

President Vladimir Putin of Russia

Mr. Venediktov. The last one. There were 5,000 of them that came in. You see the results. Forty-eight percent of the viewers—[inaudible]—believe that the relations between the United States and Russia will improve under Putin. Forty-two percent believe that they will get worse. And the rest don't know. What do you think about this last poll that we just made?

The President. Well, I think that it reflects, first of all, the fact that he's just in office, so people can't know for sure. Secondly, you've got almost 49 percent saying they will, which shows that people appreciate the fact that he's a strong and able man who has been gracious to me in this first meeting of ours in Russia. And then the 42 percent, I think, are focused on the differences we've had and the problems that have been publicized.

The truth is, you can't know for sure. But I think that based on the meeting I had, we've got a better than even chance that our relationship will improve. The relationship between the United States and Russia is profoundly important. It will tend always to be characterized by the disagreements, because they will always get more press coverage, because they will always be more current. But if there is a strong underlying commitment to democracy, to freedom, to mutual prosperity, mutual respect, I think that over time they will get better even if there are disagreements. That's what I believe, and that's what I've worked for.

President's Return to Ekho Moskvyy

Mr. Venediktov. Thank you very much, Mr. President. We will be waiting for your return, so that you could answer—

The President. I'd like to come back.

Mr. Venediktov. —by being in the studio some of the other questions, maybe as a businessman or a lawyer. Thank you very much.

The President. I'd love to come back, because I saw on your wall that the only way I get to sign my picture is if I come twice, you see. So I'd like to come back. And I want to thank all the people who called or who E-mailed in their questions. And I hope you

will give me all the questions, and maybe I can write you something about them, too.

NOTE: The interview began at 7:50 p.m. in Ekho Moskvyy Studios and was broadcast live. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov of Russia. Mr. Venediktov spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks to the Russian State Duma in Moscow

June 5, 2000

First of all, I thank you for that introduction. And even though it is still in the morning, I am delighted to be here with the Members of the state Duma and the Federation Council.

It is important to me to have this opportunity because the prospects for virtually every important initiative President Putin and I have discussed over the last 2 days will obviously depend upon your advice and your consent, and because through you I can speak to the citizens of Russia directly, those whom you represent.

I have made five trips to Russia in my years as President. I have worked with President Yeltsin and now with President Putin. I have met with the leadership of the Duma on more than one occasion. I have spoken with Russia's religious leaders, with the media, with educators, scientists, and students. I have listened to Russian people tell me about their vision of the future, and I have tried to be quite open about my own vision of the future. I have come here at moments of extraordinary optimism about Russia's march toward prosperity and freedom, and I've been here at moments of great difficulty for you.

I believed very strongly from the first time I came here that Russia's future fundamentally is in the hands of the Russian people. It cannot be determined by others, and it should not be. But Russia's future is very important to others, because it is among the most important journeys the world will witness in my lifetime. A great deal of the 21st century will be strongly influenced by the success of the Russian people in building a

modern, strong, democratic nation that is part of the life of the rest of the world. And so, many people across the world have sought to support your efforts, sharing with you a sense of pride when democracy is advanced and sharing your disappointment when difficulties arose.

It is obviously not for me to tell the Russian people how to interpret the last few years. I know your progress has come with unfilled expectations and unexpected difficulties. I know there have been moments, especially during the financial crisis in 1998, when some wondered if the new Russia would end up as a grand social experiment gone wrong.

But when we look at Russia today, we do not see an experiment gone wrong. We see an economy that is growing, producing goods and services people want. We see a nation of enterprising citizens who are beginning, despite all of the obstacles, to bring good jobs and a normal life to their communities. We see a society with 65,000 nongovernmental organizations, like Eco-Juris, which is helping citizens defend their rights in court, like Vozrozhdenie, which is aiding families with disabled children, like the local chambers of commerce that have sprung up all across Russia.

