

POTUS-Yeltsin One-on-One

April 21, 1996

10:00-11:45am

notetakers: Talbott, Ryurikov

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Presidential ceremonial office, the Kremlin, Moscow

Even before the press pool had been fully ushered out of the room, Yeltsin launched into a harsh critique of U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East.

BNY: I don't understand the American approach in Lebanon. You seem bent on going it alone. That's what Primakov is telling me — the Americans are running a separate operation. Christopher is trying to repeat what he did in '93. This won't be a success if you persist in trying to sideline Russia and France.

WJC: That's not correct. No one's sidelining anybody. We've got to work together. Primakov can play a helpful role, particularly with the Syrians. But our concern is that the parties not be able to play these foreign ministers off against each other. I'm particularly worried about Assad in that regard.

The other factor is the Israelis. They don't want the French or the EU to represent them. The U.S. and Russia continue to work together as cosponsors of the peace process, and we're making every effort to coordinate our efforts.

BNY: This is not very convincing. I think that since these four ministers have gone there with a joint plan of action, they should work together, not separately. Obviously they have their own instructions,

but that's no reason for the American side to break away from the group and started acting individually. If we start pulling in different directions, it will be exploited. Primakov has called twice and asked for instructions about what to do if the Americans go it alone. The question is, can we follow one line and can we work together? Let's get back together.

WJC: Look, you're just not seeing it correctly. It would be a big mistake for all of them to go to see Assad all together and deal with him as a committee. Chirac sent De Charette without telling us he was going to do so. Then the EU sent Agnelli. As for Primakov, his going to Syria obviously makes sense because of your relationship with the Syrians. But there are two sides to this, and we need to bring the Israelis along too. Chris and I felt that four-on-one with Assad would invite him to exploit differences among us. We should certainly try as much as possible to have a common position, but that's different from having the four meet with Assad together. Remember we've got to get the Israelis to stop as well as Hizbullah. Our first objective is to achieve a ceasefire and I think that means each of us using maximum influence where we have it and keeping in touch with each other.

BNY: I'm not talking about four in the same room tied to chairs all the time. I'm talking about cooperation and coordination.

WJC: Well, we're doing exactly that. Secretary Christopher is certainly doing that, but he is also concentrating on bringing the Israelis along. I'll try to talk to him before lunch.

BNY: Still, it's not appropriate for one of us to leave the other three and go off on his own. It's not in keeping with our role as cosponsors.

WJC: Listen, I've told you what our position is, and I owe it to Chris to get his side of the story. I'm not denying that Primakov can be a strong force. Every time we're together, something good happens. Bosnia is the best example.

BNY: This is what I'm getting at. That's why we need to talk more frequently on the telephone.

WJC: I agree. We've got a lot to talk about. There are a lot of problems, but a lot of opportunities, so let's be in touch to set up further contacts.

BNY: OK, I agree fully. With respect to the Middle East, the frequency of contacts depends on the situation on the ground. We'll have to be in touch every couple of days. I think we should think in terms of a Madrid II. But that will depend on the advice of our ministers.

WJC: Well, I'll certainly want to get Chris's advice on that. The first thing is to get a ceasefire and get the peace process back on track. We should certainly stay in touch.

Let me turn to the nuclear summit. I talked to Hillary and she said there was a lot of positive coverage back home of the meeting. I want to thank you for having the idea of the summit when we were in Halifax. It's been even more successful than I expected. I pledge to you I'll follow up on what we've got in motion.

And I listened very closely to Chris's and Strobe's reports on their meetings with you. I know you've shared with them your hopes for and concerns about our relationship. I have paid close attention to what you've told them. I would like to share with you how I see our

relationship at this critically important time. We have done a great deal together since Vancouver three years ago; the world has changed for the better as a result of our work together. You and I are the first leaders of our two countries after the Cold War. We've done a remarkable job in getting a lot done and also in being honest about our differences. My objectives are, first, an integrated, undivided Europe; and second, a cooperative, equal partnership with a democratic, economically successful Russia which is influential in the world.

Yesterday was an example of how it's working. One of the journalists pointed to our disagreement on the Iran reactor deal and asked, "doesn't it cast a shadow?" I said, "no." Look at the progress on START I and II. Also, Boris Yeltsin has been honest with me. That doesn't mean we can't do an even better job of consulting.

I want historians fifty years from now to look back on this period and say you and I took full advantage of the opportunity we had. We made maximum use of the extraordinary moment that came with the end of the Cold War.

BNY: The key word you just used was "equal" partnership. This will restore trust and confidence.

WJC: Let me say a word about your relationships with other countries in this region. I've told everyone in our government that these arrangements you've developed within the CIS are all right with me as long as they meet three standards: one, that they are freely entered into; two, that they respect the independence of these countries, and three, that their integration with Russia is compatible with the larger objective of their integration into the outside world. If those three

conditions prevail, I'll be supportive. A history of negative leadership in the past doesn't necessarily mean there can't be positive leadership in the future.

Russia has a choice here.

There will be areas where we can do more good in the short term, and there are areas where you can do more. For example, you may be the only one who can sell the zero yield CTB to China. In that sense you can exercise leadership coming out of the summit you organized here these past few days.

