

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Wim Kok, Prime Minister of the Netherlands (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Terry Dornbush, U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands
Alexander Vershbow, Senior Director for European Affairs, NSC Staff, Notetaker

Wim Kok, Prime Minister
Hans van Mierlo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs
Adriaan Jacobovits de Szeged, Ambassador to the U.S.
Joop Merckelbach, Deputy Secretary General, Ministry of General Affairs
Joris Vos, Director General for Political Affairs

DATE, TIME February 28, 1995, 10:25 - 10:50 a.m.
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: I liked the Dutch questions (during the photo op). (U)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: This is because yesterday we had a talk with Dole and he said something about peacekeeping. (U)

The President: Dole has had his view, for the past two years, that the U.S. should unilaterally lift the arms embargo -- never mind whether it collapses UNPROFOR and never mind if our analysis is that the Serbs could win because of the time it would take to get heavy artillery to the Bosnian forces. Unilateral lift doesn't work. Coordinated multilateral lift might have worked when we thought of it in February 1993. But that was a lifetime ago, and I am not sure it would work now tactically. One problem I have with the Congress is that a lot of my supporters disagree with me on this for particular reasons. For example, all the Jewish Senators see this as more or less the same as the

Holocaust, and they feel guilty that they are not doing anything to stop the Serbs. So I lose 3 or 4 votes to Dole every time from that group. It is almost egocentric for the Congress to believe that, in a situation in which the U.S. is not sending troops -- and no one is arguing for us to enter the war on the side of the government -- the U.S. should take the decision to collapse UNPROFOR, with adverse military results. So I have fought them off. Even before there was a Republican majority, there was a big majority to lift the embargo in the House. I warded it off in the Senate by just enough votes because of my personal relationships with the majority. I don't think that they can get a veto-proof majority in the Senate now. (C)

Prime Minister Kok: There has been a lot of change here in Washington. (U)

The President: That is why I wanted you to talk with Members of Congress. (C)

Prime Minister Kok: In our meeting with Dole, he was very straight with us on the one hand. But on the other hand the way he reacted give us the impression that his position on lift was not as firm as we expected. This was not clear in his words however, which were very direct. He also indicated that there might be others in the Senate who would change their position, such as Lugar. (C)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: I had the feeling that he assumed that there was a possibility of a change in his position, but he wouldn't say so publicly in order to keep the pressure on. (U)

The President: Dole believes that it is good politics with the ethnic communities to be perceived as having an aggressive policy. He also has a Croatian-American staffer who urges him on. If we lift the embargo, we need to think of the next step. It's easy if we have no responsibility, with no one on the ground. But what is next? If we lifted the embargo unilaterally and collapsed UNPROFOR, and the Bosnians started to lose, the U.S. would have to come in with air power. We would have caused the collapse of Bosnia unless we sent in air power and eventually manpower. (C)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: I asked Dole what he thought about lift in the situation we would have in April, which will be a chaotic month in the former Yugoslavia: Croatia will be sending away UNPROFOR and there will be a reconsideration of the monitors along the border between Bosnia and Serbia; there could be an end to the foreign troop presence if we add lift to the equation. I asked how Dole could imagine that the combination of these factors would have anything but a chaotic effect. Dole didn't

respond. I have the feeling that he was more open to the new facts that I mentioned than he wished to show. (S)

Prime Minister Kok: In addition to former Yugoslavia, the other element behind the journalists' questions was your commitment to the UN in general. That is an important thing, in our view. The world situation has changed so rapidly. The Soviet Union is gone. The whole question of defining our enemy has changed. Our old strategy was based on U.S. military power against that of the Soviet Union. Now we have to define positive goals for NATO and in other areas. We have to decide how we can contribute to organizing a world in which partnership is the key element. We will be speaking in the U.S., especially with the Republicans, among whom we see isolationism gaining ground. There are certainly grounds to criticize the way some UN operations are handled, but generally the UN is of key importance. It would be a dramatic mistake if the U.S. (or other players) stepped back from their responsibility. That is the key point -- in this, the U.S. must show leadership. It is up to the U.S. to play the key role in the process. We need a dialogue between Europe and the U.S. to make that clear. In a world of universal values, this is what is needed. (S)

