

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Yeltsin of Russia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Secretary Albright
Samuel Berger
Deputy Secretary Talbott

President Yeltsin
Minister Ivanov
Minister Shapovalyants
Foreign Policy Advisor Prikhodko
Deputy Minister Mamedov
Russian Interpreter

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko
Notetaker: Carlos Pascual

DATE, TIME June 20, 1999, 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.
AND PLACE: Renaissance Hotel (Russians Host),
Cologne, Germany

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Before we start, let's decide now to revive the Gore-Stepashin Commission. (U)

(Note: Ivanov prompts Yeltsin on Stephasin's name.) (✓)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Let's get them together as fast as they can. Let's also have Secretary Albright and Minister Ivanov meet soon, too. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: This is our seventeenth meeting. We met in Helsinki once and you gave me a cane. The cane unscrewed and it had a spyglass. I still have it and all the gifts that you've given me. The best was a miniature painting of my mother. (U)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

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PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I brought you another present today. A good present; maybe not a personal present. But for purposes of our friendship, it is a good present. (U)

When I became president in 1992, I signed a decree to declassify all material related to President Kennedy's assassination, regardless of where the documents were, whether in the diplomatic, military or intelligence archives. It turned out to be quite an effort. We translated everything into Russian and declassified them all. We had to translate them to make the declassification. I present them to you today as a gift. I leave it to your discretion how to use them. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. The subject of President Kennedy's assassination still fascinates the American people. There is still speculation about whether Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. Thank you. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes. All these are original copies. This is the material. (U)

(Note: President Yeltsin hands a plastic fold to President Clinton across the table and they shake hands.) (U)

THE PRESIDENT: This is wonderful. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: But if you hand it to someone, let it be very reliable hands. (U)

(Note: The folder is passed to Deputy Secretary Talbott at the time of President Yeltsin's comments. General laughter.) (U)

THE PRESIDENT: We have many things to discuss. Thank you for not giving up on the relationship and making sure we passed this very tough test. Our agreement on Kosovo is now complete. Our people are working to implement it. So I suggest we talk about securing the broader peace in Europe; about Russia's economic resurgence, and about reviving our work on arms control and nonproliferation. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I agree with this formulation of the issues. I also had in mind how we cut through a big knot. Our cooperation came to the brink of collapse with Kosovo. If we had not kept in touch and dealt honestly and openly with each other, it would have gone over the brink. We held that process back. (C)

We had several conversations -- not literally looking each other in the eye, but with our voices over the telephone -- and we kept things from going out of control. I tried to be polite on the phone. Please understand, I tried to be polite. (C)

In the course of our last conversation, I said in a straightforward way that our friendship had reached its limits, including our cooperation in Europe and the world. Then I said, let's see if we can continue to be friends, and you said yes. We decided we are going to do that and that's it. That's it. We've agreed. Why did we do that? Because everything depends on these two powerful countries. This is how we continued to be friends and to cooperate. (C)

The agreement reached in Helsinki indicates that if Russia and the United States act -- together -- we can always come to the right decisions. But only if we act together. Here in Cologne, let's pledge that we will do all we can to hold that line for the time remaining in our presidencies, even though it's not much time. Do you agree? (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: This is an official thing. (Looking to Prikhodko) Draw up the record. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: I think we have time. And one of the most important things we can do is our work on arms control. We will announce today that we will begin discussion on START III and the ABM Treaty. We need to get the Duma to act on START II. I really believe it is in both Russia and America's interest to get the ceilings lower. You and I have previously talked about missile defense issues, but let me pause for translation before we discuss this further. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: (When START II ratification is translated.) Yes. (When START II and ABM discussions are translated.) Yes. (At the end.) Yes. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: We can ask our people to have parallel discussions on START III and the ABM Treaty. START III is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children. Whatever we do must be to the benefit of Russia as well as the United States. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: On what level can this parallel work be done? (C)

