NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard

Declassified documents show security assurances against NATO expansion to Soviet leaders from Baker, Bush, Genscher, Kohl, Gates, Mitterrand, Thatcher, Hurd, Major, and Woerner

Slavic Studies Panel Addresses “Who Promised What to Whom on NATO Expansion?”

Published: Dec 12, 2017

Briefing Book #

613

Page from Stepanov-Mamaladze's notes from February 12, 1990, reflecting Baker's assurance to Shevardnadze during the Ottawa Open Skies conference: "And if U[nited] G[ermany] stays in NATO, we should take care about non-expansion of its jurisdiction to the east."

Eduard A. Shevardnadze (right) greets Hans-Dietrich Genscher (left) and Helmut Kohl (middle) on their arrival in Moscow on February 10, 1990, for talks on German reunification. Photo: AP Photo / Victor Yurchenko.

The agreement to begin the Two Plus Four talks is presented to the press by the six foreign ministers at the “Open Skies” Conference in Ottawa on February 13, 1990. Left to right: Eduard Shevardnadze (USSR), James A. Baker (US), Hans-Dietrich Genscher (FRG), Roland Dumas (France), Douglas Hurd (Great Britain), Oskar Fischer (GDR). Photo: Bundesbildstelle / Presseund Informationsamt der Bundesregierung.

Washington D.C., December 12, 2017 – U.S. Secretary of State James Baker’s famous “not one inch eastward” assurance about NATO expansion in his meeting with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev on February 9, 1990, was part of a cascade of assurances about Soviet security given by Western leaders to Gorbachev and other Soviet officials throughout the process of German unification in 1990 and on into 1991, according to declassified U.S., Soviet, German, British and French documents posted today by the National Security Archive at George Washington University ([http://nsarchive.gwu.edu](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/)).

The documents show that multiple national leaders were considering and rejecting Central and Eastern European membership in NATO as of early 1990 and through 1991, that discussions of NATO in the context of German unification negotiations in 1990 were not at all narrowly limited to the status of East German territory, and that subsequent Soviet and Russian complaints about being misled about NATO expansion were founded in written contemporaneous memcons and telcons at the highest levels.

The documents reinforce former CIA Director Robert Gates’s criticism of “pressing ahead with expansion of NATO eastward [in the 1990s], when Gorbachev and others were led to believe that wouldn’t happen.”[1] The key phrase, buttressed by the documents, is “led to believe.”

President George H.W. Bush had assured Gorbachev during the Malta summit in December 1989 that the U.S. would not take advantage (“I have not jumped up and down on the Berlin Wall”) of the revolutions in Eastern Europe to harm Soviet interests; but neither Bush nor Gorbachev at that point (or for that matter, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl) expected so soon the collapse of East Germany or the speed of German unification.[2]

The first concrete assurances by Western leaders on NATO began on January 31, 1990, when West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher opened the bidding with a major public speech at Tutzing, in Bavaria, on German unification. The U.S. Embassy in Bonn (see Document 1) informed Washington that Genscher made clear “that the changes in Eastern Europe and the German unification process must not lead to an ‘impairment of Soviet security interests.’ Therefore, NATO should rule out an ‘expansion of its territory towards the east, i.e. moving it closer to the Soviet borders.’” The Bonn cable also noted Genscher’s proposal to leave the East German territory out of NATO military structures even in a unified Germany in NATO.[3]

This latter idea of special status for the GDR territory was codified in the final German unification treaty signed on September 12, 1990, by the Two-Plus-Four foreign ministers (see Document 25). The former idea about “closer to the Soviet borders” is written down not in treaties but in multiple memoranda of conversation between the Soviets and the highest-level Western interlocutors (Genscher, Kohl, Baker, Gates, Bush, Mitterrand, Thatcher, Major, Woerner, and others) offering assurances throughout 1990 and into 1991 about protecting Soviet security interests and including the USSR in new European security structures. The two issues were related but not the same. Subsequent analysis sometimes conflated the two and argued that the discussion did not involve all of Europe. The documents published below show clearly that it did.

The “Tutzing formula” immediately became the center of a flurry of important diplomatic discussions over the next 10 days in 1990, leading to the crucial February 10, 1990, meeting in Moscow between Kohl and Gorbachev when the West German leader achieved Soviet assent in principle to German unification in NATO, as long as NATO did not expand to the east. The Soviets would need much more time to work with their domestic opinion (and financial aid from the West Germans) before formally signing the deal in September 1990.

The conversations before Kohl’s assurance involved explicit discussion of NATO expansion, the Central and East European countries, and how to convince the Soviets to accept unification. For example, on February 6, 1990, when Genscher met with British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd, the British record showed Genscher saying, “The Russians must have some assurance that if, for example, the Polish Government left the Warsaw Pact one day, they would not join NATO the next.” (See Document 2)

Having met with Genscher on his way into discussions with the Soviets, Baker repeated exactly the Genscher formulation in his meeting with Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze on February 9, 1990, (see Document 4); and even more importantly, face to face with Gorbachev.

Not once, but three times, Baker tried out the “not one inch eastward” formula with Gorbachev in the February 9, 1990, meeting. He agreed with Gorbachev’s statement in response to the assurances that “NATO expansion is unacceptable.” Baker assured Gorbachev that “neither the President nor I intend to extract any unilateral advantages from the processes that are taking place,” and that the Americans understood that “not only for the Soviet Union but for other European countries as well it is important to have guarantees that if the United States keeps its presence in Germany within the framework of NATO, not an inch of NATO’s present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction.” (See Document 6)

Afterwards, Baker wrote to Helmut Kohl who would meet with the Soviet leader on the next day, with much of the very same language. Baker reported: “And then I put the following question to him [Gorbachev]. Would you prefer to see a united Germany outside of NATO, independent and with no U.S. forces or would you prefer a unified Germany to be tied to NATO, with assurances that NATO’s jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastward from its present position? He answered that the Soviet leadership was giving real thought to all such options [….] He then added, ‘Certainly any extension of the zone of NATO would be unacceptable.’” Baker added in parentheses, for Kohl’s benefit, “By implication, NATO in its current zone might be acceptable.” (See Document 8)

Well-briefed by the American secretary of state, the West German chancellor understood a key Soviet bottom line, and assured Gorbachev on February 10, 1990: “We believe that NATO should not expand the sphere of its activity.” (See Document 9) After this meeting, Kohl could hardly contain his excitement at Gorbachev’s agreement in principle for German unification and, as part of the Helsinki formula that states choose their own alliances, so Germany could choose NATO. Kohl described in his memoirs walking all night around Moscow – but still understanding there was a price still to pay.

All the Western foreign ministers were on board with Genscher, Kohl, and Baker. Next came the British foreign minister, Douglas Hurd, on April 11, 1990. At this point, the East Germans had voted overwhelmingly for the deutschmark and for rapid unification, in the March 18 elections in which Kohl had surprised almost all observers with a real victory. Kohl’s analyses (first explained to Bush on December 3, 1989) that the GDR’s collapse would open all possibilities, that he had to run to get to the head of the train, that he needed U.S. backing, that unification could happen faster than anyone thought possible – all turned out to be correct. Monetary union would proceed as early as July and the assurances about security kept coming. Hurd reinforced the Baker-Genscher-Kohl message in his meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow, April 11, 1990, saying that Britain clearly “recognized the importance of doing nothing to prejudice Soviet interests and dignity.” (See Document 15)

The Baker conversation with Shevardnadze on May 4, 1990, as Baker described it in his own report to President Bush, most eloquently described what Western leaders were telling Gorbachev exactly at the moment: “I used your speech and our recognition of the need to adapt NATO, politically and militarily, and to develop CSCE to reassure Shevardnadze that the process would not yield winners and losers. Instead, it would produce a new legitimate European structure – one that would be inclusive, not exclusive.” (See Document 17)

Baker said it again, directly to Gorbachev on May 18, 1990 in Moscow, giving Gorbachev his “nine points,” which included the transformation of NATO, strengthening European structures, keeping Germany non-nuclear, and taking Soviet security interests into account. Baker started off his remarks, “Before saying a few words about the German issue, I wanted to emphasize that our policies are not aimed at separating Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union. We had that policy before. But today we are interested in building a stable Europe, and doing it together with you.” (See Document 18)

The French leader Francois Mitterrand was not in a mind-meld with the Americans, quite the contrary, as evidenced by his telling Gorbachev in Moscow on May 25, 1990, that he was “personally in favor of gradually dismantling the military blocs”; but Mitterrand continued the cascade of assurances by saying the West must “create security conditions for you, as well as European security as a whole.” (See Document 19) Mitterrand immediately wrote Bush in a “cher George” letter about his conversation with the Soviet leader, that “we would certainly not refuse to detail the guarantees that he would have a right to expect for his country’s security.” (See Document 20)

At the Washington summit on May 31, 1990, Bush went out of his way to assure Gorbachev that Germany in NATO would never be directed at the USSR: “Believe me, we are not pushing Germany towards unification, and it is not us who determines the pace of this process. And of course, we have no intention, even in our thoughts, to harm the Soviet Union in any fashion. That is why we are speaking in favor of German unification in NATO without ignoring the wider context of the CSCE, taking the traditional economic ties between the two German states into consideration. Such a model, in our view, corresponds to the Soviet interests as well.” (See Document 21)

The “Iron Lady” also pitched in, after the Washington summit, in her meeting with Gorbachev in London on June 8, 1990. Thatcher anticipated the moves the Americans (with her support) would take in the early July NATO conference to support Gorbachev with descriptions of the transformation of NATO towards a more political, less militarily threatening, alliance. She said to Gorbachev: “We must find ways to give the Soviet Union confidence that its security would be assured…. CSCE could be an umbrella for all this, as well as being the forum which brought the Soviet Union fully into discussion about the future of Europe.” (See Document 22)

The NATO London Declaration on July 5, 1990 had quite a positive effect on deliberations in Moscow, according to most accounts, giving Gorbachev significant ammunition to counter his hardliners at the Party Congress which was taking place at that moment. Some versions of this history assert that an advance copy was provided to Shevardnadze’s aides, while others describe just an alert that allowed those aides to take the wire service copy and produce a Soviet positive assessment before the military or hardliners could call it propaganda.

As Kohl said to Gorbachev in Moscow on July 15, 1990, as they worked out the final deal on German unification: “We know what awaits NATO in the future, and I think you are now in the know as well,” referring to the NATO London Declaration. (See Document 23)

In his phone call to Gorbachev on July 17, Bush meant to reinforce the success of the Kohl-Gorbachev talks and the message of the London Declaration. Bush explained: “So what we tried to do was to take account of your concerns expressed to me and others, and we did it in the following ways: by our joint declaration on non-aggression; in our invitation to you to come to NATO; in our agreement to open NATO to regular diplomatic contact with your government and those of the Eastern European countries; and our offer on assurances on the future size of the armed forces of a united Germany – an issue I know you discussed with Helmut Kohl. We also fundamentally changed our military approach on conventional and nuclear forces. We conveyed the idea of an expanded, stronger CSCE with new institutions in which the USSR can share and be part of the new Europe.” (See Document 24)

The documents show that Gorbachev agreed to German unification in NATO as the result of this cascade of assurances, and on the basis of his own analysis that the future of the Soviet Union depended on its integration into Europe, for which Germany would be the decisive actor. He and most of his allies believed that some version of the common European home was still possible and would develop alongside the transformation of NATO to lead to a more inclusive and integrated European space, that the post-Cold War settlement would take account of the Soviet security interests. The alliance with Germany would not only overcome the Cold War but also turn on its head the legacy of the Great Patriotic War.

But inside the U.S. government, a different discussion continued, a debate about relations between NATO and Eastern Europe. Opinions differed, but the suggestion from the Defense Department as of October 25, 1990 was to leave “the door ajar” for East European membership in NATO. (See Document 27) The view of the State Department was that NATO expansion was not on the agenda, because it was not in the interest of the U.S. to organize “an anti-Soviet coalition” that extended to the Soviet borders, not least because it might reverse the positive trends in the Soviet Union. (See Document 26) The Bush administration took the latter view. And that’s what the Soviets heard.

As late as March 1991, according to the diary of the British ambassador to Moscow, British Prime Minister John Major personally assured Gorbachev, “We are not talking about the strengthening of NATO.” Subsequently, when Soviet defense minister Marshal Dmitri Yazov asked Major about East European leaders’ interest in NATO membership, the British leader responded, “Nothing of the sort will happen.” (See Document 28)

When Russian Supreme Soviet deputies came to Brussels to see NATO and meet with NATO secretary-general Manfred Woerner in July 1991, Woerner told the Russians that “We should not allow […] the isolation of the USSR from the European community.” According to the Russian memorandum of conversation, “Woerner stressed that the NATO Council and he are against the expansion of NATO (13 of 16 NATO members support this point of view).” (See Document 30)

Thus, Gorbachev went to the end of the Soviet Union assured that the West was not threatening his security and was not expanding NATO. Instead, the dissolution of the USSR was brought about by Russians (Boris Yeltsin and his leading advisory Gennady Burbulis) in concert with the former party bosses of the Soviet republics, especially Ukraine, in December 1991. The Cold War was long over by then. The Americans had tried to keep the Soviet Union together (see the Bush “Chicken Kiev” speech on August 1, 1991). NATO’s expansion was years in the future, when these disputes would erupt again, and more assurances would come to Russian leader Boris Yeltsin.

