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Russia-Allies Dinner Toast May 9, 1995

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT STATE DINNER FOR VISITING LEADERS

Palace of Congresses
The Kremlin
Moscow, Russia

7:31 P.M. (L)

THE PRESIDENT: President Yeltsin, President Mitterrand, Prime Minister Major, Chancellor Kohl, Mr. Secretary General, ladies and gentlemen.

Tonight we gather to recall one victory, and the countless millions of sacrifices that produced it. It is fitting for all of us that we recall that day here in Russia, where virtually every family had a loss to mourn and a hero to remember.

A crowded 50 years separates us today from that moment. Yet it is still near in so many ways, woven with the entire war into the living memory of our civilization. Each of us has been touched by that war, even those who were born after its end.

World War II left us lessons, not for an evening, but for a lifetime. We would be remiss not to mention two of them tonight. The first is the extraordinary power of men and women who joined together to fight for a just cause; the heroism of those who confronted and defeated tyranny; the alliance of Soviets, British, French, Chinese, Canadians, Yugoslavs, Pols, Americans, and so many more will forever remind people of the strength that is found in common purpose.

It inspires us here today. One-time opponents are now valued and trusting friends. And with Russia's turn to democracy, the alliance for freedom stands on the verge of great new possibility.

Together, we can face vistas of promise, which separately we could never even imagine. And together we can face the challenges to our humanity in this age -- terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the continued lust for killing based on ethnic, religious or tribal differences.
As we look to new horizons in the new century, let us remember also another lesson of the great war -- the resilience of hope. Our nations prevailed because they never lost hope. It is the touchstone of our humanity.

Let us renew that hope tonight. And let us remember the words of Olga Burgoltz, the poet of "The Awful Siege of Leningrad." She said, "Again from the black dust, from the place of death and ashes, will arise the garden as before. So it will be, I firmly believe in miracles."

The resolve of her city, the perseverance of its people in the face of unspeakable horror, gave her that belief in miracles. Fortified by the wonders we have seen in just the last six years, that belief surely lives on with us today.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, I propose a toast tonight to the heroism of 50 years ago; to the honor of the Russian people and the other Soviet peoples in the awful losses they suffered and what they gave to us; and most of all, to the hope that will carry us onward to miraculous new days ahead.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

7:36 P.M. (L)
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Tonight we gather to recall one victory and countless sacrifices.

Fifty years ago the guns fell silent over Europe. That was the day when prayers were answered -- when the nations of history's greatest wartime alliance knew that they had triumphed, and when the families that paid for that triumph knew their loved ones had not died in vain. It is fitting that we recall that day here in Russia, where virtually every family had a loss to mourn and a hero to remember.

A crowded half-century separates us from that moment. Yet it is still near -- woven with the entire war into the living memory of our civilization. Each of us has been touched by the war -- even those of us born after its end. Some lost fathers or brothers, others...neighbors or friends. Those who were there had their lives changed forever.

World War II left us lessons not for an evening but for a lifetime. Yet we would be remiss not to mention two of them tonight. The first is the extraordinary power of men and women who join together to fight for a just cause. The heroism of those who confronted and defeated tyranny -- the alliance of Soviets, Britons, Frenchmen, Chinese, Canadians, Americans and so many more -- will forever remind people of the strength we find in common purpose.
It inspires us here today. Because the alliance for freedom stands on the verge of an era of unprecedented unity. Once-time opponents are now valued friends. And with Russia’s turn to democracy, the cause that inspired so many in the battles of a half-century ago is finding new fulfillment. Together, we face vistas of promise which separately we could never imagine.

As we look to those horizons, we must remember another great lesson of the war: the resilience of hope. Our nations prevailed because they never lost hope, that touchstone of our humanity. Looking to the future, let us renew that hope. And let us remember the words of Olga Berggolts, the poet of the siege of Leningrad.

Again from the black dust, from the place
Of death and ashes, will arise the garden as before.
So it will be. I firmly believe in miracles.

The resolve of her city...the perseverance of its people...gave her that belief. Fortified by the wonders we have seen in just the last six years, that belief lives on with us today.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Let us drink a toast -- to the heroism of 50 years ago and to the hope that carries us onward to the new miraculous day ahead.
The President's May 9 State Dinner Toast

Sources

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Context

The State Dinner is the final event of a long Victory Day. While paying homage to the past, the President's toast should primarily be forward looking. Given the ongoing debate in Moscow about Russia's place in the world and integration with the West, this toast provides an opportunity to link our commemorative themes (e.g. post-war reconciliation) with our goal of an undivided Europe in which both America and Russia play significant roles. We should not, however, suggest any sort of U.S.-Russian condominium or give the Russians (or our NATO allies) any reason to think that the U.S.-Russian relationship is such that Moscow has a veto over NATO decisionmaking.

Setting

The State Dinner will take place in one of several large, ceremonial halls in the Kremlin; although an historic setting, it is not necessary to comment on the venue. At least fifty other presidents or prime ministers will attend the State Dinner; it will be a very impressive crowd. At a minimum the President should offer a word of praise to French President Mitterrand, who will be leaving office within a matter of weeks.

Content

We must mention:

(1) President's and First Lady's personal thanks to Yeltsin for hosting the May 9 Victory Day commemoration.

(2) Sacrifices made by the Soviet Army and Soviet people during the War; special reference should be made to the Ukrainian and Belarussian peoples, on whose territory some of the most devastating fighting took place (Presidents Kuchma and Lukashenko will be there).

(3) Veterans, living and dead, of all allied armies -- Soviet, American, British, French (mention Mitterrand); refer to our wartime cooperation as a model for what we seek to achieve today as we work together in the UN, OSCE to address problems of global instability.

(4) Reconciliation that has taken place between wartime enemies; Germany now a political and economic leader in Europe; Italy and Japan now key market democracies.

(5) Reform in Russia now bringing Moscow into the family of industrial democracies; further integration in everyone's interest, as we develop European, world political and security structures for 21st Century.

(6) Russia and America have special responsibility which we will be discussing tomorrow at bilateral summit; restate our commitment to a Europe which is unified, whole and free; welcome opportunity to address any Russian concerns; goal is no future European conflicts.