

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: President's Discussion with Yeltsin on
Bosnia, Chechnya

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Boris Yeltsin of Russia

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko
Notetakers: Steve Pifer, Katherine
O'Loughlin, Kenneth Baldwin
and Mary Canty

DATE, TIME July 28, 1995, 10:35-11:19 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Boris? (U)

President Yeltsin: Bill? Good afternoon. (U)

The President: It's nice to hear your voice. You sound strong.
I hope you're feeling well. (U)

President Yeltsin: Well, I'm out of the hospital and restoring
my energy in a sanatorium near Moscow. (U)

The President: You looked good in your July 18 interview. I
hope you continue to make a speedy recovery. (U)

President Yeltsin: Well, I have good genes and a very strong
organism, so hopefully my rehabilitation will be quick. (U)

The President: I tell everyone you are as strong as a Russian
bear. That's what I tell everyone. I have been saying that you
will recover quickly. (U)

President Yeltsin: Thank you, Bill, for the kind words. (U)

The President: I wanted to talk to you for a few minutes about
Bosnia, but I don't want to take away too much time from your
convalescence. I'd like to share a few observations, and then
I'd like you to respond. (U)

President Yeltsin: I'm ready, Bill. (U)

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The President: As you remember in early 1994 when we worked together on this situation, we stabilized things and there were several months when the safe areas were more or less protected. Unfortunately, things have fallen apart again. Srebrenica and Zepa fell, which the UN was supposed to protect. No action was taken because UN forces were afraid of being taken hostage. It is still clear that there will be no lasting solution until a political solution is reached that takes account of the legitimate interests of all of the parties. (S)

I was very pleased with the reports from Kozyrev's visit to Belgrade. He heard some interesting and hopeful proposals from the Serbs. If they follow through, this might help get us back on the negotiating track -- which is where both of us want to be. (S)

But no real peace is possible unless and until the Bosnian Serbs stop attacks against safe areas. NATO is not eager to bomb; the new warnings from NATO are intended to deter the Bosnian Serbs from further attacks on Gorazde and other safe areas and to restore the credibility of the UN mission, which is badly damaged in this country and throughout the world. (S)

If we are going to get these talks back on track, two things must happen. First of all, the Bosnian Serbs must end their threats to all safe areas and permit humanitarian aid to get in. I welcome the assurances made to Kozyrev that the Bosnian Serbs claim to accept this. But they've broken their promises before and you need to hold them to this one if you can. (S)

Secondly, the Bosnian Serb proposal for a cessation of hostilities can't be pursued in isolation. The only way it will work is if it is part of a package deal, with the cessation of hostilities linked to a Serb agreement to negotiations based on the Contact Group plan. Otherwise the Bosnian government will simply see the cessation of hostilities as a trap. I think we should ask Kozyrev and Christopher to follow up and see if we can move forward along these lines. (S)

I understand your opposition to military action. And we would prefer that the NATO warning and the cautions Kozyrev gave in Belgrade persuade the Bosnian Serbs to cease the attacks. But if they keep breaking promises, NATO will have to respond decisively. (S)

I believe our approach and yours are complementary, as they were in 1994. Against the backdrop of NATO's warning, Russian diplomacy and your very good proposal to deploy peacekeepers in Gorazde could really improve the chances of bringing the Bosnian Serbs back to the negotiating table. That's what we have to do.

I believe the only way we can keep the situation from falling apart and further damaging the UN, U.S. and Russia is by working together. As you know, our Congress is trying to pull me in one direction, while the Duma is pushing you in the opposite direction. We have to resist the pressure to pull us apart, like we did in 1994. I wanted you to hear this directly from me and to be sure we understand one another's concerns and positions. I'd like to hear from you now. (C)

President Yeltsin: Bill, I understand your position perfectly well. I understand your position as you understand mine. That's why it's very easy for us to talk. That's why I sent Kozyrev and the deputy defense minister to Belgrade, to hand over my personal message to Milosevic. Kozyrev insisted that General Mladic, who effectively controls the Bosnian Serb troops, also take part in the meeting. (C)

Preliminary agreements were reached with Milosevic and Mladic. Little by little the Bosnian Serbs showed realism about the situation and openly promised no military action against Gorazde. We are prepared to send our peacekeepers there, 200 to 300 soldiers, so the Bosnian Serbs won't attack Gorazde. They also promised to open a road to Sarajevo for humanitarian aid and promised to decrease other military actions. They promised to get down to the negotiating table and sign an agreement on the cessation of hostilities. (C)

