

THE WHITE HOUSE

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: First Plenary Meeting with President
Vladimir Putin of Russia (S)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Secretary Madeleine Albright
Ambassador James Collins
Samuel Berger, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State
Walter Slocombe, Undersecretary of Defense
for Policy
Stephen Sestanovich, Ambassador-at-Large for
the New Independent States (notetaker)
Peter Afanassenko, State Department
Interpreter

President Vladimir Putin
Ivan Ivanov, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sergey Ivanov, Security Council Secretary
Sergey Prikhodko, Foreign Affairs Advisor
Georgy Mamedov, Deputy Foreign Minister
Yuriy Ushakov, Russian Ambassador to the
United States
Vladimir Chkhikvishvili, Director of North
American Department

DATE, TIME June 4, 2000, 1:33 p.m. - 2:40 p.m. (local
AND PLACE: time), The Kremlin, Moscow, Russia

President Putin: Mr. President, welcome once again to the Kremlin. I believe our one-on-one meeting last night yielded positive results. Under your leadership, it has been possible to manage Russian-American relations even when problems arise. That way, problems that might otherwise be insoluble can, in fact, be resolved. (S)

I propose that we split the afternoon's meetings into parts. The first meeting will focus on security issues, and the second will focus on economics. (U)

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Reason: 1.5(b)(d)

Declassify On: 6/19/10

The President: That sounds fine. President Putin, I am delighted to be back in Moscow. I, too, want to thank you for the meetings that we've already held. Since we have a good deal to discuss, I propose we get right to the agenda without further ado. (U)

President Putin: Fine. I propose the following agenda topics: START and ABM; CFE; nuclear safety and transparency; disposition of plutonium from eliminated nuclear weapons; nuclear cooperation, including cooperation against Iran; global challenges to security; cooperation with the UN and other international institutions; Yugoslavia; and, NATO-Russian relations. These are the topics I would like to discuss during this first afternoon meeting, but I am ready to discuss any other subject you would like to propose. (S)

The President: I would like to add Nagorno-Karabakh to that list. It seems that President Kocharian feels he cannot implement the settlement he worked out with President Aliyev, so as to keep Armenia's border with Iran. Perhaps special arrangements might be found, including overpasses or secure corridors, but nothing will work without your help. A settlement to the Nagorno-Krabakh conflict would be good for Russia, especially one that you, as President, helped to facilitate. (S)

Some might think that continued conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan helps to preserve Russian influence. In reality, however, instability on Russia's borders is dangerous. A settlement would facilitate reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey, which would also be good for Russia. We have worked at length with France and Russia to bring about such a settlement, but we lacked the leverage to move things ahead. Your help is necessary. (S)

President Putin: Yes, I understand. I first heard about the deal at the Sargsian funeral in Yerevan. My initial reaction was very positive. I agree that Russian interests are well-served by a settlement. This would allow cooperation between our neighbors and with our country. (S)

We have used our influence in the army and other institutions in Armenia, and this has had some results. However, the domestic political situation in Armenia blocked progress. Some leaders there were able to use the idea of a territorial swap for

political advantage. President Aliyev seems to think that a settlement would give him a place in history. (S)

Our Foreign Ministry has supported the Nagorno-Karabakh deal from the beginning. There were different approaches within the Russian Security Council. Some said continued conflict would help Russian interests, but this was not right. We'll keep working on a solution. (S)

However, I must tell you, Mr. President, that at my meeting in Minsk with President Kocharian, he asked me not to press forward. He believes the time for a settlement might come down the road. I think we ought to trust him on this, since he knows the situation better than we. His political situation seems to be better, as a result of many changes within the government that were achieved only with great difficulty. Despite this, President Kocharian wants a pause in the settlement process, and I think we should respect that. (S)

I will see President Kocharian and Aliyev when I attend the CIS Summit. I will use that occasion to hold separate meetings with each of them on this subject. (S)

The President: Thank you. I think that will help. Turning now to CFE, I am looking forward to Russia's withdrawal from Georgia and Moldova. How are you planning to meet the agreed withdrawal schedules? (S)

President Putin: Let me remind you, Mr. President, that Russia had an obligation to provide notification that it had exceeded CFE flank limits, and we complied immediately. We said that force levels would be brought down after the operation in the Caucasus was completed. This will become possible as the situation there stabilizes. There are no longer any large-scale operations, so Russian levels will be brought in to compliance with the treaty. (S)

As for Georgia and Moldova, Russia has no wish to violate the treaty, which in any case covered equipment and not stationed forces. The real issue in Georgia concerns Russian bases, which are separate from treaty obligations. Negotiations with Georgia are underway, and the next round is later this month. If Russian troops leave Georgia too quickly, it will collapse as a state. Bandits would take over the country. It is clear that President Shevardnadze has lost control. In fact, some Georgian Government officials refuse to travel to certain parts of the country without Russian military protection. (S)

Also, local conditions prevent a rapid withdrawal. The same is true in Transnistria. The situation is delicate, but we are ready for the next step later this month. Mr. Smirnov is a very difficult partner. During the last round of discussions, he said that he now thinks of Russia in a negative manner. He went hunting and has disappeared for several weeks. (S)

The movement of trains has begun. Russia doesn't want to leave behind so much equipment. It's no use for either of us, and they agree. There's too much of it, and I'm afraid it's being traded. I will go to Moldova on June 18, at President Lucinschi's invitation. I'll discuss the situation in detail. It will be resolved in the long run, but I can't say whether the deadline will be met. Still, I am confident that all agreements will be fulfilled, and that financing will be received from international organizations. (S)

The President: And what about anti-terrorism cooperation between our countries, particularly against Usama bin Laden? (S)

President Putin: I think our counterterrorism services are already working well together. The Taliban have moved their forces south. A kind of Terrorist International has been created, with support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and centered in Afghanistan. (S)

First, we tried to civilize them, as the Europeans proposed. This was philosophically correct, but even as we pursued it, they continue to hate us. They are hungry and want to eat every day. So, we followed a second approach - organized resistance. It's not likely that the Taliban will expel bin Laden. (S)

There's just one way here, which the United States itself has used. We need to step up political pressures, including with Pakistan and through international organizations. Pakistan will listen to the United States. A common front is necessary. (S)

Terrorists are being trained in Afghanistan against both of us. Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and even Kazakhstan are vulnerable. Last year, both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were hit, and hostages were taken. The terrorists use drug money to support their operations. Drug production in this region is increasing, and last year it exceeded Latin American production levels. Local authorities in Afghanistan support the traffickers. Russian and American cooperation against this would be effective. But if we

don't cooperate, the terrorists will squeeze into the gap between us. (S)

Foreign Minister Ivanov: Secretary Albright and I have agreed to establish a working group on Afghanistan, which will work in three directions: first, in the United Nations; second, to increase political pressure; and third, to increase intelligence cooperation using other means. (S)

President Putin: I have also met with the Uzbek and other Central Asian leaders. They are all affected by this problem and are all afraid. They feel vulnerable and unable to fight this aggression. They are all Muslim states, and ideological subversion is being used to prepare aggression. One example was the recent call by one Chechen leader for the worldwide extermination of Jews. We need to work together against this sort of thing. (S)

The President: Yes, I agree. And I think the working group is a good idea. There is a long effort ahead of us that will last years into the future. (S)

President Putin: What is your view of the situation? (U)

The President: I think that more economic pressure is needed. In addition, I will consult with the Pakistanis. They are in a difficult position with many tribal ties to bordering areas of Afghanistan. I think Musharraf might decide to contribute at some point. This is a complex region. Iran is a good example. We like the new president, but the outcome of the domestic struggle that is taking place is difficult to predict. (S)

Our problems with Iran include their effort to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and we appreciate the important steps Russia has taken to strengthen your export controls. We also object to Iran's attempts to block the Middle East peace process. We must use all of the tools available to us. In dealing with the Taliban, we must also keep up the pressure, using a comprehensive approach. (S)

Secretary Albright: During my recent trip to central Asia, I experienced firsthand the anxiety over terrorism among the central Asian leaders. Russian and U.S. interests in the region coincide to a large extent, since only independent, democratic, and stable countries will be able to fight off the terrorists. (S)

President Putin: Yes. I was in central Asia immediately after your visit, Madam Secretary. I noticed that the less democratic leaders understood less about how to deal with terrorism. In Ashgabat, I saw the gold-plated statue of Niyazov that rotated on a tower every 24 hours. I also saw how he fed tomatoes to the ambassadors of leading countries at his receptions. Niyazov asked me to be mild in my press conference comments on the Taliban. I refused. (S)

Foreign Minister Ivanov: Terrorist groups in many countries are now working together. The fact that Russia and the United States are working together helped to make it possible for Israel to withdraw from Lebanon. (S)

The President: I don't mind if the Hizbollah pretends that it ran Israel out of Lebanon. That's not true, of course. Israel calculated that it needed to get out in order to advance a comprehensive settlement. I think this might soon be achieved. Iran must be dissuaded from trying to block this process, although this is obviously closely connected to internal Iranian politics. (S)

As for the United States, we are more directly affected by bin Laden, and here Russia and the United States need a coordinated strategy. Air strikes will not be effective. Before our strikes, we had specific intelligence, and we were acting against a particular target. I doubt that Russian air strikes will help in the current situation. You're going to take a lot of heat for any strikes, and they do not have a high probability of success. We ought to get our people together to develop a comprehensive approach to dealing with bin Laden. (S)

President Putin: I agree that air strikes are not the best option, and I'll tell you that Russia is not planning them. But because of the threat of air strikes, the Taliban announced they had no plans for an attack. This was good. Perhaps a United Nations mission should be sent to check on this situation and to force the Taliban to explain themselves. It was good to keep them under tight pressure and not to let up. We should instruct our services to work together. I'm sure they'll find a common language. (S)

After the U.S. attack in Afghanistan, the head of our intelligence service told me that Russia would have been more precise because our intelligence was better than yours. But even with more precise intelligence, a strike in the current situation would not help. (S)

The President: This is especially true in a heavily populated place like Kandahar. We have observed that bin Laden surrounds himself with women and children so that no attack could take place without provoking an international outrage. It would be different if we were thinking of using soldiers on the ground rather than long-range missiles. But in any case, we had to make it costly for bin Laden to continue. (S)

I am pleased with the renewed cooperation between Russia and NATO. This is now fully back on track. Mr. Robertson had a good trip to Russia. We need your personal commitment to keep moving forward. In my speech in Aachen, I said that there were two unfinished problems in Europe: first, the situation in southeast Europe; and second, getting relations right with Russia. What we need to do now is fully implement our agreement, and then go beyond it. (S)

President Putin: Yes, I saw your statement in Germany concerning the need for open doors in Europe and cooperation with Russia. We saw very positive meaning in all of this, and we are ready to develop things further. There should be full-scale relations between Russia and NATO. But Russia is not in favor of letting NATO substitute for other arrangements that have been worked out since 1945. If Russia and the United States are able to coordinate their activities in the United Nations, we will be successful. If we can't do so, we'll meet a dead end. (S)

I also recently saw the statement issued by nine countries in Vilnius. Our attitude toward NATO enlargement remains unchanged. But I'll let you know that when I was asked about possible membership for Russia in NATO, I supported the idea. It's important to note, however, that the United States raised objections to my public statement, and I don't think anyone in the alliance is ready for this. (S)

The President: Well, we should start now. (S)

President Putin: This is the first time that we have heard such a statement from the United States, and I must say I am pleased. NATO's attitude toward including Russia is important for the way people view enlargement. If you're not willing to talk to us, then why are you approaching our borders? But if you really want to have normal relations with us, we need to develop them. We have to pick a road without obstacles. The countries that are seeking membership are not threatened by anyone. We want to

improve relations with all of them. We don't want problems to appear, and our activities will aim at preventing them. (S)

The President: From the outset of the NATO enlargement process, I knew that it could be a problem for Russia. I was sensitive to this, and I want it understood that NATO enlargement does not threaten Russia in any way. (S)

During our meeting last night, President Putin, I told you that if we and our successors don't damage U.S.-Russian relations; and if China can develop its relations with us, while resolving the Taiwan issue; and if Pakistan and India can avoid a major war; then the biggest international problems will be like Chechnya, pitting the civilized world against terrorists, drug traffickers, rogue states, and so forth. In such circumstances, NATO will be totally unrecognizable from the alliance created after World War II. It would be, among other things, a source of training and cooperation among big and small states in order to deal with these new international problems. (S)

I am serious about being ready to discuss NATO membership with Russia. I recognize that domestic considerations inside Russia will prevent this for now, but over time Russia should be a part of every organization that holds the civilized world together. If our successors focus on each other as the main threats they have to worry about, they will be missing the opportunity to deal cooperatively on other problems. (S)

I understand that, for many Russians, NATO still has a negative connotation. However, I hope that you will see that Central European states do not feel threatened by Russia. We want to be helpful. In particular, we should try to agree now about what the world will look like in the next ten years or so. I am serious in making this suggestion. (S)

