

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Russian
President Yeltsin (Ø)

PARTICIPANTS: President Clinton
Russian President Boris Yeltsin

Interpreter: Dimitry Zarechnak
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DATE, TIME October 30, 1997, 12:52 - 1:21 p.m. EST
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Good evening, Bill. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, Boris. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: I'm very glad to be able to talk to you on the phone. Thanks for making the call. You know, I started missing your voice. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: I miss you too. I'm a little hoarse today, hope you can hear me. Congratulations on your new grandson. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Thank you very much. I now have a big family -- eleven members, with five grandchildren. You know the development of Russia and my family go hand-in-hand. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Your family is certainly going to make its contribution. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Sure, why not. Well, it's not going to be a very significant contribution, but it will have an impact. I think we will prevail on quality rather than quantity.
(Laughter) How are things with you, Bill? (U)

THE PRESIDENT: I'm doing fine here. Jiang Zemin just left.

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PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, I know this and that must have been a very exciting moment. I hold in very high esteem his visit to your country, and I believe his visit is a breakthrough in terms of world politics. Also, I am planning to visit China on November 9. So we'll be able to synchronize our watches, you and I, as far as China is concerned. And what was your assessment of this visit? Was it good? (C)

THE PRESIDENT: I believe it's been very positive. I think it will help settle down opinions on China in this country and in the Congress, and we got a good agreement with them on nuclear cooperation. That was very important to me, so I think it was a positive meeting. I wish that...(interrupted) (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: This is a positive thing not only for you and the United States, but for Russia and the entire world. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: I think so. One of the funniest moments came yesterday during a press conference. A Chinese journalist asked me if I was concerned about your going to China and a closer relationship between Russia and China. And my answer was that during the Cold War, when Russia and China had problems, it made the United States happy, but now we all have to get along and work together because we have too many common challenges and opportunities. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Thank you for this assessment. I believe the cooperation you mentioned is intended to achieve the same objective that we share -- cooperation and peace are the two objectives we share, you and I. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Boris, I want to take just a few minutes to talk directly with you. I know you saw the Vice President in September and I had a good talk with Primakov in New York. It is important that we keep in personal contact. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Primakov told me about his meeting. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: It was good. I thank you for your invitation to come back to Russia next year after START II is ratified. I think we got a lot done in Helsinki and I want to chart a real course for the future. The Russian economy is doing better and I hope to get more U.S. investment in Russia in the future, and there's been other good news. I'm glad your people are more optimistic about ratification of CWC, and I wanted to ask you what you thought about prospects for the Duma ratifying START II

and your ideas on meetings next year. I'm looking forward to coming there next year. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Well, in the first place I want to thank you for the close attention you are paying to the problem, because I believe this is our common child and we have to bring it up together. And you know of course, that Mrs. Albright and Mr. Primakov signed several protocols related to ABM. So I don't think the Duma has any objections now about having the treaty ratified. But the only thing that is uppermost in its mind, and I think they would like to rush that thing, is approval of the budget for 1998. It helped a lot that Chernomyrdin and I got people from different factions of the Duma together and had very serious conversations with them, and as a result, most objections were cleared away. I believe that next week the budget will be approved and next on the agenda will be START II. (C)

On the subject of START III, I believe it's time to set up a joint working group of experts to start working on the text of the treaty. I think that we have first to determine the number of people we want on each side in the joint group and then we'll have to appoint heads of the two groups from each side, you and I. And I am not sure what you think about this, but I would think that if we could appoint Primakov and Albright as heads of the respective groups of experts of the two sides, then we'd have the appropriate level; and another thing, they have developed good rapport between themselves. If you find that agreeable, then we could release this to the press, even today. What do you think? (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Boris, for what I have to do here with our Congress, because we need their support for START III, we have to be it a careful in what we say, because we agreed not to begin actual negotiations of START III until START II was ratified. It might cause more problems if we say we will push other meetings now. I would recommend we tell the press that we are going to accelerate the experts' talks, and then let me talk to our people about your suggestion on how we should organize the working group. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Yes, understood, I get your point -- have to be careful not to have START III negotiation before we have START II ratification. This is the order that we agreed with you; first START II ratification, then proceed with work on START III. Also, not to lose time, we will not be engaged in actual (START III) negotiations, but the organizational aspects

of the problem -- we should set up the working group and name heads of that group. (C)