The President: I agree. It was interesting that the Republican leadership was more outward-looking at the early stages of the Mexican crisis. But the rank and file are more isolationist and politics is involved. You know I believe in the UN, in peacekeeping and in the U.S. being outward-looking. I believe this as much as I believe that the sun rises in the morning and the moon rises in the evening. There is a lack of experience among the new members of Congress. It is helpful when people like you talk with them, even if it seems as if they are not listening. It is important for them to hear you reaffirm the historic role of the U.S. This works to our advantage. In a month, I will go to Haiti and observe the hand-off of the U.S. command to a UN force. The UN, of course, will remain there until the elections have been carried out. We are looking for opportunities to highlight for the Congress the benefits of peacekeeping and to reinforce that impression. It is interesting that the American people are isolationist in general, but not in particular. If you ask them for more foreign aid, they will say no. But if you ask people whether the UN should deal with a specific problem, people will say yes. So the people don't support the Republican line one inch past the point of simple rhetoric. (S)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: I don't think that any President could put into practice those words. If Dole were in this office, he couldn't do what he says. (S)

The President: Most of what he is doing is an attempt to have it both ways politically. Republicans will say don't do X, and then when I do it, they will not have to share the blame. There may be one or two points of real difference. I think we will have a serious confrontation in April over lifting the arms embargo, particularly if the Contact Group has fallen apart. But I think we will win that battle. (Ø)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: We are really concerned about that. Our troops are in Srebrenica and are the most vulnerable peacekeepers in Bosnia. They would have to fight their way out against the Muslims and the Serbs. That is not our only reason for opposing lift. We also believe that it would restart the war and, in combination with the other factors I mentioned ... (Ø)

The President: Our military people believe that lift would lead to further losses for the Bosnians. (Ø)

Secretary Christopher: The Contact Group has been pressing for acceptance of its map, but that strategy has almost played itself out. We tried to get leverage against the Bosnian Serbs, but our leverage has run out. Our latest effort with Milosevic was risky and was always a long shot. But it didn't work. It is important not to abandon the Contact Group, but we will have to refocus on preventing an outbreak of war in Croatia and preserving the cessation of hostilities in Bosnia. On the latter, things are going pretty well except in Bihac. There is a lot to do in creating a containment strategy. We need to do more to get Tudjman to extend UNPROFOR. If there is an outbreak of war in Croatia, it will spread to Bosnia and there will be no way to prevent a wider conflict. So we need to prevent UNPROFOR withdrawal from Croatia. With all of this, we have a tough, tough road ahead on Capitol Hill. Some people there have stopped thinking about Bosnia and will vote for lift automatically. A lot of them want to do what I call "lift and pray." They don't want to put in any resources or trainers, and certainly not any troops. They want to get an emotional sense of relief by lifting the arms embargo. That's the attitude that we need to fight.

(Ø)

The President: I have a real problem on lift. The Democrats in the Senate, who are by and large Jewish, see a special historical burden. They feel we cannot walk away from the Muslims. Barbara Boxer, Carl Levin would never vote against me on anything else.

