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ W. J. Clinton, “Remarks by the President at American University Centennial Celebration: American Leadership and Global Change”, 26.02.1993, APP.

²⁵² Ivi, p. 4.

²⁵³ Ibid.

Furthermore, to legitimize such engagement, Clinton highlighted that the United States' own security and prosperity were affected by the nature of other governments worldwide.²⁵⁴ On this matter, the American President stated:

Our leadership is especially important for the world's new and emerging democracies. To grow and deepen their legitimacy, to foster a middle class and a civic culture, they need the ability to tap into a growing global economy. And our security and our prosperity will be greatly affected in the years ahead by how many of these nations can become and stay democracies.²⁵⁵

Having defined the premises of American internationalism, President Clinton introduced his administration's policy towards Russia by disclosing the "agenda for the American action in a global economy." The agenda comprised the five steps the United States was to take to delineate a "new direction internally and to help create a new direction internationally."²⁵⁶ The policy regarding the Russian Federation constituted the fifth and last point of such agenda. Russia was the only country specifically mentioned in the agenda, and this element surely represented an indicator of importance among all foreign policy issues. In particular, Clinton expressed his administration's commitment to the success of "democracy" in Russia.²⁵⁷ In other words, the Clinton administration wanted to ensure the continuation and consolidation of the reforms initiated by President Yeltsin. Following their reasoning, a democratic Russia with a free market and trade would unquestionably bolster U.S. prosperity and security.

Approaching the Vancouver Summit, the new Clinton administration had come to delineate a much more detailed strategy towards Russia. It became evident when Secretary of State Christopher addressed the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations on 22 March 1993. In his speech "Securing U.S. Interests while Supporting Russian Reform," Christopher reaffirmed the foundational principle that American prosperity was strictly related to the global environment: "America cannot thrive in a world of economic recession or violent conflicts or a world which

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ W. J. Clinton, "Remarks by the President at American University Centennial Celebration", APP, p. 6.

²⁵⁶ Ivi, p. 10.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

is riven with dictatorships.”²⁵⁸ Again, the connection with Russia was striking. The pillars of the new American foreign policy, namely building U.S. prosperity through economic integration and the promotion of democratic values, formed the basis for one of the administration’s highest foreign policy priorities: helping Russia to build “a free society and a market economy.”²⁵⁹ “That is, in my judgement,” Christopher declared, “the greatest strategic challenge of our time. Bringing Russia [...] into the family of peaceful nations will serve our highest security, economic and moral interests.”²⁶⁰

The Secretary of State also specified the ways through which supporting Russian reform would be an investment in U.S. prosperity and long-term security in his address at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota on 27 May 1993.²⁶¹ “If Russia succeeds in building a free society and market economy,” he specified, “the payoffs for America will be profound: in the reduced threat of nuclear war; in lower defense budgets; and in the vast new markets that can fuel global prosperity and create jobs for Americans.”²⁶² Furthermore, “helping democracy succeed in Russia is probably the wisest - and least expensive - investment that we can make today in America's security,” Christopher continued.²⁶³ If the reforms were to fail, then Russia would revert to dictatorship and confrontational behavior.²⁶⁴ For Russia to be a “peaceful nation,” Christopher reiterated, the United States had to help “transform a totalitarian system into a democracy” and “transform a command economy into one based upon free markets.”²⁶⁵

Having advanced the urgency and sense of opportunity for supporting Russian reforms, Christopher moved on to practical concerns, namely the specific areas where the U.S. should

²⁵⁸ W. Christopher, “Address before the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations, the Executives’ Club of Chicago, and the Mid-America Committee: Securing US Interests while supporting Russian Reform”, 22.03.1993, *Department of State Dispatch*, vol. 4 n. 13, p. 3.

²⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 5.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ W. Christopher, “Address at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota: US Support for Russian Reform: An Investment in American’s Security”, 27.05.1993, *Department of State Dispatch*, n. 22 vol. 4.

²⁶² Ivi, p. 2.

²⁶³ Ivi, p. 4.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ W. Christopher, “Address before the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations”, p. 7.

have conducted its assistance. Reporting the Clinton administration's plan, the Secretary of State announced that the number one area where the United States' interests were directly engaged was the management of the nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union.²⁶⁶ In particular, the Clinton administration had to continue working on dismantling Soviet nuclear weapons, initiated with the passage of the Nunn-Lugar Act under the Bush administration.²⁶⁷ Another important goal, Christopher stated, was trying to strengthen the groups in Russia that formed the "bulwark of a thriving democracy."²⁶⁸ Specifically, he was referring to younger people, who were perceived to be pushing for more "economic freedom and closer contacts with the West," as well as independent media networks.²⁶⁹ Thirdly, the United States had to support the Russian privatization effort decisively.²⁷⁰ Moreover, Christopher added,

at the end of the day, Russia's progress toward the market and democracy cannot occur without an overhaul of the general ground rules of the Russian economy. It will be vital to reduce their budget deficit, control the money supply, stabilize the ruble, and close down inefficient factories. Unfortunately, these are also steps that will cause the greatest pain and political risk. Here, again, Russia needs our help²⁷¹

Secretary of State Christopher's address in March 1993 had given a comprehensive introduction of the U.S. approach to Russian assistance. The next month, at his meeting with President Yeltsin in Vancouver, Clinton would officially define the tangible steps the United States would take to assist Russian reform programs.

2. The Vancouver Summit

Right before the official meeting with President Yeltsin, National Security Advisor Lake and Secretary of State Christopher - in a memorandum for Clinton - had proposed the critical

²⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 9.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 10.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

points the U.S. President needed to set forward with his counterpart.²⁷² In addition, the National Security Council Scope Paper attached to the memorandum defined the Clinton administration's agenda to be presented at the summit.²⁷³ In these documents, both the National Security Council and the State Department stressed the need to present United States-Russia relations as a partnership rather than a U.S.-led aid program.²⁷⁴ What had to emerge was the reciprocal need for cooperation between the two countries.

This was especially true at that specific time when President Yeltsin faced a strong opposition from the Russian Parliament.²⁷⁵ Historian Stephen Kotkin reports that, after Yeltsin's election, a "tug of war ensued, which seemed to turn on political programs, since the president backed market liberalization, while the Supreme Soviet passed laws to increase industrial subsidies and pensions."²⁷⁶ In addition, the battle seemed to be based on principle since Yeltsin appeared inclined to override the Soviet Constitution still in force while the parliament defended it.²⁷⁷ The bottom line was, Kotkin asserts, that "the two sides were pursuing parallel quests for absolute supremacy."²⁷⁸ The Russian political crisis was against the backdrop of the Vancouver Summit, which made Clinton's approach to President Yeltsin a particularly delicate matter. Yeltsin's internal standing was going to be tested soon after the summit, on 25 April 1993, when Russians were called to decide on amendments on Russia's Constitution through a referendum.²⁷⁹ Additionally, as scholars Goldgeier and McFaul report, the first attempt at stabilization in Russia - guided by the Gaidar team - had failed, and the

²⁷² A. Lake, "Anthony Lake to President William J. Clinton re: Your Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin", 01.04.1993, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, Box 810, Folder POTUS Briefing Books - POTUS Trip to Vancouver, April 3-4, 1993, NSC Scope Paper and Memorandum from Secretary Christopher.

²⁷³ A. Lake, "Anthony Lake to President William J. Clinton re: Your Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin", NSC Scope Paper, p. 5.

²⁷⁴ A. Lake, "Anthony Lake to President William J. Clinton re: Your Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin", NSC Scope Paper, pp. 5-6 and A. Lake, "Anthony Lake to President William J. Clinton re: Your Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin", Memorandum from Secretary Christopher, p. 4.

²⁷⁵ S. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, New York (USA), Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 167.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 168.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

privatization program was six months old.²⁸⁰ As a consequence, they argue, “it was in the context of stalling economic reforms and political polarization in Russia and not the euphoric moment of communism’s collapse that Clinton and his team were compelled to devise a strategy for dealing with Russia.”²⁸¹ For all these reasons, the Vancouver Summit occurred at a time when Russia desperately needed the United States’ economic and technical assistance in implementing the radical programs of economic and political liberalization.

From the Clinton administration’s perspective, it was important that Yeltsin’s popular approval would be confirmed as the United States wanted Russian reforms to go forward. Furthermore, they needed Russian cooperation in matters of foreign policy and international security.²⁸² The NSC scope paper directed to President Clinton stated:

Despite the problems Russia faces, its need for Western assistance, and the psychological trauma it has suffered in losing both its empire and its national identity, the first point you should be stressing is that this is very much a meeting of equals. Russia needs our assistance, but we need Russian reforms to succeed in order to have the resources and the time to reshape our own economy and cut the defense budget. Russia needs to strengthen its partnership with us on foreign policy issues because its military can no longer defend Russian interests by threat and brute force. But Russian cooperation is essential to all our efforts at the UN [...]. Russia can no longer threaten us militarily as it once did, but we cannot curb the spread of nuclear technologies or advanced weaponry if Russia decides it is in its national interest to sell rather than to scrap its enormous stockpile of weapons²⁸³

The Clinton administration was going to condition U.S. assistance on implementing specific measures to control inflation and other macroeconomic factors to ensure that – following their vision - the reforms would be beneficial in the long term. As suggested by NSA Anthony Lake at the conclusion of his memorandum to the president: “You should tell Yeltsin that you are prepared to help him with technical assistance, with programs that will encourage American

²⁸⁰ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 88.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² A. Lake, “Anthony Lake to President William J. Clinton re: Your Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin”, BCDPL National Archives, NSC Scope Paper, p. 3.

²⁸³ Ivi, pp. 5-6.

trade and investment if he takes the politically difficult steps required to get Russia's finances under control.”²⁸⁴

In short, the approach that President Clinton had to take vis-à-vis his Russian counterpart was synthesized effectively by Secretary of State Warren Christopher. In his memorandum, Christopher pointed out that the president should express U.S. support “for building democracy and market economic reform in Russia and President Yeltsin's leadership in that effort.”²⁸⁵ In addition, the president should uphold the principle of “mutually reinforcing partnership,” as the Secretary of State advised Clinton to “stress the importance of an active and effective U.S.-Russian partnership that benefits both sides.”²⁸⁶

According to Anthony Lake, the Vancouver Summit symbolized “the dramatic turn in U.S.-Russian relations during the past year.”²⁸⁷ “No longer adversaries,” the United States was now “one of the strongest supporters of Russian reforms.”²⁸⁸ In particular, the working dinner with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on 3 April 1993 centered around economic matters. At the opening, President Clinton made clear that his administration supported Yeltsin’s economic reforms. Clinton introduced the conversation: “What I thought we would talk about tonight is what we can do. I want to put together a program to build on what you are doing and what you think is important.”²⁸⁹ Russian Minister of Finance Boris Fedorov responded:

It is important that all elements of our reform package be supported by the United States and the rest of the world. The reforms are in three main directions: first, the battle with inflation [...]. That is why it is so important to implement a stabilization fund. [...] Success in our fight with inflation will mean that we

²⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 6

²⁸⁵ A. Lake, “Anthony Lake to President William J. Clinton re: Your Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin”, BCDPL National Archives, Memorandum from Secretary Christopher, p. 4.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ A. Lake, “Anthony Lake to President William J. Clinton re: Your Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin”, BCDPL National Archives, NSC Scope Paper, p. 3.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, “Working Dinner with President Boris Yeltsin”, 03.04.1993, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, Box 145, Folder 9302226.

can move forward with wider economic reforms and restructuring, the creation of private enterprises, and conversion of the military.²⁹⁰

President Yeltsin also added:

What we need is to pursue a very tough budgetary policy. There was a period when we lost control of it and adopted a populist program. But now Fedorov is in control and in pursuit of stability. Even in April with these hard times, we won't bend.²⁹¹

To these proposals, Secretary of the Treasury Lloyd Bentsen expressed American support:

I am particularly impressed by the Fedorov plan. It is absolutely critical to stabilize the ruble. We will help if we can. [...] If the Fedorov plan is put into effect, you will stabilize the currency and get the deficit down.²⁹²

The most remarkable achievement of the Vancouver summit, however, had been announced earlier that afternoon. At the one-on-one meeting on bilateral issues, Clinton had proposed \$1.6 billion in American assistance programs to Russia. It was intended to express the U.S. determination to stay engaged in support of Russian reforms and spur the Western allies to work on a larger supplemental package.²⁹³ The Vancouver package included

²⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 3.

²⁹¹ Ivi, p. 4.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ A. Lake, "Anthony Lake to President William J. Clinton re: Your Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin", BCDPL National Archives, NSC Scope Paper, One-on-One Meeting with President Boris Yeltsin, p. 1.

loan guarantees to build apartments for demobilized Russian soldiers; loans for Russian entrepreneurs; medical supplies, food and grain assistance; funds to help the Russian Government sell state-owned industries, and technical advisers to help repair pipelines and oil wells and begin exporting again.²⁹⁴

The next day, Secretary Bentsen went into more detail about the economic assistance program, particularly expressing the administration's intention to involve G-7 countries:

We fully understand with your inflation and budget concerns that you need early action on assistance. The President has directed us - and Secretary Christopher and I will be attending the G-7 meeting [later that year] - to try to set up a new facility for countries that don't have a full economic program yet in place, like Russia. By creating this new facility, we hope to release \$500 million almost immediately. Once the economic program is in place, then we would envision several billion more this year. But you need to put your central bank in order. It is an absolute imperative that you get control of your currency. The G-7 can implement by the end of the year once the economic stabilization program is put in place. We are going to encourage the World Bank to expand its activities in agriculture and energy. Many countries are having their own economic problems, but they want to help. But all of this is predicated on your getting control of the central bank.²⁹⁵

Then, Bentsen expressly referred to the results of the Russian referendum. "We hope you have a big win in the referendum," the Secretary told Yeltsin. "Yes, true, true. This is a collective work – we have to work together," the Russian President replied.²⁹⁶

At that meeting on 4 April 1993 discussions focused on security issues. As mentioned, nuclear dismantlement ranked high on the American security agenda. On that occasion, President Clinton advanced his concern for Russian arms sales to foreign countries. There were some countries, according to the American President, which continued to "promote

²⁹⁴ T. L. Friedman, "SUMMIT IN VANCOUVER; CLINTON PRESENTS BILLION TO YELTSIN IN U.S. AID PACKAGE", *The New York Times*, 04.04.1993.

