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February 12, 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Warren Christopher *W.C.*

SUBJECT: Note on Helsinki Meetings with Primakov

Primakov is an able, shrewd professional. A "survivor" at 66, his career spans Soviet and Russian leaders from Brezhnev to Yeltsin. He is at ease discussing a comprehensive foreign policy agenda and comfortable with a position of power. In six-and-a-half hours of intense, highly substantive discussions with him, more than half of it alone, he came across as well organized, disciplined and focused. There was no question that for the near term, his considerable talents have a single objective: the reelection of Boris Yeltsin in June.

Primakov elaborated the message of assurance you heard from Yeltsin in your last phone call. He underscored that there is no significant support in Russia for a return to confrontation or Cold War. Yeltsin will not rely on anti-American rhetoric to gain political advantage in his campaign, and Primakov himself committed to prosecuting Russian policy in ways that will avoid confrontation, threats or alarm. At the same time he repeatedly returned to the theme that treatment of Russia as an "equal" -- something he insisted has not occurred in the past -- will guide his conduct of Russian foreign policy. I pushed back by recounting the many instances in which you and I have gone to bat for such "equal" treatment.

Within this framework, he and I discussed the best way to conduct our relations in the coming months. Drawing on your nine meetings, I stressed the vital importance that the personal relationship you have developed with Yeltsin plays in our ability to manage overall relations between our countries,

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and he agreed. We spent some time together developing five principles to observe in doing our business, including:

- (1) avoidance of surprises (he agreed with me that Budapest and Naples must not be repeated);
- (2) regular consultations;
- (3) advance warning of initiatives that will affect the interests of the other;
- (4) fulfillment of existing commitments; and
- (5) resolution of differences without confrontation.

Primakov stressed that henceforth Russia will give greater priority to its relations with the New Independent States and their integration within the framework of the CIS. His message was straightforward: while the USSR is gone for good and the independence of the NIS is a reality, the process of integration has strong support in Russia and among the CIS states; its focus is primarily economic and it will proceed. I said so long as this process is voluntary, nonexclusive and open, it is compatible with our support for constructive integration. He also indicated Russia will more actively tackle the conflicts in the CIS. He indicated that Russia will look for UN support for peacekeeping operations in places like Tajikistan. We agreed that this is a promising moment for progress on an agreement for Nagorno-Karabakh.

We also discussed the Middle East at considerable length during our dinner. This is Primakov's area and his interest is deep. While he suggested greater cooperation with Russia could ease our efforts with the parties, he did not press for direct Russian involvement. He greatly appreciated my offer to send Dennis Ross to Moscow to brief him. On Iran, Primakov stressed that Russia will not do anything to increase Iran's nuclear capabilities and he thought the Vice President's work with Chernomyrdin on this issue has been effective. On Iraq he emphasized that Russia will respect UN sanctions on Baghdad to the fullest and will not move ahead on projects such as the huge oil equipment deal reported recently until Iraq satisfies its responsibilities to the UN with respect to weapons of mass destruction.

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In our extensive discussion of European security, Primakov took a positive line on Russian cooperation with us and NATO in Bosnia and in other areas such as Partnership for Peace. However, he was firm on opposition to NATO enlargement. I responded that the Alliance is united in its decision to accept new members. I emphasized that Russia will only encourage greater pressure from the Central Europeans for rapid movement by activist efforts to disrupt or thwart what NATO has designed to be a steady, transparent, open process. Primakov admitted that Russia could not "veto" a decision by the Central European states to join, but it is clear that for the present we will confront an overt, unyielding, hard line against enlargement from the Russian leadership.

We spent considerable time looking ahead to the April meetings you will have in Moscow. Primakov made clear Yeltsin sees the bilateral with you and the P-8 meeting on nuclear safety and security as a major element in his campaign. With the former in mind, I pressed for START II ratification and a statement on CTB. Primakov seemed to accept that a statement on CTB is achievable and did not reject the possibility of getting START II ratification. On the latter he insisted, however, that resolution of the AMB demarcation issue is a prerequisite. A troublesome issue arises from Primakov's insistence that the Moscow P-8 meeting must pave the way for Russia to become fully integrated with the G-7 in Lyon at the summit this summer -- a development he insists is supported by the French and Germans and on which he says Yeltsin has a commitment from you. I told Primakov that we did not want to see Russia frame this issue in a way we could not support and that could wind up backfiring on Yeltsin. This is going to be a difficult issue to manage with Yeltsin and our G-7 colleagues.

Overall, the clear signal from Primakov was one of assurance and steadiness in policy -- the theme of no surprises. At the same time, I was impressed with the great sensitivity to symbols and status that, I suspect, is going to be with us for the remainder of the political campaign -- and probably long thereafter. I set my next meeting with Primakov for the third week in March in Moscow, a meeting that will be focused on getting the agenda in shape for your April trip.

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