

THE WHITE HOUSE
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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Vice President
Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State
William Cohen, Secretary of Defense
John Podesta, Chief of Staff
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
Joe Lockhart, Press Secretary
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
Jamie Shea, NATO Spokesman

DATE, TIME April 22, 1999, 3:00 p.m.-3:45 p.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

Oval Office/Restricted Session

The President: I have much I want to talk about with you, but first let me hear what you have to tell me. (U)

~~SECRET~~

Classified By: Glyn T. Davies
Reason: 1.5(d)
Declassify On: 04/22/09

Secretary General Solana: Well, this will be one of the most important meetings in NATO's history. Regarding Kosovo, we need to be well prepared in advance. We have set aside three hours, starting with a ten minute briefing by Generals Naumann and Clark. I will speak in general terms about what we want to achieve. Determination and unity will be most important; this has to be more than an exercise in studying the options. At the same time, it will be difficult to avoid some tricky subjects: how the military operation is going, possible solutions to current problems, what to do with Serb radio and television transmissions, and ground troops. (C)

I don't think ground troops will be raised bluntly, but questions may arise about whether a ground force will face a permissive or non-permissive environment. I've been speaking on the phone with leaders on this. Tony Blair might bring it up, for example, but not in an aggressive way. Our goal should be to concentrate on the military aspects of Kosovo and unite the allies. We should get not only formal agreement but a real consensus. You may want to get together a small group of leaders to discuss this in advance because I don't know how openly people will speak in a larger setting. (U)

I don't expect major problems with anyone. Perhaps Simitis is in the most difficult spot but he doesn't want to show it. We have had a very positive experience with the Greeks in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) meetings -- as long as they don't have to take a separate national action they won't block the NAC. The Italians could pose difficulties. The problem is not so much D'Alema as Foreign Minister Dini. The French are, as you know, complicated. The British are on a very good line. (S)

In sum, I see no insurmountable difficulties. The toughest issue is United Nations Security Council mandates; reaching a final arrangement could be complicated. There should be no problem finalizing our Kosovo strategy tonight. We only have a few issues such as the criteria for stopping the bombing and whether/when to go to the UN. But we have five solid conditions and a good Southeast Europe Initiative. The only other difficulty would be if someone presses for answers now on ground troops. (C)

The President: The most important thing is unity and resolve. The press will be looking for a story about how the NATO effort is failing or division among us over ground troops. We have some real potential problems and need to deal with them successfully. I thought you made a good start by moving to an

updated assessment on ground troops. My view, and Tony Blair agrees, is that it's best for all of us to state that we support what you've said. (S)

The problem is with one small group, which has little involvement in the air action and also doesn't support ground troops. They're inclined to call on us to just make a deal. Another small group will say the air war isn't succeeding. In fact, the air action is going well but we need considerably more time before considering action on the ground. Weather complicated the air action, as did targeting and related issues. To succeed from the air we will need: an updated strategy; a more forthright position concerning economic pressure, which I recognize will present problems for Greece and Italy; removing obstacles to effective targeting; and moving to a 24 hour per day operational tempo - and we can't do that if we are haggling over target sets. So, we need to get the right message out from our Kosovo meeting, and should avoid a major discussion of ground troops. The reality is that we have done very well so far in Kosovo. We have lost only one plane. No one thought we could stop Milosevic in Kosovo with an air action of a few weeks. We have to broaden the targets, make the Serbs uncomfortable while minimizing civilian casualties, and stepping up economic pressures. That's what we should aim to decide, and then trumpet it. (S)

Secretary General Solana: Allied positions on targets are changing very rapidly. We need to say we are determined to go forward and win. We should get the heads of government to agree, "let's go, go all the way." General Clark has a letter from me saying "You take your responsibility and I'll take mine." He can do everything he needs to do. Last night's military action was very important. The evening before we did something that was impossible two weeks ago - an attack on Milosevic's party headquarters. We can turn the lights and heat off. (S)

Vice President: Will you discuss those issues in the NAC? (S)

Secretary General Solana: They are never discussed in the NAC. Sometimes, they're talked about bilaterally. (S)

Vice President: It seems the press is able to get information and it is then conveyed to Belgrade. Could we give it to the military commander and SACEUR only? (S)

Secretary General Solana: You should decide that. (S)

National Security Adviser Berger: We still have one thing to deal with. (U)

Secretary General Solana: Do you remember the article in the French newspaper "Liberation"? It spoke of targeting a national headquarters building and the headline said "Chirac Has a Veto." Then, we hit the building two days later and not one newspaper complained about our strike in the heart of Belgrade. (S)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: I spoke with French Defense Minister Richard and told him there would be lots of criticism in the United States about Heads of State reviewing targeting issues. He said it would be a big plus in France politically that President Chirac was micro-managing targeting. (S)

Secretary General Solana: But two days later the strike was done. (S)

Vice President: It would be much better if you give the decision authority to SACEUR without going through the political leaders. (S)

