

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
President Boris Yeltsin  
Interpreter: Peter Afanassenko  
Notetaker: Nicholas Burns, NSC Staff

DATE, TIME AND PLACE December 13, 1991; 10:49 - 11:15am  
Oval Office

President Yeltsin: Mr. President, I wanted to give you a brief run-down on events here. The Parliaments of Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia yesterday all ratified the commonwealth accords. And, in addition, in Ashkabad yesterday, the leaders of the five Central Asian republics met. And they decided to join the commonwealth and agreed to sign the document with us on December 21 in Alma Ata. (S)

I also met yesterday with the Moldovan President Snegur. He also wants to join us and sign the accord. The President of Armenia, Mr. Ter-Petrosian, who had broken with the union, will also sign the agreement. (S)

So, the way it works out is that on either December 20, 21 or 22 ten independent states will sign the accord together. In addition, I met with the Army General Staff, the security forces, the internal security forces. They all support our decision. Today all is very calm in Moscow. (S)

I talk to Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev every day to carry through the transition calmly with no disturbances. What will happen by the end of December, early January is that we will have a complete commonwealth of independent states and the structures of the center will cease to exist. We are treating Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev with the greatest respect and warmly. It is up to him to decide his own fate. (S)

Mr. President, we have also taken all the necessary legal steps to move to the market. We will free all prices on January 2 and we may be in a tough spot on food supplies in January. The EC has decided to take quick measures to help us on food, especially Russia. I would like to ask you personally to see if you could

help us with food so there will be no disturbances with our population. (S)

I ask you not to be concerned about nuclear arms. We discussed all issues with Defense Minister Shaposhnikov. With Kazakhstan joining the commonwealth, we will have all four republics with nuclear republics in one commonwealth. And so we will have a unified strategic military command. (S)

The President: That is very interesting. What determinations have been made about the rest of the Soviet armed forces scattered in the rest of the republics? (S)

President Yeltsin: Really the only aspect that remains is the ground troops because we consider that the aviation, navy and rocket forces are under the strategic command. Basically, we will have a unitary command for ground forces except for Ukraine which wants its own. But Ukraine will have one on the basis of agreed upon numbers which will be worked out. (S)

The President: Boris, what do you think Gorbachev will do? The American position is to let the democratic and reform leaders, and that includes both of you, to sort out these matters without the U.S. across the ocean involved. (S)

President Yeltsin: I met him yesterday. He said he is essentially not averse to agreeing to the decision of the ten. He is taking reality into consideration. In accordance with the 1922 treaty, we can now say that the ten independent republics will sign the accord and that their decision is final. So, the central organs will simply cease to exist. (S)

We will have a Council of Presidents of the ten and a Council of Heads of Government as coordinating functions to decide on common issues. There will be a defense union with one common head. It will be something like the British Commonwealth. (S)

Mikhail Sergeyevich is thinking of his own plans. It would be inappropriate to hint what he should do. We are treating him with respect. We do not want to force the issue and want him to come to his own decision. We will not have the position of President of the Commonwealth. We will all be equals. The all-union Soviet organs will be moved to Russia. They will become Russian institutions. Intelligence, security and the like will all become part of Russia. (S)

The President: Boris, on the food situation, Jim Baker will be coming and I will pass this urgent request on to him. He will discuss it with you. He is leaving tomorrow. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, at 10:00 a.m. on Monday. We will have a big meeting. If he had your guidance on Monday, we could get into details on distribution and use Soviet military transport to assist us. This is what we agreed to do with Germany and with the EC. (S)

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The President: One thing. We announced yesterday that we will host a Coordinating Conference in January. Jim Baker will explain it to you and discuss it on Monday. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes. Very good. I know about the conference. I do not know if the participation is of donors or includes us. (S)

The President: No, it is to coordinate the whole thing. It will be a broad coordinating meeting to ensure maximum efficiency of distribution and that everyone's interests are being taken into consideration. Jim Baker will talk to you about the requirements you may have and then we will have the coordinating meeting with donors. But it will not be a pledging conference but a coordinating one to ensure no duplication of efforts. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, I understand. We will discuss the details with Jim Baker and the type of food needed. (S)

The President: Let me make a personal observation. We have worked closely with you and with Gorbachev over the years as all this has evolved. We have a high regard for him and for Shevardnadze and the reformers and history will show they did a great deal. So, we have been saying that the republics and the center must decide on how things evolve. But we made sure that the U.S. treated these people with respect and with friendship. I am interested to hear you say you have a close relationship with Gorbachev. As this evolution takes place, I hope it will be in a friendly manner. The U.S. will not make statements saying that anybody should be kicked out. (S)

President Yeltsin: I do guarantee, I promise you personally, Mr. President, that everything will happen in a good and decent way. We will treat Gorbachev and Shevardnadze with great respect. Everything will be calm and gradual with no radical measures. (S)

The President: Wonderful. I am glad to hear that. We won't try to stand in the way of progress and cannot do that. We will support democracy and reform that you represent. I am reassured by the rest and wish you a Merry Christmas over there. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, Mr. President. Thank you. I want everything to go in a smooth and peaceful manner. (U)

The President: All right. Jim Baker is looking forward to seeing you and best of luck to you. (U)

President Yeltsin: Thank you. If any changes occur here, I will call you. (U)

The President: You have been generous in keeping me informed. On the press, I'll say that you called to fill us in of recent developments and leave it there. (S)

President Yeltsin: Yes, Mr. President. I fully agree. (U)

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The President: All right, sir. Good luck. (U)

President Yeltsin: Good bye. (U)

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