



# YELTSIN AND CLINTON: A CASE STUDY IN POLITICAL FRIENDSHIP

Master Thesis

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>DUMA</b>	The lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia
<b>G-7</b>	The Group of Seven, an international intergovernmental economic organization consisting of seven advanced economies
<b>G-8</b>	The Group of Eight, consisting of the G-7 members and Russia
<b>NARA</b>	National Archive and Records Administration
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>PFP</b>	Partnership for peace
<b>US</b>	United States of America
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, also known as the Soviet Union

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis argues that Bill Clinton, the 42<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States, and Boris Yeltsin, the first democratically elected leader of post-Soviet Russia, have engaged in a political friendship. During the two presidencies, there are three main categories of events that highlight the relationship of the two leaders: those related to the economy, e.g., Russia's economic trouble and its aspiration to join the G-7; to the military, e.g., the war in Kosovo and the enlargement of NATO; and to internal politics, e.g., the internal challenges to Yeltsin and Clinton re-election. I have leveraged recently declassified transcripts from the National Archive and Records Administration (NARA) of conversations between two leaders alongside other first-hand sources. Additionally, the thesis refers to books from close collaborators, news stories from the time, and academic articles related to friendship, politics, and social studies in general. To provide further context, the thesis offers a short overview of how both men grew up and their early political careers. To assess whether Clinton and Yeltsin were engaged in a political friendship in a structured way, I use Yuri van Hoef's model,<sup>1</sup> and its five key-components: (1) affect, (2) grant project, (3) altruistic reciprocity, (4) moral obligation, and (5) equality. After some limitations of the framework are described, I add a different perspective on the model based on behaviour and context. The thesis is a case study of various relevant events, the actions of the two leaders and other important political actors, and of the conversations between Yeltsin and Clinton and their examination through the each of the key-components of the model. To answer the research question, the outcome of each examination is pulled into one holistic argument, which claims that Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton were indeed engaged in a political friendship throughout their political and personal relationship. The analyses show that four of the key-components strongly favour the research question. The last key-component, 'equality,' does not support the hypothesis but also does not provide strong evidence against it. Lastly, the thesis provides a short overview of future avenues for research and highlights the limitations of the current work.

**Keywords:** Political friendship, Clinton, Yeltsin, National Archives, Van Hoef model, Behavioural analysis, Case study, International relations, Political science

<sup>1</sup> Yuri van Hoef, "Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major" (University of Leeds, 2018), 5.

## INTRODUCTION

*'If a friend suddenly turns out to be  
Not quite a friend, not quite an enemy, but just...  
If you can't tell at a glance,  
If he's good or bad,*

*Take a risk! Take him along to climb a mountain.  
Don't send him off on his own;  
Have him use the same support hooks that you do,  
And then you'll know, who you're dealing with.'*<sup>2</sup>

*Vladimir Vysotsky*

Mikhail Gorbachev, the former president of the Soviet Union, believed that there is little room for human emotions at the top.<sup>3</sup> There are still debates for whether at all we can observe genuine friendship and sincere emotions in the political arena.<sup>4</sup> Even more, when it comes to officials occupying high positions in government – as in between the leaders of the two heavy-armed and ideologically-charged countries fighting for dominance on the world stage. The goal of this paper is to analyse the relationship between two presidents: the American President Bill Clinton and the Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Many newspapers and articles have stressed the importance of the relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin. The New Yorker magazine has portrayed the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton as a friendship. It also emphasized the impact their relationship had on both countries.<sup>5</sup> James Goldgeier in his article ‘Bill and Boris:

<sup>2</sup> William Comer, “Vysotsky: Song about a Friend,” *Vysotsky: Translations: William Comer.*, accessed May 25, 2020, [http://www.kulichki.com/vv/eng/songs/comer.html#song\\_about\\_a\\_friend](http://www.kulichki.com/vv/eng/songs/comer.html#song_about_a_friend).

<sup>3</sup> Mihail Gorbachev, *Наедине с Собой*, 2012, 235–237, accessed June 27, 2020, <https://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/22424367/>.

<sup>4</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 44.

<sup>5</sup> Masha Gessen, “The Undoing of Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin’s Friendship, and How It Changed Both of Their Countries,” *The New Yorker*, accessed June 25, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-undoing-of-bill-clinton-and-boris-yeltsin-friendship-and-how-it-changed-both-countries>.

a window into a most important Post-Cold war relationship’ notes that both presidents had a close personal rapport.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton is significant for understanding not only international politics but also how a personal relationship between two leaders can affect their decisions and policymaking. The relationship between Russia and the US was never smooth. There was always a struggle for dominance and world influence. This tension achieved its apex during the Cold War. But due to many factors, including the fall of the Soviet Union in late 1991,<sup>7</sup> the relationship between Russia and the US changed during Yeltsin and Clinton’s presidencies.

During both presidents’ years of governance, they shared similar – to an extent – views. They tried to build a firm alliance between their countries. Their relationship was unique in a way. They both enjoyed each other’s company, tried to help each other, supported one another and strove to build a new peaceful and democratic world.<sup>8</sup> And in this context, Yeltsin and Clinton were engaged in a political friendship.

Chapter I: Theory and Methodology examines the research question and the theoretical framework used throughout the thesis. The research question examines whether the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton can be considered a political friendship. The text also presents a case for the importance of this question in a practical context (e.g., the influence of political friendships on political interactions among leaders). Section 1.1: Friendship research delves into the existing research and identifies academic gaps this paper would seek to close.

Friendship is not a new topic of research, dating back to the ancient Greeks.<sup>9</sup> However, the interplay between friendship and the constraints put on it by politics has only recently been a focus of research. Yuri van Hoef has examined political friendship via the analysis of the relationship between political elites.<sup>10</sup> This thesis will apply Van Hoef’s framework, based

<sup>6</sup> James Goldgeier, “Bill and Boris: A Window Into a Most Important Post-Cold War Relationship,” *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 4 (August 2018): 12.

<sup>7</sup> Serge Schmemmann, “End of the Soviet Union; The Soviet State, Born of a Dream, Dies,” *The New York Times*, December 26, 1991, sec. World, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-of-the-soviet-union-the-soviet-state-born-of-a-dream-dies.html>.

<sup>8</sup> James Goldgeier, “Bill and Boris: A Window Into a Most Important Post-Cold War Relationship.”

<sup>9</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Friendship in World Politics: Assessing the Personal Relationships between Kohl and Mitterrand, and Bush and Gorbachev,” *AMITY: The Journal of Friendship Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 62–82; Yuri

upon five key-components<sup>11</sup>, introduced by Van Hoef to examine political friendship. Providing a setup for the rest of the thesis, the framework and its components are described in Section 1.2: Theoretical basis. The first element ‘affect’ shows whether there is a reciprocal bond between individuals. Van Hoef argues that this affection exists between the political elites as well.<sup>12</sup> The second component ‘grand project,’ which is a core element that may help us distinguish between friendship and political friendship.<sup>13</sup> When political elites are engaged in a project where they share common values and promote one idea, political friendship might take place. The next component, ‘altruistic reciprocity,’ focuses on the dedication in the relationship between the political elites. Reciprocal commitment shows the truthfulness of the relationship between the individuals. A tightly related key-component is ‘moral obligations.’ This element provides grounds for questioning to what extent both individuals fulfilled or rejected their moral obligations towards each other and what each of them expected from the other. And the last component, ‘equality,’ evaluates to what degree the political elites engaged in a relationship are equal and how this might have affected their interactions. By leveraging the framework, political friendship is assessed in a structured manner.

Section 1.3: Different perspective highlights a few limitations of Van Hoef’s model and provides a different perspective on how the framework can be seen through the lens of behaviour and context. I argue that only behaviour matters, and that behaviour can be examined by taking into account the internal (personal), inter-personal, and external context. The section presents a simple representation of how the five key-components can be related to behaviour and context.

The last section in the chapter, Section 1.4: Sources, lays out the available sources on Clinton and Yeltsin and their political lives. Recently, the National Archives and Records

van Hoef, “Interpreting Affect Between State Leaders: Assessing the Political Friendship Between Winston S. Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt,” in *Researching Emotions in International Relations: Methodological Perspectives on the Emotional Turn*, ed. Maéva Clément and Eric Sangar, Palgrave Studies in International Relations (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 51–73, accessed June 1, 2020, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65575-8\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65575-8_3); Yuri van Hoef, “Leadership Through Friendship: The Dangers and Advantages of State Leaders Establishing Close Personal Relations,” *Journal of Leadership Studies* 13, no. 1 (2019): 70–72.

<sup>11</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major.”

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



Administration (NARA) declassified transcripts from conversations between Clinton and Yeltsin.<sup>14</sup> The materials were released in 2015.<sup>15</sup> Those documents transcribe the conversations between the two leaders and open a window into a world hidden to most of us: a high-stakes game of geopolitics. As one article put it, ‘Against the backdrop of an enormous power differential between their two countries, Clinton and Yeltsin established a close personal rapport.’<sup>16</sup> Since the release of the transcript, there is little academic research that has made use of them, and together with other first- and second-hand sources, I use them to paint a picture of the relationship between the two leaders.

Friendship as a concept is hard to define in a precise scientific manner that doesn’t contradict in some ways with our intuition on the subject.<sup>17</sup> Friendship, thus, is hard to study. But one thing is certain: friendship is more than just a ‘sum of two different individuals.’ Friendship lies in the interaction between (at least) two separate human beings. Nevertheless, to be able to understand this interaction, one must acknowledge the players. In Chapter II: The Friendship, we are going to do precisely this. After a short introduction, we are going to set the stage on which the players will act: the historical context. The choices with which the two leaders had to struggle cannot be viewed in isolation. The Cold War, and subsequently, and the fall of the Soviet Union set up a giant puzzle of overstretched treaties, connecting the world in a web of economic relationships, unstated promises to defend your allies, and local politics struggling to separate itself from geopolitics. Yeltsin and Clinton couldn’t make decisions without considering how pulling on one treaty might unexpectedly tear the fabric of the global order. To become the leader of a global superpower, one must be a formidable individual. And as we will see, both Yeltsin and Clinton are such individuals. Even more, by examining their past, we might get a feel for what makes them tick. Coming from different backgrounds – not to say, from different cultures and with different worldviews – at first glance, a friendship between Yeltsin and Clinton sounds unlikely. But some of those differences might be a key ingredient to a strong bond to-be.

<sup>14</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin” (Clinton Digital Library, 2015), 2015-0782-M-2, Presidential Libraries, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57569>.

<sup>15</sup> Office of the Federal Register (OFR), *Public Papers of the Presidents William J. Clinton 1993: Book II (August 1 to December 31, 1993)* (Office of Federal Register National Archives & Records Admin (1994), 1995).

<sup>16</sup> James Goldgeier, “Bill and Boris: A Window Into a Most Important Post-Cold War Relationship,” 43.

<sup>17</sup> Rosemary Blieszner and Rebecca G. Adams, *Adult Friendship* (SAGE Publications, 1992), 2.

The five sections in the Chapter III: The Model follow the framework, and each examines Yeltsin and Clinton's purported friendship through one of the key-components. Section 3.1: Affect, focuses on the first key-concept of the framework, 'affect' (i.e., affection). Yeltsin and Clinton have displayed at multiple times affection towards each other. They enjoyed each other's company and liked spending time together. Even when they had to discuss difficult issues, they shared optimism and enthusiasm. Humour, interestingly, was an essential part of their bond. The chapter shows many examples, including personal quotes and second-hand accounts, of affection between the two leaders. Keep in mind that when leaders expect that some of what they say might become public, they might distort what they would otherwise say in private. Thus, the chapter also attempts to highlight aspects that are more likely to be genuine.

Section 3.2: Grant Project considers the second key-concept, 'grand project.' During the Cold War, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) – also known as the Soviet Union – and the United States (US) struggled to agree on anything. This changed when both leaders took the helm of their respective countries. Yeltsin and Clinton worked on many significant projects together; project important not only for Russia and the US but for the peace of the entire world. The first section zooms into the role of the G-7, an international intergovernmental economic organization consisting of seven advanced economies: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the US (the European Union is a permanent invitee). During the time of Yeltsin, Russia was invited to the G-7, creating the G-8 (also, dubbed as G7+1).<sup>18</sup> This was a critical joint project for the presidents as it allowed Russia to further integrate into the global economy (in sharp contrast to the closed-off economy of the Eastern bloc,<sup>19</sup> and in particular, the Soviet Union). The second section in the chapter addresses the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the late 1990s. I argue that the road to the expansion (ultimately, adding Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary to the alliance) and the reactions of Russia and its leader led to a joint project for Yeltsin and Clinton: Partnership for Peace (PPF). PPF was a cooperation program between Russia and the alliance aiming to reduce the perceived threat of a bigger and stronger NATO. Lastly, we contemplate the 1998-1999 conflict in Yugoslavia, here referred to as the Kosovo War. Each side had a different view for how to solve the emerging (as early as in 1995) problem on the Balkans peninsula. Each side had to balance how their involvement (or lack of such)

<sup>18</sup> Keep in mind that Russia was ejected from the G-8 in 2014.

<sup>19</sup> A group of communist states under the hegemony of the Soviet Union.

would be perceived by the world with the potential downsides of disagreement. Here, the grant project is the joint effort by the leaders to avoid escalation of the crisis and to preserve the excellent progress made on the Russo-American relationship.

The following two sections form a duality. The two key-concepts examined – ‘altruistic reciprocity’ and ‘moral obligation’ – both focus on behaviour from one of the sides of a potential political friendship that affect the other. Section 3.3: Altruistic Reciprocity focuses on those behaviours that are made without expectation of receiving something in return. Even though this key-component is a passive element – or in other words, nothing active needs to be done – it elucidates essential nuances of the type of relationship between the two individuals. For example, Clinton showed support, even empathy, at multiple occasions, including during the conflict in Chechnya and the failed coup d’état against Yeltsin. On the other side, Yeltsin publicly endorsed Clinton during his re-election campaign (which is also examined in the next chapter). This section looks through a series of events from the perspective of the personal relationship between the leaders.

The penultimate key-component of political friendship, ‘moral obligation,’ is examined in Section 3.4: Moral Obligations. Van Hoef elaborates that in contrast to altruistic reciprocity, ‘moral obligations are active and external, and demand a political actor to act.’<sup>20</sup> In this chapter, I analyse whether Clinton and Yeltsin fulfilled their perceived moral obligations towards each other. As we have seen in the previous sections, both men supported each other in private conversations. Accordingly, they might have expected that the other person will support them publicly as well, especially in critical moments, e.g., during the government referendum challenging the role of the Russian president.

Section 3.5: Equality looks into the last key-component of the framework, ‘equality.’ Friendship scholars share consensus that friendship cannot exist in the absence of equality. Van Hoef states the same applies to political friendship.<sup>21</sup> The section addressed to what extend equality was part of the two men’s relationship and how its presence might mean for their political friendship. On one side, both presidents were leaders of their countries, which at least in a military sense were not far off in terms of power. On the other hand, the section argues, there was massive economic discrepancy between the two sides. This unbalanced lack of equality provides an interesting dynamic for the political friendship and complicates the

<sup>20</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

analysis. The section tried to disambiguate the effect of ‘equality’ by focusing on whether there is evidence that either leader changed his actions due to the potential disbalance between the two sides.

Chapter IV: Results **Error! Reference source not found.** brings everything together and uses the Van Hoef’s model as a whole to assess the research question and related inquiries. The chapter also presents an overview of the political friendship in the context of each of the five components. Subsequently, I answer the research equation and address whether the results should also affect the historical view of the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton, in particular, and between Russia and the US during that period, in general. The final chapter describes several limitations of the thesis due to the use of a single framework and sources only in English and Russian. As a response the limitations and the present other interesting ideas, Section 4.3: Future research highlights key avenues for future research, including comparative analysis and the use of video and audio sources.

As a tentative definition of political friendship, think of Aristotle's 'politike philia' and its 'emotion and noble actions aimed at living well together.'<sup>22</sup> In other words, a political friendship is the sum of altered action (and their motivating emotions) associated with improving a relationship for your mutual interest, particularly in the context of political life. Late in this chapter, I will refine this definition to allow for more precise when addressing the research question. The question this thesis addresses is whether Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin were engaged in a political friendship.

