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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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10/2/2013 KBH

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Patriarch Aleksiy II of Russia
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to Russia
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
John Beyrle, Director for Russia, Ukraine and
Eurasia Affairs, NSC (Notetaker)
Kiril Borisov, Interpreter

Aleksiy II, Patriarch
Metropolitan Kiril of Smolensk and
Kaliningrad

DATE, TIME January 13, 1994, 4:35 - 5:10 p.m.
AND PLACE: Kuntsevo Hospital, Moscow

Patriarch Aleksiy II: I am sorry that I must greet you in a hospital. I had wanted you to be able to visit me at our monastery. But I thank you for coming to see me here. I know that you have a very busy schedule, and I consider this a mark of respect for the spiritual values that we represent. (U)

I would like to offer our profound condolences on the death of your mother. I know that this happened on the eve of your departure from the United States. With your permission, I would like to offer a prayer for the eternal repose of your mother. [All stand for prayer and moment of silence.] (U)

I know that your time is limited. I would like briefly to tell you about the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. For more than 1000 years we have spread the word of God throughout Russia. Recently we passed through a difficult period, one that can genuinely be called genocidal. It is difficult for Westerners to imagine the repression and persecution that believers in our church were forced to suffer. For this reason, we welcome with all of our heart and soul the democratic changes taking place in our society, including the freedom of conscience. (U)

We do not want to be a state church; we want to remain outside of religion. Still, the moral condition of our society is not a matter of indifference to us. We want to bring the spiritual condition back to health after the last seventy-plus years. One service we can perform is peacemaking among that nations of the

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CIS. Ours is not just a Russian church; it goes beyond the current borders of Russia into the former USSR. We try to preserve stability and to further peace and prevent the incitement of ethnic strife and hatred. Recently, at our initiative, meetings were held in Azerbaijan between representatives of the Muslim and Armenian churches. And in October, I conducted talks between the government and Supreme Soviet. I had been in the United States; when I left, I had no idea I would need to mediate this conflict. I wanted only to prevent bloodshed. I felt that only the Church could restrain the warring sides. (U)

In June 1994, in either Moscow or Minsk, there will be a conference on the Christian faith and human animosity. The American National Council of Churches of Christ is providing us great deal of help in this. I received a telegram from them this week asking me to convey their condolences to you. (U)

Mr. President, we cannot but help be concerned by the results of the recent election in Russia. And we are concerned by the violations of human rights and freedom of conscience, especially in Ukraine, where the Orthodox Church is subjected to repressive methods from official sources because the liturgy requires that they mention their subservience to the Patriarchy of Moscow. We are also concerned by the situation in the Baltic states. (S)

We are extremely grateful for the help you are giving Russia during this difficult period, and would like to thank the American people through you for the help you have given us. We have set up an infrastructure to distribute humanitarian aid and ensure that it reaches those who really need it. (U)

The short time we have doesn't give us much time for discussion. But if you'd allow me, I could send you a letter through Ambassador Pickering. (U)

I do have one question: I know that many in the United States don't understand our position on matters of faith and the law on religions. There are no restrictions now on the freedom of conscience. But we would want to disallow those who come in under the cloak of religion to spread hateful propaganda. After the 75-year spiritual vacuum we have lived through, any religious leader who speaks to the people receives attention. Certain sects and teachings are permitted to proselytize here more than in any other country. (S)

The President: I was sad that we were unable to meet this past fall. But I am sure you did the right thing by returning home. As you may know, I first came to Russia as a student 24 years ago. My first impression upon returning is one of joy that people have the freedom of worship again. Today I visited the church on Red Square that you have just rebuilt. (U)

Patriarch Aleksiy II: It was just rechristened. (U)

The President: I lit a candle in memory of my mother. And I was

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glad to see so many young people. 24 years ago this month, I visited the Novodevichy Monastery. They were in the midst of a funeral, and I was struck by how devout and strong the believers were, but it seemed then that they were all older people. Today I saw so many young people, and it gladdened my heart. (U)

Patriarch Aleksiy II: This is true not just in Moscow. I have visited 18 regions of Russia and the same thing can be seen there, too. (U)

The President: I also appreciate your comments on religious liberty. My church was supporting for many years the right of Russians to worship. I am a Baptist, which is the largest denomination in the United States. So many of the leaders of my church asked me about the Law on Religions and so I am glad to hear your answer. I agree with you that people who couldn't worship for years are easy prey for false preachings. But they need to keep their eyes open so that when they hear the truth, they can have faith in it. I also appreciate your support for reform. I hope during this trip that I can convey to ordinary citizens that the United States is committed to the economic restoration of the country so that each person can live up to his spiritual potential. The recent elections made clear that many people do not see a better life coming out of this transition period and don't believe that society will get better. And when a great people cannot imagine a great future for themselves, they of course look backward. So I hope that through TV broadcasts, or meetings in the street, they'll feel that the U.S. is helping. (U)

The spiritual dimension is definitely important. When I heard how the Kazan Cathedral was destroyed and rebuilt, I was deeply moved. I hope that you will feel free to write to me and send messages. The future of your country is important to the U.S. and the whole world. And you will have a lot to say about how it all comes out. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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