(Ø)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: This is a new factor that I was not aware of. (Ø)

The President: This is a reversal of the situation of Ronald Reagan, when Congress disagreed with him, but he pursued his foreign policy anyway. Unless we have a special problem, especially in the Senate, we would normally have protection against efforts to override a veto. But my normal supporters are not with me on this. (X)

Secretary Christopher: I guess the supporters of lift are very numerous. Not a single Democrat would fail to vote for lift. It will take a lot of effort to stop it. (X)

The President: People say the arms embargo is not fair, that Serbia gives the Bosnian Serbs all the weapons they want. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: We should talk to them. We are protecting the Bosnians against the Serbs. Lifting the embargo would leave them without protection. The minute the embargo is lifted, the enclaves we are protecting will be handed over to the Serbs. Therefore, we need to talk with the supporters of lift and convince them we are on their side. (X)

The President: Please do all you can. Your time is better spent with the Senators. The House behaves like a herd. (X)

Secretary Christopher: I can almost persuade Senator Levin; he is on the edge. (X)

Anthony Lake: In January, we spent a lot of time sending teams, especially military teams, to Capitol Hill to discuss lift. Our aim was to make clear that they will be responsible if they lift the arms embargo. The issue has not moved forward because Dole realizes that he has to overcome skepticism in the Senate. In the House, on the other hand, Gingrich is playing a game. He will get a lift resolution through, let the President veto it, and then not try to override the veto, but allow it to be sustained. (X)

The President: They want to take a position without taking responsibility. (X)

Anthony Lake: We want to keep the emphasis on responsibility, responsibility, responsibility. (X)

Prime Minister Kok: We will make a special investment in contacts with Senators. I see it as very important. (X)

The President: Tell them you have soldiers on the ground protecting lives. If the embargo is lifted, you will leave. Tell them that your commanders say that if the embargo is lifted, the Bosnians will lose. When I came into office, I wanted to

lift the embargo very badly, and I believe that if we had done it early, we would have achieved a peace settlement. But given where we are now, we need to look at the evidence, including what it will do to our allies. Secretary Christopher is right. The Congress is very frustrated and just wants to do something. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: I am very happy with your clear position. We should look for opportunities to influence those parts of Congress that are influenceable. We will ask our parliamentarians to come, and I understand we need to do it rather soon. (X)

The President: You shouldn't underestimate the capacity of the freshmen Congressmen to learn, especially in the area of foreign affairs, where we may get more leeway in how they vote. You should look at all the places where the Netherlands have business investments in the U.S., and see whether your Ambassador can invite those Congressmen to a briefing -- not to tie this issue to your business interests, but to keep that in the back of their minds. (X)

Ambassador Jacobovits: That's exactly what we are doing -- in areas where we have large business interests and where there are large numbers of Americans of Dutch origin. We have received interesting reactions. Some of them don't know anything and have never been abroad. Some of them toe the line, while others are more open to our arguments. (X)

Secretary Christopher: That's great. You're ahead of us. There are 11 new Republican Senators and you should talk to all of them. (X)

Prime Minister Kok: My Minister of Defense will visit for a week. He should invest some time in briefings for the Congress, presenting the facts and the realities of the situation. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: They don't know a lot of the aspects of the problem. (X)

Prime Minister Kok: Our Defense Minister could be especially effective. (X)

Anthony Lake: He should emphasize to the Congressmen that they will be tremendously responsible for their own votes. The whole world is watching, especially those with troops on the ground in the former Yugoslavia, and there is a need for responsibility. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: Lifting the embargo could provoke an immediate U.S. action to help evacuate UNPROFOR. That could be an argument to use with them as well. (X)

Secretary Christopher: Yes, lift could Americanize the whole process. We would have a responsibility to evacuate the peacekeepers. We would set in train events that put the Bosnians at risk. That is what the freshmen Congressmen have to face up to. (X)

The President: A lot of them are living in a time warp. Two years ago, the Bosnians came here and asked for a lifting of the arms embargo and that was all. They didn't want more. But the situation now is very different. (X)

Prime Minister Kok: What is your assessment of the Russians' position toward the problems in the former Yugoslavia? (X)

The President: The Russians are occupied with other matters. (X)