²⁹⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, "Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on Security Issues", 04.04.1993, BCDPL National Archives, 145, 9302226, p. 9.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

terrorism.”²⁹⁷ Therefore, Clinton needed reassurance on weapons destruction. “We are concerned about arms sales and nuclear sales”, he continued, “on chemical warfare agents, I’m frankly concerned that those regimes who don’t respect human life will use them.”²⁹⁸ To this, President Yeltsin wanted to show as much collaboration as possible. He affirmed: “The export of chemical weapons is completely forbidden to any state. We are only working on destruction and doing it with you. These are weapons to destroy, not to export. All our strength is being spent on their destruction.”²⁹⁹ Moreover, the Russian delegation seemed to be more forthcoming with their security proposals. President Yeltsin announced the Russian unilateral actions by raising the question of nuclear dismantlement. “Let’s talk about the destruction of nuclear weapons”, the Russian President said. “We are working to destroy our heavy missiles. As for warheads, we destroyed 3,000 in February.”³⁰⁰ Furthermore, he wanted to “discuss taking nuclear systems out of readiness status early. If we can agree on a ‘not combat-ready’ status for those systems, then all the world will know that they are very tightly under mutual control.”³⁰¹ To all these proposals, Clinton replied that they would have an answer after reviewing all the issues.

After two days of discussions, the two presidents held a news conference. There, President Clinton defined the ongoing reforms in Russia as the “heroic deeds of Boris Yeltsin and the Russian people.” This was a clear effort to boost Yeltsin’s internal standing before the referendum on 25 April 1993. The American President pushed further, making American support explicit by declaring that it was in the “self-interest and high duty of all the world’s democracies to stand by Russia’s democratic reforms in their new hour of challenge.”³⁰² Subsequently, President Clinton went into detail about the American assistance programs:

I discussed with President Yeltsin the initiatives totaling \$1.6 billion intended to bolster political and economic reforms in Russia. These programs already are funded. They can provide immediate and

²⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 3.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ivi, p. 6.

³⁰¹ Ivi, p. 7.

³⁰² Vancouver Summit Press Conference with Clinton & Yeltsin, 04.04.1993, BCDPL Digital Footage.

tangible results for the Russian people. We will invest in the growth of Russia's private sector through two funds to accelerate privatization and to lend to new small private businesses. We will resume grain sales to Russia and extend \$700 million in loans for Russia to purchase American grain. We will launch a pilot project to help provide housing and retraining for the Russian military officers as they move into jobs in the civilian economy.³⁰³

Furthermore, President Clinton stressed the need to define the new American-Russian relations as a partnership, conferring prestige to the Russian government:

Our new democratic partnership can make an historic contribution for all humanity well into the next century. Both of us know that it requires effort and vigilance to make progress along the path toward democracy's ideal. And I believe we both see those ideas as rooted deeply in the human spirit.³⁰⁴

Similarly, Russian President Yeltsin talked about cooperation rather than assistance:

Bill Clinton's economic package is predicated on the fact that America wishes to see Russia prosper with a blooming economy. America intends to support Russian entrepreneurs, particularly small and medium farmers, Russia's youth. It's going to cooperate in housing construction for the military and in other areas. All of this is in support of Russian reforms, a part of the strategic form of cooperation between us.³⁰⁵

This went accordingly to what had been decided the day before in private. "We had better not use the word 'assistance' (pomoshch), but 'support' (poderzhka)", Russian Press Secretary

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

had said. “Yes, ‘support’ (sovpoderzhka) or ‘cooperation’ (sotrudnichestro)”, President Yeltsin agreed.³⁰⁶

After the news conference, President Clinton summarized the approach that his administration had committed to undertake towards Yeltsin’s government. Answering to a question, he declared:

I have made it clear that the United States is committed to democracy, to human rights, to market economics, to reducing the nuclear threat, to respecting national sovereignty of the other newly independent states. We have interests and values. They are embodied by the policies and the direction of President Yeltsin. They are enduring. He is the duly elected President of Russia. And as long as he is, I intend to work with him and support him because he reflects those enduring values.³⁰⁷

In conclusion, scholars Goldgeier and McFaul assert that

The scale and the scope of pledges announced at the Vancouver summit marked a major turning point in U.S. aid to Russia. The United States had agreed not only to provide significant amounts of assistance; it also promised to assist reforms in virtually every sphere of public and private life in Russia. From environmental policy to the development of women’s organizations, from the restructuring of the coal industry to the reorganization of political parties, from the dismantlement of nuclear weapons to the opening of business schools, the United States (and other Western countries) initiated a massive and comprehensive program aimed at transforming almost every aspect of Russian economic, political, and social life.³⁰⁸

3. The referendum in Russia and the Clinton administration’s efforts to gather financial support from their allies and international financial institutions

³⁰⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, “Meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on Security Issues”, BCDPL National Archives, p. 11.

³⁰⁷ Vancouver Summit Press Conference with Clinton & Yeltsin, BCDPL Digital Footage.

³⁰⁸ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 92.

Aware that the new bilateral aid announced at the Vancouver summit would not be enough to see market reform succeed in Russia, the Clinton administration started working simultaneously on multilateral and coordinated assistance with their allies and international financial institutions.³⁰⁹ As specified at the Vancouver Summit, Clinton thought that reaching macroeconomic stabilization in Russia was fundamental for the reforms to be beneficial. Unfortunately, Russia's first attempt at stabilization had failed, leading to the dismissal of Gaidar from the Russian government a month before the Clinton administration took office.³¹⁰ As reported by Spohr, by December 1992,

the program of economic reform was faltering, with inflation, though massively reduced, still running at an appalling 25–30% a month (equivalent to an annual rate of 2,200%). Industrial output and trade were also down by more than 25% from 1991, and the budget deficit was running at 20% of GDP. As a result, Yeltsin was forced by an angry Congress to surrender Gaidar – the architect and symbol of Russia's economic change.³¹¹

In his place, Viktor Chernomyrdin - chairman of the board of the newly formed Gazprom corporation, who had run the gas industry during the Gorbachev years – was elected Prime Minister by the Russian Congress.³¹² Still, after Clinton became President, the new team at the Treasury Department believed that a “massive influx of Western capital might be able to nudge stabilization back on track.”³¹³ However, more than the bilateral initiatives proposed by Clinton was going to be needed. The answer, therefore, was to obtain financial support for stabilization from multilateral institutions and G-7 countries.³¹⁴

At the closing of the summit, the joint statement of the Presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation stated:

³⁰⁹ Ivi, p. 98.

³¹⁰ Ivi, p. 99.

³¹¹ K. Spohr, *Post-Wall, Post-Square*, p. 1079.

³¹² Ibid. and R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, pp. 27, 35.

³¹³ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 99.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

The Presidents agreed that Russia's harmonious integration into the community of democratic nations and the world economy is essential. They therefore called for accelerated G-7 development of substantial and effective new economic initiatives to support political and economic reform in Russia. In this connection, the Presidents welcomed the extraordinary meeting of the foreign and finance ministers of the G-7 countries and the Russian Federation scheduled for April 14 – 15 in Tokyo. [...] The United States announced its support for Russia's intention to become a full member of GATT and to begin, in the near future, official talks on the conditions of Russia's accession to GATT.³¹⁵

At the G-7 meeting in Tokyo, however, the world's seven leading industrial nations did not show the same level of commitment as the United States. While the Group of Seven unanimously endorsed Yeltsin's reform efforts, they struggled to convene on an aid program that would help the success of his economic reforms and support the Russian President's internal standing before the referendum at the end of the month.³¹⁶ Eventually, the foreign and finance ministers of the G-7 countries agreed on a \$28.4-billion package of multilateral measures - including \$4 billion in fast-disbursing funds from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank - while the United States announced an extra \$1.8 billion in bilateral programs.³¹⁷ The Clinton administration now looked forward to the G-7 economic summit in July 1993 for further multilateral assistance.

In the meantime, on 25 April 1993, Russian voters were called to answer four questions. The first question was whether they had confidence in the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin. The second question regarded their approval or disapproval of the Russian government's political and economic policies since 1992. Finally, the third and fourth questions asked the Russian voters whether they wanted to hold early elections for the Russian President and the People's Deputies of the Russian Federation.³¹⁸ Yeltsin and his supporters backed a

³¹⁵ Vancouver Declaration: Joint Statement of the Presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation, 04.04.1993, for immediate release, U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/WCPD-1993-04-12/pdf/WCPD-1993-04-12-Pg545.pdf>.

³¹⁶ E. Sciolino, "YELTSIN IN BACKED AT TALKS IN TOKYO", *The New York Times*, 04.04.1993.

³¹⁷ C. Tarnoff, "CRS Report for Congress. U.S. Assistance to the Former Soviet Union. 1991-2001: A History of Administration and Congressional Action", 15.01.2002, Congressional Research Service – The Library of Congress, <https://crsreports.congress.gov>, (from now on Congressional Research Service), p. 12.

³¹⁸ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia: A Journey through the Yeltsin era*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 101.

Yes vote on the first two questions and a No vote on the last two.³¹⁹ By contrast, the opposition supported a No vote on the first two questions and a Yes vote on the third and fourth.³²⁰ Eventually, most voters taking part in the referendum expressed confidence in Yeltsin as president and his reforms, while they rejected the motion for early elections.³²¹

The next day, President Clinton phoned Yeltsin. “Congratulations on your splendid victory,” said Clinton, “I’m about to issue a statement in support of your policies. I want you to know that we’re in this with you for the long haul. We made some significant progress in Vancouver and Tokyo. We’ll keep working here to be supportive.”³²² Yeltsin replied, stressing the importance of American assistance:

I am gratified that the people have confirmed their attitude toward reform and the Presidency. A major part of the credit goes to you and what you said when we met in Vancouver. I am very grateful. It is not only our common task, it is a common battle and common victory.³²³

Then, President Yeltsin made sure to include some statements to strengthen their relationship:

I want you to know that all the Russian people were pleased with our meeting in Vancouver. They really understood your sincerity. The people of Russia felt close to you as the President of the United States, the most powerful nation in the world.³²⁴

Not only did the bipolar confrontational order seem long gone, but solid strategic cooperation built on a growing personal trust between the presidents appeared to be forming quickly. From the U.S. perspective, reforms in Russia needed to go forward, and having Yeltsin as head of state was the best chance to see that succeed. At the same time, on the Russian side, American support was fundamental, and Yeltsin’s government saw in Clinton a strong ally that, differently from his predecessor, had placed Russia at the top of foreign policy priorities and was willing to propose bold assistance programs.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, “Telcon with President Yeltsin of Russia, 26.04.1993, Confidential, BCDPL National Archives, 147, 9302835, p. 1.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ivi, p. 2.

4. The growing political polarization in Russia and the U.S. response

Although President Yeltsin had just gained a big win, the power struggle with the Supreme Soviet and the Russian Congress of the People's Deputies did not end with the referendum results.³²⁵ On the contrary, in the following months, the political division only grew. Especially in June and July 1993, Yeltsin's supporters – calling for a new constitution - and his opponents seemed to have developed an “irreconcilable hostility” to the point that the situation became very critical in August.³²⁶ What is more, an increasingly harsher economic crisis accompanied the deepening political hassle.³²⁷

Notwithstanding, as the situation in Russia deteriorated, the multilateral foreign support guided by the United States only grew. Right after the G-7 meeting on 14 and 15 April 1993, Strobe Talbott talked before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee, which drafts foreign aid legislation. Again, he depicted Russian aid not as a matter of altruism but as a policy that would ultimately serve American national interest. According to him, all the measures that the Clinton administration had backed in support of reform – the \$1.6-billion Vancouver initiative, the \$28.4-billion G-7 package, and the additional \$1.8 billion in bilateral programs - fed the nation's well-being.³²⁸ At large, an effective U.S. intervention could substantially prevent going back to a Cold War situation, but, as importantly,

an investment now in the heroic effort of these new democracies to restructure their economies will pay dividends down the road. A Russia, a Ukraine, a Kazakhstan fully integrated into the international economy will be a reliable source for raw materials and manufactured products, a reliable market for American goods and services, and a reliable partner in diplomacy and in dealing with global threats to human welfare and the environment.³²⁹

³²⁵ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 102.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ S. Talbott, “US must lead strategic alliance with Post-Soviet Reform”, Statement before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operation of the House Appropriations Committee, 19.04.1993, *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, vol. 4 n. 17, p. 3.

³²⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 1-2.

