

We realize that it is neither possible nor desirable to isolate Russia. However, we are independent states, and we decide ourselves about our affiliations and our policies.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we agreed to in our conversations with the representatives of the Central European nations that are represented at this meeting in Prague, our countries have very similar views on this subject. This is certainly a gratifying circumstance, and it is to the benefit of us all.

Let me therefore conclude by expressing my firm conviction that this meeting has become an important landmark on the road toward a new democratic and truly peaceful Europe, sharing firm and natural ties with the North American Continent. At one time, the city of Yalta went down in history as a symbol of the division of Europe. I would be happy if today the city of Prague emerged as a symbol of Europe's standing in alliance.

Thank you.

Russia

Q. Mr. President, there are nationalists in Russia who look at these four countries and other nations that were under the grip of Moscow, and they dream of rebuilding the Soviet empire. What will you tell Russian President Boris Yeltsin about the security needs of these countries and how far it should go in guaranteeing their territorial integrity and their borders?

President Clinton. First of all, I would say that based on their past statements, he's right, and they're wrong. That is, I think that the Russian position, the position of the present administration there, that they will respect the territorial boundaries of their neighbors is the proper position.

You know, each nation at critical periods has to imagine again what its future is going to be, and it has to define itself—how it will define itself as a nation and how it will define a standard of greatness. The United States, in very different ways, is going through such a period today. And Russia must do that.

In the 21st century can anyone seriously believe that we will define greatness by whether one country can physically occupy another, since we all know that wealth and opportunity will be determined by things other than physical possession of land mass? I don't think so.

And my urgent task will be to try to continue to press the path of democracy and reform and

America's support for it in Russia. They are a great people with a great history and a great future. But the future must be different from the past, and the way greatness is defined must be different. And that, I think, is a struggle plainly going on there now that will play itself out over the next few years. And I'm hoping and will be working for the best possible impact.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]?

Security of Visegrad States

Q. Mr. President, it's obvious that the leaders have accepted something short of what they really wanted. And in a way they're being treated as second cousins. They really wanted security guarantees, and you and all the NATO allies have told them that that's not in the package. In view of—

President Clinton. Let me just—I disagree that they're being treated as second cousins. This is something NATO has never done before. We will have people out in the next few days talking about how we're going to begin all kinds of joint security operations. To say that 16 nations of NATO made a mistake not to immediately issue security guarantees to some nations of Europe and not others, without knowing in any way, shape, or form whether the reciprocal obligations of NATO could be met by new members, I think is an unfair characterization of the NATO alliance.

Q. My question is, in view of the lessons of World War II, is it conceivable if any of these nations were invaded or aggressed against that NATO would not come to their help?

President Clinton. I think it is doubtful; that's right. I think our reading of history is right. But frankly, I think none of us believe that—I can't speak for the other Presidents except based on our conversations—that that is imminent. I think—what I was impressed by from these leaders is that they very much want to be a part of Europe, of the Western alliance in an economic and social and political as well as a military way and that the broad definition of security is in that.

Of course, there are always concerns that in the future, the darker past might be recreated, that there could be an expansionism again. But what we need to do is—again, what I'm trying to do is to reach out and enhance the security of these nations in ways that also permit other nations to enhance their security and partnership