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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Russian President
Yeltsin: Chechnya, START II

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Boris Yeltsin

Interpreter: Dimitry Zarechnak
Notetaker: Steve Pifer

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DATE, TIME February 13, 1995, 1:03-1:25 p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Boris. (U)

President Yeltsin: Hello, Bill. (U)

The President: It's nice to hear your voice. Thank you for
taking my call. (U)

President Yeltsin: Thank you, Bill. It's been some time since
we spoke. (U)

The President: It's been too long. I'm glad we have a chance to
talk now. (U)

President Yeltsin: Good. (U)

The President: Helmut Kohl and I had a good discussion last
week. We discussed the difficulties and challenges you face in
Chechnya. Whenever I've been asked, I have said we consider
Chechnya a part of Russia and that you are dealing with it as
best you could. (S)

President Yeltsin: I know, Bill, what you have been saying about
the situation in Chechnya. I appreciate your objectivity. (S)

The President: Both Kohl and I have tried to be supportive and
remind people that you stand for democracy in Russia and are the
best hope of that. (S)

But we are concerned that the heavy military fighting is doing
heavy damage to Russia's international image and aiding your
critics at home and abroad. You can see that in the calls by
some in our new Congress to reduce or even stop assistance to

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Russia and in the signal the European Union sent when it raised questions about implementing its interim agreement with you. Of course, the surest way to counter those critics is to settle the crisis peacefully. (S)

I have seen the OSCE report outlining a series of steps to address humanitarian aspects of the Chechnya conflict that came out last week. I want to commend you for granting the OSCE access to Chechnya. I hope you will agree to their recommendations. The first step is a humanitarian cease-fire; this would be a good first step toward a political resolution. (S)

It concerns me that the fighting in Chechnya has also led many in the West to question your government's commitment to reform. I don't support that view. I think your commitment is strong and clear and have made clear that the U.S. will continue to support reform in Russia and your efforts toward that end. But Chechnya is having an impact on opinion here and in Europe. (S)

The decision on your new privatization official sent a good signal of your real intentions. And I want to urge you to take every opportunity to signal your commitment to democracy, open government and economic reform. (S)

Boris, I would like to say one more thing. I apologize for this long monologue, but I know you will address the Duma this week. The whole world is waiting to hear your speech. It is a terribly important opportunity for you to describe the complex Chechnya dilemma for your people, including the Chechens, in a way that opens the door for a political settlement. (S)

It is also an opportunity to remind the world of why you are the best hope for continued reform in Russia. I want everyone to see you as the person who stood on the tank and stood up for freedom. I don't like some of the things that are now being said. (S)

As a friend, I urge you to take advantage of the opportunity of this speech. These are terribly difficult times for Russia. I think this speech is a great opportunity for you, and I hope that you will seize it. (S)

President Yeltsin: Thanks again for your position and for the political and moral support that I am getting from you, Helmut and several other leaders. It is very encouraging and helps create the appropriate political situation in Russia. It helps get people on our side, in support of the President, in support of our position on Chechnya. (S)

But those people who are suggesting sanctions against Russia, let them not forget that Russia is not Yugoslavia. This is not something that can be used to scare us. (S)

Chechnya is an internal republic of Russia. It is part of the Russian Federation, according to the constitution of the Russian Federation. We are dealing with an open rebellion. Under the constitution, we have the right to use force, just as you do if you have a rebellion on your hands in one of your states. (S)

Of course, we are concerned about the reaction of world public opinion. We do not want to be presented as people who are backtracking on reform or coming out in favor of dictatorship. We are for reform, and this is something I will state very clearly in my address before the Parliament. (S)

I can also tell you that I have talked to Helmut on the phone every week. We use this as an opportunity to synchronize our watches. I have started talks and worked to put an end to the open fighting. We have only police forces remaining in Chechnya to combat bandits who fire on our people. The police forces are there to stand up to those bandits. (S)

We have recognized the provisional government until the time of elections, which are scheduled for this year. We are trying to restore trade services, supply food and clothing and restore housing. All of this comes from federal funds. (S)

Chechnya was a part of Russia and will remain a part of Russia. It used to be a dictatorship within Russia but will become a democratic part of the Russian Federation, I can assure you. (S)

As for the reform process, we are forging ahead. In Davos, Switzerland Chubays mentioned many things that we're doing to push through reform here. So, Bill, thanks for your expression of concern. You may rest assured that I am firmly on my feet, pursuing democracy and reform. I have been in contact with the Chechen elders and municipal officials to ensure a good, peaceful settlement. (S)

The President: Thank you. I think it is important if you can in your speech express support for OSCE and some note of regret about what has happened in Chechnya. What is frightening the world is the large-scale human suffering resulting from the military action. It's important to show the world that you are attempting to restore democracy and want to do it in the least disruptive terms. (S)

President Yeltsin: I think without fail that I will take advantage of your advice. (U)

The President: Another quick word on an important issue. I am working to win approval of the START II Treaty by our Senate, to fulfill the commitment we made last September to exchange instruments of ratification at our next summit. I am optimistic that the Senate will ratify the Treaty by April. If there is anything I can do to increase support for START II in Russia, let me know. I think that we will pass START II here in the springtime. (S)

President Yeltsin: That would be a very good thing if we can have an exchange of instruments of ratification at our next summit. For my part, I'll try to do my best to have it resolved on my side as well. Could I mention the fact that your side plans to have START II ratified by this spring? (S)

The President: Yes, you can certainly say that we've talked, that I'm pressing for ratification in the spring and that I'm optimistic about its chances in the spring. (S)

President Yeltsin: Very good. This reference will help us speed up our process of ratification. (S)

The President: That's great. Well, good luck. (U)

President Yeltsin: Then we can start working on a START III accord. (S)

The President: I can't wait. (U)

President Yeltsin: Same here. I look forward to our next meeting. (U)

The President: Me, too, my friend. Good-bye. (U)

President Yeltsin: From me, best regards to Hillary and all my friends. Thank you for your support and the call. (U)

The President: Thanks, and tell Naina hello. Good-bye. Until our next meeting. (U)

President Yeltsin: Thank you. See you next time. (U)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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