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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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3/7/2019 KBH

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Vladimir Putin of
Russia (S)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State
(notetaker)

President Vladimir Putin
Sergey Prikhodko, Deputy Head, Presidential
Administration (notetaker)

DATE, TIME September 6, 2000, 10:50 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.
AND PLACE: Waldorf Astoria, New York City, President's
Suite

[The President does NMD statement during pool spray. Cameras leave.]

The President: Sorry for all you've been through with the loss of the Kursk. When something like this happens, people around the world identify with the victims and their families, but I identified with you, too. You must have had to put up with a lot of second-guessing. That always happens. After Oklahoma City, a lot of people asked if the building was properly protected and whether we had let terrorists into the country. So my heart went out to the people at the bottom of the sea, but it went out to everyone else as well. (S)

President Putin: There was no good option for me here. I was caught between bad options and worse options. Some people told me that if I'd let a small submarine go in there right away and at least make a stab at rescuing the guys, my ratings would have gone up. You can't let something like this be driven by public relations. You've got to give priority to actually saving people. (S)

I appreciate your sincere support. Strange as it seems, the polls afterward actually reveal that the incident didn't affect

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my standing. But my great fear is that something like this could recur. (S)

The President: We operate in a different environment now. If a building blows up in Moscow, it's as though our own relatives were involved. Or if people in Mozambique are driven by flooding to have to take shelter in trees. In many ways, this is a good thing. It reminds us of the humanity of others. It makes it harder to hate. But it also sometimes makes it harder for a leader to do the right thing because all these strong feelings are generated. (S)

President Putin: We felt impotent during this whole disaster. It now looks as though all the crew died within 60 or 90 seconds. We couldn't tell the relatives, but there was a hole about 2 meters wide blown in the hull that flooded the first three sections of the sub. I'm not even sure how we can get the bodies out. There are a lot of cod in those waters, and there may not be any flesh on the bones. We tried to apply the brakes to all this furor, but some people are strange, and they just kept feeding it. That's just a fact of life. (S)

The President: Can we talk about the Balkans? I know you've had contact with Milosevic and Djukanovic. These elections are going to be important, but they probably won't be fair. Milosevic is running behind in the polls, so he'll probably steal it. It would be preferable for him to lose, but he'll probably arrange not to. You know all this, because it's in your backyard. But there will be one big problem [he draws these three words out with heavy emphasis on each] if he moves against Djukanovic. I hope you can meet with Djukanovic while he's here. That would send a strong signal. (S)

President Putin: [Looks doubtful, thinks for a moment] Let's have Sergey Ivanov meet with him. (S)

The President: I want to raise the nonproliferation issue that we've discussed before. Our people are working hard on that, but there's a ways to go. (S)

President Putin: We've talked about that before, as you say. Part of the issue for me, as I told you, is that we don't want to see Russia lose out in competition with other countries that are moving in there. But that said, I've given the firmest instructions to the special services to engage seriously on this problem of Iran. (S)

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The President: Well, as I say, it's still a problem. Let's move it forward by Brunei. It's an impediment to the work we want to do together. It gives Congress and others a reason to oppose your integration. (S)

My whole strategy and policy toward Russia have been based on the idea of helping Russia recover its economic footing. I can only do that in the context of Russia's developing as a democracy, developing pluralism, and increasing its leadership in international institutions. These things are all tied up together. You can't have one without the other. So that's why I'm counting on you to work on this Iran thing and the other areas so that we can keep supporting you. (S)

I'd like also to say something about the UN, which is a very important institution for both of us. For the UN to be credible and effective, we've got to enforce the Security Council resolutions on Iraq. I have no objection for oil money to be used according to the rules as long as the inspections are being carried out. (S)

But Saddam Hussein is refusing inspections, and he's put \$15 billion out of the \$18 billion he's made from oil sales into defense, which for him isn't really defense at all. He's also trying to generate political pressure to change the sanctions policy. I don't understand why he won't accept the inspection regime. I think it would be a big mistake for us to say we don't care. (S)

President Putin: Let me tell you my worry here. It's a big plus in your legacy that you've done so much to stop proliferation. I told you after my visit to North Korea that I basically agreed with you and believe you were right to a large extent about the problem there. We don't want any rogue states to acquire these weapons. I'm worried about that myself. [redacted]

EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

(S)

