

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Manfred Woerner, NATO Secretary General (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
William H. Taft, Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Robert Gates, Assistant to the President and Deputy for National Security Affairs
Marlin Fitzwater, Assistant to the President and Press Secretary
Raymond G. H. Seitz, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs
Philip D. Zelikow, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

Manfred Woerner, NATO Secretary General
W. Robert Pearson, Deputy Assistant Secretary General
James Cunningham, Private Office Director

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: October 11, 1989, 2:00 - 2:30 pm
Oval Office

The President: I want to get your views on the changes going on. I worry that on our side we will get hit on the defense budget more than we should, due to this sense of euphoria. I don't think this will strain our commitment to NATO, but I hope it will not have too strong an effect on our allies in Europe. (Ø)

Secretary General Woerner: I just spoke on this matter in Rome. I am concerned about structural disarmament. We need to make a stronger case that good defenses are required because of this period of change, the potential for instability in a period of transition. Intentions today are clear, but what about tomorrow? (Ø)

I wanted to tell you two things. First, the only safe basis for managing the Western approach in this time of change is through NATO. Second, we need to identify NATO more as a political alliance dealing with political change. Your leadership during the Summit galvanized the Alliance. We still live on that. We

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(U) 9/21/2009

should follow up on the Summit Declaration to link NATO with positive values like peace, change, and greater freedom. (Ø)

Although this is not for the public, the EC role in Poland is good, but now there is a pattern of leaving things to Europe. It is in the interest of the U.S. to use NATO as a political platform to coordinate policy, not just on defense, but as an instrument for your leadership and influence, even if the level of your forces goes down. Many groups are now involved with Eastern Europe -- the EC, the OECD, the World Bank, etc. NATO should not take their place in implementing policy, but we need one place for coordination of a common approach. The role of NATO here is equivalent to visible American leadership. (Ø)

The President: Are there weak sisters causing more unravelling within the Alliance that need more bilateral efforts from us? (Ø)

Secretary General Woerner: No, the need for NATO is not in question, though we have more defense problems with some than with others. I will discuss this with Secretary Cheney. (Ø)

Governor Sununu: Does it seem that those countries which are weaker on defense want more political leverage? (Ø)

Secretary General Woerner: No. (Ø)

General Scowcroft: I do not think so. (Ø)

Secretary General Woerner: I am also concerned about my own country. (Ø)

The President: The elections next year? (Ø)

Secretary General Woerner: No, the whole situation. There is no settled solution. (Ø)

The President: How do you answer questions about German reunification, both as Secretary General and as a citizen of the FRG? (Ø)

Secretary General Woerner: I make two points. First, it is clear that the current situation is untenable. We have a clear Alliance vision for overcoming the division of Europe. Self-determination is the key. We want self-determination for all, including East Germans. The Allies are committed to German unity through self-determination. Second, this is not a policy problem for tomorrow. The main thing is to continue encouraging change in Eastern Europe and the GDR, and press the Soviet leaders to allow it. (Ø)

The GDR leadership understands what many people do not see, that if you take away the Communist Party there is no reason for the East German State to exist. The GDR's chief ideologue published an article two months ago saying just this. Gorbachev will not

allow the GDR to leave the Warsaw Pact. If it leaves, that is the end. He needs the GDR in order to keep the others in. (S)

The President: Why is that so bad for Gorbachev? It's a new day -- perhaps he will decide the Warsaw Pact is not essential, that he does not need to rely on military might. Suppose he made a dramatic move. That may seem naive, but who predicted the changes we are seeing today? (S)

Secretary General Woerner: You could try to convince him that it is better just to have friendly neighbors. But that is not realistic. The Russians see the Warsaw Pact as the great achievement of the war. Their dominance contributes to a feeling of security. They consider the Warsaw Pact a condition of their world power position. They are entirely occupied with the idea of their equality with the United States. (S)

The President: No, I probably won't convince him. I was just thinking. How are we doing with Greece now? (S)

Secretary General Woerner: It will depend on the election. There might be better relations if the conservatives win. (S)