In addition, Talbott asserted the reforms would bring about better economic and social conditions in Russia and, therefore, supporting Yeltsin's government was fundamental:

One of the main reasons that President Yeltsin is embattled today is that too many Russians identify reform with hardship - with skyrocketing prices, falling living standards, and deteriorating social order. Unless the reformist government is able to build a broader and more active constituency for its policies in the months to come, those policies - and that government - will be in jeopardy.³³⁰

As a result, the United States had to remain heavily engaged so that, in the short term, "from the outside," they would see "the benefits of reform visible and tangible to the people on the inside - that is, average Russians."³³¹ Furthermore, for the long term, they would "find targets for support that will last (and) that represent trends" they hoped would "become irreversible," so that to support an ongoing process that could survive "the buffeting of political and economic setbacks."³³²

A week before the G-7 Summit in Tokyo - to be held from 6 to 9 July 1993 - President Clinton phoned Yeltsin. The Russian President was still struggling to hold power, but he reassured Clinton while stressing the importance of increasing the level of assistance:

First, as for the Constitution, the process is going on well. And, I believe, if we resolve this, it will help improve our economy. Of course, as to Tokyo discussion on all the parts of the \$43 billion [counting the \$15 billion public debt rescheduling], we will need to exert additional efforts. Today everyone is waiting for the practical integration of Russia into the world economy and the removal of all the obstacles, as we discussed in Vancouver. I really count on our meeting in Tokyo.³³³

To this, President Clinton replied:

³³⁰ *Ivi*, p. 2.

³³¹ *Ibid*.

³³² *Ibid*.

³³³ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation", 28.06.1993, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, 152, 9304861, pp. 1-2.

The IMF is going to approve the first \$1.5 billion in assistance this week. The G-7 is shaping up well on the Russian issues. I think it will agree on the privatization fund, including establishing an office in Moscow to improve the efficiency of our assistance.³³⁴

As predicted, following the discussions in Tokyo, the seven most industrialized countries affirmed their support for Russia's political and economic reform, especially considering the ongoing turmoil inside the country. They expressed their support for the new constitution envisaged by Yeltsin and for deepening their attempt to reshape the Russian economy, according to the line set by the Clinton administration. However, the Group of Seven also stressed the need to define the Russian reform progress as primarily a self-help effort. In the press conference held on 9 July 1993, Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa declared:

The G-7 leaders supported the reform efforts of President Yeltsin and also expressed the hope that a new constitution would be adopted successfully and that a democratic and stable Russia would emerge. [...] On the economic side, [...] all the G-7 leaders welcomed the continuing courageous reform efforts with the support of the Russian people in spite of the numerous difficulties experienced in the economic area. While still reaffirming their support for the self-help efforts of Russia, they stressed the need to continue the incessant efforts on the Russian side for their economic reform.³³⁵

Particularly, concerning economic issues, the Group of Seven unanimously declared:

We welcome the further progress made by Russia since Munich [previous G-7 Summit in 1992] in its courageous reform efforts under the leadership of President Yeltsin and supported by the Russian people in the recent referendum. We urge Russia to intensify its efforts to reduce inflation and the budget deficit,

³³⁴ Ivi, p. 3.

³³⁵ Press Conference by Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation at the 1993 G7 Economic Summit: Tokyo Summit III, G7 research group, University of Toronto, <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/1993tokyo/russia/index.html>.

and to take all the necessary legal and administrative measures to build on the strong start in privatization and to promote further structural adjustment. [...] We welcome the creation of the IMF Systemic Transformation Facility and its \$1.5 billion first tranche disbursement to Russia. [...] We also welcome the recent approval of the World Bank's \$610 million oil sector rehabilitation loan associated with the EBRD's \$250 million confidence. We have made commitments to provide funds to establish a \$300 million Small- and Medium-sized Enterprise Fund in close cooperation with the EBRD. We recognize the importance of improved market access for economic progress in Russia. We will work with Russia as it proceeds towards accession to the GATT. [...] In total, this program is expected to mobilize \$3 billion. [...] In turn, we urge the strengthening of Russian implementation efforts.³³⁶

On his part, President Yeltsin – who joined the meeting on the last day - connected the need for further assistance with the internal unrest:

In the year that has passed, relations with Russia have changed. We have moved along toward a democratic and free market economy. However, the process of change has been a difficult one. The seriousness of the situation in Russia has made it possible for the Group of Seven to understand the possible outcome of such reforms and the importance of it for the world. [...] A democratic Russia is a major factor in the stability of the world. Naturally, the economic stability is important too. [...] At Tokyo we have seen that there is a partnership that is being formed for the long term. Russia is ready to cooperate throughout the vast range of possible spheres of cooperation in keeping with the appropriate declaration. We must strengthen peace in all regions of the world, and humanity must be helped and assisted in its fight against terrorism. We must get rid of weapons of mass destruction. We must actively participate in the process of settling crises such as that in Yugoslavia and other parts of the world.³³⁷

³³⁶ Economic Declaration: A Strengthened Commitment to Jobs and Growth, 09.07.1993, Tokyo, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Database of Japanese Politics and International Relations, Documents of Summit Meetings in the Past, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/summit/2000/past_summit/19/e19_a.html.

³³⁷ Press Conference by Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation at the 1993 G7 Economic Summit.

These statements were perfectly in line with the policy planning that the Clinton administration had envisaged for Russia and the multilateral assistance efforts. At the Summit Conference, Clinton concluded:

The \$3 billion program we announced here to help Russia move to a market system will not only bolster prospects for freedom there, it is a very solid investment for the United States; funds to move state-owned industries to private hands to make the free enterprise system work, funds to make available operations for new enterprises, funds from the World Bank, and funds for credits for export. All these things will help Americans to do more business in Russia, and will help Russia to succeed in a way that will continue the path chartered by the end of the cold war; fewer nuclear weapons, fewer defense investments, more opportunities to invest in people and jobs, and a peaceful future.³³⁸

In conclusion, the July 1993 Tokyo Summit established a \$3 billion Special Privatization and Restructuring Program, which included \$500 million in bilateral grants, to be used mainly for technical assistance to newly privatized companies; \$1 billion in bilateral export credits, and \$1 billion in World Bank and EBRD loans to be used by Russian companies to import Western goods; and \$500 million in World Bank loans to be used by local governments to help them substitute health, education, and other services previously supplied to employees by state-owned companies.³³⁹ In addition, the G-7 also agreed with the U.S. proposal to establish the Support Implementation Group in Moscow, a permanent mission to effectively monitor Western aid.³⁴⁰

5. The Clinton administration deals with the Russian constitutional crisis

³³⁸ “SUMMIT IN TOKYO; President Clinton on Summit Conference: ‘We Have Made a Serious Start’”, *The New York Times*, 10.07.1993.

³³⁹ C. Tarnoff, CRS Report for Congress, “U.S. Assistance to the Former Soviet Union”, Congressional Research Service, p. 15.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Approaching the fall of 1993, the confrontation between President Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament continued to escalate. Finally, on 15 September 1993, Yeltsin signed a decree annulling the powers of the two-tiered legislature – even though he had no constitutional power to do so - and set new parliamentary elections as well as a referendum for the new Constitution.³⁴¹ As a result, the Russian Parliament passed several resolutions dissolving the presidential powers vested in Yeltsin and regarding his actions as a coup d'état.³⁴² Medvedev specifies that the Russian Constitution contained a clause stating that in case of an attempt by the president to disband a legally elected representative body, his powers would cease to exist.³⁴³

As these events unfolded, the leaders of all Western countries sided with Yeltsin.³⁴⁴ On this matter, historian Sarotte notes that

Kohl and Clinton tried to make sense of these alarming developments, with the American noting hopefully that Yeltsin had promised to “proceed peacefully.” The German chancellor was skeptical, saying that “nobody on our side can really tell what is happening,” but “out of all the people that play a role there, I trust him [Yeltsin] the most.” Whatever Yeltsin’s flaws, Kohl added, “if he’s removed, it will be much worse.”³⁴⁵

Moreover, at the beginning of the month, President Clinton had directly expressed his support to Yeltsin:

³⁴¹ S. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, p. 168 and M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 397.

³⁴² Ivi, p. 107.

³⁴³ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 106.

³⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 109.

³⁴⁵ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 398.

I just wanted to call and check in with you. I haven't talked with you since the G-7 summit. I know you are going through some difficult times. I just wanted you to know that I'm thinking of you in these difficult times and to tell you still have my support.³⁴⁶

Then, he added, mentioning a new \$2.5 billion bilateral aid initiative for Russia to be approved by the U.S. Senate:

Congress is back in session today. I want you to know we will be working hard on passing the \$2.5 billion assistance package for Russia. It is now before the Senate; it has already passed the House. It will be a difficult fight but I think we will win it. It is difficult not because there isn't support for Russian aid, the difficulties are because of our own budget problems. But I'm confident we will win it.³⁴⁷

As the crisis reached its highest point, on 21 September 1993, President Clinton reaffirmed his full support to his Russian counterpart and asked what he could do to further that support:

I have just been briefed on your speech tonight [the video appeal to the Russian people about the dissolution of the Parliament broadcasted on 21 September 1993] and I wanted to call you right away to get your personal sense of what this step will mean for you, for the Russian political process, and for reform. I want to issue a public statement to state my support for you but before I do, I wanted to hear from you how this affects your position and the process of reform in Russia.³⁴⁸

President Yeltsin, in response, described the ongoing situation and explained his decision to dissolve the parliament:

³⁴⁶ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation", 07.09.1993, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, 160, 9306715, p. 1.

³⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 3.

³⁴⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation", 21.09.1993, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, 163, 9307161, p. 1.

Bill, the Supreme Soviet has totally gone out of control. It no longer supports the reform process. They have become communist. We cannot no longer put up with that. For that reason, today I signed a decree on elections to a new democratic assembly to take place on December 11 and 12. In that period, the Supreme Soviet and Congress actions will not have any effect. Everything will be governed by Presidential decree. All the democratic forces are supporting me.³⁴⁹

Clinton agreed with Yeltsin's order and wanted to hear how the reform process would be affected:

That's good. Your speech comes at an important time here – the Senate will act this week on the \$2.5 billion assistance package for Russia and the other states. [...] I intend to be in touch with our allies in Europe and Asia to underscore the importance of support for reform in Russia at this critical juncture. I just want to say again that you will have my support and the support of the American people. I will continue to push for the aid package. It will be important if you can confirm to us and to your own people that you are really going to continue the process of reform and that the elections will be free and fair.³⁵⁰

Following the Russian President's view, a new parliament would only accelerate the pace of reforms: "The reforms will go much faster now than in the past. The Supreme Soviet hindered reforms in the past. And thank you for your support."³⁵¹

Eventually, the U.S. Senate, on 24 September 1993, approved the \$2.5 billion in new aid to Russia (and other former Soviet Union republics) as part of the \$12.5 billion foreign aid appropriations bill for the year 1994.³⁵² The Clinton administration's proposal passed without

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ivi, pp. 1-2.

³⁵¹ Ivi, p. 2.

³⁵² H. Dewar, "SENATE APPROVES \$2.5 BILLION RUSSIAN AID", *The Washington Post*, 24.09.1993.

much opposition, making the vote a strong bipartisan affirmation of Clinton's policy of backing Yeltsin as the legitimate force of democracy and economic reform in Russia.³⁵³

Meanwhile, tensions continued to grow between the two opposing factions in Russia, with many People's Deputies refusing to leave the Parliament building known as the White House.³⁵⁴ As Yeltsin cut off electricity, phone service, and hot water in the building, anti-Yeltsin armed demonstrators – incited by Supreme Soviet speaker Khasbulatov and Vice President Rutskoi – attacked the Ostankino television tower, the nerve center of Russia's broadcast media.³⁵⁵ Consequently, on 4 October 1993, Yeltsin ordered Defense Minister Grachev to send the military to shell and storm the White House, which resulted in the killing of an estimated 145 of their fellow citizens and the wounding of 800 more.³⁵⁶ Moreover, Rutskoi and Khasbulatov were imprisoned.³⁵⁷ The day after, President Clinton phoned Yeltsin:

Good evening, Boris. I wanted to call you and express my support. I have been following events closely and have tried to support you as much as possible. I know this has been a difficult time for you, and I wanted to know how you are doing.³⁵⁸

President Yeltsin replied:

Bill, thank you very much for your support, which I knew and felt would be coming. Now that these events are over, we have no more obstacles to Russia's democratic elections and our transitions to democracy and a market economy. The fascist organizations that had been active in these events have now been banned, so now I feel that all will be fine. It's too bad that some people were killed, but this is the fault of those who were the first to open fire and acted in a provocative way. They [the opposition

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, pp. 110-112.

³⁵⁵ M. Sokolov & A. Kirilenko, "20 Years Ago, Russia had its Biggest Political Crisis since the Bolshevik Revolution", *The Atlantic*, 04.10.2013.

³⁵⁶ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 400.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of Russian Federation", 05.10.1993, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, 165, 9307653, p. 1.

guided by Rutskoi and Khasbulatov] brought to Moscow a gang of people [...]. They had them come here, gave them machine guns and grenade launchers, and had them fire on peaceful civilians. There was no other alternative than to use force against them.³⁵⁹

In response, Clinton wanted to make sure the elections would be scheduled as planned and worried about the results: “What is the prevailing attitude among the regional leaders?” he asked, “can we do something through our aid package to send support to these regions?”³⁶⁰ President Yeltsin was pleased: “That would be good,” he replied. “Those regional leaders who were supporting the opposition are now changing their support to us. But nonetheless, this kind of regional support would be very useful.”³⁶¹

Regarding these events, Kotkin writes, “when the smoke cleared, the institutional settlements, like the clash itself, evoked Soviet and even tsarist legacies.”³⁶² Following the bloodshed, Yeltsin started to rule by decree until the organized parliamentary elections on 12 December 1993 and sought support for “a new constitution that gave him powers well in excess of those held by his French and American peers.”³⁶³ On 22 October 1993, Secretary of State Christopher met President Yeltsin in Moscow. On this occasion, the U.S. Secretary of State conveyed President Clinton’s high appreciation for how Yeltsin had handled the recent crisis.³⁶⁴ Specifically, the transcript of the conversation states:

The Secretary said first that he wanted to bring congratulations on how President Yeltsin had handled recent events. President Clinton had followed events closely and personally. He was extremely interested

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 2.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² S. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, p. 168.

