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TO Brody, Richard J. (VP)

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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Russian Prime Minister
Vladimir Putin

PARTICIPANTS: APNSA Samuel Berger, Russian Prime Minister
Putin

Interpreter: Kyrill Borissow
Notetakers: Joel Schrader, Sean Tarver, Amy Swarm, Andrew Weiss

DATE, TIME AND PLACE:
October 30, 1999, APNSA Suite, 11:50 a.m. - 12:50 p.m. EDT

SAMUEL BERGER: Hello. (U)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Mr. Berger, good afternoon. (U)

SAMUEL BERGER: Good afternoon, sir. Mr. Prime Minister, it is

good to talk to
you. May I still call you Volodya even though you are Prime Minister
of Russia?
(U)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Yes, go ahead. (U)

SAMUEL BERGER: I am very pleased to talk to you. I wanted a brief
conversation
with you before your meeting with the President on Tuesday in Oslo.
(U)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Thank you for calling. You placed a call
to me but at the
time, I was in the Far East. (U)

SAMUEL BERGER: I understand and wanted to talk to you about
two issues that I
know are very difficult for you at this point. One, the situation in the
North
Caucasus, and the second, the status of the CFE treaty. Let me say
first before
I get into these two issues that we were very pleased the Crime
Ministerial in
Moscow was a very strong success. Your remarks were very positive
and just what
was needed. The Attorney General returned to Washington very
enthusiastic. (U)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Thanks, Sandy. (U)

SAMUEL BERGER: Let me turn for a moment to Chechnya and then
CFE. First of all,
let me be very clear the President has made clear every time he has
spoken that
we understand Chechnya poses a huge challenge to your government,
and there has
never been any ambiguity on our part about Russian sovereignty or
the Russian
government's right to protect territorial integrity or the safety of your
people.
(S)

And we also understand that you did not start this round of fighting.
But, it is
also important for you to understand our concerns about the situation.
You said
to us and to Ambassador Collins that you do not seek a purely military
solution
and will seek to minimize civilian casualties and will seek political

dialogue.

(S)

But, we are concerned by what we are seeing now, with more than 170,000 refugees and what appears to be mounting civilian casualties. I am concerned, Volodya, that the Istanbul summit could turn its focus entirely on Chechnya, which is not what you or we desire. So, as a friend of Russia, let me highlight two fundamental questions I hope you and the President can discuss in Oslo, and, if you have any other time available, which you and I can discuss. The first is how to avoid attacks that have a heavy impact on civilians who, as I understand, are completely intermingled with rebels in places like Grozniy and Gudermes.-(S)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Could you repeat again please? (U)

SAMUEL BERGER: I wanted to highlight two questions to discuss in Oslo. First, whether it is possible to avoid attacks on civilians who are intermixed with rebels in Grozniy and Gudermes. As airstrikes increase, it seems likely civilian casualties will get worse and freedom of movement for displaced people to get them across to Ingushetia is also a concern. (S)

The second issue, which perhaps we can talk about on Tuesday, is your strategy for political dialogue. I know you described a two-part strategy to Ambassador Collins, and I think it would be useful to discuss so we are in better position to understand how you intend or plan to get on some kind of political track.-(S)

Let me briefly raise one other issue, and I will conclude my remarks. And that is the issue of CFE and Istanbul. I know that your engagement in Chechnya makes it necessary for you to exceed the levels, the flank levels to which we have agreed, and I believe we are prepared to go forward with the Treaty, assuming that we resolve the remaining issues and despite the fact that Russia will not be

in compliance at the time that we sign. But in order for us to avoid us being sharply criticized for signing the treaty at a time when you are not able to be in compliance, I think there are some compensating actions Russia should take which would make the Treaty acceptable. (S)

There are three. One is, I understand your people are working on a strong public statement from you that you intend to reduce to agreed limits as soon as possible, given the situation in the Caucasus. The second would be continued transparency and disclosure on military deployments, as the Treaty requires. So far, your government has been quiet good on this. This would be very important in terms of our justifying going forward in spite of the situation. (S)

And finally, Volodya, I think, perhaps, the most important step would be to have, before Istanbul, agreements in place with Georgia and Moldova about withdrawals for Russian forces. That would demonstrate that there are specific actions which manifest and demonstrate Russia's commitment to the treaty. (S)

