

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Vaclav Havel, President of the
Czech Republic (U)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.
The President
Madeleine Albright, U.S. Permanent
Representative to the United Nations
Daniel Fried, Senior Director for Central
and Eastern European Affairs NSC
(Notetaker)

Slovakia
Vaclav Havel, President of Czech Republic
Michal Zantovsky, Ambassador to U.S.
Pavel Seifter, Foreign Affairs Advisor
to President Havel
Ladislav Spacek, Presidential Spokesman
(Notetaker)

DATE, TIME October 21, 1995, 1:00-1:20 p.m.
AND PLACE: National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library,
Library Room

The President: It's good to see you. (U)

President Havel: You have a very tight schedule, so I would like
to skip preliminaries and go straight to the issues. (U)

The President: That's fine. (U)

President Havel: First, the Czech Republic is following closely
and greatly appreciates your initiative in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I
have conveyed to President Izetbegovic our support for the
current process underway. We do support this process and are
prepared to send a Czech unit, at our expense, to help implement
a peace settlement. I repeat: at our expense. We are not
looking for charity. I have only one request -- that this unit
not be placed under Russian command. We have a good deal of
historical experience under Russian generals and have no wish to
repeat it. I have discussed with Minister Perry and General

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Shalikashvili the details of Czech participation in Bosnia. We want to be associated with NATO forces and under U.S. command.

(C)

With respect to the peace process in Bosnia, we place great hopes in the talks due to begin on October 31. In my opinion, and this is shared by the great majority of Czechs, it is important to preserve the integrity of Bosnia-Hercegovina. What is at stake is the principle of coexistence of different nationalities within one state. This principle goes beyond the intrinsic importance of Bosnia itself. We must avoid giving the impression that Karadzic and what he stands for has gained politically what he strove to gain on the battlefield. Political recognition of aggression would only inspire more. (C)

Let me continue by saying that I believe the United States is aware of its responsibility in Europe and the world. The United States won the Cold War but it has not yet won the peace. The new order of the world has still not emerged and it cannot emerge without the participation and leadership of the United States.

(C)

It is in this context that I would like to turn to the issue of NATO and NATO's expansion. We have examined NATO's recent study of the process of expansion. We have worked out our reply. I read this study and must say that it quite good. We must build on the study. In my view, discussions should start next year, in 1996, on which countries will join the Alliance and when. Time is working against us. The Czech Republic and not just our country wants to be anchored in the world. We should no longer hang in a vacuum, as has been the case during the six years since 1989. It is in the interests of Europe as a whole that we speedily build a new structure for security. (C)

I said that time is working against us. Two years ago, Yeltsin told us that he had no objections to the Czech Republic joining NATO. Look at what he says now. The situation in Russia could get worse if the communists win the Parliamentary elections or Yeltsin loses the Presidential elections, if indeed these elections are even held. (C)

What I have said does not mean that I lack appreciation for the progress already made, for example, the Partnership for Peace. I attended part of the Cooperative Challenge exercise, a Partnership for Peace exercise. The Partnership works and works well. But the Central European states believe you must go further. We all want to have good relations with Russia. But on some issues one cannot yield. (C)

In particular, the West should not yield on the issue of NATO's enlargement for the sake of reassuring Russia. If you did, if you postponed NATO enlargement in order to calm Russia, it would mean that you had accepted Russia's logic that NATO is in fact an enemy that is approaching Russia and that you had agreed to slow what was fundamentally an anti-Russian process. I do not accept the whole logic. Such arguments are themselves a relic of the Cold War. NATO's enlargement is not part of a balance of power game in which the balance is tipping against Russia through NATO's expansion. The issue is rather how NATO, Russia and the United States can become partners. Russia's argument that NATO is too strong and is drawing too close to its borders is simply not acceptable on principle. (S)

One more thought and I will conclude my long lecture. A vacuum in nature sucks in outside forces. Thus, a security vacuum in Central Europe would encourage the projection of Russian geopolitical interests that hearken back to Soviet times. We see this process taking place in the Balkans now. The dynamic of a prolonged lack of clarity in Central Europe would not be good for Russia or for Russian democracy. (S)

