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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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2016-0117-M (1.10)
10/2/2018 KBM

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Members of the Belarusian
National Front (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
David Swartz, U.S. Ambassador to Belarus
Mack McLarty, Chief of Staff
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State
(Designate)
Leon Fuerth, Assistant to the Vice President
for National Security Affairs
Nicholas Burns, Senior Director for Russia,
Ukraine and Eurasia Affairs, NSC Staff
John Beyrle, Director for Russia, Ukraine and
Eurasia Affairs, NSC Staff (Notetaker)
Iiril Borisov, Interpreter

Zenon Posnyak, Chairman of the Parliamentary
Opposition
Vladimir Zablotskiy, Deputy Chairman, Popular
Front
Aleksandr Dobrovol'skiy, Chair of the United
Democratic Party
Oleg Trusov, Head of Social Democratic
Citizenry
Sergei Levshunov, Popular Front

DATE, TIME January 15, 1994, 1:45 - 2:10 p.m.
AND PLACE: Voyskovoy 4 Guest House, Minsk, Belarus

The President: It's good to meet you all. I know that you are outnumbered but I want to urge you to stay the course. We support what you are trying to do. I have told Prime Minister Kebich and the government about the need for reform -- I hope that will be a help to you. Really, I've come here today to listen. (C)

Mr. Posnyak: Mr. President, we hold views that are different from those of Kebich and Shushkevich. We represent the Popular Front, and are in strict opposition to the government and the Supreme Soviet. When we won our independence in 1991, the old government and Supreme Soviet were in place from the communist

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regime. We were unable to hold new elections. Now we have had two years of talk about reforms, but the country isn't ready for them. Central planning persists. Corruption has risen steeply. We have the sense that the government is following a policy that favors the maintenance of the Russian empire. There has been no deep democratic reform. Radio and television are still predominantly pro-government; we have practically no access to television. It is understandable that you want to help, but you should not provide financial assistance to this government. It doesn't help us, it only helps keep the old regime in place. (C)

We held a referendum in 1992 for new elections. The results were adopted, but were then annulled by the Supreme Soviet. We consider the current parliament to be illegitimate. We would like to receive assistance toward the democratization of Belarus -- we need political reform more than economic reform. We want you to understand this situation. (C)

The second question we would like to raise is the policy of Russia toward our country. This amounts to an economic war, a policy of imperialism. The nomenklatura keeps this policy in place. A currency union between Russia and Belarus is being discussed but this is a bluff. Because of the level of privatization in Russia, this would be a disaster for us. It is economic capitulation before Russian capitalism. This union cannot take place -- it will put us in total economic dependency. We want Russia and the world to know about this. (C)

Mr. Levshunov: I must disagree with one aspect of what Mr. Posnyak has said -- we do need economic help. We are in a paradoxical situation -- we need democratic reform, but the people are most interested in economic improvement. If you help develop our economy, it will help us out of this paradox. But I agree this cannot be through credits that support the current government. (C)

Mr. Posnyak: The military influence of Russia is also an obstacle for us. (C)

The President: We have made it clear to the government that there is a limit to what we can do until new elections are held, until we see real movement toward greater democratic reforms. I was interested to hear the difference of opinion you expressed regarding economic aid, because we have the same disputes within our own government. Most of the aid that we have provided has been Nunn-Lugar assistance to the denuclearization effort. And we have now set up a new regional enterprise fund, involving Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, and plan to open an American business center here as well. I think the more that we can set people up in their own businesses, the more pressure there will be on people to change. But there is a limit to what we are prepared to do without elections and greater economic reforms.

(C)

-- End of Conversation --

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