³⁶³ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 400.

³⁶⁴ “Secretary Christopher’s Meeting with President Yeltsin”, 22.10.1993, Unclassified, U.S. Department of State, Virtual Reading Room Documents Search, <https://foia.state.gov/Search/Search.aspx> (from now on U.S. Department of State) Case ID 200000982, p. 1.

in President Yeltsin's superb handling of the crisis and admired the restraint which the President had practiced since September 21.³⁶⁵

Eventually, the new constitution drafted by Yeltsin passed in a plebiscite on 12 December 1993.³⁶⁶ It established a popularly elected lower house, the State Duma, and an appointed upper house, the Federation Council, constituted by regional officials from both the executive and legislative branches.³⁶⁷ Moreover, as reported by Kotkin, the new constitution accorded the Russian President, "like the tsars and the politburo, permanent and nearly unrestricted power to issue decrees with the force of law – appropriating a prerogative of the legislature."³⁶⁸ Furthermore, under the new constitution, the four "force ministries," defense, interior, foreign affairs, and renamed KGB, "reported not to the prime minister, but to the president – as in Soviet times to the General Secretary, and before that, to the tsar."³⁶⁹

That same day, parliamentary elections were held. On this matter, Medvedev notes:

From the legal point of view, this election was highly questionable. Yeltsin had violated the constitution, but he had not abrogated it. The constitution still in effect, to which Yeltsin had vowed loyalty when he was sworn in as president in July 1991, made no provision for a Federal Assembly or a State Duma. Those were provided for in the draft of a new constitution, which was not even going to be published until mid-November. People were supposed to vote on this new constitution in a referendum on December 12 at the same time they were electing a Duma. But what if the constitution wasn't approved? How could the Duma it provided for be valid?³⁷⁰

Eventually, the parliamentary elections ended with Russia's Choice party – the leading reformist party headed by Gaidar – winning only 12 percent of the vote.³⁷¹ On the other hand,

³⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 6.

³⁶⁶ S. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, p. 168.

³⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 169.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 170.

³⁷⁰ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, pp. 130-131.

³⁷¹ Ivi, p. 132.

the elections were a triumph for the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia - a nationalist party - guided by Yeltsin's primary opponent Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, which won 22 percent of the votes.³⁷²

Nonetheless, "I wanted to congratulate you and the Russian people on your historic elections," said President Clinton on the phone to Yeltsin on 22 December 1993.³⁷³ "In my public statements, I tried to emphasize the positive result of the elections – that they were free and fair, that the constitution was approved, and that reformers will still be by far the largest faction in the Duma."³⁷⁴ Then, the U.S. President reaffirmed his concerns about whether the elections would impact Yeltsin's economic reforms or Russia's foreign policy.³⁷⁵ Yeltsin reassured him that he would be able to work more effectively from that moment on and that he should not worry about the opposition guided by Zhirinovskiy.³⁷⁶ "I'm really looking forward to our summit in January [in Moscow]", President Clinton replied.³⁷⁷ Then, he added:

Regarding economic reform and Western assistance, I will give you a status report in Moscow of U.S. economic assistance since Vancouver. [...] But I want to know your views on the course and pace of your economic reforms. It is critical to continue those reforms. You have a good team and a good reform program. I understand that you may have to react to domestic pressures and that this might require some adjustments to your policies. We have begun a quite study within our government of possible ways the U.S. and other G-7 countries could help improve the IMF and World Bank assistance to Russia. I intend to discuss these ideas with my G-7 counterparts and then to share them with you in Moscow. I hope the results would help you improve the situation of average Russians, and therefore to strengthen political support for you and for reform. But we will do this quietly and keep your experts informed.³⁷⁸

³⁷² M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, pp. 402-403 and R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 132.

³⁷³ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation", 22.12.1993, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, 178, 9309998, p. 1.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 1-2.

³⁷⁷ *Ivi*, p. 2.

³⁷⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 2-3.

President Yeltsin thanked Clinton. Then, regarding the reforms, he said:

It's true that during the elections we slowed the pace down a bit, but now, with the elections behind us, with a new Parliament, the mood in our society has turned toward the economic agenda, and we are again busily engaged in the reform effort. We have our government in place. And we still have a President, and that President will not stand for elections in 1994. Under the new constitution, the President will stay in office until June 1996. This means that we will continue the strong implementation of reforms.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁹ Ivi, p. 3.

Chapter 4

U.S.- Russia relations on the way to the 1996 elections in Russia, 1994-1996

1. The Russian governmental and parliamentary reshuffle at the outset of 1994

1994 began with essential developments for the Clinton administration as Russia underwent significant internal changes in its governmental and legislative composition. The configuration of the Russian government was always a crucial issue for U.S. foreign policy interests for fear that a reshuffle would decelerate reforms or reinstate an authoritarian system. A report from the Joint Security Commission to the Secretary of Defense William J. Perry and the Director of Central Intelligence R. James Woosley on 14 February 1994 placed the maintenance of democracy in Russia and its management of weapons of mass destruction among the very first national security concerns:

The possibility of failure of democratic reform in Russia poses a constant danger. Further, Russia's ability to maintain control of its special weapons, [...] and North Korea's, Iran's and Iraq's attempts to develop nuclear weapons, have serious and far-reaching implications for regional security and stability.³⁸⁰

Approaching the U.S.-Russia Summit in Moscow between 12 and 15 January 1994, the American Embassy notified Washington of the Russian government reorganization following the parliamentary elections of December 1993. Through a presidential decree issued on 10 January 1994, the Russian President had reduced the number of deputy prime ministers as well

³⁸⁰ Joint Security Commission, "Redefining Security: A Report to the Secretary of Defense and Director of Central Intelligence", 28.02.1994, National Security Archive.

as ministries and federal agencies.³⁸¹ In addition, it had subordinated the “power ministries” - defense, interior, foreign affairs, and counterintelligence – directly to the president.³⁸² Ambassador to Russia Thomas Pickering viewed the reshuffle as “designed to streamline the council of ministers before the new parliament – expected to be sharply critical of government policies – gets down to work.”³⁸³ He also specified that “if the new parliament does turn out to be critical of the government, the new constitution gives the president and government strong instruments for countering the will of the deputies.”³⁸⁴ Then, he added, “major changes in government reform policies may not be known until ministerial appointments are made next week.”³⁸⁵ As a matter of fact, First Deputy Prime Minister Gaidar and Finance Minister Fedorov were forced to resign from their positions, leaving Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais as the only distinguished reformer in government.³⁸⁶ Moreover, according to the ambassador, the December election results could be interpreted as voters calling for slowing economic reforms.³⁸⁷ As historian Medvedev reports, there were many reasons for the defeat of pro-Yeltsin parties at the parliamentary elections.³⁸⁸ However, the main one was “the population’s sharp reaction against the ‘shock therapy’ that had been going on for two years, with no end in sight.”³⁸⁹

At the One-on-One meeting between the U.S. President and the Russian President on 13 January 1994 in Moscow, Yeltsin delivered his view on the situation:

The democratic forces are 80 percent of the Federation Council. That instills a sense of optimism. The situation in the Duma is not so propitious. [...] The democratic parties hold one third of the seats in the Duma. If you add the Duma territorial representatives the total strength of the democrats is 46 to 47

³⁸¹ T. Pickering, “President Yeltsin ‘reforms’ his Reform Cabinet”, From American Embassy in Moscow to Secretary of State in Washington, 11/01/1994, Limited Official Use, U.S. Department of State, Document Number C06544296, Section 01. p. 3.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ivi, Section 01 p. 2.

³⁸⁴ Ivi, Section 02 p. 3.

³⁸⁵ Ivi, Section 01 p. 2.

³⁸⁶ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 105.

³⁸⁷ T. Pickering, “President Yeltsin ‘reforms’ his Reform Cabinet”, U.S. Department of State, Section 02 p. 3.

³⁸⁸ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 133.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

percent. [...] I believe that unlike with the previous Supreme Soviet, I'll have to maintain more contact with the factions and leaders, as you're also doing.³⁹⁰

However, he added:

Early elections for the President are not on the horizon. Under the new constitution, the incumbent finishes his term in June 1996 provided I don't run for reelection. The issue of early Presidential elections has taken a second place.³⁹¹

Concerning economic reforms, Yeltsin went into detail recognizing the burden of the reforms on the Russian population and associating such economic difficulties with the insufficiency of assistance from the United States and the Group of Seven:

We believe that part of the population voted for Zhirinovsky because they were dissatisfied with the social policy. We have been concentrating on fighting against inflation. In December, it was the lowest it has been in a long time. This year we intend to stabilize the economy further and drive inflation down to five percent. At the same time, we will concentrate on the 12 percent of the population who are unhappy and who voted for Zhirinovsky. They didn't vote for taking back Alaska, Ukraine and Crimea or for the fascism he embodies but rather because they are unhappy. Our goal is to broaden structural economic reform. Everyone feels the need to intensify movement down the road of reform and pick up the pace of reform. [...] We've got to intensify privatization [...] The focus now should be on breakthroughs in investment policy. Although investment from the U.S. is still not sufficient. [...] Frankly, the work of the G-7 in Tokyo and the G-7 plus one has been very slow. The second tranche of the [Systemic Transformation Facility] STF from the IMF has been delayed since August 1993. That concerns us. [...] But there is reason for doubt among the European leaders that we are really on the reform road. When you have ups and downs, that's part of the normal problem of any country in transition.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, "One-on-One Meeting with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia", 13.01.1994, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, 468, 9400513, pp. 1-2.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ivi, pp. 3-4.

Similarly, President Clinton claimed that to alleviate the harsh social impact of reforms, Russia needed to continue its political and economic restructuring following the United States and international financial institutions' direction. For this purpose, he reaffirmed his commitment to increasing bilateral and multilateral assistance:

You know I agree with you about the social impact and difficulty of transition. The rest of the world should be supportive and sensitive. The thing is not to stop or slow down reforms but to be more sensitive to the difficulty. We've committed all of the Vancouver assistance package and distributed most of it. So the things that have been in our personal control we have moved quickly. On the second package, much is tied to the G-7. I too am frustrated and committed to moving it along faster. The international financial organizations understand too and are ready to move more quickly and flexibly if you are still committed to reform.³⁹³

Nevertheless, throughout 1994 and 1995, the Clinton administration's engagement in the economic transformation of Russia dropped considerably. Indeed, utmost security issues became more pressing, namely the question of NATO enlargement and the Bosnian crisis.

2. The question of NATO enlargement and the Bosnian crisis, 1994-1995

A consensus has consolidated among historians that, between 1994 and 1996, United States-Russia relations became more complicated. While 1993 ended with the "stroke of genius" of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), the relationship deteriorated in 1994 and 1995 due to a series of diplomatic conflicts related to the NATO enlargement and NATO's operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, there is still a very vivid debate about the nature, depth, and reasons for such fracture. Therefore, as this is not the appropriate context to get into the details of contentious matters, this section will be limited to providing an overview of these two

³⁹³ Ivi, p. 5.

transitional years to understand Clinton's approach to Russia in 1996. At the same time, for an extensive study of the 1994 and 1995 events, references to the most noteworthy works on the matter will be provided progressively.

Among the principal authors that examined the changing relations between Russia and the United States in 1994 and 1995, Sarotte provides the most radical narrative. According to her, 1994 covered the Washington-Moscow relationship with "frost" due to the increasing marginalization of the PfP.³⁹⁴ She contends that many factors contributed to this development. One of them was NATO's intensifying role in the Bosnian war and the sidelining of Russia from the decision-making processes in this framework.³⁹⁵ In addition, she argues, another reason was the loosening of the Clinton administration's internal opposition to NATO expansion.³⁹⁶ Finally, the decisive "rift" came in December 1994 when, at the end of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) session in Brussels, the ministerial issued a communiqué that formally cleared the way for expansion.³⁹⁷ Hence, as Sarotte describes the circumstances, approaching 1995, the United States-Russia relationship was significantly undermined. In the end, she writes, partnership for all former Warsaw Pact countries had capitulated to membership for the few, leaving Russia behind.³⁹⁸ In 1995, the Clinton administration openly embraced NATO enlargement and dedicated all diplomatic efforts to convince Russia to join the PfP. According to Sarotte, this "would serve as a kind of tacit acceptance that Russia would continue to work with the alliance during the process of enlargement."³⁹⁹

Goldgeier and Shiffrinson have also been notable participants in the debate. While they recognize that there are multiple reasons for the downturn of U.S.-Russia relations, they also note that "NATO enlargement was one of the most consequential policies pursued by the United States in the decades after the Cold War" and that "the United States could have countenanced a range of options for Eastern Europe involving NATO's presence to greater or lesser

³⁹⁴ This matter is explored extensively in M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, chapters 6 "Rise and Fall" pp. 419-488 and chapter 7 "A Terrible Responsibility" pp. 489- 549.

³⁹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 440.

³⁹⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 442-443.

³⁹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 466.

³⁹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 484.

