

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

1613

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Vaclav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia (U)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.
The President
James A. Baker III, Secretary of State
Nicholas Brady, Secretary of the Treasury
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Robert Zoellick, Counsellor, Department of State
Raymond G.H. Seitz, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs
Shirley Temple Black, Ambassador to Czechoslovakia
Robert L. Hutchings, Director for European Political Affairs, NSC Staff
Lisa Valyiova, Interpreter

Czechoslovakia
Vaclav Havel, President
Marian Calfa, Prime Minister
Vladimir Dlouhy, Deputy Prime Minister
Jiri Dienstbier, Foreign Minister
Vaclav Klaus, Minister of Finance
Andrej Barcak, Minister of Foreign Trade
Rita Klimova, Advisor to the President
Michael Zantovsky, Presidential Press Spokesman
Alexandra Brabcova, Interpreter

DATE, TIME February 20, 1990, 11:33 - 12:10 am
AND PLACE: The Cabinet Room

Following their Oval Office meeting, the President and President Havel met for an expanded meeting in the Cabinet Room at 11:33.
(U)

The President: Mr. President, let me welcome you and introduce you to several of our Cabinet officials. I wouldn't dare to speak for any of them -- they're too independent. But this I can say: welcome. We've been looking forward to your visit. For the benefit of our colleagues, let me just say that the President

~~SECRET~~

Declassify on: OADR

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED
PER E.O. 12958,
AS AMENDED
CJ 8/21/2009
100-1125

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

2

and I had a very good discussion. I told him I would sign the Jackson-Vanik waiver, which would be good for both our countries. This should be followed with Most Favored Nation status for Czechoslovakia, although we need a trade agreement first. We will push from our side to get that done. The President told me he wanted to work in other areas as well -- the environment, the economy, and in the area of cultural exchanges. He proposed that our Peace Corps be more active in English-language teaching and other fields. We can get started with that, if it is agreeable. On our side, we need something from Congress on OPIC and other bilateral issues we talked about. (S)

President Havel: There was also our proposal for an agreement between our security services. This is a follow-up to Secretary Baker's meeting in Prague. (S)

The President: On one technical point, we will ask Congress to authorize OPIC to operate in Czechoslovakia. We are on the same wave length in bilateral issues. I am also interested in having your view of Europe. I can tell you from our side why we feel as we do. I hope that before you leave, you can get as close as possible to our views of what we call "Europe whole and free" and on the U.S. role. (S)

President Havel: I will be pleased to explain my viewpoint and will speak to that in my Congressional speech tomorrow. We believe developments in Europe are proceeding faster and creating new tasks. For example, we believe a Germany undergoing a process of reunification should accelerate the all-European process, not complicate it. We believe this year's CSCE Summit should take decisions that the Helsinki process should grow into something more. The next summit could be a kind of peace conference marking the final post-war settlement. It might be possible to hold the next summit earlier than 1992. The talks should also be devoted to the creation of a new European security system, also including links to the United States, Canada, and the USSR, but different from the present one. I have no intention to dissolve the Warsaw Pact tomorrow and NATO the day after. (S)

I would like to conclude these general remarks with one final point. It is perhaps not so strongly felt in the U.S. as in my country, but we have a strong feeling that the process of the destruction of totalitarian systems is irreversible for the USSR as well as for Eastern Europe. In the Soviet Union, the process is much more complicated and may take a number of dramatic turns, but it is historically irreversible. For history, there is no going back. In that context, I believe it is in the interest of ourselves, the United States, and the whole world to help the process in the Soviet Union to proceed as peacefully as possible

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

SECRET

3

without dramatic earthquakes. In this regard, I think the U.S. has much wider possibilities than we to offer, for example, humanitarian assistance to the people of Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is in our interest that the process in the Soviet Union go on without civil war. There are certain conservative forces there who are thinking "the worse, the better" and are trying to foment problems. We are now negotiating with the Soviet Union about the withdrawal of their troops. I got a letter from Gorbachev explaining the domestic reasons why the withdrawal cannot happen too rapidly. There is a better life for soldiers in Czechoslovakia and no housing for them in the Soviet Union. We should conclude an agreement for withdrawal in some form in the near future and would like to accelerate it for the sake of stability in our own country and the whole of Europe, but we are not overlooking Soviet concerns. Any help that could be given to improving the domestic situation in the Soviet Union would be helpful for us and also our neighbors, who are in the same situation. That is a general outline of the question the President put to me. Now that I have spoken so long, let me turn the floor back to the President. (Ø)