There is no danger of a Soviet-era type of military occupation of Central Europe. But the danger does exist of political and economic pressures on Central Europe that would seek to perpetuate a dependency. For example, the Russian Minister of Nuclear Power recently reproached the Czech Republic for pursuing an upgrade of the Temelin nuclear power station through Westinghouse, saying that the Czech Republic should not generate a fight with Russia by seeking Western technology in the nuclear energy field. He said that the Czech Republic depended on Russia for oil and gas and, besides, "We are all Slavs." (S)

The President: First, let me discuss Bosnia. Thank you for being willing to participate in a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. I remember our conversation about Bosnia at Madeleine Albright's residence in June. Events in Bosnia gave us an opening to do more there. The fall of Srebrenica and the lack of action by the West Europeans was one factor. I responded by saying that the United States would have to take action; we could not stand by. NATO then did take action. At about the same time, Croatia began its ground offensive. Croatia's advance eased the problem on the ground because, as a result, the parties to the conflict each possess about half the territory of Bosnia. (S)

We now have two problems. First, can we make a peace agreement? We will try, beginning in about ten days. Second, what will take place in Eastern Slavonia? We are working on both issues. (S)

With respect to NATO, I understand your point. In fact, this was the argument I made to Yeltsin when we last met. His reaction to the NATO issue is a response to domestic pressure. He wants to be reelected and I don't know whether he can be. I will be firm with him and make clear that we will proceed with our plans in a careful, deliberate fashion. We can work with Russia and should continue to do so. I have the impression that some West Europeans may be more willing to bend to Russian pressure than I am. So you should work with the West Europeans and encourage them to continue on the steady path we have developed. We can do this without pushing Yeltsin too much. (S)

The question is whether Yeltsin will press us too much before his election to make a commitment not to do anything about NATO enlargement even after his election. That would be a problem. We cannot delay a great deal longer because NATO enlargement is something we have to do. I believe that both elections in Russia will be held. I just hope we won't get pressure from Yeltsin to make a public commitment not to make decision on the who and when of NATO enlargement in 1996. This would be bad. I expect a very difficult meeting with Yeltsin. It could be very hard. What he said about Kozyrev was simply unfair. (S)

You should talk to other NATO Allies about your concerns. I essentially agree with what you said. First, we should elicit the reactions of Partners to NATO's study. NATO then should meet and see about a timetable for further action. I have the personal impression, a feeling, that the end of 1996 might be an acceptable time for the Allies to address the question of who and when. I'm not sure. But I am sure that there will be no negative promises to Yeltsin about NATO. We must be clear. (S)

Regarding Bosnia, it may be possible to work out some sort of shared mission with Russia and give him something to take home from the meeting at Hyde Park. But he said that there can be no Russian forces under a NATO commander. We cannot have two commands for a mission in which combat and fighting may take place. (S)

If Russia moves in an aggressive direction in Europe we may have to speed up the NATO process. We have kept it slow and it could stay slow if Russia relented. But an aggressive Russia would make us reconsider this. (S)

President Havel: Our time is drawing to a close. Let me thank you for your time for this meeting, for coming to the museum and for your speech. I will attend your dinner. I will keep my fingers crossed about your meeting with Yeltsin. (S)

The President: I have one more matter. It would be helpful if you could repeat in the U.S. and to the Congress that you support our effort in Bosnia and are prepared to send troops to support it. Congress knows that the American people are reluctant to become involved. They want not so much to block our involvement but to be able to blame me if it goes wrong; to say that was my fault. In fact, if it goes wrong it would be my fault. Still, Congress might not approve our involvement and I would have to go in anyway. This would be difficult. It would help if you were able to speak out about this. (S)

President Havel: That is not a problem I believe you in fact are on the right course. (U)

The President: You are very well known in the United States and popular and can influence the debate. (S)

It's been good to see you again. (U)

-- End of Conversation --