The research question transcends the relationship it aims to explain. For one, as both leader sit at the top of their respective countries' military and geopolitics hierarchies, their decisions are of high importance not only for Russia and the US but also for the entire world. Even more, many situations in international relations present a plethora of 'unpleasant' choices, from which then, the leader must choose the most palatable. In other words, the choices are never easy, and those that get to the president's desk are likely to require 'the lesser of two evils' approach. Thus, if the personal relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton was such that to influence their decisions, the impact of a potential political friendship outgrows any personal context. The next sections focus on the literature on friendship, the theoretical basis used in this thesis, and available sources of information on the two political actors.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Schollmeier, *Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendship* (SUNY Press, 1994), 2–6.

## Section 1.1: Friendship research

*‘Those, who wish good to their friends for the friends’ sake, are friends in the greatest degree; for they have this feeling for sake of the friends themselves, and not for accident. Their friendship therefore continues as long as they are good; and virtue is lasting.’*<sup>23</sup>

*Aristotle*

Many philosophers have analysed the notion of friendship in the past. Aristotle meticulously studied friendship, and he recognized three types of friendship: a friendship based on utility, a friendship based on pleasure or delight, and a friendship based on virtue.<sup>24</sup> Plato also distinguished between three kinds of friendship: pleasure-based, honour-based, and virtue-based.<sup>25</sup> Michel de Montaigne believed that friendship is the ultimate goal itself, and he was willing to ‘follow his friend into anything and trusts blindly in the judgement of his friend’.<sup>26</sup> Another philosopher, Francis Bacon, considered that friendship offers many benefits: it keeps the soul healthy, it allows friends to give each other advice, and friends can represent each other.<sup>27</sup>

Although we might speculate for whether Julius Caesar or Genghis Khan made different decisions because of political friendships they might have, without accurate first-hand (and second-hand) accounts we are left to rely on anecdotes or politically motivated writing from a world too far in the past. Today, however, we can look at a video or listen to a tape and not only have a precise view of what was set but also gauge the tone and general demeanour of the speakers. Small details matter when during political meetings, both sides are speaking based on context painfully aware for those present but distant and hidden for outsiders. The next section will reveal several sources that would allow us to examine the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton in a level of detail that is unavailable for any historical figure from more than a few hundred years ago (and in many ways, a few decades).

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *A New Translation of the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Read Books Ltd., 2013), 267.

<sup>24</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

The sources below together with the framework presented on page - 11 - provide an opportunity to test this framework focusing on the relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin and to prove that friendship in politics matter.<sup>28</sup>

Aristotle considered equality the core of friendship, and he stressed the importance of equality in a relationship. He emphasized that ‘the friendship of virtue will be a friendship of equals, each fully worthy of the other’s confidence, trust, and generous support.’<sup>29</sup> To what extent Yeltsin and Clinton embraced equality and how can we measure it?

<sup>28</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Friendship in World Politics,” 80.

<sup>29</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 57.

## Section 1.2: Theoretical basis

While friendship scholarship is on the rise, there is little research on the personal relationship among state leaders. Yuri van Hoef has studied personal friendship between individual state leaders and has focused political friendship while analysing the relationship between the political elites.<sup>30</sup> Carl Schmitt, another scholar, was convinced that there could not be politics without enmity.<sup>31</sup> He even distinguished three different kinds of enemies: conventional enmity, absolute enmity, and real enmity.<sup>32</sup> However, there are many other scholars who argue that friendship between political elites may exist.<sup>33</sup> Brent E. Sasley, for instance, contemplated that affect plays a very important role in politics.<sup>34</sup>

The Chapter III – after a brief stop in Chapter II to discuss both men and recent history on Russo-American relations – will interpret the Clinton-Yeltsin relationship through van Hoef’s model of political friendship. Political friendship model was proposed by Yuri van Hoef in his work *‘Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major.’*<sup>35</sup> We will use his model, and its five key-components: (a) affect; (b) a grand project; (c) altruistic reciprocity; (d) moral obligations; and (e) equality to analyse the friendship between Clinton and Yeltsin.<sup>36</sup>

The first element ‘affect’ shows whether there is a reciprocal affectual bond between individuals. Affection is a critical part of friendship in normal circumstances. Van Hoef argues that this affection exists between the political elites as well.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, affective acts can be distinguished by non-affective acts. In a political environment, those difference become

<sup>30</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Friendship in World Politics”; Yuri van Hoef, “Interpreting Affect Between State Leaders”; Yuri van Hoef, “Leadership Through Friendship.”

<sup>31</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 31.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Yuri van Hoef and Andrea Oelsner, “Friendship and Positive Peace: Conceptualising Friendship in Politics and International Relations,” *Politics and Governance* 6, no. 4 (December 28, 2018): 116.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



more obvious. 'Affect makes friendship observable [...] to be studied at an intermediate level: between elite political actors such as state leaders.'<sup>38</sup>

The second component is 'grand project,' which is a core element that may help us distinguish between friendship and political friendship.<sup>39</sup> When political elites are engaged in a project where they share common values and promote one idea, political friendship might take place. Common projects or shared goals provide more context for the motivations of either party. Working together towards something bonds people and create a sense of joint progress. A 'grand project' is 'something the friends have recognised in each other: a joined worldview, a joined striving towards some ideal.'<sup>40</sup> So, this key-component does not refer only to actual project with a clear beginning and end state but also to joint ideologies and beliefs. The logic goes, 'if you care about the same things as me, you are more like me, and thus, I should like you more.' On the other hand, you cannot be engaged in a political friendship if know that the other person holds beliefs that are a diametrically opposed to your core beliefs.

Van Hoef states that 'Acts within a friendship can be divided between altruistic reciprocity and moral obligations.'<sup>41</sup> Altruistic reciprocity means that acts are made for the sake of the friendship alone, while moral obligations are active appeals for assistance. In other words, the motivations for the actions of the two leaders are important. They split their actions into two categories. One born from personal motivation and another, from political calculations. One, more private in its expression; the other, more public. First, we focus on the former. Van Hoef defines the altruistic reciprocity as 'a passive element of friendship because friends reciprocate out of themselves, making it void of the calculating nature of a partnership. It is, then, reciprocal because each friend continually reciprocates, without expecting the friend to necessarily reciprocate equally.'<sup>42</sup> In the context of political friendship, one could argue that altruistic reciprocity is instead a rarity than an everyday thing. Thus, finding evidence for its presence in the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton would be a strong point in favour of political friendship. Altruistic reciprocity means 'giving each other something without taking

<sup>38</sup> Yuri van Hoef and Andrea Oelsner, "Friendship and Positive Peace," 121.

<sup>39</sup> Yuri van Hoef, "Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major," 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 128.

a possible later reward in consideration.’<sup>43</sup> Reciprocal commitment shows the truthfulness of the relationship between the individuals. Usually, politicians would not do something if they know that there is no benefit. At least, this is the common idea of what people think about politicians. In the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton, there was, of course, benefit, but as I will argue, altruistic reciprocity was also persisting.

The next element is ‘moral obligations.’ This element provides grounds for questioning to what extent both individuals fulfilled or rejected their moral obligations towards each other. While ‘altruistic reciprocity’ focuses on the dedication in the relationship between the political elites, ‘moral obligation’ is closely tied with the incentives of both sides, and critically, to their expectation for how their actions. Those expectations might be purely forward-looking, ‘if I do *this* for you, I expect you to do *that* for me.’ This for that. However, the connection between expectations and actions might be more complex. Even if the future payoff is not clear – or even likely – if the other party expect for a favour to be paid off and that moral obligation is not fulfilled, they might react negatively in the now or in the future. Moral obligations are a form of (sometime unspoken) social contract between two actors. But if the contract is broken, the consequences might not be clear. And previous ‘investments’ – fulfilling moral obligations even when the short-term calculus is not in your favour – might pay off on the next ‘contract.’

And the last component, ‘equality,’ evaluates to what degree the political elites engaged in a relationship are equal and how this might have affected their interactions. If there is no equality between the friends, there is a different social relationship: for instance, like that between client and patron.’<sup>44</sup> The ‘equality’ key-component implies that the same applies to political friendship.<sup>45</sup> As mentioned above, incentives influence behaviour. If the relationship that is not balance imposes more incentive, which then might be difficult to be de-coupled from the actions of the two actors.

Here we also have an opportunity to refine the definition of political friendship introduces at the beginning of this chapter. Hereinafter, political friendship will refer to the ‘emotional bond between individual politicians that influences their political actions’<sup>46</sup> in the context of the five key-components above.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Leadership Through Friendship,” 70.

<sup>45</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 7–8.

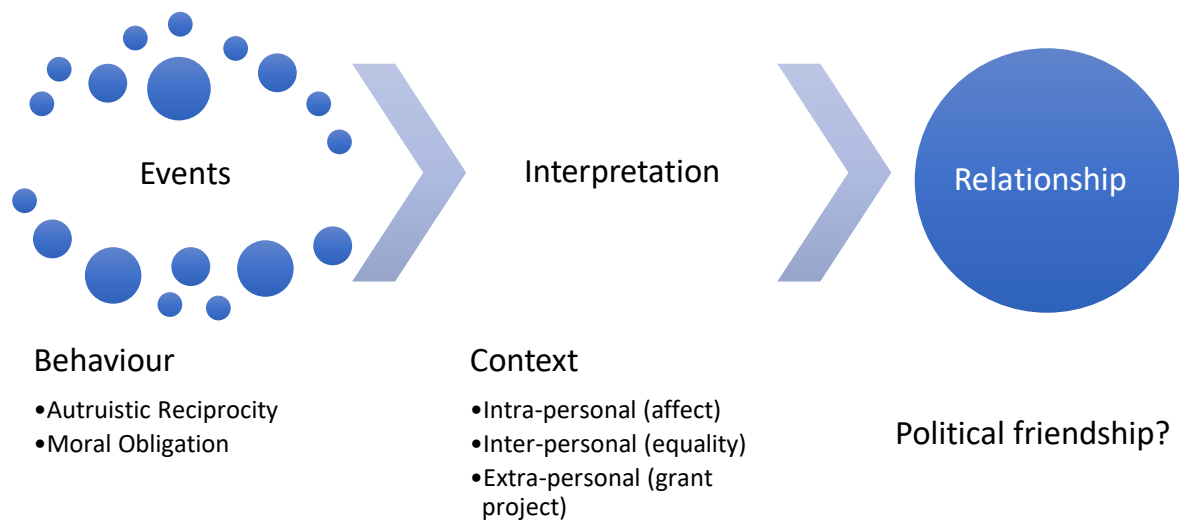
<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 2.

### Section 1.3: Different perspective

The key-components of van Hoef's model, however, have some limitations. As external observers, we can only have access to information about events and how both "potential friends" behave before, during, or after those events. In other words, we can only know what happened and what both parties did and not what they thought or what their motivations were. We are left to only interpret their behaviour in the given context and try to deduce how likely is for that behaviour to have been influenced by the political friendship. Figure 1 shows a simple toy model for interpreting what we observe – external events and the behaviour of the two subject – in the context of political friendship. Every behaviour, which has influence on the other party (and any that does not is irrelevant), can be attributed to altruistic reciprocity or moral obligation (or a combination of both). Thus, when it comes to behaviour, Van Hoef's model is collectively exhaustive. On the other hand, when it comes to how those behaviours could be interpreted, Van Hoef's model is limited. The context of a relationship can be broken into three categories:

1. Intra-personal: those aspects of the relationship that exist within the minds of the individuals like empathy or affection towards others or predispositions towards ideologies or way of working.
2. Inter-personal: those aspects of the relationship that are defined by the two people in aggregate in distinction of their personal context. In other words, what is true only for those two people together which is not true in absence of their relationship.
3. Extra-personal: those aspects of the relationship that are outside of the two individuals. The extra-personal affects the inter-personal (and the intra-personal) but will be relevant for any other two individuals in that situation.

So, behaviour can be seen through a lens of the internal (intra-personal), external (extra-personal), and inter-personal context.



*Figure 1: Toy model for interpreting events and behaviour*

The key-concept of ‘affect’ relates to the intra-personal. However, ‘affect’ does not fully capture other important dimensions of the intra-personal like pity or disgust. I may well like someone – have an affection for them – but if my actions are driven by pity, I have a relationship, but it would be difficult to describe it as a political friendship.

I argue that ‘equality’ only has bearing on the relationship to the extent it influences behaviour. Consider a mentor-mentee relationship. The two sides might not be equal – almost by design – but they might have a strong bond. Furthermore, (the lack of) equality is difficult to pinpoint as the two sides might have an advantage over each other in different ways without a clear “overall” dominance. I will argue that one example of a political friendship that is clearly not equal is the relationship between President Barack Obama and his Vice President, Joe Biden. Initially running against each other in the democratic primary for the 2008 US presidential election, they join forces and win the election versus John McCain and Sarah Palin.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, the relationship between a president and his vice president is not equal. But I argue that Obama and Biden had a political friendship and that friendship have an influence on their decisions and political careers. The fact they were not equal might have even helped their political friendship but creating clearly distinct roles for each of the two men. In the end, lack of equality can be a good thing or a bad thing for a political friendship depending on how it

<sup>47</sup> Adam Nagourney, “Obama Wins Election,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 2008, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/05/us/politics/05campaign.html>.

changes the inter-personal dynamic. The inter-personal view is more comprehensive and does not predispose a judgment for what would positively influence a political friendship.

Figure 1 only loosely attributes the five key-components to parts of the toy model. 'Grant project' is not only an extra-personal context but this view provides the clearest limitation of the key-component. Van Hoef's model puts too much weight on events or themes of a political friendship that have an objective or a clear end state. When there are multiple events that do not have commonality other than the two 'potential friends,' it is difficult to talk about a 'grant project.' Nevertheless, how the relationship affects or is affected by those events can be examined and might lead to meaningful conclusions that can then shed light on other aspect of the relationship. Themes are helpful ways to talk about overarching commonality among events, but they do not have value by themselves. For a political friendship to exist it only needs to affect decision-making, and in the end, decisions.

Another inherent difficulty in using Van Hoef's model, and perhaps any model for assessing a relationship is that relationships have different dimensions. The relative importance of each key-component depends on the context and on the interaction among the components. Thus, one component that strongly indicates against the existence of a political friendship could overpower the other four components that by themselves might lean weakly for a political friendship. Furthermore, even when we are witnessing affection and sympathy between two political elites, we cannot simply frame that relationship 'friendship,' as one must question their emotional authenticity. In the political arena, feelings might be the forbidden fruit. Political elites have too many things on mind. For one, they should think about the benefit of their own countries. Exposing personal preferences and feelings might deteriorate the political image of the person engaged in politics. Although Van Hoef's model provides a structured way to assess the relationship between political elites, each key-component must be examined from a perspective of the behaviour of the two sides and the context in which that behaviour happens.

The presence of the five key-components in a relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin are key indicators for whether they engaged in a political friendship: affect, a grand project, altruistic reciprocity, moral obligations, and equality.<sup>48</sup> I applied the model in Chapter III: The Model and extend the argument for each component by referring to the toy model above. By analysing the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton through the prism of Van Hoef's model,

<sup>48</sup> Yuri van Hoef, "Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major," 6.

I drew the conclusion for the contribution of each key-component for assessing that the presidents were engaged in a political friendship.

## Section 1.4: Sources

A casual observer reader might be surprised how well documented is the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton. Many books have been written on Clinton and Yeltsin, including many biographies and even autobiographies. Many authors used different approaches to analyse and better understand Yeltsin and Clinton not only as political figures but also as human beings. One can identify more than 40 books on the presidents and find in many of them the peculiarities of the relationship between the two political elites. Please find a list of books that were consulted for this thesis in Table 1.

Second-hand records must be examined with care in an academic setting. Each statement might have been initially made with an anterior motive. However, when it comes to Yeltsin and Clinton, there are a few sources from people close to the situation that provide valuable insight into the decision making on both sides. One example is Strobe Talbott – Clinton’s Deputy Secretary of State and an advisor on Russia politics, and his book *The Russian hand*.<sup>49</sup> Another is *Boris Yeltsin: From Dawn to Dusk*,<sup>50</sup> the book from Aleksandr Korzhakov, the Russian president’s bodyguard.

