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THE WHITE HOUSE
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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Vaclav Havel of the
Czech Republic

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Warren Christopher, Secretary of State
Madeleine Albright, Ambassador to the UN
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Charles Kupchan, NSC Staff, Notetaker

President Vaclav Havel
Alexandr Vondra, Deputy Foreign Minister
Michael Zantovsky, Ambassador to the U.S.
Ladislav Spacek, Assistant to the President
Alexandra Brabcova, Interpreter

DATE, TIME April 20, 1993 5:00 - 6:00 pm
AND PLACE: Oval Office

President Havel: Thank you for taking the time to see me. I am here to talk about all issues. I would like to tell you about events in the Czech Republic and discuss broader European issues, U.S.-Czech relations, and other international issues. (U)

Our federation split in a peaceful fashion -- something very unusual in history. And I think this split will enhance, not erode, stability in Europe. The Czech Republic desires to build on the foundation laid by Czechoslovakia; there will be continuity between the behavior of Czechoslovakia and the behavior of the Czech Republic. I am still the president. I desire to deepen already good relations with the United States. These good relations started before World War I and it is now time to continue them. (U)

Czechs believe that a continued U.S. presence in Europe is needed. We welcome more contact with the U.S. U.S. investments are already substantial. Many American students are coming to study in the Czech Republic. The basis for our new relationship is that we now share democratic values. (U)

I would not like to dwell too long on my country; other topics deserve more attention. Just let me say that we are now working on a large-scale privatization program; we are transforming our legal and political system; and we have had two free elections. We now want to focus on entering NATO and the EC because we see ourselves as Europeans who embrace European values. The Czech

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Republic wants to help implant these values in the center of Europe. We had that role before World II -- before we were overrun by Nazism and Soviet domination. (S)

Enough on my country. Let me extend to you a cordial invitation to visit Prague. Your wife is invited too. My wife is also interested in health care. And Prague is beautiful. (U)

The President: As you know, I visited Prague in 1970. I remember it well. I remember the snow on the bridges. (U)

I am very impressed with the peaceful split of Czechoslovakia. The progress you have made in democratic reform is remarkable. I hope that your country will continue to be a force for stability, peace, and democracy in Europe. We support your domestic reform efforts and your international role. I would like to hear your thoughts on relations between our two countries and on other European issues on which I have to make decisions. (U)

I am particularly concerned about the situation in Bosnia. There are now voices in this country and in Europe saying that we should do more. We are tightening the sanctions, but it is unclear that they will have their intended effect. It seems clear that the Serbs will not participate in peace negotiations as long as they keep winning. They continue to have an enormous arms advantage because of the embargo. What should the international community do? Should we end the embargo and give Muslims the ability to defend themselves? Should we seek UN authorization to use air power against artillery? What can we do to promote peace, stop ethnic cleansing, and prevent sending the wrong message to potential aggressors elsewhere? (S)

President Havel: The situation in Bosnia is very worrisome and very dangerous. We must do what we can; we have shared responsibility. The challenge is not just to stop the killing, but also to stop it from growing. The key is Russia. Will they agree to more forceful intervention? If Yeltsin's falls, we could return to a divided Europe. Any action must therefore have the support of the whole international community. G-7 assistance for Russia is helping the situation there. But there are still dangers. We should consider linking assistance to Russia to Russian cooperation in dealing with the former Yugoslavia. (S)

The President: We will have to await the outcome of Sunday's referendum. I think Yeltsin would like to be more supportive; he did not block the tightening of sanctions. If he enjoys a big victory on Sunday, he may go along with further steps. Yeltsin has less influence over the Serbs than I thought. He has tried to stop the Serbs. Part of the problem is that the supporters of Serbs in Russia are his opponents. They limit his room for maneuver. (S)

President Havel: Probably nobody has much influence over the Serbs. But the Russian vote is important in getting Russia to cooperate in the Security Council. I think the outcome is hard

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to predict. I believe Yeltsin represents the only reasonable alternative. He will probably stay in power, and the in-fighting will continue. (S)

The President: I agree. We are doing what we can through G-7 aid and through bilateral aid packages. We will ask Congress and our G-7 partners to help with privatization, nuclear safety and environmental clean-up, and housing for soldiers. Yeltsin's long-term stability depends on having the support of the military. We must therefore help to create better conditions for the military. (S)

President Havel: During my visit to the U.S. three years ago -- during my first presidency -- I spoke to Congress. Then I said that the best way to help us is to help Russia. Russian stability is the key determinant of global peace. Such assistance should be carefully considered and crafted to existing conditions. (S)

Secretary Christopher: I met President Havel three years ago. Now, as then, he is a heroic figure. What countries in central Europe represent the largest potential for ethnic tensions? Where do we need to engage in preventive diplomacy? (U)

President Havel: I don't see any ethnic conflicts in the region that have the immediate potential to turn violent. There are some in the former Soviet Union, but in Central Europe, there are no cases that look like Yugoslavia. Our main problem is that we feel as if we are living in a vacuum. That is why we want to join NATO. In addition, in our values and spirit, we are part of Western Europe. It is impossible to build a pan-European security system without the participation of Central Europe: We are now discussing in my country this question of joining Western institutions. We need association, followed by full membership. And the issue is not that we are faced with imminent threats. Rather, we are in the process of undergoing an image transformation -- a reshaping of our identity. At the same time, membership in NATO will help promote peace in the Balkans and NIS because it will serve as an example, luring these countries into the Western community. If, on the other hand, the Czech Republic fails to enter the West and reform falters, a bad example will be set. In sum, entry into NATO and the EC is central to expanding democracy not just to Central Europe, but also to the NIS. Central Europe provides a pathway for reform to spread eastward. I apologize for talking too long. (S)

The President: I agree that you should be a critical part of Europe, economically, politically, and strategically -- and a close friend of the United States. (S)

President Havel: What is needed is openness and cooperation in both the security and economic spheres. For now, we need compatible command structures and open trade. We can formalize these relationships later, maybe with treaties. To move in this direction, we are undertaking privatization and legal reform. We have a relatively open economy -- our barriers are the smallest

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in the region. Unfortunately, we are still on a USTR list of protectionist states. We resent this. U.S. imports have grown by 215%. Let me make a suggestion to promote our economic relations. We have a huge nuclear power station under construction. As with all power plants based on the Soviet model, we need Western help in developing safety mechanisms. We have contracted with Westinghouse to provide these mechanisms, but I ask that EXIM bank guarantee Westinghouse's investment. Similar contracts might then emerge for other power plants in the area. This proposal would benefit both the environment and our economic relations. (S)

Let me raise one final issue. The Czech Republic as a new country wishes to be seen as a nation that cares for more than its own narrow interests. We want to assume a broader responsibility. To achieve this, we would like to secure Eastern Europe's non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. I feel duty-bound to mention this. We would like to work with Madeleine Albright there. (S)

The President: If the nomination of the regional group goes to the Czech Republic, we would be very pleased. (S)

President Havel: We have already won the support of some in the region; we need the support of others. (S)

The President: Tomorrow you and others leaders are coming to the White House. I hope it does not rain. (U)

President Havel: I will deliver a lecture at George Washington University tomorrow. I would like to give you the text. I will also present you with a copy of one of my books. I hope it becomes part of your library. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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