MINISTER IVANOV: We would have parallel consultations on START III and the ABM Treaty. These could not be formal without the ratification of START II. We would do this on a parallel track with START II ratification. This would be done by the relevant ministries at the level of experts. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I thought we could do it a little differently. I think we, as the two presidents, should act in this direction. (C)

(Note: There is an extended pause as President Yeltsin formulates his thoughts. There is not a sound in the room.)
(C)

My idea is that, perhaps by July 30, we connect together the two presidents and the two ministers of foreign affairs. And, by the way, they (the foreign ministers) are working together well. We'll have them report back to us (the two presidents) on the actual situation. You and I (directed to President Clinton) need to decide how to proceed. (C)

(Note: President Yeltsin asks to leave the room. We are told it is for a phone call from Prime Minister Stepashin.) (C)

MINISTER IVANOV: July 30 is a notional deadline. We will be working. But until START II is ratified, it will be hard to have detailed talks on START III. I don't see START II being ratified before the summer holiday break. The Parliament is now working on economic reform laws. The situation is difficult now for the government with the Duma. We can't allow ourselves the luxury of failing on START II; we must have a 100 percent guarantee of success. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: We made this proposal for two reasons. In all our previous meetings Boris Nikolayevich and I have said that we want to move on to work on START III. First, I felt this would help build confidence with the Duma. Second, I know you have legal concerns about the ABM Treaty given the research we are doing on national missile defense. So I thought it would help with START II if we showed our continued commitment to the ABM Treaty. I want to get START II ratified, and I thought it would help with START II if we have parallel discussions on START III and ABM. (C)

MINISTER IVANOV: That's right. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: So we are in agreement there. Will the Duma act on the economic issues? (C)

MINISTER IVANOV: On some items the Duma will be affirmative; on some, not yet. We discussed this when Stepashin came back from Cologne. We have some chance. (C)

(Note: President Yeltsin returns.) (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: What was the subject while I was away? While Kosovo was going on I was getting calls every night. It was impossible to sleep. (C)

MINISTER IVANOV: We agreed on the joint statement on strategic stability. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Good. I read the text. It is good and not excessively combative. It deals with the issues at hand in a calm way. (C)

MINISTER IVANOV: We agreed to proceed with the START II and ABM discussions. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: If left with the experts, we won't get results. I want this to be done in a way so that we (Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin) are in the framework. We as the two presidents should be the ones who should make the decisions (on START III) and resolve the ABM issues. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. And we don't have too much time, or someone else will come and get credit for our work. (General laughter.) (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes. Or revise the text (on START III). (C)

THE PRESIDENT: I want to discuss the issue of nonproliferation and how it affects our cooperation on commercial space. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Agreed. (Then reflecting again on START III and ABM.) I think we should set up a special negotiating commission. In course, it can report to us on the progress made. Remember, this is the way we got progress on Kosovo by requiring Jackson and Zvarzin to report to us. We identified common ground and we agreed. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Under our law, in order to have more commercial space launches for satellites, we need to cooperate on cutting missile technology going to Iran. Gore and Primakov developed a plan, but Primakov never approved it because he never had his meeting with the Vice President. I ask you to review this plan. If it's acceptable, we can proceed with greater missile cooperation. If the original action plan is acceptable, we can go on. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Let's make this the first job for Gore and Stepashin. And the two foreign ministers can supervise the details of the work. Let's instruct Stepashin and Gore accordingly. I agree. We'll do the necessary. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Let's talk about economics. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: There is now an enormous positive feeling about Russia. The world feels like we worked to resolve the Kosovo problems. That has created broad positive feelings. So this is an opportune time to reinvigorate our work on Russia's economic revival. (C)

Now, the main reason I think it's important to close a deal with the IMF is that it sends a signal to the world's financial community. The international community trusts you and your government, but not the Duma. So closing this deal would be a good sign. (C)

