

# Withdrawal/Redaction Sheet

## (George Bush Library)

| Document No. and Type | Subject/Title of Document   | Date    | Restriction | Class. |
|-----------------------|---|---------|-------------|--------|
| 05. Memcon            | Memorandum of conversation between President George Bush and Wong Kan Seng, Foreign Minister of Singapore (5 pp.) | 10/4/91 | (b)(1)      | S      |

**Collection:**

**Record Group:** Bush Presidential Records  
**Office:** National Security Council  
**Series:** Memcons, Presidential  
**Subseries:**  
**WHORM Cat.:**  
**File Location:** October 1991

**Document Partially Declassified**  
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 By CS1 (NLGB) on 10/15/10

|   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| <b>Date Closed:</b> 1/10/2001           | <b>OA/ID Number:</b> CF01728-016 |
| <b>FOIA/SYS Case #:</b> 2000-0429-F     | <b>Appeal Case #:</b>            |
| <b>Re-review Case #:</b>                | <b>Appeal Disposition:</b>       |
| <b>P-2/P-5 Review Case #:</b>           | <b>Disposition Date:</b>         |
| <b>AR Case #:</b> 2000-0429-F(392)      | <b>MR Case #:</b>                |
| <b>AR Disposition:</b> Released in Part | <b>MR Disposition:</b>           |
| <b>AR Disposition Date:</b> 8/21/2009   | <b>MR Disposition Date:</b>      |

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- (b)(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506



~~SECRET~~

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Wong Kan Seng, Foreign Minister of Singapore (U)

PARTICIPANTS: Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Timothy Carney, Director of Asian Affairs, Notetaker

Wong Kan Seng, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Ong Keng Yong, Charge d'Affaires  
Selvadas Govindasamy, First Secretary

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: October 4, 1991, 5:05 - 5:35pm EST  
General Scowcroft's Office

After introductions and a brief exchange of courtesies, General Scowcroft began the meeting.

General Scowcroft: You have been to the UN? (U)

Foreign Minister Wong: I spent four days there for my speech at the UN General Assembly and then for the ASEAN Foreign Minister's meeting, the second of the two held every year. (U)

Our part of the world is alright except for your problem with the bases in the Philippines. How do you see that? (C)

General Scowcroft: Unless something happens, and that looks doubtful, we will go ahead and get out. (C)

We have been looking at alternative ideas for some time. (S)

We are grateful for your support which predates the current issues. It has been very helpful to us. (S)

Foreign Minister Wong: Are you looking for access in other ASEAN states? (S)

General Scowcroft: We have no specific focus on that, not wanting any leaks while the negotiations with the Philippines are on. We will be looking very seriously. (S)

Foreign Minister Wong: Until a new President and new Senate take office in the Philippines, it would be better not to move forces out of Subic Bay. The new players might bring new

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2000-0429F 8/21/09  
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thinking and maybe there would be an opportunity for retention of the bases. (S)

General Scowcroft: Our sense is that the bases are popular with the Philippine people and, if a referendum were held, retention would win quite handily. It would be a disaster if the bases close down. (S)

Foreign Minister Wong: For us, too. (S)

General Scowcroft: I have talked to some Senators. The issue is solely psychological: they will not feel really independent until they tell us to go home. (S)

Foreign Minister Wong: It is so few, just 12 (who voted against the Treaty). There is no sense in their being able to do that. (C)

President Aquino has talked to our Ambassador about the possibility of a three-year withdrawal. (S)

General Scowcroft: We will do nothing hasty. It is important, and we want to retain a presence and will be doing something to effect that. (S)

Foreign Minister Wong: With matters as they are in the Soviet Union, your move out of the Philippines would leave a vacuum. Who knows what regional powers would enter into contention. This would be destabilizing. (S)

General Scowcroft: We consider ourselves a Pacific country. Looking to the future, Japan and China are important elements. We will keep some kind of balance in the region. (S)

What about your domestic developments? (C)

Foreign Minister Wong: In our elections the 31st of August, we lost four seats. (U)

General Scowcroft: That is an earthquake! (U)

Foreign Minister Wong: Indeed, it was very dramatic. There was a two point fall in the vote for the People's Action Party as well, down to 61%. (C)

When the Prime Minister called the election it was to get support for new policies and his new style. The issue was himself and he was disappointed at the two point drop in voter support. (C)

General Scowcroft: In the context of a transition from the towering figure that (former Prime Minister) Lee was, you should be gratified at the encouraging result. (C)

Foreign Minister Wong: The next election will be crucial. In 1996, a new Prime Minister will be in it in his own name. We will see. Now, there is a feeling among people that a few oppositionists should be in Parliament. While the PAP is in power to deliver the goods, a few in opposition can be there to criticize. (S)

