

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: President's Discussion with Yeltsin on
Chornobyl, CTBT, ABM/TMD, CFE, G-7 vs G-8

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Yeltsin of Russia

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko
Notetakers: Deuce Martinez, Daniel Flessas,
Karen Dragone, James Goldgeier,
Carlos Pascual, Steve Pifer

DATE, TIME April 9, 1996, 8:05-8:45 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Hello, Boris? (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Hello. Good morning, Bill. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Good morning, Boris. I'm glad we could talk today. I'd like to begin by thanking you for your message on Ron Brown's death. He was a good friend and a valuable adviser. It has been a rough period for all of us here. Thank you for your good wishes and sympathies. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, I knew him quite well, and I'm expressing to you my personal condolences because I know he was a very good friend of yours. (U)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you. Secretary Christopher reported at length to me on his meeting with you. I appreciate your giving him so much time. It sounds like you and he and Minister Primakov laid the basis for a good meeting between us next week. (U)

I'm sending Strobe Talbott to Moscow to follow up. He's leaving tonight, and I understand you'll be seeing him on Thursday. He knows my latest thinking on all the issues between us. I thank you for seeing him as well. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Good. Well, by the way, I was wondering about your thinking on the Chornobyl nuclear power station. What do you think about it? (U)

~~SECRET~~

Reason: 1.5 (d)
Declassify On: X6

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 13526

2015-0782-M-1 (1.30)
3/13/2018 KBH

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think we should use the meeting next week to develop ideas on nuclear safety. Frankly, with regard to Chornobyl, I am interested in hearing your guidance. I would be interested in your thoughts on what would be most helpful to you and most productive in solving the problem. My basic approach is that we should balance concern for nuclear safety with the problems and promise of nuclear power. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: So, it looks like there will be a shortage of power in Ukraine if we fully close the Chornobyl power station. This will be a great tragedy for Kuchma. So, Bill, probably, we should not insert into the communiqué the idea of demolishing the station. Perhaps we can defer this issue until we meet next week. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I haven't discussed this here. I will take it up with my people. I do believe we need to have a good strong communiqué coming out of the meeting. But I'll discuss your concerns with my people. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay. Good. Yes. I think the communiqué will be strong, but regarding Chornobyl we are stumbling on that road. However, we firmly believe that we have to ban nuclear testing forever, that is, any testing of nuclear weapons. And we have to reflect this strongly in the communiqué. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I completely agree. I was very pleased by what you told Chris about your willingness to accept the Australian language on a zero-yield Comprehensive Test Ban. That will be a centerpiece of a successful summit -- and it significantly increases the chances of us getting a CTBT later this year. So that's very good news. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I do not have doubts in this respect and am firmly convinced that we have to do this. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Good. I wanted to mention a couple of other issues. First, as you and your people know, people have been putting a lot of pressure on me over the ABM Treaty. This is the cornerstone of our strategic relationship. I have resisted this pressure and will continue to do so. But one issue people are using to attack me is the lack of progress on the ABM/TMD issue. This is an issue we need to continue to make progress on. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, this goes without saying. I ask you to be very firm on this issue and that we stick together. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I have been firm on this issue and I will continue to be firm. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, I agree fully. (Ø)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I'd like to talk to you a moment about the CFE issue. My team that was in Moscow a few days ago came home pretty disappointed. They believe that your side is taking a position that guarantees a continuing stalemate, that would allow us to go into the spring and summer with Russia in noncompliance on an international treaty obligation. That is a problem in its own right. It also won't help our overall cause of promoting Russia's integration. (Ø)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I don't know who they have spoken to, but I have not given any instructions of this kind. We will act as we agreed. As you promised, you will give me leeway in the northeast and southern regions. We will have a temporary lifting of limits in these two regions. You understand that in the northwest we have pulled our forces from Germany and built houses for troops with German help last year and this year as well. The situation is better this year. (Ø)

Regarding the southern flank, as you know, we have begun pulling our forces to the borders of Chechnya as we put an end to our military operations there. When the situation is stabilized, we will begin pulling our forces from Chechnya itself. After this, I think the situation will become much better. (Ø)

