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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS THE PRESIDENT  
PRESIDENT BORIS YELTSIN  
INTERPRETER: DMITRI ZARECHNAK  
NOTETAKER: NICHOLAS BURNS, NSC STAFF

DATE, TIME December 23, 1991, 8:08 a.m. - 8:31 a.m.  
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Hello, Boris. Merry Christmas. (U)

President Yeltsin: Hello, Mr. President. I also wish you a Merry Christmas and a good new year. I would like to inform you about the results of the Alma Ata agreements. (U)

The President: I am anxious to hear about it, Boris. Thank you, sir. (U)

President Yeltsin: In the first place, eleven heads of state met in Alma Ata, and there were heads of government as well. So, out of the fifteen republics, only the three Baltic states and Georgia were absent. And though Gamsakhurdiya wants to join, we will not accept him because of the human rights situation -- he has violated human rights in Georgia and persecuted minority groups. (S)

We worked through Saturday and adopted a number of serious documents. The first of them is the Alma Ata declaration. This declaration contains provisions on respect for human rights, basic human freedoms, the territorial integrity of all states, and responsibility for preserving the civil peace. There are general provisions signifying agreed upon international principles to establish a commonwealth of independent states. As a protocol to the December 8 Minsk documents, it states that eight new independent states have joined the three original members. So, all eleven republics recognized the fundamental principles of the documents. (S)

The agreement also adopts the establishment of coordinated authorities. The supreme body will be the Council of Heads of State. We also established a Council of Heads of Government. We agreed that the heads of state will meet on December 30 in Minsk to decide on joint instruments for the commonwealth. (S)

There is a short protocol which reads (Yeltsin proceeded to read the protocol): Proceeding from the Minsk agreement and the Alma Ata Declaration, the unified military command will be preserved as will the unique strategic space. Unified control of nuclear forces and their command is given to Marshal Shaposhnikov until

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military reform issues are decided. Specific military reform proposals must be made by December 30. (S)

The next document also discusses nuclear weapons. It is a long, two and a half page document so I will not read it to you. It says that all eleven will join together to maintain all the arms control treaties signed by the USSR. This document, however, was signed only by the four heads of state of republics with nuclear weapons. It reaffirmed the principle of no first use of nuclear weapons. It agreed that only the Russian President will control the nuclear button after consultations with the three others. The President of Russia will make the nuclear decision through the Commander-in-Chief. The President of the Union will pass his responsibility in this area to the President of Russia and will resign on December 25. He will do this in the presence of Shaposhnikov. (S)

The Ukraine and Byelorussia commit to be non-nuclear states. They agree to eliminate all strategic weapons on their territory and all tactical nuclear weapons by July 1, 1992. There will be some strategic weapons maintained in Kazakhstan. Other weapons will be brought to Russia for destruction. The START treaty will be submitted for ratification in the four parliaments of the nuclear states on the same day and it will be ratified per international standards. I believe that this is one of the most important aspects internationally -- that the nuclear weapons will be controlled in only one place. (S)

The President: I agree with that. (U)

President Yeltsin: It was also decided in the Council of Heads of State that every state should resolve its UN membership issue independently. At the same time, it was agreed and signed by all heads of state, including Ukraine and Byelorussia, that the legal successor for the UNSC seat should be Russia. I would ask you, Mr. President, to use your authority to support this decision so that Russia can inherit the Soviet seat at the UNSC. (S)

All eleven heads of state made a joint decision on remuneration for Gorbachev in the future. This will include money, medical insurance and treatment, a country house, guards and transportation. All this will be provided by the government of Russia. Gorbachev is satisfied. As we agreed with you, we are thus trying to show respect for him. I repeat that he is satisfied and I have already signed the decree on all these matters. After President Gorbachev announces his resignation on December 25, nuclear control will be passed to the President of Russia in the presence of Shaposhnikov. There will be no single second break in control of the button. (S)

The President: Very good. (U)

President Yeltsin: All processes are peaceful. There will be no disturbances and our Alma Ata meeting was held in a general atmosphere of mutual understanding. I would like to assure you--we will have no explosive processes here. The past union will

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make the transition to a commonwealth of independent nations. Together with Gorbachev, we have signed the decrees that all central authority will cease functioning as of January 2. (C)

That is what I wanted to say to you, Mr. President. Also, I would ask you to step up your food contributions. The situation is dramatic. (C)

The President: First, let me thank you for this thorough and timely and essentially encouraging report. We will be consulting on the UN issue as soon as I talk to Jim Baker. I hear your appeal on food. We will try to do everything we can and move as fast as possible. (C)

Because of our respect for Gorbachev and the history of our relations with him, I appreciate on a personal basis the arrangements for him. You didn't mention the economic reform plan, but we are obviously interested in that. I would like to commend you on the way you have led the peaceful evolution of the commonwealth. Let me say, in particular, that I am interested in and pleased by the way the nuclear question has been handled. The whole world is interested in that. (C)

But, in any event, thank you for this call. I will not comment on each point. We want to help with the republics as they become independent and begin to set their own destinies. As you know, Jim Baker is just back. I saw him briefly yesterday and will share this call with him. I will be sure the U.S. Government is well coordinated on all these developments. (C)

And now if it is not presumptuous, I would like to conclude with some personal advice. You have been working very hard and travelling a lot. Please take care of your health. I want to wish you well and urge you to take care of yourself and don't get too tired. So, good luck. (C)

President Yeltsin: Mr. President, thank you very much for your understanding and generosity. I believe, Mr. President, that it will not take too long for the U.S. to recognize the independence of Russia. I also believe that, at some point, there is a need for a meeting between us. (C)

The President: That would be very constructive, to answer in principle. Of course we would want to do that. On recognition, we will move rapidly and I will discuss this with Jim Baker today. Good luck to you. (C)

President Yeltsin: Thank you very much for your attention. We should keep each other updated on the evolution of the situation. Thank you for your personal involvement and all the best for a Merry Christmas to you, your family and your colleagues. (C)

The President: Thank you. Over and out. Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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