

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Morning Meeting with Russian President
Yeltsin: NATO-Russia, START, ABM/TMD (C)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.

The President
Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State
Sandy Berger, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State

Russia

President Yeltsin
Yevgeniy Primakov, Foreign Minister
Dmitriy Ryurikov, Foreign Policy Assistant
Yuriy Mamedov, Deputy Foreign Minister

DATE, TIME March 21, 1997, 9:50-11:55 a.m.
AND PLACE: The Finnish President's Residence, Helsinki

The President: Together we've made a great deal of progress, first of all, in dealing with the consequences of the Cold War. Now both of us are in our second terms and need to decide what to do together. I believe our lasting legacy must be a partnership and framework of peace and security that our successors will embrace and that others might not otherwise embrace. And we need to prepare for how we keep changing the relationship and adding energy to it -- slash the number of weapons even further and do things now to promote trade and investment for Russia's development and achievement of our common goal of a secure and undivided Europe. (C)

Madeleine and Yevgeniy have worked hard and agreed on a strong joint statement, and I'm very pleased about that. It's a good text. I believe we are near agreement. But on some big issues only you and I can work and decide together, specifically on ABM/TMD demarcation and also determining the specifics of START. I propose that we review the text on European security, then turn our attention to START/ABM, followed by economic issues at lunch and then wrap up with one issue not on our current agenda, Nagorno-Karabakh. (C)

President Yeltsin: As you and I agree, the Helsinki summit has got strategic significance not only for our two countries but for Europe and the world. It is important so that in the future we will not look back and say we returned to the Cold War days. Sliding backwards is simply not acceptable. We are coming here not just to discuss things but to sign things. The five draft statements have been finalized. In truth, we were both voted into office for a second term, until the year 2000. Neither of us will have a third term. We want to move into 21st century with stability and tranquillity. The first document is on European security. I agree that Albright and Primakov moved toward accommodation in many areas, but there are still some issues pending. (C)

Our position has not changed. It remains a mistake for NATO to move eastward. But I need to take steps to alleviate the negative consequences of this for Russia. I am prepared to enter into an agreement with NATO not because I want to but because it is a forced step. There is no other solution for today. The principal issues for me are the following. The agreement must be legally binding -- signed by all 16 Allies. Decisions by NATO are not to be taken without taking into account the concerns or opinions of Russia. Also, nuclear and conventional arms cannot move eastward into new members to the borders of Russia, thus creating a new cordon sanitaire aimed at Russia. (C)

But one thing is very important: enlargement should also not embrace the former Soviet republics. I cannot sign any agreement without such language. Especially Ukraine. If you get them involved, it will create difficulties in our talks with Ukraine on a number of issues. We followed closely Solana's activities in Central Asia. They were not to our liking. He was pursuing an anti-Russian course. (C)

I understand the complexity of this issue, but we have no territorial or hegemonic claims on them or any other country. We are carrying out a well-tested policy with CIS countries and the Baltics, based on trust. We have various plans with countries of the former Soviet Union based on trust. That trust should remain. Our relations with the CIS and with the Baltic countries should be like yours within NATO. (C)

As I understand, you and I have differences that it would be difficult to include in the text of the agreement. Let's see what it looks like, what should be obligatory and what should not be. On things that did not get into the statement, perhaps we can find some other document or way of doing it. Perhaps it can be addressed orally. Are you going to seek ratification of this agreement by Parliaments or just by heads of government? We want

to know where we are going. We will address this calmly and rationally. (S)

We see how you and the Ukrainians are handling your relations. It does not help us in relations with Ukraine or resolve Russian-Ukrainian issues. We need U.S. restraint in dealing with Ukraine. I do not want to believe you are using pressure tactics. I am surprised by the activities of your congressional committees with regard to Ukraine. They are not helping a settlement of Russian-Ukrainian issues. (S)

