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S/NIS/RA:PREMLER:MCK
08/04/97, 7-8741
D:STALBOTT

S/NIS/RA:BLPASCOE

IMMEDIATE MOSCOW, PARIS IMMEDIATE

IMMEDIATE BAKU, YEREVAN IMMEDIATE

EXDIS CEDAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/02

TAGS: PREL, RS, AZ, AM, GG

SUBJECT: LETTER FROM DEPUTY SECRETARY TALBOTT ON ALIYEV VISIT

1. (u) Classified by: Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary, Reason: 1.5(d)

2. ~~(c)~~ Action addressees are requested to pass letter from the Deputy Secretary to the following officials at the earliest opportunity:

For Moscow: Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Nikolayevich Pastukhov, Minsk Conference Co-Chairman Valentin Vadimovich Lozinskiy;

For Paris: Minsk Conference Co-Chairman Jacques Blot.

For Yerevan and Baku: This letter is provided for your information only. No action required.

3. ~~(c)~~ Begin text of letter:

Dear (Boris Nikolayevich, Valentin Vadimovich, Jacques):

I wanted to give you a report on President Aliyev's visit to Washington last week, particularly as it related to our common effort in the Minsk Conference.

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The visit confirmed -- and may even have advanced -- the progress we have made in the last few months. President Aliyev placed a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at the top of his agenda in Washington and praised the Co-chair effort as the path to resolution. During the visit, he reassured President Clinton -- and stated in public -- that he is committed to making every effort to negotiate an agreement at least on the first phase by the end of 1997. He confirmed, both in public and in private, Azerbaijan's readiness to engage in direct negotiations with Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh under the aegis of the Minsk Group. He publicly stated his commitment to the proposal of the Minsk Conference Co-Chairs as the basis for negotiations. And he also went on record before the news media as favoring a process that defers discussion of Lachin and Shusha to negotiations on status in Agreement II some time after the signing of Agreement I.

On a less favorable note, President Aliyev and his colleagues further demonstrated their proclivity for discussing in public what we, and the Armenians, believe should be kept quiet. We expressed our regret at the breach of confidentiality. But Aliyev clearly wanted to use the opportunity to inform his countrymen that demands for Lachin and Shusha will not be met in the immediate future. On balance, that was not an insignificant step, one perhaps suggesting that he is prepared to show some political initiative, and essential at some point in reducing the maximalist demands of Azerbaijani public opinion.

The Armenians, of course, are not happy with this violation of confidentiality, and it may make it harder for Yerevan to bring Stepanakert into full participation in the peace process. We have been working hard to ensure that the American diaspora understands the importance of the Nagorno-Karabakh leaders accepting our proposal as the basis of talks in the near future. And at least some of the Senators and Congressmen now visiting the area will be carrying a similar message. We look forward to hearing from the Yerevan government in the near future on whether their efforts behind the scenes are meeting with success.

President Clinton also pressed President Aliyev to announce his willingness to lift all embargoes and blockades in the context of implementation of Agreement

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I. Aliyev did so, announcing that Agreement I would result in the full restoration of communications between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We have asked him to give the same message to Turkey, which has previously expressed its willingness to open its border with Armenia should conditions such as withdrawal be met. We will have to work on this with them to ensure Armenia has maximum incentive to move forward to negotiate an agreement.

When we started on this process in the spring, we all agreed on the necessity of speaking with one voice in our effort and using high-level visits to reinforce our message. President Aliyev's discussions with Presidents Yeltsin and Chirac early in July were invaluable in moving the process forward. I believe we made some further progress during President Aliyev's Washington visit and kept up the momentum of our effort.

I'm sure you agree that our task now is to look ahead to negotiations in the months to come. As you know, Nagorno-Karabakh will hold "presidential" elections on September 2. While none of us will want to recognize the validity of these elections as resulting in a legitimate government, they will provide a leadership that can help promote progress in the negotiations. We will be in touch with you later this month on suggestions for a possible common public position on characterizing the election. The visit by President Ter-Petrossian to Moscow in late August will be another critical event in our joint efforts. We are very hopeful that there will be significant progress at that time on movement toward intense negotiations by mid-September.

It would be useful, I think, for our Minsk Group negotiators to meet in September, perhaps early in the second week, to elaborate a strategy for intensive negotiations in the months to follow. They might then go to the region to set up direct talks or intense shuttle activity. I would be willing, if it fits your schedules, to return to the area in early October to help launch those talks. If direct negotiations are undertaken, we lean to Tbilisi as a venue to allow the negotiators of the parties easy access to Baku, Yerevan, and Stepanakert. While other venues are acceptable -- for example, Vienna, Copenhagen, or our three capitals in rotation -- we will want to keep negotiators on a short leash to their Presidents to maintain the kind of

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progress we have made to date.

Achieving an agreement on the first phase by the end of 1997 is a goal we should maintain for ourselves and, more importantly, for the parties. I am encouraged by the progress we have made so far, and I believe that imparting that optimism and sense of momentum to the parties is an important factor in achieving progress. If the parties seriously sense the possibility -- even the inevitability -- of a settlement, they will work towards it all the more intensively.

With Respect, Strobe Talbott. End of text.

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