Secretary General Solana: That's been given. (S)

National Security Adviser Berger: Mr. President, that is something we need to take up bilaterally. (S)

Secretary General Solana: But the situation is a lot better today than one week or one month ago. (S)

The President: We're in a world of 24 hour news coverage and people want immediate results. We've spent a lot of effort so far. It would be a mistake for people to believe we cannot solve this problem by a vigorous air war, tougher economic pressures and good diplomacy. There is an excellent chance it will work if we pursue these three targets with energy. I don't want the summit to end with an impulse to give up the air war and move to a land war. As world leaders we will want to stick with our conditions and give our strategy a chance to work. (S)

Secretary General Solana: We have principles and values at stake, and the future of a new generation of European political leaders is at stake too. (S)

The President: They won't quit. (S)

Secretary General Solana: They can't afford to. (S)

The President: We need unity and vigorous prosecution of our current strategy. (C)

Secretary General Solana: Only three people can speak effectively from the summit to world public opinion: you, Mr. President, Prime Minister Blair, and me -- but I am unimportant. We have to organize Schroeder and Chirac to speak beyond their home audiences, to show that it's a collective effort. Chirac needs to be heard, as do Havel and Schroeder. We have a generation of some young and determined leaders. They must be heard in Rome and Athens. Mr. President, you should seek out and address European audiences. Havel should speak to American audiences as part of the collective effort. When Tony Blair came to Brussels he had a tremendous impact around Europe, hit lots of news markets he is not normally heard in. In other words, we need to be a global NATO communications team building a coalition across borders. A collective approach like that would have great impact. That's what I want to see tomorrow. We have a press conference tomorrow after the Kosovo meeting. We'll have the 19 leaders; you and I will be there. (C)

The President: Regarding summit strategy, there are really three issues: mandates, the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) and new missions. (C)

Secretary General Solana: New missions is practically solved. On mandates, the last language I saw last night was not perfect but was getting close. It had one part that repeats the language from 1994 about the UN and OSCE but also reflects what we have done in the Balkans. We can either reaffirm both of those elements or drop it. The French are doing something today in Kosovo without a UNSCR mandate but don't want to admit that in writing. (C)

NSA Berger: You have to understand that this is an issue with potential to explode. Senator Warner is one of our strongest NATO supporters, as is Senator Roth. They and others have warned that if we appear to diminish NATO's authority to act they will introduce legislation to have the U.S. withdraw. We're under more scrutiny on this than on anything else on the summit agenda. There's a line below which we can't go without jeopardizing political and financial support for NATO. (C)

Secretary of State Albright: We ought really to just reaffirm what is in the 1949 treaty about the NATO-United Nations

relationship. All that is needed is in the preamble and Article 7 of the North Atlantic Treaty. (U)

Secretary General Solana: I can't do much more myself on this issue. I have exhausted my own authority on it. I don't know what Chirac will do but no one on the French side will act without his approval. On ESDI, we have had some very difficult discussions, especially with the Turks. The U.S. has been working toward agreement all along but the Turks are difficult. (U)

The President: Doesn't the language on the rights of non-EU allies help them? (U)

Secretary General Solana: Not enough. (U)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: The problem is if this is not agreed here, France will take it right in to the EU meetings where we have no voice. (U)

Secretary General Solana: That's why we need to find a deal with the Turks. We need to keep telling them they can ensure their equities through the implementation process. (U)

The President: We'll talk with the Turks. (U)

Secretary General Solana: You should work on France and Turkey. (U)

The President: And what about the Open Door? (U)

Secretary General Solana: It's possible the Italians might advocate letting Romania and Slovenia in now. (U)

The President: Will everyone agree if I proposed a summit review no later than 2002? (U)

Secretary General Solana: That would be good. (U)

The President: I'll support it strongly. (U)

Secretary General Solana: You'll have problems with Blair. (U)

The President: He agreed to it when we talked last night. (U)

Secretary General Solana: That's the first I've heard of that. (U)

The President: It's the right thing to do politically. (C)

Secretary General Solana: I got a phone call from Madrid last night; they have real problems with the Open Door language in the communique. (C)

Secretary of State Albright: We now have some improved language. (C)

NSA Berger: This will be the first run-on sentence I will approve. (C)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: I strongly suggest we not offer the 2002 date until we have agreement on mandates and ESDI. (C)

The President: Yes, I see the point of that. (C)

Secretary of Defense Cohen: We should work the French and Turks together. (C)

Secretary of State Albright: Blair has said he'll work on the French. (C)

The President: On mandates? (C)

Deputy Secretary of State Talbot: Yes, and ESDI. (C)

Secretary General Solana: The Italians and Greeks agreed yesterday they would like a summit news story saying that Chernomyrdin secured Milosevic's agreement to a UN-led security force. (S)

The President: That formula will not work but getting Russian and Serb agreement to an international force would represent progress. We'll have to discuss this subject later when there is more time. Thank you. (C)

-- End of Conversation --