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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with French President Chirac (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Jacques Chirac

Interpreter: Marcel Bouquet
Notetakers: Mary Ann Peters, Katherine
O'Loughlin, Peter Huggins, Wylma Robinson

DATE, TIME January 30, 1997, 10:18 - 10:47 a.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

President Chirac: Hello, Bill? (U)

The President: Hello, Jacques. (U)

President Chirac: How are you? (U)

The President: I'm fine. It's a great pleasure to hear you.
(U)

President Chirac: Great pleasure for me to hear from you, too.
May I tell you, Hillary did so well on French television. The
press was fantastic. She was fascinating. Did you see the film?
(U)

The President: No. (U)

President Chirac: It was absolutely wonderful, beautiful. Tell
her congratulations. (U)

The President: I heard it was wonderful. (U)

President Chirac: Also, let me give you my congratulations for
the Inauguration day. We have seen that on the television, that
was beautiful also and we really were glad for you. (U)

The President: So far everything is going well here. I wanted
to talk with you before you go to Russia. (C)

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Reason: 1.5(b)

Declassify On: 1/31/07

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DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Sec. 3.5 (b)
White House Guidelines, September 11, 2006
By VZ NARA, Date 6/3/2009
2015-0175-M (1.17)

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President Chirac: Bill, do you mind if I get an interpreter? As you know my English is not so good. I'll give the phone to the interpreter. (C)

The President: I think your English is quite good! Please go ahead. I wanted to talk with you before your trip to Russia because we are clearly at an important point in our efforts to integrate Russia into the rest of Europe and cement a real NATO-Russia partnership. I think it is very important that we present a united front in our discussions with the Russians as we have to date. In particular, the statements you have made to the Poles, the Hungarians and the Czechs have been very useful in that regard. (C)

As you know, Strobe Talbott and Leon Fuerth were in Moscow last week for talks with Primakov and others. Chernomyrdin is coming here next week for his regular meeting with the Vice President. I will see him and then I intend to see Yeltsin in March. I wanted to review with you where we have made progress and where we have work to do after the meetings Strobe and Fuerth had with the Russians. The discussions with Primakov went well. He was especially pleased NATO had given Secretary General Solana a broad negotiating mandate. He seemed very interested in the consultative mechanism we are proposing. Still, there are differences over the approach to the charter. Primakov wants a legally binding agreement, and we argued that a politically binding agreement would do the same job while avoiding damaging parliamentary fights. On the nuclear issue, we expressed willingness to repeat our "three no's" on nuclear deployments on new members' territory: "no intention, no plan and no reason" to do so. On conventional forces, we made it clear that we couldn't agree to prohibit forward basing, but we indicated that we might be able to meet some Russian concerns through the CFE adaptation negotiations. At the meeting this week in Brussels, the NATO allies need to agree on a comprehensive proposal for adapting the CFE treaty. I think it is important that the alliance come forward with a proposal that is meaningful, ambitious and forward-leaning. Primakov mentioned two other areas where we may be able to help. One would be an agreement to consult on NATO adaptation in the NATO-Russia channel. The other would be charter language that would, at least implicitly, make clear that Russia is not excluded from future consideration for membership in NATO. (C)

As far as Yeltsin is concerned, I expect to see him in the spring also, hopefully in March. The reports we have so far on his medical condition are fairly positive and not as grim as some of the more extreme stories. And I think it is very, very important that we keep in touch as discussions continue and that we stay on the same page and send the same message to Moscow. For me, it

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means standing firm and following through on new members at the Summit. We are all concerned with appearing to jam this through on the Russians. (Interpreter asked for clarification.) We are all concerned with the appearance that we have forced this on the Russians, but it is clear from our discussions to date that when they understand that we are unified, they will accelerate discussion of the NATO-Russia relationship, which will make it clear that we are not doing this against them and their government. ~~(C)~~

Let me just say one other thing. I know you are interested in a summit of five to discuss these important decisions on NATO-Russia. I don't rule that out, but I am concerned about the impact on other allies and where they are, particularly in their political situations at home. And we would have to know such a meeting would be a success. I would like to suggest that we not make a decision until after you meet with Yeltsin and after I meet with Yeltsin in March and we compare notes. Perhaps in order to address the concerns of other allies, we will need to define a broader agenda in addition to NATO-Russia issues. So, that's what I wanted to say. ~~(C)~~