As for Syria and Hizbullah, there too you've got influence. Use it well. Hizbullah doesn't want the peace process to succeed. They want Peres to lose the election. But Hizbullah and Syria also want to maintain some sort of relationship with Russia, so please use that leverage to get them to accept the ceasefire....

BNY: I apologize for being too open and frank with Mr. Talbott when we saw each other. In the conversation, I told him there are some unhappy aspects of this relationship. Now I think I understand better what you're up to. You're guided by tactical considerations. You're not laying claims to a monopoly in every area. You're saying that each of us has areas of strength where we can concentrate as long as we keep in close touch. I just wanted you to know how I felt and what I was worried about, and I wanted to convey my concerns to you.

WJC: They did convey them, and I'm glad if we understand each other better. None of us has any intention of sidelining Russia, in the Middle East or anywhere else. You've had a relationship with Syria for a long time, and there are important things you can do with the Syrians.

My hopes for the area obviously have a lot to do with my hopes for Israel. I want Israel to be reconciled with her Arab neighbors, first, in a way that permits peaceful relations; second, in a way that removes the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon as breeding grounds for terrorism; third, that brings Syria into more normal behavior and more normal relationship with the rest of the world; and fourth, that removes pressure on Turkey that could move it in an extremist position; and fifth, in a way that will reduce the incentive for Iran to be a rogue state requiring isolation by the international community. We have to give it an incentive to become a more responsible actor. There's one final factor underlying our policy in the Middle East: we have to preserve the stability of the energy supply until we've developed alternative energy sources. If we can achieve these objectives, I don't care who gets the credit. My goal is a Middle East that is not a constant headache, but that is at peace and is a source of spiritual nourishment and prosperity.

I think we could go around the world, looking at every area and identifying what our objectives are, what yours are, and where we can work together. I suspect that in the Middle East, you'd want to avoid radical Muslim fundamentalism. A real, equal partnership would mean each of us deciding what we can do to advance our goals where they are compatible.

BNY: I think we should do this with a small group of trusted experts. They should reflect on possible alternatives and report back to us.

WJC: I agree. Strobe and Mamedov already have something like that going. Why don't we give them this new assignment?

BNY: (checks with Ryurikov, who assents) Okay, let's do that.

WJC: Good. Now, Bosnia is a perfect example of how we can work together....

BNY: (interrupting) On Iran, we're not playing any games. We're sticking to a Soviet-era contract on a diesel powered submarine. If we maintain that kind of relationship with Iran, we can push them in a more positive direction. In that connection, I should tell you I may have to go to Tehran or invite the President of Iran here after my re-election.

WJC: We talked at Hyde Park about CFE. I've made a real effort to move this process a long way. Thanks to the Russian position since Hyde Park, we've been working hard with the Turks, who've been here this week. We are close to a solution and need to resolve the flank issue quickly. Our experts have shown your people how your military can have what they need in the region. It would more than double the equipment the treaty now permits in the flank.

We could solve this today if you'd agree to our map. I worked hard to be in position to say I can sell this approach to Turks. If we can agree to this, we are done.

I know that the issue of Novorossisk is hard for you. But my experts have looked at this very carefully. It all comes down to where 212 armored personnel carriers are based. We are not saying that the base at Novorossisk needs to be closed. We have shown how you can satisfy your military requirements and comply with Treaty by moving some equipment from there to elsewhere in region.

I gather these are airborne units, which are very mobile. They can be used in the region no matter where they are based. It wouldn't cost very much.

I really don't think it's worth putting CFE at risk over the question of where 212 APCs are based.

Solving this one problem would alleviate the last stumbling block.

We've got to get this out of the way. On a couple of occasions you've justified what you're doing with Iran because, as you said, "Look, Bill, I have to do this because it's a contract inherited from the Soviet Union." Well, CFE is the same thing: it's a treaty you inherited from the Soviet Union. These 212 represent less than five percent of the total. If we could resolve this, the Review Conference on May 15 will be a huge success for your administration. You'll be able to say, "I got twice as much equipment and a longer transition time." That could be ratified by the Conference, and the timing would be very good for you.

BNY: OK, first thanks for your efforts here. We're agreed to what you've proposed — this scheme is all right. We accept your solution, including the quantitative parameters.

I've got to tell you, this Novorossisk base is a pain in the neck. It's an integrated part of the division based there. Also, now that we don't have Crimea, it's an important port on the Black Sea. But I agree that we'll take these 212 vehicles out of Novorossisk. We've been resolving bigger issues successfully, so I'm prepared to resolve this the way you suggest and will instruct my military accordingly. And we can tell the press that on this very serious matter, on our level, we're determined to resolve this before May 15.

But still the Conference would have to address modernization.

WJC: What we've done will make it easier to address modernization at the Conference.

BNY: (to Ryurikov) Send Grachev an order to get the 212 vehicles out of Novorossisk.

(To POTUS) At the conference, we'll propose modernization.

WJC: And what I'm saying on that is that the issue will be easier to deal with if we get the flanks question out of the way.

