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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Chancellor Helmut Kohl

Notetakers: Mary Ann Peters, Katherine
O'Loughlin, Peter Huggins

DATE, TIME February 28, 1996, 11:49 a.m. - 12:13 p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

Chancellor Kohl: Hello, Bill. (U)

The President: Hi Helmut, guten tag. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Are you going to speak German now, Bill? (U)

The President: No, no, I'm going to listen in German so I can
hear it twice. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Let me say how very pleased I am to hear your
voice. Bill, as I look at how matters are going in the
Republican primaries, you should be glad. I would have thought
you drew up the list of the Republican candidates! (U)

The President: Well, I want them to keep changing who wins so it
is a long time before it gets resolved. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Remember what I told you six months ago? I
think my prediction will come true. I know you listened to me in
disbelief at the time, but I think the outcome will be as I said.
I'd like to tell you my impressions of my trip to Moscow. (U)

The President: Yes, please do. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Obviously, everything I tell you is filtered
through my own eyes, and as we both know, the time we have until
the elections is fairly long. First of all, my impression of
Boris Yeltsin. When I saw him in late August of last year, he
was in miserable physical condition. I saw him again at
Mitterrand's funeral. And now, I saw him again a few weeks

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later. I am not a doctor, but it is truly obvious that he has lost weight, and generally speaking, he looks to be in good physical condition. All the information he requires is at his fingertips; he doesn't require notes, even in our long talks. There are a lot of stairs in the Kremlin. I walked up with him, and you can see how someone moves and what physical condition they are in. As to my discrete question whether he was in good enough shape for the campaign, he said obviously yes; I must say he has launched into a program that is quite impressive. (C)

As to the political situation, generally speaking, he has a fairly clear impression of where he stands. It's sad because I'm certain people around him tell him too many positive things about what is actually going on. I was very open in my assessment of the situation. I would say he has a chance of getting into the second round of the election, and if he gets there, he has a fair chance of winning the election. A fairly large number of people, reformers, are criticizing him. They, themselves do not stand any chance of being candidates. But I think it's a safe bet: if the vote is between him and the communist candidate in the second round, he can count on the broad support of the reformers who criticize him now. Just one example is Sobchak, the mayor of St. Petersburg. I believe and hope this man will play an important role in the future, and I don't think we can exclude that he might want to be a candidate in a future election. He says he has severe misgivings about this matter or that, but then he says we have to do everything to make sure Yeltsin will win the election. It is the lesser-of-two-evils principle, but it is a clear statement in the direction we desire. (C)

Yeltsin himself sees that everything will depend on the question of Chechnya. He sees as important the position of the female voters, and I do think he is right. And the question is whether he will be able to come to some peaceful settlement of the conflict, as he has said in public. I was frank with him about Grachev's role, being very critical of it, and I must say his reaction was fairly interesting. He didn't deny that one could see it that way. And since there were rumors that the civilian Under Secretary of State for Defense Kokoshin, would be dismissed -- in our eyes he has a good reputation -- Yeltsin assured me this would not take place, and this man would keep his position. (C)

I think Yeltsin is also aware that something must be done in social policies. I think he's going to make use of what was achieved with the IMF on the basis of our support. So I think Bill, you and I know exactly who our counterpart is. I just left an idiotic debate in our parliament; they are stipulating conditions he would have to make, for example, on human rights. You and I are familiar with this. There is no way we are in a

position to choose who the President of Russia will be, and we do have to live with who the current president is. I am convinced nothing better can come out of it. (C)

I was clear in telling him he has no veto over NATO, as you said in public when you were over there. And, Bill, I would say in the event of his being reelected, there is a good chance for a meeting next year with the newly reelected President of the United States, Bill Clinton, together with a number of us from Europe, to meet with him and reach some sort of reasonable settlement to this issue of NATO and NATO enlargement and present to him a proposal that takes into consideration the justified security requirements of Russia. Then I see we have a genuine opportunity of reaching a settlement on that question in the second half of next year. We do have a gigantic task here with the enormous number of weapons they have massed over the years. An arsenal of nuclear weapons, chemical weapons -- biological weapons, all of these need in some way to be regulated. I was equally clear in telling him of our firm position that we would give him help for self-help purposes only if he would pursue reforms and that they not conclude any special arrangements with Iran. I explained to him that an arrangement of this nature would immediately set off alarms here in our country. I think that was the gist of what we talked about. (C)

The President: That's very encouraging. Do you have the impression there was anything we could do to help him in the elections? I have to tell you frankly that unless we can announce START II or something special in the spring...; however, if the Russian people knew how much I wanted him reelected, it might actually hurt his chances. (C)

Chancellor Kohl: I do think it would help him, Bill, but we have to be very careful. I do not feel that any sort of public pressure would be helpful. When you go there in April, I do think you can do a lot of good, and I am more than ready to assist you in preparing for this visit in a discrete manner. I think we probably have the strongest influence over him, and he himself says it quite clearly. I am only saying this to you. I would not say it publicly, because people would be envious, stressful and distrustful. The basic problem we've seen everywhere is that they are increasingly showing an inferiority complex, having fallen from the exalted position of being a world power to where they presently are, which has caused a psychological reaction that was to be expected. In reality, they are deeply ashamed of the failure of the Russian soldiers and Army in Chechnya; this is just one of many examples. (C)

The President: Well, you've given us plenty to think about here. One thing I'm trying to do is minimize any disputes in other

areas that may come up between now and then, trying to be sensitive to his political needs. But it sounds to me like he is going to low-key the NATO thing in dealing with us, which I think is best for all concerned. (Ø)

Chancellor Kohl: Yes, Bill. It is clear. I said it to him clearly and unequivocally that we have to come to some sort of arrangement, and he has no veto. The more we stipulate any sort of radical conditions, the more difficult it will be to come down from those barricades and find reasonable arrangements. I think it is quite possible, by the end of the decade, that the Poles will be able to enter NATO. When I told this to the Polish Parliament last summer, they were enthusiastic, but now they want to be members by the end of this year, which is unrealistic. (Ø)

The President: We just have to be steady about it. You and I have to take the lead on this; we just have to be very steady. (Ø)

Chancellor Kohl: Yes, absolutely. I am not somebody who is always optimistic, but in this matter, I see a real chance, a real window of opportunity. One other thing we have to avoid is to create the impression in Moscow that if they resort to enhanced cooperation with China, this would get them out of a quandary. (Ø)

The President: I agree with that. I think we have to keep drawing them in, and be steady about it, but in a way to make Yeltsin look strong and not weak. (Ø)

Chancellor Kohl: Exactly. Bill, it's actually quite simple. I don't know if we will be successful in this course, but if we do not stay the course on this, I'm absolutely sure there will be failure. (Ø)

The President: I agree. I hope you are coming to see me in May. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Yes, I think we agreed. (U)

The President: I think May 23rd will be the date. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Oh, I was told it would be between May 15 and 19th. (U)

The President: I'll check on it. Our people will work it out. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: As you know, we can always have another phone call. (U)

The President: Yes, I think we should talk before I go to Russia. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Exactly, and if you feel the need, I can send Bitterlich to Washington. (U)

The President: All right. Thank you very much. (U)

Chancellor Kohl: Thank you and give my warmest regards to your wife. I will keep my fingers crossed about the election. (U)

The President: Thank you. I think it will be OK. (U)

Chancellor Kohl. Good bye. (U)

The President: Good bye. Auf weidersehn. (U)

-- End of Conversation --