

THE WHITE HOUSE
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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Secretary General Solana of
NATO

PARTICIPANTS: U.S. PARTICIPANTS

The President
Ambassador Alexander Vershbow
Secretary Madeleine Albright
Secretary William Cohen
Doug Sosnik
Samuel Berger
Brian Atwood
General Hugh Shelton
Antony Blinken (notetaker)

NATO PARTICIPANTS

Secretary General Javier Solana
Deputy Secretary Balanrino
Assistant Secretary General Klaiber
Assistant Secretary General Cragg
Director Domecq
Deputy Director Yer
Hoyt Lee (notetaker)

DATE, TIME May 5, 1999 -- 7:30 - 9:00 a.m.
PLACE: NATO Headquarters, Belgium

Secretary General Solana: Mr. President, first let me thank you for this visit. It is very important and very timely. But let me first start by saying again thank you for your hospitality and your leadership at the NATO Summit. I think we can all be happy with the results. How do you want to organize this meeting? (U)

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Reason: 1.5 (d)

Declassify on: June 7, 2009

The President: Let me first say I agree that the Summit went very, very well. You were great. We all appreciated your tremendous leadership. But let me turn to some of the issues about Kosovo. First, where are we on the maritime operation? (C)

Secretary General Solana: I think we are pretty close to finding a solution. The main problem is the so-called legal basis. The European Union took an important decision to implement an embargo. Many countries that are not in the EU have agreed to join. But of course, this is a consensual system. The military committee at NATO has been tasked to look at a broader search and visit system. I hope today that we can give a formal tasking to the military committee. But this legal basis problem remains. So what we have now is a consensual approach by the EU and NATO countries. For example, we cannot stop and search Russian ships given the problem of the legal basis. I hope we can find an appropriate solution, but it is taking time. Today is a crucial decision, I hope we can move things forward. (C)

The President: Would it help or would it hurt for me to say something in public?

Secretary General Solana: I don't think we need a new statement. But what we need to do is talk within NATO and explain to the other leaders. We could go to the United Nations Security Council. Meanwhile, we can continue to work on a consensual basis and go as far as we can in that manner. As you know lots of the oil goes through Slovenia to Croatia. We can't enter their borders. (C)

Secretary Albright: Croatia won't let you go in? (C)

Secretary General Solana: The problem is small boats that are moving right along the coastline. (C)

The President: Yes, the problem is we can't get big ships in there. (C)

Samuel Berger: Ironically, the problem is not really Russian ships even though that is the perception of the problem. (C)

Secretary General Solana: That is right. We need to work on Slovenia and Romania. They have all agreed to help. (C)

The other question is how do we handle updating KFOR and "B-"? On KFOR we had a discussion on Monday. Everyone agreed that there is a need to revisit because the situation today is different than it was when we first discussed KFOR. For example, we will need more engineers. Some countries do not want a formal tasking now. They just want to proceed and do it without comment. As for "B-" in other words an entry in force, we will get a report today from the military committee. (S)

On KFOR as such, some countries think that with diplomacy seeming to move forward, this is not the moment to say anything publicly. For example, that is France's position. I think what is important is that the work goes forward. And all agreed that work must be done. (S)

The President: How do you think the communications operation is working? We have now sent a number of good people from the United Kingdom, from the United States and other countries to help. (S)

Secretary General Solana: I think it is now working very well. I meet with them regularly. I think they are doing a very good job. We have French, German, British and Americans working on this. Other countries will also send people. So I think there are no difficulties, on the contrary. (S)

The President: I think we need to continue to work on this -- especially now, with some hope for diplomacy -- so that we keep getting out to the media of every country, new stories of atrocities. Most of the NATO countries are doing well. And of course, everyone has their own domestic problems to focus on too, as we do with that terrible situation in Denver. The difficulty is keeping the story line out in public. We need to do this to bolster our ability to stand strong. The press has an insatiable need to be fed. (S)

I don't know how much of a readout you got of our meetings with Chernomyrdin? We spent an hour and 45 minutes together. Sandy, Madeleine, the Vice President were also there. I think it will be very helpful in the long-term to get the conditions met, if we can do so with the Russians. Of course, it won't be helpful if it means watering down the conditions. We are determined to hold strong to the conditions. For example, compare the situation to early Bosnia. We were in a UN straight jacket with the dual key system. Now, there is no need to wait two or three years to do something. I think Chernomyrdin understands the importance, in terms of Russia's status, in terms of sustaining

reform, in terms of Russia's relationship with the West. But he still is focused more on what he can sell to Milosevic as opposed to our conditions. We are working hard to show that the conditions are not there for military victory, but are the minimal necessary conditions to make Kosovo work, to give people their lives back in a secure way. Meanwhile, we need to remain vigorous with the air campaign. But it is a net plus to work with the Russians. (C)

Secretary General Solana: This morning, I read about the visit of Chernomyrdin to New York and his meeting with Kofi Ana. It seems that it went well. He recognized that it is impossible to solve the problem without an international military force. (C)

Secretary Albright: That's right, but it is not clear what that means to him. (C)

Secretary General Solana: There still seems to be this idea of dividing sectors. (C)

The President: Yes, and it won't work, it would be a de facto partition. (C)