The Archive compiled these declassified documents for a panel discussion on November 10, 2017 at the annual conference of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) in Chicago under the title “Who Promised What to Whom on NATO Expansion?” The panel included:

\* Mark Kramer from the Davis Center at Harvard, editor of the Journal of Cold War Studies, whose 2009 Washington Quarterly article argued that the “no-NATO-enlargement pledge” was a “myth”;[4]

\* Joshua R. Itkowitz Shifrinson from the Bush School at Texas A&M, whose 2016 International Security article argued the U.S. was playing a double game in 1990, leading Gorbachev to believe NATO would be subsumed in a new European security structure, while working to ensure hegemony in Europe and the maintenance of NATO;[5]

\* James Goldgeier from American University, who wrote the authoritative book on the Clinton decision on NATO expansion, Not Whether But When, and described the misleading U.S. assurances to Russian leader Boris Yeltsin in a 2016 WarOnTheRocks article;[6]

\* Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton from the National Security Archive, whose most recent book, The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush: Conversations That Ended the Cold War (CEU Press, 2016) analyzes and publishes the declassified transcripts and related documents from all of Gorbachev’s summits with U.S. presidents, including dozens of assurances about protecting the USSR’s security interests.[7]

[Today’s posting is the first of two on the subject. The second part will cover the Yeltsin discussions with Western leaders about NATO.]

Read the documents

Document-01-U-S-Embassy-Bonn-Confidential-Cable

Document 01

U.S. Embassy Bonn Confidential Cable to Secretary of State on the speech of the German Foreign Minister: Genscher Outlines His Vision of a New European Architecture.

Feb 1, 1990

Source

U.S. Department of State. FOIA Reading Room. Case F-2015 10829

One of the myths about the January and February 1990 discussions of German unification is that these talks occurred so early in the process, with the Warsaw Pact still very much in existence, that no one was thinking about the possibility that Central and European countries, even then members of the Warsaw Pact, could in the future become members of NATO. On the contrary, the West German foreign minister’s Tutzing formula in his speech of January 31, 1990, widely reported in the media in Europe, Washington, and Moscow, explicitly addressed the possibility of NATO expansion, as well as Central and Eastern European membership in NATO – and denied that possibility, as part of his olive garland towards Moscow. This U.S. Embassy Bonn cable reporting back to Washington details both of Hans-Dietrich Genscher’s proposals – that NATO would not expand to the east, and that the former territory of the GDR in a unified Germany would be treated differently from other NATO territory.

Document-02-Mr-Hurd-to-Sir-C-Mallaby-Bonn

Document 02

Mr. Hurd to Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn). Telegraphic N. 85: Secretary of State’s Call on Herr Genscher: German Unification.

Feb 6, 1990

Source

Documents on British Policy Overseas, series III, volume VII: German Unification, 1989-1990. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Documents on British Policy Overseas, edited by Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, Oxford and New York, Routledge 2010). pp. 261-264

The U.S. State Department’s subsequent view of the German unification negotiations, expressed in a 1996 cable sent to all posts, mistakenly asserts that the entire negotiation over the future of Germany limited its discussion of the future of NATO to the specific arrangements over the territory of the former GDR. Perhaps the American diplomats missed out on the early dialogue between the British and the Germans on this issue, even though both shared their views with the U.S. secretary of state. As published in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s official 2010 documentary history of the UK’s input into German unification, this memorandum of British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd’s conversation with West German Foreign Minister Genscher on February 6, 1990, contains some remarkable specificity on the issue of future NATO membership for the Central Europeans. The British memorandum specifically quotes Genscher as saying “that when he talked about not wanting to extend NATO that applied to other states beside the GDR. The Russians must have some assurance that if, for example, the Polish Government left the Warsaw Pact one day, they would not join NATO the next.” Genscher and Hurd were saying the same to their Soviet counterpart Eduard Shevardnadze, and to James Baker.[8]

Document-03-Memorandum-from-Paul-H-Nitze-to

Document 03

Memorandum from Paul H. Nitze to George H.W. Bush about “Forum for Germany” meeting in Berlin.

Feb 6, 1990

Source

George H. W. Bush Presidential Library

This concise note to President Bush from one of the Cold War’s architects, Paul Nitze (based at his namesake Johns Hopkins University School of International Studies), captures the debate over the future of NATO in early 1990. Nitze relates that Central and Eastern European leaders attending the “Forum for Germany” conference in Berlin were advocating the dissolution of both the superpower blocs, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, until he (and a few western Europeans) turned around that view and instead emphasized the importance of NATO as the basis of stability and U.S. presence in Europe.

Document-04-Memorandum-of-conversation-between

Document 04

Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow.

Feb 9, 1990

Source

U.S. Department of State, FOIA 199504567 (National Security Archive Flashpoints Collection, Box 38)

Although heavily redacted compared to the Soviet accounts of these conversations, the official State Department version of Secretary Baker’s assurances to Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze just before the formal meeting with Gorbachev on February 9, 1990, contains a series of telling phrases. Baker proposes the Two-Plus-Four formula, with the two being the Germanies and the four the post-war occupying powers; argues against other ways to negotiate unification; and makes the case for anchoring Germany in NATO. Furthermore, Baker tells the Soviet foreign minister, “A neutral Germany would undoubtedly acquire its own independent nuclear capability. However, a Germany that is firmly anchored in a changed NATO, by that I mean a NATO that is far less of [a] military organization, much more of a political one, would have no need for independent capability. There would, of course, have to be iron-clad guarantees that NATO’s jurisdiction or forces would not move eastward. And this would have to be done in a manner that would satisfy Germany’s neighbors to the east.”

Document-05-Memorandum-of-conversation-between

Document 05

Memorandum of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow.

Feb 9, 1990

Source

U.S. Department of State, FOIA 199504567 (National Security Archive Flashpoints Collection, Box 38)

Even with (unjustified) redactions by U.S. classification officers, this American transcript of perhaps the most famous U.S. assurance to the Soviets on NATO expansion confirms the Soviet transcript of the same conversation. Repeating what Bush said at the Malta summit in December 1989, Baker tells Gorbachev: “The President and I have made clear that we seek no unilateral advantage in this process” of inevitable German unification. Baker goes on to say, “We understand the need for assurances to the countries in the East. If we maintain a presence in a Germany that is a part of NATO, there would be no extension of NATO’s jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east.” Later in the conversation, Baker poses the same position as a question, “would you prefer a united Germany outside of NATO that is independent and has no US forces or would you prefer a united Germany with ties to NATO and assurances that there would be no extension of NATO’s current jurisdiction eastward?” The declassifiers of this memcon actually redacted Gorbachev’s response that indeed such an expansion would be “unacceptable” – but Baker’s letter to Kohl the next day, published in 1998 by the Germans, gives the quote.

Document-06-Record-of-conversation-between

Document 06

Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow. (Excerpts)

Feb 9, 1990

Source

Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1.

This Gorbachev Foundation record of the Soviet leader’s meeting with James Baker on February 9, 1990, has been public and available for researchers at the Foundation since as early as 1996, but it was not published in English until 2010 when the Masterpieces of History volume by the present authors came out from Central European University Press. The document focuses on German unification, but also includes candid discussion by Gorbachev of the economic and political problems in the Soviet Union, and Baker’s “free advice” (“sometimes the finance minister in me wakes up”) on prices, inflation, and even the policy of selling apartments to soak up the rubles cautious Soviet citizens have tucked under their mattresses.

Turning to German unification, Baker assures Gorbachev that “neither the president nor I intend to extract any unilateral advantages from the processes that are taking place,” and that the Americans understand the importance for the USSR and Europe of guarantees that “not an inch of NATO’s present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction.” Baker argues in favor of the Two-Plus-Four talks using the same assurance: “We believe that consultations and discussions within the framework of the ‘two+four’ mechanism should guarantee that Germany’s unification will not lead to NATO’s military organization spreading to the east.” Gorbachev responds by quoting Polish President Wojciech Jaruzelski: “that the presence of American and Soviet troops in Europe is an element of stability.”

The key exchange takes place when Baker asks whether Gorbachev would prefer “a united Germany outside of NATO, absolutely independent and without American troops; or a united Germany keeping its connections with NATO, but with the guarantee that NATO’s jurisdiction or troops will not spread east of the present boundary.” Thus, in this conversation, the U.S. secretary of state three times offers assurances that if Germany were allowed to unify in NATO, preserving the U.S. presence in Europe, then NATO would not expand to the east. Interestingly, not once does he use the term GDR or East Germany or even mention the Soviet troops in East Germany. For a skilled negotiator and careful lawyer, it seems very unlikely Baker would not use specific terminology if in fact he was referring only to East Germany.

The Soviet leader responds that “[w]e will think everything over. We intend to discuss all these questions in depth at the leadership level. It goes without saying that a broadening of the NATO zone is not acceptable.” Baker affirms: “We agree with that.”

Document-07-Memorandum-of-conversation-between

Document 07

Memorandum of conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow.

Feb 9, 1990

Source

George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, NSC Scowcroft Files, Box 91128, Folder “Gorbachev (Dobrynin) Sensitive.”

This conversation is especially important because subsequent researchers have speculated that Secretary Baker may have been speaking beyond his brief in his “not one inch eastward” conversation with Gorbachev. Robert Gates, the former top CIA intelligence analyst and a specialist on the USSR, here tells his kind-of-counterpart, the head of the KGB, in his office at the Lubyanka KGB headquarters, exactly what Baker told Gorbachev that day at the Kremlin: not one inch eastward. At that point, Gates was the top deputy to the president’s national security adviser, Gen. Brent Scowcroft, so this document speaks to a coordinated approach by the U.S. government to Gorbachev. Kryuchkov, whom Gorbachev appointed to replace Viktor Chebrikov at the KGB in October 1988, comes across here as surprisingly progressive on many issues of domestic reform. He talks openly about the shortcomings and problems of perestroika, the need to abolish the leading role of the CPSU, the central government’s mistaken neglect of ethnic issues, the “atrocious” pricing system, and other domestic topics.

When the discussion moves on to foreign policy, in particular the German question, Gates asks, “What did Kryuchkov think of the Kohl/Genscher proposal under which a united Germany would be associated with NATO, but in which NATO troops would move no further east than they now were? It seems to us to be a sound proposal.” Kryuchkov does not give a direct answer but talks about how sensitive the issue of German unification is for the Soviet public and suggests that the Germans should offer the Soviet Union some guarantees. He says that although Kohl and Genscher’s ideas are interesting, “even those points in their proposals with which we agree would have to have guarantees. We learned from the Americans in arms control negotiations the importance of verification, and we would have to be sure.”

Document-08-Letter-from-James-Baker-to-Helmut-Kohl

Document 08

Letter from James Baker to Helmut Kohl

Feb 10, 1990

Source

Deutsche Enheit Sonderedition und den Akten des Budeskanzleramtes 1989/90, eds. Hanns Jurgen Kusters and Daniel Hofmann (Munich: R. Odenbourg Verlag, 1998), pp. 793-794

This key document first appeared in Helmut Kohl’s scholarly edition of chancellery documents on German unification, published in 1998. Kohl at that moment was caught up in an election campaign that would end his 16-year tenure as chancellor, and wanted to remind Germans of his instrumental role in the triumph of unification.[9] The large volume (over 1,000 pages) included German texts of Kohl’s meetings with Gorbachev, Bush, Mitterrand, Thatcher and more – all published with no apparent consultation with those governments, only eight years after the events. A few of the Kohl documents, such as this one, appear in English, representing the American or British originals rather than German notes or translations. Here, Baker debriefs Kohl the day after his February 9 meeting with Gorbachev. (The chancellor is scheduled to have his own session with Gorbachev on February 10 in Moscow.) The American apprises the German on Soviet “concerns” about unification, and summarizes why a “Two Plus Four” negotiation would be the most appropriate venue for talks on the “external aspects of unification” given that the “internal aspects … were strictly a German matter.” Baker especially remarks on Gorbachev’s noncommittal response to the question about a neutral Germany versus a NATO Germany with pledges against eastward expansion, and advises Kohl that Gorbachev “may well be willing to go along with a sensible approach that gives him some cover …” Kohl reinforces this message in his own conversation later that day with the Soviet leader.

Document-09-Memorandum-of-conversation-between

Document 09

Memorandum of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl

Feb 10, 1990

Source

Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros, edited by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev, (Moscow: Ves Mir, 2006)

This meeting in Moscow was the moment, by Kohl’s account, when he first heard from Gorbachev that the Soviet leader saw German unification as inevitable, that the value of future German friendship in a “common European home” outweighed Cold War rigidities, but that the Soviets would need time (and money) before they could acknowledge the new realities. Prepared by Baker’s letter and his own foreign minister’s Tutzing formula, Kohl early in the conversation assures Gorbachev, “We believe that NATO should not expand the sphere of its activity. We have to find a reasonable resolution. I correctly understand the security interests of the Soviet Union, and I realize that you, Mr. General Secretary, and the Soviet leadership will have to clearly explain what is happening to the Soviet people.” Later the two leaders tussle about NATO and the Warsaw Pact, with Gorbachev commenting, “They say what is NATO without the FRG. But we could also ask: what is the WTO without the GDR?” When Kohl disagrees, Gorbachev calls merely for “reasonable solutions that do not poison the atmosphere in our relations” and says this part of the conversation should not be made public.

