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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with German Chancellor Kohl (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Chancellor Kohl

Interpreter: Gisela Marcuse
Notetakers: Marc Koehler, Lyle Harrison,
Katherine O'Loughlin, Larry
Wright, Marianna Papadimitriou,
Mary Ann Peters

DATE, TIME February 7, 1997, 9:46 - 10:13 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Helmut. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Guten tag. How are you? (U)

The President: Guten tag. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: I am absolutely speechless. I see your organization is streamlined since your reelection. I'm very pleased to hear your voice. I read your very good speech. I hope you are fine and in good spirits. When I look out my window, I see spring and my mood is very much like spring. You know we have enormous battles to face. We have lived way beyond our means. Now we have to fight and we have to reduce unemployment and cut spending. Well, you know all of that, this is the kind of work that has to be done. And at any rate, I'm in a good fighting spirit. (C)

Before you start, I'd like to make one point: I believe we should cooperate very closely regarding the UN Human Rights Conference on China, because I listened and read very carefully what you had to say on the subject. I believe we have to have a reasonable solution. Who is the person who sits on that particular desk in the White House? Because I would very much like to discuss that matter in a very low-key way. I'm afraid when things are discussed in official channels they sometimes get leaked. (C)

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The President: Yes, I'm glad you mentioned that. We were very shortly about to start consulting on that with the EU. John Shattuck will be working on it at the State Department. Eric Schwartz handles it here at the White House. Maybe we ought to have Sandy Berger talk to Bitterlich about it, and they can agree on how we should handle it between our two countries. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: Bitterlich will be in Washington on Monday. (C)

The President: I think so. We will follow up on that. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: Very good. (C)

The President: I wanted to talk to you a little about NATO-Russia issues. As you know, Chernomyrdin has been in Washington for the last couple of days, meeting with Gore, and I am going to see him today. We are going to announce that I am going to meet with Yeltsin in May. I mean March, I'm sorry, about six weeks from now. We have been working very hard to address Russia's concerns over NATO enlargement and build a strong NATO-Russia relationship. Madeleine Albright is going to Moscow later this month to continue talks as well. On specific issues, the Russians have pressed for legally binding prohibitions on forward deployments of nuclear weapons and NATO conventional forces. We have made it clear that we cannot support that, but we did indicate a willingness to repeat the so-called "three no's" on nuclear weapons in the charter -- we have no intention, no plan to do it and no reason to put nuclear weapons on territory of new members. And we also assured the Russians we can meet some of their concerns on conventional forces through CFE negotiations. (C)

There are two other potential problems out there. We have put forward a proposal for a consultative mechanism with the Russians for possible joint actions. The Russians also wanted a veto over NATO out-of-area deployments and we have made it clear that was not acceptable. (C)

Now there are two other areas where we may be able to work something out. One would be an agreement to consult on NATO adaptation in the NATO-Russia channel. The other would be charter language noting Russia is not excluded from future consideration for membership. (C)

That's a basic summary of the NATO issues. I just want to make two or three other points. It's important we keep in close touch as NATO-Russia discussions continue, and that we keep sending the same message to Moscow. This includes standing firm on our plans

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to follow through with invitations to new members at the Madrid Summit in July. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Thank you very much, Bill. I would like to give you my answer right away. First of all, I think there is no doubt about it, and this is certainly not a contentious issue. It is firmly Germany's position that we absolutely need to keep the date of the NATO Summit meeting just as planned. It must take place at the exact date and at no other time. (S)

Secondly, and I think that it needs to be abundantly clear to everyone, that no one has a veto regarding NATO enlargement, that this is a sovereign decision of sovereign nations. I told Boris Yeltsin this, that he has absolutely no veto at all. (S)

If you start from these two assumptions, and I am absolutely of the opinion that we need to do this, we still all of us agree we need to come to some sort of agreement with Yeltsin and the Russians. Precisely because he does not have a veto right, we need to talk to him, and we need to counter this "anti-mood" that is currently prevalent in Moscow, and I must say this "anti-mood" has increased. I do believe the psychological situation because of this has become much more difficult, which is why I think we would be well advised to try to bring about these changes in NATO together with him and in consultation with him. And again, I am absolutely sure that any possible successor to Boris Yeltsin will be immeasurably more difficult for us. I would like to make the best possible use of the time while he is in office. (S)

