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NOTE FOR STROBE TALBOTT

FROM: NICK BURNS *NB*

SUBJECT: Letter to Yeltsin on Budapest and other items

Strobe: I am writing this note to brief you on aspects of the Budapest Summit and discussions on the plane ride back and this morning with the President. Attached is a letter to Yeltsin from the President on Budapest. I would appreciate it if you could look at it this morning as the President wants to get it to Yeltsin by Thursday.

Because of the sensitive info in this memo, I am sending this only to you by courier. I will hand carry a copy to Jim on Wednesday a.m.

Letter to Yeltsin

The President reacted very strongly to Yeltsin's Budapest speech. In fact, he was really pissed off and his anger grew when we returned to Washington to see how the evening news treated it. In separate discussions with me and Tony in Budapest and after our return, he made several comments that I wanted to share with you:

-- He felt that Yeltsin showed him up by criticizing not only our NATO policy in such strong and unexpected terms but also his criticism of the U.S. role in the world. He felt like a pawn and wondered to Tony if he should have taken back the mike to rebut Yeltsin on the spot. This was his reaction directly after the speech when I saw him and also today when Tony saw him for the morning briefing.

-- He was offended by the manner in which he was treated and by the Kozyrev incident last week. Tony described it to me by saying the President did not want to be used any more as a prop by Yeltsin.

-- He wants us to figure out how to improve our communications with Russia on NATO. He asked me whether or not we should try to be more frank with the Russians by giving them a more specific sense of how we saw the expansion process unfolding and of its

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timetable. He asked if we should share with them aspects of our thinking that we are not currently sharing with others in order to engage them more effectively.

-- He understands that, in addition to the problem of Yeltsin dumping on us in public, we must also deal with Russia's real and legitimate security concerns about NATO expansion.

As a result of these discussions, Tony asked me to write a letter that would repeat some of the same themes of disappointment as the President's last letter.

Tony has cleared the attached draft and would like you, and Secretary Christopher if you think it necessary, to clear this one.

I had three purposes in drafting it: 1) express keen, personal disappointment at how Yeltsin handled the debate in Budapest; 2) focus once more on their legitimate policy concerns; 3) define a process to continue discussions with them in coming months. In writing this, and in my conversations with the President and Tony, I have stressed that we need to separate our understandable anger on the tone of the debate with Russia's substantive concerns which we must take seriously.

You will see that the letter stiffens Yeltsin on the trilateral proposal with Kohl--the President agrees with us that this would be a mistake and does not want to travel in January--and proposes instead our VP idea, as well as a series of Christopher-Kozyrev discussions. Kozyrev suggested to Christopher in Budapest that they get together. The letter picks up on that proposal.

Note: Unfortunately, in the 30-second discussion that the President held with Yeltsin after the START signing ceremony, the President responded affirmatively to Yeltsin's comment that they would see each other early in the new year (i.e. the January proposal). He did not mean to do that. The letter makes clear January will not work.

Next Steps within the USG

1) First, we shouldn't overreact publicly to Budapest and last week's problem with Kozyrev. We should refrain from hitting the Russians in public and from any thought that we are engaging in a major review of policy. I mention this because more than a few people within the government have suggested just the opposite.

2) I suggest you hold two meetings this week:

--A small think session with you, Jim, Toria and me to discuss what happened and what we need to do to fix it, including perhaps the draft letter. I am free today at any time for such a meeting.

--A Rump Group session to focus on what we all need to do to keep Russia relations on track.

3) Mamedov: You should call Mamedov to get his personal explanation for all of this. Pickering spoke to him today and has given us some impressions in a NODIS cable. I also want to discuss with you whether or not the last week's events betray some of the shortcomings in the Mamedov channel. We relied on him heavily to transmit our policy messages on NATO expansion. I am disappointed that he did not give us a warning on what first Kozyrev and then Yeltsin planned to do and say in Brussels and Budapest. Mamedov may have lost the policy battles in Moscow but he had an obligation, I think, to give us more advance warning.

don't think he needs it →

4) Longer-Range Thinking: Jim Steinberg suggested that we should consider reconvening his Team B group to look at the assumptions underlying our Russia policy. Upon reflection, I would not favor this. It will leak as it did the last time and that won't help us. If we decide this type of study is necessary, I would intrust it to one very smart person who would not leak--perhaps Tom Graham or Bill Burns in Moscow or George Kolt here.

5) Principals Discussions: Tony wants to discuss Russia with Christopher, Perry, Madeline, you, me and a few others. He agrees with me that we shouldn't do a formal Principals group because it will leak. Better to do something on a Saturday morning where we can present our thoughts and the Principals can think about future steps.

6) Gore-Chernomyrin: We will have to focus on giving the VP some very persuasive points on NATO for G-C. I think State should draft and keep close hold.

I also think you might want to reconsider initial plans to travel to Kiev during G-C. If there is a Yeltsin meeting, you should be there for it and it will likely be on Friday. This would knock out Kiev.