Let me conclude with one final comment, Volodya. I think of you often these days because I know you are in the midst of an extraordinarily difficult and challenging undertaking. I know it is frustrating as well as very difficult. As your friend -- both personally and the U.S. as Russia's friend -- we only want this to work out satisfactorily. But I think I owe it to you to express some of the concerns we have so that you can take those into account as you proceed. (S)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Thank you for the conversation. Let me attempt to respond to your points as you raise them. As far as our actions in Chechnya are concerned, you knew from beginning as did President Clinton, and you will recall in this connection our conversation in New Zealand. (S)

The fact is this situation in Chechnya was developing in a very tragic

way. In addition to the fact that these bandits were attacking Dagestan, they also detonated explosives that destroyed several large buildings in Russia. All in all, the total number of dead from explosions and fighting was more than 1,500. As you know, all of these explosions took place at night or at early hours in the morning. As you know, the victims were completely innocent civilians. And these bandits, when they were in action in Dagestan, shamelessly spoke to TV cameras that their goal was to take away from Russia the area from the Black Sea to Dagestan. By the actions they perpetrated, we were left with no choice but to fight against them. But, on the whole, the situation is developing exactly the same as you and I discussed in New Zealand. (S)

Now, as for your comments on attacks on large cities, these cities, Grozniy and Gudermes are not excluded from attacks. But we will do everything not to allow attacks on these cities. But they are on the list. We talked about this, as you recall, after lunch, and we are moving in that same direction. (S)

The main thing is the bandits not try to provoke the armed forces there. Unfortunately, Maskhadov, who has lost control over the vast part of the republic, has been weakened, so he is forced to draw into his government these bandits. (S)

Speaking to these people is something that is totally unacceptable to us. We have made public statements on behalf of the Russian government in Chechnya to all forces taking action there to appeal to all those against terrorism and bandits and those prepared to fight terrorism. We are prepared to enter into dialogue with these people. (S)

Of course, in this situation you cannot exclude the possibility of casualties among the civilian population. But I must tell you, Sandy, that the

character of
these losses are not what they are being portrayed as by the bandits
inside
Chechnya. Quite frankly, this is a propaganda effort on their part.
These
bandits are forcing civilians to build fortifications under the threat of
execution. They have executed people who have not cooperated with
them, and I
have video proof of this. (S)

I recently visited Chechnya and had meeting with villagers from one
of the
settlements. The people there are totally impoverished now. These
people have
not received any salaries or pensions for years even though the
Russian
government has sent payments to Grozny. These payments have not
been delivered
to them. The very first question from villagers was the following:
"You are not
going to leave and abandon us, are you?" (S)

Sandy, believe me this is not propaganda. I am speaking frankly to
you. But I
understand this issue is very complex and we should not be fighting
against a
people. And we understand the concern of the U.S. Government and
the concern of
the President about losses among the civilian population. But we too
are
concerned about potential losses, Sandy, and, because of that, you and
I have a
very common position here. We have done everything in our power to
minimize this
possibility. (S)

And now, concerning the issue of free transit of displaced people and
movement
from Chechnya to Ingushetia. They are allowed to move freely. I
remind you,
Sandy, even before these latest events, one half million inhabitants
have moved
into the territory of Russia proper. But, as you can understand, there is
a
problem housing these people. There is a problem with housing
because the
bandits committed a very grave error when they attacked Dagestan.
(S)

Dagestan is also a Muslim country. In 1996, Dagestan received a large

number of
refugees from Chechnya and during first war they did the same.
Because of the
bandits' actions in Dagestan, their neighbors throughout the Caucasus
are
reacting very negatively to them. (§)

It is true that our armed forces have closed off roads between
Chechnya and
Ingushetia. We had to close these roads because the local authorities
in control
were totally corrupt and allowed certain goods to go through, without
any
controls, from Chechnya to the outside. And they also allowed
weapons to move
into Chechnya. (§)

So you see, Sandy, if we already accepted half a million before
military actions
took place and accepted another 100,000 more during this crisis, we
cannot refuse
them because they are our citizens. We will do everything we can to
house them.
And by the way, Sandy, you will notice these refugees are fleeing to
Russia and
not going abroad. We will accept all these people as they are our
citizens. (§)

But the corrupt local government is unhappy with us as well as the
local police
who are also corrupt. But we will not give in to them. I can tell you
confidentially, Sandy, that as soon as our forces took over roads, on
the first
day, the Army officers were offered a three thousand dollar bribe to
let a truck
pass which was loaded with freight consisting of fuel and
ammunition. So I
understand your concerns about civilians, and you can be assured that
we will
take them all in. (§)

And now, concerning the political dialogue, a point you raised. First
of all,
Sandy, you must understand we are under tremendous pressure from
our own
population in our country. This is unlike 1996 when we had the first
Chechen
war. This is not an ethnic war, but a battle we are waging against
terrorism. I
tell you, Sandy, this is exactly what it is. I know you are a friend of