<sup>49</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Korzhakov, *Boris Yeltsin: From Dawn to Dusk*, 1997.

Author	Book Title
Alexander Korzhakov	Boris Yeltsin: From Dawn to Dusk
Bill Clinton	My life
Boris Yeltsin	The struggle for Russia
	Борис Ельцин: Записки президента
	Исповедь на заданную тему
David Maraniss	First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton
George W. Breslauer	Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders
Hillary Rodham Clinton	Living History
Leon Aron	Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life
Melvyn P. Leffler	For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War
Mihail Gorbachev	Наедине с собой
Strobe Talbott	The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy
Taylor Branch	The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President
Борис Минаев	ЕЛЬЦИН

Table 1: Consulted books

Furthermore, both presidents have written autobiographies: *My Life* from Bill Clinton and *Notes from the President*<sup>51</sup> (Записки президента in Russian) from Boris Yeltsin. Hillary Clinton, the wife of the American president, also wrote an autobiographical book, *Living History*,<sup>52</sup> which addresses much of Clinton's presidency. All of those resources provide context and substance to the arguments presented in this thesis.

<sup>51</sup> Boris Yeltsin, *Борис Ельцин: Записки президента* (Российская политическая энциклопедия (РОССПЭН), 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History* (Simon & Schuster, 2003).



A key first-hand source for this thesis are the recently declassified documents from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).<sup>53</sup> Those documents transcribe conversations between the two leaders through the presidency of Clinton.<sup>54</sup> The transcripts allow us to ‘eavesdrop’ on calls and reveals the interplay between politics and personality. It shows us ‘how the sausage is made.’ Of course, reading a conversation is different than listening to it. And the people in the room might have been aware of many influencing factors that are obscured from the written version of the conversations. Political actions might diverge of what transpired by ‘reinforcing an established shared narrative or by retroactively presenting a different story.’<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, knowing what was said provides an additional dimension to research only done based on interpretations of what was said and why.

<sup>53</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin.”

<sup>54</sup> James Goldgeier, “Bill and Boris: A Window Into a Most Important Post-Cold War Relationship,” 43.

<sup>55</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 60.

*'Mr. President, this summit of ours, unlike its predecessors, is about the future, a future in which we will strive to integrate Russia and the West, to build a new century of peace in Europe, and a future of shared responsibility that comes with a vast territory, large populations, great power, and democratic values, to use our combined influence and authority for the good of the world beyond our borders'*<sup>56</sup>

*Bill Clinton to Boris Yeltsin*

### Section 2.1: Historical context

This section provided a brief overview of Russo-American relationships before Clinton and Yeltsin in order to understand the international importance of the relationship between Russia and the US, in turn, the importance of the relationship of the two leaders.

During the Cold War, there was no fruitful cooperation between the two countries even though the relationship between Russia and the US became warmer with the fall of the Berlin wall. Mikhail Gorbachev contributed enormously to the improvement of the interaction between the two countries. It is undeniable that there was a bond between Gorbachev and Reagan which helped put the end to the Cold War. Even Reagan admitted the fact that there was a special relationship between him and Gorbachev, 'I think, frankly, (that) President Gorbachev and I discovered a sort of a bond, a friendship between us, that we thought could become such a bond between all the people'.<sup>57</sup> Gorbachev sought to continue in the same direction with Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush. One could argue that their cooperation was fruitful, and Gorbachev considered their agreement to destroy thousands of nuclear weapons was their main achievement.<sup>58</sup> When Yeltsin became the first democratically elected president of Russia, he decided to continue the same course Gorbachev took. A course towards cooperation and amity.

<sup>56</sup> United States President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Federal Register Division, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1994), 1633.

<sup>57</sup> John-Thor Dahlburg, "Reagan Greeted With Hearty Bearhug by Gorbachev," *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1990, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-09-18-mn-595-story.html>.

<sup>58</sup> "Mikhail Gorbachev: George H.W. Bush and I Ended a War Together. But Peace Is Now in Jeopardy," *Time*, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://time.com/5471437/mikhail-gorbachev-george-hw-bush-war-peace/>.

The Cold War exacerbated the hostility between the Soviet Union and the US. The United States was a capitalistic country which opposed everything the Soviet Union did.<sup>59</sup> The US and the Soviet Union came to be known as antagonistic states. They competed in everything and tried to prove to the entire world that their own system of values is better than the other's. In fact, the Soviet Union negated everything the US capitalistic system produced. This antagonism led to the building of two separate spheres of influence. During these 'cold' times, conflicts (albeit not only military conflicts) were an inescapable part of the game. Even the death of the most frightful leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin did not bring peace between both camps. Nikita Khrushchev, one of Stalin's successors, decided to keep the same course and continue the confrontation.<sup>60</sup>

Both camps did not trust each other. Each one suspected the other one of the worst sins. Rivalry was the main weapon. It was a world where competition misplaced collaboration. Trust issues could be observed since Stalin's times. The so-called Father of Nations never trusted anyone; he mistrusted even his closest henchmen. Even his closest allies, in the end, died from Stalin's orders. Stalin eliminated everyone. Especially those who once helped him rise to his current position. Consequently, trust issues grew into paranoia.<sup>61</sup>

Not only distrust was an issue. Both camps tried to undermine each other's authority. There are many examples of unethical behaviour, especially from the USSR's side. For instance, in 1962, when the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, tried secretly to place missiles on the island of Cuba, some 1,500 kilometres from the US coast.<sup>62</sup> But the Americans found out about this operation, and one could imagine that they were not happy about this. The American President John F. Kennedy reached to Khrushchev and asked to 'halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless and provocative threat to world peace and to stable relations between our two nations.'<sup>63</sup> Because of the USSR's provocative behaviour, the world was again on the brim of the war. The Soviet ambassador to

<sup>59</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 14.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>63</sup> National Archives, "Forty Years Ago: The Cuban Missile Crisis," *National Archives*, last modified August 15, 2016, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/fall/cuban-missiles.html>.

the United States noted that, ‘For a week the world was on the verge of war. Both our nations were in an excruciating state of strain.’<sup>64</sup>

In the infamous ‘kitchen debate,’ Nikita Khrushchev and the US president Richard Nixon joined the fray. Both statesmen tried to show that their country is better. The debate started over the house exhibition. Nixon sought to bring to Khrushchev’s attention that their houses and technologies are better: ‘American houses last for more than 20 years, but, even so, after twenty years, many Americans want a new house or a new kitchen. Their kitchen is obsolete by that time... The American system is designed to take advantage of new inventions and new techniques.’<sup>65</sup> Khrushchev responded that the Soviet tradition disagrees with everything his American counterpart said, ‘This theory does not hold water. Some things never get out of date – houses, for instance, and furniture, furnishings – perhaps – but not houses. I have read much about America and American houses, and I do not think that this is an exhibit and what you say is strictly accurate.’<sup>66</sup> Even at the end of the meeting, Khrushchev did not forget to stress their difference, ‘You’re a lawyer of Capitalism, I’m a lawyer for Communism. Let’s kiss.’<sup>67</sup>

The thaw in the Russo-American relationship began when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. The tear of the Berlin Wall is an emblematic achievement which put an end to the Cold War. The speech of the 40<sup>th</sup> president of the United States Ronald Reagan is a turning point in the US-Russian clash, ‘General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!’<sup>68</sup>

Even though Gorbachev implemented his politic of openness, he was not entirely ready to break away from the Communist legacy. Russia needed someone courageous to rise above the past and lead Russia into a completely new direction. Thus, in June 1991, Yeltsin won 57

<sup>64</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, 357.

<sup>65</sup> “The Kitchen Debate,” *Teaching American History*, accessed June 27, 2020, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-kitchen-debate/>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> ““Tear Down This Wall,”” *National Archives*, last modified August 15, 2016, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2007/summer/berlin.html>.

percent of the vote to become Russia's first democratically elected president.<sup>69</sup> Yeltsin was different. He contributed to the fall of Communism. He sought to rebuild Russia and to make Russia a democratic free country. A country in which values would be respected on the international arena. This is why Clinton warmly welcomed Yeltsin,

'Mr. President, this summit of ours, unlike its predecessors, is about the future, a future in which we will strive to integrate Russia and the West, to build a new century of peace in Europe, and a future of shared responsibility that comes with a vast territory, large populations, great power, and democratic values, to use our combined influence and authority for the good of the world beyond our borders.'<sup>70</sup>

Clinton continued,

'Together, we have agreed to safeguard clear materials and to shut down plutonium production reactors. Together, with Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, we will rid your region of thousands of nuclear warheads. Together, we must ensure that all the new independent states achieve their rightful place as strong and independent nations in Europe, able to chart their own destinies. For that reason, all Americans rejoiced and deeply respected your decision to withdraw your troops from the Baltic nations. Together, we are working to bring peace to Bosnia, to the Middle East, to Karabakh. Together, we will carry the fight against transnational problems like terrorism, environmental degradation, and organized crime. Together, we can, and we will make a difference not only for our own people but also for men, women, and children all around the world.'<sup>71</sup>

The emphasis on the word "together" is palpable. Furthermore, Clinton describes quite the agenda.

<sup>69</sup> Serge Schmemmann, "Yeltsin Is Handily Elected Leader of Russian Republic in Setback for Communists," *The New York Times*, June 14, 1991, sec. World, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/14/world/yeltsin-is-handily-elected-leader-of-russian-republic-in-setback-for-communists.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Office of the Federal Register (OFR), *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 1633.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Finally, Clinton added, ‘Mr. President, it is an honour to have you with us. Together, we have done well in laying the foundation of trust and security between our two peoples. Now let us build on it to secure a future of peace.’<sup>72</sup> This illustrates that Clinton was determined to work towards peace. This was his ultimate goal.

For the first time in decades, the relationship between Russia and the US shifted into a new direction. Both Yeltsin and Clinton worked together to show the world that what happened during the Cold War should not repeat again. The relationship between Russia and the US during the Cold War was a zero-sum game. Yeltsin and Clinton during their meetings emphasized that the disastrous relationship between Russia and the US must be forgotten. Both presidents were about to embark on a new journey, a journey to cooperation and amity.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

## Section 2.2: The human behind the leader

*'The childhood was very difficult. There was no food. The harvest was poor. Everyone was forced to go into kolkhoz<sup>73</sup>. In addition, gangs were operating all around, almost every day, shooting, murdering and thieving.'*<sup>74</sup>

*Boris Yeltsin*

Yeltsin was a controversial figure in Russia. Some people praised him; others hated him. The leader of the Liberal Democratic party of Russia Vladimir Zhirinovskiy many times accused Yeltsin of committing the most dreadful crime in the history of Russia, and he was referring to the so-called Belovezha Accords.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, he argues that the events of 1991 brought 'violence, huge number of victims and destruction.'<sup>76</sup> By signing these agreements, Yeltsin de facto dissolved the Soviet Union and established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

After 74 years of Communism, Russia was embarking on a new journey. And the captain of the ship was Yeltsin. He considered himself well prepared to lead Russia into a new direction. Richard Nixon, admired him, saying,

*'Yeltsin has totally repudiated the communist party; Gorbachev has not. Yeltsin is for immediate independence for the Baltics and for Georgia; Gorbachev is not. Yeltsin is for immediately cutting off all economic and military aid to Cuba, Afghanistan, and Angola; Gorbachev is not. Yeltsin is totally committed to gaining power by winning a free election; Gorbachev will not take this chance.'*<sup>77</sup> *'For Yeltsin was not easy. Was not simply to make the transition to the capitalistic system smoothly. Not everyone was happy with this transition. There were still people with hammer and sickle flags protesting against the Yeltsin's new implementations.'*<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Collective state-operated farm (own translation)

<sup>74</sup> Boris Yeltsin, *Исповедь на заданную тему* (Человек, 1990), 12.

<sup>75</sup> "Жириновский обвинил Ельцина в 'главном преступлении в истории России,'" *PIA Новости*, last modified December 8, 2019, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20191208/1562110877.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Jonathan Movroydis, "Nixon on Gorbachev and Yeltsin," Blog, *Richard Nixon Foundation*, September 10, 2018, accessed May 24, 2020, <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2018/09/richard-nixon-gorbachev-yeltsin/>.

<sup>78</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 49.

To understand Yeltsin's character and ambition, it is important to consider his past. During his entire life, Yeltsin was a rioter. Since his childhood, he showed independence and sought to achieve justice. There are countless stories from his childhood and juvenility which prove that Boris was an unordinary child. Stubbornness always persisted since his childhood. Yeltsin's childhood was not one of the most pleasant as he would later recall. There were years of poverty and struggle to simply survive.

In one of his memoirs, Yeltsin recalls the following, 'The childhood was very difficult. There was no food. The harvest was poor. Everyone was forced to go into kolkhoz. In addition, gangs were operating all around, almost every day, shooting, murdering and thieving'<sup>79</sup> As a child, Yeltsin was only pleased to have a leadership role in all the children's games. He was courageous, and he definitely enjoyed the adventure, the danger and the most important, he was not afraid to confront other people, children or even adults.

The historian Leon Aron summarizes Yeltsin's struggle in one sentence 'He made irreversible the collapse of Soviet totalitarian communism, dissolved the Russian empire, ended state ownership of the economy- and held together and rebuild his country while it coped with new reality and losses.'<sup>80</sup> Andrey Kozyrev, the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, thought that Yeltsin has an exceptional personality and that 'in revolutionary situations, you need a leader who is blunt, not necessarily subtle or sophisticated in his techniques.'<sup>81</sup>

An exciting story which proves Yeltsin's braveness happened during the Great Patriotic War. Young Yeltsin volunteered to steal a grenade in order to see with other kids what's inside.<sup>82</sup> He stole two grenades, and the next day he disassembled them while other kids stayed away.<sup>83</sup> Unfortunately, the story did not happily end. Sadly, the fuse detonated, and later Boris had surgical intervention. He was left without his left thumb and index finger.<sup>84</sup> The consequences were not very pleasant for Boris. He was many times humiliated by his classmates and comrades. They even gave him many derogatory names, such as 'urod,'

<sup>79</sup> Boris Yeltsin, *Исповедь на заданную тему*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Leon Aron, *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life* (Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2000), 736.

<sup>81</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (Alfred A. Knopf (Random House), 2010), 178.