Another problem: you are conducting naval maneuvers near Crimea. It is as if we were training people in Cuba. How would you feel? It is unacceptable to us. We are not going out to seize Sevastopol. Our only interest there is to maintain some infrastructure. We respect Georgia, Moldova and other countries and have no claims on their territory. We merely want to rent some facilities for our Black Sea fleet. (Ryurikov hands President Yeltsin a piece of paper.) (S)

I propose that in the statement we could accept the fact that Russia has no claims on other countries. In fact, regarding the countries of the former Soviet Union, let us have a verbal, gentlemen's agreement -- we would not write it down in the statement -- that no former Soviet republics would enter NATO. This gentlemen's agreement would not be made public. (S)

The President: Let me start by saying that I accept that there is now a new Russia that is not interested in taking over other countries. If you remember the last time we met, I told you that I was trying to create a new NATO that would not be a threat to Russia but that would permit the United States and Canada to stay in Europe and work with Russia and other countries to build an undivided, free Europe and to deal with other problems. (S)

I've tried to reassure you, the Russian government and the Russian people that I'm trying to change NATO. The most important steps in that regard are, first, the language in the statement on nuclear weapons -- the three no's. Second, the language on conventional forces, which reflects a very carefully considered position that we've worked out in NATO. Third, the fact of the NATO-Russia charter itself -- which will redirect the mission of NATO. Fourth, the proposal by NATO on adapting the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe tabled in Vienna. It calls for reducing overall levels and freezing equipment levels in several key areas. All of these are designed to change the impression of NATO as something directed against Russia. (S)

If Primakov and Solana can complete the text of a NATO-Russia charter, I'd like to see a signing, before Madrid, at a big

ceremony, so we can say to the world that there is a new NATO and a new Russia and that's the right spirit. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: I agree. ~~(S)~~

The President: If we were to agree that no members of the former Soviet Union could enter NATO, it would be a bad thing for our attempt to build a new NATO, but it would also be a bad thing for your attempt to build a new Russia. I am not naive. I understand you have an interest in who gets into NATO and when. We need to make sure that all these are subjects that we can consult about as we move forward -- consult means talk about; it means making sure that we're aware of your concerns and that you understand our decisions and our positions and our thinking. ~~(S)~~

But consider what a terrible message it would be if we were to make the kind of supposedly secret deal you're suggesting. First of all, there are no secrets in this world. Second, the message would be, "we're still organized against Russia -- but there's a line across which we won't go." In other words, instead of creating a new NATO that helps move toward an integrated, undivided Europe, we'd have a larger NATO waiting for Russia to do something bad. Here's why it is bad for Russia, what you are proposing. Russia would be saying, "we have still got an empire, but it just can't reach as far West." ~~(S)~~

Second, it would create exactly the fear among the Baltics and others that you're trying to allay and that you're denying is justified. A third point: the deal you're suggesting would totally undermine the Partnership for Peace. It would terrify the smaller countries that are now working well with you and us in Bosnia and elsewhere. Consider our hosts here in Finland; President Ahtissari told me last night that we're doing the right thing in the attitude we're taking toward the future of enlargement. He said that Finland hadn't asked to be in NATO, and as long as no one tells Finland it can't join NATO, then Finland will be able to maintain the independence of its position and work with PFP and with the United States and with Russia.

~~(S)~~

I said a few days ago that I'd leave open the possibility of Russia in NATO and, in any event, of having a steadily improving partnership between NATO and Russia. I think we'll have to continue to work this issue, but we should concentrate on practical matters. However, under no circumstances should we send a signal out of this meeting that it's the same old European politics of the Cold War and the same old business, we're just moving the lines around a bit. Instead, the signal here should be to tell the world and tell Russia that it's a new NATO and a new Russia. There's evidence of that in the position that NATO

has taken on nuclear weapons and on conventional weapons, which is reflected in the joint statement. ~~(S)~~

I see that "legally binding" means something different in our context. Opponents of the NATO-Russia deal in the Senate will tie it up for two years. So we really should go with the form that we've proposed in the joint statement. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: I agree. ~~(S)~~