Samuel Berger: Can we come back for a moment to the maritime interdiction. I understand that we're a minority of one. Can we at least describe the voluntary system as "Phase I" so it is clear that this is not the final step, and that we are continuing to work on it. I hope we can move to a more comprehensive system that is more than "please stop." (C)

Secretary General Solana: The rules of engagement for a non-consensual system will be the same. So what we have to do is decide if countries are prepared to go beyond the consensual system. (C)

The President: Let me ask a practical question. If in fact a significant percentage of the oil is coming through Slovenia and then on to small boats that hug the Croatia coastline, why not put in small coast guard boats? There are less likely to cause a problem than larger ships. (C)

Secretary General Solana: Yes, we must push Croatia to be more helpful as well. (C)

Secretary Albright: They agreed to turn off the pipeline. (C)

The President: This is all well enough, but what I think we need is some small boats operating in shallow water. (C)

Secretary Cohen: Some of the countries that are against a non-consensual regime will refuse to put in boats. (C)

Secretary General Solana: Not every country needs to participate. (C)

The President: Let me ask you about the humanitarian operation. It is of great concern to me. We are watching Macedonia very closely. We cannot allow it to be destabilized. We should talk about moving more people to Turkey. (C)

Secretary General Solana: I think there are three things that we have to look at. First, new camps in Macedonia. Second, countries that have the capacity to take on more people must do so. Third, we need to move more refugees out to Albania. It is hard to find land there. So these are my three reactions. Now Blair tells me that the Macedonian Prime Minister is more reliable, but there are ups and downs. (C)

The President: He is also very young. (U)

Secretary General Solana: Yes, it is quite a combination -- their president is 81, and their Prime Minister is 31. Another thing I should mention is that Bulgaria and Romania are behaving very well. We had some questions on the use of civilian air space yesterday. It is a complicated question but we had a very good outcome. So on the whole I think the neighbors are behaving very well. On the humanitarian situation overall, we need to get more services. The problem is not so much capabilities but the difficulty of dealing with others. We at NATO are basically doing everything. When others see that we are responsible for all the humanitarian efforts they get upset, like the UNHCR. There is a stupid competition. We don't need the credit, we don't need more publicity. Anyway, it is getting better now that we have the summer, but then we have the cold winter ahead of us and so we need to act. (C)

Brian Atwood: We are exploring the Turkey option. One of the issues is that we need to get Bulgaria and Greece to allow over land transit. (C)

Secretary General Solana: I know that Turkey is taking quite a large number. And Bulgaria is also more open now. (C)

Brian Atwood: The numbers are overwhelming. If it continues, we will need a radical solution. Bulgaria and Romania can take in between 5,000 and 10,000, but that is it. (S)

Secretary General Solana: The best country to help is Romania. It is a complicated place. The pressure on the President is tough. But we will hate to have Iliescu again. That would be a big step backwards. We need to talk to them to help them out. Of all the neighboring states, it is the one with the most difficulty. (S)

Apart from that, you're going to Germany. Some of our countries have elections and of course party congresses. I hope these will not prove to be too difficult. In Germany there are the Greens on May 13. Then on June 13, we have the European elections. So in this campaign season, Kosovo will be an important issue. We need to maintain a high level of support. The NATO Summit showed the leadership at the top is very important. With all respect to Secretary Albright, Ministers can do a lot but it is on the margins. The effort at the top is key, it can break logjams. (S)

The President: Is there anything else we can do to help you?
(U)

Secretary General Solana: No, I think we are doing well. We just have to keep the communications open. The atmosphere is good. (S)

I have two concerns about the media in the coming days. First, the idea that NATO makes mistakes everyday. We need to stop that and present things in a different manner. We somehow need to incorporate the collateral damage in our normal action. (S)

Secretary Cohen: We need to keep the focus on the refugees and on their suffering. (S)

Secretary General Solana: I agree but the media is sending lots of people to Belgrade. It is outrageous. (S)

Samuel Berger: I think we need to take them to the refugee camps in an organized, systematic way. Once they see that, they will see Belgrade in a very different way. (S)

The President: It was very interesting when Jesse Jackson returned. He and his group had clientitis. In Belgrade itself, the Serbs are in complete denial because the State controls the

media. They do not acknowledge Kosovo or Bosnia, they don't want to know about it. We need to hammer all of this home to the western press. (C)

Secretary General Solana: We need to use the people in the camps to be interviewed, to tell their personal story. This could have a real impact. The second thing I want to say is that we need to get leaders to communicate beyond the borders of their own countries. They need to talk to other countries. This will help show that it is not just one country acting here but a coalition of countries. (C)

The President: I totally agree. When I am in Germany, I will be doing a round table with a number of foreign journalists. Let me say too that in the run up to the European election, I think we need a good thirty-day plan. We need to communicate very clearly to our publics. And we need to take people to the camps to do tours and to see for themselves. We need a very aggressive effort. (C)

Secretary General Solana: We had fantastic press conference with some Kosovar Albanians here. It made a big impact on the press corps. (C)

Anyway, I think it is time now for the briefings that we have organized. There are two of them, one on the military situation and another on the humanitarian situation. (C)

The President: Okay, that sounds great. By the way, I know you are getting one of my very good people, Bob Bell. (C)

Secretary General Solana: Yes, I thank you very much. We are delighted that he will be joining us. (U)

Samuel Berger: I hope Javier, that you believe in reciprocity.

Secretary General Solana: We'll see.

-- End of Conversation --