

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Russian President Vladimir
Putin (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Secretary Madeleine Albright
Samuel Berger, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Gene Sperling, Assistant to the President
for Economic Policy and Director of the
National Economic Council
Mark Medish, Special Assistant to the
President for Russian, Ukrainian &
Eurasian Affairs (notetaker)
Nick Sorokin, Interpreter

President Vladimir Putin
Sergey Ivanov, Secretary, Security Council
Sergey Prihodko, Deputy Head, Presidential
Administration
Vladimir Chkhikvishvili, Director, North
America Department, Ministry of Foreign
Affairs
Interpreter

DATE, TIME November 15, 2000, 1:20-2:35 p.m. Local Time
AND PLACE: Assarra Guest House, Brunei

The President: You represent the world's largest country, and
we meet in what may be the world's smallest country. (S)

President Putin: Don't forget San Marino or the Vatican. (S)

The President: I just gave an address at a beautiful seaside
resort, which cost \$1 billion to build. The owners figure that
if they maintain a one hundred percent occupancy rate, charging
\$600 a night, it will pay off in 72 years. (S)

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Classified by: Robert A. Bradtke
Reason: 1.5(b)(d)
Declassify On: 11/26/10

President Putin: I have heard the sea is not safe around here. There are lots of things that can bite. (S)

The President: Earlier, I saw the so-called Snake Island; but snakes really aren't a problem for you or me, are they. We deal with them every day. (S)

President Putin: I want to pass on my congratulations to Hillary for her victory in the New York Senate race. (S)

The President: Thank you. There really isn't a precedent for a First Lady being elected into public office. The case of Bobby Kennedy and the U.S. Senate is only vaguely comparable. (S)

President Putin: Who was voting against her? Italian-Americans? (S)

The President: It was mostly ideological conservatives, and some of the Italian-Americans actually worked with us despite Rick Lazio. Hillary was criticized by conservatives in the Jewish community for supporting the Palestinians, but it was really only a small minority within the community, like those who criticized Rabin for initiating peace talks. Most support peace, but as we've learned in the past, minorities can be noisy and loud. (S)

President Putin: On the question of the Middle East, how can we cooperate? Igor Ivanov is presently in the region. (S)

The President: You know, the problems started when Likud leader Sharon, together with a hundred supporters, went up on Temple Mount. The reaction was swift, with violence and disputes about who did what and who was responsible for starting it. Arafat decided that despite the violence, the Palestinians could use the situation to obtain greater support in the UN. He also perceived the Israeli response as being disproportionate -- namely, you throw a rock, and they bring out guns. (S)

President Putin: That's generally the right reaction to an attack, in any region. (S)

The President: The problems stem from the grievances of young, unemployed Palestinians. These grievances have handed Hamas and other extremists greater power. Arafat is afraid of this, because he knows he can't control them, much as some of the Israeli settlers can't be controlled by the Israelis. (S)

This is a dangerous situation, with both sides feeling that they are victims: the Palestinians are upset that the Oslo process is not yet complete, and that the Palestinian people are still subject to checkpoints. On the other side, Barak has made the best offer so far, and he feels Arafat has snubbed him despite the big political risks he has taken. Barak's standing in Israel has been reduced, because he went so far and got nothing in return. He's now under enormous pressure to adopt a tougher stance; Barak is still willing to meet, but needs to know there will be real results before he will do so. (S)

It's as if the Chechens said they would meet with you, but would keep bombing your buildings in the meantime. Arafat has succeeded in reducing daily demonstrations, but has not gone far enough, and he needs to make a clearer commitment. If he did this, I could get Barak to implement Sharm el-Sheikh. (S)

While Igor is out there, the best thing he could do would be to buy some days of calm. The problem is that while Barak wants an agreement, he needs black and white certainty. Arafat, on the other hand, doesn't mind gray areas because that's where he's been all his life. Arafat and Barak both say they want an agreement before the start of the New Year, but we need calm first in order to resume talks. (S)

I think you could have an impact. If we can get them to talk and reach an agreement, we will all have work to do help them implement it, as will other countries. I can get Barak to stop, but he won't do it if they're still firing. (S)

I would also like to say a few words about Syria. I think you should encourage the Syrians to resume talks with Barak. He offered the late Hafez Assad to get out of Golan, bar a few hundred meters, and I think a deal can still be done. But it's dangerous for Bashar Assad to support Hizbollah. Israel has shown remarkable restraint thus far, given that they would normally have hit Lebanon and probably Syria after the abductions. It was a mistake for Bashar to inflame the situation. There's still an opportunity here, and Igor should tell Bashar to keep his lines of communication open with Israel. (S)

I have had real fears of a regional war. We need to work together to prevent this. The most important thing is to stop the violence between the Israelis and Palestinians. (S)

President Putin: Yes, we must try and put an end to the violence and pursue all available options. Arafat is not in total control. (S)

The President: I agree. (U)

President Putin: Hizbollah is being supported by other countries and clearly has a negative impact on the Palestinians. We must work with those shoring them up in a positive way. But above all, we must work to put an end to the violence. I discussed this with President Chirac in Paris, and passed this message on publicly in response to a question from a Palestinian press correspondent in the press conference following our talks. (S)

