

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with George Vassiliou, President of Cyprus  
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
James A. Baker, III, Secretary of State  
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff  
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for  
National Security Affairs  
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President and  
Deputy for National Security Affairs  
Nelson Ledsky, Special Cyprus Coordinator  
Barry F. Lowenkron, NSC (notetaker)

President George Vassiliou  
George Iacovou, Foreign Minister  
Michael Sherifis, Ambassador

DATE, TIME: October 4, 1989, 2:00 - 2:40 pm EDT  
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

President Vassiliou: "On behalf of the Cypriot people, I would be grateful if you would accept this piece of pottery. It is very old, dating back to around 600 B.C." (U)

The President: "Thank you. This is a very special gift, and I'll be very careful with it. Why don't we wait until the press has been through before we start?" (U)

(The Press then depart.)

The President: "I want you to know that I'm impressed with your dedication and sincerity in trying to reach a settlement on Cyprus. But, I want to hear your views on where the Cyprus negotiations are going." (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "I must tell you that the talks are not going well. Turkey and Turkish Cypriot leader Denktash had rejected the UN Secretary General's ideas for a settlement. I believe that Denktash wants to sabotage the talks because he is not interested in a solution. As for Turkey, it has not made up its mind on whether it wants a solution. Given the present political situation in Turkey, the Turkish government will follow

Denktash's lead and therefore reinforce the stalemate in the talks. Nelson Ledsky {Special Cyprus Coordinator} is trying to get the talks restarted, but constructive conditions are needed. As long as Denktash and Turkey believe that the status quo can be perpetuated, the negotiations will fail. It is important to get Turkey to realize that the status quo is not a solution. Cyprus is a small fish that cannot pressure Turkey, but the U.S. can. The next step is to have meaningful negotiations under the auspices of the UN Secretary General. The Secretary General had set the parameters for the talks, and Denktash, seeing that progress was possible, would no longer play by the Secretary General's guidelines. Denktash's actions are similar to that of a football player who, rather than continuing to play, picks up the ball and walks off the field." (Ø)

The President: "What is the current position of the UN Secretary General?" (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "The UN Secretary General wants a solution, but is opposed to having talks simply for the sake of talks, which is Denktash's strategy. Mr. Ledsky wants to get the talks started, and then apply pressure from behind the scenes. However, without the UN Secretary General's framework, the talks will not succeed. I need US support to pressure Turkey into accepting meaningful negotiations." (Ø)

The President: "As I understand Nelson's {Ledsky} position, one has to learn to crawl before one can walk, therefore it's important to get the talks going again. I support this. I believe we share the same objective, a peaceful solution. It's important, however, to get re-engaged. Nelson, would you like to add anything?" (Ø)

Mr. Ledsky: "What you've said Mr. President is correct. Allow me if you will to review briefly where we've been with the UN Secretary General's efforts. The Secretary General sent a letter to Turkey in June asking the Turkish government to support his efforts. However, Denktash disrupted the talks in July. The Turks have told Denktash to negotiate and to conform to the rules as laid down by the Secretary General. Next Tuesday the Secretary General will be meeting with Denktash to see if the negotiations can resume. We should await the outcome of that meeting and take stock on where to go from there. I'm not absolutely confident that Denktash will agree to resume the talks. But, the Turks know that the talks are vital. Therefore, I'm more optimistic than President Vassiliou. I think it important to see what emerges from next Tuesday's meeting between the UN Secretary General and Denktash." (Ø)

Secretary Baker: "I think it's important for us to bear in mind that the President has spoken to both Prime Minister Ozal and President Evren on the Cyprus issue." (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "I'm grateful to hear that." (U)

The President: "There's nothing to be grateful for since we've not yet seen any success. However, both of us are not that far apart." (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "After the UN Secretary General tabled his paper, Denktash created a crisis, insisting that he would not continue the negotiations until the paper were withdrawn. I have accepted the paper, Denktash has rejected it. If the UN Secretary General were to accede to Denktash's wishes and withdraw his paper, he would be accepting an ultimatum from Denktash. In that case I would be discredited. If Denktash backs down, then he would lose face. I cannot negotiate if the UN Secretary General were to withdraw his paper. The negotiations should take place in private and on the basis of the UN Secretary General's ideas. There are three important disagreements that required resolution: re-establishing a unified State as opposed to a permanent partition of the island; a security guarantee for the Turkish Cypriots, and, resolution of the refugee problem by the re-adjustment of territory, with the option presented to those Greek Cypriots who fled the north to return." (Ø)

