

United States Department of State

Washington, D. C. 20520



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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM *9/20*

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September 20, 1993

TO: The Secretary cc: P - Mr. Tarnoff
EUR - Mr. Oxman
FROM: S/NIS - Strobe Talbott *ST*
SUBJECT: My September Trip to the Caucasus and Central Asia

Nick Burns and I returned Friday evening from a Presidential mission that took us to the capitals of nine New Independent States of the former Soviet Union, as well as to Ankara and Brussels. This itinerary took me to three countries -- Turkey, Latvia and Belgium -- that are "out of area" for me. As so often in the past, I'm grateful to the help and hospitality of EUR and Steve Oxman, with whom I'm sharing a copy of this memo.

Nick and I led a delegation that included representatives of State, NSC, Defense, the Chiefs, Treasury and CIA. In this memo, which supplements our reporting cables, I wanted to focus on some of the themes of the trip, which was, among other things, a scouting expedition for your own visit to the region in late October.

Nagorno-Karabakh

This ethnic conflict took up quite a bit of your time over the weekend. It dominated your phone conversation with Turkish FM Cettin and figured in your talk with Kozyrev as well. It is likely to obtrude during the days and weeks ahead. Since it was also Topic A during my stops in Ankara, Baku, Yerevan and Moscow, I thought it might be helpful if I gave you a fairly thorough read-out at the end of this memo on my talks in all four capitals. Despite our best efforts, I am increasingly concerned that we will soon face a Russian fait accompli, i.e., a signed agreement brokered in Moscow among the three parties to the conflict to accept Russian separation forces to enforce a ceasefire and a formal request to CSCE to bless or bolster the Russian mission.

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Kazakhstani Nukes

President Nazarbayev and I reached what he called a "gentleman's agreement": he'll ram NPT accession through his parliament before the end of the year -- which means before President Clinton visits in January; in exchange, you'll bring with you in October a draft "charter" on U.S.-Kazakhstani relations, including some security "assurances" derived from what we're already offering Ukraine and Belarus. If this works, we'll be 2-for-3 on our denuclearization agenda by New Year's Day. Ukraine, I fear, will still be a problem in this respect (as well as others) in '94. Anyway, it's definitely worth a stop for you in Almaty.

Our Man Oskar Akayev

Speaking of stops along the old Silk Road... One of the bright spots on our delegation's itinerary was the Kyrgyz Republic. President Akayev is a true (if, I admit, a somewhat loquacious) democrat, and his economic policies are exemplary. He's feeling very lonely out there, surrounded by the other four "Stans," which are all run by Communist-era leaders who are lagging in both political and economic reforms. I've got several ideas on how we and our key allies can support him. (I made a pitch to this effect both to the NAC and the EC in Brussels), and I'm sure your short stop in Bishkek in October will be to good effect.

Human Rights and Democracy

EUR/ISCA Desk Director Larry Napper's nickname for Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan is "the Three Amigos" -- a trio of troublesome fellows out there in the badlands of Central Asia. In Tashkent and Ashgabat, our Ambassadors invited opposition political figures to meet with our delegation; the local authorities arrested, detained, intimidated or otherwise prevented the would-be guests from attending. I responded by making a stink in both places and with both Presidents. In Turkmenistan, I shortened our stay and refused to sign an assistance agreement. Those particular Amigos -- Presidents Karimov and Niyazov -- seemed to get the message that human rights will be an important criterion for us as we develop the relationship. Tom Simons will be making his own trip to the area next week. He will reinforce our basic message: lack of respect for human rights will mean very limited aid and cooperation beyond humanitarian assistance.

In Dushanbe, the principal topic was democratization -- specifically, the need for the Tajik regime to broaden its base

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through reconciliation with opposition groups. Chairman Rakhmanov would have us believe that Tajikistan's troubles are overwhelmingly the result of an onslaught by the forces of radical Islamic fundamentalism from Afghanistan, while we see the conflict as, at root, a civil war. Significantly, our view of both the problem and the solution coincides very closely with Moscow's: the Tajik government must make a serious try at a national reconciliation dialogue that is seen as credible by all but its most radical opponents. This is one hot spot in the "near abroad" where we and the Russians are very much in sync.

