

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Russian President Boris Yelstin

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Russian President Yeltsin

NOTETAKERS: Jenny McGee, Robert Ford, Joel Ehrenreich,
and Sean Tarver

DATE, TIME December 31, 1999, 09:02-09:22 p.m. EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Boris? (U)

President Yeltsin: Hello, Bill? How do you do, Bill? (U)

The President: I'm fine. I just wanted to call you today. I know this has been a tough but courageous decision. I just wanted to say I read your statement this morning. I'm sad, but I am very proud of you. You have guided your country through a historic time and you are leaving a legacy that will leave Russians better off for years to come. I want you to know that we will work with Putin and the Russian people as they make their choice for the next democratically elected president, and you can be proud that you created a constitution that works and that it continues to guide this transfer today. (Ø)

I know that the democratic changes you led made it possible for Russia to be integrated into the international community. I was very proud when Russia joined the G-8, and I am proud of the work we did on arms control and other issues. I know we didn't finish everything we wanted to do on arms control, but we set the framework at Cologne, and I will continue to work with Putin on these objectives. (Ø)

Boris, I believe that historians will say you were the father of Russian democracy and that you worked to make the world a safer place, and I wanted you to know that Hillary and I are thinking of you and Naina. Thank you very much for all the times we have spent together and all the work we have done together. (Ø)

President Yeltsin: Thank you, Bill, for the very kind words, for the sincerity that you expressed to me now. Of course, this was not an easy decision for me, and you, as no one else, can

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understand that. But I want to support Putin 100 percent and now I've given him three months, three months according to the constitution, to work as president, and people will get used to him for these three months. I am sure that he will be elected in the forthcoming elections; I am sure about that. I am also sure that he is a democrat, and that he is a person with a big soul, and that he is very strong and very intelligent and, on many occasions, I had a chance to know that myself. (C)

Together with you, we did a lot to strengthen Russian-American cooperation. Thanks to our interaction, our personal efforts, and our contacts, we managed to overcome emerging problems. Of course, I will help Putin with everything, in all areas. Of course, he needs international experience. He needs international contacts, and I will, of course, help him with that. I will go with him. I will fly on board the plane. I will meet with you and him in order to transfer the viewpoint of Russia on different questions. And, of course, this will be done without breaking away from democracy, from pursuit of a market economy, from everything we managed to agree with you on, which includes the reduction of armaments and the issue of chemical weapons. (C)

Of course, it is not very easy, and you understand it very well. Particularly, I have always been criticized that I am just trying to keep a grip on power. This proves that I have not just tried for power. If it is necessary for Russia, if it is necessary for democracy, I am able to sacrifice this half a year of presidential rule. And, of course, I will make use of what you just told me and, if I find myself in America, I will drop by at your place and, together, we will be able to remember all that we managed to achieve together, and we can discuss those questions of mutual interest to us. (C)

And I want to tell you, Bill, that on the seventh, I will leave for Bethlehem in order to celebrate the bicentennial of Christianity, and this will also be a very important event. During this period, formally I will not be president, but I will be recognized as president, and I will try to put on the table something to make a contribution to the settlement in the Middle East. (C)

I am very glad I was your friend, and I will continue to be your friend. I am very glad that Hillary and Niana had a very good relationship. I think that it should be continued. (C)

The President: It will be continued. (U)

President Yeltsin: But, as for the rest, the President is President, and he is supposed to perform his duties. Putin is a

strong person and he will be able to cope with the task he has. And that was what I wanted to tell you and thank you very much, Bill. Thank you for this telephone call, which you made by your own initiative. I appreciate it very much, Bill. And I think that Russia should enter the third millennium with new politicians who are intelligent and strong, dynamic people. It is so and it will be like that. And, Bill, I would like to congratulate you and Hillary on the New Year and express my gratitude to you that you wished this happy New Year to Naina and myself. Thank you very much. (C)

The President: Thank you, Boris. (U)

President Yeltsin: And I embrace you cordially. You should believe me, it was done for Russia, for the sake of Russia, for its future. I would like from the bottom of my heart to embrace you. I want you to continue the celebration of Christmas and the New Year, because the New Year will come to our country in a few hours. All the best to you, Bill. I embrace you most cordially and I hope we will meet each other in the not too distant future. Okay, Bill. (C)

The President: Thank you, Boris. It is good to hear you sounding so strong and chipper and brave, as always. I can't wait to see you, and I promise to be a good partner with Putin. (C)

President Yeltsin: That is very good and very important. That is what I had in mind. (C)

The President: Great. Good bye Boris. Happy New Year. (U)

President Yeltsin: Okay, Bill. Good bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --