

SECRET/SENSITIVE

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

DECLASSIFIED  
PER E.O. 13526  
2011-0841-11A  
ES 6/18/13

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Gorbachev

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President  
for National Security Affairs

President Gorbachev  
Anatoliy Chernyayev, Aide to the General  
Secretary

DATE, TIME May 31, 1990, 10:54 - 12:45 p.m.  
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Welcome. We can open with anything you wish. We want this meeting to be seen as successful. We will try hard for a sense of success to present to the outside world. One more thing: we have this meeting, then expanded meetings, then Camp David, with you and me, then Baker and Shevardnadze. I think the private sessions will be most remunerative. There should be no press and no leaks. That is how I see it unfolding. (S)

President Gorbachev: My sincere greetings. It is good to be here in the White House. I am not a diplomat -- you have studied me -- I have no intention of becoming one. I believe the current time is such that we need to understand each other and to develop policies with respect to each other, and to others, which are predictable. I share your approach to this meeting. It should have a positive result. I am sure we can achieve that. (S)

I think our colleagues can complete the reviewing work. Our mission is to complete the philosophical discussion on issues we discussed even in 1987 and then at Malta. We said in the former meeting that if you were elected we would want to continue the work begun with President Reagan, and we took a further step at Governor's Island. Then, I believe we did the right thing at Malta by not waiting for a formal meeting. (S)

I would like to salute you. After Malta, events were developing, and they could have gone differently without Malta and the understandings we reached there. The processes continue, putting an even heavier load on us. That makes this meeting even more important. Let me make several points to begin our philosophical exchange. I think you agree that the center of world politics is the Soviet Union. What happens there is of monumental importance for you and the world. I value the positions you have stuck to. I know it is not easy, as it is not easy for me. (S)

While giving credit to our predecessors, we have to accept that

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we have a special task at this watershed in history. We cannot avoid that responsibility. The fact that we are using all forms of dialogue is appropriate. Let me outline the first point of my thoughts; these have not changed basically since the Reagan period. (S)

First, since we are in a radically new phase of our relations, we need a radically different view of, and approach to, each other. You may or may not agree, but the confrontation we got into after World War II wasted our time and energy, while others -- the former vanquished -- were moving ahead. Now they (the vanquished) are behaving very arrogantly. Japan's empire is now extending to you, to us, and to Western Europe. Germany likewise is a very powerful center in Europe and areas around Europe. Even countries like China and India in the developing world are moving. The world is changing in dramatic ways. The U.S. alone, despite its power, can not lead the world by itself. Playing "cards" against each other is not the way to go. (S)

What kind of country would each like the other to be? We don't want a weaker U.S. with infringed interests -- this would create instability -- and in U.S. political circles it is gradually becoming popular to see a stronger but democratic Soviet Union developing. Perestroika is how we hope to make that happen. We are moving toward a Soviet Union that is progressive, dynamic, free and turned toward the outside world and the U.S. If you analyze our statements and our initiative, you will see that we are not trying to infringe upon U.S. interests, especially security. (S)

This is our choice, and we are trying to get all sectors of Soviet society to accept this. It is not easy, but we are making progress. As a result, the image of the U.S. as a hostile and aggressive power is fading. But, realistically -- I must be honest -- every day I get reports; there are many in the Soviet Union telling me the U.S. is continuing to move and is trying to take advantage of perestroika to seek unilateral advantage. That is not surprising; you must have the same kind of people. (S)

The President: Why do your people think this way in a period of budget cuts and so forth? (S)

President Gorbachev: Public opinion as a whole is supportive and backs our policy. But at the same time some signal vigilance and are suspicious, for example war veterans, the military, and also the military/industrial complex. On balance, most want a good relationship and are for expanding cooperation. I believe our policy will be getting more and more support, but our people will follow very closely the steps taken by the U.S., especially in the security field. Let me conclude on this first point. I think we should build on what we have started, keep it going, and accelerate it. People in the Soviet Union will judge your policy by your attitudes towards perestroika and towards trade and finance. (S)

The most harmful thing right now as our system is moving to open

up is that there is not fair play. That could lead to a reversion to old ways, a sliding back from the ambitious policies we want to pursue. I say this because some in your press say that Gorbachev is weak and you should press your advantage. I am glad you have taken a firm policy line in favor of better relations and support of perestroika. That was in the U.S. interest, but I want you to know we appreciate it and I am sure the world does as well. As we take steps in various areas that will stimulate more contact and a better interrelationship, I have told international business that those who are with us now will be remembered, and those who stayed on the sidelines will lose out in the long run. (S)

This is a central point in my observations. All other points are subsidiary, so I would like to re-emphasize it. There is a regrouping in the world, and U.S.-Soviet relations are vital in this process -- the question is, can we cooperate? When we do, people feel better, except for fears of condominium; but when we quarrel, people worry. Our conduct thus far has avoided the condominium idea. We cannot freeze our relations, however; we must move forward or we will fall behind. (S)

The President: I am most worried that we will not have enough time. This is fascinating. We need time, because under these philosophical points lie many specific issues. (S)

There is a significant change in U.S. attitudes toward the Soviet Union, although there is emerging suspicion. I was looking at some polls; they show strong personal support of you. This is partly because of the way you personally interact, but also because you have done things which only recently would have been impossible for Americans to contemplate. (S)

You wondered at Governors Island whether there were elements that wanted perestroika to fail. I said that, if so, it was very much a minority view; it is even more so today. We do have elements, in my party, who are still suspicious and don't want to deal from equality and mutual respect. They are a small minority. We do not intend, either directly or indirectly, to play "cards" against you: China, India, etc. That is offensive to me, and I will not engage in it. Our people are probably not sufficiently sensitive, for example, to Soviet losses in World War II. (S)

As we wrestle with arms control, not only have I become more sensitive to that issue, but all my people have as well. We are attuned to that driving point for the Soviet Union, the fact that so many lost their lives. I wanted to get that comment on the table before we get -- inevitably -- to Germany, so you would know that I am sensitive to that historical fact. (S)

We do not want winners and losers. I wrote into my arrival comments the disproportionate responsibility that the Americans and the Soviets have for world structure. We respect the standing of the Soviet Union. Yes, you have problems, but you should understand that as long as I am in this office there will be no attempt to downgrade the position which the Soviet Union

rightly occupies. You must believe my sincerity on this point as we get into detailed issues. You gave me that map at Malta with the blue flags. I asked the CIA to see how accurate your intelligence was. They gave you high marks. (S)

President Gorbachev: I am sure your data on us is even better, because your technology is better. (S)

The President: But you get it all from Congress. (S)

President Gorbachev: Not all. (S)

The President: I told Brent that we have to convince you that these flags don't mean that we are trying to surround, to encircle the Soviet Union. Some of it we can do by words; some must be by actions. The U.S. has not been a historic threat to the Soviet Union, nor vice versa. Problems arose only when the Cold War developed. (S)

I would like to go back to your first point. Obviously our commitment to democracy and freedom is well known. As we adhere to those principles, we are not trying to complicate life for the Soviet Union. (S)

There are several problems we need to discuss, here or in a bigger meeting -- however you wish. Germany heads the list of difficult questions. CFE is very important, and maybe we can make progress. I understand you have hangups there which tie into the German problem. We don't want a Soviet Union that is threatened by any power. We may have very different ideas about the future of Germany. Will they return to their old ways, or have they learned and paid their dues? I am of the latter view. I think that, after 40 years, Germany is different now. But I wouldn't want to see a Soviet Union threatened by some new force. Nor do I want to single out Germany in a way which threatens to make history repeat itself. (S)

The last point I would make is that I am respectful of the internal affairs of another country, and I know the Lithuanian problem is extraordinarily difficult. We are looking at your economic reforms to see how they will help cooperation and deepen our relationship. Gorbachev has 70% approval in U.S. opinion polls because Americans are saluting what you are doing. We want these trends to continue -- we relate to all that -- but that is entirely your business. (S)

We visualize a Soviet Union which does not seek regional gains. If you see us doing things like putting in a radical Afghan regime which seems to be against your interests, that is bad. The same is true for us with respect to Cuba. (S)