Foreign Minister Wong: Tremendous thing are going on in the USSR. How do you see the next three years? (U)

General Scowcroft: What happened with the failure of the coup was that the conservatives, who had tried to slow things down, to stop the evolution which Gorbachev had put in motion, not only did not succeed, but caused much more rapid movement. Bad elements have been eliminated for some time, but more chaos exists now than if matters had moved more gradually. (S)

Gorbachev's own real power is significantly diminished. Our sense now is that centrifugal forces are stronger than centripetal forces. It is quite possible that on December 1 the Ukraine will vote to leave the union. (S)

The economic situation is dreadful. the old system has been dismantled. No new system is in place and no one knows what to do. A member of the New Economic Commission was in this morning. He said, regarding their Defense Industry, that when the USSR worried about an attack from Europe, they built plants in Siberia, attaching special cities to each plant. If a plant goes out of business, the problem is how to reconnect the plant to some other industry. They are located in an uneconomic part of the country and workers' wages are extra high for them to settle in such desolate places. (S)

The likelihood is for a fairly complete breakdown of the country into its republics, at least for a time. They might eventually come back together again. (S)

Foreign Minister Wong: What about nuclear weapons? (U)

General Scowcroft: This problem is one of the reasons behind the recent U.S. proposal. Now, while the situation is stable, we might control and eliminate the weapons more rapidly. (S)

It is not entirely clear. The other Republics are fearful and jealous of Yeltsin. Kazakhstan and the Ukraine have commented that they are not willing to let the weapons go into Russian control. (S)

Tactical weapons are no problem, but for SS-18s in silos, they cannot move. It is a dilemma for them and worrisome for us. (S)

Foreign Minister Wong: What will Kazakhstan do if the Ukraine leaves the USSR? (U)

General Scowcroft: It is likely that Kazakhstan would go independent as well. They would not want to be alone with Russia if the Ukraine goes. If all stay in the union, there would be a counterweight to the size of Russia. ~~(S)~~

All of this makes the economic situation more difficult. Different regions have different economic independence: the Ukraine exports food and imports oil; Kazakhstan exports oil and minerals. A break-up would make things even more complicated. ~~(S)~~

Foreign Minister Wong: That is why the Europeans are not proposing to put in much money. ~~(S)~~

General Scowcroft: Emergency assistance during the coming winter would be OK. But, they can absorb the entire world supply of excess capital to no effect at this point. There must be an economic plan. ~~(S)~~

Foreign Minister Wong: Will this have an impact on China? (U)

General Scowcroft: Good question. The Chinese were upset when the coup failed. They are very worried. They are worried that they are the last remaining significant communist country and what that will mean. They worry over the example to the Chinese people. If the USSR breaks up, there will be independent countries on China's southwest border which will be an attraction to the non-Han people of China. ~~(S)~~

We would like to open a dialogue with China. We are in a difficult position. Congress makes it difficult to do anything. ~~(S)~~

Foreign Minister Wong: If the Soviet breakup affects China and if China goes the same way it will be much worse. ~~(S)~~

(b) (1)

In our quiet way we talked to them about Hong Kong and the need for agreement with the British government. We said Hong Kong is their link to the rest of the world for both capital and technology. They made an agreement on the airport. So long as China does not export arms to others, we do not have to bother. Of course we must deal with human rights. (S)

General Scowcroft: Any developments there? (U)

Foreign Minister Wong: Deng put reform-minded people in key positions. The longer they are there, the track of reform is easier. When Deng and Yang Shangkun pass, it will work. But, if there is a sudden passing, then struggle will result. Younger province leaders have traveled and know what will be good for their country. (S)

General Scowcroft: It is frozen now. (C)

Foreign Minister Wong: A period of waiting, waiting. If there are enough of those people, they can take China through the transition. Otherwise there will be ten million refugees and problems throughout Southeast Asia where ethnic Chinese minorities exist. (S)

General Scowcroft: A Cambodia settlement? (U)

Foreign Minister Wong: We hope to sign in Paris on 23 October and begin a new phase. Whether it will be implemented as envisaged is another matter. But, with a strong UN presence and strong Special Representative of the Secretary General it will work. It will take about 18 months from signature to elections. (C)

General Scowcroft: Hopefully it will get there. (U)

Foreign Minister Wang: If Cambodia is removed, then Southeast Asia will be stable and it is up to governments to pursue regional problems. In ASEAN, the problem is with the Philippines: national disaster; coup. This may improve with a new administration. Unemployment is destabilizing. (S)

General Scowcroft: We plan to stay and contribute to stability. (C)

The Foreign Minister concluded by giving General Scowcroft a pictorial book on Singapore.