The President: Good. We've got the right solution. Now, a more general matter. I've worked for the last four years when you were up and when you were down. I've always made an extra effort to help you in what I knew was a very difficult situation. Now we're at a point where we want the whole world to see how things have changed -- not how they've stayed the same. We should concentrate on what we've agreed -- on nuclear weapons and conventional forces, not on where we disagree. ~~(S)~~

The deal you've proposed would confirm everyone's fears. It would make us both look weaker, not stronger. If we made the agreement you're describing, it would be a terrible mistake. It would cause big problems for me and big problems for you. It would accentuate the diminishment of your power from Warsaw Pact times. The charter will be a much more powerful and positive message. It's without precedent, and it's comprehensive, and it's forward-looking, and it's hopeful. It will move us toward a situation that's good for both of us. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: Bill, I agree with what you've said but look at what will happen. We intend to submit this document to the Duma for ratification, and we hope it will be ratified. But the Duma will take two decisions. First, it will ratify the document, then it will attach a condition that if NATO takes in even one of the former republics of the Soviet Union, Russia will pull out of the agreement and consider it null and void. That will happen if today you do not tell me one-on-one -- without even our closest aides present -- that you won't take new republics in the near future; I need to hear that. I understand that maybe in ten years or something, the situation might change, but not now. Maybe there will be a later evolution. But I need assurances from you that it will not happen in the nearest future. ~~(S)~~

The President: If I went into a closet with you and told you that, the Congress would find out and pass a resolution invalidating the NATO-Russia charter. I'd rather frankly that the Duma pass a resolution conditioning its adherence on this point. I'd hate for the Duma to do that, but it would be better

than what you're suggesting. I just can't do it. A private commitment would be the same as a public one. (C)

I've told you -- and you have talked to Helmut and Jacques, you know their thinking -- no one is talking about a massive, all out, accelerated expansion. We've already demonstrated our ability to move deliberately, openly. But I can't make commitments on behalf of NATO, and I'm not going to be in the position myself of vetoing NATO expansion with respect to any country, much less letting you or anyone else do so. (C)

I'm prepared to work with you on the consultative mechanism so as to make sure that we take account of Russia's concerns as we move forward. Another reason why I feel so strongly: look at Bosnia. That's the worst conflict in Europe since World War II. The Europeans couldn't solve it. The United States was finally able to take an initiative there, and Russia came in and helped. It took me years to build support. What if way in the future another Bosnia arises? If the NATO-Russia understanding is done right, then Russia would be a key part of the solution, working with the United States and Europe. (C)

But if we create a small version of a larger stand-off that existed during the Cold War, there won't be the needed trust. This process of integrating Europe is going to take years; we need to build up the OSCE -- it's not going to happen overnight. But if we make a statement now that narrows our options in the future, it will be harder to do the other good things we want to do. (C)

I know what a terrible problem this is for you, but I can't make the specific commitment you are asking for. It would violate the whole spirit of NATO. I've always tried to build you up and never undermine you. I'd feel I had dishonored my commitment to the Alliance, to the states that want to join NATO and to the vision that I think you and I share of an undivided Europe with Russia as a major part of it. (C)

President Yeltsin: Okay, then let us agree -- one-on-one -- that the former Soviet republics will not be in the first waves. Bill, please understand me, I am flying back to Russia with a very heavy burden on my shoulders. It will be difficult for me to go home and not seem to have accepted NATO enlargement. Very difficult. (C)

The President: Look, you're forcing an issue that doesn't need to drive a wedge between us here. NATO operates by consensus. If you decided to be in NATO, you'd probably want all the other countries to be eligible too. But that issue doesn't arise. We need to find a solution to a short-term problem that doesn't

create a long-term problem by keeping alive old stereotypes about you and your intentions. (S)