If everything goes according to this plan and there are no provocations by the Muslims or Croats, Milosevic will come to Moscow and we can record this in a protocol or a formal agreement. If you recall Bill, the recent aggravation of the situation the last time was due to Muslim provocation, when they launched an attack with 20,000 army troops. (C)

I have also another concern that relates to the Bihac problem. The problem is that the Croatian forces are carrying out activity in the enclave which aggravates the situation more. I mentioned in my letter that, if the Croatians launch a full-scale attack, we won't be able to convince the Serbs to stop. I ask you to contact Tudjman. Maybe you, Kohl or the appropriate person should take action to make sure the Croats stop; otherwise our efforts will fail, and there will be widespread conflict. (C)

I want to say a couple of words concerning the Bildt document, which provides for the suspension of some sanctions on Serbia in exchange for the recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Because you know it would be an important document, especially considering the fact that Milosevic and Mladic promised to get rid of Karadzic if he gets in the way of this process. My meeting in this context with Milosevic would be useful, a convincing fact

based on the results of the Kozyrev negotiations in Belgrade. We know Milosevic has influence with the Bosnian Serbs. (C)

I understand your proposals and realize yours and mine constitute two pages of one and the same document. We have reached agreements with them and will work toward others. If they fail and they don't keep their word, then we will be forced to take your option. But I hope you understand well the position of the Duma and public opinion with regard to a military options for resolving the situation. So that's basically what I wanted to say. We are working in one direction, and I agree it is mutually complementary. (C)

The President: First, I want to thank you for all you've just said. I am very encouraged; it is clear we can work together, in the hope of making some progress. I would like to mention three specific points in response to what you have said. (C)

First, regarding Bihac, I share your concern. Both Kohl and I cautioned the Croats to exercise restraint and avoid a wider war and to respect UN peacekeepers. Here's the problem, the Croatian Serbs inserted 10,000 troops near Bihac into the fight. Tudjman was afraid it would fall, so he sent troops. Bihac is a safe area protected by a UN resolution and a previous NATO commitment. He is afraid that, if Bihac falls, all other arrangements will fail. We will continue to urge restraint, but it would help if you could encourage the Serbs to pull back. (C)

Two, now on the Bildt package, we are prepared to keep working on it within the Contact Group, but we still have some reservations. I'm afraid Serbia could recognize Bosnia, get sanctions lifted but still have nine months to pour economic and military support to the Bosnian Serbs in a way that will stop the peace process and encourage a wider war. (C)

President Yeltsin: Bill, not all sanctions, but only part, will be lifted. This will give Milosevic hope that, if he behaves in the right manner and keeps his word, all sanctions will be lifted. (C)

The President: I understand and am prepared to keep working. But I wanted you to understand my reservations. (C)

President Yeltsin: OK, good. (C)

The President: Let me make one final point. You are correct when you say the Serbs took Srebrenica and Zepa after the Muslims launched an offensive in central Bosnia, but the Muslims did it only after months and months of the Serbs refusing to enter negotiations on the basis of the Contact Group plan. Earlier

this year, the Serbs said they wanted 53 percent, not 49 percent, of the land, but there is nothing to say that they can't negotiate for more after they enter the peace process. (S)

This is crazy to have all of this killing and international trauma going on in a small country for only four percent of the land. We have to get them negotiating under the Contact Group. They still can negotiate for more land. It's not worth all the hell that's going on. We have to get them talking. (S)

President Yeltsin: I agree. (S)

The President: Thank you and let me also say the news on Chechnya is encouraging. Keep pushing ahead, you seem to be doing well, and we are very supportive. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, thank you, Bill. The negotiating group has made a little break for three days. Military hostilities have stopped in Chechnya. Only one item remains outstanding. I personally invited all of the members of the negotiating group to come to my place to talk. On our side we did everything we could to come to an agreement, but the Chechen side recently started thinking differently. But I'm sure we'll work it out. One more thing, the Constitutional Court has made known its opinion on my decree on Chechnya. The vote was 12 to 6, they said it was legal and doesn't go against the constitution. My decision was within the framework of the constitution and of a single state. (S)

The President: Thank you, that sounds great. We may need to talk again in a few days. I hope everything goes well with your recuperation. (S)

President Yeltsin: Thank you very much Bill. We can call each other in a few days. We have to follow events in the area closely to see what the Serbs do. One more thing, I heard you would like in October -- when we meet in New York for the UN anniversary -- that I could make a brief stop in Washington, not an official visit, but just a working visit. Is this true? (S)

The President: We are just trying to work out the dates. (S)

President Yeltsin: OK, that's great. Thank you very much. I hope to hear from you soon. (U)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

President Yeltsin: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --