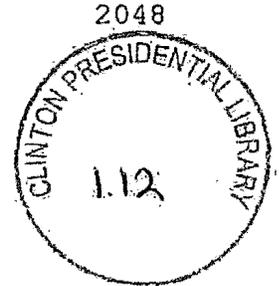


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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with NATO Secretary General Willy Claes

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
William Perry, Secretary of Defense
Leon Panetta, Chief of Staff
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Alexander Vershbow, Senior Director for European Affairs, NSC Staff
John Kornblum, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs
Robert Hunter, U.S. Ambassador to NATO
BG Donald Kerrick, NSC Staff, (Notetaker)

Willy Claes, NATO Secretary General
Klaus Scharioth, Director SYG Private Office
Jamie Shea, Press Spokesman
James Foley, Deputy Director, Private Office

DATE, TIME March 7, 1995, 12:00-12:30pm
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

SYG Claes: Thank you for sending the Vice President to Brussels. He provided a lot of information on dealing with the Russians.
(U)

The President: We are working very hard with the Russians on NATO expansion and other issues, and I believe we're making good progress. ~~(C)~~

SYG Claes: We will finalize the expansion study by the end of the summer, so we can start getting the information to all the interested partners. It is a complicated study with many political and military issues. We plan to report to the Ministers in December. Then we will be facing a serious problem, Mr. President. It is not wise to start the second phase immediately. It is preferable to take the Russian elections into account before attacking the "who" and the "when." My solution is to start individual tours, discussions with the candidates, to

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see who is ready to fulfill the conditions--and when. At some point we will decide to take in countries A, B and C, but then the question will be how we avoid creating the feeling that those nations who are not taken in belong to the Russian zone. We must maintain strong relations with those who are knocking on our door by developing the Partnership for Peace. The young democracies are facing a lot of problems, especially in the defense area. In the Communist days, they had no civilian defense experts. PFP is helping consolidate the young democracies. ~~(S)~~

The second question is what to do with Russia. One thing is clear, the more Yeltsin speaks against enlargement, the more knocks there are on our door. We should keep to the pace decided in December. We are ready to implement the documents with Russia that Kozyrev came to sign in December. Consensus, Mr. President, is building within NATO on parallel approaches: expansion and cooperation with Russia. We will have an important brainstorming session at the end of the month. A lot depends on the results of your planned letter to Yeltsin and the reply Yeltsin sends to you. ~~(S)~~

The President: We have tried to persuade them, as Vice President Gore may have told you, that we need to develop a parallel relationship between NATO and Russia as we move toward expansion. We will need to be deliberate and open as we work through it. I believe it can be done. There are upheavals in Russia and these are of increasing concern. But if Russia wants to elevate its status and build working relations with NATO, we are prepared to do our part. ~~(S)~~

SYG Claes: If you have no objections, we can go on with our brainstorming on what to do with those not in the first list of new members. What should we do with them? ~~(S)~~

The President: The first question is, are there countries who want to be in PFP but not in NATO? (U)

SYG Claes: Yes, of course. (U)

The President: So we are really dealing with three groups. Those in PFP who don't want to be NATO members; those who want to be members but won't, at least in the short run; and those who will become members. We will have to find ways to develop objective criteria that do not cause countries to drift back into the Russian sphere of influence. ~~(S)~~

SYG Claes: There is some risk in speaking about criteria. It could suggest there is automaticity if they are fulfilled. Membership will be a political decision, although there are lots of conditions to be fulfilled. We will face another difficulty

in the Alliance in developing the text of the study. The French will ask that new members be given a choice of different formulas for the integrated military structure: the French model, the Spanish model and full integration. From the Russian viewpoint, the French model is the interesting one, since they participate in the political side, but not in the military structure. There is no doubt the Visegrad countries favor joining the integrated military structure. But France will oblige us to present different options. This will be one of the difficult issues going before the Council in December. (S)

Secretary Christopher: Do you think the French elections will make any difference? (S)

SYG Claes: I am not sure how the elections will turn out. I believe we have a better chance of dealing with Balladur than we do with Chirac. Plus, Kohl and Balladur have a good understanding. So, that would be our best solution. But the results of the election are unknown. (S)

President Clinton: At any rate, I generally agree with the way you're going. The site visits will be very important. (Looking at Secretary Christopher) What do you think about discussing the "who and when" after the Russian elections? (S)

Secretary Christopher: That's when it will happen, but I wouldn't make the direct connection. There will be lots of steps we will need to take after December. We see this as a protracted discussion. Look at the case of Slovakia, which may not be ready for membership. Many in our Congress are red hot about expansion, but when they look at what it means, the process will not pick up speed. (S)

President Clinton: The Russian situation may be determined by developments beyond our reach. We have all invested a great deal to preserve the best possible relations with Russia. The Vice President visited Yeltsin in the hospital because it was important that we not have a misunderstanding. We have done all we reasonably can do to preserve a constructive attitude and deepen our relations. If NATO leaders support the development of an appropriate relationship with the Russians and keep working with them to define what it is, we can pull this off. Let's go back to Slovakia. Those countries who want PFP, but not NATO membership, will be our best friends in the expansion process. Those that get in will be very happy. We will have the most difficulty with those in the gray area, who do not get in at the beginning. We need to tell them we will be proceeding country by country and try to avoid a political tug-of-war between West and East. If there are enough countries who don't want to join, we may be able to limit the adverse reaction. This will take

careful country-by-country management. I believe we are doing it about right. (S)

SYG Claes: We will face sensitive moments, especially in regard to the Baltic States. The recent elections in Estonia show us that already. (S)

