

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Russian President Yeltsin ~~(C)~~

PARTICIPANTS: President Clinton
Russian President Boris Yeltsin

Interpreter: Dimitry Zarechnak
Notetakers: Lyle Harrison, Jeff Rathke,
Cindy Lawrence, Ki Fort

DATE, TIME: November 22, 1997, 9:00 - 9:43 a.m. EST.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, hello, Boris? (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Bill? (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, Boris. I wanted to talk to you briefly about where we go on Iraq. First I wanted to tell you I appreciate your personal efforts. I think we need to work hard to stay together on these issues. We need to see cooperation on the ground and in the air, including especially an end to efforts to block or hamper inspection of chemical and biological sites and an end to threats to U2 flights. ~~(C)~~

In terms of the composition of UN inspection teams, let me make clear my priorities. First, that the teams be autonomous and free to pursue their professional obligations. Secondly, they need to be composed of properly trained technical experts. ~~(C)~~

I know you want to send more humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people. I agree they deserve our help. ~~(C)~~

In terms of certifying whether the Iraqis are complying on nuclear and missiles inspections, from my point of view, it is purely a question of fact and professional judgment. I don't believe the United States, Russia, or any other country, should make it happen or not make it happen on political grounds. That

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is why we have trained professional experts. We've made more progress there, but whether it's sufficient is what the team is there for. They should decide. ~~(S)~~

Let me emphasize again. I never said that we should not be able to help the Iraqi people. But we should be able to finish the work. Biological and chemical inspections are more difficult than the missile or nuclear ones. They (Iraqis) must give more access to the sites. We have shown through diplomatic efforts, backed by credible force, that we can work to solve this question. You've played a role in that; I hope we can work closely together on next steps. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Good, Bill. I think that we have acted correctly together, and now for the time being the threat of crisis is no longer there. When I was meeting here with Aziz, I stated that the one-sided actions on the part of Iraq, such as disbanding of the commission, were not acceptable, and we have agreed to resume activity of the commission in the composition that was there, including American participants. And I also believe, Bill, that they feel the hardships. The situation is quite difficult for them because its making peoples' lives very hard. Maybe Bill, we could come to an agreement with you on which issues have been solved and which remain outstanding, and proceeding from that basis, we could lift some part of the embargo. Of course, we have to come to an understanding on U-2 flights and other similar things. ~~(S)~~

On the whole, I have the impression that the Iraqis themselves have become tired of their policies and want to return to the community of normal states. I think now the time has come when we should not push them away, but should let the situation get back to normal as it is among other states. ~~(S)~~

I think that the record of the five Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Geneva was good, and the statement they issued also was a good achievement. It is necessary that Madame Albright should continue to maintain contact with Mr. Primakov to prevent any kind of repetition of this situation. ~~(S)~~

Bill, I would like to ask you to make together (with us) some kind of concession, a small concession in the Security Council, just a small concession in their direction. Hussein expressed his willingness and readiness to cooperate. In other words, he has shown willingness to use peaceful diplomacy methods. So slowly, the heavy military hardware could be withdrawn from that

area. I mean the ships and the phantoms. What do you think about that? ~~(C)~~

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, I agree we need to keep working together and agree on the need to give relief to the Iraqi people. However, I think it is quite important over the next few days that Saddam allow UNSCOM to operate, to show his good faith. After all, he did kick the inspectors out and they have just returned. It's important that we see they can do their jobs. ~~(C)~~

Secondly, in terms about what you said about certifying that they have complied, my understanding is that the inspectors are closer to finishing on the missile and nuclear side than on the biological or chemical side; as to whether they have really finished their tasks, we should let the team tell us this. For example, one of the best people on the UNSCOM missile team is a Russian, Mr. Smidovich. They know what needs to be done to finish. If in fact, they are close to completion, they need to tell us so. If there is more to do, then we can agree on accelerating the work. ~~(C)~~

But Boris, I just want to take a minute to talk about the chemical and biological issues. I think you should have your people give you the list of chemical agents that Saddam Hussein admitted to having in 1989, which he says he destroyed, but has no records on, although he has lists on other things. Also, look at what he admitted to just in 1995 -- just two years ago. No other country in the world has a major chemical and biological program and has actually used it against others as the Iraqis have used it on Iran and the Kurds. When UNSCOM inspectors were forced to leave, it was just as they were about to get access to a suspected biological site. Even if Saddam were in a position where he couldn't use it on anyone else, he could sell it to terrorists or to American, European, Japanese or Russian organized crime networks. And just a little bit of this can do a lot of damage, as we saw in the Tokyo subway attack a couple of years ago. We should watch this closely.