Now, on another subject we've spent a lot of time and effort on — the ABM treaty and the demarcation for theater defenses. As you know, I've had a real struggle on my hands at home over this. I've been attacked on demarcation, and I had to veto the Defense Department bill to protect the ABM Treaty. Our people have been talking and the agreement we are developing will help us preserve the treaty. It will strengthen my ability to rebut critics who want to undermine it.

The agreement reached by our experts calls for:

— Finishing a Part I demarcation agreement covering lower-velocity TMD systems by June, and do our best to complete Part II covering higher-velocity TMD systems by October, and to do this on basis of what experts agreed yesterday should be included in each of these parts.

— Your pushing for Duma approval of START II after your election, with aim of exchanging instruments of ratification by October.

BNY: Yes, definitely. I'll even try to do it before the elections. In the Duma they're asserting that the U.S. is trying to take advantage of us

with all you got from START II, although our military says that isn't true.

(Ryurikov, who is reading along from a Russia document, whispers to Yeltsin, "Testing!") Oh, yes: testing.

WJC: I was coming to that. You have raised concerns about our higher-velocity TMD systems. My officials have explained to yours that, other than agreeing not to test these systems against strategic ballistic missile targets, we will not agree to further flight test limits on our higher-velocity TMD systems, and I am glad your side understands that. However, with respect to our program, I can tell you our military has no plans now to conduct any flight test of such system against any target during the next three years.

BNY: That will be sufficient.

WJC: Now, for purposes of our public and congressional posture, it must be clear that there is no official agreement, but you have my personal assurance on this policy unless I discuss it with you in advance.

BNY: Your word is good enough.

WJC: Excellent. Now, there's also this issue of Yamantau Mountain. I just don't want anyone to make a headache out of this.

BNY: There's nothing mysterious there. No one would do anything there without my permission, and you have my word on it.

WJC: But Lake and Ryurikov can discuss it.

BNY: Yes.

WJC: Good. Now, on NATO, you know I'm committed to avoiding surprises for you. Enlargement is going ahead in the manner I've said before: gradual, steady, transparent. At the NATO meeting in June, they'll focus on some housekeeping, some internal issues, and on dialogues with the PFP states for the remainder of 1996.

As for the relationship between NATO and Russia, we should build on the success we're already having in Bosnia. IFOR is the kind of cooperation we need. Bosnia.

Let's do what we can to make sure the enlargement is as much of a non-issue as possible, consistent with what we agreed at the outset. And let's discuss it a couple of weeks in advance of the NAC so there are no surprises.

BNY: OK (nods)

WJC: The truth is, IFOR will be more of a problem for me than for you because of the dispute over the future of IFOR. The pressure is going to build up in the months ahead. But I don't want it to become a problem for you.

BNY: For me, there will be no problem with regard to our peacekeeping forces in Bosnia. We have an understanding with the Federation Council that we will maintain our presence as long as possible. It so happens that the upper house is on my side. But the State Duma is making a stink.

WJC: We need to talk about Chechnya. I'm assuming that Dudayev won't let you resolve this before the elections. But it's still crucial that you achieve a political solution because the ongoing violence is obviously bad for you.

BNY: My March 31st plan has already helped. My ratings have already gone up. You've endorsed my plan. But we've still got to deal with these bands of terrorists. My plan combines negotiations with tough action against small bands of terrorists. We also have the good offices offered by the former dissident Orlov, Shimiyeu, the President of Tatarstan, and King Hassan II, who is the chairman of the Conference of Islamic States and who is a big opponent of separatism. He's reacted favorably to my message. If you could encourage him to help I'd be grateful. All the more detailed issues we'll deal with through Chernomyrdin's commission. Hassan can help us put pressure on Dudayev. All we want from Dudayev is that Russia remain an undivided country.

WJC: I know Hassan very well. I'll call him.

BNY: That'll be enough. It will help. We're in the process of signing individual agreements with 19 of the 22 districts in Chechnya to eliminate pressure on both the Russian military and the bandits. Only three districts are left. These districts are still under Dudayev's control. On the 30th of April, I'll fly to Chechnya, even though all my advisors are against it.

WJC: Be careful, be safe.

BNY: In short, I'm getting a feeling of optimism. Hassan is a good intermediary.

WJC: On nuclear cooperation with Iran, let's continue to discuss this via the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission. It's important to have a way of discussing these issues.

BNY: Fine.

WJC: Either we're working on it, or we've agreed, or we're still in disagreement. But it causes me problems when Minister Mikhailov says publicly, as he has a few times, that we have no objections. That puts me in a bad position.

BNY: Well, Mikhailov is no politician. He's a plant director.

There's still one issue still left over from Hyde Park. The disarmament process is moving ahead under START even though it's not ratified. But there's a perception that nuclear material is piling up at storage facilities. What is the status of the two plants? The question of financing is unresolved, and there's a danger of terrorism.

(The Kremlin bells and the clock on the mantle simultaneously strike noon.)

WJC: Let's get our experts together on this and perhaps I can report to you over lunch.

(Yeltsin takes POTUS off for a tour of the private quarters.)