

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Robert Rubin, Secretary of the Treasury
Leon Panetta, Chief of Staff
Strobe Talbott, Acting Secretary of State
Samuel Berger, Deputy Assistant to the
President for National Security Affairs
Nicholas Rey, U.S. Ambassador to Poland
Dan Fried, Senior Director for Central and
Eastern European Affairs, NSC Staff,
Notetaker

Aleksander Kwasniewski, President of Poland
Dariusz Rosati, Foreign Minister
Jerzy Kozminski, Ambassador to the U.S.
Marek Siwiec, Senior Advisor to the
President
Jerzy Milewski, National Security Advisor
Andrzej Majkowski, Under Secretary of State
in the Office of the President

DATE, TIME July 8, 1996, 11:30 a.m. - 12:10 p.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: I'm delighted to welcome President Kwasniewski to Washington and to the Oval Office. I want to thank him for the hospitality he extended to the First Lady a few days ago.
(U)

The United States and Poland have established a strong partnership: we've worked together in the Partnership for Peace; our troops are serving together in Bosnia; we are the number one foreign investor in Poland. I am very pleased with the state of our relations and the aggressive leadership that the President is giving to his nation. (U)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Classified by: Andrew Sens
Reason: 1.5(b)
Declassify On: 7/8/06

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Sec. 3.5 (b)
White House Guidelines, September 11, 2006
By VZ NARA, Date 4/5/2014
2015-0781-M (1.15)

We're going to discuss issues affecting our future relations and the future of Poland, including NATO enlargement, which has been a disciplined, open process since 1994, when the United States initiated it. I want to reiterate my conviction that the process will continue and will bear fruit. I think that we are doing it in the right way, and that's the way I think we should continue to do it. (U)

I've wanted to meet him for some time, and I got a great report on Poland from Hillary the other night, so I'm looking forward to it. (U)

Reporter: Mr. President, will you talk about the timing of NATO expansion? (U)

The President: Certainly. We'll talk about what is planned for the December ministerial and what will happen after. (U)

Reporter: Senator Dole has talked about 1998. Are you willing to be as precise as that? (U)

The President: Well, first of all, I'm glad that he supports the expansion of NATO. I think it's important for me, as President, to adhere in all my public comments to the things that we've agreed among our NATO allies to do. Keep in mind, this is a process that has to proceed by consensus, and we have to have the support of all the allies to do what we wish to do. But you should make no mistake about it, NATO will expand. (U)

Reporter: President Clinton, it looks like former Governor Lamm is going to enter the presidential race. I wonder what your sense of that is. (U)

The President: I just don't know. I've known him a long time. I like him. And I hope if that happens -- I hope his wife will do what she said she was going to do. (Laughter.) Did you see what she said? (U)

Reporter: Which was what? (U)

The President: That she'd be for me if she thought it would undermine our position in the election. (Laughter.) I hope we have a good, positive debate. (U)

Reporter: Are you surprised that someone who is supposed to be a friend of yours would enter the election? (U)

The President: No. (U)

Reporter: A Cuban plane has just been hijacked to the U.S. Navy base in Guantanamo Bay. What is your reaction to that? (U)

The President: I understand the passengers have been returned and the pilot stayed. As far as I know, there was no further incident. (U)

The U.S. press then left and the Polish press entered the Oval Office. (U)

Reporter: Mr. President, have you proposed any new timetable for NATO expansion? (U)

The President: Let me welcome President Kwasniewski to the White House and to the Oval Office. I want to thank him for the warm hospitality extended to my wife last week. She had a wonderful trip to Poland and gave me a great report on it. (U)

We are going to discuss NATO enlargement and other things. I want to emphasize that the United States secured the agreement of our allies to expand NATO, and we agreed that we would follow a certain deliberate process. We will do that. We will probably take some further steps on that when the ministerial meets in December. I'm certain that more action will be taken there. (U)