I think I told you before, entirely off the record, that when you bombed Iraq for what it was doing, I supported you, or at least I would have done the same thing in your shoes. But looking ahead, how do we make them [the Iraqis] sign? It's hard. We need to establish general rules of conduct, intercontinental safeguards. Now, on this disagreement between us over Iraq, we're not playing it up. We're doing everything we can to make them stop what they're doing. That's a common goal. (S)

The President: [redacted] EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d I understand what you say, but there's a big difference. The Iraqis under Saddam Hussein have used chemical weapons against their own people and their neighbors, and they've shot SCUDs into Israel during the Gulf War. (S)

It may turn out that the biggest threat in the next ten years isn't going to be state-to-state war. Rather it may be terrorists with smaller chemical and biological weapons and even small nuclear weapons, which dogs in airports won't be able to sniff out. (S)

Somehow we have to find a way to work together to stop the enemies of the nation state from these other forms of risk. The increasing openness of the world, combined with the acceleration of technology and science, has brought a lot of benefits, but it's also increased rapidly our vulnerability. The preferable way of dealing with this is the UN. We need a framework of cooperation that minimizes the exposure of our societies and our civilization. (S)

[redacted]
EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d

[redacted] We should see Iraq as a precursor of the larger problem we face over the next twenty years. (S)

President Putin: I basically agree. [redacted] EO 13526 1.4b, 1.4d
[redacted] (S)

Back on Yugoslavia, I've got to tell you that I see something very unfair here. You talk about the elections coming up [in Serbia]. But there are also these elections in Kosovo. Yet there are 100,000-150,000 Serbs who aren't actually there, who've been made into refugees. Their absence from the elections is going to feed the trend toward Kosovo's splintering off from Serbia. That will have repercussions around the world, for other states. (S)

You worked very hard and effectively, even decisively, in the G-8, and I'm prepared for Russia to work with you here. But we weren't consulted in the decision to bomb Yugoslavia and to set in motion the process that is taking Kosovo out of Serbia. That's not fair. And it's not fair to the 150,000 Serbs that

the fate of Kosovo will be decided without them. They should be given a voice. Otherwise, the fate of their motherland will be decided behind their back. Milosevic has nothing to do with this. (S)

[They agree that Secretary Albright and Foreign Minister Ivanov will pursue at dinner the question of Serb participation in the Kosovo elections.] (S)

The President: One more thing about the UN. I've worked hard on the issue of reorganizing the UN. As part of the deal I've made with Congress, we've got to adjust the scale of assessments. Your people and mine have talked about this. I really need your support on this. I think what we're suggesting is consistent with Russia's role as a founder of the UN and as a member of the Security Council. (S)

It's also important if I'm going to free up the \$840 million that's now locked up. I want us to be able to pay our bills and support peacekeeping. Perhaps down the road, we can find a better way of doing this, including have a special fund that will help countries, like Mozambique, that have a growing economy one year, then get hit with a devastating flood. I hope that after our election here, we'll have a Congress that is more supportive of the UN. This has been one of the most painful and frustrating issues I've dealt with as President. (S)

[Small talk about the President's trip to Africa, whether he had to get vaccinated, how shocked he was by the devastation of malaria, TB and AIDS; how global warming is spreading malaria, how Arkansas was the hottest place on earth last week (115 degrees). Putin comments on how much Coke he's drinking. The President says he's jet-lagged, then says Putin must be, too, having just circled the globe. The President says, "But you're younger and in better shape than me." The President then gives Putin a quick rundown on the U.S. election.] (S)

The President: I need to raise with you the Pope matter. We've talked about this before, and I need guidance from you on what to do next here. There's a real health issue here. (S)

President Putin: I'll be absolutely candid with you. I've got the information from my people. He is absolutely healthy. There's no problem there. There's a different problem. As I told you, I will take a decision here. But I need to wait until the formalities are finished. If I take a decision beforehand, it could be used against us -- it could be said that we were holding him for no reason. (S)

The President: You need to release him as quickly as possible.
He's not well. (S)

[While the signing ceremony is being arranged, the President asks Putin for an update on the trouble along Russia's southern border, especially Chechnya and Central Asia. Putin does a report on how his government is determined to finish off the Chechen "terrorists." Putin says he has a lot of support from the Russian people, who are "pissed off" at the repeated terrorist attacks. Putin also talked about President Rakhmonov of Tajikistan and what a difficult, complex fellow he is, and how President Karimov of Uzbekistan has been talking to the Israelis about arms supplies. He then concludes by thanking POTUS for help on various economic projects, including an EXIM Bank loan.] (S)

-- End of Conversation --