

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Former Polish President Lech Walesa (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Samuel Berger, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Daniel Fried, Senior Director for Central and Eastern European Affairs, NSC Staff, Notetaker
David Johnson, Senior Director for Public Affairs, NSC Staff
Victor Litwinski, Interpreter

Lech Walesa, former President of Poland
Jerzy Kozminski, Polish Ambassador to the United States
Marek Karpinski, Walesa Spokesman
Andrzej Jaroszynski, Deputy Chief of Mission, Notetaker
Magdalena Iwinska, Interpreter

DATE, TIME June 3, 1996, 11:00 a.m. - 11:27 a.m.
AND PLACE: Map Room, The White House

The President: Hello, Mr. Walesa. It's good to see you and good to see you looking so well. (U)

Lech Walesa: I feel pretty good. After all this travel, I'm in real American condition. You know, I've been traveling around the United States for a couple of weeks, talking to a lot of people -- students, faculty, Polish Americans -- and I must say that Americans are now very engaged in politics, very interested in it and not just interested in money as I've seen before. (U)

We've spoken about NATO enlargement and people are thinking about this in two ways: a peaceful line and a line of confrontation. Many would not want to do it if it meant confrontation. They wouldn't want to die to Eastern Europe. And I understand this. But I tell them that we don't have to have confrontation in mind as we enlarge NATO. Just the opposite: if we enlarge NATO we

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Reason: 1.5(b,d)
Declassify On: 6/4/06

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Sec. 3.5(b)
White House Guidelines, September 11, 2006
By YZ NARA, Date 6/5/2015
2015-0780-M (1.22)

won't have confrontation; we'll only have confrontation if we don't enlarge because if we don't enlarge than Americans would have to die, but not for Eastern Europe, not for Poland, but for their own and their own interests. (C)

I told all this to students at the University of Chicago. They were there with two professors who opposed NATO enlargement and I spoke for a long time. They supported my idea in the end -- 17 out of 20 did so. The professors were surprised. So it's clear that some Americans are opposed to enlargement and that is not easy for you, but many support it as well. (U)

The President: You know where I stand on this: we should enlarge NATO; we will have the support of the American people for this and most Europeans will support us, too. Since we first discussed this, you and I, I've persuaded most of our European allies that we should move ahead and I've stressed that there will be no veto by Russia nor by anyone else. NATO ministers are meeting now and will meet again in December. They will stay on the exact timetable that we got NATO's foreign ministers to agree to last year. Enlargement will come and we should only make clear that through enlargement we are not doing anything against any country. (C)

With respect to Poland, I have the impression that the country is still moving forward in a pro-Western way. Poland will soon join the OECD; reforms are continuing and I hope these will continue. (C)

Lech Walesa: Obviously, we will do our best to continue these reforms. But all depends really on what you in America decide. The Europeans -- France, England, the others -- will not decide this question. You will. We Europeans complain about you but look to you to decide things; we have an American complex. The Poles will support you fully. You can count on it. The Germans are both supportive (on NATO enlargement) and not supportive; they are constantly changing because they have a Russia complex. We Poles don't have a Russia complex because we've already settled our scores with them. (C)

But America decides these issues. And without a clear signal from you Europe will lose its way. That would be terrible because now, for the first time, Europe has a chance, a unique chance, for unity. Not unity of the sort Stalin and Hitler tried to create but real, democratic unity. So my plea is to create a United States of Europe. I could even be the President. But the point is that we have a historic moment to make the right decisions. As I've told you before, the question is whether we will achieve this. (C)

We won't achieve it if we make too many concessions to Russia. And you have control over this. Not the French, Germans, British nor anyone else. But you. So a manly decision awaits. We will support you if you make a clear one. Perhaps not now, but in your second term. That's what we want. (C)

The President: We understand very well what is going on. We have to enlarge NATO in a way that that does not provoke a bad reaction from Russia but does not give them a veto either. We must unify Europe politically and economically. (C)

Lech Walesa: But opportunities have been wasted before. That's because democracy has trouble making the tough decisions; democracy makes easy decisions but not difficult ones. The West lost two opportunities. One was in August 1991 after the putsch in Moscow. NATO could have enlarged then to support democracy and reform; in order to support Yeltsin, in fact, who stood for democracy. Yeltsin would have supported this had it been done in the right way. The second opportunity was in the summer of 1993 when Yeltsin visited Poland. We got him to agree -- to sign an agreement -- in which he said he did not object to Poland joining NATO. He was there with all of his generals and ministers and he agreed to this. But the West did not react and two weeks later he withdrew his offer. You could have enlarged NATO then or at least said you were going to. (C)