³⁹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 526.

degrees.”⁴⁰⁰ Eventually, NATO enlargement was a conscious decision to maximize “U.S. oversight over European security affairs at the cost of sullied relations with Russia.”⁴⁰¹

On the other hand, Radchenko advances a “softer” position. He argues that 1994 and 1995 constituted a transition toward a more antagonistic relationship between the two countries. However, this development was just one oscillation in favor of hostility within a wider framework where U.S.-Russia relations were constantly swinging between cooperation and hostility. In the end, Russia’s objective was to be treated equally internationally, either as a partner or an antagonist. For this reason, he maintains, there was never a serious intention on the part of key policymakers in Washington to include Russia in NATO.⁴⁰² According to the historian,

Moscow would not be willing or capable of subordinating itself to a US-led security organization. In this sense, all the discussions about not creating new dividing lines in Europe were at best naive wishful thinking, and at worst – deliberate obfuscation, an effort to temper Russia’s resentment at being thus deliberately excluded from the most important European security organization.⁴⁰³

Ultimately, he notes, Russia went through an internal nationalistic resurgence.⁴⁰⁴ “By embracing enlargement,” he argues, “without finding an appropriate role for Russia, the [U.S] policymakers overlooked the possibility that it might actually contribute to the latter’s nationalistic resurgence or, indeed, externally legitimize it.” “This is exactly what

⁴⁰⁰ J. Goldgeier & J. Shiffrin, “The United States and NATO after the end of the Cold War: Explaining and Evaluating Enlargement and Its Alternatives”, in N. P. Monteiro and F. Bartel (eds), *Before and After the Fall: World Politics and the End of the Cold War*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 284-285. For a deeper understanding, see also Shiffrin Joshua R, “Eastbound and down: The United States, NATO enlargement, and suppressing the Soviet and Western European alternatives, 1990–1992”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, nos. 6-7 vol. 43, 2020, pp. 816-846 and Shiffrin Joshua R, “NATO enlargement and US foreign policy: the origins, durability, and impact of an idea”, *International Politics*, vol. 57, 2020, pp. 342-370.

⁴⁰¹ J. Goldgeier & J. Shiffrin, “The United States and NATO after the end of the Cold War”, p. 284.

⁴⁰² S. Radchenko, “‘Nothing but Humiliation for Russia’: Moscow and NATO’s eastern enlargement, 1993-1995”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 43 nos. 6-7, 2020, p. 808.

⁴⁰³ Ivi, p. 809.

⁴⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 787.

happened.”⁴⁰⁵ Similarly to the management of NATO enlargement, in the context of the Bosnian war decision-making, Radchenko adds that there was never a genuine willingness on the part of the United States to keep Russia on board in case interests diverged.⁴⁰⁶ Radchenko concludes that

like the narrative(s) of NATO’s enlargement to the East, the Bosnian narrative- (s) had the potential of narrowing the gap between Russia and the West but the opportunity was largely squandered. Both sides undoubtedly share the blame, though perhaps the Russians less so, given how desperate they were at this point to be taken into account.⁴⁰⁷

It is clear that many elements concerning the developing U.S.-Russia relations in 1994 and 1995 are still subjected to different interpretations. However, what is essential for the purpose of this work is that Clinton’s relationship with Yeltsin’s government had been worsening approaching the Presidents’ election year. Therefore, the Clinton administration looked at 1996 as a critical moment to reposition their approach to Russia.

3. The state of the Russian economy and Yeltsin’s internal standing before the 1996 elections

As the Clinton administration in 1994 and 1995 mostly focused on the question of NATO enlargement and the Bosnian crisis, during part of 1995 and the first half of 1996, the U.S. foreign policy team’s attention revolved around two elections in Russia: for the State Duma in December 1995; and for the president in June and July 1996. In both cases, historians agree that Yeltsin’s prospects seemed gloomy.

Ever since 1992, the “shock therapy” program advanced by Yegor Gaidar had been tough on the Russian population. In fact, when the Russian government freed prices, “latent

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ivi, p. 795.

⁴⁰⁷ Ivi, p. 796.

inflationary pressures burst forth in dramatic fashion.”⁴⁰⁸ Only in 1992 Russia’s inflation rate reached 2500 percent.⁴⁰⁹ As a result, Russian savings were fundamentally reduced, as well as economic output. Moreover, on a macroeconomic level, the beginning of market-oriented reforms initiated a deep fiscal and monetary crisis. When Gaidar was forced to leave his post as First Deputy Prime Minister following the parliamentary elections of 1993, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin took his place in guiding Russian economic policy. According to historian Robert Service, “Chernomyrdin, while abandoning the *laissez-faire* zeal of Gaidar, continued to strengthen the roots of capitalism in Russia.”⁴¹⁰ Nevertheless, significant state subsidies remained in place. Following Service, “Chernomyrdin maintained the policy of enormous state subsidies for fuel, lighting, telephones and transport” and “devoted resources to keep the prices of farm produce low.” At the same time, the program of privatization began. Most of Russia’s privatization program was defined and implemented by Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais. Specifically, he had chosen a voucher model of privatization, which implied using vouchers to distribute state assets.⁴¹¹ By 1995, sixty-five percent of the industry had been privatized.⁴¹² This development produced a further drop in industrial activity and considerable economic and social inequality in Russian society.⁴¹³ However, Service notes that not all economic data were dire.⁴¹⁴ He adds: “Although gross domestic output continued to diminish after 1993, the rate of diminution was slowing.” Moreover, despite the steady decrease in economic output, consumers could benefit from the elimination of long lines and empty store shelves.⁴¹⁵ Nonetheless, economic liberalization policies had created hardship for average Russian citizens, which was manifested through the Parliamentary elections in December 1993. As a matter of fact, the elections of 1993 were a success for Yeltsin’s opposition parties. On the other hand, they constituted a setback for Yeltsin’s internal support and intention to go forward with reforms.

⁴⁰⁸ E. Depoy, “Boris Yeltsin and the 1996 Presidential Election”, *Intricacies of U.S. Foreign Policy*, Vol. 26 No. 4, Fall 1996, p. 1144.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia: from Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 534.

⁴¹¹ E. Depoy, “Boris Yeltsin and the 1996 Presidential Election”, p. 1146.

⁴¹² R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 534.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 535.

⁴¹⁵ E. Depoy, “Boris Yeltsin and the 1996 Presidential Election”, p. 1146.

Projecting into the new year, the state of the Russian economy was still not promising. Russian historian Roy Medvedev provides a general overview of the following two years as he reports:

In outlining a series of social, economic, and political measures for 1994–95, Yeltsin and his entourage, together with the Chernomyrdin administration, were sure they could change direction and improve the social and economic conditions in Russia. They proposed to stop the decline in production and stabilize finances and expected market mechanisms to start working full force. This would strengthen the regime's political base. But it did not happen. The economic situation kept growing worse, and financial stabilization remained as elusive as ever. Discontent mounted, while the political groups that had consistently supported Yeltsin and his government grew weaker and began to fall apart.⁴¹⁶

Furthermore, the continuation of the war in Chechnya – initiated by Yeltsin in December 1994 – significantly aroused opposition even among those who had always favored him.⁴¹⁷

On top of everything, after reaching its highest amount in 1994, U.S. funding for Russian reform steadily decreased for the rest of Yeltsin's government.⁴¹⁸ Approved by Congress in September 1993, the U.S. bilateral assistance to the New Independent States for 1994 amounted to \$2.5 billion, of which \$1.6 billion were directed at Russia.⁴¹⁹ For 1995, the U.S. Congress approved \$379 million of funding under the Freedom Support Act; in 1996, the amount decreased to \$100 million.⁴²⁰ These funds were mainly coordinated by the State Department, which provided bilateral aid directly to Russia.⁴²¹ In addition, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) funded projects of American private companies or nonprofit organizations to offer advice, knowledge, and expertise to their Russian partners.⁴²² In 1996, AID changed the strategy behind its funding supply. The new assistance coordinator, Richard Morningstar, announced a new approach called Partnership for Freedom, “under which funds for those

⁴¹⁶ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 204.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 93.

⁴¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 94.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ *Ivi*, p. 95.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

assisting the Russian federal government decreased and those working with nongovernmental actors and regional government increased.”⁴²³

On the other hand, macroeconomic assistance was substantially provided by international financial institutions. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development launched a lending program to steer enterprise restructuring. In addition, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank established programs in Russia to assist in macroeconomic stabilization.⁴²⁴ However, the main task of the World Bank in Russia was implementing restructuring programs in agriculture, transportation, coal, oil, and social protection.⁴²⁵ However, as Goldgeier and McFaul report,

In the first two years of engagement with Russia, the World Bank approved ten loans worth roughly \$3 billion, making Russia one of the Bank’s biggest clients almost overnight. These early years, however, were not good ones for the Bank in Russia. Agriculture, one of the Bank’s first targets, was one of the sectors slowest to change in Russia. The billions spent in trying to restructure the coal industry were tainted by corruption and poor economic performance. While Russia soon grew in the mid-1990s to become the Bank’s third largest recipient, the record of achievement was mixed. As a World Bank press release candidly admitted, “By 1995, the Russian portfolio of projects was one of the most troubled in the Bank.”⁴²⁶

They also note that despite the Clinton administration’s increased bilateral aid – compared to his predecessor – and effort to gather substantial multilateral assistance, “even a billion dollars a year was a small fraction of money in a country as large and with as many problems as post-communist Russia.” As a result, “these levels of assistance meant that Clinton officials had to make strategic choices about what to fund and how to fund, with the obvious implication that many sectors in desperate need of help - that is, social welfare or education - received almost no funding at all.”⁴²⁷

Moreover, historian Stephen Kotkin adds:

⁴²³ Ivi, p. 98.

⁴²⁴ Ivi, p. 101.

⁴²⁵ Ivi, pp. 101-102.

⁴²⁶ Ivi, p. 102.

⁴²⁷ Ivi, p. 119.

Eventually, even the Clinton White House began to understand that Russia would not become a liberal polity or secure market economy overnight. “Blame” for Russia’s “failure” was craftily shifted to the International Monetary Fund (whose organizational chart had the U.S. Treasury Secretary at the top).⁴²⁸

Then, he continues:

Russia’s reform conundrum, beyond achieving a difficult macroeconomic stabilization, entailed the need to create altogether new state capacity, including the rootedness of the state in organized social constituencies and individuals’ identities, when a massive and dysfunctional anti-liberal state, alongside a non-market and time-warp economy, was the chief inheritance from the USSR. That is why, at the most basic level, Russia did not undergo sustained liberal reform.⁴²⁹

Under all these circumstances, Yeltsin’s internal standing in the vicinity of the parliamentary elections in 1995 was trembling.

4. The Clinton administration’s areas of concern before the beginning of the election campaign in Russia: new evidence from the archives

Historian Medvedev reports that, before the Duma elections in December 1995, President Yeltsin announced the establishment of two big political parties: one would be a party of the right center and the other a party of the left center.⁴³⁰ Yeltsin hoped that these two parties would gather more than half the votes in the parliamentary elections.⁴³¹ However, the right-center party led by Chernomyrdin - “Our Home Is Russia” – won only 65 seats out of 450.⁴³² At the same time, none of the other parties of the right-wing “democrats” – to which belonged most ministers of the first Yeltsin government – made it into the Duma.⁴³³ In addition, the Chairman of the State Duma, Ivan Rybkin, had assumed the task of forming the “loyal opposition” party

⁴²⁸ S. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse*, p. 202.

⁴²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 203.

⁴³⁰ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 206.

⁴³¹ *Ibid*.

⁴³² R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 530.

⁴³³ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 208.

of the left center.⁴³⁴ However, he won only 1.1 percent of the votes.⁴³⁵ On the other hand, Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), obtained 22.3 percent of the votes, translating into 157 seats in the Duma.⁴³⁶ To sum up, Medvedev writes that

in the 1995 Duma elections the votes of all the groups that supported Yeltsin and his government, taken together, added up to about 25 percent, while the votes of those in the “Communist” part of the electorate added up to 32 percent. [...] No single group had a controlling vote in the Duma, although the preponderance of the CPRF was obvious - out of 450 seats in the Duma, the Communists and their allies held 186.

In addition, the historian Service reported that after the parliamentary elections, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais resigned.⁴³⁷ Throughout Yeltsin’s government, the first had been the strongest advocate of preserving solid ties with Western countries, especially the United States. Similarly, Chubais had been an excellent ally to U.S. interests, as he had continued the program of market liberalization initiated by Gaidar. As Goldgeier and McFaul observe, “Anatoly Chubais became a favorite partner for American assistance programs.”⁴³⁸ Particularly, they continue,

Chubais had established a very effective technical assistance program, initially funded by the Ford Foundation, with his American counterparts, Andrei Shleifer and Jonathan Hay, well before the Clinton team came to office or AID set up shop in Russia. Shleifer, a Harvard microeconomist and Russian émigré, provided ideas for Chubais’ first privatization program, while Hay, a young lawyer working directly in the GKI [State Committee for State Property Management of the Russian Federation] offices, acted as the main conduit of these ideas into the Russian bureaucracy.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁴ Ivi, p. 209.

⁴³⁵ Ivi, p. 210.

⁴³⁶ Ivi, p. 212 and R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 530.

⁴³⁷ R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 537.