<sup>82</sup> Leon Aron, *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life*, 8.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



‘kaleka’ which means ‘freak’ and ‘cripple’ respectively.<sup>85</sup> This was not the only case when Yeltsin got in trouble. Once Yeltsin got involved in a fight, and he was punched in the face and his nose was broken.<sup>86</sup> He was brought home unconscious. This incident also left a mark on Yeltsin’s face forever.<sup>87</sup>

There is another tale which shows that Yeltsin was not only courageous but also fearless. One summer he decided to go hitchhiking to see the wide and picturesque Russia. He was travelling by train when he found himself in a group of criminals just released from the jail who were playing cards.<sup>88</sup> They forced the future president to play with them, and he lost everything he had. Then the criminals issued an ultimatum ‘We will play for your life. You lose, and we throw you off the roof’.<sup>89</sup> Then suddenly Yeltsin regained his luck and won back and eventually saved his life. This case proves Yeltsin’s ultimate courage not to step off when danger appears. Another story reveals Yeltsin’s aversion for compromises and injustice. Years later when Yeltsin was working in construction as a master of a site, he found out that that his crew and the machinery was gone.<sup>90</sup> They were sent to one of the bosses to build a garage.<sup>91</sup> Such attitude and behaviour was unacceptable for Yeltsin. He found the crew and the machinery and sent them back to their lawful workplace.<sup>92</sup>

Yeltsin was a fighter in politics as well. When in 1987 general secretary of the communist party Gorbachev dismissed Yeltsin from the Moscow city party leadership and from politburo. Yeltsin was devastated and needed one year to cover. It broke his ties to the Communist Party forever. Since childhood, Yeltsin learned to stand up for his rights and not to give up. Years later, he would not be afraid to oppose the leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev. After a year he returned with new forces and was ready to take the leadership in his hands.<sup>93</sup>

Clinton also had a troublesome childhood. His father died before he was even born; his stepfather was an abusive alcoholic. Clinton was affected by the drinking problems of his

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 21.

stepfather. In his memoir, he also recalls one of the worst moments of his stepfather drunken brawl,

‘One night his drunken self-destructiveness came to a head in a fight with my mother I can’t ever forget. Mother wanted us to go to the hospital to see my great-grandmother, who didn’t have long to live. Daddy said she couldn’t go. They were screaming at each other in their bedroom in the back of the house. For some reason, I walked out into the hall to the doorway of the bedroom. Just as I did, Daddy pulled a gun from behind his back and fired in Mother’s direction. The bullet went into the wall between where she and I were standing. I was stunned and so scared. [...] Mother grabbed me and ran across the street to the neighbours. The police were called. I can still see them leading Daddy away in handcuffs to jail, where he spent the night.’<sup>94</sup>

His stepfather drinking problems perhaps made Clinton come with empathy to people who had drinking issues. And Yeltsin was known to have problems with his drinking.<sup>95</sup> This would explain why Clinton tolerated compassionately to all Yeltsin’s drunken disorderliness. Another reason could be as he once mentioned that it ‘Yeltsin drunk is better than most of the alternatives sober.’<sup>96</sup>

Dealing with his stepfather drinking problems helped Clinton understand Yeltsin’s issues and to develop a unique approach in their relationship. Clinton understood and noticed Yeltsin’s alcohol issues even from their first summit when Yeltsin ‘drank through the meal without touching his food’.<sup>97</sup> And Clinton did not turn his back on Yeltsin. On the contrary, he enjoyed his interaction with the Russian president saying that ‘life with Yeltsin was a constant adventure.’<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 13.

<sup>95</sup> Joe Middelton, “Britain so Worried Yeltsin’s Drinking It Drew up Contingency Plan in Case He Died,” *Mail Online*, December 31, 2019, sec. News, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7838893/Britain-worried-Boris-Yeltsins-drinking-drew-contingency-plan-case-died.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 185.

<sup>97</sup> Taylor Branch and Bill Clinton, *The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President* (Simon & Schuster, 2009), 84.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

‘That evening, back in the presidential hotel suite, Chris, Tony and I lamented the prospect of having to conduct high-stakes diplomacy under the conditions we’d witnessed during the day. Clinton told us to relax. “I’ve seen a little of this problem in my time,” he said, referring to his experience growing up with an alcoholic stepfather. ‘At least Yeltsin’s not a mean drunk.’<sup>99</sup>

Some people in the US considered Clinton too soft. In general, Clinton was eager to achieve peace and conflicts were not appealing to him. To put it even more clearly, Talbott mentions that

‘Altercation and remonstrance were forms of discourse that did not come naturally to him. His preference was to conciliate in other people’s squabbles and to boost leaders whom he liked. A signature of his political technique was to begin his reply to almost any proposition by saying, ‘I agree with that,’ even when he didn’t. This default to agreeableness was not just a reflection of his desire to be liked—it was also a means, both calculated and intuitive, of disarming those he was trying to persuade, of pretending to begin a conversation on common ground in order to get there before it was over.’<sup>100</sup>

Even then, at twenty-two, Clinton was a natural politician, a prodigious talker but a good listener too, with an easy-going, engaging manner and a capacity to project empathy, not just retail buy wholesale, making individuals in a group, even a crowd, feel singled out. His enthusiasm for the process and the substance of governance was infectious and entertaining.<sup>101</sup> Clinton was a brilliant student. He even won a Rhodes Scholarship and studied for two years at Oxford University. He was studied Law at Yale University. He was on the youngest elected governors. Bill taught classes in Antitrust, Agency and Partnership at Fayetteville Law School.

Clinton fought for justice. It is not surprising that he studied law. One of his main confrontations happened in his family. When his stepfather was yelling and abusing his mother, Bill stood up and demanded his stepfather never ever to strike his mother again.<sup>102</sup> Clinton was

<sup>99</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 65.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>102</sup> David Maraniss, *First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton* (Riverside: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 40.

vehemently opposing racism.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, he was against the war in Vietnam, and he resisted conscription for the Vietnam war.<sup>104</sup>

Bill Clinton and Yeltsin met in 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1992 The Russian President came to the US to meet George H. W. Bush, the American President at that time, Clinton later in his autobiography recalled that first meeting, describing Yeltsin as ‘polite and friendly but slightly patronizing.’<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, he also expressed his admiration for Yeltsin.

‘I had been a big admirer of his since he stood up on a tank to oppose an attempted coup ten months earlier. On the other hand, he plainly preferred Bush and thought the President was going to be re-elected. At the end of our talk, Yeltsin said I had a good future even if I didn’t get elected this time. I thought he was the right man to lead post–Soviet Russia, and I left the meeting convinced I could work with him if I succeeded in disappointing him about the outcome of the election.’<sup>106</sup>

In fact, Yeltsin indeed sympathized with Bush. In the confrontation between Bush and Clinton, Yeltsin thought that Bush would be re-elected.<sup>107</sup> He even morally supported George Bush. Van Hoef argues that ‘more the rule than the exception, state leaders do not take kindly to their predecessor having had a friendship, which immediately negatively impacts the relations of both states, until a successor comes into place’.<sup>108</sup>

‘During the elections Bush was demoralized, his spirit was down, and this news reached also Moscow. I was told that he sits for hours motionless and stares at one point. I called him, I tried to cheer him up.’<sup>109</sup> (my translation)

Yeltsin understood Bush very well. There were many times when Yeltsin was in the same position, and this is why he understood Bush’s feelings. Yeltsin argued that ‘sometimes

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor Branch and Bill Clinton, *The Clinton Tapes*, 38.

<sup>105</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 412.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Борис Ельцин, *Борис Ельцин: Записки Президента* (РОССПЭН, 2010), 103.

<sup>108</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 216.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

the organism could not stand all the tension.’<sup>110</sup> ‘The only thing you can do and not resign, not to drop everything,’ advised Yeltsin, ‘is to bite the bullet and pull yourself together.’<sup>111</sup>(own translation) Even though Yeltsin supported Bush, he was also attracted by Clinton. Yeltsin had built a friendly relationship with Bush and his wife.<sup>112</sup> He considered Bill unordinary, young and beautiful, with good education and upbringing.<sup>113</sup>

In 1995, Clinton and Yeltsin watched a performance of Cirque de Soleil together. Clinton said that he enjoyed the high-wire act of pair of acrobatic twins and that it reminded him of the relationship he has with Yeltsin.<sup>114</sup> Yeltsin vehemently agreed with Clinton, and added ‘And no safety net.’<sup>115</sup> Indeed, their relationship resembled as an equilibrist who walks on a tightrope. Where each movement, each step should be carefully measured, even the breath should be harmonized, and no mistakes allowed.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 168.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

## Section 3.1: Affect

*'You and I can't let anyone come between us. Every time we are together something good happens'.<sup>116</sup>*

*Bill Clinton to Boris Yeltsin*

First impression always matters. There is a Russian proverb stating that you meet the people by their clothes, but we see them off by their intelligence (own translation; *'Встречают по одежке, провожают по уму'*).<sup>117</sup> In the case of Bill and Clinton, intelligence is what mattered. They both looked forward to building a strong relationship not only between themselves but also between their countries. In his inaugural speech, Clinton stressed out the importance of improving the relationship between Russia and the US.<sup>118</sup> The first key-component of political friendship is affective bond. Both Clinton and Yeltsin had this bond. Many pieces of evidence show that Clinton and Yeltsin liked each other.

In 1994, Clinton greeted Yeltsin with an astonishing speech stressing the importance of improving the relationship between Russia and the US:

*'Mr. President, it wasn't so long ago that Russian-American summits were moments of high drama and sometimes disappointing results. The people of our countries and from around the world watched nervously as their leaders met in a heavy atmosphere of mutual suspicion and fear. The fate of the world seemed to hang in the balance of those encounters. And success was defined as the avoidance of confrontation or crisis.'*<sup>119</sup>

Clinton is focusing on the past by which he highlights that 'now' is a different time, and the relationship can be 'restarted.' Clinton continues, focusing on the 'now,'

<sup>116</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 202.

<sup>117</sup> The literal translation is that 'clothes do not make the man.'

<sup>118</sup> "THE Inauguration: 'We Force the Spring': Transcript of Address By President Clinton," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1993, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/21/us/the-inauguration-we-force-the-spring-transcript-of-address-by-president-clinton.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Office of the Federal Register (OFR), *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 1633.

‘Today we meet not as adversaries but as partners in the quest for a more prosperous and a more peaceful planet. In so many areas, our interests no longer conflict, they coincide. And where we do disagree, we can discuss our differences in a climate of warm peace, not cold war. The Russian-American relationship is at last, remarkably, a normal one, full of real accomplishment and genuine promise.’<sup>120</sup>

And here is the common ground. Both leaders hoped to build a bond between their countries. Clinton, then, praises his counterpart,

‘Mr. President, this evolution in our relations is due in no small part to the peaceful revolution you are leading in Russia one that the United States has fully supported. Your steadfastness and courage in the face of difficult odds have inspired millions of Americans. [...] Mr. President, we are privileged to share a great moment, a historic opportunity. When we met in Vancouver over 18 months ago, and again in Moscow last January, we vowed to seize that opportunity by creating and building upon a new partnership between our two nations, a partnership that works.’<sup>121</sup>

The American President shows praise and likeness to what Yeltsin has done. And Clinton is happy with what they have done together,

‘And we have kept that commitment. As a result, our missiles no longer target each other’s people for destruction; instead, they are being dismantled. Our soldiers no longer face each other as deadly adversaries; instead, they work together as partners for peace. Young Russians and Americans no longer learn to be fearful and mistrustful of each other; instead, they study together in record numbers. Trade between our countries is no longer stifled by export controls and prohibitions; instead, it is growing every day to the benefit of both our peoples. In short, our nations are growing closer together, replacing suspicion and fear with trust and cooperation.’<sup>122</sup>

After the meeting, Clinton said,

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

‘I was glad to see Yeltsin in good spirits and apparently recovering from open-heart surgery. He had lost a lot of weight and was still pale, but he was back to his old buoyant and aggressive self.’<sup>123</sup>

Clinton indeed considered Yeltsin his partner, and was genuinely sad when Yeltsin resigned, and Putin became the new president of Russia. Clinton wrote in his memoir

‘Yeltsin had never fully recovered his strength and stamina after his heart surgery, and he believed Putin was ready to succeed him and able to put in the long hours the job required. Boris also knew that giving the Russian people the chance to see Putin perform would increase the chances that he would win the next election. It was both a wise and a shrewd move, but I was going to miss Yeltsin. For all his physical problems and occasional unpredictability, he had been a courageous and visionary leader. We trusted each other and had accomplished a lot together. On the day he resigned, we talked on the phone for about twenty minutes, and I could tell he was comfortable with his decision. He left office as he had lived and governed, in his own unique way.’<sup>124</sup>

Clinton and Yeltsin shared a common sympathy. This sympathy was shown in public many times. They both enjoyed each other’s company. They both took pleasure in having walks; their phone calls often deviated from usual political concerns. In one of their telephone conversations, Clinton shared his concern about Yeltsin’s health for the first time. ‘Bill noticed that Yeltsin got thinner and advised him to eat more. Bill’s good attitude towards Boris could be observed in their first meetings.<sup>125</sup> Most importantly, Clinton’s attitude towards Yeltsin did not change during their entire relationship. From the beginning of their relationship Clinton understood and tried to put himself in Yeltsin’s shoes. Moreover, Clinton very well understood Yeltsin’s position in his country. He mentioned that ‘Yeltsin was up to his ears in alligators, and I wanted to help him’.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 526.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 621.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 351.



In his memoirs, Yeltsin never explicitly wrote about his feelings towards Clinton. He, however, exposed his sympathies for German chancellor Helmut Kohl. Yeltsin wrote that ‘any people say that he and I have a similar appearance: we are both husky; we have similar habits, perspectives on life, and ways of behaving. I have always felt a particular fondness for him. Despite difficulties, Kohl was able to get a call through to me.’<sup>127</sup> The quote shows Yeltsin’s likeness towards people with similar worldview and demeanor. Georgiy Mamedov, Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister, thought that between Clinton and Yeltsin there is chemistry which will help to solve all the issues which are ahead of them.<sup>128</sup>

Clinton was a very infectious person. He was in good relationship with state leaders. It is well known about Clinton friendship with the British prime minister Tony Blair.<sup>129</sup> They enjoyed each other’s company, called each other and made jokes about each other.

Yeltsin always sought to thrust into the limelight that he likes Clinton and that they are both partners.

‘Despite all the talk, the reports in newspapers and the gossip, Russia and America remain partners. Bill Clinton and I remain partners. It will take more than we’ve been through to ruin that.’<sup>130</sup>

For Yeltsin, on the one hand, it was imperative to maintain a good relationship with the US; on the other hand, he felt pressure from people in Russia. In his country, there was still a great pressure from the Communists, who believed in old values and sought to bring back Communism. Communism was the most significant threat not only to Yeltsin but to all Democrats who sought to live in a new free world, without Gulags, censorship, exiles, repressions, poverty. Yeltsin himself said that ‘when they were under the Communism it was a drama; when the tsar was shoot it was a tragedy; when the war with Germany started – it was a matter of life and death of an entire nation.’<sup>131</sup> Yeltsin was aware that democracy is above all

<sup>127</sup> Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia* (Belka Publishing Company, 1995), 132.

<sup>128</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 69.

<sup>129</sup> Marina Hyde, “A Very Fine Bromance: When ‘Bud’ Bill Clinton and His Mate Tony Blair Ran the World,” *The Guardian*, last modified January 8, 2016, accessed June 26, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/08/bromance-bud-bill-clinton-tony-blair>.

<sup>130</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 143.

<sup>131</sup> Boris Yeltsin, *Борис Ельцин: Записки президента*, 5.

a heavy terrible responsibility, for a normal person.<sup>132</sup> And Yeltsin dedicated many sleepless nights, his health even, to the sacred idea of Democracy.<sup>133</sup>

Clinton himself expressed how well he believed they worked together. For instance, during a misunderstanding related to the Middle East, Clinton said, ‘I am not denying that Primakov can be a strong force, but you and I can’t let anyone come between us.<sup>134</sup> Clinton continued, ‘Every time we are together, something good happens, Boris.’

In 1996, when Yeltsin had to face the second election, Clinton was fully supporting him. When Clinton went to visit the Novodevichy Monastery, and he saw the grave of Nikita Khrushchev, he said ‘I wonder how that old fella would feel about what’s going on here now. I’ll bet given the choice, he’d be for Yeltsin too. I want this guy to win so bad it hurts. I guess that shows.’<sup>135</sup>

When asked about his opinion of Yeltsin, Clinton said,

‘Compared with the realistic alternatives, Russia was lucky to have him at the helm. He loved his country, loathed communism, and wanted Russia to be both great and good. Whenever anyone made a snide remark about Yeltsin’s drinking, I was reminded of what Lincoln allegedly said when Washington snobs made the same criticism of General Grant, by far his most aggressive and successful commander in the Civil War: “Find out what he drinks, and give it to the other generals.”’<sup>136</sup>

Bill Clinton’s wife also showed admiration for Boris Yeltsin. She liked and respected him, and to her, he was a true hero.<sup>137</sup> She admired him for standing up for what he believed in, for his courage. For her, Yeltsin was a man who saved the democracy:

‘First, when he climbed onto a tank in Red Square in 1991 and spoke out in defiance of the military coup attempt and again in 1993, when a military cabal tried to take over

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>133</sup> Leon Aron, *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life*, 650.

<sup>134</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 202.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>136</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 354.