Russia,
and you should understand the essence of this problem. In Russia, no
one will
understand us if we start a dialogue with these bandits exactly as no
one would
understand in America if you start speaking with Bin-Ladin. (S)

I can cite a specific example for you. At my insistence, the leader of
Dagestan
was invited to a meeting with Maskhadov, and he traveled there. I
made an
announcement to this effect on TV before the meeting was to take
place when
Maskhadov was travelling to meet him halfway. The local residents
cut off roads
with their own bodies, and they stopped this meeting from taking
place. (S)

We have to keep this sort of thing in mind. We cannot pretend that the
opinions
of our people are not being taken into account. I can tell you honestly
that I
did not expect that sort of reaction to take place. If I had known this
reaction
would take place, I would never have made the statement on TV
announcing the
meeting of the Dagestani leader with Maskhadov that was to be
carried out
according to my personal instructions. (S)

Our strategy in Chechnya is to seek out a partner that would be
accepted by all
nationalities involved and try to carry out a dialogue with that
individual. I
hope in the near future we will be able to come up with such a person.
(S)

And now, a couple of words about CFE. I thank you for your position
on this
issue. Indeed, we did exceed the flank limits envisioned by the Treaty,
but we
did give notification of the fact that this was going to take place. So I
appreciate and thank you for your position in stating that you would
be willing
to sign the Treaty, even with our temporally exceeding limits on our
flanks. (S)

There is no problem on our side with making a public statement
saying as soon as
the reasons that forced us to exceed our limits are gone, we will return

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001. email	Andrew Weiss to Richard Brody re: Berger-Putin Memcon [partial] (3 pages)	11/01/1999	P1/b(1)

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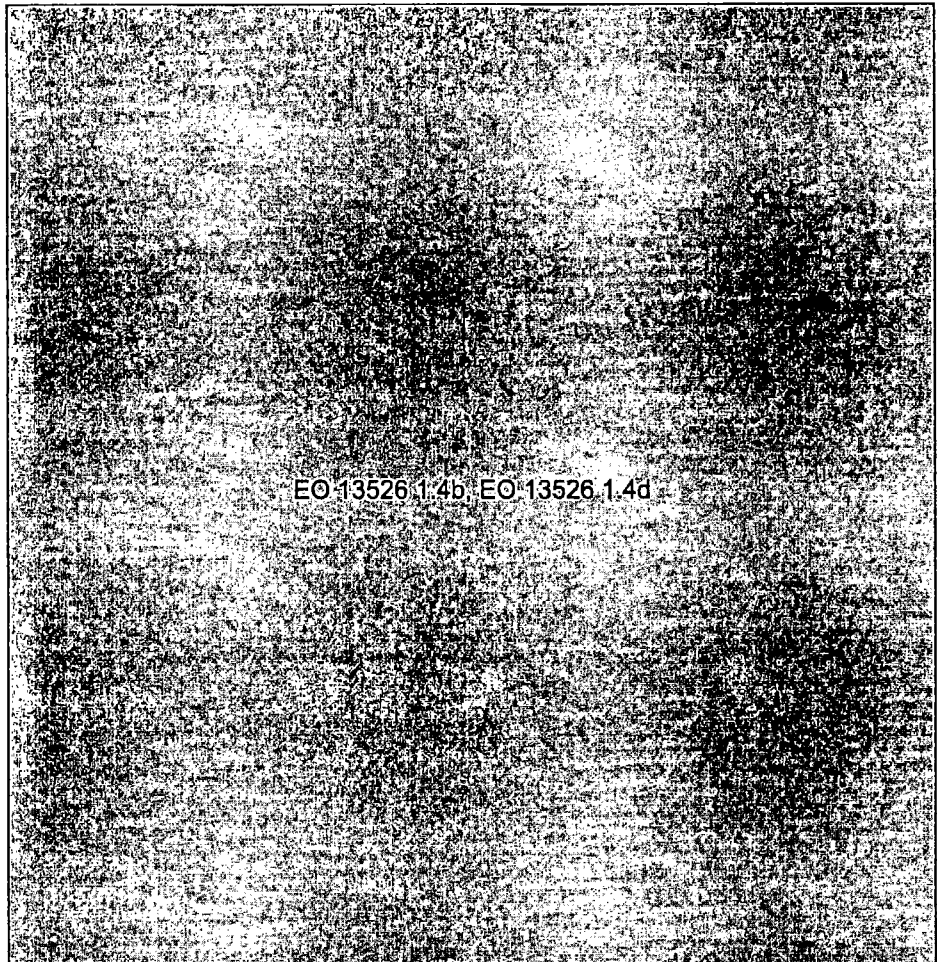
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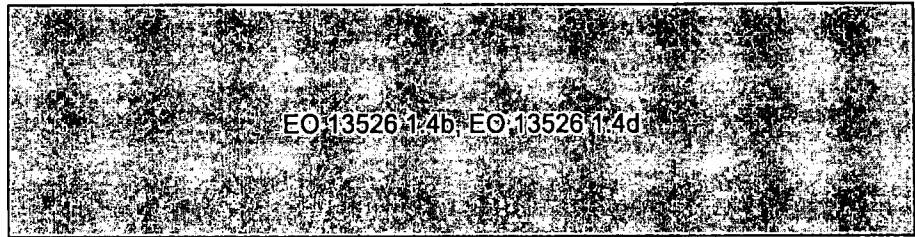
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to the
treaty required levels. I think your comments about transparency were
appropriate. We are planning to continue in that spirit and will make a
statement to that effect. (S)