Gorbachev aide Andrei Grachev later wrote that the Soviet leader early on understood that Germany was the door to European integration, and “[a]ll the attempted bargaining [by Gorbachev] about the final formula for German association with NATO was therefore much more a question of form than serious content; Gorbachev was trying to gain needed time in order to let public opinion at home adjust to the new reality, to the new type of relations that were taking shape in the Soviet Union’s relations with Germany as well as with the West in general. At the same time he was hoping to get at least partial political compensation from his Western partners for what he believed to be his major contribution to the end of the Cold War.”[10]

Document-10-01-Teimuraz-Stepanov-Mamaladze-notes

Document 10-1

Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze notes from Conference on Open Skies, Ottawa, Canada.

Feb 12, 1990

Source

Hoover Institution Archive, Stepanov-Mamaladze Collection.

Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze was particularly unhappy with the swift pace of events on German unification, especially when a previously scheduled NATO and Warsaw Pact foreign ministers’ meeting in Ottawa, Canada, on February 10-12, 1990, that was meant to discuss the “Open Skies” treaty, turned into a wide-ranging negotiation over Germany and the installation of the Two-Plus-Four process to work out the details. Shevardnadze’s aide, Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze, wrote notes of the Ottawa meetings in a series of notebooks, and also kept a less-telegraphic diary, which needs to be read along with the notebooks for the most complete account. Now deposited at the Hoover Institution, these excerpts of the Stepanov-Mamaladze notes and diary record Shevardnadze’s disapproval of the speed of the process, but most importantly reinforce the importance of the February 9 and 10 meetings in Moscow, where Western assurances about Soviet security were heard, and Gorbachev’s assent in principle to eventual German unification came as part of the deal.

Notes from the first days of the conference are very brief, but they contain one important line that shows that Baker offered the same assurance formula in Ottawa as he did in Moscow: “And if U[nited] G[ermany] stays in NATO, we should take care about nonexpansion of its jurisdiction to the East.” Shevardnadze is not ready to discuss conditions for German unification; he says that he has to consult with Moscow before any condition is approved. On February 13, according to the notes, Shevardnadze complains, “I am in a stupid situation – we are discussing the Open Skies, but my colleagues are talking about unification of Germany as if it was a fact.” The notes show that Baker was very persistent in trying to get Shevardnadze to define Soviet conditions for German unification in NATO, while Shevardnadze was still uncomfortable with the term “unification,” instead insisting on the more general term “unity.”

Document-10-02-Teimuraz-Stepanov-Mamaladze-diary

Document 10-2

Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze diary, February 12, 1990.

Feb 12, 1990

Source

Hoover Institution Archive, Stepanov-Mamaladze Collection.

This diary entry from February 12 contains a very brief description of the February 10 Kohl and Genscher visit to Moscow, about which Stepanov-Mamaladze had not previously written (since he was not present). Sharing the view of his minister, Shevardnadze, Stepanov reflects on the hurried nature of, and insufficient considerations given to, the Moscow discussions: “Before our visit here, Kohl and Genscher paid a hasty visit to Moscow. And just as hastily – in the opinion of E.A. [Shevardnadze] – Gorbachev accepted the right of the Germans to unity and self-determination.” This diary entry is evidence, from a critical perspective, that the United States and West Germany did give Moscow concrete assurances about keeping NATO to its current size and scope. In fact, the diary further indicates that at least in Shevardnadze’s view those assurances amounted to a deal – which Gorbachev accepted, even while he stalled for time.

Document-10-03-Teimuraz-Stepanov-Mamaladze-diary

Document 10-3

Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze diary, February 13, 1990.

Feb 13, 1990

Source

Hoover Institution Archive, Stepanov-Mamaladze Collection.

On the second day of the Ottawa conference, Stepanov-Mamaladze describes difficult negotiations about the exact wording on the joint statement on Germany and the Two-Plus-Four process. Shevardnadze and Genscher argued for two hours over the terms “unity” versus “unification” as Shevardnadze tried to slow things down on Germany and get the other ministers to concentrate on Open Skies. The day was quite intense: “During the day, active games were taking place between all of them. E.A. [Shevardnadze] met with Baker five times, twice with Genscher, talked with Fischer [GDR foreign minister], Dumas [French foreign minister], and the ministers of the ATS countries,” and finally, the text of the settlement was settled, using the word “unity.” The final statement also called the agreement on U.S. and Soviet troops in Central Europe the main achievement of the conference. But for the Soviet delegates, “ the ‘Open Sky’ [was] still closed by the storm cloud of Germany.”

Document-11-U-S-State-Department-Two-Plus-Four

Document 11

U.S. State Department, “Two Plus Four: Advantages, Possible Concerns and Rebuttal Points.”

Feb 21, 1990

Source

State Department FOIA release, National Security Archive Flashpoints Collection, Box 38.

This memo, likely authored by top Baker aide Robert Zoellick at the State Department, contains the candid American view of the Two-Plus-Four process with its advantages of “maintain[ing] American involvement in (and even some control over) the unification debate.” The American fear was that the West Germans would make their own deal with Moscow for rapid unification, giving up some of the bottom lines for the U.S., mainly membership in NATO. Zoellick points out, for example, that Kohl had announced his 10 Points without consulting Washington and after signals from Moscow, and that the U.S. had found out about Kohl going to Moscow from the Soviets, not from Kohl. The memo pre-empts objections about including the Soviets by pointing out they were already in Germany and had to be dealt with. The Two-Plus-Four arrangement includes the Soviets but prevents them from having a veto (which a Four-Power process or a United Nations process might allow), while an effective One-Plus-Three conversation before each meeting would enable West Germany and the U.S., with the British and the French, to work out a common position. Especially telling are the underlining and handwriting by Baker in the margins, especially his exuberant phrase, “you haven’t seen a leveraged buyout until you see this one!”

Document-12-1-Memorandum-of-conversation-between

Document 12-1

Memorandum of conversation between Vaclav Havel and George Bush in Washington.

Feb 20, 1990

Source

George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, Memcons and Telcons (https://bush41library.tamu.edu/)

These conversations might be called “the education of Vaclav Havel,”[10] as the former dissident-turned-president of Czechoslovakia visited Washington only two months after the Velvet Revolution swept him from prison to the Prague Castle. Havel would enjoy standing ovations during a February 21 speech to a joint session of Congress, and hold talks with Bush before and after the congressional appearance. Havel had already been cited by journalists as calling for the dissolution of the Cold War blocs, both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and the withdrawal of troops, so Bush took the opportunity to lecture the Czech leader about the value of NATO and its essential role as the basis for the U.S. presence in Europe. Still, Havel twice mentioned in his speech to Congress his hope that “American soldiers shouldn’t have to be separated from their mothers” just because Europe couldn’t keep the peace, and appealed for a “future democratic Germany in the process of unifying itself into a new pan-European structure which could decide about its own security system.” But afterwards, talking again to Bush, the former dissident clearly had gotten the message. Havel said he might have been misunderstood, that he certainly saw the value of U.S. engagement in Europe. For his part, Bush raised the possibilities, assuming more Czechoslovak cooperation on this issue, of U.S. investment and aid.

Document-12-2-Memorandum-of-conversation-between

Document 12-2

Memorandum of conversation between Vaclav Havel and George Bush in Washington.

Feb 21, 1990

Source

George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, Memcons and Telcons (https://bush41library.tamu.edu/)

This memcon after Havel’s triumphant speech to Congress contains Bush’s request to Havel to pass the message to Gorbachev that the Americans support him personally, and that “We will not conduct ourselves in the wrong way by saying ‘we win, you lose.’” Emphasizing the point, Bush says, “tell Gorbachev that … I asked you to tell Gorbachev that we will not conduct ourselves regarding Czechoslovakia or any other country in a way that would complicate the problems he has so frankly discussed with me.” The Czechoslovak leader adds his own caution to the Americans about how to proceed with the unification of Germany and address Soviet insecurities. Havel remarks to Bush, “It is a question of prestige. This is the reason why I talked about the new European security system without mentioning NATO. Because, if it grew out of NATO, it would have to be named something else, if only because of the element of prestige. If NATO takes over Germany, it will look like defeat, one superpower conquering another. But if NATO can transform itself – perhaps in conjunction with the Helsinki process – it would look like a peaceful process of change, not defeat.” Bush responded positively: “You raised a good point. Our view is that NATO would continue with a new political role and that we would build on the CSCE process. We will give thought on how we might proceed.”

Document-13-Memorandum-of-Conversation-between

Document 13

Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David.

Feb 24, 1990

Source

George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, Memcons and Telcons (https://bush41library.tamu.edu/)

The Bush administration’s main worry about German unification as the process accelerated in February 1990 was that the West Germans might make their own deal bilaterally with the Soviets (see Document 11) and might be willing to bargain away NATO membership. President Bush later commented that the purpose of the Camp David meeting with Kohl was to “keep Germany on the NATO reservation,” and that drove the agenda for this set of meetings. The German chancellor arrives at Camp David without Genscher because the latter does not entirely share the Bush-Kohl position on full German membership in NATO, and he recently angered both leaders by speaking publicly about the CSCE as the future European security mechanism.[12]

At the beginning of this conversation, Kohl expresses gratitude for Bush and Baker’s support during his discussions with Gorbachev in Moscow in early February, especially for Bush’s letter stating Washington’s strong commitment to German unification in NATO. Both leaders express the need for the closest cooperation between them in order to reach the desired outcome. Bush’s priority is to keep the U.S. presence, especially the nuclear umbrella, in Europe: “if U.S. nuclear forces are withdrawn from Germany, I don’t see how we can persuade any other ally on the continent to retain these weapons.” He refers sarcastically to criticisms coming from Capitol Hill: “We have weird thinking in our Congress today, ideas like this peace dividend. We can’t do that in these uncertain times.” Both leaders are concerned about the position Gorbachev might take and agree on the need to consult with him regularly. Kohl suggests that the Soviets need assistance and the final arrangement on Germany could be a “matter of cash.” Foreshadowing his reluctance to contribute financially, Bush replies, “you have deep pockets.” At one point in the conversation, Bush seems to view his Soviet counterpart not as a partner but as a defeated enemy. Referring to talk in some Soviet quarters against Germany staying in NATO, he says: “To hell with that. We prevailed and they didn’t. We cannot let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat.”

Document-14-Memorandum-of-conversation-between

Document 14

Memorandum of conversation between George Bush and Eduard Shevardnadze in Washington.

Apr 6, 1990

Source

George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, Memcons and Telcons (https://bush41library.tamu.edu/)

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze delivers a letter to Bush from Gorbachev, in which the Soviet president reviews the main issues before the coming summit. Economic issues are at the top of the list for the Soviet Union, specifically Most Favored Nation status and a trade agreement with the United States. Shevardnadze expresses concern about the lack of progress on these issues and the U.S. efforts to prevent the EBRD from extending loans to the USSR. He stresses that they are not asking for help, “we are only looking to be treated as partners.” Addressing the tensions in Lithuania, Bush says that he does not want to create difficulties for Gorbachev on domestic issues, but notes that he must insist on the rights of Lithuanians because their incorporation within the USSR was never recognized by the United States. On arms control, both sides point to some backtracking by the other and express a desire to finalize the START Treaty quickly. Shevardnadze mentions the upcoming CSCE summit and the Soviet expectation that it will discuss the new European security structures. Bush does not contradict this but ties it to the issues of the U.S. presence in Europe and German unification in NATO. He declares that he wants to “contribute to stability and to the creation of a Europe whole and free, or as you call it, a common European home. A[n] idea that is very close to our own.” The Soviets—wrongly—interpret this as a declaration that the U.S. administration shares Gorbachev’s idea.

Document-15-Sir-R-Braithwaite-Moscow-Telegraphic

Document 15

Sir R. Braithwaite (Moscow). Telegraphic N. 667: “Secretary of State’s Meeting with President Gorbachev.”

Apr 11, 1990

Source

Documents on British Policy Overseas, series III, volume VII: German Unification, 1989-1990. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Documents on British Policy Overseas, edited by Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, Oxford and New York, Routledge 2010), pp. 373-375

Ambassador Braithwaite’s telegram summarizes the meeting between Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Douglas Hurd and President Gorbachev, noting Gorbachev’s “expansive mood.” Gorbachev asks the secretary to pass his appreciation for Margaret Thatcher’s letter to him after her summit with Kohl, at which, according to Gorbachev, she followed the lines of policy Gorbachev and Thatcher discussed in their recent phone call, on the basis of which the Soviet leader concluded that “the British and Soviet positions were very close indeed.” Hurd cautions Gorbachev that their positions are not 100% in agreement, but that the British “recognized the importance of doing nothing to prejudice Soviet interests and dignity.” Gorbachev, as reflected in Braithwaite’s summary, speaks about the importance of building new security structures as a way of dealing with the issue of two Germanies: “If we are talking about a common dialogue about a new Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals, that was one way of dealing with the German issue.” That would require a transitional period to pick up the pace of the European process and “synchronise it with finding a solution to the problem of the two Germanies.” However, if the process was unilateral – only Germany in NATO and no regard for Soviet security interest – the Supreme Soviet would be very unlikely to approve such a solution and the Soviet Union would question the need to speed up the reduction of its conventional weapons in Europe. In his view, Germany’s joining NATO without progress on European security structures “could upset the balance of security, which would be unacceptable to the Soviet Union.”