<sup>137</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History*, 411.

the Russian White House and Yeltsin stood firmly for democracy, aided by strong support by Bill and other world leaders.’<sup>138</sup>

In 2000, Bill Clinton went to Russia for an official visit to meet the new Russian President Vladimir Putin. After the meeting, Clinton went to visit his old friend Boris Yeltsin. Even after Yeltsin resigned, Clinton still cared about Yeltsin. Yeltsin shared the same feelings. When he saw Clinton, he embraced him and kept saying ‘my friend, my friend.’<sup>139</sup>

‘Boris, you’ve got democracy in your heart. You’ve got the trust of the people in your bones. You’ve got the fire in your belly of a real democrat and a real reformer. [...] Russia needs you. You really changed this country, Boris. Not every can say that about the country he’s led. You changed Russia. Russia was lucky to have you. The world was lucky you were where you were. I was lucky to have you. We did a lot of stuff together, you and I. We got through some tough times. We never let it all come apart. We did some good things. They’ll last. It took guts on your part. A lot of that stuff was harder for you than it was for me. I know that.’<sup>140</sup>

Looking through the first key-component, ‘affect,’ we clearly see that Yeltsin and Clinton liked each other, and there was a special bond between them. They met 18 times.<sup>141</sup> Even Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, who had a very close relationship (and their countries were allies), did not meet so many times. Certainly, Yeltsin and Clinton had many issues to discuss and solve, but they both preferred meeting face-to-face to tackle the most serious issues. Even though Clinton was advised to avoid the mistake that Bush allowed – being too close with Gorbachev – Clinton let himself build a strong tie between himself and Yeltsin.<sup>142</sup> They met and they called each other, not only to discuss serious matters but also to congratulate each other on different occasions and to check each other’s health conditions.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 411.

<sup>139</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2003), 6.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8

<sup>141</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 8.

<sup>142</sup> Taylor Branch and Bill Clinton, *The Clinton Tapes*, 84.

<sup>143</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin,” 313.

When Yeltsin resigned, Clinton said he was going to miss Yeltsin who was ‘a courageous and visionary leader.’<sup>144</sup> Even the closest person to Clinton during his presidency, Strobe Talbott, acknowledged the strong bond between the two presidents.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 621.

<sup>145</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*.

## Section 3.2: Grand Project

*'Strobe Talbott and a strong team will be coming to Moscow next week to focus on NATO and Russia. I know what your position is and I am not asking you to embrace enlargement, but I think we can define a NATO-Russia relationship that will serve both sides' interests, and make Russia a true partner of NATO and assure Russia a major role in Europe.'*<sup>146</sup>

*Bill Clinton to Boris Yeltsin*

One of the most important key-components which provides evidence that political friendship takes place is a grand project. Van Hoef considers this element one of the core components of the relationship, which makes political friendship distinct from other forms of friendship.<sup>147</sup> When two countries engage in common projects to make a positive change not just for their countries but for the entire world, we could clearly see how their relationship evolves. Both Yeltsin and Clinton worked together for the benefit of their countries, and both promoted peace over confrontation. This section will focus on critical projects on which both presidents worked. It is worthwhile to note that both presidents were ambitious, and they wanted the best for their country.

The first thing that each of the leaders sought to improve was the relationship between both countries. In order to achieve peace and collaboration between Russia and the US, Clinton and Yeltsin, most importantly, sought to build a firm bridge between their countries. A bridge which will withstand all the uncertainty and external threats. In order to do so, Clinton and Yeltsin were eager to build trust between them as individuals. Trust was one of the main issues between both countries. In fact, the main issue. During the Cold War, the landmark of the relationship between the US and the USSR was mistrust.

The Group of Seven (G-7)

Yeltsin was very ambitious. He not only sought to bring Russia and the US together, but he also wished to put Russia on the same stage with the most powerful countries. He wanted Russia to have influence, for other countries to follow Russian's 'advice.' One of his biggest aspirations was for Russia to gain a new reputation as of a peaceful state. The best way to

<sup>146</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin," 88.

<sup>147</sup> Yuri van Hoef, "Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major," 6.

achieve his ambition and Russia's voice to be heard was to become part of the Group of Seven (G-7). Russia entering G-7 would prove that Russia has still economic power, and other countries should show her respect.

‘Boris Yeltsin harboured no such doubt or discomfiture about Russia's size or its place in the world. He wanted Russia to be part of every international organization of any standing, especially organizations that brought together the heads of state from the most powerful democracies, since those were the ranks where he felt the new Russia, and he as its founding father, deserved to be accepted.’<sup>148</sup>

Clinton supported Yeltsin, and he was adamant about bringing Yeltsin to the circle of world leaders.<sup>149</sup> This was important for both of them. The G-7 consisted of the seven countries with the most advanced economies: the United States, Canada, France, United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, and Germany.<sup>150</sup> These countries gather once per year to discuss the current global issues and to find a solution for the global challenges. The decisions taken by these countries have an enormous impact.<sup>151</sup> It is not surprising why Russia strived to be part of this organization.

During the spring of 1994 Yeltsin had much on his mind; there was a ministerial problem, for people like Kozyrev to be dealt with. But Yeltsin instead was focused on the annual G-7 Summit, to be held in Naples in July. He wanted to know why it wasn't the G-8 (as in, including Russia) or, as he kept calling it during phone calls to Clinton, ‘the Big Eight.’ Clinton was prepared to oblige Yeltsin by inviting him to Naples as a full participant rather than a guest. He felt it would be a relatively low cost, high-impact way of anchoring Yeltsin, and therefore Russia, in the West. As Strobe Talbott stated ‘the G-8 would be the ultimate club, and Russia's clubbability might help serve as an antidote to its pariah complex at least in the mind, and behaviour, of its president.’<sup>152</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 125.

<sup>149</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History*, 410.

<sup>150</sup> “Role of the G7,” Text, *European Commission - European Commission*, accessed May 23, 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/international-cooperation/international-organisations/g7\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/international-cooperation/international-organisations/g7_en).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 124.

## NATO enlargement

For Yeltsin, the question of NATO enlargement was a question of life and death. NATO enlargement could perhaps ‘blow up the circuits’ of the relationship between the US and Russia.<sup>153</sup> When for the first time in 1993, Warren Christopher informed Yeltsin that they would postpone the NATO enlargement and instead it would focus on Partnership for Peace (PFP). Yeltsin was over the moon.<sup>154</sup> Warren Christopher argued that Yeltsin perhaps misunderstood the idea of PFP program.

‘Yeltsin became quite animated when I described the Partnership proposal. The Russians had been very nervous about the NATO issue in the run-up to our visit. He called the Partnership idea a “stroke of genius,” saying it would dissipate Russian tensions regarding the East Europeans and their aspirations toward NATO. “This really is a great idea, really great,” Yeltsin said enthusiastically. “Tell Bill that I am thrilled by this brilliant stroke.” In retrospect, it is clear that his enthusiasm was based upon his mistaken assumption that the Partnership for Peace would not lead to eventual NATO expansion.’<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore, when Yeltsin understood that NATO, in fact, did not renounce the plans to enlarge, he refused to sign the PFP agreement in the beginning.<sup>156</sup>

NATO enlargement was a threat to Russia. Yeltsin opposed this idea from the bottom of his heart. He stressed that NATO enlargement would bring a ‘new era of confrontation.’<sup>157</sup> However, Yeltsin was again truly trusting Clinton. Especially, Russia was concerned that countries from the former Warsaw Pact would consider becoming a member of NATO. This could cause a loss of influence in the region, which would have harmful consequences for Russia. Yeltsin negotiated with Clinton NATO’s enlargement ambitions. He tried to convince Clinton to at least not give membership to any countries within the Russian sphere of influence while he is a President. Otherwise, this could cause him to lose the elections. Yevgeny

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>155</sup> George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 191.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 178.

Primakov, the minister of foreign affairs, mentioned that ‘if any countries of the former Soviet Union are admitted to NATO, we will have no relations with NATO whatsoever.’<sup>158</sup> So far, Baltic states sought to join NATO. The argument was that the US had never recognized the Baltic’s incorporation in the USSR.<sup>159</sup>

NATO has a negative echo in Russia even today. When Clinton went to Russia on his last official visit, Vladimir Putin made a joke saying that Russia should probably join NATO.<sup>160</sup> When asked by the interviewer if he really meant it, Putin remarked that he said it half-seriously/half as a joke.<sup>161</sup> In addition, he added ‘NATO, as far as I am concerned, Is a remnant of the past. This organization emerged during the Cold War – between two systems. And as of now, NATO is a mere instrument of the foreign policy of the United States. It has no allies within – it has only vassals. And I have a fairly good impression of how work is done within NATO. [...] There are only two opinions in NATO – the American and the wrong opinion.’<sup>162</sup>

The talks about NATO enlargement were not pleasant. Even one time over the telephone conversation on NATO Yeltsin simply hang up.<sup>163</sup> But surprisingly, Clinton was not upset; he understood Yeltsin’s action and mentioned that,

‘We’ve got to play this thing out. I can’t just go there and tell him “Go back to the script, Boris, and be a good boy. Among other things this guy is just incapable of letting things go exactly the way his aides want it to go. I can kind of relate to that.”’<sup>164</sup>

Yeltsin and Clinton met in Helsinki for the Summit to discuss issues concerning both countries, and the most important, the NATO enlargement. Both presidents were seriously preparing for the Summit. In one of the telephone conversations, Yeltsin emphasized that ‘I am getting ready aggressively for Helsinki. In fact, we are going to have some difficult sessions over there, but we shouldn’t forget about our partnership, mutual understanding and

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Oliver Stone, *The Putin Interviews* (Hot Books, 2017), 59.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 59–60.

<sup>163</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 157.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 129.



interaction.’ Again, for Yeltsin, the partnership was the most important. But also, Yeltsin firmly believed that it is not the right time for NATO expansion eastwards.

‘The Helsinki summit has got strategic significance not only for our two countries but for Europe and the world. It is important that in the future we won’t look back and say we returned to the cold war. Sliding backward is simply not acceptable... We were both voted for second terms, until the year 2000; neither of us will have a third term. We want to move into the twenty-first century with stability and tranquillity. Our position has not changed. It remains a mistake for NATO to move eastward. But I need to take steps to alleviate the negative consequences of this for Russia, I am prepared to enter into an agreement with NATO, not because I want it but because it’s a step I’m compelled to take. There is no other solution for today.’<sup>165</sup>

Yeltsin was adamant that the NATO enlargement should not happen under any circumstance. And, Yeltsin proposed that ‘Clinton promise that NATO would not “embrace” the former Soviet republics.’<sup>166</sup> During the Summit, Yeltsin was listening intently. ‘I understand,’ he said when Clinton was done.

‘I thank you for what you’ve said. If you’re asked about this at the press conference, I’d suggest you say while the U.S. is for the expansion of NATO, the process will be gradual and lengthy. If you’re asked if you’d exclude Russia from NATO, your answer should be “no.” That’s all.’

Clinton promised that U.S. policy would be guided by ‘three no’s: no surprises, no rush and no exclusion.’<sup>167</sup>

Clinton even suggested that there will be a place for Russia in NATO. Yeltsin confidently rejected Clinton’s idea of Russia entering NATO. In addition, he announced that this does not make sense and he stressed that Russia is ‘wide, and NATO is quite small.’<sup>168</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 145.

Yeltsin's impulse to make Clinton promise that NATO will not enlarge eastwards was to an extent ludicrous. Clinton tried to explain to Yeltsin that making an oral agreement on this specific matter is not possible. The American president pointed that,

'If we were to agree that no members of the former Soviet Union could enter NATO, that would be a bad thing for our attempt to build a new NATO. It would also be a bad thing for your attempt to build a new Russia. I am not naïve. I understand you have an interest in who gets into NATO and when. We need to make sure that all these are subjects that we can consult about as we move forward. 'Consult' means making sure that we're aware of your concerns, and that you understand our decisions and our positions and our thinking. But consider what a terrible message it would send if we were to make the kind of supposedly secret deal, you're suggesting.'<sup>169</sup>

Clinton added that the agreement to which Yeltsin was referring,

'would make us both weaker, not stronger. If we made the agreement, you're describing it would be a terrible mistake. It would cause big problems for me and big problems for you. It would accentuate the diminishment of your power from Warsaw pact times.'<sup>170</sup>

It is comprehensible that Clinton could not undertake such responsibility since he could not fully stop NATO enlargement. He did not have such a big influence what concerns NATO decisions. Bill made an attempt to explain this to Yeltsin, pointing that

'We've already demonstrated our ability to move deliberately, openly. But I can't make commitments on behalf of NATO, and I am not going to be in the position myself of vetoing any country's eligibility for NATO [...] I'm prepared to work with you on the consultative mechanism to make sure that we take account of Russia's concerns as we move forward.<sup>171</sup> [...] I've always tried to build you up and never undermine you. I'd feel I had dishonored my commitment to the alliance, to the states that want to join

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 238–239.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 240.

NATO, and the vision that I think you and I share of an undivided Europe with Russia as a major part of it.’<sup>172</sup>

Clinton indeed tried to postpone the NATO enlargement and to find a solution that will suit both Presidents. In one of the meetings he mentioned that,

‘Strobe Talbott and a strong team will be coming to Moscow next week to focus on NATO and Russia. I know what your position is and I am not asking you to embrace enlargement, but I think we can define a NATO-Russia relationship that will serve both sides’ interests, and make Russia a true partner of NATO and assure Russia a major role in Europe.’<sup>173</sup>

Perhaps, Yeltsin, himself, would agree to NATO expansion, but he was afraid of the reaction at home. Yeltsin worried about the expansion. When Clinton asked him if Yeltsin thinks that he will allow NATO to attack Russia from Poland, Yeltsin denied that he believes that this could happen, but he stressed that ‘lot of older people who live in the western part of Russia and listen to Zyuganov.’<sup>174</sup> Yeltsin also emphasized that ‘unlike the United States, Russia had been invaded twice – by Napoleon and by Hitler – and the trauma of those events still colored the country’s collective psychology and shaped its politics.’<sup>175</sup>

Yeltsin did not only wish to stop NATO enlargement, but he also sought to achieve a sort of agreement between NATO and Russia. Yeltsin tried to minimize the negative effects of NATO enlargement on Russia. In particular, the Russian Duma was full of NATO opponents. Most specifically, the opponents were communists. They even sent an open letter to Clinton under the heading ‘NATO will shatter Trust.’<sup>176</sup> After many years of negotiations, finally, such an agreement was signed. In 1997 Russia and NATO signed the ‘Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation.’ The main

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>173</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin,” 411.

<sup>174</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 527.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Joseph Laurence Black and Professor J. L. Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion: Bearing Gifts Or Bearing Arms?* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 69.

principles and targets of this agreement were to build a ‘stable, peaceful and undivided Europe.’<sup>177</sup> This agreement perhaps was the best Yeltsin could do. He tried to justify this decision stating that this was the only option for Russia in order to maintain peace. On the television speech after the agreement has been signed, Yeltsin declared

‘NATO’s plan of enlargement eastwards has become a threat for Russia’s safety. How were we supposed to react to this? Each cleavage (between Russia and the West) represents a threat for everybody, and this is the reason why who chose to negotiate with NATO. The task was to diminish the negative effects of the enlargement of the North Atlantic alliance and to prevent a new split in Europe. [...] The creation of a big peaceful Europe means the creation of Europe in which each nation feels safe. The fact that the agreement between Russia and NATO has been signed confirms that there will be a new peaceful Europe, not divide into camps. Everyone needs this, and Russia need [sic] this too.’<sup>178</sup>

Despite the fact that Yeltsin made everything to diminish the negative effect of NATO’s enlargement, not everyone in Russia was happy about the agreement.<sup>179</sup> Many considered that Yeltsin gave up too easily without a real fight, that a better agreement could be achieved, that his negotiations were not enough.<sup>180</sup>

‘Boris, on NATO, I want to make sure you’ve noted that I’ve never said we shouldn’t consider Russia for membership or a special relationship with NATO. So, when we talk a NATO expanding, we’re emphasizing inclusion, not exclusion. My objective is to work with you and others to maximize the chances of a united, undivided, integrated Europe. There will be an expansion of NATO, but there’s no timetable yet. If we started tomorrow to include the countries that want to come in, it would still take several years until they qualified, and others said yes. The issue is about psychological security and a sense of importance to these countries. [...] As I see it, NATO expansion is not anti-

<sup>177</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin,” 360.

