

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

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

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Russian President Yeltsin

Interpreter: Dmitry Zarechnak  
Note Takers: Larry Wright, Matt Sibley, Jonathan Elkind, Andrew Weiss

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: August 25, 1998, 9:39 a.m. - 10:08 a.m. EDT  
Martha's Vineyard

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, Boris? (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Hello, Bill. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Hi, Boris, thank you for taking my call. I just wanted to talk to you directly during this momentous period before I come over there. I know the pressure must be enormous with so much at stake for Russia. Strobe is coming to Moscow this week, and I hope you can find time to meet with him. He will have my latest thinking about our upcoming meeting. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Well, we have undertaken a very thorough preparation for the upcoming meeting and we analyzed all of the previous positions, and we also analyzed the work of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission and also we went through some of the positions we could suggest as far as fighting terrorism is concerned. Of course, we will be prepared to discuss Afghanistan, Sudan, the troubles in Iraq, and the situation in Kosovo. In other words, we have carried out a very thorough preparation for the meeting. Of course, we don't want it to become an opportunity for mutual recriminations, but a chance for constructive work -- new ideas and proposals we can stand by jointly, you and I. And because of the great significance and importance of that particular issue, I have returned Chernomyrdin to head the government, so he can continue with Gore to work jointly in a constructive way. ~~(S)~~

~~SECRET~~

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, that sounds very good. Let me say, I think it is very important that this summit produces concrete results that the world can see. We have made real progress on arms control, the sharing of early warning data on ballistic missile launches and disposing of excess plutonium for nuclear weapons. And we have to make sure those agreements are finalized, too.

~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: That is correct. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: I also want to comment on the other issues you raised. I think we can turn them into symbols of cooperation rather than points of conflict. Strobe will go into the details of the issues of Iran, Iraq and Kosovo. I think we have worked hard on Iran and have a chance to demonstrate real progress. Your people are working on investigations of Russian entities that have been cooperating with Iran's missile program. If the results could be announced before I get to Moscow, it would set the right tone for the meeting. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, I agree. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. On Iraq, Saddam is defying the memorandum of understanding he agreed to with Kofi Annan. As you know, I have taken no unilateral action on this, because I want to sustain both the unity of the Security Council, and also its credibility. He must reverse course and reinstate the inspection program. It is curious to me that he did this at a time when he was very close to going from inspection to monitoring on his atomic energy program. I don't know why he picked this time. If the message came directly from you that he must resume the inspections under the Memorandum of Understanding with Kofi Annan, it would be something we can reinforce as a united front, rather than a point that divides us. On Kosovo, I think we have a chance to make a difference that could save thousands of lives. You know there are already 200,000 refugees, and we are only a few weeks from winter, so the humanitarian situation is precarious. Milosevic believes he can attack the Kosovars without consequence, thus ignoring the commitment he made to you in Moscow. There are about 200,000 people displaced from their homes, and 10,000 hiding in the mountains, who could literally freeze to death. I think it is time for us to send a clear signal that he can't use indiscriminate force against civilians. Strobe has ideas about how we might do this. It is important we stick together on this, and it also is important that we don't create another Bosnia over there. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Well, indeed, on this we have some untapped possibilities. ~~(S)~~

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I hope so, because we really are going to have to work on it. The only other issue I wanted to mention is the one that I know is taking most of your time and that is the economy. A few weeks ago, you told me that the future of Russian reform is at stake and that is probably truer now than ever. I just wanted to say, the more certainty you can put in the situation the better it would be. I am sending one of my top economic experts before the meeting. I think it is important our teams work together so we can have frank discussions about economic matters next week. Hopefully, we will be able to say some things that will be helpful and reassuring at the end of our meeting. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I agree with what you said on that general subject. This is very visible to the entire world, and the situation in the world has had an impact on the financial situation in Russia. On our side, we have taken appropriate measures, stabilizing measures, which have been vetted by the International Monetary Fund. We need to continue working very hard on that problem. One more issue I want to raise before you: while you are in Moscow, we will have to look into the next century, twenty-first century, and formulate new ideas, particularly joint security in the twenty-first century. We also have to outline the issues you and I have successfully dealt with and resolved. We will transfer power to the next generation of politicians. You and I will also pass on a group of problems and issues that we should have jointly resolved, so in the twenty-first century, there is no doubt that this group of problems has been resolved by us. If you look at it from that angle, in Moscow we could come up with a joint document on that subject. What would you say on that? As far as the mass media is concerned, I don't think there is any reason for you to worry, Bill. I will make sure that the press takes an objective position with respect to both you and I. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, that is encouraging. I hope we can reach agreement. Let me just say on the terrorism issue, I just wanted to make one brief comment on the action in Afghanistan and Sudan. I sent our former UN Ambassador, Bill Richardson, to Afghanistan to meet with the Taliban to ask them to expel Usama bin Laden. Then before I took any action, the Saudi Arabians went at a very high level to Afghanistan to ask for the same thing. They have helped the Taliban quite a lot, as you know. They refused to do so. The evidence is absolutely conclusive - that he killed almost 300 people and wounded 5,000 more to blow up two American embassies and that he had plans to blow up between one to three more and had other plans to kill others, including the acquisition of chemical weapons. We did what we had to do to protect our people and discourage such things in the future. The

more we can do to work together on the issues of security and terrorism, since you and all other countries will have to face terrorism in the next 20 years, the better it will be. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I think in Moscow, we will have time for a very thorough exchange of views on this subject. ~~(C)~~

THE PRESIDENT: I am looking forward to it. Well, thank you for this conversation, Boris. I'm looking forward to seeing you. I will do whatever I can so we can work together in ways to support you and strengthen Russia at this important time. ~~(S)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, indeed, we need to support each other now. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: All right, I will see you soon. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I think you and I have enough will and also our past relationship and very good rapport that we can build on so we can continue our discussions in Moscow and come up with appropriate and relevant solutions. I'm very glad I had this conversation with you at this time. It has really put me in a better mood and eased my feelings. You can be assured that I will extend to you warmth and hospitality, as my friend, while you are in Moscow. And you will see no signs going against you in the streets of Moscow, you can be sure of that, too. So until I see you and there is very little time left, let's make use of that time so we can make very effective and constructive preparations so we can have a truly good meeting. ~~(C)~~

THE PRESIDENT: Good. Good-bye. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Bill, a hug from me until I see you next time. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Boris. I will see you soon. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --