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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: The President's Discussion with President Yeltsin on the Russian Election, Bilateral Relations, START II Ratification and NATO

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
President Yeltsin of Russia

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko  
Notetakers: Ted Sevigny, Mary Canty,  
Elaine Florio, Steve Pifer

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: February 21, 1996, 10:38-11:05 a.m. EST  
Oval Office

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Hello? (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Hello, Bill. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Hello, Boris. Thank you for taking my call. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: It's always my pleasure to talk to you. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I won't take a lot of your time, but I want to go over a couple of items. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Very well. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I was very impressed by your speech announcing your candidacy for reelection. I know you are going to be in a wide-open, rough-and-tumble campaign, just like I face here. I see that as a great achievement of yours, guaranteeing free and fair elections. You have a chance of making a comeback, and I was impressed by what you said and how you said it. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Thank you very much. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I had a good meeting with Chernomyrdin when he was here. I was very pleased with the results of his talks with the Vice President. The new commercial space launch accord and the agreement on financing U.S. engines for IL-96 airliners mean jobs, real benefits to your people. I think that's what it takes for sustaining public support for engagement. I am also

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pleased that the Christopher-Primakov relationship is off to a good start. It looks like they will work well together. Christopher looks forward to visiting Moscow in March. (Ø)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I have been pleased by those very successful meetings. I have been briefed on the successful meeting by Chernomyrdin, and I believe Primakov also had a good meeting. I can tell you the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission already has a good track record with six intergovernmental sessions. So they are off and running. (Ø)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Let me say also that I am looking forward to the nuclear summit and to coming to Moscow. I hope it will be possible for you to ratify START II. It would be a momentous event if we could exchange instruments on START II; it would add meaning to the nuclear summit. It would also be useful for progress on CTBT and other agenda items. I'd like to know your perspective: what do you see as the prospects in the Duma for START II? (Ø)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: As a matter of fact, I had a conversation yesterday with the chairman of the Duma, Mr. Seleznev. According to him, one of these days they will be presenting this Treaty to the committees and after that they will try to pass it in the Duma as a whole. I consider it is realistic that in April the whole operation will be completed. But at the same time, I want to note that we need a sure, firm agreement that there will be no change to the ABM Treaty. This is what I want from you, that the Treaty will stand firm. As for CTBT, I am prepared to sign any document at any time and at any place. (Ø)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you. I agree with you on this. As you know, Congress passed legislation with provisions that would have undermined the ABM Treaty, and I vetoed it. They then took out the provisions that undermined the Treaty. I told them of my commitment to the ABM Treaty, and I believe they understand and that now we are free and clear with the ABM Treaty. (Ø)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: All this is very good news. Thank you. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I want to mention a couple of other things. I am about to meet with President Kuchma. It's important that we provide the support he needs at this critical point, as he is taking bold steps to consolidate democracy and reform in Ukraine. They are having a lot of difficult times, but I believe it is important to keep Ukraine on the path of progress and think we should support him. (Ø)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: All right, Bill. I can tell you that I met Mr. Kuchma here recently in Moscow. I believe we were able to

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remove some of the controversies, especially on the Black Sea Fleet, in terms of its division. I think that some time in the very near future I will go to Kiev, which will be a good occasion to sign a full-scale agreement between Russia and Ukraine. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: That's good news, very good news. The only other thing I wanted to say is that I was encouraged by reports I've seen that your government is seeking a peaceful resolution to the Chechnya dispute. I know it's a troublesome issue. That would remove a difficult situation and enhance your political reputation around the world. I want you to know that we would do anything we could to support a peaceful settlement. (S)

The other thing I wanted to say is that I am also pleased with our ongoing cooperation in Bosnia. My military commanders tell me things are going well. The quality of our cooperation has been high, and we have enjoyed working with your soldiers. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: This is also very good news. I think we are getting ready, on your side and our side, for operating in Bosnia very successfully. On Chechnya, in my speech in Yekaterinburg, I said it would be very important to end the conflict in this area and finish, finish this up, before the election. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: This is good news. I just wanted to call and let you know that, during this election year, we should call and talk more often. We need to keep up our partnership and friendship. I would like to know what you are going through and share developments here. If you feel the need to call, I hope you will do so any time. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I agree we should give and take more often during the election year. We should exchange the experience of our election campaigns. This is very important. Maybe things on your side are going a little easier, but the campaign will be difficult in any case. (S)

I have one more thing if I may -- NATO, the NATO situation and expanding to the east. I think we, you and I, agreed that for one year there would be some kind of hiatus and that no one would raise this issue very strongly. But at this time NATO is holding some kind of sessions raising the issue -- these individual dialogues with the Central and Eastern European states. I would like to stay with the original understanding. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Let's discuss what is going on and what is not going on. When the NATO ministers met ... can you hear me? (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay. (U)

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PRESIDENT CLINTON: First of all, our timetable, which we discussed, provides nothing in 1996 except for private conversations with Partnership for Peace members that have indicated an interest in joining NATO on what it takes for them to meet the requirements. There are no recommendations for timetables, just conversations between countries about their desires. (S)

Publicly, what we seek to emphasize at our next NATO meeting is two issues: first, the desire of France to become more closely involved in NATO and in the European security structure. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: This is the French and the military committee ... (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Second, we want 1996 to be a year to focus on IFOR and Bosnia and what we are doing together. There will be no surprises on the agenda. We are going to stay with the agreement. The timetable provides only for interested PFP members to be consulted in 1996, but that is all private. The public focus will be on IFOR and France -- whether the French will be more involved in NATO -- mostly IFOR and Bosnia. Nothing more. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Bill, thank you. Thank you very much for your comments. One thing I wanted to ask has to do with the IMF loan in the amount of nine billion dollars. I will be meeting Camdessus here and would like to ask you to use your influence to perhaps add a little, from nine to 13 billion dollars -- to deal with social problems in this very important pre-election situation and help the people. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I support concluding a new agreement. I'll see what can be possible; I will do some work on it. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Good, Bill. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: All right. Thank you, Boris. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Thank you very much. Please receive my big hug. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you. I receive it. Please give my best to Naina. I'll see you soon. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Please give my best to your wife. We'll be in touch over the phone soon. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: All right, bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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