We see a country of people taking responsibility for their future—people like those of Gadzhiyev on the Arctic Circle who organized a referendum to protect the environment of their town. We see a country transforming its system of higher education to meet the demands of the modern world, with institutions like the new Law Faculty at Novgorod University and the New Economic School in Moscow.

We see a country preserving its magnificent literary heritage, as the Pushkin Library is doing in its efforts to replenish the shelves of libraries all across Russia. We see a country entering the information age, with cutting-edge software companies, with Internet centers at universities from Kazan to Ufa to Yakutsk, with a whole generation of young people more connected to the outside world than any past generation could have imagined.

We see Russian citizens with no illusions about the road ahead, yet voting in extraor-

dinary numbers against a return to the past. We see a Russia that has just completed a democratic transfer of executive power for the first time in a thousand years.

I would not presume to tell the people you represent how to weigh the gains of freedom against the pain of economic hardship, corruption, crime. I know the people of Russia do not yet have the Russia they were promised in 1991. But I believe you, and they, now have a realistic chance to build that kind of Russia for yourselves in far greater measure than a decade ago, because of the democratic foundations that have been laid and the choices that have been made.

The world faces a very different Russia than it did in 1991. Like all countries, Russia also faces a very different world. Its defining feature is globalization, the tearing down of boundaries between people, nations, and cultures, so that what happens anywhere can have an impact everywhere.

During the 1990's, the volume of international trade almost doubled. Links among businesses, universities, advocacy groups, charities, and churches have multiplied across physical space and cyberspace. In the developing world some of the poorest villages are beginning to be connected to the information superhighway in ways that are opening up unbelievable opportunities for education and for development.

The Russian people did more than just about anyone else to make possible this new world of globalization by ending the divisions of the cold war. Now Russia, America, and all nations are subject to new rules of the global economy. One of those rules, to adapt a phrase from your history, is that it's no longer possible to build prosperity in one country alone. To prosper, our economies must be competitive in a global marketplace; and to compete, the most important resource we must develop is our own people, giving them the tools and freedom to reach their full potential.

This is the challenge we have tried to meet in America over the last few years. Indeed, the changes we have seen in the global economy pose hard questions that both our nations still must answer. A fundamental question is, how do we define our strength and

vitality as a nation today, and what role should government play in building it?

Some people actually believe that government is no longer relevant at all to people's lives in a globalized, interconnected world. Since all of us hold government positions, I presume we disagree. But I believe experience shows that government, while it must be less bureaucratic and more oriented toward the markets and while it should focus on empowering people by investing in education and training rather than simply accruing power for itself, it is still very important.

Above all, a strong state should use its strength to reinforce the rule of law, protect the powerless against the powerful, defend democratic freedoms, including freedom of expression, religion, and the press, and do whatever is possible to give everyone a chance to develop his or her innate abilities.

This is true, I believe, for any society seeking to advance in the modern world. For any society in any part of the world that is increasingly small and tied together, the answer to law without order is not order without law.

Another fundamental question is, how shall countries define their strength in relation to the rest of the world today? Shall we define it as the power to dominate our neighbors or the confidence to be a good neighbor? Shall we define it by what we are against or simply in terms of what others are for? Do we join with others in common endeavors to advance common interests, or do we try to bend others to our will?

This federal assembly's ratification of START II and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty suggests you are answering these questions in a way that will make for both a stronger Russia and a better world, defining your strength in terms of the achievements of your people and the power of your partnerships and your role in world affairs.

A related question for both Russia and America is, how should we define our relationship today? Clearly, Russia has entered a phase when what it needs most is outside investment, not aid. What Americans must ask is not so much what can we do for Russia, but what can we do with Russia to advance our common interests and lift people in both nations?

To build that kind of relationship, we Americans have to overcome the temptation to think that we have all the answers. We have to resist the feeling that if only you would see things our way, troubles would go away. Russia will not, and indeed should not, choose a course simply because others wish you to do so. You will choose what your interests clearly demand and what your people democratically embrace.