⁴³⁸ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 103.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

As a result, according to the two scholars,

when AID eventually began to fund programs in Russia [...] - and adhered to the idea that that supporting individual reformers was the best strategy for supporting reform - if Chubais backed a proposal, then it received generous funding with little to no oversight.⁴⁴⁰

Thus, they argue, the Clinton administration unanimously related the continuation of reforms with individual reformers.⁴⁴¹ “Supporting ‘non-reformers’ or working with those not committed to democracy, markets, and a pro-Western orientation,” they continue, “did not seem like a policy in the U.S. national interest.”⁴⁴² However, they also add that, according to Policy Planning Staff Director James Steinberg, this belief was counterbalanced by their willingness to “make sure that the break [with the past] was as irreversible as possible.”⁴⁴³ Consequently, moving forward, U.S. officials committed to establishing close ties with those in the Russian government who seemed less attentive to liberal economic reforms.⁴⁴⁴ Regarding this matter, newly declassified documents from the Clinton administration confirm that the results of the parliamentary elections - particularly having Chubais and Kozyrev out of Yeltsin’s government - were a source of preoccupation for President Clinton. However, again following McFaul and Goldgeier’s argument, it emerges that the Clinton administration did not intend to soften their support to Yeltsin’s government after these substitutions hoping that economic reforms would persist. In this case, secondary and primary sources imply that Clinton’s first objective was ensuring the continuation of reforms. At the same time, private conversations between the U.S. and Russian Presidents indicate that Yeltsin’s guidance was not questionable. Differently from other members of the Russian government, Yeltsin’s presence was considered fundamental for the durability of a market economy in Russia. A month after the Duma elections, President Clinton phoned the Russian President. The discussions centered mainly on the elections’ results and the state of reforms. Clinton opened the conversation by stating:

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ivi, p. 104.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 105.

There has been a lot of commentary here on the results of the Duma election and personnel changes in your government. But I'm encouraged by your comments that Russia will not turn away from the path of reform and that there will be no big shifts in Russian foreign policy. We will continue to offer support.⁴⁴⁵

In response, President Yeltsin reassured Clinton that he had no intention of reverting the reforms and that the course of economic liberalization would continue despite the opposition in the Duma:

Bill, it's true rumors are going around that we're making a change in our course. But bear in mind that I will not let that happen. The Communists in the Duma do not have a majority vote. To override my veto, they need a two-thirds majority; the Communists are not in a position to do that. [...] At this point, I guarantee to you the course of reform and democracy will stand. Incidentally, you may have heard that even the IMF has bought this rubbish on a change in our reform course, that we are not staying on course. They say we have to make a case, to show this is not true. They have delayed their payments to us and obligation of credits of \$9 billion. I hope you might help and push them a little to make the payment that is already overdue.⁴⁴⁶

President Clinton took the opportunity to reassert the need for continued reforms and assured Yeltsin that he would urge the IMF to carry on with its assistance:

I am encouraged by what you are saying and appreciate that. You know I support your participation with the IMF and will work with them to see what we can do. [...] If you are staying on the course of reform, they have no reason not to continue their support, as they promised they would.⁴⁴⁷

Then, on the same call, President Clinton mentioned two urgent matters for his administration to be settled before the Russian elections in June 1996 and the presidential elections in the United States the following November. First, referring to the ongoing Chechen War, the U.S. President asked: "Do you think you can find a way to bring this conflict to a peaceful end?"⁴⁴⁸ President Yeltsin responded that negotiations were underway and said: "I only have three months to solve this, or I shouldn't run again. We must do this; we need to

⁴⁴⁵ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "President's Discussions with Yeltsin on Reform, Chechnya, START II and NATO", 26.01.1996, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, 1082, 9600480, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ivi*, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

resolve this problem.”⁴⁴⁹ Concerning security matters, the Clinton administration was particularly interested in advancing arms control and nuclear disarmament progress before elections and ensuring that Russia would continue to comply with their NATO enlargement policy. Hoping to make progress before the Nuclear Safety and Security Summit on 19 and 20 April 1996, Clinton stated:

The Senate is close to ratifying START II, maybe even today. If there is any way to get the Duma to approve it, and we could get some progress on the CTBT [Comprehensive-Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty], that would add global significance to our summit. It would be a big plus and helpful to you in your election.⁴⁵⁰

President Yeltsin replied:

I believe it will be possible to agree on ratification. It's a must that we have it done prior to April. It will be an election issue for both of us. We must render help to each other; it will be important to demonstrate that our relationship is going forward.⁴⁵¹

Then, the Russian President ended the conversation by suggesting establishing closer contacts as the elections approached. President Clinton agreed. With the Nuclear Summit to be held in April and the G-7 Summit and Russian elections in June 1996, the upcoming spring was a crucial moment for the Clinton administration to step up their collaboration with the Russian government.

On a second phone call on 21 February 1996, President Clinton reaffirmed the need to keep in touch more often:

I just wanted to call and let you know that, during this election year, we should call and talk more often. We need to keep up our partnership and friendship. I would like to know what you are going through and share developments here.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 4.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, “The President’s Discussion with President Yeltsin on the Russian Election, Bilateral Relations, START II Ratification and NATO”, 21.02.1996, Confidential, BCDPL National Archives, 1086, 9601097, p. 3.

Again, the issues discussed were the most influential for the outcome of the elections. While avoiding condemning Yeltsin's military campaign publicly, President Clinton encouraged a peaceful resolution of the war in Chechnya, claiming that it "would remove a difficult situation and enhance your political reputation around the world. I want you to know that we would do anything we could to support a peaceful settlement."⁴⁵³ Hence, Clinton administration disclosed documents convey that the ongoing Chechen War was perceived chiefly as a public opinion problem. The Clinton administration's objective was to end the war before it was too late for Yeltsin's reelection. This argument is partially supported by Goldgeier and McFaul, who report that

everyone on the team agreed that the United States had to respect Russia's territorial integrity; no one advocated recognition of Chechnya. [...] The United States was developing a larger foreign policy agenda with Russia that State Department officials did not want derailed by Chechnya. On the traditional security front, for instance, Christopher in March 1995 called talks with the Russians "the most ambitious arms control agenda in our history." Some U.S. officials believed Chechnya enhanced American leverage in these other issue areas such as NATO enlargement, CTR, and Bosnia, because Yeltsin needed Clinton's support more than ever. [On the other hand] Talbott emphasized that the United States should not "zigzag" in its policy, since Russia's revolution would be a long and difficult one, full of ups and downs. U.S. support for reform therefore had to act as ballast to help keep Russia on track.⁴⁵⁴

However, they also argue that standing by Yeltsin on this matter made "promoting economic assistance and championing democracy [...] not so straightforward."⁴⁵⁵ "American statesmen emphasized the importance of the democratic process," they continue, "but in practice, Clinton made the decision to stand by Yeltsin no matter what his friend in Moscow did, most dramatically during the Russian president's assault on his own parliament in October 1993 and Yeltsin's military intervention into Chechnya a year later."⁴⁵⁶ However, conversations between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin on the issue of the Chechen war suggest that there was never a real doubt whether Russia was on the right democratic path on the part of the Clinton administration. In fact, substantial pressure to end the war only came in the first months of

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, pp. 139-140.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ivi*, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

1996, given Yeltsin's low poll ratings and the proximity of the elections. In a telephone conversation on 13 February 1995, Clinton had told Yeltsin:

It concerns me that the fighting in Chechnya has also led many in the West to question your government's commitment to reform. I don't support that view. I think your commitment is strong and clear and have made clear that the U.S. will continue to support reform in Russia and your efforts toward that end.⁴⁵⁷

Then, signaling the Yeltsin government's renewed privatization programs, he highlighted Yeltsin's "real intentions."

The decision on your new privatization official sent a good signal of your real intentions. And I want to urge you to take every opportunity to signal your commitment to democracy, open government and economic reform.⁴⁵⁸

On the other hand, historian Sarotte's reading of U.S. – Russia relations on the matter of the Chechen War differs from the one provided by Goldgeier and McFaul. Following her analysis, the Chechen question complicated the U.S. – Russia relations. Indeed, Sarotte asserts that Washington's private commentary with its NATO allies differed greatly from their public stance on Chechnya.⁴⁵⁹ To make this argument, she reports the U.S. Secretary of State recalling that he "felt that the Chechen invasion of 1994 'cast a dark shadow over our relationship with Russia' and was 'inconsistent with pretensions of democracy.'⁴⁶⁰ However, - like Goldgeier and McFaul - in doing so, she also contends that actions in Chechnya were incompatible with the democratic promotion advanced by the Clinton administration. Moreover, she stresses

⁴⁵⁷ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telephone Conversation with Russian President Yeltsin: Chechnya, START II", 13.02.1995, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, Box 564, Folder 9500995, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 504.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

forcibly that this matter was soon used by the Clinton administration to push further their NATO expansion policy. She writes:

The invasion was thereby becoming a self-inflicted Russian wound, among other reasons because it made expansion more likely. In Christopher's words, Chechnya served as "an alarm bell for all of Central Europe," which could now "visualize the tanks entering their capitals" and make a better case for the need to be in the Atlantic Alliance as a result.⁴⁶¹

Therefore, even at the height of Russian brutality in Chechnya, Clinton – when visiting Moscow in April 1995 – focused conversation solely on the matter of NATO enlargement and arms control, besides affirming that "Russians were 'paying a tremendous price in lost opportunities to advance relations with the rest of Europe so long as the debacle' in Chechnya continued."⁴⁶² Thus, again, the overriding suggestion is that the Clinton administration - recognizing the discrepancy between their "democracy promotion" in Russia and Yeltsin's policy toward Chechnya – tarnished themselves with hypocrisy by deciding to advance their security interests primarily.

Moreover, on the same call of 21 February 1996, the other pressing issue of discussion for Clinton remained to ensure ratification of START II in the context of the upcoming Nuclear Summit in Moscow. Yeltsin responded positively when asked whether it would be realistic for the Duma to approve the treaty, saying that "the whole operation would be completed" by April.⁴⁶³ To conclude, once again, the U.S. President specified his administration's line on NATO expansion: during the election year, there would be no announcements regarding which countries and when would be admitted. Clinton wanted to avoid ruptures with Russia, similar to what had happened in December 1994 and was willing to pause the process of enlarging NATO for the year. He clarified:

Our timetable, which we discussed, provides nothing in 1996 except for private conversations with Partnership for Peace members that have indicated an interest in joining NATO on what it takes for them to meet the requirements. There are no recommendations for timetables, just conversation between

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Ivi, p. 531.

⁴⁶³ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "The President's Discussion with President Yeltsin on the Russian Election, Bilateral Relations, START II Ratification and NATO", BCDPL National Archives, p. 2.

countries about their desires. [...] The timetable provides only for interests PFP members to be consulted in 1996, but that is all private.⁴⁶⁴

President Yeltsin thanked Clinton. Then, just before ending the call, he said:

One thing I wanted to ask has to do with the IMF loan in the amount of nine billion dollars. I will be meeting Camdessus [IMF managing director] here and would like to ask you to use your influence to perhaps add a little, from nine to 13 billion dollars – to deal with social problems in this very important pre-election situation and help the people.⁴⁶⁵

“I’ll see what can be possible,” concluded Clinton. “I will do some work on it.”⁴⁶⁶

5. Clinton’s complete endorsement of Yeltsin’s reelection

Only a few days before the call, on 16 February 1996, President Yeltsin had publicly announced that he would seek a second term.⁴⁶⁷ At the formal opening of the presidential campaign, he presented himself as the worthiest candidate to continue Russia’s “political and economic reforms” and “head off a Communist victory.”⁴⁶⁸ Nevertheless, when Yeltsin began his campaign, his poll ratings were terribly low.⁴⁶⁹ Following Medvedev’s analysis, Yeltsin

had presided over five years of “shock therapy,” unfulfilled promises, constantly rising prices, the hoodwinking of small investors, a declining standard of living, overnight enrichment for tens of thousands accompanied by impoverishment for tens of millions, destruction of the educational system, health care, and science and culture in general, rampant crime of all kinds, a falling birth rate and a rising death rate, the war in

⁴⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ M. R. Gordon, “Yeltsin, Seeking a Second Term, Points to Communism as the Foe”, *The New York Times*, 16.02.1996.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 215.

Chechnya, the degradation of the army, the decline of industry and agriculture, the weakening of all forms of social protection, unemployment, homeless children, refugees, strikes, and ecological disasters.⁴⁷⁰

As a result, in January 1996, Yeltsin's ratings were significantly poorer than those of Gennady Zyuganov, the man projected to be his primary opponent.⁴⁷¹ After announcing their candidacies in mid-February, Zyuganov's ratings were twice as high as Yeltsin's.⁴⁷²

According to McFaul and Goldgeier, the Clinton administration was willing to stand by Yeltsin in his time of need. In early March 1996, a Principals Committee meeting – gathering U.S. cabinet-level officials – was held to discuss the upcoming April summit in Moscow.⁴⁷³ Indeed, the discussions almost entirely centered around Russia's policy. On this occasion, following the recollection of the Senior Director for Russia affairs at the National Security Council, Coit D. Blacker, Vice President Gore declared:

This is Russia's one chance. Boris Yeltsin is its one chance. We made this investment and if we stand by as this communist guy, Zyuganov, runs and he wins, we're not going to have a policy. We're going to take a huge hit. Russia's going to go down the drain, and we can't afford that at this time.⁴⁷⁴

Also, National Security Advisor to the U.S. Vice President, Leon Fuerth, recalled: "The Vice President was asking, you have maybe another candidate who is likely to advance democracy?"⁴⁷⁵ As reported by Goldgeier and McFaul, President Clinton agreed and commented:

I know the Russian people have to pick a president, and I know that means we've got to stop short of giving a nominating speech for the guy. But we've got to go all the way in helping in every other respect.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ivi, p. 216.

⁴⁷³ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 148.

