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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Yeltsin of the Republic of Russia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Boris Yeltsin, President of Russian Republic
Interpreter: Peter Afanassenko
Notetaker: Ed Hewett

DATE, TIME: December 8, 1991, 1:08 - 1:36pm
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Boris, how are you, sir? (U)

President Yeltsin: Hello, Mr. President, very fine to welcome you. Mr. President, just as we had agreed that when extraordinary events took place, we would inform each other, I inform you and you inform me. Today, a very important event took place in our country, and I wanted to inform you myself before you learned about it from the press. (C)

The President: All right, thank you. (U)

President Yeltsin: We got together today, Mr. President, the leaders of the three states -- Byelorussia, Ukraine, and Russia. We gathered and after many lengthy discussions that lasted about two days agreed that the system in place and the Union Treaty everyone is pushing us to sign does not satisfy us. And that is why we got together and literally a few minutes ago signed a joint agreement. Mr. President, we, the leaders of the three states -- Byelorussia, Ukraine and Russia -- noting negotiations to the new treaty are at a standstill, have seen objective reasons that the formation of independent states has become reality. Also noting that the rather short-sighted policy of the center has brought us to economic and political crisis -- affecting all means of production and various layers of society -- we, the community of independent states of Byelorussia, Ukraine, and Russia, have signed an accord. This accord, consisting of 16 articles, is basically a creation of commonwealth or group of independent states. (C)

Mr. President, this accord creates a so-called commonwealth of states, including an article that this is an open commonwealth, open to all states, including all the former members of the union. (C)

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The President: I see. (U)

President Yeltsin: The members of this commonwealth have a goal for strengthening international peace and security. They also guarantee all international obligations under agreements and treaties signed by the former Union, including foreign debt. We are also for the unitary control of nuclear weapons and nonproliferation. (C)

This accord was signed by the heads of all states involved -- Byelorussia, Ukraine, and Russia. (C)

The President: Okay. (U)

President Yeltsin: The room from which I am calling also contains the President of Ukraine and Chairman of Supreme Soviet of Byelorussia. I also just finished speaking with President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. I read to him the full text of the accord, including all 16 articles. He is fully in accord with all of our actions and he wants to sign the accord. He is about to fly to the Minsk airport to sign it. (C)

President Bush: I see. (U)

President Yeltsin: This is very serious. These four states form 90% of the national product of the Soviet Union. This is an attempt, a step, to maintain a commonwealth, but to free us from the global center which had issued commands for over 70 years. This is a very serious step, and we hope, we are sure, we are certain, that this is the only way out of the critical situation we find ourselves in. (C)

The President: Boris, are you... (U)

President Yeltsin: Mr. President, I must tell you confidentially, President Gorbachev does not know these results. He knew that we were to meet -- in fact, I told him myself we would meet. Surely we will immediately send him the text of our accord as certainly he will have to make decisions at his level. Mr. President, I was extremely, extremely frank with you today. We four states feel there is only one possible way out of this critical situation. We don't want to do anything secretly -- we will give a statement immediately to the press. We are hoping for your understanding. (C)

The President: Well, Boris, I appreciate your call and your frankness. We will look immediately at the 16 points. What do you think the center's reaction will be? (C)

President Yeltsin: First of all, I talked with Minister of Defense Shaposhnikov. I want to read the 6th article of the agreement. As a matter of fact, Shaposhnikov fully agreed and supported our position. (C)

I am now reading Article 6:

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"The member countries of the commonwealth will cooperate for international security and peace, as well as arms control and reduction of armaments and expenditures for defense. They will aim for arms control, including complete elimination of nuclear arms and complete disarmament under strict international controls." ~~(S)~~

The President: Uh huh. (U)

President Yeltsin: "They will respect each other's attempts to create non-nuclear states/nuclear free zones and/or neutral states." (U)

The President: I see. (U)

President Yeltsin: Please note well the next paragraph, Mr. President (and I urge the interpreter to translate this precisely):

"The states will keep and support united command over common military and strategic space. They will work out, develop, and codify unitary command over the military, will provide for single control of nuclear weapons, and will work out all procedural sides of this." ~~(S)~~

Dear George, I am finished. This is extremely, extremely important. Because of the tradition between us, I couldn't even wait ten minutes to call you. (U)

The President: First, I am very grateful to you. Second, we will study the 16 points with great interest as soon as we receive them. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: I am sending them immediately. (U)

The President: We will owe you a reaction -- we will get back to you. We are grateful for your exceptional courtesy. (U)

President Yeltsin: I am very satisfied. This is really, really hot off the press -- this is the latest information. To be frank, even Gorbachev doesn't know, although we shall inform him right away. ~~(S)~~

The President: Thank you again for this special courtesy to the United States. We will work with you and others as this develops. Of course, we hope this whole evolution is a peaceful process. (U)

President Yeltsin: Yes, absolutely. (U)

The President: Please pay my respects to the other two presidents, and Nazarbayev when you see him. (U)

President Yeltsin: Mr. President, thank you for all your understanding of our position and your support. For the situation we are in, we could not do so otherwise. ~~(S)~~

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President Bush: We certainly want to study this carefully. We realize this must be sorted out by participants, not outside parties like the United States. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: We guarantee this, Mr. President. (U)

President Bush: Well, good luck, and thank you for your call. We are interested in the reaction from the center and other republics. Time will tell, I guess. ~~(S)~~

President Yeltsin: I'm sure all other republics will understand and join us very soon. ~~(S)~~

The President: Thank you again for your call after such an historic happening. (U)

President Yeltsin: Goodbye. (U)

The President: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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