If we do the wrong thing, it will erode our own position about the kind of Europe we want. I hear your message. But your suggestion is not the way to do it. I don't want to do anything that makes it seem like the old Russia and the old NATO. (S)

(The two Presidents agree to move on to START.) (S)

President Yeltsin: On START, the issues are the timeframe and the numbers. We have agreed to 2,000-2,500 as the maximum figure. This was actually something we suggested in 1994. (There is some confusion and back-and-forth among the Russians about this.) But let us not dwell on this point: we agree to 2,000-2,500. (S)

On SLCMs, they are not mentioned in START II. I suggest the following compromise: we agree to the year 2007 to cover both START II and START III -- and the end of the year 2003 to cover warhead deactivation. On long-range SLCMs, they're effectively strategic weapons. They're an irritant because of verification problems. I suggest we do away with all cruise missiles, land- and sea- and air-based, and in this way put the whole issue of cruise missiles behind us. (S)

The President: So let me restate your proposal so I can be sure I understand it completely. You propose deactivation of warheads by the end of 2003, extension of START II implementation until the end of 2007 and full implementation of START III by 2007. (S)

Foreign Minister Primakov: A more rapid schedule for deactivation is impossible for both technical and financial reasons. What we have offered is the absolute minimal schedule. We need to build up our own destruction and deactivation capabilities on our own territory because they were in other countries. (S)

President Yeltsin: This will also cost \$10 billion. (S)

The President: I know I cannot agree to eliminate all our cruise missiles for reasons that have nothing to do with Russia. For example, we've got to think about Iraq and overall, we've got to think about minimum exposure of our own troops. We need to talk to our people about the other issues. (S)

President Yeltsin: Okay, we'll talk again. (S)

The President: In order to do all this, we should resolve the ABM/TMD issue. It will be difficult for me to get the Senate to go along with START III unless we resolve ABM/TMD. When Mr. Primakov spent over an hour with me the other day, we agreed on four points: reaffirmation of ABM, limits on testing targets, a consultative arrangement to assure that they don't violate the ABM Treaty and cooperation on TMD. (S)

If you asked me several years ago to look into a crystal ball and predict how at the end of the century we'd be spending our resources in the area of missile defense, I would have bet the money I've saved for my daughter's college education that we'd be worried largely about Russia or the Soviet Union. But now here we are, working together on so many things, and we're contemplating working together and sharing technology in this area, too. (S)

President Yeltsin: We have just three additional lines in the agreements -- in addition to the four elements where we agree, we need to say more about negotiating on high-velocity interceptors. (There is confusion and discussion on the Russian side.) (S)

The President: Well, it sounds as though we really haven't agreed on anything. (S)

(The President then goes through his ABM/TMD script carefully; following are his ABM/TMD points:

- ABM Treaty remains cornerstone of strategic stability. Reaffirmed this in our May 1995 Joint Statement, which established principles to guide resolution of ABM/TMD demarcation negotiations.
- Can take big step today towards strengthening ABM Treaty for future if we agree on joint statement that includes comprehensive and clear guidance to conclude negotiations on demarcation. Believe we are close to agreement on this.
- If can agree, this would be historic summit.
- Our proposed approach would:
 - Renew our joint commitment to ABM Treaty.
 - Complete demarcation arrangement by addressing today's TMD systems and technologies through constraints on testing targets and exchanging detailed information on our TMD programs.