~~(C)~~

You asked for a small gesture on this. Keep in mind that we have Resolution 986, which we all supported. We can expand humanitarian relief as a gesture -- if they cooperate -- if we see we're going to get access. The faster they cooperate, the more we can work out. This is important for the future stability of the world that we're trying to create. But I think it's important to concentrate on the biological and chemical

issue. We can't take it lightly. To me this is a very serious issue. We need to find a way for the inspectors, whoever they may be, to be trained and to do their jobs. This is my overwhelming concern. Nothing would make me happier than to have Iraq restored as a responsible member of the community of nations. But we need to focus on this. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay, I agree. I have another question which does not have anything to do with Iraq. Bill, I am aware that the State Department made a decision and the Embassy here held a meeting whose agenda included measures to prevent the "exit" (opening) of Russia to the East. I think that is unacceptable in relations between partners. It is up to each country to decide what kind of relations it wants, especially in trade and commerce. Each country should decide with which country to trade. Besides, we agreed we would solve such things between you and me, even over the phone. And we believe we should solve them together through diplomacy. And this is sustained by the fact that understanding between Albright and Primakov is good, and that is very important. (C)

You are right Bill. The crisis with Iraq is over, but we should be prepared to work together and to prevent any new happening or similar event. And then, on another subject Bill, I do miss you. I think it is high time we meet again, and it is time for you to come here to Russia. I think the appropriate time would be if you came early next year. What is the most convenient time for such a visit? (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Let me respond to the first issue. I don't know what the State Department issue is. But let me assure you, I want you to be more involved in Asia, not less. I'm on my way to Vancouver right now for APEC. I want you to be in APEC, and I hope we can work out WTO as well. I want Russia more involved in the Asia-Pacific region. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: (interrupts the translator): Then you should tell Collins about that. You should reprimand him. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say a word about Iran. I also was pleased about the arrest of the Iranian trying to obtain missile blueprints. It is a constructive step. Strobe has given Primakov some specific ideas about next steps that we hope you will consider carefully. (C)

Finally, I am looking forward to coming to Russia, but I thought we both agreed it would be better if I came after the Duma ratified START II. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay, then you plan to come after the ratification of START II by the Duma? ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes, I thought we talked about this before. I am very anxious to come, even in winter. But if I came before (START II ratification), then it might lead to press coverage solely about that. It might complicate your efforts, with nationalists and opponents in the Duma arguing that my coming intensified pressure on you. It would put you in a difficult position. But it might be better for you and for the range of our relations not to have this cloud over our meeting. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay. I agree with you. It is necessary that the Duma wind up work on the budget as soon as possible and then they can begin consideration of START II. When I met with representatives of the Duma we came to an understanding about that sequence. ~~(S)~~

But we should also take note of the fact that since we have not met for quite some time; some politicians may take that as a sign of difficulties in our relations; we should not provide any grounds for such thinking or allegations. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I agree and I hope that we will get some good press in Russia for acceptance of Russia in APEC and the U.S. role in that. That should do away with the speculation. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Thank you. I will see you soon, I hope. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes. I hope so. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Tell me, by the way, was Hillary satisfied with her visit? (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes, she loved it, especially the time she spent with Naina. She told me about it in great detail. She also said that, like me, you also have a better wife than you deserve. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: That's very good. Please give my best regards to Hillary. I embrace you, Bill, and please telephone

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me if any changes take place. But don't delay this meeting between us, because such a delay is immediately interpreted as some kind of cooling off between the United States and Russia, although this is not true. The fact is that relations are growing and becoming stronger. ~~let~~

THE PRESIDENT: I agree. We'll be together soon. Goodbye Boris. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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