In addition, I am going to visit China on the 25th, and we intend to agree on withdrawing forces, they and us, from our borders. This will also help us reduce conventional forces. (Ø)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: First, Boris, I appreciate what you have said in regard to what we talked about in Halifax and Hyde Park. The position of your negotiators is that you need more than we can offer. The proposal that we've made leaves you with considerable flexibility in the areas you said you needed. We have also worked hard since Vancouver to help you on the officer housing issue. (Ø)

I hope we can resolve the CFE issue before we meet. Secretary Christopher is writing to Primakov on this subject today, and Strobe will be in a position to talk about it further with your people on Thursday. I am pleased with your Chechnya plan. Your announcement made a big impression in this country. We will continue to negotiate. And, with the withdrawal of army groups in Chechnya, I hope this will allow us to close the gap and that we can make an all-out push to resolve the flank issue before we meet. That would be a big result for us. (Ø)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Well, things will go as we agreed. I will try to figure out who has invented our new positions. I don't

have a new position. I know only what we agreed to in Halifax.

(S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Great. I just want to mention one or two other things. It is very important to me that the meeting in Lyons be a success for you. Strobe will discuss my thinking with Primakov and you, if you want to talk. But my bottom line is that we want Moscow and Lyons to be a big success for you. We want to do it the right way and believe that we can do that. From what we hear and read, the election seems to be going well. I am following it closely. I am interested in how you feel and in your perspective. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I'll try to explain it now. But first, Bill, tell me one thing. I've been told you won't decide once and for all to determine the G-8 issue at Moscow and Lyons. Is this correct? (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I want to do everything I can to make the summit successful for you. We are working to expand your part. But I believe, and the others do, that timing is a problem. I have been more forthright with you than others on this issue. Because of the timing, there is no consensus for outright conversion from G-7 to G-8. (S)

All of us want to help you. But the truth is that we cannot go to a G-8 at Lyons. We want to be able to show Russian participation is expanding. We don't want a negative story coming out of Lyons. We want a positive story after Lyons about support for Russia and for you and your critical, expanding role within our framework. We can orchestrate the Lyons event in a way that makes the most of your presence. There is no consensus for change, but we want to repeat the fact that Russia's view is expanding and that Russia has made progress on the road to integration. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Well, Bill, the thing is that Helmut and Jacques Chirac have another opinion. They firmly believe that we have to complete the process in Lyons and record conversion to the G-8. Russia is following the right road, the democratic road, the road of market reform per Western standards. (S)

I understand there are doubts due to possible election results. You asked about the election process. Let me try to say something. The situation is becoming better; my rating is growing steadily, and Zyuganov's is declining. We are at approximately the same level. (S)

However, I have strong measures in reserve. My ratings will continue growing. I have been traveling throughout Russia. My

team is going throughout Russia to every house and apartment. The general situation is not bad. The mass media has stopped criticizing me -- and is even trying to support me, which will help me. As I said, I have traveled throughout Russia meeting with people. Their attitude is good and favorable. I'm not absolutely certain, but I'm more certain than I was one month ago. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: This is good news. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes. It's very important that I've managed to resolve these problems regarding the elections. I understand, but still, Bill, I'd like very much to have your support in Lyons. We have room to develop and make more steps toward democracy and human rights and Russia's place in the world. We can resolve remaining problems, and the mass media won't be able to criticize. The media is writing about these things now. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: The key thing for me is to have expectations aligned in a way that will make Lyons a big success for you. I have always supported you and Russia from the first time we met. I have always been forthright; it's part of what I owe you as a friend, and I have been forthright and honest from the beginning. I'll be in close touch with others. We should not have any negative stories coming out of Lyons, only positive stories for you right before the election runoff. I'm trying to set this up so that nothing negative will come out of Lyons. It has to be a hundred percent win for you. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I am very grateful to you Bill. I know your line of support regarding Russia and myself. I am grateful to you, and Russia is grateful. But let us not drop the subject of Lyons. Maybe we can discuss this with the other G-7 leaders. (S)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Fine. Thank you, Boris. Have a good day. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Thank you, Bill. Thank you, Bill, for calling me, and I understand your situation and am sorry about your loss. I'm glad your race is going well. (C)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you and good-bye, Boris. (U)

-- End of Conversation --