

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Baltic Presidents (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Lawrence Eagleburger, Acting Secretary of State
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Mary Ryan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for
European and Canadian Affairs
Nicholas Burns, Director for Soviet Affairs, NSC
Staff (Notetaker)

Arnold Ruutel, President of Estonia
Anatoliy Gorbunovs, President of Latvia
Vytautas Landsbergis, President of Lithuania
Lennart Meri, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Estonia
Janis Jurkans, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Latvia
Algirdas Saudargas, Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Lithuania
Rein Kivi, Assistant to the President of Estonia,
Interpreter
Stasys Lozoraitis, Charge d'Affaires of Lithuania
in Washington (Interpreter)
Karina Petersson, Interpreter for President of
Latvia

DATE, TIME September 17, 1991, 10:00 - 10:45am
AND PLACE: Oval Office, Rose Garden and Cabinet Room

The President: Let me open this meeting by simply saying welcome in the spirit of joy that events are moving so fast and that you will be members of the United Nations. We are very pleased. I apologize in advance for our crowded schedule today. We have the President of Peru here on an official visit and I must see the Secretary of Defense. The schedule is cluttered. (U)

But the main point is we welcome three democratic leaders of the Baltic countries to the White House. This is an important meeting for us as I hope it is for you. I just spoke to Secretary Baker. He has just left Israel for Egypt. He asked that I thank you for him for the hospitality he received during his trip to the Baltics. We viewed this as a significant visit. (U)

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I want now to turn the program over to you with my congratulations. On behalf of the American people, let me say that we want to work closely with you. All of you have a big job ahead and problems with the Soviets. It will be one of our priorities to try to be of assistance. We are glad you are here.
(U)

President Ruutel: I am sitting here in the middle of the table and so will speak first. Mr. President, for myself and the Estonian people, we are gratified by U.S. support for our independence which we believe is irreversible. I was in the U.S. not long ago and met with many political leaders. I felt here a strong sympathy from everyone. As your time is limited and the joyful event at the United Nations awaits, let me just give you a few ideas. (U)

I hope the U.S. can support us in solving our many problems. The deployment of the Soviet army in Estonia and the other Baltic states is important and should be part of your agenda with the Soviets. We understand that everyone must demonstrate responsibility on this problem which affects security in Europe and the whole world. But it seems to us that the time for solving this problem has come. We have no doubt that the resolution of this problem will help to build a Common European Home. We, of course, are also very much interested and involved in the acute problem of economic development. We need to fill the gap between us and other European countries produced by the last fifty years. I won't go into details since we have discussed this before, but perhaps we could present some thoughts to you later. (C)

The President: Excuse me, but I have one question. In helping you to solve the problem of the Soviet army, do you mean we should do so in our regular meetings with the Soviets or in another forum? (C)

President Ruutel: Yes, I meant in your normal dealings in the course of arms reductions talks. But the Balts should be an entirely separate question in the arms negotiations. As the USSR plans to reduce overall troop levels, it would be logical to do it with the Baltics first. I am quite sure that it would not pose a danger to the USSR if we were neutral. (C)

The President: Thank you for that clarification. (U)

President Landsbergis: Allow me to express my joy and gratitude for the political protection you gave us in establishing diplomatic relations and in sponsoring us for the UN. I also want to note that our security will not be complete until the Soviet army leaves. We want their troop removal to begin this year. They came as an army of occupation in 1940 and should go out this year, or at least begin to leave. It is very important that the army leave from our occupied countries. We are not formerly communist allies of the USSR like Poland and Czechoslovakia. We are occupied and are in much worse condition than them. The situation is very clear. We do not want any

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agreements that would provide a legal basis for the Soviet troops to stay. They are there illegally and we do not want to legalize their continued stay. I am asking for the political and legal support of the U.S. The U.S. should raise this with the Soviets and perhaps tie it to aid and credits. (C)

The President: This is very clear and I understand the request. We want to help. That is why I asked how we could do so -- in the UN or bilaterally. Their major argument in staying is housing. Did they raise this with you since you achieved your independence? (C)

President Ruutel: Yes, the Soviets have asked us to pay for housing and want us to provide it for officers. (C)

The President: Dick Cheney has just come in and will be interested in this. His job has changed, given the tremendous changes in the USSR. We in the U.S. have a disproportionate responsibility in the world to safeguard peace and freedom. We are fighting to keep a strong defense for the U.S. which we think is in the best interest of world peace. Dick and I have talked a good deal about this. (C)

President Gorbunovs: Mr. President, I have nothing substantial to add to what my colleagues from Lithuania and Estonia have said. It is with great gratitude that the Latvians remember how the U.S. supported us for fifty years during the illegal Soviet occupation. This sense of gratitude was elevated when we learned that the U.S. would recognize the Baltic states and re-establish diplomatic relations. Mr. President, I was personally gratified that you called me and the others leaders to announce this. We are also gratified by Secretary Baker's visit and for your support for our economic development and our participation in international organizations. We were very satisfied to learn that the gold you kept in safe vaults for us would be available to us. We face many problems. We intend to build a free market but it will be very difficult to accomplish. We hope the U.S. will support us in this. But our main concern is the presence of the USSR armed forces. They are a major destabilizing factor. There should not be a legal status for these troops. They must be removed. (C)

The President: Well, let me make some comments. I hope you all understand that since we have come to office we have made it clear to Gorbachev that the best thing he could do would be to free the Baltics. Gorbachev felt he was unable to do this at the beginning. We put that to him as the number one thing at Camp David and Helsinki and other meetings. As Ambassador Lozoraitis knows, there is a strong domestic feeling and our sense of fair play was also a factor. We wanted the Soviets to leave. We rejoice in the fact that circumstances have led them to do so. I hear what you are saying on the military and we will try to find ways to help. You have a very strong legal case as free countries and should not have troops on your soil. The moral case is also clear. Let us see how we can be helpful. The Vice

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President, Acting Secretary Eagleburger and Dick Cheney will all be dealing with this issue. We will be alert to ways to be helpful. Of course, there will need to be negotiations between the parties concerned. (C)

We outlined six measures that we will take to support you. We have supported you for UN and CSCE membership and will also support you for other international organizations. You know about our intention to return the gold and other assets. We want to normalize our bilateral economic relations with MFN, GSP, OPIC -- that is very important, OPIC, in insuring investments abroad. Larry Eagleburger can fill you in on the details. It is a very active program abroad. We also want to help you integrate into the world economy, to help you prepare for membership in the IMF and World Bank. We support your immediate membership in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. We have also decided to start a small assistance program and will do what we can to help you. Finally, we would like to send Peace Corps volunteers to your countries and I understand some of you have responded favorably to that. We would urge your rapid movement to free markets while recognizing the difficulty that your economies are interlocked with the Soviet economy in energy and production. To the degree that we have expertise, we want to help. (C)

I applaud your determination to have a peaceful transition. I would only caution you or just say that adherence to CSCE principles -- the rule of law and respect for minority rights are important. I don't want to lecture here because we have our own stormy history on this. But we are committed and think you should be to human rights. We are excited by all this. It is a hopeful time and I wish we weren't laboring under a trillion dollar debt. People ask why we don't launch a Marshall Plan. Well, our hands are tied to some degree. But our economy is getting better after our long recession. Everyone's trade is somewhat dependent on our economy. (C)

I want to leave you with a hopeful message. We have great enthusiasm for Baltic independence. There is a movement in our country that I need to fight a little that says we are doing enough overseas. But we will not withdraw from our responsibilities to our friends, friends like you, to firm up these changes that are occurring. We won't give up on the Middle East peace process or on Latin American debt. But I do want you to know that we are not as flush or as able to do as much as we would like. But we will work with you. I think it is good you are here to tell the American people about the work that needs to be done, that you need help. If the Baltic leaders can make this case, you will have our support and gratitude. It will help with this quasi-isolationist attitude that springs up in the U.S. from time to time. We haven't done enough and we want to do more. (C)

Again, a thousand apologies for the time problem. I am delighted you are free. Larry, do you have anything to add? (U)

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Acting Secretary Eagleburger: I would only add with regard to the assistance program that we have learned from Eastern Europe that it is much easier to deal with your needs if there is one place in your government we can go with contacts. I would urge you to name one person. (U)

The President: When will you formally be admitted into the UN? (U)

President Landsbergis: Today. (U)

Foreign Minister Meri: At 3:00 p.m. (U)

The President: What will you have to do? Make speeches? (U)

President Ruutel: We will have to make brief remarks. (U)

The President: I say this with some degree of facetiousness, having served at the UN. There is no such thing at the UN as a short speech. I recommend you leave at some point because it goes on and on. But seriously, the UN is in an interesting time. It is much more helpful on peacekeeping. We still fall short on some issues like Cyprus and Middle East peace. But it is an exciting time and this Secretary General has been superb. (U)

President Landsbergis: Mr. President, I would like you to know that we would like Mr. Lozoraitis to be our Ambassador to the U.S. (U)

The President: I am delighted. We know Mr. Lozoraitis well and have respect for him. I mean that. Congratulations. (U)

President Landsbergis: Does this mean we have agreement? (U)

The President: Yes. Of course. It does mean there is agreement. And now we won't have to shuffle all those papers. I think it is great and congratulate you, Ambassador Lozoraitis. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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