Document-16-Valentin-Falin-Memorandum-to-Mikhail

Document 16

Valentin Falin Memorandum to Mikhail Gorbachev (Excerpts)

Apr 18, 1990

Source

Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros, edited by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev, (Moscow: Ves Mir, 2006), pp. 398-408

This memorandum from the Central Committee’s most senior expert on Germany sounds like a wake-up call for Gorbachev. Falin puts it in blunt terms: while Soviet European policy has fallen into inactivity and even “depression” after the March 18 elections in East Germany, and Gorbachev himself has let Kohl speed up the process of unification, his compromises on Germany in NATO can only lead to the slipping away of his main goal for Europe – the common European home. “Summing up the past six months, one has to conclude that the ‘common European home,’ which used to be a concrete task the countries of the continent were starting to implement, is now turning into a mirage.” While the West is sweet-talking Gorbachev into accepting German unification in NATO, Falin notes (correctly) that “the Western states are already violating the consensus principle by making preliminary agreements among themselves” regarding German unification and the future of Europe that do not include a “long phase of constructive development.” He notes the West’s “intensive cultivation of not only NATO but also our Warsaw Pact allies” with the goal to isolate the USSR in the Two-Plus-Four and CSCE framework.

He further comments that reasonable voices are no longer heard: “Genscher from time to time continues to discuss accelerating the movement toward European collective security with the ‘dissolving of NATO and WTO into it.’ ... But very few people … hear Genscher.” Falin proposes using the Soviet Four-power rights to achieve a formal legally binding settlement equal to a peace treaty that would guarantee Soviet security interests as “our only chance to dock German unification with the pan-European process.” He also suggests using arms control negotiations in Vienna and Geneva as leverage if the West keeps taking advantage of Soviet flexibility. The memo suggests specific provisions for the final settlement with Germany, the negotiation of which would take a long time and provide a window for building European structures. But the main idea of the memo is to warn Gorbachev not to be naive about the intentions of his American partners: “The West is outplaying us, promising to respect the interests of the USSR, but in practice, step by step, separating us from ‘traditional Europe.’”

Document-17-James-A-Baker-III-Memorandum-for-the

Document 17

James A. Baker III, Memorandum for the President, “My meeting with Shevardnadze.”

May 4, 1990

Source

George H. W. Bush Presidential Library, NSC Scowcroft Files, Box 91126, Folder “Gorbachev (Dobrynin) Sensitive 1989 – June 1990 [3]”

The secretary of state had just spent nearly four hours meeting with the Soviet foreign minister in Bonn on May 4, 1990, covering a range of issues but centering on the crisis in Lithuania and the negotiations over German unification. As in the February talks and throughout the year, Baker took pains to provide assurances to the Soviets about including them in the future of Europe. Baker reports, “I also used your speech and our recognition of the need to adapt NATO, politically and militarily, and to develop CSCE to reassure Shevardnadze that the process would not yield winners and losers. Instead, it would produce a new legitimate European structure – one that would be inclusive, not exclusive.” Shevardnadze’s response indicates that “our discussion of the new European architecture was compatible with much of their thinking, though their thinking was still being developed.” Baker relates that Shevardnadze “emphasized again the psychological difficulty they have – especially the Soviet public has – of accepting a unified Germany in NATO.” Astutely, Baker predicts that Gorbachev will not “take on this kind of an emotionally charged political issue now” and likely not until after the Party Congress in July.

Document-18-Record-of-conversation-between

Document 18

Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow.

May 18, 1990

Source

Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1.

This fascinating conversation covers a range of arms control issues in preparation for the Washington summit and includes extensive though inconclusive discussions of German unification and the tensions in the Baltics, particularly the standoff between Moscow and secessionist Lithuania. Gorbachev makes an impassioned attempt to persuade Baker that Germany should reunify outside of the main military blocs, in the context of the all-European process. Baker provides Gorbachev with nine points of assurance to prove that his position is being taken into account. Point eight is the most important for Gorbachev—that the United States is “making an effort in various forums to ultimately transform the CSCE into a permanent institution that would become an important cornerstone of a new Europe.”

This assurance notwithstanding, when Gorbachev mentions the need to build new security structures to replace the blocs, Baker lets slip a personal reaction that reveals much about the real U.S. position on the subject: “It’s nice to talk about pan-European security structures, the role of the CSCE. It is a wonderful dream, but just a dream. In the meantime, NATO exists. …” Gorbachev suggests that if the U.S. side insists on Germany in NATO, then he would “announce publicly that we want to join NATO too.” Shevardnadze goes further, offering a prophetic observation: “if united Germany becomes a member of NATO, it will blow up perestroika. Our people will not forgive us. People will say that we ended up the losers, not the winners.”

Document-19-Record-of-conversation-between

Document 19

Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Francois Mitterrand (excerpts).

May 25, 1990

Source

Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros, edited by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev, (Moscow: Ves Mir, 2006), pp. 454-466

Gorbachev felt that of all the Europeans, the French president was his closest ally in the construction of a post-Cold War Europe, because the Soviet leader believed Mitterrand shared his concept of the common European home and the idea of dissolving both military blocs in favor of new European security structures. And Mitterrand did share that view, to an extent. In this conversation, Gorbachev is still hoping to persuade his counterpart to join him in opposing German unification in NATO. Mitterrand is quite direct, telling Gorbachev that it is too late to fight this issue and that he would not give his support, because “if I say ‘no’ to Germany’s membership in NATO, I will become isolated from my Western partners.” However, Mitterrand suggests that Gorbachev demand “appropriate guarantees” from NATO. He speaks about the danger of isolating the Soviet Union in the new Europe and the need to “create security conditions for you, as well as European security as a whole. This was one of my guiding goals, particularly when I proposed my idea of creating a European confederation. It is similar to your concept of a common European home.”

In his recommendations to Gorbachev, Mitterrand is basically repeating the lines of the Falin memo (see Document 16). He says Gorbachev should strive for a formal settlement with Germany using his Four-power rights and use the leverage of conventions arms control negotiations: “You will not abandon such a trump card as disarmament negotiations.” He implies that NATO is not the key issue now and could be drowned out in further negotiations; rather, the important thing is to ensure Soviet participation in new European security system. He repeats that he is “personally in favor of gradually dismantling the military blocs.”

Gorbachev expresses his wariness and suspicion about U.S. effort to “perpetuate NATO,” to “use NATO to create some sort of mechanism, an institution, a kind of directory for managing world affairs.” He tells Mitterrand about his concern that the U.S. is trying to attract East Europeans to NATO: “I told Baker: we are aware of your favorable attitude towards the intention expressed by a number of representatives of Eastern European countries to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and subsequently join NATO.” What about the USSR joining?

Mitterrand agrees to support Gorbachev in his efforts to encourage pan-European processes and ensure that Soviet security interests are taken into account as long as he does not have to say “no” to the Germans. He says “I always told my NATO partners: make a commitment not to move NATO’s military formations from their current territory in the FRG to East Germany.”

Document-20-Letter-from-Francois-Mitterrand-to

Document 20

Letter from Francois Mitterrand to George Bush

May 25, 1990

Source

George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, NSC Scowcroft Files, FOIA 2009-0275-S

True to his word, Mitterrand writes a letter to George Bush describing Gorbachev’s predicament on the issue of German unification in NATO, calling it genuine, not “fake or tactical.” He warns the American president against doing it as a fait accompli without Gorbachev’s consent implying that Gorbachev might retaliate on arms control (exactly what Mitterrand himself – and Falin earlier – suggested in his conversation). Mitterrand argues in favor of a formal “peace settlement in International law,” and informs Bush that in his conversation with Gorbachev he “indicated that, on the Western side, we would certainly not refuse to detail the guarantees that he would have a right to expect for his country’s security.” Mitterrand thinks that “we must try to dispel Mr. Gorbatchev’s worries,” and offers to present “ a number of proposals” about such guarantees when he and Bush meet in person.

Document-21-Record-of-conversation-between

Document 21

Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.

May 31, 1990

Source

Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Moscow, Fond 1, opis 1.[13]

In this famous “two anchor” discussion, the U.S. and Soviet delegations deliberate over the process of German unification and especially the issue of a united Germany joining NATO. Bush tries to persuade his counterpart to reconsider his fears of Germany based on the past, and to encourage him to trust the new democratic Germany. The U.S. president says, “Believe me, we are not pushing Germany towards unification, and it is not us who determines the pace of this process. And of course, we have no intention, even in our thoughts, to harm the Soviet Union in any fashion. That is why we are speaking in favor of German unification in NATO without ignoring the wider context of the CSCE, taking the traditional economic ties between the two German states into consideration. Such a model, in our view, corresponds to the Soviet interests as well.” Baker repeats the nine assurances made previously by the administration, including that the United States now agrees to support the pan-European process and transformation of NATO in order to remove the Soviet perception of threat. Gorbachev’s preferred position is Germany with one foot in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact—the “two anchors”—creating a kind of associated membership. Baker intervenes, saying that “the simultaneous obligations of one and the same country toward the WTO and NATO smack of schizophrenia.” After the U.S. president frames the issue in the context of the Helsinki agreement, Gorbachev proposes that the German people have the right to choose their alliance—which he in essence already affirmed to Kohl during their meeting in February 1990. Here, Gorbachev significantly exceeds his brief, and incurs the ire of other members of his delegation, especially the official with the German portfolio, Valentin Falin, and Marshal Sergey Akhromeyev. Gorbachev issues a key warning about the future: “if the Soviet people get an impression that we are disregarded in the German question, then all the positive processes in Europe, including the negotiations in Vienna [over conventional forces], would be in serious danger. This is not just bluffing. It is simply that the people will force us to stop and to look around.” It is a remarkable admission about domestic political pressures from the last Soviet leader.

Document-22-Letter-from-Mr-Powell-N-10-to-Mr

Document 22

Letter from Mr. Powell (N. 10) to Mr. Wall: Thatcher-Gorbachev memorandum of conversation.

Jun 8, 1990

Source

Documents on British Policy Overseas, series III, volume VII: German Unification, 1989-1990. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Documents on British Policy Overseas, edited by Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, Oxford and New York, Routledge 2010), pp 411-417

Margaret Thatcher visits Gorbachev right after he returns home from his summit with George Bush. Among many issues in the conversation, the center of gravity is on German unification and NATO, on which, Powell notes, Gorbachev’s “views were still evolving.” Rather than agreeing on German unification in NATO, Gorbachev talks about the need for NATO and the Warsaw pact to move closer together, from confrontation to cooperation to build a new Europe: “We must mould European structures so that they helped us find the common European home. Neither side must be afraid of unorthodox solutions.”

While Thatcher speaks against Gorbachev’s ideas short of full NATO membership for Germany and emphasizes the importance of a U.S. military presence in Europe, she also sees that “CSCE could provide the umbrella for all this, as well as being the forum which brought the Soviet Union fully into discussion about the future of Europe.” Gorbachev says he wants to “be completely frank with the Prime Minister” that if the processes were to become one-sided, “there could be a very difficult situation [and the] Soviet Union would feel its security in jeopardy.” Thatcher responds firmly that it was in nobody’s interest to put Soviet security in jeopardy: “we must find ways to give the Soviet Union confidence that its security would be assured.”

Document-23-Record-of-Conversation-between

Document 23

Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, Moscow (Excerpts).

Jul 15, 1990

Source

Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros, edited by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev, (Moscow: Ves Mir, 2006), pp. 495-504

This key conversation between Chancellor Kohl and President Gorbachev sets the final parameters for German unification. Kohl talks repeatedly about the new era of relations between a united Germany and the Soviet Union, and how this relationship would contribute to European stability and security. Gorbachev demands assurances on non-expansion of NATO: “we must talk about the nonproliferation of NATO military structures to the territory of the GDR, and maintaining Soviet troops there for a certain transition period.” The Soviet leader notes earlier in the conversation that NATO has already began transforming itself. For him, the pledge of NATO non-expansion to the territory of the GDR in spirit means that NATO would not take advantage of the Soviet willingness to compromise on Germany. He also demands that the status of Soviet troops in the GDR for the transition period be “regulated. It should not hang in the air, it needs a legal basis.” He hands Kohl Soviet considerations for a full-fledged Soviet-German treaty that would include such guarantees. He also wants assistance with relocating the troops and building housing for them. Kohl promises to do so as long as this assistance is not construed as “a program of German assistance to the Soviet Army.”

Talking about the future of Europe, Kohl alludes to NATO transformation: “We know what awaits NATO in the future, and I think you are now in the know as well.” Kohl also emphasizes that President Bush is aware and supportive of Soviet-German agreements and will play a key role in the building of the new Europe. Chernyaev sums up this meeting in his diary for July 15, 1990: “Today – Kohl. They are meeting at the Schechtel mansion on Alexei Tolstoy Street. Gorbachev confirms his agreement to unified Germany’s entry into NATO. Kohl is decisive and assertive. He leads a clean but tough game. And it is not the bait (loans) but the fact that it is pointless to resist here, it would go against the current of events, it would be contrary to the very realities that M.S. likes to refer to so much.”[14]

Document-24-Memorandum-of-Telephone-Conversation

Document 24

Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush

Jul 17, 1990

Source

George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, Memcons and Telcons ((https://bush41library.tamu.edu/)

President Bush reaches out to Gorbachev immediately after the Kohl-Gorbachev meetings in Moscow and the Caucasus retreat of Arkhyz, which settled German unification, leaving only the financial arrangements for resolution in September. Gorbachev had not only made the deal with Kohl, but he had also survived and triumphed at the 28th Congress of the CPSU in early July, the last in the history of the Soviet Party. Gorbachev describes this time as “perhaps the most difficult and important period in my political life.” The Congress subjected the party leader to scathing criticism from both conservative Communists and the democratic opposition. He managed to defend his program and win reelection as general secretary, but he had very little to show from his engagement with the West, especially after ceding so much ground on German unification.

