

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Russian
President Yeltsin

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Yeltsin

INTERPRETER: Nikolai Sorokin
Notetakers: Joel Schrader, Jenny McGee,
Miles Murphy, and Doug Bayley

DATE, TIME June 13, 1999, 9:07 - 10:05 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Boris. Thank you for taking my phone call. (U)

President Yeltsin: Hello, Bill. (U)

The President: I think that we are at another important and promising moment in our partnership in Kosovo. We now have to work very hard to get a just and lasting peace there and for our militaries to work well together on the ground. I know that Al Gore talked with Prime Minister Stepashin yesterday about the difficulties in the last two days and our efforts to coordinate our roles in Kosovo. We need to take charge of the situation, both for the sake of our goals in Kosovo and so that we can show the world that we are working together. (S)

I understand that we have agreed on a short-term proposal to deploy forces together as soon as possible. This is an interim approach based on what you and I worked out for Bosnia. We know how that works, and it is the fastest way to get Russian and U.S. troops on the ground. Second, I know that Foreign Minister Ivanov has been working with Madeleine Albright and Strobe Talbott about some promising ideas to use next week to deal with the important and urgent outstanding challenges as well as solving our long-term problems in Kosovo. If we can get these ideas developed next week, we could have a very good meeting in Cologne, a week from today. (S)

~~SECRET~~

Reason: 1.5 (d)
Declassify On: 7/12/09

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 13526

2015-0732-M-2 (1.39)
3/13/2018 KBH

I believe we should instruct our foreign ministers and ministers of defense to meet as soon as possible and work out these arrangements and show that Russia and the U.S. can cooperate in Kosovo and play our respective roles to make this essential peace work. (S)

There is one more matter I need to raise. We need to resolve the issue of the airport at Pristina as soon as possible. I hope you will give orders to General Zavarzin to work this out today with General Jackson, the KFOR Commander. Otherwise, the story of the airport will overshadow everything we are doing to bring peace to Kosovo and to protect the Kosovo Serbs and Kosovar Albanians. It will become the whole story and could possibly undermine what we are doing there and the chance for Russia and the G-8 to have a great success in Cologne. (S)

President Yeltsin: Bill, I think that all three questions you have raised are only to be discussed among the two presidents. Namely, you and me. So we have the preliminary discussions among us, then we elaborate on this scheme. After we do that, we can give instructions to the group of generals. We can give instructions in the short term to elaborate on the final scheme, not the final scheme, but the one to be approved by us. Only when we approve that one will it become the final one. (S)

The President: Yes. As I understand it, I think we agree. As I understand it, our generals have worked out a short-term scheme to get us through the next few days, based on our operation in Bosnia. Then our ministers of defense will have to come up with a long-term plan, which we will approve. But we must have this short-term plan implemented immediately because we don't want a security vacuum to develop in Kosovo, especially because we have given our word that we will not let the KLA move in and take over any areas and frighten the Serbs who live there. It is important for me, Boris, as I know it is for you, to keep our word to the world community and protect all the citizens of Kosovo. We will have our ministers of defense and foreign ministers work on the short-term solution and bring it back to us for approval. (S)

President Yeltsin: Well, I have one more option. It is for us two to meet in some hiding place. Well, it is for you and I to meet either on a boat or some submarine or some island so not a single person will disturb us, so you will not be agitated by anyone, and I will not be agitated by anyone or any person. (S)

The President: But Boris, my impression is our people have to work this out. We can meet, you and I, but we have to have some idea of where we are going first. We've got to have this short-term solution worked out and the airport issue. Otherwise, if we meet, the world will think there's some major crisis between the two of us, not just that we are meeting about Kosovo. (S)

President Yeltsin: When you and I meet, nobody will think anything of it. People trust us. And that is why I think that this option is quite attractive and beautiful and very trustworthy for the world. (S)

The President: Let me ask you this. Since I have to leave the day after tomorrow to go to Europe anyway, let's tell our people, the generals, to have already worked out a short-term solution, based on our partnership in Bosnia, for the next 11 days, so there will not be a vacuum in Kosovo. Let's give them the orders to implement the agreement on the short-term solution. Let's tell them to work out the airport solution. (S)

You and I can go somewhere in the vicinity of Cologne, around the G-8, because you are leaving Russia, and anyway, I will be there. Otherwise, I will have to cancel something on this European trip and that will look like some big crisis to the world. So let's tell the generals to work out the short-term issue, the airport, and then you and I will meet on the long-term plan. We can go off from Cologne somewhere and do that. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, but this is not a very clear plan. We have to elaborate on this and have an absolutely clear, detailed plan, like the first item, the second item, the seventh item, the tenth item. (S)

The President: Yes, but we have to have a plan to deliberate on. That is why I think it is important for our ministers to meet and come up with a plan. We can't just make it up as we go along. (S)

President Yeltsin: Bill, you see, all we need is to have just one assistant for both of us. Not more than that, not the whole bulk of 20 people. Only one or two assistants and those have to be very smart professional people who know the case and should be the people who trust us and whom we trust. (S)

The President: Boris, let me be as clear as I can. I am prepared to meet, but I am not prepared to meet as long as we have this impasse at the airport and no short-term solution for the next ten days. I will not wreck all that we have worked for in Kosovo and create a security vacuum where the KLA can come back in, and meet under those circumstances. (S)

The whole world thinks something crazy is going on. We have got to work out these two things. Before this happened, Russia was the toast of the world. People were saying Russia is back, peace has been solved, and Russia played a major role. Now the view of Kosovo may be we can't get KFOR in, what is the KLA going to do, and there is a standoff at the airport. I have no intention of meeting under these circumstances. It is not good. All the credit Russia got is at risk of being lost, and we will have a disaster at Cologne, instead of a triumph for Russia.