I think one problem we have is that many Russians still suspect that America does not wish you well. Thus, you tend to see our relationship in what we call zero-sum terms, assuming that every assertion of American power must diminish Russia, and every assertion of Russian strength must threaten America. That is not true. The United States wants a strong Russia, a Russia strong enough to protect its territorial integrity while respecting that of its neighbors, strong enough to meet threats to its security, to help maintain strategic stability, to join with others to meet common goals, to give its people their chance to live their dreams.

Of course, our interests are not identical, and we will have our inevitable disagreements. But on many issues that matter to our people, our interests coincide. And we have an obligation, it seems to me, to focus on the goals we can and should advance together in our mutual interest and to manage our differences in a responsible and respectful way.

What can we do together in the years to come? Well, one thing we ought to do is to build a normal economic relationship, based on trade and investment between our countries and contact between our people. We have never had a better opportunity, and I hope you will do what you can to seize it.

This is the time, when Russia's economy is growing and oil prices are high, when I hope Russia will create a more diversified economy. The economies that will build power in the 21st century will be built not just on resources from the soil, which are limited, but on the genius and initiative of individual citizens, which are unlimited.

This is a time when I hope you will finish putting in place the institutions of a modern economy, with laws that protect property, that ensure openness and accountability, that

establish an efficient, equitable tax code. Such an economy would keep Russian capital in Russia and bring foreign capital to Russia, both necessary for the kind of investment you deserve, to create jobs for your people and new businesses for your future.

This is a time to win the fight against crime and corruption so that investment will not choose safer shores. That is why I hope you will soon pass a strong law against money laundering that meets international standards.

This is also the time I hope Russia will make an all-out effort to take the needed steps to join the World Trade Organization. Membership in the WTO reinforces economic reform. It will give you better access to foreign markets. It will ensure that your trading partners treat you fairly. Russia should not be the only major industrialized country standing outside this global trading system. You should be inside this system, with China, Brazil, Japan, members of the European Union, and the United States, helping to shape those rules for the benefit of all.

We will support you. But you must know, too, that the decision to join the WTO requires difficult choices that only you can make. I think it is very important. Again I will say, I think you should be part of making the rules of the road for the 21st century economy, in no small measure because I know you believe in the importance of the social contract, and you understand that we cannot have a world economy unless we also have some rules that people in the world respect regarding the living standards of people—the conditions in which our children are raised, whether they have access to education, and whether we do what should be done together to protect the global environment.

A second goal of our partnership should be to meet threats to our security together. The same advances that are bringing the world together are also making the tools of destruction deadlier, cheaper, and more available. As you well know, because of this openness of borders, because of the openness of the Internet, and because of the advances of technology, we are all more vulnerable to terrorism, to organized crime, to the

spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons—which themselves may some day be transferred, soon, in smaller and smaller quantities, across more and more borders, by unscrupulous illegal groups working together. In such a world, to protect our security we must have more cooperation, not more competition, among likeminded nation-states.

Since 1991, we have already cooperated to cut our own nuclear arsenals by 40 percent; in removing nuclear weapons from Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan; in fighting illicit trafficking in deadly technology. Together, we extended the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, banned chemical weapons, agreed to end nuclear testing, urged India and Pakistan to back away from nuclear confrontation.

Yesterday President Putin and I announced two more important steps. Each of us will destroy 34 tons of weapons-grade plutonium, enough to build thousands of nuclear weapons. And we will establish a system to give each other early warning of missile tests and space launches to avoid any miscalculation, with a joint center here that will operate out of Moscow 24 hours a day, 7 days a week—the first permanent, joint United States-Russian military cooperation ever. I am proud of this record, and I hope you are, too.

We will continue to reduce our nuclear arsenals by negotiating a START III treaty and to secure the weapons and materials that remain. But we must be realistic. Despite our best efforts, the possibility exists that nuclear and other deadly weapons will fall into dangerous hands, into hands that could threaten us both—rogue states, terrorists, organized criminal groups.