Ambassador Taft: We need a strong government there. They now can't give an inch to the Turks. (S)

Secretary General Woerner: The Turks are more generous on Alliance matters. (S)

The President: The Turks want to get into the EC. (S)

Secretary General Woerner: What is your feeling about progress in arms control? (U)

The President: We are going forward with CFE. We see no impediment there right now. Everyone is together now and Shevardnadze said they want to work this out expeditiously. Brent or Bob could go into the technical details more, but we think this is worth pushing. On CW, we have made a proposal but recognize some difficult verification problems. We now have a little high ground, but I am not optimistic about results because of the verification problems. On START, Brent would you comment? (S)

General Scowcroft: Akhromeyev was astonishingly frank in talking about various formulas and tradeoffs, more than in Wyoming. Wyoming indicated more flexibility on their side. It is too early to say, however, if they want real movement. (S)

The President: I think they want a START agreement badly. (S)

General Scowcroft: I don't know yet. They want a CFE treaty. We'll see more by the Summit next year. (S)

Mr. Gates: Shevardnadze is preoccupied with internal problems. He talked all about it on the plane to Wyoming. They need CFE

and START, but they haven't figured out how to get from here to there in a way that will satisfy their government. (S)

Secretary General Woerner: We need to maintain pressure and keep the initiative. Your CW proposal was good. NATO is dominating the agenda. (S)

General Scowcroft: In CFE we have as many problems within the Alliance as we do with the East. (S)

Secretary General Woerner: What do you think about the future of Eastern Europe? (U)

The President: There will be more dynamic change unless it gets to a point where the Soviets cannot accept it. There may be a line out there, or it may result in Gorbachev's departure. We were speculating about this a month ago. If the hard-liners take over, all bets are off. There could possibly be an iron fist. If we leave that contingency out, I can't say how far things could go. (S)

So we should just not be imprudent, not push the Soviets beyond that hidden line. I want to be sure I understand the nationalities and other problems in the Soviet Union so we do not inadvertently alarm them. You don't handle this with a new initiative every day or call the shots on how fast change will come to all these governments. We should stay on the high ground. This calls for a certain delicacy, and when I see Gorbachev we will talk about it, not to draw lines, but to get a feel for his views. Bob Gates is a Soviet expert. (S)

Mr. Gates: Once constraints are lifted, it is hard to put things back in the box. They will want East European states to remain in the Warsaw Pact and CEMA, and avoid anti-Soviet actions. Beyond that it is unclear what Moscow will allow. Can they accept such change for East Germany? I agree with Secretary General Woerner. (S)

The President: There could be different possibilities for Czechoslovakia. Let me give you an example of how we conduct ourselves. Yeltsin came here -- he is quite a character. We didn't want to stick a finger in Gorbachev's eye, but we're not unafraid either. If they see Ted Kennedy why can't I see Yeltsin? They understood it. Brent worked out a good formula. That's an example of the need for understanding. At the same time, we can't just worry about Gorbachev being mad. (S)

[Secretary Baker and Assistant Secretary Seitz joined the meeting.]

Secretary Baker: I bring greetings from President Cossiga. (U)

The President: We've just had a good talk. You should feel the door is open here anytime. We're most respectful of what you're doing and can talk with no holds barred. (S)

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Secretary General Woerner: You should maintain your strong leadership during this time of uncertainty. (S)

The President: If you see a vacuum being created, or anything we can do bilaterally or by speaking out, let me hear about that. (S)

Secretary General Woerner: I won't hesitate. There are some other matters I wish to take up with Secretary Baker and General Scowcroft. You should use the Alliance for managing East-West relations. Don't let the Europeans go their own way. Use it. (S)

The President: Cossiga told me a Summit would be important for Gorbachev. (S)

Secretary General Woerner: More important than for you, I agree with Cossiga. There are many reasons. He has internal problems and needs to be seen as your equal, deciding the fate of the world together with the American President. This is his backup. With problems everywhere, he can be seen as the one who achieves things with the great superpower. (S)

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