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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Russian President Yeltsin (U)

PARTICIPANTS: President Clinton
Russian President Boris Yeltsin

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko
Notetakers: Larry Wright, Bob Ford,
Anthony Campanella,
George Chastain, James Smith

DATE, TIME April 6, 1998, 10:01-10:28 EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Hello, Bill. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, Boris. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I'm very glad to have this call from you, and very thankful for your latest letter, in which you say that you understand the intentions of the new government. I think we can get his nomination through - through our parliament - the nomination of Kiriyenko. He's a very vigorous politician, a very skillful politician, and I think he'll build good rapport with Gore. I've currently instructed Kiriyenko, who is acting head of the government, and Kokoshin, head of the Security Council, to deal with matters formerly in the purview of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission. And so we're not departing in any way from or changing in any way our bilateral relationship and accords. (S)

THE PRESIDENT: That's very good news, because we hope that Al and the new Prime Minister would be able to carry on the work of our binational commission. I know he had very good relations with Kiriyenko in our commission and he has very high regard for him. (S)

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PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, he is a skilled professional. Tomorrow I plan to conduct a roundtable discussion with all the factions of the Duma in attendance. I hope I will prevail over them and get strong approval of his nomination, and I believe through joint efforts we will be able to resolve current problems, like the Kosovo problem in the framework of the Contact Group, and my belief is that we will not depart from the path which you and I have jointly set forward. (S)

As far as the START II treaty is concerned, the moment the new government is approved, we will move in the State Duma to discuss the terms of the new START II accord. And in the meantime, I would ask you, Bill, to abide strictly by the provisions of the START I accord. We have some fears that the U.S. is not complying fully with the provisions of accords that have been reached. (S)

I am satisfied with the meeting in Moscow that the energy ministers of the G-8 have just completed, and I think we'll have to raise this matter in Birmingham in a very serious way. (S)

Also, there's one more question I want to discuss with you, Bill. Our side was presented with this matter of the growing Russian intelligence presence in the U.S., and I believe, Bill, that we have to close down this issue because neither you nor I need to become enmeshed in a competition over who has more intelligence officers infiltrated in the country of the other side. And what is more, you are using some of the people of the special services of the other countries of the CIS and former Warsaw Pact and are using them against Russia. And also, you have opened offices of your representatives in CIS countries and this also is a blow against Russia....and let us get our special services to see how they can help each other. (S)

The next passage was incomprehensible due to bad phone line. Following fragments were subsequently provided by the U.S. interpreter:...((exchange information...accusing...identified as...remain active...organization... We were the ones who did the work and had three people arrested. ...Afghanistan and Spain and other countries of southern Africa, which had bought equipment for Iran, and Russia is not at fault for this.)) (S)

THE PRESIDENT: Boris, let me just say first, what you said about START II - it's very important that we get ratification as soon as possible, and we'll follow through on our promises on START I. On the intelligence issue, we need to deal with it without its becoming a contentious public issue between us, and

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I hope we can bring numbers down to reflect our new relationship. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, let's reduce our numbers; let's do so by percentage points, in embassies and various other offices, then we can judge the public mood in the two countries. In other words, I accept what you just suggested. (S)

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, our people will get together on it. Also, I'd like to raise an issue that I know our people talked about earlier today: the issue of Russian entities' cooperation with Iran on missile technology. The interception of specialty steel destined for Iran is potentially a disastrous setback for our relationship; it's a violation of your own laws, and also there's a pending vote in Congress on this issue. I'm aware that some arrests have been made, and we'll study the report very carefully. It has the potential to jeopardize so much that we've done together and so much that we hope to do together. It's important we not let this critical moment get away from us. I'm aware of the report that your people have given us, but we personally have to ride herd on this and guide our governments toward common goals. I don't want any act of Congress or action in your country to destroy our relationship. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay, as far as the interception is concerned, unfortunately, I learned of this only today. Already, I've instructed the security service to investigate this matter. You never mentioned the subject of specialty metals; you mentioned missile technology, but you never mentioned specialty metals. (S)

THE PRESIDENT: But Boris, I believe that's part of ballistic missile technology, because without specialty metals, they can't do what they want to do. But I appreciate your response. It's important we continue to work together. I think a prompt resolution is quite important. I'm encouraged by what you said. I don't want this to interrupt the relationship we've got and the progress we're making. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay, Bill, I agree. Today, the moment I learned about this (incident), I issued written instructions to the security services to investigate what happened. And I agree, let's work together, let's stand together on this, as you suggested. (S)

THE PRESIDENT: That's great. I think more work needs to be done. Our Congress has legislation pending that would really

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hurt our relationship, so I don't want it to pass. A quick and vigorous resolution could help us prevent this. So we could turn a bad situation to our benefit by the vigorous pursuit of this matter by your government. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say just one word on Kosovo. Albright and Primakov are working on it, and I think it's like Bosnia and Iraq; we have to keep working until we get negotiations between Milosevic and Kosovo. Otherwise, Milosevic's policies will make the Kosovar Albanian community more radical and violent, and we'll have a terrible mess on our hands. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Well, here we see eye to eye with you, Bill. Primakov has instructions I gave him to hold Milosevic under constant pressure, to press him constantly. And if there's any need, I can pitch in, as well. We will have to work on in the Contact Group, and you and I will have to resolve that. (S)

THE PRESIDENT: Great. I just wanted to mention a couple of other things briefly. I'm glad you had a good meeting with Jacques Chirac and Helmut Kohl; it got a good message out. The second thing I wanted to mention is my recent trip to Africa. I'm convinced the international community can do more to assist them in many ways. I wanted to bring this up with you, because President Mandela brought up to me that too often during the Cold War, they felt like pawns in the struggle between us. Maybe there's something you and I can do to lift the positive impact the U.S. and Russia can have on the people of Africa. Maybe we can talk about it when I see you in Birmingham. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, I agree with what you just said, and we just had a visit with President Nujoma of Namibia. I told him that by the end of the year, and following your example, I would also pay a visit to one or two African countries. (S)

THE PRESIDENT: Good. I'll see you in Birmingham. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay, Bill. Hugs from me. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks. Goodbye. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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