⁴⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 149.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

I appreciate that some of you are worried about avoiding any embarrassment for me if Zyuganov ends up winning. Don't worry about that. I'll handle that part of it.⁴⁷⁶

In fact, some in the foreign policy establishment – including Strobe Talbott - wanted the President to be cautious.⁴⁷⁷ Given Russian electoral moods, backing Yeltsin too explicitly constituted a high risk. According to Talbott, there was a possibility that a potential Yeltsin defeat could be seen as Clinton's failure, undermining the President's own chances of winning the November elections.⁴⁷⁸ Nonetheless, as he said, the U.S. President was going to go "all the way."⁴⁷⁹ This effort also emerged through Clinton's public addresses. On 5 February 1996, President Clinton, starting to deliver his own campaign speeches, had justified his administration's continuous engagement in the world. Without explicitly mentioning Russia – which, as explained by Goldgeier and McFaul, could weaken his public approval – he made a case for sustaining efforts to advance open markets and free trade. Coherently with his administration's initial positions, safeguarding free markets was in the best interest of the United States, as it necessarily led to democracy, peace, and security. Addressing the democratic governors in Washington DC, the U.S. President declared:

Let me say I know that it isn't particularly popular to say - particularly at a time when people have so many of their own problems – but the United States must not withdraw from its world leadership. We must continue to be the world's leading force for peace and freedom, for democracy and prosperity. The secretary of commerce [...] would be the first to tell you that he could not take these trips and sell America's products and sell America's services, and get investments for America all around the world, if we were not perceived as being willing to lead the cause for peace and freedom, if we were not also working to continue to dismantle the nuclear threat until it doesn't exist anymore, to work with countries to end the threat of biological and chemical warfare. Maybe there will come a time in the next few years when regional associations of freedom-loving people will be able to solve all their problems, and we'll just have to carry our own little bit of a load. But for now, people look to the United States. And if you believe that it matters, then I ask you to understand that we have to make difficult decisions still, and we have to invest some money still in our leadership for these causes. Our economic strategy is working in

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ivi, p. 148.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

part because it is going hand in glove with our commitment to peace and freedom and democracy. And we cannot afford to walk away.⁴⁸⁰

Once again, Yeltsin's presidency was equated to the success of "democracy" in Russia. Therefore, all efforts were concentrated on maximizing Yeltsin's internal and international standing. Goldgeier and McFaul also note that considering any direct bilateral assistance from the United States risky, Clinton urged the IMF to commit to new loans.⁴⁸¹ Three months before the Russian presidential elections - in March 1996 – the IMF announced that it would provide \$10.2 billion to the Russian government in the next three years.⁴⁸² The loan exceeded considerably the previous IMF commitments. In fact, the institution initiated a new major assistance agreement in 1994 by providing \$1.5 billion, and in 1995, the sum increased to \$6.8 billion.⁴⁸³ The 1996 pledge was exceptional. As reported by Goldgeier and McFaul, "a month before its final approval, Clinton had publicly endorsed the loan, arguing, 'I believe the loan will go through, and I believe that it should. I do support it strongly.'"⁴⁸⁴ Moreover, this time "IMF managing director Michel Camdessus explicitly tied these funds to Yeltsin's course of reform, warning that the loans would be terminated if a different course [that is, communist course] were adopted."⁴⁸⁵ At the same time, IMF officials perceived signing a multi-year contract before the elections as strategic. They believed that, in the event of communist leader Zyuganov's victory, he would not have engaged in the complex process of abolishing the program.⁴⁸⁶ Therefore, it could safeguard Russia in the program for the following three years.⁴⁸⁷

In the two months preceding the Russian elections, supporting Yeltsin became more complicated for the Clinton administration. First, to win votes against Communist Party leader Zyuganov, Yeltsin "shifted more and more toward the political center."⁴⁸⁸ According to historian Service, Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin started to curtail the project of reforms.⁴⁸⁹ "The

⁴⁸⁰ "Presidential Speech", *C-SPAN, Report Video Issue*, 05.02.1996, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?69734-1/presidential-speech>.

⁴⁸¹ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 151.

⁴⁸² *Ivi*, p. 152.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸⁸ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 217.

⁴⁸⁹ R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 531.

headlong rush into capitalism was slowed,” and a new “social orientation” was reflected in his campaign promises and decrees.⁴⁹⁰ The Russian President tried to distance himself from the adverse by-products of “shock therapy” and understood that the best way to win votes was settling arrears in wages and pensions, increasing scholarships for students and welfare for retired people, and providing compensation for Russians’ savings extinguished by years of hyperinflation.⁴⁹¹ This position is confirmed by Clinton’s private conversations with the Russian President. On a phone call with President Clinton, Yeltsin was rather straightforward:

Please understand me correctly. Bill, for my election campaign, I urgently need for Russia a loan of \$2.5 billion. [...] The problem is I need money to pay pensions and wages. Without resolving this matter of pensions and wages, it will be very difficult to go into the election campaign. You know if we could resolve this subject in a way with [IMF managing director Camdessus] providing the \$2.5 billion in the first half [of the year], we could perhaps manage.⁴⁹²

Eventually, Clinton was not able to provide the loan, having urged the International Monetary Fund to radically step up its assistance in February.⁴⁹³ However, his administration’s support remained quite forceful throughout the spring of 1996, despite Yeltsin’s slow-down of reforms. In the spring of 1996, Zyuganov was still ahead of him in the national opinion surveys.⁴⁹⁴ At this point, Yeltsin considered suspending the presidential elections.⁴⁹⁵ On 18 March 1998, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Pickering transmitted to Washington a warning from Yegor Gaidar about Yeltsin’s idea to delay the elections for two years.⁴⁹⁶ On this matter, Goldegeier and McFaul report that

The Clinton team met to discuss scenarios and U.S. preemptive and responsive policy options. As Talbott recalled, “The best [outcome for the Clinton administration] was a Yeltsin victory, the worst a Zyuganov one, but the trickiest was what we called a ‘Yeltsin cheat or steal.’” Although very worried

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. and R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 217.

⁴⁹¹ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 217.

⁴⁹² Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, “Telephone Conversation with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on CTBT, Chechnya, Economics, CFE and Russian Election”, 07.05.1996, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, Box 1101, Folder 9603149, p. 2.

⁴⁹³ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 151.

⁴⁹⁴ R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 531.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 153.

about this third plot, the Clinton officials recognized that they had few policy tools to deter such a plan. They opted to refrain from making any public threats about sanctions should the election be postponed. Instead, they used quiet but urgent diplomacy. At the urging of Pickering and Talbott, Clinton sent Yeltsin a private message that registered his “strongest disapproval of any violation of the constitution.” As Talbott explains, “He [Clinton] felt we had no choice. He’d backed Yeltsin through thick and thin, always on the grounds that the U.S. was supporting not just the man but the principle, that Russia would work its way out of its crisis through elections, referendums and constitutional rule.”⁴⁹⁷

From Clinton’s perspective, this eventuality provided one more reason to strengthen his support so that Yeltsin would not go forward with postponing the elections. This stance is consistent with both the events and the content of U.S. government documents of the last two months of the Russian election campaign. The Clinton administration tried to nurture Russia’s international prestige by allowing Yeltsin to attend the G-7 Summit in Lyons scheduled right before the elections. At the same time, Yeltsin’s attendance allowed Clinton to commit to his promise to strengthen Russia’s relations with Western institutions. Indeed, President Yeltsin wanted to complete the conversion of the Group of Seven into the G-8 before June.⁴⁹⁸ However, Clinton knew it would not be realistic in such a short time – and worried about the Russian election’s outcome. Therefore, he wanted to avoid making public statements about the G-8 so Russia’s image would obtain the best result. On the phone call President Clinton shared with Yeltsin on 9 April 1996, he declared:

We want Moscow and Lyons to be a big success for you. We want to do it the right way and believe that we can do that. From what we hear and read, the election seems to be going well. I am following it closely. [...] I want to do everything I can to make the summit successful for you. We are working to expand your part. But I believe and the others do, that timing is a problem. I have been more forthright with you than others on this issue. Because of the timing, there is no consensus for outright conversion from G-7 to G-8. [...] We want a positive story after Lyons about support for Russia and for you and your critical, expanding role within our framework.⁴⁹⁹

In response, Yeltsin said:

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, “President Discussion with Yeltsin on Chernobyl, CTBT, ABM/TMD, CFE, G-7 vs G-8”, 09.04.1996, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, Box 1093, Folder 9602172, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

I understand there are doubts due to possible election results. You asked about the election process. Let me try to say something. The situation is becoming better; my rating is growing steadily, and Zyuganov's is declining. We are approximately at the same level. [...] I understand, but still, Bill, I'd like very much to have your support in Lyons. We have room to develop and make more steps toward democracy and human rights and Russia's place in the world.⁵⁰⁰

Clinton was firm. "We should not have negative stories coming out of Lyons, only positive stories for you right before the election runoff," he reaffirmed. "I'm trying to set this up so that nothing negative will come out of Lyons. It has to be a hundred percent win for you."⁵⁰¹

As Lyons represented an excellent opportunity to boost Yeltsin's international standing, so did the Moscow Summit on Nuclear Security. The Summit participants agreed to seek a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and advance cooperation to avoid the smuggling of nuclear materials. The next day, on 21 April 1996, Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin held a One-on-One meeting where they dealt with strategic arms reductions, modifications to the CFE Treaty [Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe], and cooperation in promoting peace in Bosnia and the Middle East.⁵⁰² However, one big issue persisted: the continuation of the war in Chechnya. At their bilateral meeting, President Clinton agreed with Yeltsin that Chechnya was part of the Russian Federation and once more called for a diplomatic solution.⁵⁰³ Subsequently, at the press conference, Presidents Yeltsin and Clinton were asked about the situation in Chechnya:

President Yeltsin, you just mentioned that things were going according to plan in Chechnya. But there are other reports that hostility there continues and human rights groups are complaining still about the behavior of Russian forces. I wonder, for President Clinton, what do you say to those who believe that the United States has not been firm enough, hasn't been critical enough, and that even now the criticism is muted specifically because the United States is anxious to see President Yeltsin reelected?⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ Ivi, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁰¹ Ivi, p. 5.

⁵⁰² Memorandum of Conversation, "POTUS-Yeltsin One-on-One", 21.04.1996, Secret, BCDPL National Archives, Box 43319, Folder 9602708.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ "Press Conference by President Clinton and President Yeltsin", 21.04.1996, for immediate release, Clinton White House Archives.

In response, President Clinton compared Yeltsin's military campaign in Chechnya to the American Civil War:

You say that there are some who say we should have been more openly critical. I think it depends upon your first premise - do you believe that Chechnya is a part of Russia, or not? I would remind you that we once had a civil war in our country in which we lost on a per capita basis far more people than we lost in any of the wars of the 20th century over the proposition that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for that no state had a right to withdraw from our Union. And so the United States has taken the position that Chechnya is a part of Russia, but that in the end, a free country has to have a free association, so there would have to be something beyond the fighting, there would have to be a diplomatic solution. That's what we have done.⁵⁰⁵

At the same time, Secretary of State Christopher and his Deputy Talbott contended that the Chechen war did not undermine the course of reform in Russia.⁵⁰⁶ As reported by Goldgeier and McFaul,

Talbott said at the time, "We believe that Russia must end the violence and killing, urgently seek a peaceful solution, and reach out for a reconciliation with the people of Chechnya. At the same time, we believe it is premature to interpret the debacle in Chechnya as the death of democracy, freedom, and reform all across Russia." And Christopher even praised the Russian armed forces for showing restraint. Above all else, the Clinton team remained determined to not let Chechnya define their Russia policy or derail the linchpin to their Russia policy in Moscow, Boris Yeltsin. Chechnya in their view was a hiccup in a difficult and long transition, but the transition was still moving - and had to be moved - in the right direction.⁵⁰⁷

However, the two scholars explain that the Chechen War never became a major foreign policy problem for the Clinton administration because of economic reasons:

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 142.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

The Chechens had no important backers in Washington. There is only a minuscule Chechen diaspora in the United States. Chechnya did not have oil or diamonds or some major economic interest that might attract American business support. On the contrary, the American business community firmly supported Russia in this conflict.⁵⁰⁸

Nevertheless, the overriding perception when analyzing the U.S. disclosed primary sources of that time - as highlighted by Talbott and Christopher's words - is that there was never a clear connection between the Chechen war and the end of the democratic path in Russia. As a result, right until the Russian presidential elections in June 1996, the Clinton administration not only backed Yeltsin's policy in Chechnya but also did not consider cutting economic assistance and continued to push forward with plans to convert the G-7 into the G-8. In a telephone conversation on 7 May 1996, Clinton told Yeltsin: "I am very pleased to see that you quickly dismissed the suggestion that the elections be postponed. This election will be the milestone for Russian democracy. I believe you are right to trust in the wisdom of the Russian voters."⁵⁰⁹

On 16 June 1996, in the first round of the elections, Yeltsin gained only 35 percent of votes among all those who cast their ballots.⁵¹⁰ However, this first voting session represented a setback for Zyuganov too, who won 32 percent of the vote.⁵¹¹ Thus, their chances were very similar when Yeltsin and Zyuganov confronted each other in the second round of voting. Eventually, Yeltsin remained president, with 53.7 percent of those taking part in the election voting for him.⁵¹² As Medvedev notes, commenting on the aftermath of the elections,

the political shifts Yeltsin made from January to June 1996 were only the first necessary steps in the right direction, but they were not continued after the election. Many of the social programs announced in the spring and summer were discontinued in the fall of 1996.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁸ Ivi, p. 144.

⁵⁰⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telephone Conversation with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on CTBT, Chechnya, Economics, CFE and Russian Election", BCDPL National Archives, 07.05.1996, p. 3.

⁵¹⁰ R. Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 218.

⁵¹¹ Ivi, p. 219.

⁵¹² Ivi, p. 223.

