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WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia (S)

PARTICIPANTS: United States:
The President
Secretary Christopher, Secretary of State
John Deutch, Director of Central Intelligence
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
RADM John Leucke, Director, Strategic Plans and Policy, USCENTCOM
H. Allen Holmes, Assistant Secretary for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, Department of Defense
Andrew Sens, Executive Secretary, National Security Council
Dimitri Zarechnak (interpreter)

Russia:
President Yeltsin
Foreign Minister Primakov
Security Advisor Rurikov
Michail Barsukov, Director, Federal Security Service
S. Berezhkov (interpreter)

DATE, TIME March 13, 1996, 10:15 - 10:45 a.m.
AND PLACE: Sharm el-Sheikh

President Yeltsin was in a good mood and looked well (he said at the end that he had lost 12 kilograms). He congratulated the President about having resolved everything overnight and having already drafted the Conference communiqué. (S)

The President gave Yeltsin a copy and apologized that it was only in English. (S)

Foreign Minister Primakov said that he could read it, and Yeltsin joked that since Primakov knew English, Secretary Christopher should now learn Russian. The Russians would be glad to provide the Secretary with a young attractive instructress who would work with the Secretary night and day. (S)

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The President joked that this would change the Secretary's image in the United States. (S)

The President asked Yeltsin how his election campaign was going. (S)

Yeltsin replied that Bill Clinton's campaign was going well, and he would be elected if the election took place now. (S)

The President agreed, but noted that there were still eight months to go. (S)

Foreign Minister Primakov, having looked at the communiqué, indicated that it was a good one. (S)

The President thanked Yeltsin for coming to the Summit. This would boost the peace process and help Peres and Arafat. Confidence in Israel had plummeted after the bombings, and this would help to improve the situation. (S)

Yeltsin agreed. He said he had no reservations about coming, especially since Russia was a cosponsor of the peace process. He then said that he wanted to reply to the President's question about the election campaign in Russia. (S)

Yeltsin's people have begun to get geared up. Staff, committees, personnel had been put together throughout Russia -- down to the villages. The official registration of candidates would take place April 5. A candidate needed one million signatures to be on the ballot. He, Yeltsin, had over 6 million. And Yeltsin's tax declaration, submitted to the Central Election Committee, did not contain anything to raise questions, just as President Clinton's did not. (S)

The President observed that working for the government does not give one a big salary. (S)

Yeltsin continued that he would give a speech outlining his platform to about 5,000 supporters and then get down to the nuts and bolts of the campaign on April 6. Forty-nine candidates had declared, but Yeltsin did not think that more than 5 or 6 of them would be able to get the necessary number of signatures. The aim of Yeltsin and his supporters would be to convince the candidates one-by-one to withdraw from the race and to throw their support behind Yeltsin. The one candidate who would not agree to do this was Zyuganov. He is a die-hard Communist, and Yeltsin would need to do battle with him. Gorbachev was not a serious candidate -- he had awoken one morning and decided to run and would wake up another morning and decide to withdraw his candidacy. This would

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be better for him because he now had some standing, and if he participated in the elections, he would lose any reputation he had left. (S)

Yeltsin continued that he would need to travel intensely throughout Russia for two months to talk to thousands of people, to get his message to every apartment, house and person. (S)

Yeltsin's program would only be aimed at increasing democracy and deepening reforms. He would not deviate from that path. To improve his ratings, his people have created their own polling organization, to offset the Communist polling organizations, which fabricate things that don't exist. (S)

Yeltsin continued that as recently as a month ago, he still had doubts about running, but after he saw the Communist platform, he decided to run. The Communists would destroy reform, do away with privatization, nationalize production, confiscate land and homes. They would even execute people. This was in their blood. It would be a disaster for Russia and many other countries. So Yeltsin agreed to run and now felt better and more optimistic about the situation. He had traveled through Russia and had felt the public's support. But he admitted that he should not be over confident. (S)

The President indicated that there was not much time, but he wanted to say a few things about the elections. First of all, he wanted to make sure that everything the United States did would have a positive impact, and nothing should have a negative impact. He was encouraged that the Secretary of State was heading to Moscow to meet with Minister Primakov, and he wanted the April Summit to be a positive event. The United States would work with Russia to ensure this, so that it would reinforce everything that Yeltsin had done in this regard. (S)

Yeltsin noted that preparations for the multilateral summit in Moscow on April 20 would occupy him fully on April 19, but after the summit on April 20, he would be happy to meet for three to four hours with President Clinton to discuss bilateral issues. He added that a leader of international stature such as President Clinton should support Russia and that meant supporting Yeltsin. Thought should be given to how to do that wisely. (S)

The President replied that Secretary Christopher and Minister Primakov would talk about that. The main thing is that the two sides not do anything that would harm the other. Things could come up between now and the elections in Russia or the United States, which could cause conflicts. Perhaps the Gore-Chernomyrdin process could be relied on more to resolve these

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issues, such as the poultry issue which recently arose. This is a big issue, especially since about 40% of U.S. poultry is produced in Arkansas. On the other hand, of course, Russia had legitimate issues about inspections of U.S. produce. But this question should be on its way to resolution, and an effort should be made to keep such things from getting out of hand. (2)

Yeltsin interjected "use direct channels," then went on to note that the main thing was that the U.S. inspectors confirmed that there had been violations, and now we were back in business. But let the Gore-Chernomyrdin contacts continue on this. (2)

The President concluded that he was looking forward to today's meetings and the ones in April. (2)

-- End of Conversation --