President Chirac: Thank you very much, Bill. Thank you very much. Quite clearly, I don't intend when I see Mr. Yeltsin to speak any language other than the language of solidarity, because that is what we have to say to him. On Sunday, what I intend to say to Mr. Yeltsin is the following: first, expansion of NATO will be taking place on the basis of the current calendar -- commitments have been made now regarding the three, four or five countries that are likely to join in the first wave of new members. Secondly, expansion of NATO is in no sense a danger for Russia. We're not going back to the Alliance of the Cold War. Thirdly, Russia's interest is to commit itself if possible to negotiations so it can come up with an agreement with NATO that will make it possible to take on board its concerns; that should be quite simple to the extent that NATO is in no sense set up to be against Russia. ~~(C)~~

Regarding the question you raised, Bill, on the political or legal framework of the agreement which has to be drawn up, I don't think that this is a really fundamental aspect, and I think both of them are feasible. So that's what I want to say very clearly to Mr. Yeltsin when I meet him. And I will telephone you once I'm back in Paris the following week or Levitte will be telephoning Sandy Berger to explain how the meeting went. ~~(C)~~

But I would like to say one other word to you. First of all, on the basis of the information I have on the physical condition of Mr. Yeltsin, apparently, he is not very well. I hope you are the one with the right information. I have information that he is

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not in very good health. Today, I had lunch with President Kuchma of the Ukraine; he had telephoned Yeltsin a few days ago and he wasn't very optimistic and he knows him very well. I also have similar comments from President Aliyev of Azerbaijan. Be that as it may, this is the first point: in Moscow, I think this is creating a preelectoral atmosphere. Mr. Zyuganov is in Paris today and he said two things. He met with the President of the French National Assembly, and the first thing he said is that we need to ensure that Mr. Clinton sets up a collegial system. And secondly, he said it was out of the question to accept anything regarding expansion of NATO. General Lebed, who is coming to France tomorrow, I think, is saying exactly the same thing. This is a domestic political problem. And all of those who believe that there may be a change at the head of Russia, and I hope they are wrong, are becoming demagogical and hedging their bets. (C)

Secondly, if we can't reach an agreement with Russia -- I personally believe we will be able to reach one, but we will have to be diplomatic about it -- but if we don't reach an agreement, there will be very serious consequences, initially for Europe, so I do hope that we can conduct the whole business with the maximum of diplomacy. In my opinion, an agreement is not beyond our reach. I believe the agreement is possible. Having weighed the pros and cons, I think the way out in the present condition is that there should be a meeting of the five. Now this is a proposal by Germany, France and Britain, and of course, the Russians would agree. I do understand the reservations that you have regarding the reactions of the other countries, but I don't think that is very serious. It will be far more serious not to succeed in Madrid, which is to say the cards are in our hands. As you know, the problem regarding the other countries is one we are all very aware of. This is the problem Germany and France have with the European Union. Everything done within the union is by the driving force of France and Germany and the result of our efforts. Of course, the others complain that France and Germany decide everything, and whenever we don't, they all say that if we had, we would have moved forward. If we are not moving forward, they say we didn't decide. It is the same for NATO. I know we need some time to organize this. We must achieve success at Madrid, and I think we will need to take a decision immediately after your meeting with Mr. Yeltsin. (C)

The President: Let me respond to two or three points. First of all, I am pleased by what you said and the clear commitment we both share. On the meeting of the five, the main thing is to make sure we have the right substance in advance of the meeting and if we do, it could be quite helpful. On the question of the attitude of other political actors in Russia, Lebed, in his comments to us, actually is milder and more ambiguous than the Yeltsin government. When he was here, he said to us that NATO

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expansion is going to occur and Russia must accept it and make the best arrangement possible. I do think we are less likely to reach agreement if we even hint that there is a possibility of slowdown in the timetable. That, I think, would give them an opening to exploit and they would try to run through it. But I think we can deal with Lebed in a positive way. That is my impression. (C)