Mr. Ledsky: "President Vassiliou's statement is a fair assessment of where things stand. I hope that the UN Secretary General will succeed with Denktash. In my opinion, the Turkish Cypriots will counter the UN Secretary General's paper with ideas of their own. I see three areas as well that have to be addressed in the negotiations: the status of refugees, security guarantees for the Turkish Cypriots without preconditions, and the nature of the central government for Cyprus. I think the negotiations will be resumed but that they will not be quick or easy." (Ø)

The President: "Are there any communications between the members of both communities?" (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "There had been some contacts but no movement, although members of both communities have been able to live side by side in London for years." (Ø)

Mr. Ledsky: "There is more contact among the people of Berlin than among the citizens on Cyprus." (Ø)

Governor Sununu: "Are there any Greek Cypriots who support Denktash or any Turkish Cypriots who support Vassiliou?" (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "Yes." (U)

Governor Sununu: "What about the possibility of holding a referendum on the island to resolve the dispute?" (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "An agreement is needed first before a referendum can be held." (Ø)

Foreign Minister Iacovou: "In the context of a referendum, 65,000 Turkish settlers who have moved onto the island after the Turkish invasion should be barred from voting. Denktash draws his strength from these settlers." (Ø)

The President: "What is the Turkish troop level on the island?" (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "There are 35,000 Turkish troops and 400 tanks on Cyprus, as opposed to 10-11,000 Greek Cypriot troops. I hope to build up the Cypriot forces in order to reduce the ratio of Turkish Troops to Cypriot troops from 4 to 1 to 3 to 1." (Ø)

The President: "Are you concerned about your personal security?" (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "The day I reach a solution is the day that my enemies will shoot at me." (Ø)

The President: "Are you perceived as a hostile figure?" (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "No." (U)

The President: "What's the status of your relations with the Soviet Union?" (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "Our relations are friendly, but not special. Both sides have modest trade on a barter system. Moreover, Cyprus, as a member of the non-aligned movement, supports the rapprochement between the US and the Soviet Union." (Ø)

The President: "Secretary Baker had good meetings in Wyoming with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze." (Ø)

The President: "I want to take constructive steps to help the negotiations. I've spoken to President Evren and Prime Minister Ozal. The United States is not in the position to snap its fingers and make Turkey do what you want. But, we have an excellent relationship with both leaders and we'll continue to raise the Cyprus issue with them." (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "I understand Turkey's historical importance to the US as an ally against the Soviet Union." (Ø)

The President: "US-Turkish relations also grew stronger in response to the strains we've experienced with Greece." (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "East-West relations are changing. The US can manage its relations with the Soviet Union without the help of Turkey. Now is the time to press the Turks. If Turkey could

be made to realize that the US does not accept the status quo on Cyprus, then Turkey would move to support a solution." (Ø)

The President: "We'll continue to support the UN Secretary General's efforts. We have a very able Ambassador to the UN, Tom Pickering, who has the confidence of Secretary Baker and Perez de Cuellar." (Ø)

Secretary Baker: "In my view, Ozal is making a serious effort to get Denktash to re-engage. I do not think we're being naive in trusting Ozal. When I saw you last in Paris, you told me that President Evren might be the key player in Turkey on Cyprus. Based on that, the President talked to Evren and again to Ozal. If there is anything else the US can do, we will do it." (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "This is the first time an American Administration is doing something, and I am grateful. But, I need to show concrete progress. Maybe a goodwill gesture on the part of Turkey can help. I remember when I saw you last year Mr. President when you were Vice President. I raised the idea at that time of Turkey allowing the re-opening of the city of Famagusta under UN auspices. It's currently a ghost city." (Ø)

Mr. Ledsky: "That's an idea that was first raised by the US, Britain and Canada in the Ford Administration." (Ø)

President Vassiliou: "This gesture would lead to the rebuilding of the city and create momentum in the talks." (Ø)

The President: "I'll do all I can to help the negotiating process along. I think we should wait and see what happens next week when the UN Secretary General meets with Mr. Denktash." (Ø)

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m. (U)