

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Russian President Yeltsin (S)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.  
President Clinton  
Secretary Albright  
National Security Advisor Berger  
Deputy National Security Advisor Steinberg  
Ambassador Sestanovich  
Carlos Pascual

Russia  
Russian President Yeltsin  
Foreign Minister Ivanov  
Kremlin Foreign Policy Advisor Prihodko  
Defense Minister Sergeyev

Interpreter: Peter Afansenko  
Notetaker: Carlos Pascual

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: November 19, 1999, 10:45 a.m.-11:40 a.m.  
Istanbul, Turkey

President Yeltsin: We are in neutral territory here. I welcome you. (U)

The President: Neither of us has a stake here. It's good to see you. (U)

President Yeltsin: Well, Bill, what about those camps here in Turkey that are preparing troops to go into Chechnya? Aren't you in charge of those? I have the details. Minister Ivanov, give me the map. I want to show you where the mercenaries are being trained and then being sent into Chechnya. They are armed to the teeth. (Note: Yeltsin pulls out map of Turkey and circulates it.) Bill, this is your fault. I told Demirel yesterday that I will send the head of the SRV tomorrow and we will show him where the camps are located. These are not state-sanctioned camps. They are sponsored by NGOs and religious

DECLASSIFIED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE  
INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL,  
E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(D)(3)  
ISCAP APPEAL NO. 2016-156, document no. 21  
DECLASSIFICATION DATE: March 05, 2018

organizations. But let me tell you if this were in Russia and there were but one camp, I would throw them all out and put the bandits in the electric chair. ~~(S)~~

The President: Perhaps Demirel could help you. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Well, he ought to. Tomorrow after I get back, I will send the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service here. ~~(S)~~

Bill, did you hurt your leg? ~~(S)~~

The President: Yes, but it is not bad. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: When one leg of the President hurts, that is a bad thing. ~~(S)~~

The President: It lets me know I am alive. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: I know we are not upset at each other. We were just throwing some jabs. I'm still waiting for you to visit, Bill. I've said to you come to visit in May, then June, then July and then August. Now it's past October and you're still not there. ~~(S)~~

The President: You're right, Boris, I owe you a visit. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Last time I went to the U.S., Bill. ~~(S)~~

The President: Well, I better set it up. I'll look at the calendar and find a time that's good for you and me. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Call me and tell me the month and date. Unless I have another visit, I will do the maximum amount I can to do everything around your schedule. The main things I have are to go to China and India. ~~(S)~~

The President: Boris, we still have lots to do together. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: You heard my statement on nuclear arms and on banning nuclear tests. I just signed a law on ratification of a new agreement on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Isn't that right, Minister Ivanov? ~~(S)~~

Minister Ivanov: You signed the documents that sent the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to the Duma for review. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Well, in any case, I still approved it. (S)

The President: Maybe I can get the Congress to agree still. They kept the Treaty even after they rejected it. So perhaps, there is still a chance. (S)

President Yeltsin: Or perhaps it's just the bureaucrats working and they haven't had a chance to send it back to you yet. I'm upset that you signed the law to change the ABM Treaty. (S)

The President: I signed no such law. People in Congress don't like the ABM Treaty. If Congress had its way, they would undermine the treaty. I'm trying to uphold it. But we need a national missile defense to protect against rogue states. We can't have a national missile defense that works without changing the ABM Treaty. But I want to do this cooperatively. I want to persuade you that this is good for both of us. The primary purpose is to protect against terrorists and rogue states. It would be ineffective against Russia. The system we're looking at would operate against just 20 missiles. And Boris I want to figure out how to share the benefits. For all I know, in twenty years terrorists could have access to nuclear weapons. I know your people don't agree with me, but I'm not trying to overthrow the ABM Treaty. We're still trying to discover what's technically possible with national missile defense, but there are people in America who want to throw over the ABM Treaty. I have made no decisions yet. (S)

President Yeltsin: Bill, Bill. I got your note. It went into all these things in incredible detail. I read it and I was satisfied. I've not yet ceased to believe in you. (S)

I ask you one thing. Just give Europe to Russia. The U.S. is not in Europe. Europe should be the business of Europeans. Russia is half European and half Asian. (S)

The President: So you want Asia too? (S)

President Yeltsin: Sure, sure, Bill. Eventually, we will have to agree on all of this. (S)

The President: I don't think the Europeans would like this very much. (S)

President Yeltsin: Not all. But I am a European. I live in Moscow. Moscow is in Europe and I like it. You can take all the other states and provide security to them. I will take

Europe and provide them security. Well, not I. Russia will.

(S)

We will end this conflict in Chechnya. I didn't say all the things I was thinking (in his speech). I listened to you carefully. I took a break just beforehand. Then I listened to you from beginning to end. I can even repeat what you said.