The technology required to launch missiles capable of delivering them over long distances, unfortunately, is still spreading across the world. The question is not whether this threat is emerging; it is. The question is, what is the best way to deal with it? It is my strong preference that any response to strengthen the strategic stability and arms control regime that has served our two nations so well for decades now—if we can pursue that goal together, we will all be more secure.

Now, as all of you know well, soon I will be required to decide whether the United States should deploy a limited national defense system designed to protect the American people against the most imminent of these threats. I will consider, as I have repeatedly said, many factors, including the nature of threat, the cost of meeting it, the effectiveness of the available technology, and the impact of this decision on our overall security, including our relationship with Russia and other nations, and the need to preserve the ABM Treaty.

The system we are contemplating would not undermine Russia's deterrent or the principles of mutual deterrence and strategic stability. That is not a question just of our intent but of the technical capabilities of the system. But I ask you to think about this, to debate it—as I know you will—to determine for yourselves what the capacity of what we have proposed is—because I learned on my trip to Russia that the biggest debate is not whether we intend to do something that will undermine mutual deterrence—I think most people who have worked with us, not just me and others, over the years know that we find any future apart from cooperation with you in the nuclear area inconceivable. The real question is a debate over what the impact of this will be, because of the capacity of the technology involved.

And I believe that is a question of fact which people of good will ought to be able to determine. And I believe we ought to be able to reach an agreement about how we should proceed at each step along the way here, in a way that preserves mutual deterrence, preserves strategic stability, and preserves the ABM Treaty. That is my goal. And if we can reach an agreement about how we're going forward, then it is something we ought to take in good faith to the Chinese, to the Japanese, to others who are interested in this, to try to make sure that this makes a safer world, not a more unstable world.

I think we've made some progress, and I would urge all of you who are interested in this to carefully read the Statement of Principles to which President Putin and I agreed yesterday.

Let me say that this whole debate on missile defense and the nature of the threat re-

flects a larger and, I think, more basic truth. As we and other nation-states look out on the world today, increasingly we find that the fundamental threat to our security is not the threat that we pose to each other, but instead, threats we face in common—threats from terrorist and rogue states, from biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons which may be able to be produced in increasingly smaller and more sophisticated ways; public health threats, like AIDS and tuberculosis, which are now claiming millions of lives around the world, and which literally are on the verge of ruining economies and threatening the survival of some nations. The world needs our leadership in this fight, as well. And when President Putin and I go to the G-8 meeting in July, I hope we can support a global strategy against infectious disease.

There is a global security threat caused by environmental pollution and global warming. We must meet it with strong institutions at home and with leadership abroad.

Fortunately, one of the benefits of the globalized information age is that it is now possible to grow an economy without destroying the environment. Thanks to incredible advances in science and technology over the last 10 years, a whole new aspect in economic growth has opened up. It only remains to see whether we are wise enough to work together to do this, because the United States does not have the right to ask any nation—not Russia, not China, not India—to give up future economic growth to combat the problem of climate change. What we do have is the opportunity to persuade every nation, including people in our own country who don't yet believe it, that we can grow together in the 21st century and actually reduce greenhouse gases at the same time.

I think a big part of making that transition benefits Russia, because of your great stores of natural gas. And so I hope we will be working closely together on this in the years ahead.

In the Kyoto climate change treaty, we committed ourselves to tie market forces to the fight against global warming. And today, on this World Environment Day, I'm pleased that President Putin and I have agreed to deepen our own cooperation on climate change.

This is a huge problem. If we don't deal with this within just a few years, you will have island nations flooded; you will have the agricultural balance of most countries completely changed; you will have a dramatic increase in the number of severe, unmanageable weather events. And the good news is that we can now deal with this problem—again I say, and strengthen our economic growth, not weaken it.