After Kosovo, you could see renewed investment interest in Russia. You need to get private sector money back in. It could even be like the early years of our partnership in 1993 and 1994, and maybe even more. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: (Nods positively throughout translation.) I personally will see to it. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Once that happens, once the IMF deal is closed, there will be a big movement to reschedule your Soviet-era Paris Club debt. I know you want this debt to be forgiven, and I support that. But the majority of that is not my debt to forgive. It's mostly German money. I'll keep talking to Schroeder. In fact, I'll see him tonight. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I also want to say, Bill, the Kosovo crisis put a lot of our problems in stark relief. We need to remove

all those irritants. They have constantly stood in the way, and they almost tripped us over. We need a program of action. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. And in that context, I want to raise another economics issue. We've talked for five years about getting beyond Jackson-Vanik. I want to make it go away. But the problems I have to get it to go away are your Law on Religion and concerns about anti-Semitic actions by your nationalists and extremists. So when you go home, perhaps you can make a strong statement condemning anti-Semitism. I tell Congress the problem is not with you, but they say that if we take away Jackson-Vanik and another government comes in, what do we do? So I need some help on the religion front. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Specifically this statement can be made. Give me the material on who is making anti-Semitic statements, and I'll give them a big one! (To Prikhodko) Keep track of the issues we've resolved. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: We need to work on getting rid of all these problems in the relationship in this last year. When new people come into office, they're understandably afraid of making mistakes, so they're cautious. You and I need to worry about what's important. It could be a full year in office before others have the necessary confidence. So you and I need to get rid of these problems. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: It is so important to resolve these issues. I express my firm commitment to do this with your help. On anti-Semitism, you give me the names, and I will grind them down. I will reign them in. (C)

(Note: The lights flash off.) (U)

THE PRESIDENT: The Germans must be watching us. (General laughter.) Anything else? (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes. You made a big mistake in one of our calls. We need to find a way to streamline our consultative mechanisms. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, go ahead. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Our joint action on Kosovo should have strengthened our trust and cooperation on the multilateral sphere for a long time to come. We need a collective mechanism to solve problems. We also need to increase the role of the UN.

I apologize for being so blunt, but you treat the UN in a very cool way. If we could jointly work on this, it would provide a big boost to the UN. It could be a body that resolves the issues that it is faced with. (C)

And then there is the OSCE problem. In any event, the OSCE should be at the top of a European system of security. We need a code of conduct for European states and European organizations. It is from this perspective that we approach the development of the OSCE charter. (C)

I don't want you to be concerned about our trying to move the United States to the side. It's just that if something happens in Yugoslavia, Europe should deal with this. Right now we have everyone piling on in one big mound. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: I agree we should move to strengthen the UN and the OSCE. In KFOR, the United States has less than 15 percent of the forces. Even less with the addition of Russia. In Bosnia, we had 34 percent. The UN will have the lead in Kosovo on civilian implementation. We should work to strengthen the UN, strengthen the OSCE and strengthen the ability of Europeans to solve the problems of Europe. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, this is what I stand for -- not neglecting the fact that Russia is a European country. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. That is one of your great accomplishments. I would like to ask Secretary Albright and Minister Ivanov to follow up on this. (C)

You know, in one call, I pointed out to you the difference between your actions in Chechnya and NATO's actions in Kosovo. (C)

(Note: An aide to President Yeltsin enters and says that President Yeltsin's plane is close to losing its time slot to depart for Moscow. President Clinton's last phrase on Chechnya and Kosovo is never translated.) (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: We are always pressed for time. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I owe you a visit. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Any time. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: How many hours daylight are there now in Moscow?
(U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: It's dark only for about three hours. Come over. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: We'll go over everything. ~~(C)~~

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Today, Talbott and Mamedov, you must put together an official record of what we have done -- a verbatim report. Don't forget to include among all the items the revival of the Gore-Stepashin Commission. ~~(C)~~

THE PRESIDENT: This is the only work I'm asking the Vice President to do. ~~(C)~~

(Note: Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin come around the table and hug.) (U)

-- End of Conversation --