Secretary Christopher: We are deeply disappointed by what Kozyrev did with Milosevic. He undercut the Contact Group badly. The bottom line is that the Russians are under so much pressure in the Duma that they are trying to curry favor with the military. So their foreign policy may be even less independent than previously. We are trying to persuade Milosevic to do something positive. Instead, the Russians have shown them that he has an ally among the nationalists in the Duma. But we need to keep the Contact Group alive. We cannot expect as much from it, but we should not abandon it. We won't get the Russians to put sufficient pressure on the Serbs, but we need to preserve the NATO coalition. We need to work to prevent an outbreak of war in Croatia and the resumption of the war in Bosnia. The Russian situation raises larger questions. Chechnya has impaired Moscow's ability to be adventurous, but it also has made Russian diplomacy less effective. The Russians have less maneuvering room. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: Do we have any instruments to stop what they are doing in Chechnya? In the European Council, we don't know exactly what to do. Gaydar told me that we should not use the words "economic sanctions", because that would bring the whole Russian population -- which is now critical of Yeltsin -- against us. (X)

The President: I agree with that. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: But Gaydar said that we should be as tough as possible in our political language, that we should

send delegations, the Red Cross, Amnesty International -- perhaps these steps will influence the situation for the better. In fact, what language will be useful? The Russians are not terrified by political language. (S)

Secretary Christopher: We need to make clear in a subtle way that participation in the G-7 and other fora will not stay on an upward path if they don't handle Chechnya more effectively. (S)

The President: This is what we have done. I have talked to Yeltsin, as has Helmut Kohl. Yeltsin is in a very dicey situation, we know that. But I pushed him hard to let the OSCE people in, to press for a political solution, and to downplay the military aspects. I am hoping that he will settle this crisis before the World War II celebration in May. We are trying to back them off as much as we can. There is a lot of opposition to what he is doing in Russia. But I agree that it could slip the other way if they thought we were threatening sanctions. (S)

Prime Minister Kok: But we should not reward them either. The May 9 anniversary is instrumental. If we decide to go to Moscow, it should be combined with a strong push to change the situation in Chechnya. They want to hold military parades, yet this would be unacceptable under the present circumstances. They should be told that a closer relationship to the G-7 would have to be forgotten. We need to see steps before May 9, rather than threatening economic sanctions. (S)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: Are you going to the May 9 anniversary? (S)

The President: I have not made a final decision. It's a difficult decision. I want to continue to support democracy in Russia and movement toward reform. The World War II anniversary is a big deal for Yeltsin. We don't want to be seen as failing to acknowledge the magnitude of Russian losses during the war. This argues for attending. But we have sought to make the most of it with regard to affecting Chechnya. (S)

Anthony Lake: Beyond how we deal with Chechnya, the fundamental issue in Russia is whether Yeltsin can repair his base with the reformers. If he doesn't, he has no political base. So we are walking a tightrope on how to use the May 9 event. We need to be firm about Chechnya. But how we say it should not give the nationalists a hammer with which to beat Yeltsin. It would only make it harder for Yeltsin to win back reformers like Gaydar. (S)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: Yes, Yeltsin is a hostage. (S)

Prime Minister Kok: A distinction should be made between the clear language that we use with Yeltsin in private and what we say in public. (X)

The President: I have told him as plainly as I can that his whole legacy -- everything he has stood for and symbolized -- is at risk unless Chechnya is resolved. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: You are right in referring to the Russians' World War II experience. It is the only thing they have. All the rest of their history is full of shame. Their victory in World War II is the only positive thing they can show the world. Therefore, we need to give them as much room as we can. 22 million Russians died. They feel that they were the real martyrs in the war -- the West got all the glamour, and they got all the misery. (X)

Prime Minister Kok: But my view is that public opinion in the Netherlands would not understand our presence, with military troops marching by, as long as Chechnya is still going on. So we need to take into account the Russian psychology on the one hand, but also our own domestic psychology on the other. We need to find a way to be there in May in a better context than is now the case. The Russians should be asked to understand that. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: Yes, this is correct. (X)

