

THE WHITE HOUSE
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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President of Russia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Putin

Interpreter: Kyrill Borissow

Notetakers: Deana Sutliff, Sean Tarver,
Frank Jarosinski

DATE, TIME: September 30, 2000, 3:04-3:38 PM EDT,
AND PLACE: Residence

The President: Hello? (U)

President Putin: Hello. (U)

The President: Hello, Vladimir. Thank you for taking the call.
(U)

President Putin: Good afternoon to you, Bill. I'm happy to hear
your voice. (U)

The President: I just wanted to talk to you for a minute about
Yugoslavia. (U)

President Putin: With pleasure. (U)

The President: I know this is a difficult and delicate moment,
but I just wanted to say it seems to me since virtually everyone
accepts the fact that the opposition won the election and they
are now opposed to a second round of voting, because they believe
it gives Milosevic time to manipulate the balloting and,
possibly, create instability in Montenegro. I think the best
thing to do is to try to get Milosevic to leave, but I think
you're the only person who can do that. (U)

I know it's a difficult situation for you, but what I would
encourage you to do is that you send him a private message, not a
public one, urging him that you wish him to leave and making
clear that Russia will support the will of the people. I think

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publicly you should say that. It seems to me we have a choice between a violent and peaceful transition. The only country in the world who can play a decisive role in this is Russia because they know they need to turn to you after all this is over to continue to have a solid relationship. (C)

President Putin: Bill, we are aware of the fact that your country experts and think-tanks are working on it thoroughly and weighing each step that needs to be taken. But I want you and me to have a frank discussion about it -- absolutely frank. And what I tell you won't need any further verification. We've been acting absolutely to the point on the agreements that were reached in Okinawa -- in absolute conformity with them. The question here is a form and message of Kostunica and coordination of our efforts. Most likely, Milosevic gets the sense of our position. (C)

I have already had a conversation with Schroeder, and you will be the second person to learn this information. I suggested we have a meeting in Belgrade between one of our decision-makers like the National Security Advisor or the Minister of Foreign Affairs and opposition representatives, but he [Kostunica] declined such a meeting. So he declined contact with us, but we will basically let you know our position. We already let him know our position in no uncertain terms that we don't want to be cornered or be in a position to support especially non-democratic solutions to the situation. (C)

I want it to be clear on the point that we are not deviating from any avenue of approach to cooperation with you as our partner. But I wanted you to know that the time is right for him to leave the scene. I am not sure he will do so. And trying to analyze the situation, we think what might be productive and fruitful is the following. (C)

Today the opposition, for all practical purposes, has rejected the second round of elections. In our opinion, this is a blunder. If they don't run a second round of elections, then the Milosevic side will be the only uncontested side, so he [Kostunica] will leave the scene, and Milosevic will win the election. (C)

Now if the opposition tries and goes for the second round, if the opposition tries to run the second round, they stand every chance to win. Why? Because Montenegro has not voted yet, and there is a group of people who voted for other candidates. They will vote for him. He has a 100 percent chance to win. Milosevic would only have one chance left for him, that is fraudulent election results, whether he is trying to resort to that action, nobody can say for sure or guarantee that he will not. (C)

But what could we do? If we were to pursue, it would indicate very clear support on our behalf to the opposition. We could invite the leader of the opposition to Moscow. Then Ivanov, our foreign minister, would meet him here. I could probably have a conversation with him over the phone as well. While he would be here in Moscow, he could state that he is prepared to run a second round of negotiations, provided that Milosevic would allow verification, and maybe even international observers, both at the level of the polling stations and the count of the vote. That position would find absolutely official and clear-cut support on our side. (C)

However, should Milosevic reject such a position, then in no uncertain terms we will take a position of condemning his actions. The very fact of the opposition leader visiting Moscow and having talks at the top level here would demonstrate our very clear support for him and would probably add five to seven percentage points to his favor. I think we have nothing to lose in such a position, but the gains are very clear. I would like to underline again on our part in all quarters this would be regarded as very clear and unambiguous support to the opposition. (C)

While we are certainly in touch with the opposition, they are telling us that a recount of the first round of elections has to be carried out. We would certainly be willing to participate and have some impact on it, but I very much doubt we would come up with positive results in that scenario. We certainly jointly could come up with some ideas and take some actions. The only apprehension I have is that we are losing time for preparation for the second round of elections. Milosevic is not wasting time and is getting ready for the second round. (C)

Well, I certainly am not trying to push anybody here with any ideas, but this is simply our vision, our analysis. At the same time, why don't we really try to exert pressure on Milosevic again. The only apprehension again is that we probably would be dragging our feet and losing time here. This is our perspective, Bill. (C)

The President: Let me say, I completely understand your position, and the only thing that bothers me about it is that the opposition believes they have evidence that he essentially defrauded voters in the first round, that he got rid of 600,000 votes. And they believe he will use this period before a runoff election to arrange to steal it again. I think that's what they are worried about. (C)