<sup>178</sup> Борис Минаев, *Ельцин* (Молодая гвардия, 2014), 706.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

Russian; it's not intended to be exclusive of Russia, and there is no imminent timetable. And we'll work together. I don't want you to believe that I wake up every morning thinking only about how to make the Warsaw Pact countries a part of NATO – that's not the I look at it. What I do think about is how to use NATO expansion to advance the broader, higher goal of European security, unity and integration – a goal I know you share.'

Here Clinton talks about a shared goal. All of the conversations above show willingness from both Clinton and Yeltsin to work around internal and external pressure. It was apparent that Yeltsin cannot stop NATO from expansion; there was nothing he could do to avoid this. Strobe Talbott stressed that,

'the main points that we'd rehearsed in advance were there principally, NATO was going to expand – but the tone and context were part of an approach Clinton had worked out in his head during the lunch: every time he'd said that expansion was going forward, he'd added that it was part of a larger process including Russia.'<sup>181</sup>

Both leaders thought about the needs and impact on the other and try to avoid jeopardizing the main goal of harmonious and sustainable relationship between the two countries.

In 1997, Clinton said,

'Together we've made a great deal of progress, first of all, in dealing with the consequences of the Cold War. Now both of us are in our second terms and need to decide what to do together. I believe our lasting legacy must be a partnership and framework of peace and security that our successors will embrace and that others might not otherwise embrace.'<sup>182</sup>

Clinton positions their joint and individual legacy as something to be protected by both.

<sup>181</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 136.

<sup>182</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin," 105.

He continues, ‘And we need to prepare for how we keep changing the relationship and adding energy to it – slash the number of weapons even further and do things now to promote trade and investment for Russia’s development and achievement of our common goal of a secure and undivided Europe.’<sup>183</sup> In other words, the economic development of Russia only comes if collaboration is present in other vital areas like reduction in nuclear weaponry.

On Kosovo Conflict

*‘We must act: to save thousands of innocent men, women and children from humanitarian catastrophe, from death, barbarism and ethnic cleansing by a brutal dictatorship; to save the stability of the Balkan region, where we know chaos can engulf all of Europe. We have no alternative but to act and act we will, unless Milosevic even now chooses the path of peace.’*<sup>184</sup>  
*Tony Blair*

Even if we could argue that the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton was (to some extent harmonious), like in every relationship, there were ups and downs. There were many disagreements – from Russia selling missiles to Iran to Russian troops in Baltic countries– but in the end, Clinton and Yeltsin managed to find a solution to tackle all their issues. However, a conflict in the Balkans broke the balance. The Kosovo war was the apple of discord – a seemingly small matter that leads to a bigger dispute – for Russia and the US. It created disruptions in the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton, and also it conducted to further alienation between Russia and the US. Both countries – even to this day – were unable to fully restore the harmony between their states before the crisis in Yugoslavia. In 2016, the president of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin declared that ‘the relationship between Russian and the US worsened not because of Syria or Crimea events but as a result of the conflict in Yugoslavia.’<sup>185</sup>

The disagreement started even earlier in 1995 when the Bosnian conflict achieved its apex and raised the tension between Yeltsin and Clinton. Yeltsin said,

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Guardian Staff, “Blair: ‘We Must Act - to Save Thousands of Innocent Men, Women and Children,’” *The Guardian*, last modified March 23, 1999, accessed May 31, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/23/balkans.tonyblair>.

<sup>185</sup> “Украина и Сирия Ни При Чем: Путин Объяснил, Почему Испортились Отношения России и США,” accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.depo.ua/rus/svit/ukrayina-i-siriya-ni-do-chogo-putin-poyasniv-chomu-zipsuvalisya-17102016080200>.

‘I come here with a sense of opportunity, but also with a lot of anxiety. Everything will depend on what you and I agree to. We can’t let our partnership be shattered by a failure to agree. We have to find some sort of compromise—a little from your side, a little from mine—and then we can shake on it, right here. We need to end the discussion today with an agreement. If we don’t agree, it’ll be a scandal. We’ve gotten off track. It’s not a problem between the two of us personally. There are no personal grudges between us, no personal mistrust. But our countries, our governments have started to work on opposite sides of too many issues. We’ve been pulling against each other rather than pulling together. Somehow we have to restore our personal rapport as the driving force in the relationship.’<sup>186</sup>

Yeltsin emphasized that the US’s refusal to let Russia have its own sector in Bosnia was putting him in an impossible position at home.<sup>187</sup> ‘Extremists in the Duma were saying, “Yeltsin has sold out to the U.S. and to Clinton! Yeltsin and his government are pandering to the West and forgetting about the East!”’ As he impersonated his enemies at home, Yeltsin raised his voice, shook his fist and put on a wild look. The Russian people, he said, were susceptible to these charges because ‘they have an allergy to NATO.’<sup>188</sup>

The conflict in Kosovo infused bitterness in the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton, and to some extent, it detached the two countries from each other. The main confrontation was between the Serbian military and Kosovar Albanians, which resulted in many deaths from both sides and many people from the region were forced to leave their homes.<sup>189</sup> In 1999, when all peace negotiations between Milosevic and NATO allies broke, and the situation became a threat for the democratic principles of the West. NATO decided to intervene and restore order. Russia and China did not approve this decision.<sup>190</sup>

The Kosovo war plays a primordial role in the evolution of the Russo-American relationship. Not only because NATO started the bombings without the UN council approval,

<sup>186</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 180.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> “NATO’s Role in Relation to the Conflict in Kosovo,” *NATO & Kosovo: Historical Overview*, last modified July 15, 1999, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm>.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

which breaks the International law, but also without Russia and China's consent. Yeltsin and Clinton meticulously discussed how the issue should be handled. This was the first time when they could not reach an agreement.

President Yeltsin:

'Bill, it is a great pity for me. We have been for so long working in each other's direction. We have done a great deal. I have reached agreement with the State Duma with regards to START II, and on the sixth of April, they were supposed to ratify the Treaty. This time around that will not happen, of course, under the circumstances. It is easy to throw bombs about. However, the long-term political search for a constructive solution to the situation, that's a different thing. But this is the only correct approach, the only correct way. If we pool our strengths together, we could turn Milosevic around. Their parliament made some appropriate decisions yesterday.'

President Clinton:

'Let me just say this, Boris. I did everything I could do along with you to try to negotiate with Milosevic. He made an agreement last Fall and ended the trouble for a while, and then he unilaterally violated the agreement. [...] He won't even stop the violence, and this means he is going to recreate Bosnia all over again, and we're supposed to sit around and say that this is terribly unfortunate. Basically, it will be your decision if you decide to let this bully destroy the relationship, we worked hard for six and a half years to build up.'

President Clinton: 'Well, let me just say this, I believe we should not give up on diplomacy. After what - [Yeltsin interrupts]'

President Yeltsin:



‘Of course, we are going to talk to each other, you and me. But there will not be such a great drive and such friendship that we had before. That will not be there again.’<sup>191</sup>

Regardless of all the disagreements, Clinton firmly believed that together with Yeltsin they could solve this issue as well. No matter how difficult it could be, they must and will find a solution. Clinton understood Yeltsin’s worries and tried to mitigate the consequences of this disagreement. He said to Strobe Talbott that,

‘We’ve got to remember that Yeltsin’s got his problems, but he’s a good man. He is trying to do his best in the face of a lot of problems back home. I think we’re going to get this Bosnia deal done, and it’s harder for him than for me. I’ve got problems, but nothing like this.’<sup>192</sup>

And indeed, Yeltsin had problems.

‘Zhirinovsky was a leader of the opposition bloc that had nearly twice as many seats as the pro-Yeltsin forces. On a visit to Belgrade in late January, he warned that he and his parliamentary allies would consider NATO action in Bosnia a declaration of war on Russia. He travelled across the border into the Serb-dominated part of Bosnia itself and pledged Russian support for the locals as well as for their protector Milošević.’<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore, Yeltsin himself was against the NATO bombings. He called NATO actions ‘unacceptable’ and an ‘execution of the Bosnian Serbs.’<sup>194</sup>

But both men continued working together despite the disagreement. Clinton summarized their grant project together well,

<sup>191</sup> “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin: 2015-0782-M-2,” *Clinton Digital Library*, last modified July 13, 2018, accessed January 5, 2020, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57569>.

<sup>192</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 185.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

‘The world has changed for better of our work together. We’ve done a remarkable job in getting a lot done while also being honest about our differences. My objectives are, first, an integrated, undivided Europe, and second, a cooperative, equal partnership with a democratic, economically successful Russia which is influential in the world [...] I want historians to fifty years from now to look back on this period and say you and I took full advantage of the opportunity we had. We made maximum use of the extraordinary moment that came with the end of the Cold war.’<sup>195</sup>

Yeltsin also believed that, together with Clinton, they are partners who look in one direction and made progress towards it. He said,

‘Our relationship came to the very brink of collapse. If you and I hadn’t kept in touch and dealt honestly and openly with each other, it would have gone over the brink. In our phone conversations, while we weren’t literally looking each other in the eye, we were doing so with our voices. [...] There were a couple of points when we made pretty clear to each other that our friendship had just about reached its limit. But even at the toughest moment, we asked ourselves, “should we keep working together?” And we always answered “Yes! We’re going to fix this problem this way or that way”. And we’d find a way of agreeing on whatever the question was. Why did we do that? Because everything depends on our two powerful countries, that’s why!’<sup>196</sup>

The second key-component ‘grand project’ shows that Yeltsin and Clinton were engaged in different long-term projects, each of great importance for both countries and for the global community. The main goal, the ‘grand project,’ was to build trust between the US and Russia and to promote peace. During the Cold War, there was no cooperation between Russia and the US. There was a clear division, considering the establishment of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The first big project Yeltsin and Clinton embarked was on bringing Russia into G-7. This was not an easy project considering Russia’s economic and political situation. However, both presidents successfully completed this mission and Russia became part of G7+1.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 351.

Nevertheless, there were also disagreements. The main disagreement was on NATO enlargement and the handling of the Kosovo War. The dispute over NATO enlargement was solved by the creation of Partnership for Peace, which boosted the NATO-Russia cooperation. Misunderstandings were exacerbated by the crisis in Yugoslavia, and the dispute escalated when NATO decided to start a bombing campaign. Yeltsin did not agree with NATO actions and was genuinely disappointed. One could say that Kosovo was the test for the Yeltsin-Clinton relationship. A test which they both passed.

Even after the war ended, they continued to keep in touch and to care about each other. On the New Year's Eve of 1999, when Yeltsin was no longer president of Russia, Clinton called him to show once again his support. He thanked him for all the time they have spent together and all the work they have done. Yeltsin agreed with Clinton and once again stressed their personal efforts to strengthen the relationship between Russia and the US, and the most important, they managed to overcome all emerging problems. Despite heated debates before and during the conflict, in the end, Clinton and Yeltsin managed to keep their bond and move on. They continued on their grant project and never wavered.

### Section 3.3: Altruistic Reciprocity

The relationship between the two leaders was challenged early, ‘Even when Yeltsin was already a President and Clinton was not yet elected. In June 1992, when Yeltsin came to Washington to meet with President Bush, Yeltsin was supporting Bush, and he was even supporting his re-election.’<sup>197</sup> Despite those facts, Clinton told Yeltsin that in case he wins he will fully support Yeltsin.<sup>198</sup> This was not the only time when Clinton supported Yeltsin. He supported him even in time of turmoil.

It is undeniable Clinton understood Yeltsin and tried to support him, and often, only morally. There is one vivid episode clearly showing to what extent Clinton empathized with Yeltsin. When the Russian president visited the US in 1995 for a summit, they both made a speech at a press conference in Hyde Park, New York. It was quite evident that Yeltsin was mildly (or not so mildly) inebriated.<sup>199</sup> Yeltsin’s behaviour was slightly ludicrous when he started accusing the press over their assertion that the different attitude of the US and Russia towards the conflict in Bosnia will turn the summit into a disaster.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, Yeltsin called the press a disaster.<sup>201</sup> The video of Yeltsin’s speech is still viral, and people can see it online. Strobe Talbott, the Deputy Secretary of State in Clinton’s administration, characterized Yeltsin’s diplomacy as ‘performance art, and when he was drunk, the performance was burlesque.’<sup>202</sup> It is essential to observe how Clinton handled the issue. He was calm and tried to cover for Yeltsin. He ‘doubled over in laughter, slapped Boris on the back and had to wipe tears from his eyes.’<sup>203</sup> Clinton could have used the situation to position himself in a better light in comparison to Yeltsin. To implicitly say that America is led better than Russia. But he did not.

‘Yeltsin’s a good politician,’ said Clinton. ‘He’s tough and he’s brave, and he knows what he’s got to do. I knew he’d do the right thing in the end.’ Later he amplified: “I knew

<sup>197</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 350.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 184.

<sup>200</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major,” 184.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

Yeltsin was going to pull out of the Baltics on time when he answered “nyet”<sup>204</sup> to that question in Naples. He was getting it established that he wasn’t going to do his thing because of pressure from us – he’d do it for his own reasons.’<sup>205</sup> Clinton, again, is not antagonistic. Even in the light of an obvious disagreement between the two sides, the US President uses the opportunity to praise the qualities of his political opponent.

Yeltsin found in Clinton not only a partner but also a confidant. He was sharing with him his deepest thoughts and worries. Yeltsin believed that Russia and the US would be partners until the end.<sup>206</sup> When Yeltsin was running for the second term and was exhausted because of the election race, he revealed to Clinton that ‘Well, actually, three months of the pre election race has taken its toll. I feel somewhat tired. You realize from your own experience that this is difficult. You are only just starting your own campaign; the heat is still ahead.’<sup>207</sup> Yeltsin felt the need to share with Clinton what was on his mind because he trusted him. He knew that Clinton would understand and support him.

It is worthwhile to note that humour was constantly persisting in their relationship. The witty and funny remarks of both presidents are well-known. ‘I saw the picture of you dancing with the girls in the band and you looked wonderful. I’m disappointed that no one sets up events like that for me in my campaign.’,<sup>208</sup> said Clinton to Yeltsin. Looking at videos or reading the transcripts, one can see that their jokes were based on a knowledge of the other. Jests and smiles are difficult to fake and not necessary for a prosperous political relationship. Thus, genuine laughter is a good indicator of empathy and care. Said differently, an indicator for ‘altruistic reciprocity.’

Clinton respected Yeltsin for many reasons. For one, he believed Yeltsin extremely hard-working. Clinton acknowledged that the Russian President had a harder job than he had and that ‘making the Russian government work meant, above all, bringing the economy under control in a way that permitted international help, in the form of both assistance and investment.’<sup>209</sup> Respect is another tell-tale sign for ‘altruistic reciprocity.’

<sup>204</sup> The Russian word for “no.”

<sup>205</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 129.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>207</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin,” 40.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 285.

It is normal to call a president and congratulate him on his victory in the election. But how you do it is up to you. And Clinton seems to exhibit real pride in Yeltsin's 1996 victory. 'It's great to hear your voice! Congratulations. I know you're tired. I'm proud of how hard you fought back after being down in the polls. The Russian people expressed their pride in the progress you are making. I'm so happy and I wanted to call and tell you that I am proud of you.'<sup>210</sup>

Yeltsin responded to Clinton's congratulations with reciprocity: 'I appreciate that throughout the campaign up to the last day, you said the right things and never sent the wrong signals. Rest assured, I will do the same for your campaign. There will be no interference in your internal affairs. But I know deep in my heart who I support and who I hope will win the election.'<sup>211</sup>

During the governmental referendum on the powers of the Russian president, Yeltsin faced growing opposition from ultra-nationalists and unconverted Communists. When the referendum was happening, Clinton was checking the news throughout the day and waiting for the results.<sup>212</sup> In the situation as well, Clinton showed support and care for Yeltsin.