(S)

Bill, I'm serious. Give Europe to Europe itself. Europe never felt as close to Russia as it does now. We have no difference of opinion with Europe, except maybe on Afganistan and Pakistan -- which, by the way, is training Chechens. These are bandits, headhunters and killers. They're raping American women. They're cutting off ears and other parts of their hostages. We're fighting these types of terrorists. Let's not accuse Russia that we are too rough with these kinds of people. There are only two options: kill them or put them on trial. There's no third option, but we can put them on trial, and sentence them to 20-25 years. (S)

How many Americans, French, British and Germans have I freed that were there in Chechnya under the OSCE? The Chechen killers don't like the language of the OSCE. Here's my Minister of Defense. Stand up. We have not lost one soldier down there. Tell them, Minister Sergeyev. (S)

Minister Sergeyev: We did not lose one soldier in Gudermes.

(S)

President Yeltsin: You see, Gudermes was cleansed without one military or civilian killed. We killed 200 bandits. The Minister of Defense is fulfilling the plan as I have said it should be. He's doing this thoughtfully. The soldiers only ask: don't stop the campaign. I promised these guys -- I told every soldier, marshal and general -- I will bring the campaign to fruition. We have these Chechens under lock and key. We have the key. They can't get in, they can't get out. Except maybe through Georgia; that's Shevardnadze's big mistake. And through Azerbaijan; that's Aliyev's mistake. They're shuttling in under the name of Islam. We're for freedom of religion, but not for fundamentalist Islam. These extremists are against you and against me. (S)

We have the power in Russia to protect all of Europe, including those with missiles. We'll make all the appropriate treaties with China. We're not going to provide nuclear weapons to

India. If we give them submarines, it will be only conventional diesel submarines, not nuclear. They would be from the 935 generation. (S)

You're going in that direction too. I'm thinking about your proposal -- well, what your armed forces are doing -- getting rid of fissile materials, particularly plutonium. We should just get rid of it. As soon as it's there, people start thinking of how to make bombs. (S)

Look, Russia has the power and intellect to know what to do with Europe. If Ivanov stays here, he will initial the CFE Treaty and I'll sign it under him. But under the OSCE Charter, there is one thing I cannot agree -- which is that, based on humanitarian causes, one state can interfere in the affairs of another state. (S)

National Security Advisor Berger: Mr. President, there's nothing in the Charter on one state's interference in the affairs of another. (S)

Secretary Albright: That's right. What the Charter says is that affairs within a state will affect the other states around it. (S)

President Yeltsin: Russia agrees to take out its property and equipment from Georgia in accordance with the new CFE Treaty. I have a statement on this. (looking toward Ivanov) Give it to me. I signed it today. Actually, it was late last night. I like to work late. (S)

The President: Me, too. (S)

President Yeltsin: I know you like to work late, Bill. When you call me, I calculate the time and I tell myself it's 4 a.m. and he's calling me. It lets you cleanse your brain and you feel great. I am not criticizing you, Bill. The President should be encouraged to work hard. (S)

The President: So, we will get an agreement on CFE. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes. (S)

The President: That's very important. We've worked on this for seven years. (S)

President Yeltsin: Look, Ivanov has lost the statement in his own bag. He can't find the paper in his own bag.

On the Charter, we have to look at it from the beginning. The Charter's ready. However, when states begin to tie in the Charter with the final declaration that has wording unacceptable to us, that's when we'll say no. And responsibility for this will fall fully on the West. (S)

(Looking at Ivanov) Give me this thing. It is written on paper, Bill. I am ready to sign it. It is a declaration about what we're talking about. (S)

Secretary Albright: Some states want to record in the declaration your willingness to have an OSCE mission. (S)

President Yeltsin: No, not at all. We will finish this with our own forces. Chechnya is the business of the internal affairs of Russia. We have to decide what to do. After we cleansed Gudermes, the muslim mufti came and asked for help. He said I hate Basayev and he should be banned. These are the kinds of leaders we will put forward. I have thought this through carefully. (S)

The President: On the Chechen problem. I have been less critical than others. Even today, I asked the others how they would deal with this if it were their country. This is a political issue. It may be the best thing for you within Russia to tell the Europeans to go to hell. But the best thing for your relations with Europe for the long term is to figure out the policy that you want to have with Europe and to keep that in mind as you deal with Chechnya. (S)

President Yeltsin: (Gets up rapidly) Bill, the meeting is up. We said 20 minutes and it has now been more than 35 minutes. (S)

The President: That's fine. We can say the meeting is over. (S)

President Yeltsin: This meeting has gone on too long. You should come to visit, Bill. (S)

The President: Who will win the election? (S)

President Yeltsin: Putin, of course. He will be the successor to Boris Yeltsin. He's a democrat, and he knows the West. (S)

The President: He's very smart. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: He's tough. He has an internal ramrod. He's tough internally, and I will do everything possible for him to win--legally, of course. And he will win. You'll do business together. He will continue the Yeltsin line on democracy and economics and widen Russia's contacts. He has the energy and the brains to succeed. Thank you, Bill. ~~(S)~~

The President: Thank you, Boris. It was good to see you. (U)

-- End of Conversation --