(S)

We have to solve this first and then meet on the long-term issues. It is very important that Russia be seen as playing a major role in the peacekeeping operation. I have always done what I can to enhance the role of Russia. I have worked hard. I can't come to a meeting with these two issues outstanding, where it looks like we put peace in Kosovo on hold. It is not acceptable, and it is wrong. I am proposing three things. (S)

President Yeltsin: Bill, you and I, it is not for me to make arrangements. Without us nobody will make such arrangements, so let us agree we need to do something anyway whether you propose or let me propose, and you will agree, and then we need to have a discussion to narrow the gap and bring each other closer. (S)

The President: Boris, we can work out the long-term issue, but here is what it looks like to the rest of the world. Russia worked on a peace agreement with Ahtisaari. You and I were behind it. We made a peace agreement, and the UN endorsed it. The UN specifically provided for the introduction of the KFOR force and for implementation of this within the spirit of Rambouillet. That is what the UN said. Now it looks like, without any reference to that, Russia goes in and occupies the airport at Pristina and says, "We will stop the whole thing the UN said, and we are going to, even if it creates a vacuum and the KLA comes back in, instead of what we promised to do, we will move troops in immediately because we don't have everything worked out." (S)

Russia is going to stop this and wreck the peace. We were about to have at Cologne a celebration of Russia in the peace operation. Instead, we face day after day, international embarrassment that Kosovo will be wrecked. Our generals have already agreed on a short-term solution along the lines of our cooperation in Bosnia. We just need to get the operation up and going within Kosovo, and we need to work out this airport thing, and then you and I can meet in Europe and work out this long-term involvement of Russia. (S)

I want you to have involvement because it is important to give confidence to the Serbs in Kosovo. But if we go off and meet now and put this on hold, the whole world news will be about how Russia wrecked this, and the refugees can't come back, and you occupy the airport in Pristina. I don't think it is good for you, and it is not good for what we are trying to achieve, and it will be seen by the KLA as an open invitation to move into Kosovo and stir up trouble. They will completely lose any confidence that the world community wants to bring the refugees back. (S)

First, we need to tell our generals on the spot to resolve the airport, and second, resolve what is going to happen over the next ten days, based on what we did in Bosnia, and third, we ought to meet and work out the issue of the leadership of Russia during the peacekeeping operations. Otherwise, we are going to be in a terrible mess, which will destroy the credibility of the peace operation and do enormous damage to you and me. (S)

President Yeltsin: No, Bill, it will not work that way because we will find the people responsible and guilty of doing this. We will find those who initiated this whole thing. There is not such a person in the presidency, and we will find the one in the military who initiated this. Well, I propose for us to do the following, since the two of us are good friends and have always had very good relations. Let us take a day for a time out, a day for rest, and then on the basis of our conversation today, we will connect and talk tomorrow. We can arrange the particular time. We should arrange a phone conversation and continue our work, but in a more precise and concrete perspective. (S)

The President: Well, I would be happy to talk tomorrow. You know how much regard I have for you and how convinced I am we can always work out our differences, but I also believe it would be a good thing if our military commanders in Pristina can try to work out this airport issue because it is reaching the point

where instead of the triumph of our peace in Kosovo, the whole story is what is happening at the airport, and this is more about the problems of great countries than restoration of peace and the return of people to their homes. If today at least you can ask your general to meet with our general to work out this airport thing, I think that is very important. Otherwise, we can talk tomorrow about the other matters. (S)

President Yeltsin: Okay. Are your generals there? (S)

The President: General Jackson, the British general on the site, is the one we want to talk about it. General Zavarzin and General Jackson. (S)

President Yeltsin: Could you repeat the name of the general? (S)

The President: General Michael Jackson, the KFOR commander, and your commander there, General Zavarzin. (S)

President Yeltsin: Jackson. General Jackson. Can you repeat it and spell it out? (S)

The President: Jackson is our KFOR commander there, and I believe your general is Zavarzin. (S)

President Yeltsin: What is his name? Bill, could you repeat the last name of our general? (S)

The President: I don't care who. That is your choice, but I believe your general on the spot in Pristina is Zavarzin. (S)

President Yeltsin: Okay, now I have who you are talking about. So today we instruct them to work today, part of the night and part of the day tomorrow, and then they meet to report to us on the phone, let's say about five o'clock in the evening. (S)

The President: Okay. (U)

President Yeltsin: I didn't hear that, Bill. (U)

The President: Yes, that is fine. We should ask them to work today and report back to us in a few hours. (U)

President Yeltsin: So okay. Tomorrow at five o'clock in the evening your general reports to you, my general reports to me,

then one hour later we call each other and then decide on how our positions coincide. (S)

The President: Five o'clock your time. That is okay. (U)

President Yeltsin: Did we agree? (U)

The President: That is fine. I accept that. (U)

President Yeltsin: Okay, and we will tell the press we will continue our telephone conversation tomorrow. (U)

The President: Yes, that is good. (U)

President Yeltsin: Is it okay? (U)

The President: That is fine. Yes. (U)

President Yeltsin: Okay, then I am waiting. (U)

The President: Thanks, Boris. I will talk to you tomorrow. We will work this out. (U)

President Yeltsin: Yes, we will. We will anyway. (U)

The President: Goodbye. I will talk to you tomorrow. (U)

President Yeltsin: Goodbye, Bill. (U)

-- End of Conversation --