While Gorbachev fought for his political life as Soviet leader, the Houston summit of the G-7 had debated ways to help perestroika, but because of U.S. opposition to credits or direct economic aid prior to the enactment of serious free-market reforms, no concrete assistance package was approved; the group went no further than to authorize “studies” by the IMF and World Bank. Gorbachev counters that given enough resources the USSR “could move to a market economy,” otherwise, the country “will have to rely more on state-regulated measures.” In this phone call, Bush expands on Kohl’s security assurances and reinforces the message from the London Declaration: “So what we tried to do was to take account of your concerns expressed to me and others, and we did it in the following ways: by our joint declaration on non-aggression; in our invitation to you to come to NATO; in our agreement to open NATO to regular diplomatic contact with your government and those of the Eastern European countries; and our offer on assurances on the future size of the armed forces of a united Germany – an issue I know you discussed with Helmut Kohl. We also fundamentally changed our military approach on conventional and nuclear forces. We conveyed the idea of an expanded, stronger CSCE with new institutions in which the USSR can share and be part of the new Europe.”

Document-25

Document 25

September 12 Two-Plus-Four Ministerial in Moscow: Detailed account [includes text of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany and Agreed Minute to the Treaty on the special military status of the GDR after unification]

Nov 2, 1990

Source

George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, NSC Condoleezza Rice Files, 1989-1990 Subject Files, Folder “Memcons and Telcons – USSR [1]”

Staffers in the European Bureau of the State Department wrote this document, practically a memcon, and addressed it to senior officials such as Robert Zoellick and Condoleezza Rice, based on notes taken by U.S. participants at the final ministerial session on German unification on September 12, 1990. The document features statements by all six ministers in the Two-Plus-Four process – Shevardnadze (the host), Baker, Hurd, Dumas, Genscher, and De Maiziere of the GDR – (much of which would be repeated in their press conferences after the event), along with the agreed text of the final treaty on German unification. The treaty codified what Bush had earlier offered to Gorbachev – “special military status” for the former GDR territory. At the last minute, British and American concerns that the language would restrict emergency NATO troop movements there forced the inclusion of a “minute” that left it up to the newly unified and sovereign Germany what the meaning of the word “deployed” should be. Kohl had committed to Gorbachev that only German NATO troops would be allowed on that territory after the Soviets left, and Germany stuck to that commitment, even though the “minute” was meant to allow other NATO troops to traverse or exercise there at least temporarily. Subsequently, Gorbachev aides such as Pavel Palazhshenko would point to the treaty language to argue that NATO expansion violated the “spirit” of this Final Settlement treaty.

Document-26-U-S-Department-of-State-European

Document 26

U.S. Department of State, European Bureau: Revised NATO Strategy Paper for Discussion at Sub-Ungroup Meeting

Oct 22, 1990

Source

George H. W. Bush Presidential Library, NSC Heather Wilson Files, Box CF00293, Folder “NATO – Strategy (5)”

The Bush administration had created the “Ungroup” in 1989 to work around a series of personality conflicts at the assistant secretary level that had stalled the usual interagency process of policy development on arms control and strategic weapons. Members of the Ungroup, chaired by Arnold Kanter of the NSC, had the confidence of their bosses but not necessarily the concomitant formal title or official rank.[15] The Ungroup overlapped with a similarly ad hoc European Security Strategy Group, and this became the venue, soon after German unification was completed, for the discussion inside the Bush administration about the new NATO role in Europe and especially on NATO relations with countries of Eastern Europe. East European countries, still formally in the Warsaw Pact, but led by non-Communist governments, were interested in becoming full members of international community, looking to join the future European Union and potentially NATO.

This document, prepared for a discussion of NATO’s future by a Sub-Ungroup consisting of representatives of the NSC, State Department, Joint Chiefs and other agencies, posits that "[a] potential Soviet threat remains and constitutes one basic justification for the continuance of NATO.” At the same time, in the discussion of potential East European membership in NATO, the review suggests that “In the current environment, it is not in the best interest of NATO or of the U.S. that these states be granted full NATO membership and its security guarantees.” The United States does not “wish to organize an anti-Soviet coalition whose frontier is the Soviet border” – not least because of the negative impact this might have on reforms in the USSR. NATO liaison offices would do for the present time, the group concluded, but the relationship will develop in the future. In the absence of the Cold War confrontation, NATO “out of area” functions will have to be redefined.

Document-27-James-F-Dobbins-State-Department

Document 27

James F. Dobbins, State Department European Bureau, Memorandum to National Security Council: NATO Strategy Review Paper for October 29 Discussion.

Oct 25, 1990

Source

George H. W. Bush Presidential Library: NSC Philip Zelikow Files, Box CF01468, Folder “File 148 NATO Strategy Review No. 1 [3]”[16]

This concise memorandum comes from the State Department’s European Bureau as a cover note for briefing papers for a scheduled October 29, 1990 meeting on the issues of NATO expansion and European defense cooperation with NATO. Most important is the document’s summary of the internal debate within the Bush administration, primarily between the Defense Department (specifically the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney) and the State Department. On the issue of NATO expansion, OSD “wishes to leave the door ajar” while State “prefers simply to note that discussion of expanding membership is not on the agenda….” The Bush administration effectively adopts State’s view in its public statements, yet the Defense view would prevail in the next administration.

Document-28-Ambassador-Rodric-Braithwaite-diary

Document 28

Ambassador Rodric Braithwaite diary, 05 March 1991

Mar 5, 1991

Source

Rodric Braithwaite personal diary (used by permission from the author)

British Ambassador Rodric Braithwaite was present for a number of the assurances given to Soviet leaders in 1990 and 1991 about NATO expansion. Here, Braithwaite in his diary describes a meeting between British Prime Minister John Major and Soviet military officials, led by Minister of Defense Marshal Dmitry Yazov. The meeting took place during Major’s visit to Moscow and right after his one-on-one with President Gorbachev. During the meeting with Major, Gorbachev had raised his concerns about the new NATO dynamics: “Against the background of favorable processes in Europe, I suddenly start receiving information that certain circles intend to go on further strengthening NATO as the main security instrument in Europe. Previously they talked about changing the nature of NATO, about transformation of the existing military-political blocs into pan-European structures and security mechanisms. And now suddenly again [they are talking about] a special peace-keeping role of NATO. They are talking again about NATO as the cornerstone. This does not sound complementary to the common European home that we have started to build.” Major responded: “I believe that your thoughts about the role of NATO in the current situation are the result of misunderstanding. We are not talking about strengthening of NATO. We are talking about the coordination of efforts that is already happening in Europe between NATO and the West European Union, which, as it is envisioned, would allow all members of the European Community to contribute to enhance [our] security.”[17] In the meeting with the military officials that followed, Marshal Yazov expressed his concerns about East European leaders’ interest in NATO membership. In the diary, Braithwaite writes: “Major assures him that nothing of the sort will happen.” Years later, quoting from the record of conversation in the British archives, Braithwaite recounts that Major replied to Yazov that he “did not himself foresee circumstances now or in the future where East European countries would become members of NATO.” Ambassador Braithwaite also quotes Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd as telling Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh on March 26, 1991, “there are no plans in NATO to include the countries of Eastern and Central Europe in NATO in one form or another.”[18]

Document-29-Paul-Wolfowitz-Memoranda-of

Document 29

Paul Wolfowitz Memoranda of Conversation with Vaclav Havel and Lubos Dobrovsky in Prague.

Apr 27, 1991

Source

U.S. Department of Defense, FOIA release 2016, National Security Archive FOIA 20120941DOD109

These memcons from April 1991 provide the bookends for the “education of Vaclav Havel” on NATO (see Documents 12-1 and 12-2 above). U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz included these memcons in his report to the NSC and the State Department about his attendance at a conference in Prague on “The Future of European Security,” on April 24-27, 1991. During the conference Wolfowitz had separate meetings with Havel and Minister of Defense Dobrovsky. In the conversation with Havel, Wolfowitz thanks him for his statements about the importance of NATO and US troops in Europe. Havel informs him that Soviet Ambassador Kvitsinsky was in Prague negotiating a bilateral agreement, and the Soviets wanted the agreement to include a provision that Czechoslovakia would not join alliances hostile to the USSR. Wolfowitz advises both Havel and Dobrovsky not to enter into such agreements and to remind the Soviets about the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act that postulate freedom to join alliances of their choice. Havel states that for Czechoslovakia in the next 10 years that means NATO and the European Union.

In conversation with Dobrovsky, Wolfowitz remarks that “the very existence of NATO was in doubt a year ago,” but with U.S. leadership, and NATO allied (as well as united German) support, its importance for Europe is now understood, and the statements of East European leaders were important in this respect. Dobrovsky candidly describes the change in the Czechoslovak leadership’s position, “which had revised its views radically. At the beginning, President Havel had urged the dissolution of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO,” but then concluded that NATO should be maintained. “Off the record,” says Dobrovsky, “the CSFR was attracted to NATO because it ensured the U.S. presence in Europe.”

Document-30-Memorandum-to-Boris-Yeltsin-from

Document 30

Memorandum to Boris Yeltsin from Russian Supreme Soviet delegation to NATO HQs

Jul 1, 1991

Source

State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Fond 10026, Opis 1

This document is important for describing the clear message in 1991 from the highest levels of NATO – Secretary General Manfred Woerner – that NATO expansion was not happening. The audience was a Russian Supreme Soviet delegation, which in this memo was reporting back to Boris Yeltsin (who in June had been elected president of the Russian republic, largest in the Soviet Union), but no doubt Gorbachev and his aides were hearing the same assurance at that time. The emerging Russian security establishment was already worried about the possibility of NATO expansion, so in June 1991 this delegation visited Brussels to meet NATO’s leadership, hear their views about the future of NATO, and share Russian concerns. Woerner had given a well-regarded speech in Brussels in May 1990 in which he argued: “The principal task of the next decade will be to build a new European security structure, to include the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact nations. The Soviet Union will have an important role to play in the construction of such a system. If you consider the current predicament of the Soviet Union, which has practically no allies left, then you can understand its justified wish not to be forced out of Europe.”

Now in mid-1991, Woerner responds to the Russians by stating that he personally and the NATO Council are both against expansion—“13 out of 16 NATO members share this point of view”—and that he will speak against Poland’s and Romania’s membership in NATO to those countries’ leaders as he has already done with leaders of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Woerner emphasizes that “We should not allow […] the isolation of the USSR from the European community.” The Russian delegation warned that any strengthening or expanding of NATO could “seriously slow down democratic transformations” in Russia, and called on their NATO interlocutors to gradually decrease the military functions of the alliance. This memo on the Woerner conversation was written by three prominent reformers and close allies of Yeltsin—Sergey Stepashin (chairman of the Duma’s Security Committee and future deputy minister of Security and prime minister), Gen. Konstantin Kobets (future chief military inspector of Russia after he was the highest-ranking Soviet military officer to support Yeltsin during the August 1991 coup) and Gen. Dmitry Volkogonov (Yeltsin’s adviser on defense and security issues, future head of the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission on POW-MIA and prominent military historian).

Notes

[1] See Robert Gates, University of Virginia, Miller Center Oral History, George H.W. Bush Presidency, July 24, 2000, p. 101)

[2] See Chapter 6, “The Malta Summit 1989,” in Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton, The Last Superpower Summits (CEU Press, 2016), pp. 481-569. The comment about the Wall is on p. 538.

[3] For background, context, and consequences of the Tutzing speech, see Frank Elbe, “The Diplomatic Path to Germany Unity,” Bulletin of the German Historical Institute 46 (Spring 2010), pp. 33-46. Elbe was Genscher’s chief of staff at the time.

[4] See Mark Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,” The Washington Quarterly, April 2009, pp. 39-61.

[5] See Joshua R. Itkowitz Shifrinson, “Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion,” International Security, Spring 2016, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 7-44.

[6] See James Goldgeier, Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO (Brookings Institution Press, 1999); and James Goldgeier, “Promises Made, Promises Broken? What Yeltsin was told about NATO in 1993 and why it matters,” War On The Rocks, July 12, 2016.

[7] See also Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, “Masterpieces of History”: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989 (CEU Press, 2010), for extended discussion and documents on the early 1990 German unification negotiations.

[8] Genscher told Baker on February 2, 1990, that under his plan, “NATO would not extend its territorial coverage to the area of the GDR nor anywhere else in Eastern Europe.” Secretary of State to US Embassy Bonn, “Baker-Genscher Meeting February 2,” George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, NSC Kanter Files, Box CF00775, Folder “Germany-March 1990.” Cited by Joshua R. Itkowitz Shifrinson, “Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion,” International Security, Spring 2016, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 7-44.

[9] The previous version of this text said that Kohl was “caught up in a campaign finance corruption scandal that would end his political career”; however, that scandal did not erupt until 1999, after the September 1998 elections swept Kohl out of office. The authors are grateful to Prof. Dr. H.H. Jansen for the correction and his careful reading of the posting.

[10] See Andrei Grachev, Gorbachev’s Gamble (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), pp. 157-158.

