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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Russian
President Boris Yeltsin

PARTICIPANTS: President Clinton
Russian President Boris Yeltsin

Interpreter: Dimitri Zarechnak
Notetakers: Jim Smith, Pat O'Shaughnessy,
Jeff Rathke, Cindy Lawrence,
Ki Fort, Bill Courtney

DATE, TIME February 2, 1998, 9:31-9:51 a.m. EST
AND PLACE: The White House

THE PRESIDENT: Hello. (U)

PESIDENT YELTSIN: Hello, Bill. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Hello Boris. Thanks for taking my call, and let me begin by saying that I hope you had a great birthday yesterday. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Oh yes. Bill, I am really glad that we will talk now because we have not discussed things over the phone for quite awhile, although we have exchanged messages. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: I agree. I would like to talk to you about Iran and Iraq and prove once again that you and I, when we work together, can solve even the toughest problems. Before turning to Iraq, let me say I was encouraged at the report of the recent Wisner-Koptev meeting and Gore-Chernomyrdin call. I understand you have put in motion a series of specific steps to stop leakage of technology to Iran and to others. It's important that you and I show our peoples, including the Duma and Congress, that the United States and Russia are working together on this issue. It's critical to implement the agreements because Iran's missile program is moving ahead. I was especially pleased by Chernomyrdin's issuance of a new decree to

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control exports of dual technology items; I hope you'll be able to publish the decree text soon and follow it with strict enforcement measures that will send a very strong signal of Russia's commitment not to help Iran develop missiles. Ambassador Collins is talking to Foreign Minister Primakov's people about the next steps that will serve both of our interests, so we just need to stay on top of this and keep working on it. Now on Iraq. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Well, Bill, in order to sustain our interest we should meet more often. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I agree with that. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: So Bill, we could have a hastily arranged meeting somewhere at a crossroads or on the way to another meeting to discuss our serious problems. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: I will explore that, but I would like to talk about Iraq for a few minutes. I'm calling today primarily to discuss the situation in Iraq because we are really at a critical moment in our dealings with Saddam. I know Secretary Albright and Foreign Minister Primakov saw each other in Madrid on Friday and discussed this. I know you've talked to Jacques Chirac about this. I know we're all working so hard on this -- that's a positive development. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Saddam's restrictions of access make it impossible for UNSCOM to do its job anymore and that's alarming. In fact, it is his most serious challenge to UNSCOM since 1991. He is basically trying to destroy UNSCOM to protect his weapons programs and to get sanctions lifted prematurely. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Well, Bill you know, I sent my representative there a few days ago to Iraq, to Hussein and today I sent him again for a second time with my message. He had discussions with Hussein for one hour and thirty minutes. Hussein's position today is let's meet with Butler and discuss our problems. There will be no problems with UNSCOM's operation. Furthermore, he can agree on a number of presidential facilities to be surveyed. So this was their discussion. I warned him again seriously in my message that I, we will not let him blow up peace in the world, and he says he will be ready for further diplomatic negotiations. Now I understand that he is seriously frightened by this situation,

and he understands that the world powers can take extreme measures. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Boris, I think it is a good thing to press him on this. I have not given up on diplomacy, but it is very important that we maintain UNSCOM's fundamental integrity and effectiveness. A sham UNSCOM, or you might say a Potemkin UNSCOM, that's no better than no UNSCOM. We simply cannot allow Iraq to rebuild its weapons of mass destruction. And Boris, you know how dangerous little bits of VX and anthrax are. It is good you are pushing him. The more Saddam believes we're together on this, the more he believes in the possibility of force, the more chance diplomacy still might succeed, even though I am skeptical on this. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: You know that we will be ready to apply pressure on him every day and to keep our representative, Viktor Posuvalyuk, there on a daily basis. We want to pressure him into accepting our conditions. We are going to act until his mind is set correctly. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: What I want is for us to agree today to stay in the closest possible touch on this. If it looks as though we've run out the string on diplomacy, we will need to talk again. As for what we and our people say publicly, I am not going to pronounce the diplomatic track dead. I am going to express skepticism about it, but I will say the diplomatic track is still open, and I hope you will stop short of ruling out force if diplomacy fails. Let me say separately, I do support a significant increase in the oil-for-food mechanism and an improvement in the way it works. I think this shows we are working in good faith here, but we have to be firm on the possibility of using force. I know you talked to Jacques on a UNSC resolution. I personally don't believe we need a new resolution, but a "material breach" resolution could be useful if we got all members to agree. If we pass such a resolution, it will enhance the chance that diplomacy and your efforts will work because he will believe force will be used. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Of course, I understand you. Well, you know let's try it this way, Bill. We'll apply pressure and you will apply pressure and we will try to agree on a single text. It will be the text of us both. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: We will work on that. I hope we can have a major summit later this year, but in terms of another meeting,

let's leave that open and let our diplomatic efforts go forward. I am encouraged by this call, and we will keep working on this. (S)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Okay, very good. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Boris. Goodbye. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Goodbye Bill, and my best regards to your wife. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I will tell her you said hello and give my best to Naina. Bye, bye. (U)

(The President hangs up.)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: And we need to define when we meet again. Let Primakov and Albright discuss things and agree upon a month later this year. (Pause) Goodbye. (S)

-- End of Conversation --