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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon With President Ulmanis of Latvia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Ulmanis
Interpreter: Alvin Skipsna
Notetakers: Anne Davis Alexander,
Neil Bleicken, and Paul Hughes

DATE, TIME January 20, 1994; 1:04pm - 1:25pm, EST
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Hello. (U)

President Ulmanis: Hello? (U)

The President: This is President Clinton. (U)

President Ulmanis: I am very pleased to hear your voice. (U)

The President: I wanted to call and discuss with you the useful and productive discussions I had with President Yeltsin in Moscow on troop withdrawal from Latvia. (U)

President Ulmanis: I am very grateful for your call. I am very pleased with your call, especially since, with this great natural catastrophe in California, you could find time to call me. I want to express to you my great sympathy for the many who were hurt or killed in the catastrophe. I was especially concerned because so many Latvian-Americans live in the area. We are following the situation very closely and congratulate you for doing so well. And now I am ready to listen to what you have to say to me. (U)

The President: Thank you very much. Thank you for your concern for our people. I'm sure Foreign Minister Andrejevs has already reported on his contact with Secretary Christopher. Our discussion of the troop withdrawal from Latvia focused on the Skrunda radar facility. President Yeltsin agreed to compromise on the number of years his forces would remain at Skrunda after the main withdrawal. He agreed to split the difference between his proposal and yours, amounting to a four year occupancy followed by an 18 month period for dismantlement of the structure. I know this is a difficult political question for you, but I hope you can support it as it has the full political support of President Yeltsin and his government. Your ambassador here said there was some interest in sending a high level delegation here to discuss this and I would welcome this.

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I would like to say a word on the Russian minority in Latvia because there may be some confusion on our position. President Yeltsin did raise this issue during our Skrunda discussions. This is a sensitive issue for President Yeltsin. We have made it clear to the Russians that there is no linkage between minority rights and troop withdrawals, and we make no such linkage ourselves. I told President Yeltsin that we are committed to minority rights around the world, and we would consult with the CSCE mission in Latvia, which has minority rights under its mandate. As I told you in New York in September, we don't believe the Russians in Latvia or any other Baltic state are subject to human rights abuses. We discussed instead their political and social involvement in your society, a process I think we all support. (S)

But the point I wanted to make to you today is that the United States doesn't link these two and didn't make any commitments to Russia beyond consulting the CSCE mission in Latvia as part of their regular work. The key issue on troop withdrawal is the Skrunda issue. If we can solve this, President Yeltsin has told me that they are ready to sign the agreement. (S)

President Ulmanis: May I raise a couple of problems? (U)

The President: Sure. (U)

President Ulmanis: There could be an alternative to the delegation you mentioned. We have heard of a meeting in Oslo. We would also be very pleased if the United States would be willing to send high-level representatives to Latvia. It would be an alternative that would allow them to observe the situation on the spot. The question of four years plus 18 months presents a problem because the government has exhausted its [political] resources and would need to make a survey amongst the population. The question is not so much the time of occupancy on Skrunda as guarantees that the agreement would be honored so we can then inform the public. (S)

The President: I understand. (U)

President Ulmanis: This is basically a Latvian-Russian problem. Your call is most helpful. The call is very important to us to help inform us of your position and help us carry out our conversations on Russia. Are you familiar with the latest announcement of Foreign Minister Kozyrev? (S)

The President: Yes I am, and he assured us that that reflects no change in their position, and he is still committed to withdrawal. The Russians are trying to downplay the press reports and claim the press has exaggerated these remarks from what I said about Russian support in Georgia to keep Shevardnadze in. (S)

President Ulmanis: After seeing Mr. Kozyrev's original text, I think the press reports were not so much of an exaggeration, because his remarks were not that beneficial to the Baltics. Our

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impression of his statement was that your effort on our behalf in Russia was not that much of a success. May I assume, from this call, that this was not the case? (C)

The President: Absolutely. We discussed withdrawal from the Baltics and focused on the Latvian issue because Russia seemed most eager in getting it done to sign an agreement. I explained to President Yeltsin that this is an important issue to me personally and the United States government that they continue and complete their troop withdrawal from the Baltics. (C)

President Ulmanis: I would like to express the warning that, in its relations to Latvia, Russia has not always been entirely correct. They look on us as if we were still part of their country. This causes great unease. If, in your future discussions, you can make the point that we are an independent country, that would be very helpful. I predict...I warn, there could be provocations in Latvia designed to provoke a response between the two countries that could draw Latvia back into the Communist orbit. I will do my best to urge restraint on our side. If there could be an effort to speak to the Russians not to overreact to the provocations but show understanding and restraint, that would help. (C)

The President: I understand. I will follow up with our people on the meeting in Oslo, and I will make clear exactly the point you just made during our next meeting with the Russians. (C)

President Ulmanis: Mr. Clinton, is it all right with you if inform the public in Latvia about our conversation? (U)

The President: Yes, I think it's okay to say we had a conversation. I hope you would be careful about what we said, simply saying I spoke with President Yeltsin on Latvia, and we agreed that if he could resolve the Skrunda issue the withdrawal question could be resolved. If you would say that, that would be okay. (C)

President Ulmanis: I understand that I should not detail every part of the conversation. I would like, specifically, to refer to your statement that there should be no linkage between the troop withdrawal and the human rights issue. (C)

The President: It's okay to say we don't link the two issues but also that we support the CSCE mission there. (C)

President Ulmanis: I would like to thank you for the conversation. I am an optimist and believe that the problems of Latvia and the Baltic States will not grow into a problem for the whole world. (C)

The President: I just want to try to resolve this in your best interest. I want you to be fully independent and will work to that end. (U)

President Ulmanis: Thank you very much for your call, bye. (U)

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The President: Thank you very much, goodbye. (U)

(The President dropped out of the call)

President Ulmanis: (to the interpreter) Is the call all over?
(U)

Interpreter: Yes. (U)

President Ulmanis: How do you think it went? (U)

Interpreter: What was your impression? (U)

President Ulmanis: I feel it went extremely well. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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