NATO is going to expand, and we're going to do it in a deliberate, open fashion, as we have said all along. (U)

I'm very pleased with our present level of cooperation. I appreciate the service of Polish troops in Bosnia. I appreciate the participation of Poland in the Partnership for Peace. And our economic relations are growing stronger every day, and I'm very pleased with the level of investment of the United States in Poland. I hope we will be able to continue that. (U)

I'd like to ask the President to make a statement, and then we'll answer your questions. (U)

President Kwasniewski: Well, you understand Polish a little bit, for after so many years in the United States you speak English clearly. (U)

(In Polish) I am very pleased by this meeting, coming so soon after the visit to Poland by Mrs. Clinton. Today, the President and I will discuss NATO's enlargement and security question, and Poland's place in this process. We will discuss the cooperation between our countries in a whole range of fields. President Clinton mentioned the level of American investment in Poland, and we are pleased that it is so high, but we still want more of it.

As I wrote on the Official Book in the White House just now, the development of U.S.-Polish relations is good not only for Poland but for all of Central Europe and for the development of Europe at this historic moment. We have a chance to end the division of Europe once and for all. (*End remarks in Polish.*) (U)

Reporter: Mr. President, when are you going to say who and when will be admitted as new members of NATO? (U)

The President: That's what we're going to discuss in December. I know it is frustrating to you, but you have to realize that NATO is a group that operates together. And a NATO pledge is a solemn pledge; it's a security pledge. One of the ways that we have secured agreement from all of our allies is to have worked with them together in a very deliberate fashion. (U)

So our next meeting is in December, and I think that further steps will be taken in December. I think that that is what I should say at this point, consistent with my obligation to our NATO allies. (U)

The Polish press then left the Oval Office. (U)

President Kwasniewski: First, let me thank you for the opportunity to visit the United States. This is a special honor for me because I was in the United States twenty years ago, exactly. I came in July 1976 during the Bicentennial as a student. I was in New York and saw the Tall Ships operation and visited 33 states. That's more states than many Americans visit except Presidential candidates during an election period. Today, visiting Arlington Cemetery was very special for me, there again after twenty years; then as a student and now as President of Poland. So you have my thanks. (U)

My second point is that Poland is in good shape. Our economic growth is very good; we are in a position of increasing prosperity. We want to continue this process and to close the gap between Poland and the countries of the developed world. Privatization in Poland has made major strides and it will continue. In 1995, 67 percent of our GDP was private, and think: just seven years ago we had a centralized, state-run economy. A level of two-thirds private is a great change. People in Poland are hungry for success, very much like West Europeans after World War II. The positive trends in the economy will continue, and our main task is to allow this to move forward. (U)

Poland is stable politically as well. We can change our governments, our presidents, but our direction remains constant. You met with former President Walesa and that was very good. It is normal for a country to have an ex-president. In fact, during

my Presidential debate with Mr. Walesa, I said that democratic countries should have many former presidents and one sitting president. If there is just one President and not any former Presidents in a country than something is wrong with democracy there. Poland's political spectrum will develop normally. We will have a left -- a normal, European social democratic left, a right and a moderate middle. This process is not easy, but Poland clearly is maturing. The situation is good, and there is no reason to see Poland as unstable. (U)

My third point is about regional issues. I recall your telephone call after my election when you said that Poland should seek to develop ties with the countries to the East as well as to the West. This idea is still somewhat controversial in Poland, but you were right. You appreciated my conviction that Poland needs to develop ties with the West and the East -- Russia and Ukraine. Of course, we want to be a member of the European Union and NATO. That is our main strategic goal. But we also want the best possible relations with Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania and all the others. Poland has excellent relations with all its neighbors and, as far as Poland can help it, Central Europe will be a stable part of Europe. NATO enlargement will not mean adding an unstable region to NATO; enlargement will increase stability and thus mean less trouble for the United States. NATO enlargement will be good for Russia as well. I discussed this with Yeltsin while in Russia, and I believe we can make progress in Polish-Russian relations. ~~(C)~~

A point about bilateral relations: these really are excellent, and we are very satisfied. We welcome American investment and we should work to engage even more. There is every prospect that investment will continue to grow, partly because our regulations are stabilizing -- especially thanks to our entry on July 11 into the OECD. We are not satisfied with our, Polish I mean, economic activity in America. Last year, Poland's exports to the United States grew, but we want to do more to sell in the U.S. market. Still, bilateral relations are going well. You visited Poland two years ago; Mrs. Clinton was in Poland last week; Vice President Gore was twice in Poland; and the number of working visits on all levels is quite high. So our dialogue is rich and good. (U)

My last point is about NATO enlargement. This is the most important issue. Now, after the Russian elections, is the best time to make real decisions and advance this issue. To achieve more security cooperation in Europe, now is the time to decide. Russia, after its elections, is on a democratic path and will stay on it; it will not in the end turn away from cooperation with the West. Russians want to cooperate with the world and not to return to isolation: they remember the past; they want to be

partners and members of the international family. Our region will be a stable one. Now is the time to decide the who, the when, the how of NATO enlargement and to reach our goal. ~~(S)~~

I told CNN this morning that Poland's progress since we started in 1989 is simply unbelievable. No one thought then that we could achieve so much so fast. Seven years ago, we started on the democratic road. The first stage included the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union itself, and the unification of Germany. Now we can move to the next stage. ~~(S)~~

The most recent American Presidents have their roles to play in this. President Reagan helped in bringing about the end of the Soviet Union; President Bush helped reunify Germany. You, Mr. President, have the historic challenge of enlarging NATO, thus unifying Europe and completing the changes we began in 1989. This is not anything against Russia but for European integration and stability. ~~(S)~~

The President: I agree with that. Our task is to build a united Europe. If you go back in history to the very beginning of the nation state, Europe has never been united, not really. Now we have a chance to do this. And the security dimension is one important element of this process. (U)

I told President Yeltsin from the beginning that it would be good if we could enter the next century with a Europe united. We want to work with Russia on this but will move forward in any event. I think we can work this out with Russia and can get to work now, after the elections. ~~(S)~~

With respect to NATO enlargement, I think the upcoming December NATO ministerial will announce, I believe, a NATO meeting to take place at some point, perhaps the first half of 1997. I hold this out as a possibility. I think this 1997 meeting would be in a position to make decisions. The United States has been a strong supporter of NATO enlargement from the very beginning. Our task is to prepare the December meeting to push for decisions and announcements to be taken next year. This is my position. The trick is to do this in a way that reinforces our concept of a united Europe. We must prepare for the worst but keep working for the best. ~~(S)~~

President Kwasniewski: I agree that we have just such a chance. We can overcome the divisions of Europe established after the Second World War. After the war, Poland was placed in a very difficult position. We could only work within narrow limits and we did what we could but that wasn't enough. After 1989, thanks to events that began in Poland, we have a chance to create a

genuinely united Europe. That is the great task and goal of our generation. (C)

Mr. President, you visited Czechoslovakia as a student, just as I visited the United States twenty years ago. This was normal: young people then wanted to see the other part of this great divide. Now we, our generation, can end these divisions once and for all. Mr. President, you should speed up this process and achieve, as you told Yeltsin, a united Europe by the end of this century. NATO enlargement is a great opportunity for our common future. (C)

Mr. President, you have good chances for two major successes. One is a real unification of Europe. NATO enlargement is crucial politically, socially and psychologically for Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. We all need to be included in Europe, not out of some strategic fear -- Poland has good relations with all its neighbors -- but because it is important for us to be together with the West, to finish what we all began in 1989. (C)

The other great success before you is of course relations between the Israelis and Palestinians. I know you will meet tomorrow with Prime Minister Netanyahu and, though it is not our affair, I support this of course and wish you all the success. (C)

The President: I look forward to working with you for many years. You said that it is normal for democratic countries to have one president and many ex-presidents. I agree, though in the United States we're trying to keep the numbers of ex-presidents down. (Laughter). (U)

The Vice President: I knew that the two of you would have a lot to say to one another. Your wives are both lawyers, and you both have teenager daughters. (U)

President Kwasniewski: Mr. President, what is your view of the Russian elections? (C)

The President: Well, we were pleased by the result. It is important that Yeltsin won and with a good margin. We are also pleased that he has asked Chernomyrdin to organize a cabinet. (C)

President Kwasniewski: He is a good technocrat. (C)

The President: Yes, but a technocrat with a good heart. (C)

The Vice President: We have developed a very good relationship through my commission with him. (C)

The President: I am struck by the forces in Russia who still cannot imagine Russia being great without its retaining an ability to tell its neighbors what to do -- perhaps not Poland any longer, but countries once in the Soviet Union. It is very important therefore that you reach out to Ukraine. We're trying hard to work with the Central Asian states. We want also to promote an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The elements of this agreement are there, but the issue of the role of Russia remains. (C)

Russia will be a challenge in the future, no doubt, but the election there -- a second election really -- is an important and positive fact. Have you been in Yeltsin's Kremlin office since it was redecorated? (C)

President Kwasniewski: Yes. (U)

The President: Then you saw the statues of four Tsars. Three Tsars really, and one stature of Catherine. Yeltsin told me that they never completed their reforms because they could not create anything greater than themselves; they could not establish a means to provide for their own succession -- a democratic system to pass on what they had achieved. But now Russia has developed such a system, and this may help them define their greatness in a different way. I really am hopeful about Russia. (C)

President Kwasniewski: Yes, the situation with Russia is hopeful. But this is a time therefore to make the courageous decisions; we no longer have to be afraid for Russian democracy in the same way. Poland recently hosted a meeting of Central European Presidents. As host, I could add an invitation of my own, and I invited President Kuchma of Ukraine. I asked him who would win the Russian elections, and he replied that the Central Election Commission would tell Yeltsin that Zyuganov had won 55 percent of the vote, but that Yeltsin should not fear because he had won 65 percent. (Laughter). Seriously, though, the point was that we all feared for Russian democracy. But now Russia seems on a democratic path. (C)

We know Yeltsin. He was the better candidate. His mission now is to bring Russia to some normal political life, and it will be more normal now. Yeltsin will move in a social democratic direction. Lebed is dangerous, of course, but as a representative of the nationalist, militarist forces he is better than Zhiranovsky. The situation is ripe for real decisions. (C)

The President: When did you arrive? (U)

President Kwasniewski: I left Poland on Friday and in New York met with some Polish-Americans. You are aware, perhaps, that there is such a community in the United States. (Laughter). (U)

The President: I had a notion. (U)

President Kwasniewski: It is very interesting but the number of Polish-Americans seems to grow just before American elections. I also met with businessmen. Poland has attracted about \$8 billion in foreign investment since 1989, but we could do even better. I should mention that I'll be back in the United States for the Olympic Games and may see more businessmen then. (U)

The President: I'll see you then. How's my Ambassador doing? (U)

President Kwasniewski: He's a real success. (U)

The President: I notice that he's sitting on your side of the room. (U)

Ambassador Rey: That's just where I found a spare chair. (U)

President Kwasniewski: Our Ambassador, Kozminski, is very good, too. We have known each other for twenty years, since we were students together. You also have associates in government with whom you were students together (turning to Acting Secretary Talbott). (U)

Ambassador Rey: Mr. President, your wife warned me that you would have to provide beds in the White House for the Polish delegation because you and President Kwasniewski would never be able to stop talking. So I'd better just stand up now. (U)

The President: It was good to talk to you. (U)

-- End of Conversation --