

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Secretary General Javier Solana
of NATO (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State
William Cohen, Secretary of Defense
Samuel Berger, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State
Leon Fuerth, National Security Adviser for
the Vice President
James Steinberg, Deputy Assistant to the
President for National Security Affairs
Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, U.S.
Permanent Representative to NATO
Donald Bandler, Special Assistant to the
President and Counselor to National
Security Adviser for the NATO Summit
(notetaker)

Javier Solana, Secretary General, NATO
Jorge Domeq, Director of the Secretary
General's Private Office
Hoyt Yee, Deputy Director of the Secretary
General's Private Office

DATE, TIME March 15, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

Oval Office/Restricted Session

The President: Thank you for the great job you are doing for
the Alliance. (U)

Secretary General Solana: I greatly appreciate your support and
American support for NATO. We still have lots of work to do
before the Summit. (U)

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Classified by: Glyn T. Davies
Reason: 1.5(d)
Declassify On: 3/16/09

The President: I agree. If the Serbs don't sign the draft agreement soon there will be even more to do. NATO needs to maintain a firm position. I talked to Tony Blair today and he is solid but some other allies have less resolve and need to be brought along to support the use of force if that should prove necessary. (Ø)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: I have a real concern that there is a difference of opinion among allies on the objectives for the possible use of force. If we take action we need to look hard at a phased air campaign that will bring Milosevic to the table with a desire to sign -- and thus prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. NATO has to be prepared for the possibility that Milosevic will not be persuaded by Phase I of the air campaign and will decide simply to hunker down. He might also decide to attack the UCK in the areas his forces have surrounded in Kosovo. He might also strike at NATO forces in FYROM and in Bosnia. The allies need to be aware of these dangers and we need to get an understanding with them that they'll be with us and prepared to respond vigorously if he reacts in those ways. (Ø)

National Security Adviser Berger: I agree. If Milosevic decides to hunker down the Alliance would have no deterrence against a FRY offensive against the Kosovar Albanians or Bosnians. Therefore, NATO needs a second bullet that would go beyond Phase I and provide us with a next step if necessary. Milosevic can create chaos and he needs to understand that we are ready and willing to go to the next step. (Ø)

Secretary General Solana: We needed today's good news and need to start talking in the coming days with the Allies so they'll be prepared to act in the way you've indicated. (Ø)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: The Alliance risks being blamed for a humanitarian disaster in Kosovo if we did not bomb. A second problem is the risk of being blamed for meek and ineffective bombing that does not produce a cooperative FRY attitude. (Ø)

Secretary General Solana: There is also a third scenario in which NATO might bomb and then be blamed for any subsequent FRY attacks on the Kosovars. (Ø)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: I agree. What NATO needs is the capacity to continue air strikes beyond Phase I if necessary. (Ø)

Secretary of State Albright: In the event NATO commences airstrikes, it will be essential to be able to continue the momentum beyond Phase I. (S)

Secretary General Solana: Yes, we need to consult with Allies soon and prepare the ground for a Council decision on Phase II. (S)

The President: We need to have a plan to activate once we get into Phase II. (S)

Secretary of State Albright: There is also a potential problem with talks going on too long, with the Serbs wanting to renegotiate and some allies dragging their feet. (S)

Secretary General Solana: If you agree, I'll start making phone calls that welcome the KLA signing but prepare the ground for a possible NAC decision on Phase II at a later date. You're right about the importance of dealing with the calendar factor. Primakov will be in Washington March 24 and Russia would certainly not react well to air strikes. If NATO needs to strike before his visit, the U.S. needs to be prepared to do damage control. You need to decide how to handle this visit and what happens after it. I would appreciate it if you keep me informed of U.S. thinking on this aspect. (S)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: I do not believe Primakov would come to Washington if NATO bombs the FRY before his visit. (S)

The President: Russia might have more leverage and more success with Serbia following the Kosovar's signature of the draft agreement. It's obvious they haven't felt pushed to do anything in the absence of that signature. (S)

Secretary of State Albright: The fact that Ivanov got no assurances from Milosevic during his meetings in Belgrade is not a good sign. (S)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: They won't sign if their intelligence tells them that France or Germany is not on board with the plan for a strong air campaign. (S)

Secretary General Solana: The most powerful signal to Milosevic that NATO was serious would be the withdrawal of the OSCE verifiers. (S)

National Security Adviser Berger: You spoke recently with President Chirac. What were his views on the use of force? (S)

Secretary General Solana: He was strongly committed to proceeding with air strikes if negotiations are exhausted. At this point, he and Blair envisage 48 hours of Phase I strikes followed by a pause to see what happens. (S)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: I am very concerned about a pause since the Chinese and Russians would intervene in the United Nations Security Council to try to stop any further actions. It is essential to keep the Allies on board with a realistic plan. The mission would be difficult. They have a robust air defense system and we're likely to have some pilots shot down. Some casualties would be inevitable. (S)