[11] For an insightful account of Bush's highly effective educational efforts with East European leaders including Havel – as well as allies – see Jeffrey A. Engel, When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), pp. 353-359.

[12] See George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, A World Transformed (New York: Knopf, 1998), pp. 236, 243, 250.

[13] Published in English for the first time in Savranskaya and Blanton, The Last Superpower Summits (2016), pp. 664-676.

[14] Anatoly Chernyaev Diary, 1990, translated by Anna Melyakova and edited by Svetlana Savranskaya, pp. 41-42.

[15] See Michael Nelson and Barbara A. Perry, 41: Inside the Presidency of George H.W. Bush (Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 94-95.

[16] The authors thank Josh Shifrinson for providing his copy of this document.

[17] See Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and John Major published in Mikhail Gorbachev, Sobranie Sochinenii, v. 24 (Moscow: Ves Mir, 2014), p. 346

[18] See Rodric Braithwaite, “NATO enlargement: Assurances and misunderstandings,” European Council on Foreign Relations, Commentary, 7 July 2016.

Related Links

The Last Superpower Summits

January 23, 2017

The Shevardnadze File: Late Soviet Foreign Minister Helped End the Cold War

July 24, 2014

The Washington/Camp David Summit 1990: From the Secret Soviet, American and German Files

June 13, 2010

The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev, 1990

May 25, 2010

Bush and Gorbachev at Malta

December 3, 2009

National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library

The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW

Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000

Fax: 202/994-7005

Contact by email

Join Our Mailing List 'Like' us on Facebook Follow us on Twitter Subscribe to our YouTube Channel

GWU logo​

Charity Navigator Four star charity

support our work - donate

The National Security Archive is committed to digital accessibility. If you experience a barrier that affects your ability to access content on this page, let us know via our Contact form.

Skip to main content

Home 35+ YEARS OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACTION

Donate

Join Email List

Contact

Search this site

Main navigation

 Home

 Publications

 Postings

 Projects

 Documents

 FOIA

 DNSA

 Blog

 Русские Страницы

 About

NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard

President Clinton and President Yeltsin toasting at the state dinner

President Clinton and President Yeltsin toasting at the state dinner, Hall of Facets, The Kremlin, Moscow, May 1995 (Photo: Alexander Zemlianichenko, AP)

Russian president led to believe Partnership for Peace was alternative to expanded NATO

Documents show early Russian opposition to “neo-containment;" more U.S. assurances to Russia: “inclusion not exclusion” in new European security structures

Published: Mar 16, 2018

Briefing Book #

621

Compiled and edited by Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton

For more information, contact:

202-994-7000, nsarchiv@gwu.edu

Subjects

Cold War – General

Soviet-U.S. Relations

Regions

Central/Eastern Europe

Russia and Former Soviet Union

Project

Russia Programs

President Michal Kovac of Slovakia, President Lech Walesa of Poland, President Bill Clinton, President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic, and President Arpad Goncz of Hungary

From left, President Michal Kovac of Slovakia, President Lech Walesa of Poland, President Bill Clinton, President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic, and President Arpad Goncz of Hungary, in Prague, January 12, 1994 (Photo: Rick Wilking, Reuters)

President Clinton, President Yeltsin, and President Leonid Kravchuk

President Clinton, President Yeltsin, and President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine shake hands on denuclearization agreement in Moscow, January 1994

President Yeltsin with U.S. Vice President Al Gore in Moscow

President Yeltsin with U.S. Vice President Al Gore in Moscow, December 1994

President Yeltsin and President Clinton at Hyde Park, New York

President Yeltsin and President Clinton at Hyde Park, New York, October 1995

President Clinton and President Yeltsin at Halifax

President Clinton and President Yeltsin at Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 17, 1995 (Source: Yeltsin Center)

Washington, D.C., March 16, 2018 – Declassified documents from U.S. and Russian archives show that U.S. officials led Russian President Boris Yeltsin to believe in 1993 that the Partnership for Peace was the alternative to NATO expansion, rather than a precursor to it, while simultaneously planning for expansion after Yeltsin’s re-election bid in 1996 and telling the Russians repeatedly that the future European security system would include, not exclude, Russia.

The declassified U.S. account of one key conversation on October 22, 1993, (Document 8) shows Secretary of State Warren Christopher assuring Yeltsin in Moscow that the Partnership for Peace was about including Russia together with all European countries, not creating a new membership list of just some European countries for NATO; and Yeltsin responding, “this is genius!”

Christopher later claimed in his memoir that Yeltsin misunderstood – perhaps from being drunk – the real message that the Partnership for Peace would in fact “lead to gradual expansion of NATO”;[1] but the actual American-written cable reporting the conversation supports subsequent Russian complaints about being misled.[2]

Christopher wondered afterwards (according to his memoir, pp. 280-281) whether the Russian foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, had deliberately failed to alert Yeltsin about the inevitability of NATO expansion, or whether Yeltsin was just relieved that NATO expansion would not be immediate – or whether Yeltsin was just having “a bad day.” But Christopher had told Kozyrev himself earlier that day, according to the U.S. declassified cable (Document 7), that there would be “no predetermined new members” in NATO, and “we’re emphasizing the Partnership for Peace” is “open to all.”

The Strobe Talbott account of the October 22nd meeting with Yeltsin is more detailed and nuanced than Christopher’s, but also leaves the impression that Yeltsin heard only what he wanted to hear, somehow not letting the Americans explain that the real message was “PFP today, enlargement tomorrow.”[3] “Yeltsin welcomed us looking like a stunned bull” and delivered a “long, barely coherent boast” before interrupting Christopher’s presentation on NATO and PFP (“Without letting Chris finish…”). Christopher’s actual words to Yeltsin, at the end of the meeting, were that the U.S. would be “looking at the question of membership as a longer term eventuality.”

Documents from the Russian side show opposition to NATO expansion across the political spectrum, dating back to a Yeltsin supporters’ meeting with NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner in the summer of 1991 (he assured them expansion would not happen), and forward to the large majority of Duma deputies from every political party joining the anti-NATO caucus in 1996. As the U.S. chargé d’affaires in Moscow, James Collins, warned Secretary of State Christopher just before his trip to meet Yeltsin in October 1993 (Document 6), the NATO issue “is neuralgic to the Russians. They expect to end up on the wrong side of a new division of Europe if any decision is made quickly. No matter how nuanced, if NATO adopts a policy which envisions expansion into Central and Eastern Europe without holding the door open to Russia, it would be universally interpreted in Moscow as directed against Russia and Russian alone – or ‘neo-containment’….”

Yeltsin himself had set off wide discussion of possible NATO expansion with his public remarks in Warsaw in August 1993, where he acknowledged the Helsinki Final Act right of countries to choose their alliances, and “seemed to give a ‘green light’ to NATO expansion.” (See Document 5, Tab C “NATO Expansion: Eastern and Allied Views”)

The U.S. “green light” document notes that almost immediately, however, Moscow got “busy ‘refining’ its position.” Yeltsin’s letter to Clinton on September 15, 1993, (Document 4) expressed “uneasiness” over the discussion of “quantitative expansion” and strongly advocated “a pan-European security system” instead of NATO. Yeltsin warned, “Not only the opposition, but moderate circles as well [in Russia], would no doubt perceive this as a sort of neo-isolation of our country in diametric opposition to its natural admission into Euro-Atlantic space.” Yeltsin also argued “the spirit” of the German unification treaty “precludes the option of expanding the NATO zone into the East” (citing the provisions preventing non-German NATO troops from being stationed on the former East German territory). This paragraph was the only one in the Yeltsin letter highlighted for Strobe Talbott by a staff expert on Russia/Ukraine, Steve Pifer.

The declassified U.S. record includes new evidence on internal American thinking, such as a specific calendar for expansion in one early September 1993 document from the State Department (see Document 2), up to and including the ultimate admission of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia to NATO in 2005, after the Central and Eastern Europeans and the Baltics. But Yeltsin’s September 15 letter contributed to intense debates on the American side, including the Defense Department rejection of the State Department’s calendar, leading to the Partnership for Peace idea rather than explicit NATO expansion in the fall of 1993. One October 5, 1993, document (Document 5) summarized the debate as between the “State approach to NATO expansion” or the Office of the Secretary of Defense approach, “partnership for peace with general link to membership,” and the latter became Christopher’s presentation to Yeltsin on October 22: partnership for all, not membership for some.

In January 1994, President Clinton told Yeltsin in Moscow that the Partnership for Peace was “the real thing now.” On the way to Moscow, Clinton delivered the famous “not whether but when” speech in Prague, which would be seized on by NATO expansion proponents in the Clinton administration to win the internal debate.[4] The declassified memcons of Clinton’s Prague meetings with the leaders of the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia show the American president arguing for the Partnership for Peace as a “track that will lead to NATO membership” and that “does not draw another line dividing Europe a few hundred miles to the east.” (See Document 11) Clinton candidly admitted to Vaclav Havel “there is no consensus now among NATO allies to extend formal security guarantees” because of uncertainty about which countries could contribute, and because “the reaction in Russia could be the reverse of what we want.”

Polish President Lech Walesa told Clinton (Document 12): “Russia had signed many agreements, but its word was not always good: one hand held a pen; the other a grenade. Yeltsin told the Poles in Warsaw last summer that Russia had no objection to Poland’s membership in NATO; he, Walesa, had a paper with Yeltsin’s signature to prove it. But Yeltsin had changed his mind. The Visegrad countries here represented, Walesa continued, kept their word; they had a Western culture. Russia did not.” Czech President Vaclav Havel immediately responded, “it was neither possible nor desirable to isolate Russia.”

The Americans kept trying to reassure Yeltsin. Quotations from President Clinton’s face-to-face conversations with Yeltsin in 1994, particularly September 27, 1994, at the White House, show Clinton “emphasizing inclusion, not exclusion …. NATO expansion is not anti-Russian; it’s not intended to be exclusive of Russia, and there is no imminent timetable…. the broader, higher goal [is] European security, unity and integration – a goal I know you share.”[5]

But the Russians were hearing in the fall of 1994 that new Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Richard Holbrooke was speeding up NATO expansion discussions, even initiating a NATO study in November of the “how and why” of new members. Yeltsin protested with a letter to Clinton on November 29, 1994, (Document 13) that emphasized Russia’s hopes for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as a “full-fledged all-European organization” and complained, “one completely fails to understand the reasons behind a new revitalizing of the discussion on speeding up the broadening of NATO.”

On December 1, Foreign Minister Kozyrev unexpectedly refused to sign up for the Partnership of Peace; and on December 5, Yeltsin lashed out about NATO at the Budapest summit of the CSCE, in front of a surprised Clinton: “Why are you sowing the seeds of mistrust? ... Europe is in danger of plunging into a cold peace …. History demonstrates that it is a dangerous illusion to suppose that the destinies of continents and of the world community in general can somehow be managed from one single capital.”[6]

The dismayed Americans began to understand that Russia had concluded the U.S. was “subordinating, if not abandoning, integration [of Russia] to NATO expansion.” (See Document 17) Washington dispatched Vice President Al Gore to Moscow to patch things up, using the existing Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission’s scheduled meetings as the venue. Gore’s talking points for his meeting with Yeltsin (in the latter’s hospital room) (Document 16) and the Russian record of Gore’s meeting with Duma Speaker Ivan Rybkin on December 14, 1994, (Document 14) show the Americans emphasizing there would be no rapid NATO expansion, only a gradual, deliberate process with no surprises, moving in tandem with the “closest possible understanding” between the U.S. and Russia, and no new NATO members in 1995, a year of Russian parliamentary elections.

Gore later told the Belgian prime minister that “Yeltsin was prepared to acquiesce to the basic truth that NATO would expand.” A March 1995 U.S. cable reports, “In a conversation with Yeltsin in his hospital room, the Vice President explained that the NATO-Russia relationship was analogous to the docking of the space shuttle with the Mir space station, which had to match orbits and speeds to come together. Yeltsin had agreed, but noted that in such delicate maneuvers, sudden motions could be dangerous.”[7]

 Yeltsin showed only limited acquiescence when Clinton came to Moscow in May 1995 to mark the 50th anniversary of victory over Hitler in World War II. The U.S. memcon of the one-on-one meeting at the Kremlin (Document 19) features repeated Yeltsin objections: “I see nothing but humiliation for Russia if you proceed …. Why do you want to do this? We need a new structure for Pan-European security, not old ones! .... But for me to agree to the borders of NATO expanding towards those of Russia – that would constitute a betrayal on my part of the Russian people.” For his part, Clinton insisted that “gradual, steady, measured” NATO expansion would happen: “You can say you don’t want it speeded up – I’ve told you we’re not going to do that – but don’t ask us to slow down either, or we’ll just have to keep saying no.” Clinton also assured Yeltsin, “I won’t support any change that undermines Russia’s security or redivides Europe,” and urged Yeltsin to join the Partnership for Peace. At the end, the two leaders agreed that any NATO expansion would be delayed until after the 1996 Presidential elections (in both countries).

At the Clinton-Yeltsin meeting in June 1995 at Halifax, Nova Scotia (Document 20), Clinton applauded the Russian agreement finally to join PFP, and recommended more military-to-military cooperation and more Russia-NATO dialogue. The Russian leader had kind words for the American president: “I myself and the Russian leadership have no doubt about our partnership. We’ll build the partnership on the basis of our friendship, yours and mine, and we’ll do so for the sake of world peace.” Then Yeltsin reiterated, “we must stick to our position, which is that there should be no rapid expansion of NATO;” and he went on to argue, “it’s important that the OSCE be the principal mechanism for developing a new security order in Europe. NATO is a factor, too, of course, but NATO should evolve into a political organization.”