The President: May I just say before we walk over to the White House what our position is. "Historically irreversible change" is what you call what is going on in the Soviet Union. I hope you're right and have no reason to argue the point, but the problems facing Mr. Gorbachev are extraordinarily difficult -- not only economic but also ethnic, in the Baltic states and elsewhere. We think that our presence in Europe -- military and economic -- has been a stabilizing presence, not a threatening presence. We're convinced of that in our heart of hearts. Some in this country look at the changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and they say we ought to think more selfishly about what's best for the U.S. Some say that if all Soviet troops go out, all U.S. forces should go out too. That's in this country. In Western Europe, I don't hear anyone saying that, because they still see us as stabilizing, not threatening. Whatever happens with the German question, West European countries see the U.S. presence as stabilizing. From talks I and Secretary Baker have had with East European leaders, there is some of that feeling too. (Ø)

You have been very tactful in not telling me about your economic problems, so I shall be very tactful in not telling you about the economic problems I have. But there is sentiment here to pull back, driven partly by economics, for a "peace dividend." Our view, my Administration's view, is that we shouldn't withdraw and declare peace. We shouldn't decouple or delink ourselves from Europe. I believe from my talks with Gorbachev in Malta, and Secretary Baker's several talks with Shevardnadze, that the Soviets don't see us a threat to their reform. Further, I'm convinced that after what may have been a shaky start, or what some perceived as a shaky start, that he knows we want

SECRET

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

4

perestroika to succeed and want him to succeed. We have not tried to accelerate change by putting pressure on, for example, the Baltic states. We are not trying to complicate his agenda by calling for a free Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia. We are not trying to stir up problems in Armenia or Azerbaijan. We have made it clear to him we want to work with him on a broad agenda of economic cooperation, but he is way behind Czechoslovakia, even in an understanding how market economies work. We want to see a continued evolution of freedom wherever it is denied and want to see, in a broad philosophical sense, self-determination, and we want to see stability. (S)

It is in the interest of the U.S. to see a stable Europe "whole and free." So when we talk about a continued role for NATO, we are not speaking of a Maginot Line across Europe, but a revised agenda, a political agenda, for NATO and a stabilizing U.S. presence. When we talk about Germany in NATO, we are not talking about extending military forces all the way through the GDR. That's not what we have in mind at all. The big question we get in the press is "Who's the enemy?" I hope there isn't an enemy. I hope you're right about historically irreversible change and hope this is enhanced by a democratic, freedom-loving United States whose forces in history have threatened no one. We can talk more at lunch, but I wanted you to know what we mean about a broader role for NATO and a continuing role for U.S. forces. One last point: if the Europeans don't want us, we'll haul our forces out of there fast. That would make a lot of happy mothers and fathers. We wouldn't stay a day longer than we're wanted. I just want to get that off my chest. (S)

President Havel: I believe I may have been misunderstood. I do think there is no doubt about the stabilizing role of the U.S. and NATO at the present time. There is no doubt in the Soviet Union either. But I would just point out that the world is changing. NATO may be transformed into part of a new security system comprising all of the CSCE countries, with a continuing U.S. role. But history is going so fast that some day your troops may return to their mothers, though not all at once. (S)

The President: Let me just mention that our immediate objective is fewer numbers of troops. We are making it clear to the Soviet Union that there will not be absolute synchronizing of one-to-one, one Soviet for one U.S. soldier. But, I agree. Who knows? I hate to think that forever and ever U.S. forces will remain in Europe. Shall we continue our philosophical discussions over chow? One thing you mentioned interests me. You said "without earthquakes." Let me assure you that everything our diplomacy is aimed at is not inflicting on them dramatic earthquakes. We won't retreat from our commitment to freedom and human rights about which you've written so eloquently, but we want to manage change "without earthquakes." (S)

-- End of Conversation --

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

Originally Processed With FOIA(s):
2000-0429-F

CITATION MARKER

**This is not a textual record. This is used as an
administrative marker by the George Bush Presidential
Library Staff.**

Record Group/Collection: George H.W. Bush Presidential Records
Collection/Office of Origin: National Security Council
Series: Presidential Memcon Files
Subseries:

OA/ID Number: CF01729
Folder ID Number: CF01729-014

Folder Title:
[Memorandum of Conversations (Memcons) - January 1990-June 1990]: February 1990