We need to improve our interaction. I realize you have taken on a huge responsibility but public, as opposed to expert, expectations of the peace process have been unattainable. We have been very cautious in our public posture, especially against the backdrop of the U.S. elections. We do have some traditional relations with countries in the region and could use them more efficiently. I would like to see better coordination with the United States. There has been a qualitative change in our relations with Israel; for example, the way in which we interact with Soviet era émigrés who account for one third of the population and who make up a large portion of the settlers. Consequently, we have a very uneasy perspective on these events. (S)

I would like to see more cooperation and more agreement on the next steps. We will also work with the EU, which also needs to participate. By the way, Chirac made a strong hint that he wanted to be invited but stopped short of saying that he was offended. For me personally it's not opportune to get overly involved because of situation in the Caucasus. (S)

The President: The Israelis believe everyone in the world is against them. We also need to reach out to Arabs and bring the level of paranoia down on both sides, as I think you're trying to do. We can help create the conditions needed to end violence. I think an informal approach is better than an international conference, which would seem to the Israelis like another bashing by the UN. (S)

President Putin: I agree with you that the key is to change the emotional dynamics. Let's see what we can achieve with Igor's mission. (S)

The President: When Arafat and Barak met in Paris, Arafat subsequently talked to Chirac and refused to sign the security agreement. The key is for you to develop relations with both sides and the Israelis in particular. For the United States, it is important to do the same with some of the Arab states. (S)

President Putin: I agree. (U)

The President: On the issue of nonproliferation, I think we've made some real progress over last several years, including the safeguarding of fissile material. (S)

I saw your statement on lowering the Start III threshold of warheads and ABM Treaty-compliant missile defense systems. I want our experts at the Department of Defense to continue working on these issues, as this should make it possible for you and the next Administration to reach an agreement. (S)

President Putin: I wanted to clarify why we did it. I don't expect any breakthroughs at this time, but wanted to underscore that even during the transition period in the U.S. the strategic dialogue goes on. (S)

The President: You know from the way I handled missile defense, I want us to work together on this and don't want the U.S. to break the ABM Treaty. (S)

If Bush does win -- and I honestly don't know whether this will be the case, although the full count probably favors Gore, slightly -- I will urge him not to violate the ABM Treaty as some of his Republican colleagues have proposed. (S)

I received your letter on the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement on arms sales, and I understand your argument. So far, the aide-memoire has been good for both sides, and, of course, I still believe lasers and missiles are very important concerns. However, there may be a way to modify the agreement to address your needs, without withdrawing. I fear your withdrawal would give Republicans ammunition and momentum to violate the ABM Treaty, even though they're obviously very different agreements. Let's have our experts talk and see if your needs can be accommodated. (S)

President Putin: He said, "I know his mom and his dad, they're good people, but I don't know about him." (S)

The President: Yeah, I liked that. (S)

The President: I failed to get the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty through the Senate, the first time something like that has happened in eighty years. But there are many in Senate who don't like the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty or the ABM Treaty. If you withdraw from the aide-memoire, momentum will build and the Republicans will use it. (S)

I think we have based our relationship on a win/win premise as opposed to a win/lose framework, allowing us to manage our disagreements. This is not about me anymore, as I won't be here. It would be good if you could buy some time and avoid withdrawal, because we don't want to give forces of reaction ammunition to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. I think it would be a mistake to abrogate unilaterally. (S)

President Putin: This is an unexpected subject, and I will need to think about it further. If we pursue the basic logic here, it seems that we either withdraw from the aide-memoire or modify it. And the next Administration will withdraw from the ABM Treaty unless we modify the aide-memoire -- and the ABM Treaty as well. This is a bit tricky. (S)

The problem also concerns the damage to our commercial interests and the worsening in relations with our buyers that would result. By the way, Article 5 of the aide-memoire provides for modification contingent on developments in Iran, and things are changing there for the better. Also, the Germans are doing big business with Iran via Hermes export credits, as much as \$2 billion, I believe [Berger tells Sergey Prikhodko that the Germans do not sell arms to Iran. Prikhodko shrugs.] (S)

But I fully understand your concern about Iran and their acquisition of weapons; since the MFA has already sent a letter, it's difficult to rescind. We have cooperated well on missiles and nuclear proliferation and will continue to do so. But maybe we can find some way to modernize and work out a new arrangement consistent with the Wassenaar approach. (S)

By the way, despite our agreements, U.S. arms continue to find their way into Afghanistan via Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Igor will look into this issue and work with Madeleine. (S)

The President: I'm concerned about this and hope we can work something out. (S)

Finally, Charlene Barshefsky was invited to visit Russia by German Gref, and I think she should go. We think you should get into WTO as quickly as you decide to move. (S)

On the question of North Korea, thank you again for the initiative you conveyed from Pyongyang back in July. Madeleine is working on this issue and is trying to move it forward. (S)

President Putin: Are they talking about halting production or exports? (S)

Secretary Albright: They are willing to stop both, for a price, but a further problem concerns currently deployed missiles. (S)

-- End of Conversation --