Vice President Gore: I am concerned about that and will be going there in a few days. (S)

Secretary Christopher: I see those elections as part of a trend that has swept across all of Central Europe. The harsh pro-reform people lose public support. The key is not to let the new leaders pull back too far. When Chernomyrdin took over, there were dire predictions that didn't come to pass. (S)

Vice President Gore: Mr. President, one of the most pleasant surprises during my visit to Brussels was the opportunity to see how important the PFP is to partners. I didn't fully appreciate how important it is to those countries. We haven't gotten full credit for the success of PFP. For that middle group of countries, the more we can enhance PFP, the better they will feel when they don't get into NATO at the start. The degree by which the simultaneous process proceeds with Russia will be an important factor in determining the nature of the new lines drawn. If there is not sufficient progress, those on the other side of the line will feel abandoned. With progress, the line will be a softer one. (S)

Mr. Lake: Mr. President, I want to go back to the question of implicitly agreeing that nothing will happen until after the Russian election. It would be extremely dangerous to agree on a working assumption that we are not revealing. If it were revealed, it would say, in a way, that the Russians have a veto, that we are putting the Russia track ahead of expansion. The consequences would be to destroy the psychological progress we have made in Central and Eastern Europe. Besides the Russians, other European states are having elections. If they sense our priorities, they will have free rein to exploit the situation, and it would exacerbate the domestic politics of NATO expansion. (S)

The Vice President: We should never use the Russian elections as a reference date. It is not part of our decision-making process. The first place I encountered it was in Brussels.

SYG Claes: I am not suggesting it. But if we took a decision on the "who and when" in December, it would play into the hands of Russian nationalists and communists. We have enough work to do

after December, even with respect to candidate number one. We are not giving the Russians a veto right or droit de regard. ~~(S)~~

The President: That's the way to do it. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Perry: I would like to expand on three points. We must accelerate development of the NATO-Russia relationship. In my judgment, we should focus not on a treaty, but on something like a standing consultative committee; it is important to move quickly. Second, We must have a robust PFP. Third, we must not link it to the Russian elections. It is important to reemphasize those points. The process will move slowly of its own accord and we don't need to slow it down. ~~(S)~~

SYG Claes: The PFP agreement negotiated with Russia is more than we have signed with any other Partner. It takes into account the size of Russia and its military capability. The second document is more important, the so-called "broad and enhanced dialogue." We can do a lot with this. It has the potential of becoming a consultative mechanism with Russia once it is implemented. Are there plans for a Russia-U.S. Summit? ~~(S)~~

The President: We are working on that now and will let you know soon. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Christopher: We had an interesting discussion yesterday about how Chechnya had cast a dark shadow over our relationship with Russia. We need progress there to make NATO members more comfortable. We received good news today that the Russians will accept OSCE monitors. On the Russia-NATO documents, there is no need for a signing ceremony. I hope to be able to get the Russians to sign when I meet with Kozyrev in a few weeks. ~~(S)~~

SYG Claes: Ambassador Churkin can just come sign them in my office. But Kozyrev wants to come to NATO, to show he's part of the Western family. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Christopher: He will first have to sign a performance bond (laughter). ~~(S)~~

Mr. Lake: We have only a few minutes left. We need to hear the Secretary General's views on Bosnia and Croatia. What is the state of play on planning? ~~(S)~~

SYG Claes: I have been trying to sell Congress on NATO. I wanted you to know that the atmosphere on the Hill with respect to Bosnia is different than it was three months ago. They are much more reasonable. It is quite remarkable. ~~(S)~~

The President: Some are beginning to consider the consequences of the actions they are calling for. (S)

SYG Claes: At NATO, we have prepared several scenarios for UNPROFOR withdrawal. We do not support withdrawal from the political point of view. A lot depends on the attitude of Tudjman. I still believe Tudjman is bluffing. It is still possible to obtain a new mandate, although we'll have to give it different clothes with a new name. I learned this in three different meetings with the Croatian Ambassador in Brussels. I don't think Tudjman wants to risk a military confrontation with the Serbs. It is not clear what his exact price will be, but if he is ready to reconsider, it will have to be on the basis of some defensible formula. If not, we are in serious trouble. (S)

From a military perspective, it will be difficult to withdraw UNPROFOR from Croatia and keep it in Bosnia. Tudjman knows this and is pushing from a strong position. Our position is clear. We are ready if we cannot convince Tudjman. If we are obliged to leave Croatia we will need a containment strategy. Our military authorities have promised a containment strategy by the week of March 20. I do not know the details yet. (S)

Another point: I feel personally squeezed between the Council and the military authorities. The military authorities have developed 1000 pages of scenarios. They say that UNPROFOR withdrawal will be the most complicated operation since World War II, and that we need to start prepositioning. The NAC said OK to laying communications lines. The military authorities are now pressing for Step Two of propositioning, which we can't do without sending U.S. and UK experts. It will take eight weeks between the completion of Step Two and the beginning of withdrawal. Imagine what could happen in eight weeks if everything is exploding. The Council doesn't want to give the wrong signal and encourage those who want UNPROFOR out. I understand the political arguments, but the military authorities are getting nervous. If things go wrong, people will say NATO cannot do its job. Council approval of Op Plan 40104 may be required on March 15. After March 15, it will be difficult to slow debate on Step Two because of the pressure from the military authorities. From the military view, you can be proud of what the military, especially the U.S., has done. My answer is that we are ready, but I hope the withdrawal can be stopped.

The President: We are determined to do that. It sounds like you are on top of all this.

-- End of Conversation --