- Establish consultative arrangement for future technologies and systems, so as to ensure they do not circumvent ABM Treaty.
- Expand our cooperation with Russia in theater missile defense.
- This last point, Boris, is especially significant. Know it has been point of interest and emphasis for Primakov and your Defense Ministry.
- Our Joint Statement on ABM commits us to explore cooperative defense efforts in at least three TMD areas: providing early warning support for TMD activities; cooperating in developing TMD technologies; and expanding joint TMD exercise program we have already begun.
- Important you appreciate our TMD programs are not aimed at Russia -- they are to protect our troops; just as your TMDs are intended to protect your forces. Helping you with early warning information now could help you deal with missile threats around your periphery.
- Beyond that, I can envision scenarios 10-15 years from now where Russian and American military units could be operating together -- perhaps in joint peacekeeping missions or even as partners in peace enforcement coalition -- and could come under attack from common foe armed with highly capable, short- or medium-range missiles.
- In world of proliferation dangers we both confront, this is not far-fetched. Should put priority on ensuring that in any such case our TMD systems complement each other and bolster our combined missile defense capabilities.
- As for current differences in our respective positions on demarcation, believe we can resolve how to handle current TMD systems. Let's leave future systems to our successors and not let best become enemy of good.
- It would serve both our countries' security interests if we can conclude demarcation agreement today. But I cannot agree to any further constraints on TMD testing or deployments, beyond those we have already agreed. Your proposed text leaves door wide open to continued disagreement over additional constraints your experts have been pressing.

- If you can agree that the elements that have been agreed by our experts constitute all that is required to meet Russia's concerns, we can conclude ABM/TMD agreement here in Helsinki.
- Language in joint statement would read: "the elements of this agreement will be..."; not as your experts propose: "will include." That's formula for continued stalemate at experts level. They have been at this for three years and cannot go further absent guidance from our level.
- If you and I now can settle this fundamental point, our experts can make the necessary changes in joint statement text. There is one sentence that references other possible elements that would have to be deleted.
- As leaders, we have worked on this issue for a long time. Now I am at our bottom-line. And without agreement, we risk new assaults from my Congress -- not only to stop the demarcation talks but to try to throw over the ABM Treaty itself.
- You have said that, without agreement on ABM/TMD, you cannot push START II in Duma. If this is true, I cannot go ahead with announcing our support for extension of START II and START III reductions.
- That would mean U.S. will stay at START I levels, and we will both have missed an historic opportunity for parity at lower levels, and at lower costs.
- Have opportunity to resolve this issue and make it stick. Let's seize this. Can put ABM/TMD issue behind us, pave way for quick action on START. Will both gain in terms of increasing security and strategic stability. This is not zero-sum game.
- Can we close on this based on what I've discussed?

End ABM/TMD talking points.) (C)

President Yeltsin: We need to do a bit more than that. (C)

The President: Then we can't have a statement. Look, Boris, we've resolved this issue two or three times, but it always comes back again and again. I have no confidence that the same thing won't happen this time if we simply turn it back over to the experts. There's no way you can draw a line today that answers every possibility that could arise tomorrow. If what we're

agreed to do so far isn't enough, then we can't agree to anything. You and I would look like fools, frankly, if we let this thing just keep bouncing back and forth between us and the experts. (S)

President Yeltsin: Okay, Bill, let us just add three lines to the agreement on non-testing of high-velocity systems. (S)

The President: Boris, as I told you, I don't want to make an agreement that satisfies your concerns about our defenses but that tries to address missile defenses that aren't even going to be invented, much less tested, in my lifetime. I don't want to rule out a theater missile defense that will protect our troops; it's that simple. I'm trying to develop a defense that will answer both our concerns and yours. (S)

Look, I do understand your point: you're saying that, if we take a shot gun to use against a target that requires only a rifle, we'll hurt ourselves. But I don't want to give up something that we may genuinely, for good reasons, need someday. (S)

Foreign Minister Primakov: We're already agreed on certain elements -- four elements. We've been told to accept only American terms and conditions and have gotten nothing in return, so what's needed are new instructions. (S)

President Yeltsin: We accept everything in the document that's now before us, but we just want instructions to expand the negotiations. (S)

Secretary Albright: It's important to seal what we've done already and agree to consult on further issues. (S)

The President: There are two issues that have come into focus here, and I want to go back to our experts on your proposal on 2003/2007. (S)

President Yeltsin: Okay. And, Bill, we agree to the text we have on European security. (S)

-- End of Conversation --