President Putin: Bill, can I insert a couple of words here? (U)

The President: Sure. (U)

President Putin: Please, could you look into the proposal? I will again give you the gist of it. The leader of the opposition is going to visit Moscow. And he will say that he will reconsider his position with regard to the second round of elections, provided Milosevic gives access to opposition and/or international observers both to polling stations and the counting of the vote. Whether this will 100 percent guarantee against fraud, I don't know. But his experts are going to say they will verify it, the opposition will be involved, and we can then express our position that this is going to be a democratic and fair election. (C)

Then if Milosevic were to reject such a proposition, it would give an opportunity for the opposition to reject the second round position and for us to explain our position in no uncertain terms again. (C)

The President: So you believe if you invite him and he accepts it, it would send a clear signal of support for fair elections and that you don't have a problem with him becoming President? (C)

President Putin: Absolutely. I can also tell you something that might happen, if he were indeed to come to Moscow. He would be invited by the Chairman of the Committee of International Relations of the State Duma. Then he might say that he was seeking consultations with our foreign minister, and Ivanov would receive him. During his stay, I would talk to him over the phone. Then during his stay, we would come up with a statement where we would say we support his position that the opposition should have access to the vote count. (C)

The very fact of this arrival in Moscow would show our support and add five to eight percentage points to his vote and provide qualitative changes to his candidacy. We will not allow his opponents to speculate about his so-called special relationship with Moscow, which is, incidentally, no impediment in parallel to trying to exert pressure over Milosevic along the lines you just mentioned in this telephone conversation. (C)

The President: Let me ask you this. I do think this has merit, unless it just gives time for Milosevic to steal the elections. But I want to ask you another question. How are we going to get him out of there? (C)

President Putin: You mean remove him? (C)

The President: Yeah, is he afraid to leave office? (C)

President Putin: I think I can have a word with him and relate to him that the international community will not hold this against him and there will be no action against him. But I would like to discuss this further and think this needs to be explained to him again. (C)

The President: But would he be able to stay in Serbia? Would they let him go somewhere else? (C)

President Putin: I think it would be better if he stays in Serbia. (C)

The President: Yeah, me too, but I just don't know what the climate is there. (C)

President Putin: Frankly, I don't know, of course, but maybe he would want to leave. It's a possible move on his part, but I don't know. We don't want such a gift. Why don't we send him to America? (C)

The President: Yes, I know what you mean. Let me think about this. The only thing I'm worried about is that later on we don't want to look like we were duped into helping him steal the election. I also wouldn't put it past him for an excuse for him to impose martial law so we have to encourage the military not to go along with it. If he wanted to invade Montenegro, that's another excuse to put the election off. The big problem is -- (C)

President Putin: [Interrupting] I believe you are right that such a danger indeed exists. However, I would think that if the opposition leader were to come here and Russia would express its position in no uncertain terms, that Milosevic would not dare such a plan or an action on his part. (C)

The President: Well, I agree that it would be harder. You could make it hard for him to steal the election. (C)

President Putin: Well, like I said, certainly we can't guarantee this 100 percent, but what we can do is place demands on him and if he doesn't comply, then the opposition will be more justified in deciding not to go for the runoff elections. We will be able to say, yes, the demands of the opposition are well-justified. That would go absolutely in conformity with our own domestic political position. In our elections, the opposition would be present at all stages of the elections, including counting of the votes. (C)

The President: That would certainly help if you'd say that. (C)

President Putin: However, all of this does not exclude what you referred to at the beginning, and we are now our part and will try to work on him in this direction. At the same time, I have to be frank -- I personally doubt that even talking to him in such a direction will result in him voluntarily agreeing to a recount and retiring. I believe there is no chance for that. (C)

At the same time, the very fact of the arrival of the opposition leader in Moscow would in no way be an impediment to such an approach. In fact, it would likely reinforce the likelihood of international verification and monitoring. If Moscow will determine its position, all of that would be in hand, the issue to which you have referred to at the beginning of the conversation (C)

The President: I think that's possible. I believe if he comes there, that will discourage Milosevic a little and at least increase the chances that he will step down. (C)

President Putin: Well, as a matter of fact, Kostunica has told me they will try again to convince Milosevic that there is a need for a recount, but it seems to me this will be a futile exercise. (C)

The President: Well, he's trying to hang on. (C)

President Putin: He sure is. (C)

The President: Okay, let me think about this. I may want to call you again, but I'm encouraged at least by what you said here. I think it is important that he knows Russia will not let him get away with stealing the elections. (C)

President Putin: It is important that he should not be able to use it as an ace and try to speculate with our position. It's important that everybody in Yugoslavia gets a clear picture of what our position is. That is important. (C)

The President: All right. Let's see what we can do and stay in close touch. (C)

President Putin: Thank you, Bill. Yes, over here we will engage on this a little bit, and then we will keep you posted again. (C)

The President: Okay. Thank you. (U)

President Putin: Thank you, Bill. (U)

The President: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --