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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Lech Walesa, former President of Poland (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State
Ambassador Nicholas Rey
Samuel R. Berger, Deputy to the President
for National Security Affairs
Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State
Daniel Fried, Special Assistant to the
President and Senior Director for Central
and Eastern European Affairs, NSC Staff
(notetaker)
Val Chlebowski, Interpreter

Lech Walesa
Andrzej Ananicz, Director of the Lech Walesa
Institute
Marek Karpinski, Lech Walesa Institute

DATE, TIME July 10, 1997 at 7:00-7:25 p.m.
AND PLACE: Royal Castle, Warsaw

Lech Walesa: This building tells the story of our nation, its destruction and rebuilding. We have been through a lot. Terrible things. That is why I thank you for a great deed at Madrid. I have to tell you that Russia is still dangerous and I am surprised that some people still do not understand this. But you were very clever in your tactics. Oh yes, you didn't say too much about this but you know it. This was good and you did a good job. (U)

The President: We are not through yet and you can help us. First, NATO will conduct accession talks with Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. These will go on through the fall and must be completed by January. Then, in 1998, all the NATO Parliaments must ratify enlargement. There is not much problem with countries that are parliamentary democracies -- their prime ministers' agreement at Madrid will likely suffice for their parliaments. But countries like the United States cannot be taken for granted. We must work at this. Republicans and Democrats in the United States understand that this is not a

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partisan issue. Still, there are opponents of enlargement and they say the risks are too great and we can help them understand that NATO enlargement means reducing risks to Americans. This requires a lot of work and you, being well known to Americans, can help. (C)

Lech Walesa: I want to help and will go to the United States. I can meet with Senators and will give them our side. I will say that NATO enlargement will prevent conflict; that if we don't enlarge we will create threats, especially from Russia. Life does not like a vacuum, and Russia really does not. Without movement to fill this vacuum, things could become dangerous; they could even threaten America. We must decide and, having decided, act. (U)

I really don't understand the problems with NATO enlargement. This is not a question of money. With good training, Polish soldiers can do their part; fewer American soldiers will be needed. Poland will certainly pay its share, its dues. We are good soldiers, though we don't have equipment. And when we switch to U.S. equipment we will make good business for American companies. So why is America concerned? (U)

The President: I agree that there is an overwhelming case for NATO enlargement. We must now make the experience of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic successful. This must work well the first time. I know that some Poles are concerned that Russia has somehow gained special rights as a result of the NATO-Russia Founding Act. But Russia has no special rights in NATO. NATO is already cooperating with Russia in Bosnia and we should keep cooperating to act against a variety of threats, against what may happen. Meanwhile, we should try to reduce the larger problem of Russia, and the problem Russia has with NATO. But we will not do this by giving Russia special rights. We're still arguing with the Russians over CFE because we won't give the new NATO members any kind of second class status. (C)

Lech Walesa: Sure, but the main threat to NATO and to us all still is Russia, though we don't know at what point Russia might become a threat. The Czechs, Hungarians and Poles after joining NATO will work with Russia and make Russia peacefully accept NATO and NATO enlargement. (U)

The President: I agree. And if not, the next three or four countries in NATO will make Russia give up its attempts to block NATO enlargement. Enlargement really eliminates threats to all countries. Of course, this raises another question. We must be prepared for the question: against whom does Russia arm itself? I fear that the public reaction to enlargement and Russia could be complex. If Russia is not a threat, why pay for enlargement?

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if it is a threat, did NATO create this threat? We need to make our arguments for NATO enlargement clearly and in a way that does not generate these concerns. (C)

Lech Walesa: I sympathize with you. It is difficult. Of course, you won your reelection and I lost, so this is no longer my job, though I will help. (U)

The President: Can you run again? (U)

Lech Walesa: I may; I can. It is good to be President but I feel better now that I'm not any more. I can chose what to do; before I couldn't. But I'm ready for these tasks and will help. I remember how I visited the United States and debated two professors about NATO enlargement before a group of students at the University of Chicago. They thought they would beat me but I won when the students voted. These professors didn't expect that. (U)

The President: There are two blocs in Congress with which we must work. One wanted to enlarge to five countries. They did not completely like our decision but in the end they will vote for enlargement. The other group believes that Russia is so fragile that enlargement will damage them and create a dangerous reaction. They are not sure about enlargement. (C)

Lech Walesa: Don't worry, we will work with you and Poland will protect U.S. interests in this region and in NATO. (C)

-- End of Conversation --

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