My last point brings us back to the Baltics. To the degree that we see a commitment to your own principles of self-determination, we can cooperate. I have tried to conduct myself in a constrained way because I know you have big problems. But I am being hit both on my left and on my right by those who say that I

am subordinating U.S. dedication to principle. I will be honest: some of Landsbergis' moves could look to you like putting a finger in your eye. (S)

President Gorbachev: When I have wanted to speak in strong terms on this issue, I have said that Bush would settle this in 24 hours, because in the U.S. the Constitution is respected. The pre-perestroika leadership did not have respect for our Constitution, so the people don't. Now we are moving to become a people with respect for laws. (S)

The President: I understand, but you saw Landsbergis equating me with Chamberlain because I showed too much understanding of your position. I am getting into too much detail, but I see a world in which these fundamental principles continue to be worked out in your country. We need to work together. (S)

One last point. You mentioned the arrogance of some nations. In some of our speeches we too may seem that way, although I think we are not. Many in the U.S. think the Japanese are that way, but it is in the U.S. and Soviet interest that we work together with Japan. I have recently come to that point of view, although in the war I was shot down by the Japanese. What I see is a Soviet Union which can shed its historic fears, just as the U.S. is shedding its historic fears of Japan. (S)

This is the end of my speech. I am not sure I have covered your points well; if not, we can continue. (S)

President Gorbachev: I welcome this kind of discussion. Let me take five minutes more. (Continues, despite General Scowcroft's discouragement.) The phase of perestroika that we are now going through is probably decisive. Our political system has changed in a decisive way. In the elected bodies, all the way up, we have totally new people. Those functions which were the province of the party are now done by the Supreme Soviets. This is now formalized in constitutions and in local government statutes. (S)

Looking at our union, we are now in the actual process of reforming that federation. Now we have adopted measures, which now means we must implement them. This means more self-government, etc. I sent a letter to the Council of Federations to prepare for a discussion of all this, to rebuild our federation. The difficulties will be fundamental. Different Republics may have different relationships, but our basic decision is for a free market economy. (S)

Two thirds of the speakers at the Ryzhkov plan's presentation were negative, but the next day it was 50-50. Some started to comment on the positive aspects and on how to improve them. I was in the country, but thought I should talk to the people. So I dictated something and then talked simply and directly. I think people are beginning to understand what it means, the market. I said that those who work hard and put out quality products will profit by markets. Others will have to change so

as not to be left behind. I said, let's organize a market economy -- so the next day the Supreme Soviet debate was very different. They even took the notion of a referendum off the table by a 3-1 margin. They decided that the government and the parliamentary committees will work on it together for a week and try to come together. We are not ready yet for a market economy. We have a centralized economy and we must take account of this as we move. It seems easy to you. (S)

The President: I see. But it's like being pregnant: you can't do it half-way. (S)

President Gorbachev: But neither can you have a baby in the first month. We want to avoid an abortion. We are beginning with bread because it was so distorted. I am trying to get people to understand, and it is beginning to work. We need about two years for the transition. Kendall wants to tell the two of us how to interact on this. I told him to find a time. (S)

The President: He will be here tonight; I am drinking his vodka. (S)

President Gorbachev: For us, the decisive issue is the transition to a market economy. We hope to interact with you at this moment. (S)

The President: We should talk about the practical end of it. Jim has described your talk with him. We have differences, but let's talk about them. (S)

President Gorbachev: We need maneuvering room during this transition. The sums are not very big, but it is important that they be available. The U.S. would not need to provide it all, but you should be supportive. It is important that we not fail in this effort. (S)

The President: I agree, but you must know about my political constraints. At the plenary, I will call on you to discuss what you wish and we will go on from there. I have no surprises. (S)

President Gorbachev: Good. (S)

The President: Our Vice President is very well connected to our right wing. He has had a difficult time with our press, but he can be very helpful with arms control, etc. I wanted him to be involved as much as possible for that reason, and I would like to have him join us for a moment. (S)

(End of one-on-one)

(At the end of the one-on-one discussions, the Vice President joined the meeting for a few minutes.)