The third opportunity is coming soon, after the Russian elections. If Yeltsin loses -- and he has very little chance of winning in my opinion -- there will be chaos. So you should enlarge NATO to help the forces of democracy in Russia. If Yeltsin wins it might be harder to enlarge NATO because he will depend on some understanding you have reached with him. I don't know what these understandings might be but you do. You should understand that this will be a decisive moment because if you wait too long and Russia grows stronger, there will only be new conditions coming either from Russia directly or through Belarus or even Ukraine. So the election is decisive. Yeltsin has slim chances, though of course the election really will be won by the side with the better structures to count the votes, not just get votes but count the votes. (C)

The President: I think Yeltsin's chances are better than that, but we shall see. In any event, we will pursue our timetable for NATO enlargement regardless of the outcome of the election. (C)

Lech Walesa: Russia is unstable and unpredictable and unlikely to have really normal elections. I told Senator Dole what I told you about the importance of counting votes. He agreed and said that in an American primary election this year he got more votes than there were inhabitants of that electoral district. (C)

Marek Karpinski: It was a Republican primary in San Juan, Puerto Rico. (U)

Lech Walesa: One more thing: Yeltsin really can be dangerous. He has already shot at his people and at parliament. He has crossed this threshold. He has the will and the structures to carry out such action. Every other politician in Russia might have doubts and hesitations before reaching the shooting stage and might not be sure whether the structures would actually obey an order to shoot. But Yeltsin would have no such doubts. This part of the world is not like the United States where an order is an order. In Russia, orders are often just not realized. But Yeltsin has the capability to do such things. This makes him dangerous in a situation of confrontation. In a peaceful situation, of course, Yeltsin is preferable because he is a known quantity. But the situation is not necessarily peaceful in Russia. (C)

I should add that you have with you on your staff some very experienced people, people who know Russia and Poland and the whole situation. They know all this better than I. One of your best people is with us now and he has been a long-time friend of Poland (Walesa gestures to one of the U.S. participants.) He was with us through a lot and always gave good advice. He knew just what was going on and what to do; he was very helpful. I just thought I would thank him for all he has done for us for so long. (U)

Daniel Fried: Thank you, Mr. President. (U)

Samuel Berger: Mr. Walesa, you said earlier that the Germans have sometimes one attitude toward NATO enlargement and sometimes another. This President, however, has had just one attitude: that NATO will enlarge. President Clinton's leadership in 1994 was crucial to enlargement getting moving at all and his leadership will continue. (C)

Lech Walesa: Yes, I know. But all this has been done in an evolutionary way. Yes, you have launched this and done a lot. The direction is clear and that is good. But the point is that this is a revolutionary situation, not evolutionary, and decisive moves are important. In 1939 we were in a decisive situation. We resisted Hitler, knowing that war would come anyway and if we waited or gave in it would just be worse. But now things are getting worse. The loss of Belarus to Russia is really a matter of concern. So we are insisting on the right decisions. Don't waste this opportunity. Of course the delays are not America's fault. The Europeans have been very slow throughout. And you think, why should we worry about Europe if the West Europeans

don't? But you must make the hard choices, even for the Europeans, because the Europeans themselves won't or can't. It is just like Yugoslavia. The Europeans could decide nothing. You had to make the decisive moves. And you did and these were right. (C)

This is the way forward. You understand what democracy requires. The Europeans just see money. Here is where decisions must be made. Make them and the Europeans will shout for a while but accept them. So we expect decisions on NATO enlargement in your next term. We are confident and you can be confident in the Poles. But we must be clear about where we are. (C)

Poland is like a ballet dancer, a beautiful dancer in a theater or a cafe. Poland has nice legs and Yeltsin is tempted. But we are far safer with someone else. Yeltsin is too crude for us. (C)

Let me turn to internal matters, things in Poland. My opponents were all educated in the United States. They had good training here and they won the election. We hope we will get educated and trained, too, and that we will win. They won a battle in the last elections. But I won, too; in fact, I won the war because democracy won in the elections. Some ask me why I did not "defend" my job even after I lost the elections. But I tell them that I couldn't be Fidel Castro. I had to respect democracy. (C)

The people who won the elections have a mandate only to continue Poland's Western course; to continue democracy and market economics. So far, they have. They have been consistent. This is good and they are capable; they are good businessmen; communism will not return to Poland. Of course if they tried to turn back there would be a revolution. We would lead that. But this won't happen. We will struggle with them, but democratically. And we will not do so in a way that interferes with Poland's economy. It is doing well and we want Poland to be stable. (C)

So, Poland will be fine. But how long will Poland keep dancing on a thin line, like a ballerina, without knowing with whom to dance? She wants NATO and the EU as her partners. Yeltsin can be very jealous. A jealous Natasha. (U)

The President: Poland will have a long dance with the right partners, a good dance. (U)

Lech Walesa: But make sure the music is the right kind. (U)

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The President: Every time I see Boris Yeltsin from now on I'll be sure to think of Natasha. (U)

Lech Walesa: Jealous Natasha. (U)

The President: Sure, jealous Natasha. It has been great seeing you again and seeing you in such good spirits. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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