During the coup against Yeltsin, Talbott says about Clinton, '[...] he and Hillary had gone to visit her father, who was in the final stages of a terminal illness. Even in the midst of a family crisis, Clinton had been thinking about Yeltsin, whose situation seemed to be growing more dire by the hour. The opposition deputies had declared Yeltsin's decrees unconstitutional and were now threatening to remove him from office and replace him with Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi [...]' "This thing is getting serious," said Clinton. "We've got no time..."<sup>213</sup>

Yeltsin cherished the good relationship with the US and believed it was what his people wanted. 'I wanted to say. I urge you not to yield to what some of your opponents are saying about slashing down the level of U.S.-Russian cooperation. We have nothing to be shy about regarding the U.S.-Russian partnership. The voters have shown their support for it. My 14 percent lead is quite good, quite impressive, and given this mandate I will be able to continue

<sup>210</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin," 49.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>212</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 70.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

to pursue the policies and good personal relations we have initiated together, and we will continue to follow these policies in the future.’<sup>214</sup>

On a personal level, Clinton was concerned about Yeltsin’s health. Clinton recommended good doctors for Yeltsin. Many times, Clinton started his conversation with Yeltsin by asking him how he feels and being genuinely worried about Yeltsin’s health conditions. He was not only afraid that Russia could lose its most democratic leader of all times, but he was afraid he could lose a friend of his. Conversely, Yeltsin expressed gratitude towards Clinton’s help,

‘I thank you for your continuous feelings and expressions of those feelings during the period of my surgery and recuperation. Your doctors are good — great experts. They did a great deal. They were always there before and during the operation, and afterwards. I will never forget what you did for me.’<sup>215</sup>

Indeed, Clinton was not indifferent what concerns Yeltsin’s help. He was willing to help Yeltsin to undergo heart surgery with minimal risks for his health. On 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of September 1996, in Moscow, there was supposed to be a scientific conference on heart surgery, and Yeltsin asked Clinton if would be possible to have a consultation with a US specialist. Unquestionably, Clinton could not say ‘no’ to his friend. His assured Yeltsin that the best doctors who will come to Moscow will give him ‘the widest possible choice.’<sup>216</sup> Clinton’s act of goodwill reminds us of Saladin’s gesture during the Siege of Acre in 1192 when Saladin sent ice and peach to his nemesis Richard I (the Lionheart).<sup>217</sup> That is with one exception: Clinton and Yeltsin were not enemies but allies.

Yeltsin and Clinton appreciated their companionship. They liked and enjoyed each other’s company. The topics they discussed differed, from discussing severe political issues to praising Russian ballet and American jazz. Clinton was friendly in nature. He tried to maintain

<sup>214</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin” (Clinton Digital Library, 2015), 78, 2015-0782-M-2, Presidential Libraries, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57569>.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>217</sup> James Reston Jr, *Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007), 331.

friendly relationships with all state leaders. For instance, he had a bond with the British prime minister Tony Blair. Clinton said about Blair ‘Blair was young, articulate, and forceful, and we shared many of the same political views. I thought he had the potential to be an important leader for the UK and all of Europe, and was excited about the prospect of working with him.’<sup>218</sup> But the relationship with Yeltsin seems different and more personal. When Clinton found out that Yeltsin resigned to said,

‘For all his physical problems and occasional unpredictability, he had been a courageous and visionary leader. We trusted each other and had accomplished a lot together. On the day he resigned we talked on the phone for about twenty minutes, and I could tell he was comfortable with his decision. He left office as he had lived and governed, in his own unique way’.<sup>219</sup>

The relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton was a close relationship, not just between two presidents, but closer. It was a relationship between two state leaders who sought to cooperate and build a bridge between Russia and the US. To build close ties. The most important mission was to forget about the rivalry, forget about the Cold War, and to destroy the invisible wall previous leaders put between the USSR and the US. A mission difficult to achieve; some might say impossible. But we can clearly see that Yeltsin and Clinton put an effort to do so, and they achieved some incredible results. They both worked on projects; they both participated in different events and meetings, which contributed to bringing Russia into the global community. From 1993 to 2000, Clinton and Yeltsin met 18 times.<sup>220</sup> For the first time in Russo-American history, both countries were on the same side. They did not compete for world dominance; they collaborated on projects for both countries’ benefits. And for altruistic reciprocity to persist in a relationship, one should not always ask for favours.

On aggregate, the examples above show that on multiple instances over a long period, Yeltsin and Clinton cared for one another outside of what would be expected from a political partner. The examples above reflect the dedication in the relationship between the two presidents. From when Yeltsin started the war in Chechnya and received Clinton’s full moral

<sup>218</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 531.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 621.

<sup>220</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 8.



support to when Clinton ran for the second term and was encouraged by Yeltsin with enthusiasm. A feeling of reciprocity persisted in almost every conversation they had.<sup>221</sup> They laughed together and spoke with a fondness for each other. They supported one another even when there was no political gain for themselves. Based on ‘altruistic reciprocity,’ we can conclude that Yeltsin and Clinton were engaged in a political friendship.

<sup>221</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin.”

### Section 3.4: Moral obligations

*'Partnership is not just a matter of calling each other Bill and Boris. It's a matter of give-and-take.'*<sup>222</sup>

When Yeltsin decided to run for a second term, he asked Strobe Talbott that Clinton shall not have a separate meeting with his main rival, the leader of the Communist party, the ultra-nationalist Gennady Zyuganov. Yeltsin highlighted that a meeting with any other candidate would be acceptable except with Zyuganov. Moreover, he added that

*'Zyuganov is my real rival for electoral victory. I don't mean your president can't shake hands with him at the embassy or talk a few minutes, but no separate meeting in a separate room! I understand you're under pressure from Congress and others who will be watching closely and will be upset if Clinton doesn't meet with a whole range of opponents. But he mustn't have any separate meetings. A photo is ok, but that's it.'*<sup>223</sup>

Clinton, indeed, honoured Yeltsin's request, which critics of the American President might have framed more as an order than a request. But in the end, no tête-à-tête meeting with Zyuganov took place. Clinton supported Yeltsin because he was fighting for tomorrow's Russia, instead of that of yesterday.<sup>224</sup>

Another example is the issue with Chechnya, where Clinton again supported Yeltsin more as a favour. When Yeltsin decided to fly to Chechnya and sit on the negotiation table to tackle all the issues between the Chechens and the Russians, Clinton expressed his full support: *'That is a very courageous decision. Everyone will see you are trying to bring about peace and restrain the military action. That's good. If there is anything else, I can do, let me know. I'm ready.'*<sup>225</sup>

Clinton sought to persuade Yeltsin to withdraw the Soviet troops from the Baltic countries. The reluctance to withdraw the troops was contributing to the negative image of Russia abroad. Clinton believed that Yeltsin should withdraw the military forces in order to

<sup>222</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 163.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>224</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 528.

<sup>225</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin," 26.

achieve peace on that part of Europe. Clinton urged Yeltsin, ‘Boris, don’t screw this up. You’ve got to get out of Estonia. Everyone is watching. You either confirm the worst that a lot of people think about Russia or you’ll confirm the best that I’ve been saying about you.’ Yeltsin indicated he was prepared to come to an agreement if Meri, the President of Estonia, would come to Moscow and meet with him face-to-face. Clinton promised to urge Meri to do that. The meeting ended with Clinton feeling confident that the problem was solved.<sup>226</sup> Subsequently, Clinton fulfil his promise and spoke with the Estonian president.<sup>227</sup>

Clinton indeed supported Yeltsin during his the most difficult times. When the constitutional crises arose in 1993, and the political situation in Russia became tense, Clinton once again declared that he supports the only democratically elected president, Boris Yeltsin.

‘The United States continues to stand firm in its support of President Yeltsin because he is Russia’s democratically elected leader. We very much regret the loss of life in Moscow, but it’s clear that the opposition forces started the conflict and that President Yeltsin had no other alternative than to try to restore order. [...] I have at this moment absolutely no reason to doubt the personal commitment that Boris Yeltsin made to let the Russian people decide their own future, to secure a new constitution with democratic values and democratic processes, to have a new legislative branch elected with democratic elections.’<sup>228</sup>

President Yeltsin faced growing opposition from ultra-nationalists and unconverted Communists. Yeltsin about communists when talking to Clinton: ‘Let us take up the election campaign. There is a U.S. press campaign suggesting that people should not be afraid of the communists; that they are good, honourable and kind people. I warn people not to believe this.’<sup>229</sup> So, here Yeltsin is implicitly asking for Clinton not to support the message that (Russian) communists are not dangerous.

The Russian President continued,

<sup>226</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 127.

<sup>227</sup> James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia After the Cold War* (Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 174.

<sup>228</sup> Office of the Federal Register (OFR), *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 1668.

<sup>229</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin,” 9.

‘More than half of them are fanatics; they would destroy everything. It would mean civil war. They would abolish the boundaries between the republics (of the former Soviet Union). They want to take back Crimea; they even make claims against Alaska. Let us say you have to imagine that there is something wrong with what they have to think with.’<sup>230</sup>

Here, Yeltsin pushes an agenda that his opposition would be bad for American interest. Those exchanges show that the Russian President was not shy in presenting issues in light of their benefits and downsides for the other side.

In the context of moral obligation, if a favour is requested from one of the sides, the other should “gladly” respond and lend a hand. This is what Clinton many times did. For instance, the annual summit of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Budapest was very important for Yeltsin, and he sought the US participation. Clinton initially did not plan to go to the summit, but as this was so important for Yeltsin, he agreed to come as well. And he did it without asking anything in return or making a point that he would not have gone otherwise.<sup>231</sup>

Some G-7 countries were reluctant to accept Russia in their group because they considered it to be economically weak. They could not be blamed for their reluctance since Russia indeed faced many internal issues, and its economy was not flourishing. During the election campaign between Bush and Clinton, G-7 agreed on financial aid to support the economy and democracy in Russia.<sup>232</sup> Since Russia depended on the financial support of the international community, its membership in the G-7 was questionable. However, Clinton showed Yeltsin that he can count on him and that he also wants Russia in. Therefore, in 1997 Russia becomes a full member of G-7.

‘In the face of [...] strong views, Clinton settled for an arrangement whereby the G-7 leaders would treat Yeltsin as a full participant in their discussion of political issues but not of the economic ones. However, Clinton left no doubt that he regarded this outcome as barely adequate and entirely temporary: sooner or later there was going to be a G-8

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 137.

<sup>232</sup> Catherine J. Danks, *Russian Politics and Society: An Introduction* (Pearson Education, 2001), 271.

at the leaders' level, and he was going to use the Naples meeting to lay the ground. For him, the evolution of the G-7 into a G-8 was a way of fostering Russia's integration into the post-Cold War international system.'<sup>233</sup>

On the issues NATO, Yeltsin faced big pressure from the Duma. If he would agree with NATO enlargement, Duma would definitely vehemently attack him. Accepting NATO's expansion could result in growing mistrust from people in Russia. This is the reason why Yeltsin sought Clinton's word of honour that NATO will postpone its enlargement. He was pushing Clinton to make this promise:

'I need to hear that. [...] But I need assurances that it won't happen in the nearest future. [...] Let's agree – one-on-one – that the former Soviet republics won't be in the first waves. Bill, please understand what I'm dealing with there: I am flying back to Russia with a heavy burden on my shoulders. It will be difficult for me to go home and not seem to have accepted NATO enlargement. Very difficult.'<sup>234</sup>

Here, Yeltsin is explaining his difficult situation and implicitly ask Clinton to fulfil a moral obligation and avoid inviting ex-Soviet countries into NATO.

Clinton said on-air about Yeltsin in 1993, 'As long as [Yeltsin] is promoting democracy, as long as he is promoting human rights, as long as he is promoting reform, I the United States should support him. He has been brave and consistent.'<sup>235</sup> The American President was expressing that he will be willing to support Yeltsin at times he might not want to in exchange for a continued commitment towards reform. This sense of trade can be seen on important issues for both presidents. However, there are few examples on one side 'forcing' the other or when there were expectations that a 'desire' would always be granted. One could argue that the situations when the other person was 'obligated' to do something are normal, and the same would have been expected from any other collaborating partner. Examples are present and persisting across the relationship but not unusual or crossing obvious moral boundaries. But in conclusion, we cannot dismiss that the two leaders were engaged in political friendship based on the 'moral obligation' component.

<sup>233</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 125.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 240–241.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

‘Moral obligation’ requires actions from both individuals. Yeltsin and Clinton were not afraid to show public support to each other. Clinton offered financial aid for the Yeltsin’s re-election campaign. Sometimes, Yeltsin was acting too pushy and demanding too much, and Clinton – perhaps being too friendly – gave Yeltsin what he wanted. A clear example is Russia becoming part of G-7. This key-component does reflect positively for the hypothesis that Clinton and Yeltsin were engaged in a political friendship.

### Section 3.5: Equality

*'We actively support reform and reformers and you and Russia.'*<sup>236</sup>

*Bill Clinton to Boris Yeltsin*

In terms of equality, we should take into consideration that it is not so easy to define whether Clinton and Yeltsin were equal to each other. During the Cold War, for many decades, the US and Russia were antagonists. Both countries shared mutual dislike towards each other. They both were competing for a sphere of influence; they both struggled to influence other countries. The outcome of the battle was the collapse of the Communism and the rise of Capitalism. The 'hateful' capitalism proved to be stronger. Therefore, one could say that the US was victorious, and Russia – defeated. After the US remained the sole superpower, the decision was to decide how to use this power. The US could continue the competition and exacerbate even more the enmity or choose a different path. The path to reconciliation and collaboration. Clinton chose the latter. He decided to cooperate and make a world safe and democratic place.

Even though the US was economically stronger and politically more stable, Clinton did not treat Yeltsin as a weak opponent. First, Yeltsin was not Clinton's opponent. Secondly, Clinton did everything he could as seen above to show the world that Russia has become a democratic country, and that Yeltsin is its truthful democratic leader. Moreover, Clinton supported Yeltsin not only because he considered this to be the right thing to do but because he seems to understand him as a person.

*'Yeltsin was in the fight of his life against the old Communists and other reactionaries. He was going to the people with a referendum. And I didn't care about the risk of losing — I reminded our team that I had lost plenty of times myself. I had no interest in hedging my bets, and instructed Tony Lake to draft a statement of strong support.'*<sup>237</sup>

Yeltsin and Clinton were both presidents. This was the first and most common trait. Nevertheless, they were both on the same side. Strobe Talbott was sure that 'Bill Clinton knew one big thing: on the twin issues that had constituted the casus belli of the cold war —

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>237</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 352.

democracy versus dictatorship at home and cooperation versus competition abroad” —Yeltsin and I were, “in principle, on the same side.”<sup>238</sup>

Yeltsin said those words when the relationship between Russia and the US were not so smooth. The dilemma for how to deal with the conflict in Kosovo alienated Clinton and Yeltsin. Equality also means making compromises. If one side can force its choices on the other with impunity, then there is no equality.

After the meltdown of the Soviet Union Yeltsin inherited a devastated country, a country full of troubles: long lines in order to buy food, shortages, impoverished people. The situation could not be solved overnight. Once Yeltsin was ordered to demolish the Ipatyev house, where the czar family was convicted and killed. Yeltsin did this in 24 hours. After, he was praised and even promoted. But now, he needed to build the economy of Russia. A new strategy was needed to achieve amelioration and prosperity.

To rebuild his country, Yeltsin needed help from abroad. In his appeal for help, Yeltsin announced that his country is facing challenges that no one has faced before.<sup>239</sup> Clinton came to rescue Yeltsin, and the US provided financial support to Russia. In fact, Yeltsin desperately needed the money. Even more, Clinton was not the only one who offered to provide financial aid to Russia. His predecessor, George H. W. Bush, also contributed financially to Russia’s revival.<sup>240</sup> And to put it bluntly, the lender is always superior to the taker. So, despite any friendly feelings towards each other, one-sided monetary help creates one-sided obligations.

In any case, Clinton sought to continue Bush’s direction in handling the Russia case. Perhaps, he considered that by providing financial assistance, they could make Russia follow the democratic course. And Yeltsin was not in the position to refuse such help because without the external financial support, Yeltsin did not stand a chance to rebuild the Russian economy. This is why Yeltsin accepted with open arms the American assistance.