As for the summit in Istanbul, we have been engaged with dialogue
with Moldova
for some time now, but the problem there is not with the Russia
position but the
situation in the Transdniester region. We frankly are not happy with
position
the leadership has taken in the Transdniester region. We are closer in
our
position to Moldova, but this will not be resolved soon. (S)

As for Georgia, it is not clear what they want. First, he wishes for our
troops
to withdraw. Then he doesn't want us to leave. Sometimes he says
there is a
need to open the border, and other times he says we need to keep it
closed. (S)





We are counting not only on your personal support, Sandy, but also the support of the President. But, as you said, on Tuesday we can meet and talk in greater detail about the strategy in the Caucasus. I look forward to our meeting. (S)

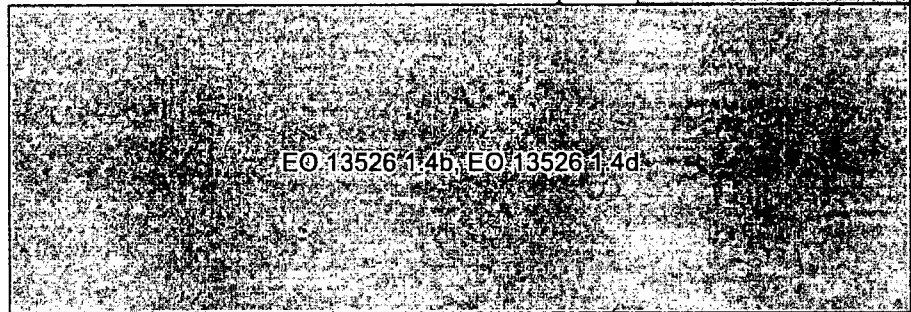
SAMUEL BERGER: Thank you very much for your explanation. Let me say a few brief things in response. First of all, we support the territory integrity of Russia and your right to fight terrorism. I think the problem is that history demonstrates, both our history and our experience as well as your experience that, if you destroy the entire forest in order to find a few rotten trees it almost always fails. So, our concern is with, as I said before, an escalation of air and artillery attacks that cause very large civilian casualties and refugees. That is a very high cost from your effort to get at the bandits and the terrorists. (S)

The last thing, Volodya, I will say -- and then we can talk on Tuesday -- is that it is important to us if we are going to be able to sign the CFE Treaty, that the Georgia and Moldova problems are going to be resolved. We recognize the problem with Smirnov. We know he is going to Russia soon, and we hope you will do everything possible to get him to cooperate. As for Georgia, from what we have heard from your negotiators, the problem is with the schedule, and we hope there is some flexibility in that area. If there is anything we can do to be helpful before Istanbul, please let Ambassador Collins know, and we will do what we can. (S)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Thank you, Sandy. (U)

SAMUEL BERGER: I will see you on Tuesday. (U)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Just a second please.



At any rate, I am prepared to discuss this with you in greater detail. (S)

SAMUEL BERGER: I understand very much what you have said, but I want you to understand, we are prepared to go forward despite the fact that Russia is over the limits, but I think our abilities to do that depend on Russia being able to solve the problems with Georgia and Moldova. (S)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: All right, Sandy, we will discuss this further. As for Turkey, I don't know what the schedule calls for, but I will find out. (S)

SAMUEL BERGER: Volodya, I wish you the best. (U)

PRIME MINISTER PUTIN: Thank you, Sandy, and until our meeting, then. (U)

SAMUEL BERGER: Okay. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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