The President: We will keep working on it. I have a good relationship with Yeltsin. So far we have managed to work through most issues. I believe we have an understanding on a timetable for NATO expansion, but Russian politics are so dicey. (X)

Prime Minister Kok: What is your view about NATO expansion? (X)

The President: I think we have a good approach in which we will have a study and a report to Partners during 1995 on the "how" and "why." We will not get to the "when" and "who" until next year. Everything is being calculated with account for the NATO-Russia relationship. The Russians are still in a state of agitation and Chechnya has not done anything for their position in that regard. (X)

Prime Minister Kok: Should we move to our expanded meeting? I wanted to ask you about the Energy Charter. (X)

The President: The only other things I wanted to raise here were the helicopters. When do you expect to make a decision? (X)

Prime Minister Kok: We are very close to a decision. We have reached a decision with most of the concerned Cabinet members and will have a decision probably in the second half of March. There are really two options, as I told you in our phone call earlier. We are deciding on the basis of three factors: the first is quality and price and the way the helicopters can be used to meet our military and operational requirements; the second is the whole framework of compensation for employment -- the qualitative and quantitative package of structural and incidental elements; the third factor is how it relates to European cooperation and our relations with other European countries. On the second point, until now the total compensation package of the French-German helicopter has been better than that of the U.S. That cannot be denied, although there are other elements to be considered as well. So we are still undecided. (X)

The President: I think that McDonnell-Douglas will make a better offer. We have spoken with them and received word back that they will improve their offer. (X)

Prime Minister Kok: We had a meeting last week with all the Cabinet ministers concerned. I believe we can decide on the basis of an objective analysis of the packages. Compensation is not the only question, but it will play a role. We have requested that the U.S. firm reconsider the composition of its package, both the size and the qualitative make-up. It will really be a help if that package was reconsidered. (X)

The President: I have been informed, as I said, that they will improve the compensation package. (X)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: Let me add one small remark. We are in the run-up to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference. It will be very hard to get somewhere on European integration. We are doing our utmost to get our foreign policy thinking in line and to get strategic and commercial procedures established at the European level. From a purely foreign policy point of view, there have to be strong arguments not to go European on the helicopter purchase. In the present context of European integration, it would be strange to buy American. People already know we do a lot of business with the U.S., and our military is more Anglo-Saxon-oriented than in other countries. But buying American would create a strange attitude unless the arguments are strong enough. We need to show what is good for the Netherlands. (X)

The President: I understand your position, but you have to consider the flip side as well. It would be of enormous help to me in my argument against the isolationists to be able to show that we have all kinds of relations with other countries and that

we can't have commercial relations without doing our share internationally. There are a lot of new Congressmen who have never thought about these questions. Their instinct is to follow the isolationist route. So don't discount what help it will have in fighting isolationism here.

Anthony Lake: There is also specific application in support of NATO. Interoperability is a serious question. It is harder for us to argue that we should stick with NATO, that NATO is the way for us to engage in the world, if we don't have interoperable systems. (U)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: I see your point. (U)

The President: And I see yours! (U)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: It might be helpful, however, if I could provide another perspective. We have very weak arguments because the openness of the defense market is one-sided. The American market is one-sided. You wouldn't be able to buy Netherlands frigates in the future, even though they are very good, as good as the Apache Helicopters. We know we have the best frigates, but countries won't buy them because of their own domestic situations. (U)

Prime Minister Kok: I see your point and I take your point. The message here is that partnership, cooperation -- NATO cooperation -- are important. But as head of a new government, I also have to emphasize good neighborliness, good cooperation with Germany and good cooperation with my Benelux partners. If we want good neighbors, people say we should buy European. (U)

Foreign Minister van Mierlo: Ten minutes before this meeting, Foreign Minister Kinkel was on the line on this very subject, urging us to buy European. (U)

Anthony Lake: We only have ten minutes left for our expanded meeting. (U)

The President: I suggest we go directly to lunch. (U)

-- End of Conversation --