A third challenge that demands our engagement is the need to build a world that is less divided along ethnic, racial, and religious lines. It is truly ironic, I think, that we can go anywhere in the world and have the same kinds of conversations about the nature of the global information society. Not long ago, I was in India in a poor village, meeting with a women's milk cooperative. And the thing they wanted me to see was that they had computerized all their records. And then I met with the local village council, and the thing they wanted me to see in this remote village, in a nation with a per capita income of only \$450 a year, was that all the information that the federal and state government had that any citizen could ever want was on a computer in the public building in this little village. And I watched a mother that had just given birth to a baby come into this little public building and call up the information about how to care for the child and then print it out on her computer so that she took home with her information every bit as good as a well-to-do American mother could get from her doctor about how to care for a child in the first 6 months.

It is truly ironic that at a time when we're living in this sort of world with all these modern potentials, that we are grappling with our oldest problems of human society—our tendency to fear and then to hate people who are different from us. We see it from Northern Ireland to the Middle East to the tribal conflicts of Africa to the Balkans and many other places on this Earth.

Russia and America should be concerned about this because the stability of both of our societies depends upon people of very different ethnic, racial, and religious groups learning to live together under a common framework of rules. And history teaches us

that harmony that lasts among such different people cannot be maintained by force alone.

I know when trying to come to grips with these problems, these old problems of the modern world, the United States and Russia have faced some of our greatest difficulties in the last few years. I know you disagreed with what I did in Kosovo, and you know that I disagreed with what you did in Chechnya. I have always said that the Russian people and every other people have a right to combat terrorism and to preserve the integrity of their nations. I still believe it, and I reaffirmed that today. My question in Chechnya was an honest one and the question of a friend, and that is whether any war can be won that requires large numbers of civilian casualties and has no political component bringing about a solution.

Let me say, in Kosovo my position was whether we could ever preserve a democratic and free Europe unless southeastern Europe were a part of it, and whether any people could ever say that everyone is entitled to live in peace if 800,000 people were driven out of a place they had lived in for centuries solely because of their religion.

None of these questions will be easy, but I think we ought to ask ourselves whether we are trying to resolve them. I remember going to Kosovo after the conflict, after Russians and Americans had agreed to serve there together as we have served in Bosnia effectively together, and sitting down with all the people who represented the conflict around the table. They would hardly speak to each other. They were still angry; they were still thinking about their family members that had been dislocated and killed.

So I said to them that I had just been involved in negotiating the end of the conflict in Northern Ireland, and that I was very close to the Irish conflict because all of my relatives came from a little village in Ireland that was right on the border between the North and the South, and therefore had lived through all these years of conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants.

And I said, now here's the deal we've got. The deal is majority rule, minority rights, guaranteed participation in decisionmaking, shared economic and other benefits. Majority

rule; minority rights; guaranteed participation in decisionmaking; shared economic and other benefits. I said, now, it's a good deal, but what I would like to tell you is that if they had ever stopped fighting, they could have gotten this deal years ago.

And so I told the people of Kosovo, I said, "You know, everybody around this table has got a legitimate grievance. People on all sides, you can tell some story that is true and is legitimately true. Now, you can make up your mind to bear this legitimate grievance with a grudge for 20 or 30 years. And 20 or 30 years from now, somebody else will be sitting in these chairs, and they will make a deal—majority rule, minority rights, shared decision-making, shared economic and other benefits. You can make the deal now, or you can wait."

Those of us who are in a position of strong and stable societies, we have to say this to people. We have to get people—not just the people who have been wronged; everybody has got a legitimate grievance in these cauldrons of ethnic and racial and religious turmoil. But it's something we have to think about. And as we see a success story, it's something I think we ought to look for other opportunities to advance.

Real peace in life comes not when you give up the feelings you have that are wrong, but when you give up the feelings you have that are right, in terms of having been wronged in the past. That's how people finally come together and go on. And those of us who lead big countries should take that position and try to work through it.