If I understand it correctly, his main problem is, and this is from discussions with him, that we come to some agreement on a treaty with him. For example, the idea that we conclude a treaty with him that obviously at the end will have to be ratified -- I told him quite clearly this won't work, but I believe it is a hurdle that can be overcome. The necessary thing, the thing dearest to his heart, is for him to be seen as an equal, and we must create the necessary precondition to enable him to appear like that. He must be seen internationally and at home as a man who has power, enjoys international recognition, and as one of the most important players in the world. (S)

Now no one has ever said we shouldn't hold a meeting among all of us, but obviously Madrid is the only place where NATO will be able to make a decision and where NATO will be able to make its positions clear. That is how the idea of a conference before that came up. Yeltsin mentioned it to me and to Chirac. No one thought of it as a steering committee for NATO. (S)

Prodi was just here and I reassured him of that. But let me say I am personally absolutely sure that without some sort of

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gesture, and I am open to any kind of intelligent idea, but without a gesture, we will have enormous problems reaching an agreement in Madrid. Bitterlich will be in Washington and will have additional information to give to your people. Please don't misunderstand me, Bill. I am certainly not keen on another summit. I am an old hand at this and do not need prestige from it. But I see very real problems and perhaps your people should talk to Bitterlich and discuss that. After you talk to Chernomyrdin, we could talk again. I will be back in the office after Tuesday next week. (C)

The President: Let me say first of all, in general, we need to find some ways to elevate Boris' status and we need some way to let the people in Russia know we regard him as an equal, a leader of Russia, a country that matters in a very significant way. I think that there are a number of things we can do and one would be to try to adapt the CFE treaty to try to address some of his concerns. I am pleased the Allies made so much progress last week in Brussels. The U.S. adopted a number of key elements in the German approach to revising the Treaty. We will be getting back to the Allies soon with additional views on this issue, but I think this is one area where we can make a big difference for him. I have some other ideas I am working through and I'll get back to you as soon as I have them. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: That would be good. (C)

The President: Now on the summit, I am not opposed to the meeting of five, but I want to defer the idea until after I get back from my meeting with Yeltsin in March. We need to know what will come out of the meeting, and be assured it will be a success. It must accelerate the process, not derail it. (C)

Helmut, there is just one other issue I want to mention briefly to you. As you know, we are having this dispute with France over NATO command. We very much want France to join the integrated military structure. However, I am not prepared in present circumstances to relinquish command over AFSOUTH, even if it means the French will not integrate -- the U.S. Navy is too important in that area. I have offered some other things to enhance European visibility in the Mediterranean along with the agreement to review the AFSOUTH in a few years time. (C)

I would like you to use your influence on Chirac to show flexibility. This is a command that has a certain resonance with our military because of what we've done, the amount of our forces there, and what we may have to do, so this is an area I just don't think I can give in on, but I'm sensitive about elevating Europe's role in NATO command structures, and very happy to try to meet Chirac's demands on other concerns. (C)

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Chancellor Kohl: Bill, perhaps your people ought to make use of Bitterlich being in Washington next week, and share with him your ideas of what offers you have in mind for the French, and he will report back to me, because very obviously I have a great interest in there being no bad feelings between France and the United States. (S)

The President: Yes, I agree with you. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Is it okay to be on the phone with you again the second half of next week? (S)

The President: Absolutely. I'll talk to you then. (S)

Chancellor Kohl: Very good. Give my regards to your wife and you take care of yourself. You have no election so you can relax. Enjoy yourself. (U)

The President: Yes, I cannot serve for life like you can. I'm jealous. I'll do my best. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: You couldn't possibly be jealous of me, you couldn't possibly if you knew what I meant! I think you have a very good set-up there in the United States, it takes you out of the limelight! (U)

The President: Yes, and I have a good pension! (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Good-bye. (U)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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