Baltic Troop Withdrawals

In Moscow and Riga, we pressed our case on this politically urgent issue: The Russians must, by October 6, reach agreement with Latvia and Estonia on timetables for final withdrawals, otherwise the Byrd amendment kicks in; to make that possible, the Balts should be as reassuring and enlightened as possible on the status of the Russian-speaking minorities (Bob Frasure, our Ambassador in Tallinn, has coined the useful phrase, "inclusive democracy"). We also urged both the Russians and the Latvians to: tone down their public rhetoric; focus their negotiating energy first on getting a withdrawal timetable, and leave secondary issues like compensation until later; and welcome a CSCE mission to Latvia with as flexible a mandate as possible (the Russians don't want the CSCE involved at all; the Latvians want to keep such a mission away from minority rights issues).

I heard some good news in Moscow. My principal interlocutor there, Georgiy Mamedov, told me that there was "no official linkage" between the withdrawals and the Baltic governments' treatment of the ethnic Russians. Since President Yeltsin and Defense Minister Grachev have both asserted such linkage in the past, and we've emphatically rejected it, so this was an important and especially welcome "clarification" of the Russian position. Moreover, Mamedov, who usually is very informal and self-confident, was, on this issue, reading from a typed set of talking points that had been cleared throughout his government.

In Latvia, in addition to meeting with the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, we had a session with representatives of the local Russian community. We had done the same thing in Estonia during our visit there in May. You would have been personally gratified by how appreciative the Russians there are to the way in which the Clinton Administration -- through your statements on the subject last April -- has put their fate on its agenda. EUR DAS Sandy Vershbow is leading an interagency delegation to the area this week.

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NATO Expansion

In Moscow, I got an earful from several Russians with whom I met about their anxiety over how this critical issue plays out. Their comments basically echoed Yeltsin's September 15 letter to the President: while they know they can't stand in the way of the Poles, Czechs and Hungarians joining NATO, this is far from their preferred option; instead, they favor a NATO-Russian "political statement or cooperation agreement" to offer joint security guarantees to the nations of Central and Eastern Europe; Russia must not be the object of a rejuvenated NATO, but rather its partner in meeting shared security challenges in Europe, particularly interethnic conflict; and, above all, the Russians don't want to be surprised on January 10. Every Russian I spoke with made a plea for early and full consultations with us.

In presenting me with Yeltsin's letter, Mamedov made clear that the Russian government has now gone on record, in Yeltsin's name, to register its concern with "the option of quantitative build-up of the Alliance by adding East European countries to it." The Russians, who have been following the public dimension of this debate, are very worried about "criteria" that they know the Visegrad countries (and the Baltics) could meet but that Russia could not. Hence Yeltsin's warning against "a bloc membership criteria." At the same time, they're looking for some way to square the circle and to sound constructive. Hence the proposal for a NATO-Russian agreement to serve as a bridge of some kind between a redefined, perhaps even expanded, NATO and Moscow. Also, you'll note that the Yeltsin letter urges a definition of the post-Cold War mission for new "pan-European structures" that can deal with "crises and conflicts raging presently in Europe." Given the Russian notion of Europe, that means not only Yugoslavia but Georgia and, of course, Nagorno-Karabakh. So, for purposes of this memo, we're back to Square One.

Oh, yes: one more thing before I go back to Nagorno-Karabakh... In a tete-a-tete, Mamedov passed on Kozyrev's heartfelt desire, during his visit to Washington next week, to jog with President Clinton (and, of course, to be photographed doing so).