President Putin: I understand. It's not just the world that has changed in the past ten years. Russia has changed, too. I agree that it is important to try to look into the future. Russia should not be led into ideological responses in dealing with a world of chaos and disorder. There are obstacles, of course, to real cooperation with NATO. (S)

During the Soviet period, popular attitudes developed that now must be broken. In the process, however, Russia must not be seen as losing its autonomy as a state. The problem is that Russia is outside of an organization that makes the most important decisions. We should deliberate, figure out how to

cooperate, and then act on it. Russia is ready for cooperation, including NATO membership. If we hear that NATO is ready to accept us, then we will step forward. But it is difficult to do so if our opinions are ignored. That's why our people prefer the United Nations, in which we have a vote. (S)

The President: I am very encouraged by what I am hearing. We should think about this further, then maybe talk privately later. Obviously, it is better for Russia to be in the tent. Russia needs to understand that we have many fights inside NATO, and the United States doesn't always win them. The most important fight that we didn't win involved a failure, over two years, to act in Bosnia. We had to work like hell. If Russia and the United States had not had a disagreement about southeast Europe, we would not be having the present debate. Our discussion could be much more straightforward. (S)

President Putin: Thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate your remarks. I think our discussion last night was helpful and philosophical. I will now ask Foreign Minister Ivanov to report further on his discussion with Secretary Albright and others in the U.S. delegation. (S)

Foreign Minister Ivanov: I would first like to propose that foreign ministers take part in the G-8 meeting in Okinawa next month. The agenda for the meeting is very broad. (S)

President Putin: Do you think that we will handle the discussions badly? (S)

Foreign Minister Ivanov: Certainly not. However, since we will be responsible for implementing much of what you agree to, it will be useful for us to be there. (S)

The President: Even before President Yeltsin had begun attending the meetings, there had been a move to make the G-7 meetings more informal. Because financial issues remain on the agenda, we agreed that financial ministers should continue to participate. The G-8 has become a political group with an economic component, rather than an economic group with a political component as it was in the past. I understand Foreign Minister Ivanov's concerns and will look into the problem. (S)

President Putin: Thank you. As for the documents that have been prepared for us, I will sign the principles document as well as the memorandum of agreement to create the Shared Early Warning Center. We will also issue two further statements, on

plutonium disposition and climate change. Let me note that over 200 documents have been signed by the Presidents of Russia and the United States since 1991. (S)

The President: I am particularly pleased by the statement on climate change. Having once been in Moscow in January, I was afraid you might favor global warming. (Laughter.) There are many economic possibilities for Russia in dealing with climate change, not only because of your natural gas reserves, but because jobs are created by the policies needed to deal with the problem. (S)

It's a good trend that people can make money by doing good things for the environment. All governments will want to be seen as pro-growth and pro-environment at the same time. But given this reality, I want to know why you abolished the State Committee on the Environment. (S)

President Putin: I know that the environment is one of Vice President Gore's political aces. And the environment will be a priority for us, after having been ignored for a long time. For example, forest rehabilitation has been a big issue, and the previous ministry combined two functions: environmental and industrial. Priority was always given to commercial considerations; environmental concerns were routinely left out. (S)

The same thing happened to the Environmental Committee, which had a strong connection to commercial interests. Now these will be completely separate. The Prime Minister has reassigned this responsibility to another ministry, which will aim to preserve environmental protection. Licensing, meanwhile, will be done by a separate government agency. (S)

The President: Thank you for that explanation. I would now like to ask Secretary Albright to report on her discussion with Minister Ivanov. (S)

Secretary Albright: We discussed the Middle East peace process at length, including the need to revive momentum on the multilateral track. We also discussed a variety of people-to-people contacts that should be given further support. Finally, we discussed the possibility of expanding cooperation to combat drug trafficking, with the aim of highlighting this issue in Okinawa. (S)

The President: I think it is also important that we invigorate contacts between our respective parliaments. Most members of the U.S. Congress who take a strong interest in Russia have been doing this for years. However, their ranks haven't been strengthened by new recruits. It is also important to expand exchanges involving local officials, such as mayors. I strongly believe that both Russian and American officials benefit from these contacts. (S)

President Putin: Very well. At this time, I would like to propose a short break. Mr. President, I would like to take you to see the new Kremlin plaque honoring recipients of the Order of Victory from the end of World War II. General Eisenhower was one of these. So was Stalin. This is part of our history, and we believe nothing should be left out. (U)

The President: Thank you. (U)

-- End of Conversation --