Currently I have developed good contacts with the state Duma and I have this feeling of confidence that the Duma will ratify the text of the START II treaty. We could discuss at this point the size of the membership of each expert group -- let's say eighteen on each side, sixteen total -- and appoint as heads Albright and Primakov, no negotiations. Now this is an organizational thing, it will take some time to complete. In the meantime, START II could be ratified. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Great. (U)

Boris, there is one other specific matter I need to raise. I have a letter on its way to you about Iranian ballistic missiles. If Iran gets them, it will be dangerous for Russia and destabilizing for the Middle East and Europe. This is a real test for us. I took to heart your assurance you are working hard to stop the flow, but I believe we have to do more. I made some specific proposals in the letter that I hope you will consider seriously. (C)

I also believe it is important that the next round of talks between Ambassador Wisner and Mr. Koptev take place as soon as possible; I heard there is a delay in the dates, and I hope we can fix that. This has become an urgent question here, and I'm fighting off irresponsible efforts in Congress that would be detrimental to what we're trying to do together. So I hope you'll read the letter and get back to me on the specific suggestions. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: (Interrupts the translation midway through, just at reference to the President's letter) No, Iran is not going to get any missiles from us, there is no way they can get them. I know you have full trust and confidence in Wisner just as I have full trust in Koptev. We are ready to cooperate, to accept here a group of your experts. We will be giving them full access to our archives and all other documents, and they'll be most welcome here to do work and research. There will be no obstacles on our side. We want the group here. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: I understand you are doing all you can and there will be no missiles. Your assurances are most important. We're still concerned about related technology transfers. I'll send you the letter and Wisner and Koptev will work through it. We'll work through it. (C)

you the letter and Wisner and Koptev will work through it. We'll work through it. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Good, Bill, agreed. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say Hillary is really looking forward to her trip to Russia. She is going to visit your home town and hopes Naina is going to join her there. Hillary wants her trip to highlight for the American people how much reform and change are taking place throughout Russia under your leadership. She is very excited about the trip and I only wish I could be there with her. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Thank you for these kind words and please give my warm regards to Hillary. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Boris. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Bill, there is one more thing I want to clarify. Are we in agreement or not that we will set up a working group of experts to work on START III? Are we going to do that now or not? (C)

THE PRESIDENT: I think that we ought to do that, if we can say we are going to explore all aspects, lay the groundwork toward as much mutual understanding as possible. But in this country, it would cause a lot of problems if I seemed to be negotiating START III before START II is ratified. If we can characterize the work of the working group as something other than negotiating the treaty then it will be all right. As long as we can set it up without making it look like we are actually negotiating, I think we're OK. (C)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Ok, so I understand it this way: we will first push in a very vigorous way for early ratification of START II, then also promptly proceed with setting up these working groups on START III. (C)

THE PRESIDENT: That's great Boris, thank you. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Thank you. It's been very pleasant for me to have this opportunity to talk to you on the phone, and I'm looking forward to our next meeting. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Me too. I can't wait to see you, and if you ever want to talk to me, any time day or night, I'm always glad to talk to you. (U)

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PRESIDENT YELTSIN: And of course we'll have lots of things to discuss when we meet. And a hug for Mrs. Clinton once again. I've been remiss as far as initiating telephone calls and conversations from my side. I'll make it up to you. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: Great, Boris. Good-bye friend. (U)

PRESIDENT YELTSIN: Good-bye. (U)

THE PRESIDENT: See you, good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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