Nagorno-Karabakh: View from Ankara, Baku, Yerevan and Moscow

The crisis seems to be approaching a climax of some kind. The headlines could read either, "PEACE COMES TO TROUBLED REGION!" or, "RUSSIANS INTERVENE, WORLD WORRIES!" Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin both have a lot riding on making sure that

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the story (or this chapter of it) ends the first way, not the second. If it goes badly, the episode could fan fears, which are already widespread, of resurgent Russian imperialism. That, in turn, could trigger an international (and domestic American) backlash against both the Yeltsin government and our Administration's support for Russian reform. If, however, there is a settlement in which the Russians are seen to have played a responsible and constructive role, it could augur well for regional security and stability, for international peacekeeping, and for the next phase of U.S.-Russian relations.

The N-K Armenians are in the best military/political position they will ever have to achieve an internationally-supported settlement that would assure their autonomy and security, albeit within Azerbaijan (i.e., it would not grant them full independence or merger with Armenia). Having historically been the victims in this long-running tragedy, the N-K are now very much on top. They have humiliated the Azerbaijanis and hold large amounts of territory outside of Nagorno-Karabakh itself. But if they overplay their hand, they will snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. (Our delegation members who met with the N-K leader Robert Kocharian in Yerevan were struck by the similarity between this brave, stubborn, embattled, salt-of-the-blood-stained-earth fighter and certain Israelis who have evoked a mixture of our admiration and exasperation over the years.)

We found that virtually all the parties -- the Turks, the Azerbaijanis, the N-K Armenians, the Armenian government and the Russians -- have all but given up on the so-called "Minsk" negotiations, which are aimed at a settlement that would be monitored by international observers. The alternative, in their minds, would be a "separation force," manned primarily by Russians, that would be a classic example of peace-making, or peace-imposing, rather than peace-keeping. The questions of the hour are, first, whether we can breathe new life into CSCE/Minsk and avoid a separation force; and, if the answer to that question is no, whether we can make sure that a separation force takes a form and comes about in a way that meet CSCE/UN norms. To put the same proposition in the negative: can we avoid the appearance, not to mention the reality, of Russia's taking unilateral military action?

Part of the problem is that the Russians have in effect developed a competitive alternative to the existing CSCE plan. The Russian version has some appeal to the N-K (it allows them to withdraw from the occupied territory in phases rather than immediately and fully). But it also has a very troublesome kicker: the separation force.

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Our effort with the Russians has been to bring them back under the CSCE tent and to dissuade them from taking unilateral action. A key point here: we haven't ruled out a separation force altogether, but we have told the Russians in no uncertain terms that they had better not confront the international community with a done deal and then expect us to give it our blessing.

Our effort with the Armenians and N-K has been to get them to go for a deal now, one that would, we hope, not necessarily require a separation force. On one key point, there was some progress in our intensive discussions with President Ter-Petrosyan: he no longer denies that he holds the key to N-K; he acknowledges that he could get the N-K forces to accept a durable ceasefire and begin withdrawal in exchange for a settlement and a lifting of the Turkish embargo against Armenia. But he hasn't agreed to turn the key yet. He made clear to us his dilemma: he wants the best possible deal for the N-K, and that may mean letting the Russians in effect impose it, with force; but, as the true father of his country's new and fragile independence, he doesn't relish the idea of being responsible for a Russian military comeback in the Transcaucasus.

We saw him on the eve of his being called onto the carpet by Yeltsin in Moscow. Our Ambassador in Yerevan has been told that Yeltsin was very tough with him, essentially putting him on notice that the Russians were coming in and showing him a letter from the Azerbaijani leader, Gaidar Aliyev, "inviting" them to do so.

Aliyev, who was Brezhnev's proconsul there when I last saw him 13 years ago, didn't come clean with us during our four-hour session that he was sending such a letter to Yeltsin, but he certainly tried to stimulate the sense of crisis by saying that Russian intervention is inevitable.

It may be, but the Russians must understand that if a separation force proves necessary, the CSCE must come to that conclusion itself and give its imprimatur in advance. The immediate issue, as you know because you underscored our position on this with Kozyrev, is to go ahead with the Minsk Group meeting in Paris on Wednesday.

Jim Collins, our designated heavy-hitter on these issues, starts work today!

cc: P - Mr. Tarnoff
EUR - Mr. Oxman

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Also Talbot
at NAG

Savin Thorne