The Russian declassified documents from closed Duma hearings (Document 18) and internal memos in the 1990s (Document 25) detail the Russian objections that NATO expansion would (1) threaten Russian security, (2) undermine the idea of inclusive European security that Gorbachev and Yeltsin both sought, and (3) draw a new line across Europe. The record of early and vehement Russian objections, including Yeltsin’s multiple remonstrances to Clinton, tends to support Collins’ analysis from October 1993 and to undercut a claim in recent scholarly literature that Russian complaints about NATO expansion are more a function of today’s “memory politics” than “what really happened in 1990 and beyond.”[8]

Today’s posting includes, in translation, one of the earliest Russian compilations of Western assurances against NATO expansion during and after the German unification discussions of 1990, put together by new Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in January 1996, described in his subsequent memoir in 2006, and published in some detail in his 2015 book. (Document 22) Also published in English for the first time is Primakov’s summary for the head of the Duma in early 1997 about the threat of NATO expansion to Russian security interests, just prior to the NATO summit that would announce the invitations to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary to join NATO. The Primakov documents speak to the fundamental Moscow understanding of the end-of-the-Cold-War arrangements, that Germany would unify in NATO in 1990 only with the inclusion of the USSR (and then Russia) in subsequent European security structures.[9]

The Primakov compilation of Western assurances to Gorbachev may have provided the catalyst for a forceful State Department rebuttal sent to all European posts in February 1996 (Document 23), after then-Ambassador Collins reported that a “senior Kremlin official” was complaining that NATO expansion would violate the “spirit” of the German unification treaty (just as Yeltsin had argued in his September 15, 1993, letter to Clinton). The February 23rd cable transmitted a memo written by Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Europe John Kornblum, together with John Herbst, then at State’s office on the Newly Independent States (NIS) and a future ambassador to Ukraine, characterizing the Russian claims as “specious” and “unfounded.” This memo seems to have provided some basis for State and NATO talking points ever since in addressing Russian complaints about NATO expansion.[10]

The Kornblum-Herbst memo focused on the Two-Plus-Four negotiations that developed the German unification treaty, arguing that the treaty only applied to the territory of the former East Germany, and provided no precedent for limits on any new NATO members. The memo inaccurately described one comment by Hans-Dietrich Genscher as “unilateral” and only applying to the former GDR, when in fact State Department and British diplomatic cables at the time (February 1990) showed Genscher specifically and repeatedly referred both to the former GDR and to Poland and Hungary as countries that might want to join NATO. But otherwise, the memo did not address the high-level assurances about Soviet security (such as “not one inch eastward”) provided to Gorbachev by a wide range of Western leaders (James Baker, Helmut Kohl, Douglas Hurd, John Major, and George H.W. Bush, among others).[11]

The Kornblum-Herbst memo contained one confusing reference, supposedly citing the “senior Kremlin official,” to “legally binding declarations by Eastern European leaders” at the time. Neither State’s intelligence bureau nor its historian’s office could find such declarations, perhaps because the Russians were actually referring to Western leader assurances, or even to the famous Vaclav Havel speech to a joint session of the U.S. Congress in February 1990 calling for dissolution of both blocs (he soon changed his mind).[12]

Today’s posting does not address the undeniable benefits to the Central and Eastern European countries of integration into NATO – although some of these were articulated by their leaders in the memcons with President Clinton in January 1994 that are published here. Nor does the posting provide any net assessment of the gains and losses to American and European security from NATO expansion. Rather, the focus of this collection of documents is simply on what Russian President Boris Yeltsin heard from the Clinton administration about NATO expansion in the first half of the 1990s, and on the repeated Russian objections that were just as repeatedly discounted by Clinton administration officials.

The National Security Archive initially compiled these declassified documents for a panel discussion on November 10, 2017, at the annual conference of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) in Chicago under the title “Who Promised What to Whom on NATO Expansion?” The panel included:

\* Mark Kramer from the Davis Center at Harvard, editor of the Journal of Cold War Studies, whose 2009 Washington Quarterly article argued that the “no-NATO-expansion pledge” was a “myth”;

\* Joshua R. Itkowitz Shifrinson from the Bush School at Texas A&M, whose 2016 International Security article argued the U.S. was playing a double game in 1990, leading Gorbachev to believe NATO would be subsumed in a new European security structure, while working to ensure hegemony in Europe and the maintenance of NATO;

\* James Goldgeier from American University, who wrote the authoritative book on the Clinton decision on NATO expansion, Not Whether But When, and described the misleading U.S. assurances to Russian leader Boris Yeltsin in a 2016 WarOnTheRocks article;

\* Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton from the National Security Archive, whose most recent book, The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush: Conversations That Ended the Cold War (CEU Press, 2016) analyzes and publishes the declassified transcripts and related documents from all of Gorbachev’s summits with U.S. presidents, including dozens of assurances about protecting the USSR’s security interests and including the Soviets in the post-Cold War European security structure.

Today’s posting is the second of two on the subject. The first part covered the Gorbachev discussions with Western leaders about NATO and the future of Europe.

Read the documents

Document-01-Memorandum-to-Boris-Yeltsin-about

Document 01

Memorandum to Boris Yeltsin about Russian Supreme Soviet delegation to NATO HQs

Jul 3, 1991

Source

State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Fond 10026, Opis 1

This document is important for describing the clear message in 1991 from the highest levels of NATO – Secretary General Manfred Woerner – that NATO expansion was not happening. The audience was a Russian Supreme Soviet delegation, which in this memo was reporting back to Boris Yeltsin (who in June 1991 had been elected president of the Russian republic, largest in the Soviet Union), but no doubt Gorbachev and his aides were hearing the same assurance at that time. The emerging Russian (as opposed to Soviet) security establishment was already worried about the possibility of NATO expansion, so in June 1991 this delegation visited Brussels to meet NATO’s leadership, hear their views about the future of NATO, and share Russian concerns.

Woerner had given a well-regarded speech in Brussels in May 1990 in which he argued: “The principal task of the next decade will be to build a new European security structure, to include the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact nations. The Soviet Union will have an important role to play in the construction of such a system. If you consider the current predicament of the Soviet Union, which has practically no allies left, then you can understand its justified wish not to be forced out of Europe.” Now in mid-1991, Woerner responds to the Russians by stating that he personally and the NATO Council are both against expansion—“13 out of 16 NATO members share this point of view”—and that he will speak against Poland’s and Romania’s membership in NATO to those countries’ leaders as he has already done with leaders of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Woerner emphasizes that “We should not allow […] the isolation of the USSR from the European community.” The Russian delegation warns that any strengthening or expanding of NATO could “seriously slow down democratic transformations” in Russia, and calls on their NATO interlocutors to decrease the military functions of the alliance.

This memo on the Woerner conversation was written by three prominent reformers and close allies of Yeltsin—Sergey Stepashin (chairman of the Duma’s Security Committee and future deputy minister of security and prime minister), Gen. Konstantin Kobets (future chief military inspector of Russia after he was the highest-ranking Soviet military officer to support Yeltsin during the August 1991 coup), and Gen. Dmitry Volkogonov (Yeltsin’s adviser on defense and security issues, future head of the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission on POW-MIA, and prominent military historian).

Document-02-Strategy-for-NATO-s-Expansion-and

Document 02

Strategy for NATO's Expansion and Transformation

Sep 7, 1993

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 07 JUL 2004 199904515

This document speaks to how much had changed from 1991 to 1993 – not only the end of the Soviet Union, but also the replacement of the Bush 41 administration with the new Clinton appointees. Relatively few Clintonites at this point apparently favored NATO expansion, but they were highly placed, such as National Security Adviser Anthony Lake (who would try to define Clinton foreign policy as “democratic enlargement”) and Undersecretary of State for International Security Affairs Lynn Davis.

This memo for Secretary of State Warren Christopher from Davis and her co-author at State’s Policy Planning shop, Stephen Flanagan, provides a detailed look at the “fast-tracker” point of view inside the Clinton administration as of early September 1993. The memo includes a specific calendar for expansion of NATO and groups of countries to be admitted, with the 2005 group even listing Russia and Ukraine. Flanagan, a Bush 41 veteran who stayed on into the Clinton administration, had already published a journal essay in 1992 floating NATO expansion ideas. Here, Davis and Flanagan argue for urgency in transforming and expanding NATO, so as to buttress “Western-oriented reformers in central and eastern Europe.” Interestingly, they say: “The challenge for NATO over the next generation – containing and coopting Russian power – is similar to one of NATO’s core purposes in the last generation – integrating Germany as a responsible leader of the trans-Atlantic community.”

According to James Goldgeier’s account in Not Whether But When, Central and East European leaders had pressed President Clinton on NATO membership as early as April 1993 at a Holocaust Museum event in Washington, but U.S. policy development really began that summer after Secretary Christopher announced there would be a NATO summit in January 1994. Here, Davis and Flanagan are optimistic that NATO expansion could be done with “Russia’s OK too” given Yeltsin’s remarks in Warsaw about the Helsinki Final Act and nations choosing their own alliances. “Clearly, if Russia reverts to totalitarianism or otherwise emerges as a threat to states in the region, NATO might stop its expansion at phase III [Romania, Albania and the Baltics]” but “here again, this need not be seen as a threat to Moscow.” Need not, but likely would be.

Document-03-Your-Deputies-Committee-Meeting-on

Document 03

Your Deputies Committee Meeting on the NATO Summit

Sep 14, 1993

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 23 APR 2004 200001086

Even before the Yeltsin letter arrived on September 15, 1993, the Defense Department was pushing back against the fast-trackers inside the Clinton administration. This briefing memorandum for Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff, from Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Stephen Oxman, gives a candid account of the internal Clinton administration debate over NATO expansion, and how the inter-agency process was “short-circuited” by the Defense Department, particularly Assistant Secretary for Regional Security Affairs Charles Freeman Jr., a former ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Oxman is writing to prepare Tarnoff for a deputies’ committee meeting that would include key Defense Department and National Security Council officials. Oxman reports that “OSD argued that consideration of NATO expansion had to date focused on the interests of the Central and East Europeans, rather than on USG interests.” Defense proposed instead that discussion focus on the “Peacekeeping Partnership” (later called Partnership for Peace once “peacekeeping” fell into disrepute after the Somalia debacle). So State’s goal should be a NATO Summit announcement of expansion “that also leaves the membership door open to Russia, Ukraine, and other[s].” Oxman writes, “Through Summit language on membership – and through intensive consultations with Russia and Ukraine – we will need to ensure that they perceive our approach to NATO as one that also serves their security interests and reinforces their sense of belonging in Europe.”

Document-04-Retranslation-of-Yeltsin-letter-on

Document 04

Retranslation of Yeltsin letter on NATO expansion

Sep 15, 1993

Source

U.S. Department of State. Case No. M-2006-01499

This letter is written soon after Yeltsin returns from Poland, where he agreed with President Lech Walesa that Poland had a right to join NATO, which was reflected in a communiqué and press conference on August 25.[13] There is some ambiguity as to the conditions under which Yeltsin made such a statement, but Walesa told U.S. officials later that he had written documents signed by Yeltsin that confirmed his words. According to Yeltsin, however, he only expressed “understanding” as part of reaffirming his commitment to the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, which stipulated that every country was free to make choices regarding politico-military alliances.

This Yeltsin letter to Clinton lays out Yeltsin’s strong stance against rapid expansion and his concern about NATO’s apparent path of geographical and numerical expansion rather than transformation into a political organization. Russian leaders, based on their understanding about the post-Cold War settlement in Europe, were eager to be integrated into a pan-European security system. The letter defines the Russian position clearly: “Security must be indivisible and must be based on pan-European security structure.” The letter cites the security assurances that the Russians thought they received during the negotiations on German unification: “the spirit of the treaty on the final settlement … precludes the option of expanding the NATO zone into the East.” Acknowledging legitimate security concerns of East Europeans, Yeltsin suggests that there are other options to satisfy their concerns short of joining NATO such as “official security guarantees to the East European states with an accent on ensuring sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and maintenance of peace in the region.”

Document-05-Your-October-6-Lunch-Meeting-with

Document 05

Your October 6 Lunch Meeting with Secretary Aspin and Mr. Lake

Oct 5, 1993

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 07 JUL 2004 199904515

Within three weeks of the deputies’ meeting (see Document 3), the principals would discuss NATO expansion, in preparation for Secretary of State Christopher’s trip to Europe and Moscow later that month. This October 5, 1993, briefing memorandum, written by Assistant Secretary Robert Gallucci and sent through Undersecretary Davis, defines the NATO expansion debate for Christopher as the main topic for his next-day lunch meeting with National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. Gallucci writes, “The primary difference is over whether NATO would commit at the January NATO summit to expansion, or simply hold out the vague possibility.” The former is State’s view, the latter Defense’s, and the difficulty of combining them would seemingly contribute to the tangled Christopher presentation to Yeltsin on October 22 (see Document 8).