Secretary General Solana: It would be important that this not be a U.S.-only operation. All allies need to be involved in the air campaign from the very beginning. All would have to be on-board politically, share the responsibility and have a role. This would send a strong signal to Milosevic and others that NATO could not be divided. (S)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: It would be best if we could avoid having to go back to the NAC for approval of a second phase. Can you work this out with the NATO in advance? (S)

Secretary General Solana: We now have authorization for a limited Phase I operation, and would need to go back to the NAC for approval to go to Phase II and III, if needed. (S)

Ambassador Vershbow: We can see how far we can push the envelope of Phase I. (S)

The President: This conversation about Kosovo is a perfect illustration of why we can't agree to tie our hands with language in the Strategic Concept that creates a blanket requirement for a United Nations Security Council mandate. (S)

Secretary General Solana: You don't have to tell me; I agree on the importance of not putting the Alliance in a position where its actions and decisions could be vetoed by Russia or China. The recent veto by China of the extension of the UNPREDEP's mandate was a good example of what NATO has to avoid. We should use that example to convince Allies that decisions may be made on grounds that have nothing to do with the issue at hand. (S)

The President: I agree. We have to persuade any remaining Allies that haven't come to grips with that. In other respects summit preparations seems to me to be in pretty good shape. (C)

Secretary General Solana: I agree. The Strategic Concept is on track. Concerning the vision statement, the U.S. should handle that so the other leaders are personally engaged. We should work on it from the top down rather than bottom up so they feel it is their own document. The only potentially disruptive Strategic Concept issue is the mandate. We should try to get that agreed before the summit to avoid the kind of last minute problems we had in Madrid. Similarly, we should decide in advance of the summit on the general direction we want to go and on the constraints. (C)

The summit leaders will have a rare opportunity at the summit to discuss the future of the transatlantic relationship. Assuming that the outstanding issues in the Strategic Concept and ESDI can be resolved beforehand, allied leaders could have as much as five hours for an meaningful, forward-looking and open exchange of ideas on common principles and interests. If this focused on the countries' bonds of friendship and common values rather than drafting it would be a huge success. The dream of '99 is to create new dimensions in our relationship. This will be the first summit for a good number of the Prime Ministers, many of whom are young. We should use this meeting to underscore that the transatlantic relationship is not merely a military and security one but has economic and political dimensions. You can lead that discussion. (C)

The President: I agree completely and hope that events will permit allies to have that kind of discussion. (C)

Secretary General Solana: In addition to the NAC there will be a NATO-Ukraine summit -- which could be the event of the year for Kuchma -- and hopefully a NATO-Russia meeting. (C)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: At the Wehrkunde meeting in Munich this year the Russian delegate gave a hard speech with redlines and the Ukrainian delegate rebutted it strongly. (C)

Deputy Secretary of State Talbott: I understand the Russians are maintaining the option that either Prime Minister Primakov or Ivanov may attend provided that Russian concerns on the Strategic Concept, CFE and Kosovo are adequately addressed beforehand. If we have bombed Kosovo before the summit, they might send a third secretary. (C)

Secretary of State Albright: We have made significant progress in recent days on CFE adaptation. (C)

The President: Now is everyone clear on what needs to be done in coming days on the Kosovo problem? (C)

Secretary General Solana: I understand everyone's thinking but have doubts about the timing. (C)

National Security Adviser Berger: The key is how to configure the military options. We hope the threat of force works, or if not that Phase I would be convincing. But if not, we need to have the possibility of escalating to Phase II in a nearly automatic way without having to go back to jittery Allies, which could cause undue delay and weaken deterrence. (C)

Secretary of State Albright: I agree. As Javier and I discussed yesterday, FRY compliance on the ground and its cooperation in the negotiations should be treated as a package that allies would judge when weighing the need for action. We have the ACTORDs and need to retain a crisp yes/no decision process. (C)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: I also agree that NATO must avoid a situation in which it deployed Phase I, Milosevic doesn't move, then we go into a NATO debate rather than continuing with Phase II despite the lack of desired results. NATO must be prepared to go all the way; otherwise, this would be seen as a failure. (C)

The President: We will begin phoning Allies today on this matter. (C)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: I will talk about it with German Defense Minister Scharping, who is in Washington tomorrow. (C)

Secretary General Solana: He will be good on the issue. A potential problem is France wanting to ensure the success of Rambouillet and seeking more time. We'll have three NATO people at the Kleber Center negotiations. (C)

Secretary of State Albright: Yes, but they're being asked to stay in the basement. (C)

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Secretary General Solana: We will need to stay in close touch on developments in Paris. Please keep me informed of your thinking, particularly with regard to timing of any actions.

(C)

The President: You're doing a great job. We will have a great summit. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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