On the question of a treaty or legally binding agreement, the problem I see is that it would guarantee a whole round of political fights over ratification which would be particularly destructive in some countries. It could lead us to a lowest common denominator and an agreement that would wind up not satisfying anyone. If there were a higher-level political commitment signed by you and Yeltsin and the U.S. and a couple of other countries, I think it would have the impact of following through on our commitment without running the risk of a really messy ratification fight in the Duma or other political bodies around the world, including the U.S. Senate! (C)

President Chirac: Bill, I agree with you. First of all, I want to have a meeting of five but only if we are sufficiently well prepared to ensure success. Otherwise, there is no advantage to having a meeting. So I do agree with you there. But I think we can prepare it well and then be assured of having no problems in Madrid. Secondly, regarding the type of treaty, this is a political problem. I am sure we can find a phrasing or a formula sufficiently appropriate and attractive for the Russians and which would have no legal consequences. To be quite honest, I don't have a strong opinion on this. But I do want things to be very clear. I was slightly shocked during my discussions with Talbott -- I had the impression that he thought I perhaps did not support the Western point of view and that I might be having direct negotiations with the Russians. I don't know why, but that is the impression I got and I hope I was wrong. What I do want to say to you is that I will say to Mr. Yeltsin that expansion will take place and we must find correct conditions to ensure that this is not a traumatizing experience for Russia. That is how I see things at the moment. (C)

The President: I think that is great to hear. It is what I thought you would say. I believe... (C)

President Chirac: Sorry Bill, I'm sorry to interrupt: I never said anything other than that. In fact, I have been criticized for what I have said in the French press. (C)

The President: Yes, I know. In my talks with the Hungarians, the Czechs and the Poles, they are so grateful to you for holding to the July schedule. They see you as a great friend and

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advocate with no ambiguity. And that is what I have always believed. As I think you understand, this is an historic point and the French leadership is crucial to the success of this enterprise. But I also believe Yeltsin trusts you and knows that you will do whatever you can do to make arrangements they can live with. We will work together with you on that. (C)

President Chirac: I believe you. Now, Bill, regarding the problem with the reform of NATO as seen from the French point of view. We will talk about that when the time comes. I did want to say to you that I hope this won't be the occasion for difficulties between the U.S. and France. If we can come to an agreement, so much the better. Better in general terms because French public opinion is not in favor of it. But that is not really a problem. If we can't reach a technical agreement, I don't want a problem between us. I refuse to have arguments with you on this particular subject. (C)

The President: Let me say, first of all, my impression is that Berger and Shali had a good meeting with Levitte and Douin on NATO command structure. They have agreed to continue the dialogue. I believe Levitte is coming here in a couple of weeks, and we will work very hard to work this out. I want very much to have France rejoin the integrated military structure. I believe we have gone a long way already toward building a European defense identity within NATO and developing a system for meeting European command aspirations. I want to work with you on this and not have a fight between us, but I must be guided by advice from the military about NATO effectiveness. That is why we didn't respond more positively to your specific proposal on AFSOUTH command. But we will be working on this and will find a way for your concerns and our concerns to be met. This is not a political issue for me, it is entirely the advice of my military commanders for the development of a long-term integration strategy and military and NATO effectiveness. I am committed to working something out; when Levitte comes back we will keep working on this. (C)

I also hope at some point you and I will be able to meet, but I want to do it in a way consistent with your needs that doesn't cause problems. Whatever happens, I am not going to let this issue affect my personal relations with you or U.S.-France relations on larger issues regarding NATO. And I will keep working on this. I hope to meet you, but to do it at a time that is convenient for you. (C)

President Chirac: I entirely agree with you, and I think we are on the same wavelength here. The subject does need to be looked at with calm and serenity, and it shouldn't cause problems between us. As soon as I get back from Moscow, Levitte will call

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Berger, and if there is anything extraordinary or exceptional, I will call you directly. (C)

The President: That is good. You will call me directly on that? (C)

President Chirac: As soon as I get back from Moscow, I will have Levitte call Berger just to explain how the meeting went. And if there was something exceptional or extraordinary, then we will organize a direct phone call. (C)

The President: Good. I will be available any time. I am always glad to hear from you. (C)

President Chirac: Thank you. (U)

The President: Thank you and good-bye. (U)

President Chirac: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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