

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Afternoon Meeting with Russian President
Yeltsin: Joint Statements, Public Line on
NATO-Russia (X)

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, 4:00-4:50 p.m.
AND PLACE: The Finnish President's Residence, Helsinki

The President: There will be a chance over dinner to talk about a variety of other issues, but we should take a few minutes right here to talk about the press conference. (X)

I think we want to see if we can agree on how this event should be seen by the world, by Russians, by others. So let's review some of the language that we are both going to use in the press conference. I'd like to read you some of my own statement so that you can tell me whether it works for you. (X)

(Following some discussion back and forth about the timing and the venue for signing the joint statements) (X)

President Yeltsin: I want three of the five documents signed: European security, START and economics. (X)

The President: What about START and CWC? (X)

President Yeltsin: Fine, I am happy to sign all five. (X)

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The President: I would like to return to the question of harmonizing our public statements. Boris, I think it's important that, in the way we talk about this, we not encourage people to say who won and who lost. I don't want people saying that Yeltsin won three and Clinton won two. (C)

I also think it is important that we use the press conference to underscore the magnitude of these decisions that you and I have made together, both in the area of economics and also in the area of arms control. We went a lot farther than we thought and certainly a lot farther than many other people thought would be possible. (C)

Let me now go through the language to make sure that it's consistent with your understanding of things and also with what you think would be the best interpretation of this meeting. By the way, I thought that your tough rhetoric over the last week was understandable given everything that you are dealing with. But I think it is now time that we try to change the atmosphere, and it would be helpful if we could agree on how we are going to talk about various issues, particularly the issue of relations between NATO and Russia. (C)

What I'm going to say in my opening statement is that I support NATO enlargement and you think it's a mistake. That's blunt. It's straight-forward. But I am then going to go on to say that we agreed on the importance of ... (C)

President Yeltsin: (interrupts) I would prefer slightly different language, Bill. I would like to say that we are opposed to enlargement, but in order to minimize the negative consequences, we accept the proposal for an agreement between NATO and Russia because it is in the interests of the Russian people. (C)

The President: I agree. That's pretty much the formulation used in the joint statement. (The President then goes back to reading the text. He reads at some length from the G-7/8 language.) (C)

I'm trying to avoid saying anything about G-7 issues that others might have an interest in. By the way, Boris, I think in the press conference we should avoid any answers to questions, any backgrounding with the press afterwards, anything in our public statements that uses the word "concessions." As I said before, I don't want people to score this as you versus me. I don't want them to say that Boris won on three issues and Bill won on two. (C)

President Yeltsin: Okay. But the question could come up that this economic package that you've proposed is sort of a bribe to get Russia to accept NATO enlargement. (X)

The President: Well, they won't be able to say that. On the investment side, there's nothing about this that is in any way a bribe. With the internal changes that we hope you will make in your economic system, Russia could become the number one -- one of the best investments in the world. And if it does do that, I want to make sure that American companies have opportunities to take advantage of that. It'll mean jobs for Americans. I wouldn't fulfill my responsibilities as President of the United States if I did not make sure that the United States was in at the beginning of this process. And, by the way, this is only partly about economics. If Russia continues to develop its economy, it's going to be a better partner in many other areas as well. (X)

(There's then some discussion about going over nasty questions that might come up at the press conference. Mr. Berger goes out to get a list of questions. Mr. Talbott comments that they could get difficult questions -- plenty of questions had already been suggested by Henry Kissinger.) (X)

President Yeltsin: Oh yes, that's Madeleine's teacher! (X)

The President: No, there's actually a serious point here, because we are under two lines of attack. There are some people who claim that NATO enlargement will ruin reform in Russia. I know that is rather similar to your line. But there is another line of attack that we hear from Kissinger and certain Republicans who like to say, look at all the concessions that Clinton has made. (X)

(Then there is a back-and-forth between the President and President Yeltsin over legally binding. The bottom line is that President Yeltsin accepts the exact formulation that is used in the joint statement.) (X)

President Yeltsin: It's important that we sign this document before Madrid. We need to get together the leaders of Russia and NATO to sign it. I would say in May. Jacques Chirac has suggested hosting the signing event in May. (X)

The President: Okay, if we can reach an agreement before then. May in Paris would be fine, and I'll come, but I don't think we should announce this today because we do not have an agreement on the charter. (X)

President Yeltsin: I agree. (X)

The President: Okay. Paris in May, but no announcement today.
(C)

(Mr. Berger then tries out some murder-board tough questions, and one of the questions is were there any secret deals in Helsinki.)
(C)

President Yeltsin: We wanted to have a secret deal, but we were rejected. (C)

The President: (laughing) I was prepared to make a secret deal on the vodka concession from Russia! (C)

Foreign Minister Primakov: There ought to be a secret deal to make Madeleine the next Secretary General of NATO. (C)

Mr. Berger: This is a historical moment. For the first time, the President of the United States and the leader of Russia are jointly preparing their answers for a press conference. (C)

(Mr. Berger then tries out on Yeltsin a question on Russia's membership in NATO.) (C)

President Yeltsin: The question was not discussed, and the issue does not arise. (C)

(Mr. Berger then tries out a question about authority to extend START II. He presses President Yeltsin on what his answer would be to the question of submitting START II to the Duma. President Yeltsin, after some misunderstanding about the actual question, says yes, he will press ahead with it.) (C)

President Yeltsin: We have done powerful work. (C)

-- End of Conversation --