In that way, Yeltsin was not equal to Clinton, and one can imagine that he had to always consider when he might need help again and whether he will receive it. For instance, when Yeltsin was in need of money for his election campaign, he leaned again towards Clinton and asked for help. ‘Please understand me correctly. Bill, for my election campaign, I urgently need

<sup>238</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 10.

<sup>239</sup> Michael Dobbs and Don Oberdorfer, “Yeltsin Appeals for American Aid,” *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1992.

<sup>240</sup> David S Foglesong, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire”*: *The Crusade for a “Free Russia” Since 1881* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 241.



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 him providing the \$2.5 billion in the first half, we could perhaps manage. Or if you could do it under your banks with Russian government guarantees.’<sup>241</sup> This is another example of money flowing only in one direction. And again, if support only goes in one direction, there is an implicit obligation from the taker to the giver.

Peace and prosperity were both presidents’ ultimate goal. Yeltsin and Clinton many times mentioned that the politics of the Cold War should be forgotten. Both Presidents’ action differed absolutely from the Cold War traditions. Somehow, Clinton tended to show and bring to the public that the relationship between both presidents is based on equality. Clear evidence is the Conference held in Helsinki on 21 March 1997 where Clinton and Yeltsin reached agreement on different issues (not about NATO enlargement). Before the conference, Clinton advised Yeltsin to avoid any public statements that use the word ‘concessions.’<sup>242</sup> ‘I don’t want people to score this as you versus me; I don’t want them to say that Boris won on three issues and Bill won on two.’<sup>243</sup>

Yeltsin certainly sought to be perceived as equal to Clinton. On many occasions, he tried to bring this up. When Clinton was re-elected, Yeltsin raised a glass for his good friend the President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton and wished him every success and stressed that they affirmed that during their negotiations they will be conducting an honest, equal partnership.’<sup>244</sup>

Clinton and Yeltsin found a common language concerning different issues. Sometimes Clinton came to terms with Yeltsin’s decisions, other times Yeltsin made compromises. One could argue that the withdrawal of Russian armoured vehicles from a military base in Novorossisk, a naval port on the Black sea, was a compromise from both sides. This was an

<sup>241</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin,” 26.

<sup>242</sup> David S Foglesong, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire”: The Crusade for a “Free Russia” Since 1881*, 241.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin,” 170.

agreement under the terms of Conventional forces in Europe treaty.<sup>245</sup> The treaty was of significant importance for several countries, and Russia agreed on these terms.

Yeltsin pledged for partnership with the US. ‘My impression is that the U.S. does not quite know what to do Russia now – whether to develop a partnership as we have been doing for the last few years, or whether to try to compete with Russia from your current position of superiority. But Russia is not Haiti, and we won’t be treated as though we were. That won’t be sustainable, and it won’t be acceptable. Just forget is [sic]! What we insist on is equality. What I began with Bush and have developed with Clinton – an equal partnership – in the interests of both our people.’<sup>246</sup>

Were Clinton and Yeltsin equal on the domestic front? Both of them were presidents in a presidential republic. However, the domestic situation in both countries was different. While Clinton’s presidency was not threatened by his opponents, the situation was different in Russia. Yeltsin had a lot of enemies who did not want to see him on top of the power, and many of them probably despised him. James Goldgeier said in his article, ‘that in no other era before or since has the Russian president been in such a weak position when meeting with his American counterpart.’<sup>247</sup>

At one of the first meetings between the two, Clinton said that ‘You represent something profoundly different from what we have ever seen come out from Russia. Something all these politicians [in the U.S] can appreciate is the astonishing degree to which you can give bad news to the people and still stay with reform. I think they believe you’ll stay with reform to the very end.’<sup>248</sup>

After Clinton was elected, the President received a letter from Yeltsin asking for an urgent meeting. “His letter reads like a cry of pain,” said Clinton. “You can just feel the guy reaching out to us and asking us to reach out to him. I’d really, really like to help him. I get the feeling he’s up to his ass in alligators. He especially needs friends abroad because he’s got so many enemies at home. We’ve got to try to keep Yeltsin going.”<sup>249</sup>

The war in Chechnya was a burden for Yeltsin. Clinton compared Yeltsin to Abraham Lincoln as a president who had to go to war to keep his country together: ‘I would remind you

<sup>245</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 203.

<sup>246</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 197.

<sup>247</sup> James Goldgeier, “Bill and Boris: A Window Into a Most Important Post-Cold War Relationship,” 4.

<sup>248</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 32–33.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

that we once had a civil war in our country... over the proposition that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for: that no state had a right to withdraw from our Union.’<sup>250</sup>

Clinton even commented on internal reforms in Russia, ““We know where we stand,” he said to the press. “We are with Russian democracy. We are with Russian reforms. Then, as the mantra built to its climax, Clinton slipped in the tell-tale pronoun: “We actively support reform and reformers and you and Russia.” And you, he had said, meaning the man at his side, his new friend Boris, who was heading back to Moscow to resume the fight of his life, with Clinton backing him all the way.’<sup>251</sup> In either situation, Yeltsin needed support. Clinton, of course, had domestic political problems as any leader would, but never to the extent, Yeltsin had.

On the international stage, the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton was not always smooth. Like in every relationship, there were ups and downs, agreements and disagreements. One of the most disturbing issue was the US allegations that Iran is getting missiles from Russia.<sup>252</sup> ‘Categorically no. That technology could be coming from North Korea or China but not from Russia. I know. Bill, you have recently received such intelligence. The Israeli Prime Minister was here, too, and said something about all of this, but I have looked into it, and there is absolutely nothing of the kind. We’re aware that Islamic fundamentalism poses a threat to us as well.’<sup>253</sup> Even though Yeltsin declined Russia’s involvement, it later appeared that Russia was indeed sending missiles to Iran.<sup>254</sup>

Furthermore, it seemed that Yeltsin was always getting suspicious of the US’s intentions. He was always seeking acknowledgement that the US was not against Russia. That they are not acting behind Russia’s back. Yeltsin sought Clinton’s attention, and he felt betrayed and insecure when his expectation did not meet.

Yuli Vorontsov, a Russian and Soviet diplomat, once stated that,

<sup>250</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 204.

<sup>251</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 68.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>253</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, “Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin,” 131.

<sup>254</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2003), 117.

‘You know, Strobe, having worked on U.S-Russian relations most of my career, including during the Soviet period and the cold war, I must tell you that it is much easier to be your enemy than to be your friend. As your friend, we constantly have to hear to us that we must love all the girls you love and hate all the boys you hate.’<sup>255</sup>

Some people were accusing Clinton of being too soft with the Russians. For example, the prime minister of Israel Netanyahu was blaming Clinton’s administration for ‘coddling the Russians.’<sup>256</sup> Yeltsin was accused of the same in his country. Yeltsin was accused not only by appeasing the Americans but also that he was the one to blame for the meltdown of the Soviet Union. The most accusations came from the Communists. The most extravagant accuser was a member of the DUMA (the Russian Parliament), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. He was notorious in Russia for his ludicrous statements. He believed that Alaska should be taken back. He also criticized Clinton and advised him ‘to stay home and practice playing his saxophone instead of coming to Russia for state visits.’<sup>257</sup>

But even in those struggles, Yeltsin and Clinton seem to have each other backs. Clinton was impressed by ‘Yeltsin’s stubbornness, resilience and defiance in the face of adversity and antagonism.’<sup>258</sup> His admiration was for Yeltsin’s ability to ‘stand up to the bastards who are trying to bring him down.’<sup>259</sup>

‘The thing I like about Yeltsin I really like [sic] is that he’s not a Russian bureaucrat. He’s an Irish poet. He sees politics as a novel he’s writing or a symphony he’s composing. That’s the one thing that draws me to him. It’s why he’s better than the others. But it’s also his shortcoming. I’ve got to convince him that for the next two years, he’s got to come to work every day and be a bureaucrat and make the government work.’<sup>260</sup>

To summarize, it is clear that Yeltsin was in a worse position when it comes to economics and domestic politics. But he held his ground and compensated on the international stage. Yeltsin and Clinton were not equal, but that does not seem to have hindered their

<sup>255</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 294.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>257</sup> Vladimir Kartsev and Todd Bludeau, *Zhirinovskiy: An Insider’s Account of Yeltsin’s Chief Rival & Bespredel-The New Russian Roulette* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>258</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, 285.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

relationship or to have been used to pressure the other side outside of normal political pressures. Defining whether there is equality between two individuals is never easy. Furthermore, it is also difficult to assess in what ways two persons are equal. Even though, after the meltdown of the Soviet Union, Russia was not in a position to compete with the US due to its weak economic and political situation. Nevertheless, Yeltsin sought to achieve equality. On different occasions, he stressed that he seeks equality in the relationship between the countries. To some extent, this equality has been achieved, in part due to the efforts of both presidents.

*'If you live long enough, you'll make mistakes. But if you learn from them, you'll be a better person. It's how you handle adversity, not how it affects you. The main thing is never quit, never quit, never quit.'*<sup>261</sup>

*Bill Clinton*

### Section 4.1: Putting everything together

In aggregate, the five key-components of the framework support the idea that Yeltsin and Clinton were engaged in a political friendship. Three components – affect, grant project, and altruistic reciprocity – only suggest that the hypothesis is correct. Two components, moral obligation and equality, can be viewed as indicating the hypothesis is false. However, as the Results chapter argued, the evidence is limited that those key-components was a factor for the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton. Thus, the thesis argues that Yeltsin and Clinton were engaged in a political friendship.

The table below summarizes how the individual key-components affect the overall argument for whether Yeltsin and Clinton were engaged in a political friendship. After examining all five key-components, four clearly support the hypothesis that Yeltsin and Clinton were engaged in a political friendship. The last one, 'equality,' is either neutral or slightly negative. However, in light of the economic situation in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, this lack of equality is understandable and based on the evidence does not seem to have influenced the treatment of each president to his counterpart. Thus, we can argue that the hypothesis cannot be disproven, and thus, that Clinton and Yeltsin can be considered to have engaged in a political friendship.

<sup>261</sup> B. Drummond Ayres Jr, "THE 1992 Campaign: Reporter's Notebook; Clinton Enjoying Mystery Over Choice for Ticket," *The New York Times*, June 29, 1992, sec. U.S., accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/29/us/1992-campaign-reporter-s-notebook-clinton-enjoying-mystery-over-choice-for.html>.

<b>Key-component</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<i>Affect</i>	<p><b>Positive</b></p> <p>Both leaders had affection for each other. Both had a common vision for the future and respected the other. They laughed together and talk about the other with fondness.</p>
<i>Grand project</i>	<p><b>Positive</b></p> <p>From the internal reform in Russia to the future of Europe, both presidents wanted the same things. They overcame many obstacles but stayed on the course.</p>
<i>Altruistic reciprocity</i>	<p><b>Positive</b></p> <p>Both men cared for each other, and not only in terms of their ‘careers’ but also about their health and wellbeing.</p>
<i>Moral obligations</i>	<p><b>Positive</b></p> <p>Although both men put ‘political pressure’ on each other, the ‘favours’ they did for each other never influenced their relationship. Even more, neither complaint that the other is pushing them or required ‘payment’ in return.</p>
<i>Equality</i>	<p><b>Negative to Neutral</b></p> <p>After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia was inferior to the US economically and was in a less stable political environment. Militarily and on the international stage, however, Russia was still a formidable opponent, and the US had to take their preferences into account.</p> <p>Neither men, however, used the supposed disbalance to pressure the other into acts they would never do otherwise. It was a mutually beneficial relationship that had to work around any unequal dynamic.</p>

*Table 2: Impact of key-component on the central hypothesis*

## Section 4.2: Limitations

This thesis takes advantage of numerous first- and second-hand sources. However, all of them are in textual form, whereas due to the recency of the examined period, various videos and audio clips exist, including of Clinton and Yeltsin. Adding information from video and audio footage might help understand the emotions behind the words. Text does not convey emotions in the same way and for a few of the key-components, e.g., ‘affect,’ emotions play a critical role of assessing the potential political friendship.

Another limitation is that all sources that are considered here are in either English or Russian. This narrows the perspective only from the view of the US or Russia. For example, looking at the Kosovo war without considering the perspective of Serbs or US allies like Germany or Bulgaria does not provide enough of global context for the decisions both leaders had to wrestle with. Further complicating the issues, sources in Russian are somewhat restricted to only those which follow the generally expected ‘party line’ at the time, which creates the danger that some descending voices are more difficult to find.

Due to the nature of the thesis, the relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin is considered in its entirety. Although this provides a good overview of how the relationship developed and the interconnectedness of decisions, a more local (in time or in space) perspective is missing. Moreover, as the number of pages of a master’s thesis are restricted, the sheer number of events pushed the author to have a broad but shallow approach rather than dig deeper in a given event. With more focus on a given timeframe or theme (e.g., ideology), the research would have been easier to follow and make connection between events and the key-components.

The thesis also does not provide compassion with other leaders at the time or leaders in similar situations. Thus, the thesis does not make conclusions about what aspect of the relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin are idiosyncratic.

Importantly, the thesis mainly relies – with some extension and referring to newly available sources – on only one model to assess the political friendship: the model of Van Hoef. Without comparing with different models or designing a framework specifically for the relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin, the thesis is limited in its conclusions outside of whether there was a political friendship.



### Section 4.3: Future research

On the basis of the findings of this thesis, and the limitations presented above, future research can focus on individual events during the presidencies of Yeltsin and Clinton. If Yeltsin and Clinton can be considered to have engaged in a political friendship, their actions might have changed because of that. Thus, it is interesting to investigate whether a different person in the same situation might have acted differently.

Another interesting avenue of research is to compare the relationship between Yeltsin and Clinton with other relationship, perhaps from the same time or in a similar position. For instance, one can compare the relationship between Reagan and Gorbachev with that between Clinton and Yeltsin and focus on the differences that might have been driven due to the presence of a political friendship. A new direction for research would be to compare the research done on Russo-American relationship between leaders with relationship along the same ideological divides. For instance, comparing the relationship of individual US presidents with the Russian and Chinese leaders at the time.

As the previous section described, there are many video and audio sources that exist from the time of the events depicted here. Furthermore, many participants in the events examined in this thesis are still alive, including Bill Clinton. Performing interviews with key players would allow for targeted questions that focus on the emotional side of the relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin. Family members or close friends might reveal more for how either leader thought about the relationship and the person on the other side.

As mentioned in the limitations section, relying only on one framework might skew the results when one there is a lot more information about one aspect of the relationship. Comparing and contrasting with different models would improve the analysis. Albeit, there are not any obvious choices. Perhaps, in line with the reasoning in Section 1.3: Different perspective, Van Hoef's model can be extended or framed from two different perspectives to provide a challenge to the standard model. Either way, comparing results from various methodologies not only increases the confidence in the conclusions but also might result in a more comprehensive (but having the danger of being too complex) set of models for the research of political friendships.

Lastly, once the question of whether a political friendship existed is established, future research can use that insight to address the correctness of Clinton and Yeltsin's decisions from a historical and political science perspective. In other words, to what extent have the decisions made by either leader influenced by their political friendship and are those decision better or

worse because of the effect of the political friendship. Was Clinton 'too nice' to Yeltsin because he liked him? Did Yeltsin allowed his unequal position from an economic perspective influence his decisions when it comes to military or internal politics?

#### Section 4.4. Conclusion

The thesis shows that Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin were engaged in a political friendship. By leveraging recently declassified transcripts from the National Archive and Records Administration (NARA) of conversations between two leaders alongside other first-hand sources, I provide a holistic view of the relationship between the two leaders. Then, to assess whether Clinton and Yeltsin engaged in a political friendship in a structured way, I use Yuri van Hoef's model and its five key-components: (1) affect, (2) grant project, (3) altruistic reciprocity, (4) moral obligation, and (5) equality. After some limitations of the framework are described, a different perspective on the model based on behaviour and context is added.

After analysing each of the key-components, the aggregate findings show that Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton were indeed engaged in a political friendship throughout their political and personal relationship. The analyses show that four of the key-components strongly favour the research question. The last key-component, 'equality,' does not support the hypothesis but also does not provide strong evidence against it. Lastly, the thesis provides interesting avenues for future research and highlights limitations of the current work.

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