Let me say, finally, a final security goal that I have, related to all the others, is to help Europe build a community that is democratic, at peace, and without divisions—one that includes Russia and strengthens our ability to advance our common interest. We have never had that kind of Europe before in all of history, so building it will require changing old patterns of thinking. I was in Germany a couple of days ago in the historic old town of Aachen, where Charlemagne had his European empire in the late 8th and early 9th centuries, to talk about that.

There are, I know, people who resist the idea that Russia should be part of Europe and who insist that Russia is fundamentally

different from the other nations that are building a united Europe. Of course, there are historical and cultural arguments that support that position. And it's a good thing that you are different and that we are different; it makes life more interesting. But the differences between Russia and France, for example, may not be any greater than those between Sweden and Spain, or England and Greece, or even between America and Europe. Integration within Europe and then the transatlantic alliance came about because people who are different came together, not because people who are the same came together.

Estrangement between Russia and the West, which lasted too long, was not because of our inherent differences but because we made choices in how we defined our interests and our belief systems. We now have the power to choose a different and a better future. We can do that by integrating our economies, making common cause against common threats, promoting ethnic and religious tolerance and human rights. We can do it by making sure that none of the institutions of European and transatlantic unity, not any of them, are closed to Russia.

You can decide whether you want to be a part of these institutions. It should be entirely your decision. And we can have the right kind of constructive partnership, whatever decision we make, as long as you know that no doors to Europe's future are closed to you, and you can then feel free to decide how best to pursue your own interests. If you choose not to pursue full membership in these institutions, then we must make sure that their Eastern borders become gateways for Russia instead of barriers to travel, trade, and security cooperation.

We also should work with others to help those in Europe who still fear violence and are afraid they will not have a stable, secure future. I am proud that together we have made the OSCE into an effective champion of human rights in Europe. I am pleased that President Putin and I recommitted ourselves yesterday to helping find a settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I am proud we have together adapted the Conventional

Forces in Europe Treaty, to reduce conventional arms in Europe and eliminate the division of the continent into military blocs. I believe it is a hopeful thing that despite our different outlook on the war in the former Yugoslavia, that our armed forces have worked there together in both Bosnia and Kosovo to keep the peace.

We may still disagree about Kosovo, but now that the war is over, let me say one other thing about Yugoslavia. I believe the people of Serbia deserve to live in a normal country with the same freedoms the people of Russia and America enjoy, with relationships with their neighbors, including Russia, that will not constantly be interrupted by vast flows of innocent people being forced out of their country or threatened with their very lives.

The struggle in Belgrade now is not between Serbia and NATO. It is between the Serbian people and their leaders. The Serbian people are asking the world to back democracy and freedom. Our response to their request does not have to be identical, but Russia and America should both be on the side of the people of Serbia.

In the relationship we are building, we should try to stand abroad for the values each of us has been building at home. I know the kind of relationship that we would both like cannot be built overnight. Russia's history, like America's, teaches us well that there are no shortcuts to great achievements. But we have laid strong foundations. It has helped a great deal that so many Members of our Congress have visited you here, and that a number of Duma committee chairmen visited our Congress last month, that members of the Federation Council have been invited to come to Washington.

I want to urge you, as many of you as can, to visit our country, and invite Members of our Congress to visit you. Let them understand how the world looks from your perspective. Let them see how you do your jobs. Tell them what you're worried about and where you disagree with us. And give us a chance to build that base of common experience and mutual trust that is so important to our future together. All of you are always welcome to come and work with us in the United States. We have to find a mutual understanding.

I also would say that the most important Russian-American relationship still should be the relationship between our peoples, the student exchanges, the business partnerships, the collaboration among universities and foundations and hospitals, the sister-city links, the growing family ties. Many of the Russians and Americans involved in these exchanges are very young. They don't even have any adult memories of the cold war. They don't carry the burdens and baggage of the past, just the universal, normal desire to build a good future with those who share their hopes and dreams. We should do everything we can to increase these exchanges, as well.