⁵¹³ Ivi, p. 225.

Moreover, as Medvedev soberly noted “the return of privatization mastermind Chubais to a high post in Yeltsin’s administration canceled many of the hopes held by those who voted for the Russian president.”⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the Clinton administration's foreign policy throughout its first term made it unequivocal that it had firmly committed to supporting Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Although such support was not linear over the years and manifested in multiple ways, the Clinton administration's premises and expectations when directing support at Yeltsin remained coherent throughout the entire first term. Two moments were particularly relevant to understand such support: the initial assistance to Russia in 1993 and Clinton's later approach before the Russian presidential elections in 1996. Moreover, Clinton's strategy toward Russia had deep roots in the years that preceded his presidency. Firstly, to fully comprehend the intensity and the course of Clinton's support as well as the reasons and expectations behind it, it was necessary to examine what happened between the demise of the Soviet Union and the inauguration of Bill Clinton as President of the United States in January 1993. In addition, 1994 and 1995 also constituted a transitional phase for Clinton's foreign policy and set the basis for his approach to Russia in 1996.

Before Clinton became President, the George H.W. Bush administration was tasked with finding a new foreign policy that would supplant the previous Cold War strategy of "containment." Like Clinton, Bush was an internationalist. The first post-Cold War president believed that the United States intervention was a source of good and could provide stability. He showed a deep faith in the perks of globalization, pushing for establishing regional economies and free trade areas. Furthermore, he embraced the establishment of democratic governments and market economies in the Central and Eastern European countries fighting for independence from the Soviet Union. However, his administration had significant conservative and realist tendencies. In fact, they believed they should prioritize the balance of power rather than trying to impose an American-shaped political and economic system forcibly. In other words, the Bush administration always emphasized stability through the conservation of an advantageous *status quo* and rarely used international engagement to promote change.

Eventually, when Bill Clinton became President in 1993, his administration had to acknowledge Bush's legacy. The United States' international leadership was undeniable. In Bush's "New World Order," the Soviet Union had been sidelined to the role of junior partner. This means that the Soviet Union's cooperation in foreign affairs was important, sometimes fundamental, but Gorbachev's Politburo was never fully included in the decision-making processes. Subsequently, Russia was going to maintain the same marginalized role under the

Clinton administration. Moreover, as part of Bush's inheritance, the United States was engaged in free trade negotiations and conflicts worldwide. The Clinton administration persisted in pursuing economic globalization and kept the United States involved in Somalia and Bosnia. However, this engagement became part of a bigger vision. Under Clinton, international conservatism was going to be surpassed by a solid commitment to change. Indeed, advancing free trade and market economics was instrumental in cementing the pillar of his foreign policy: the promotion of "democracy." Soon, it became clear that a fundamental premise within the Clinton administration was taking root. First, they implied that developing and consolidating a market-based economy would necessarily lead to economic success. Secondly, market economy and democracy became two inseparable concepts. Within this theoretical framework, promoting "democracy" abroad did not only mean ensuring that free and fair elections would be held periodically, and freedom of expression and information would be safeguarded. More importantly, it meant nurturing the establishment of market-based economies.

This conception of democracy had a significant impact on the Clinton administration's planning of a foreign policy strategy. "Democracy promotion" was incorporated on the front line of Clinton's foreign policy vision as a mutually reinforcing objective alongside broader U.S. economic and security interests. Primarily, fostering free trade and open markets was necessary for economic growth and democracy building. At the same time, "democracy" – following the "democratic peace" theory - would have enhanced cooperation between countries sustaining a more peaceful global environment. Therefore, promoting the spread of "market democracies," which materialized in the "Democratic Enlargement" strategy, was justified by the assertion that it would bring about international prosperity, security, and peace. Even though the application of "Democratic Enlargement" to real world crises proved complex and made the Clinton administration's involvement more selective – particularly after the Somalian disaster and the non-intervention in Rwanda and Bosnia –, the concepts on which U.S. intervention was justified and global leadership asserted remained in place throughout the years. The idea that engagement through the liberalization of economics and trade and the promotion of democracy was fundamental for U.S. national interests strongly persisted. This way, the United States presented itself, at least theoretically, as a leader in promoting a more peaceful, secure, and prosperous international environment.

The Clinton administration's approach to Russia was particularly emblematic of its foreign policy vision. In the very first months of his government, Clinton expressed a robust commitment to the success of "democracy" in Russia. Therefore, his administration immediately and dramatically expanded U.S. assistance to the Russian transition from a

command economy to a market-based one. In the first year of the Clinton administration, the United States economic assistance to Russia was exceptional. In 1993 the Clinton administration announced the disbursement of \$5.9 billion in bilateral initiatives. In addition, they pushed for multilateral assistance from the G-7 countries and international financial institutions to help economic stabilization. This led to the announcement of an additional \$24.8 package in the spring of 1993 and a \$3 billion program in July 1993. Once again, they asserted that the consolidation of democracy would only pass through Russia's full development of a market economy. At large, helping Russia build a "market democracy" was seen as an investment in U.S. security and prosperity. Avoiding "authoritarian resurgence" would have translated into a reduced defense budget, a lower threat of nuclear war and military conflicts, and created new markets for American investments and consumer goods. Furthermore, Russian President Boris Yeltsin initiated economic reforms in 1990 and showed Clinton a firm commitment to pursuing the same policies in the future. As a result, support for Russia became increasingly associated with the figure of the President. The Clinton administration trusted Yeltsin as the best chance for Russia to build on their conception of "democracy."

Indeed, as the internal confrontation between President Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament continued to escalate, the Clinton administration's support for Yeltsin grew. First, the Russian President disregarded the Constitution and disbanded the Parliament, claiming they had become "communists" and did not support the reform process anymore. Then, he set new parliamentary elections as well as a referendum for the new Constitution and fought the opposition by ordering the shelling of the Parliament building in Moscow. Nevertheless, the Clinton administration's support persisted. Following the Russian Parliamentary elections in December 1993, the U.S. President focused mainly on ensuring that the reform process would not stop.

While the Clinton administration's attention to economic reform in Russia diminished in 1994 and 1995 due to the question of NATO enlargement and the Bosnian crisis, historians agree that the U.S. support for Yeltsin resumed with full force as the Russian presidential elections approached. Yeltsin's internal standing was weak due to the harsh impact of the "shock therapy" on the Russian population. In addition, the military campaign initiated by Yeltsin in Chechnya in December 1994 was highly unpopular. Nonetheless, The Clinton administration continued to regard Yeltsin as the best chance for the liberalization reforms to go forward and decided to turn a blind eye to the horror of the Chechen war, declaring its legitimacy publicly. What is more, Clinton significantly intensified his support to the Russian President in the spring of 1996 by encouraging the IMF to step up its financial assistance and

ensuring the participation of Russia in the G-7 summit. Furthermore, even when Yeltsin thought of postponing elections due to his low ratings, the Clinton administration stood by his side.

Nevertheless, despite the Clinton administration's consistent commitment to "democracy promotion" in Russia and trust in President Boris Yeltsin, analysts agree in asserting that some developments in Russian politics could be regarded as unquestionably undemocratic: the disbanding of the Parliament and shelling of the Russian White House in 1993, the military campaign to resist independence in Chechnya, and the intention to postpone elections in 1996. Some have also highlighted that despite the Yeltsin government's undemocratic behaviors, the Clinton administration continued their support to secure economic liberalization. However, recently disclosed U.S. government documents allowed us to find that the Clinton administration read these events differently. On the one hand, it is true that they internally expressed concern about the public's perception of these developments as Yeltsin's illiberal tendencies. At the same time, they believed they could not risk the election of the Communist Party's leader, which would have likely represented a setback for reforms. They asserted that to secure economic growth internationally, the solution was to heighten the same reforms that had produced immense hardship for Russian citizens. Moreover, continuous assistance to Russia ensured unprecedented compliance in security matters, such as NATO enlargement and the management of the Bosnian crisis, but also nuclear disarmament and arms control. Nevertheless, more importantly, this thesis finds – through the study of recently disclosed U.S. government documents – that the Clinton administration never hesitated on whether Yeltsin's path was the right one for democracy. As long as elections were held and market reforms extended, the basis for "democratic development" in Russia and "democratic enlargement" internationally remained solid.

Concerning the question of the Chechen War, newly disclosed U.S. documents of the Clinton administration show clearly that Yeltsin's military campaign in Chechnya was mostly perceived as a problem of public opinion. Before the beginning of the election year, Clinton – in private conversations with his Russian counterpart – never substantially pushed for a settlement of the crisis. Only in 1996, with Yeltsin facing low ratings and high unpopularity in Russia, the U.S. President consistently suggested a peace settlement. This argument is partially supported by Goldgeier and McFaul's analysis of the Clinton administration's reaction to the crisis. In fact, they report that the Clinton administration never advocated for the recognition of Chechnya and stood by Yeltsin's judgment that it was part of the Russian territory. In addition, they write that U.S. policymakers agreed that Russia's policy – part of a larger foreign policy plan – should not have been derailed by Chechnya and that they would continue to support

Russia's economic liberalization. However, they also argue that this choice made the "support for economic assistance and championing democracy not so straightforward."⁵¹⁵ In other words, the Clinton administration's indifference – and, later, open endorsement – toward Yeltsin's management of the Chechen crisis tinged the rhetoric of "democracy promotion" with hypocrisy. Similarly, historian Sarotte – reporting a complication of U.S.-Russia relations due to the Chechen crisis – asserts that the U.S. public stance on Chechnya was different than what the Clinton administration perceived behind closed doors.⁵¹⁶ Like Goldgeier and McFaul, she links the preoccupation expressed by some U.S. officials as an attestation of the incompatibility of the Russian actions in Chechnya with "promoting democracy." Nonetheless, she contends this discomfort was never stressed publicly as the Clinton administration realized they could use the crisis to their advantage and advance the NATO enlargement policy more freely⁵¹⁷. Again, in her argument, there is a distinct claim of hypocrisy. However, as mentioned, private conversations between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin in 1995 and 1996 prove these assertions wrong. The Chechen War was perceived as a problem for democracy in Russia so long as public opinion and other Western countries recognized it as such. In April 1996, after Clinton compared the Russian military operation in Chechnya to the American Civil War, Secretary Christopher and his Deputy Talbott said it was "premature to interpret the debacle in Chechnya as the death of democracy, freedom, and reform all across Russia."⁵¹⁸ Chechnya was just a "hiccup in a difficult and long transition, but the transition was still moving – and had to be moved – in the right direction."⁵¹⁹

Furthermore, after the Clinton administration fully endorsed Yeltsin's reelection in the spring of 1996, Washington was willing to increase its support. As reported in Goldgeier and McFaul's primary sources, there was a preoccupation that "Russia is going to go down the drain" and that they could not "afford that at this time."⁵²⁰ In fact, the path of economic reform and democracy envisaged by the Clinton administration was still not consolidated. In this context, Vice President Gore asked: "You have maybe another candidate who is likely to advance democracy?"⁵²¹ In addition, as some officials warned President Clinton about backing

⁵¹⁵ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 139.

⁵¹⁶ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 504.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 142.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 149.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

Yeltsin too explicitly for fear of public reactions, Clinton replied he would go “all the way.”⁵²² The Clinton administration’s efforts emerged also through public speeches. “I know it isn’t particularly popular to say,” announced Clinton, but they were “still willing to lead the cause of peace and freedom.”⁵²³ Then, he continued, “we have to make difficult decisions still,” but “our economic strategy is working in part because it is going hand in glove with our commitment to peace and freedom and democracy.”⁵²⁴

Finally, when Yeltsin’s intention to delay elections became known within the Clinton administration, secondary sources and primary documents used for this research agree that they decided to strengthen their support for Yeltsin. This decision implied pushing for Russian attendance at the G-7 Summit and announcing important arms control initiatives at the Moscow Summit. Again, as reported in Goldgeier and McFaul’s primary sources, Deputy Secretary of State Talbott declared that “the U.S. was supporting not just the man but the principle, that Russia would work its way out of its crisis through elections, referendums and constitutional rule.”⁵²⁵

Ultimately, all these sources merge into the conclusion that the Clinton administration’s reading of certain events differed from historians’ and analysts’ common assertion of Yeltsin’s undemocratic inclination. In other words, objectively undemocratic tendencies, such as the shelling of the Russian White House, the military operation in Chechnya, and the intentions to delay elections, were generally not perceived as such by the Clinton administration. Instead, they were “bumps in the road” within a larger democratic vision for Russia. In fact, they never expressed hesitation about whether or not their support for Yeltsin was the right path to “democratic success” in Russia. Following the Clinton administration’s own conception of democracy, that was certain. President Yeltsin was advancing the economic reforms that would have necessarily led to a solid democratic system in Russia and never expressed reservations about the continuation of such reforms. Therefore, this thesis finds that the Clinton administration’s rhetoric was not hypocritical, as many have implied, but genuine. Embodied within Clinton’s definition of democracy was a specific idea of a righteous economic path. Hence, as the success of democracy consistently coincided with the success of capitalism, any doubt of hypocrisy disappears when we look at Yeltsin’s commitment to it over the years.

⁵²² Ivi, p. 148.

⁵²³ “Presidential Speech”, *C-SPAN, Report Video Issue*, 05.02.1996.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ J. M. Goldgeier, M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 153.

Finally, the reelection of Boris Yeltsin in July 1996 was welcomed as a huge victory, and Clinton, who had put at stake his own domestic credibility and approval, could finally focus on his election campaign. To conclude, it is fundamental to note that the results of this research - and the premises on which they were found - remain disputable and open to being an object of study and discussion.

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