And finally, we must have a sense of responsibility for the future. We are not destined to be adversaries, but it is not guaranteed that we will be allies. For us, there is no fate waiting to be revealed, only a future waiting to be created by the actions we take, the choices we make, and the genuine views we have of one another and of our own future.

I leave you today looking to the future with the realistic hope that we will choose wisely; that we will continue to build a relationship of mutual respect and mutual endeavor; that we will tell each other the truth with clarity and candor as we see it, always striving to find common ground, always remembering that the world we seek to bring into being can come only if America and Russia are on the same side of history.

I believe we will do this, not because I know everything always turns out well but because I know our partnership, our relationship, is fundamentally the right course for both nations. We have to learn to identify and manage our disagreements because the relationship is profoundly important to the future.

The governments our people elect will do what they think is right for their own people. But they know that one thing that is right is continuing to strengthen the relationship between Russia and the United States. Our children will see the result, a result that is more prosperous and free and at peace than the world has ever known. That is what I believe we can do.

I don't believe any American President has ever come to Russia five times before. I came twice before that, once when I was a very young man and our relations were very different than they are now. All my life, I have wanted the people of my country and the people of your country to be friends and allies, to lead the world away from war toward the dreams of children. I have done my best to do that.

I hope you will believe that that is the best course for both our countries and for our children's future.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. in Plenary Hall at the Duma. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Putin and former President Boris Yeltsin of Russia. The President also referred to OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One

June 5, 2000

Sightseeing

The President. Did you guys go see Lenin?

Q. We tried; we couldn't get in.

The President. I'll tell you something, if you've never been to Kiev and you have time while we're there—if you don't all have to cover me all the time, when we're just having meetings and stuff—you should go to the monastery, all these beautiful buildings where they have all the historical treasures of Ukraine, all these—these metal artifacts going back over a thousand years, fabulous stuff—2,000, 3,000 years.

And underground—they have this underground network of tunnels that the priests still run. And the tunnels are perfectly preserved atmospherically, and there are mummies there where the priests have been buried for 500, 600, 700 years, and they're like that, and you can see the skin on their hands, just like Lenin, except not treated. No, no, they were just buried there. It is the most astonishing thing.

Remember how that Peruvian—wasn't it a Peruvian girl—looked when they found her after 500 years in the ice?

Q. Yes.

The President. That's the way the atmosphere is. And you're walking through these tunnels, and you just come up and there's a little grave. They just cut a thing into the tunnel and they lay the priests there. I mean, there they are. It is the most astonishing thing. Who did it? Weren't you amazed? Weren't they all buried 500, 600, 700 years ago?

Q. Yes.

The President. And you hold the little candle down there. And the atmosphere is stunning. But like a group of you, if you can whatever, swap off—because a lot of this stuff is just meetings until we do the rally. There's no press conference or anything. As many of you as can be spared—there is nothing like it anywhere else in the world that I'm aware of.

Q. Would you write a note for our bosses?
[Laughter]

Former President Boris Yeltsin of Russia

The President. Yes, I'll give you an excused absence. But no kidding, if there is any way any of you can go, you should go. It is a truly extraordinary thing. It's amazing. Yeltsin looked good today.

Q. Did he?

The President. Yes. He's in good spirits, happy. He's got a beautiful place.

Q. Which spirits, exactly?

The President. No spirits. [Laughter] He and his wife and his daughter were there. We all just had a nice visit. It was like old times. But he's in good shape.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:17 p.m. en route from Moscow, Russia, to Kiev, Ukraine. In his remarks, the President referred to former President Yeltsin's wife, Naina, and his daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on Signing a Ukraine- United States Joint Statement in Kiev, Ukraine

June 5, 2000

Thank you very much. Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, leaders of the government, leaders and Members of the Rada, leaders