This briefing memo cautions, “Opening up the possibility of NATO membership would represent a significant change, and will require an approach which will need to be seen to provide strong support for reform in Russia as well as in the Central and East European states.” This publication omits a 7-page section elaborating State’s views and a 3-page section on OSD’s position in favor of Tabs C and D on “Eastern and Allied Views” and “Managing the NATO Expansion Issue with the NIS.” Tab C describes Yeltsin’s “green light” in Warsaw and the subsequent pullback by Moscow, including Yeltsin’s letter (see Document 4) and its claim that the German reunification treaty “excludes by its meaning the possibility of expansion of the NATO zone to the East.”

The memo also analyzes Yeltsin’s opposition: “Yeltsin’s entire reformist platform is based on the assumption that Russia’s relations with the West have turned a corner and Cold War antagonisms have been put aside. If this assumption were called into question, NATO expansion could damage the foundation of Yeltsin’s policies.” On the Newly Independent States (NIS), the memo notes it is “important to find ways to bolster their sense of security, too, and prevent a perception among them that they have been excluded from the new European security architecture.” The final section of the NIS Tab recommends what would become the Christopher trip to Moscow, “an ideal opportunity to engage the Russians and others on this issue, and assure them that our initiative offers enhanced security for all.”

Document-06-Your-October-21-23-visit-to-Moscow

Document 06

Your October 21-23 visit to Moscow - Key foreign policy issues

Oct 20, 1993

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 04 MAY 2000 200000982

Chargé d’Affaires and future Ambassador to Russia James Collins sends Secretary Christopher a briefing cable in advance of his visit to Moscow where he is expected to meet with Yeltsin and Kozyrev. This is the first visit of any Western senior official to Moscow after Yeltsin’s dissolution of the Parliament and October confrontation with the hardline faction of the parliament that resulted in bloodshed in the center of Moscow. New elections are scheduled for December and Yeltsin needs all the support from the West he can get. Collins advises the secretary of state to be sensitive to Yeltsin’s and Kozyrev’s need for Russia to be seen domestically as a partner with whom the West consults and does not just take for granted, and he lists some controversial issues: NATO expansion, the post-Soviet space, and Ukraine.

On NATO, Collins notes that the Russians are aware that the U.S. internal debate is reaching a crucial moment about expansion and want to be assured that the door is open to Russia, not just to East Europeans. In Collins’ view, “what the Russians hope to hear from you is that NATO is not moving precipitously and that any policy NATO adopts will apply equally to them.” Their “neuralgic” attitude stems from the fear that they will “end up on the wrong side of a new division of Europe.” Therefore, Collins counsels Christopher to make sure the Russians know that the U.S. is actively promoting Russia’s "complete reintegration into the family of Western states.”

Document-07-Secretary-Christopher-s-meeting-with

Document 07

Secretary Christopher's meeting with Foreign Minister Kozyrev: NATO, Elections, Regional Issues

Oct 25, 1993

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 11 MAR 2003 200001030

On his trip to Europe to explain the U.S. position on NATO expansion, Secretary Christopher comes to Moscow after meetings in Budapest. He and special ambassador Strobe Talbott meet with Foreign Minister Kozyrev and his deputy, Yuri Mamedov, before they visit Yeltsin at his country residence. In his memo about the Kozyrev meeting, Christopher is very brief about the NATO discussion. He tells Kozyrev that the U.S. is sensitive to the Russian position and has developed a new proposal as a result: the Partnership for Peace, which would be open to all countries on an equal basis. Kozyrev is concerned about any expansion, and he “asked pointedly, whether there would not be two or three new members now?” Christopher says “no” and only talks about an eventual new NATO membership as something that would happen in the distant future. The secretary tells Kozyrev that “he believed that this met Russia’s requirements.” Christopher does not directly address Kozyrev’s concern about the decision about the expansion, but, misleadingly, lets it sound as if PFP is the alternative for the time being.

Document-08-Secretary-Christopher-s-meeting-with

Document 08

Secretary Christopher's meeting with President Yeltsin, 10/22/93, Moscow

Oct 22, 1993

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 08 MAY 2000 200000982

Christopher is taken to Yeltsin’s country house, Zavidovo, for a meeting that lasts only 45 minutes. Yeltsin has most likely already been briefed by Kozyrev about his conversation with the secretary of state and his assurance about PFP and not membership. Christopher starts with strong praise for Yeltsin’s handling of the constitutional crisis with the Parliament, passing on “high appreciation” and emphasizing that Clinton is “extremely supportive” of his actions. For most of the conversation they talk about the upcoming elections, which Yeltsin calls “the first free and fair election for the parliament since 1917,” and the Clinton visit to Moscow planned for January 1994.

In the last part of the conversation, which appears somewhat rushed—Christopher repeats that he does not want to take up more of Yeltsin’s time—they turn to the most sensitive issue—the expansion of NATO. Christopher tells Yeltsin that his letter on NATO expansion (see Document 4) “came at exactly the right time and it played a decisive role in President Clinton’s consideration.” As a result, according to Christopher, the decision has been made to press ahead with the Partnership for Peace, which would be open to all and without pushing some countries ahead of others. Hearing this statement as a response to his concern about expansion, Yeltsin quickly asks Christopher to confirm his impression—“Yeltsin […] asked if he understood correctly that all countries in CEE and NIS would be on equal footing and there would be a partnership and not a membership.” Christopher replies, “Yes that is the case, there would not even be an associate status.” A relieved Yeltsin exclaims, “This is a brilliant idea, it is a stroke of genius.”

Yeltsin talks enthusiastically about how this “brilliant stroke” solves all tensions between Russia and the Eastern European countries, how it ensures that Russia will not be a “second-class citizen” and will be an equal partner. He asks to convey his gratitude to Clinton. After this explosive approval, Christopher adds that the question of membership will “in due course” be considered as well, but “as a longer term eventuality.” Christopher in his memoirs portrays Yeltsin in this meeting as unfocused and recovering from the stress of drinking, immediately interrupting him calling the PFP a “stroke of genius.” In fact, the memcon shows that Yeltsin was keenly focused on the distinction and asked a pointed question to confirm his impression. No wonder the Russians later found this conversation misleading and felt betrayed when Clinton said “not whether but when.”[14]

Document-09-Izvetiya-Summary-of-Primakov-SVR

Document 09

Izvetiya Summary of Primakov/SVR Report on NATO

Nov 26, 1993

Source

FBIS-SOV-93-226 Russia International Affairs

This report, issued by the SVR and presented publicly by Evgeny Primakov (then the SVR director and later foreign minister) shows the awareness of Russian intelligence services about active discussions in the Clinton administration concerning options for NATO expansion. The report points to the geostrategic, military, and psychological implications for Russian security. Psychologically, expanding NATO rather than building a new security system would prolong the existence of Cold War bloc thinking and mistrust. Geopolitically, Russian experts do not discern an intention on the U.S. side to build an institution for European security that would be adequate for a post-confrontation situation in Europe. How NATO transforms itself would be of crucial importance to Russia. And militarily, the fact that the largest grouping of military forces in the world would advance to within close proximity of Russian borders “requires a cardinal reconceptualization of all defense conceptions, reconfiguration of the armed forces, reconsideration of all military theaters (districts), deployment of additional infrastructures, re-deployments of large military contingents, changes in contingency plans and of the character of the military-educational preparations,” even though the report says it is understood that the alliance does not intend to launch a strike against Russia. Such reconceptualization would lead to a significant strain on the budget at a time when Russia is trying to reduce its armaments.

Document-10-Memcon-of-05-January-SecDef-Call-to

Document 10

Memcon of 05 January SecDef Call to Russian MOD Grachev

Jan 5, 1994

Source

William J. Clinton Presidential Library

Secretary of Defense Les Aspin places the first phone call using the “Partnership line” to his Russian counterpart, Pavel Grachev. Aspin’s first question to Grachev is about Russian reactions to the upcoming NATO summit. Aspin states that “the main focus will be on NATO expansion since a number of countries were pushing for NATO membership.” He also affirms the Clinton administration’s support for the Partnership for Peace program. Grachev expresses his full support for PFP and opposition to NATO expansion. He says that although every country has the sovereign right to choose its political and military alliances, “Eastern Europe and the Baltics should not speculate about the mythical Russian threat.” In his opinion, “European security should be collective, not bloc-oriented, relying instead on all-European structures.” They talk about Russia-NATO cooperation, joint work on non-proliferation, and bilateral military-to-military relations. At the end of the conversation, Aspin says “that he and Grachev seemed to be in total agreement, and he thanked Grachev for his views on NATO and ‘Partnership for Peace’ program.”

Document-11-The-President-s-Meeting-with-Czech

Document 11

The President's Meeting with Czech Leaders

Jan 11, 1994

Source

William J. Clinton Presidential Library

On the second leg of his Europe trip, after the NATO summit in Brussels, President Clinton stops in Prague where he meets first with Czech president Vaclav Havel, then a larger group of Czech officials, and on the following day, with the leaders of all the Visegrad states. The Clinton conversation with Havel is particularly important for illuminating Clinton’s sincere attempts to square the circle, both promising that the Partnership for Peace is “a track that will lead to NATO membership,” and that the U.S. does not intend to “draw another line dividing Europe a few hundred miles to the east.” Clinton candidly describes to Havel the attitudes of NATO members about expansion, that “there is no consensus now among NATO allies to extend formal security guarantees” because they are not at all certain which of the new countries could actually contribute to security, and because “the reaction in Russia could be the reverse of what we want.”

Clinton provides the insurance policy argument for the Partnership, saying “Russia is not a near-term threat … But if historical trends do reassert themselves, we will have organized ourselves so that we could move quickly not only to NATO membership but other security relations that can serve as a deterrent.” Havel matches Clinton’s candor, agreeing with his points, “But given sensitivities of the population here, he [Havel] said, he must emphasize that the PFP is a first step leading to full NATO membership. The President expressed full agreement.”

Document-12-The-President-s-Luncheon-Plenary

Document 12

The President's Luncheon Plenary Meeting with the Heads of State and Government of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic

Jan 12, 1994

Source

William J. Clinton Presidential Library

The day after his discussions with Vaclav Havel and the Czechs, President Clinton meets with the larger group of leaders of the Visegrad countries, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, to inform them about the results of the Brussels discussions on NATO, especially the Partnership for Peace program. The conversation shows the Visegrad leaders’ dissatisfaction with what they consider an insufficient step toward protecting their security, and their active lobbying for full NATO membership and security guarantees against the potential Russian threat. Poland’s Lech Walesa argues that they have to seize the moment of opportunity while Russia is weak, and says he frankly doubts the validity of Russian pledges and assurances. Walesa emphasizes that the Visegrad countries “had a Western culture. Russia did not.” Havel quickly expresses concern that it is not “possible or desirable to isolate Russia.” Polish Foreign Minister Olechowski articulates his worries that the U.S. might be “cutting a deal” with Russia by establishing new spheres of influence. All participants agree that they will join PFP but only if it is the first step to full NATO membership, and Clinton confirms this understanding. Right after this meeting, in his prepared remarks at the press conference in the Prague Castle, Clinton utters the momentous phrase: “now the question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members, but when and how.”

Document-13-Official-informal-No-248-Boris-Bill

Document 13

Official informal No. 248 "Boris-Bill Letter"

Dec 6, 1994

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 07 JUL 2004 200000983

On the eve of Budapest CSCE meeting, Yeltsin sends Clinton a letter addressing Russian view of European security and warning against a rapid NATO expansion. In many ways, the letter is a concise preview of Yeltsin’s “cold peace” speech that would shock Clinton and the media only days later at the Budapest meeting. Here Yeltsin writes that Russians see the institutionalization of OSCE as a major step toward making it a “full-fledged all-European organization with a sound legal basis,” and the main structure dealing with security and peace-keeping in Europe. This organization lists all the aspiring NATO candidates as its members, as well as the United States and Russia on an equal basis. The Russians see OCSE as the only fully integrative post-Cold War structure, which should be developed and strengthened by joint effort. In this scheme of priorities, expansion of NATO would divert energy and attention from the all-European project. Referring to their last conversation during the late September summit in Washington, Yeltsin writes that “we have agreed with you that there would be no surprises, that first we should pass through this stage of partnership, whereas issues of further evolution of NATO should not be decided without due account to the opinion and interests of Russia.” The Russian leader warns that discussions with prospective members and developing timetables “will be interpreted and not only in Russia as the beginning of a new split of Europe.”

Document-14-Record-of-the-Main-Content-of-the

Document 14

Record of the Main Content of the Conversation between I.P. Rybkin and Vice President of the United States A. Gore

Dec 14, 1994

Source

GARF Fond 10100, Opis 2

Gore is in Moscow for the fourth semi-annual meeting of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, the high-level group intended to regularize the bilateral US-Russia relationship and agenda, from space to nuclear weapons to environmental issues. After Yeltsin’s unexpected “cold peace” speech at the Budapest CSCE summit on December 5, blasting NATO expansion as ending the era of cooperation in Europe, Gore is trying to repair relations and explain the state of NATO discussions on enlargement, saying the Russian reaction is based on a misunderstanding and on “the inability on our part to clearly convey to the Russian side what we are talking about.” He repeats during the conversation that “[t]he expansion process will not be rapid. On the contrary, it will be gradual, deliberate, absolutely open and transparent, without surprises. We plan to have full and frank discussions with Russia at every stage of this process.” In response, Rybkin stresses that [t]he assurances you gave regarding NATO expansion are very important,” and implicitly links the process of NATO expansion with ratification of START II.

Document-15-Record-of-Conversation-between-V-P

Document 15

Record of Conversation between V.P. Lukin, First Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Special Adviser to the Secretary of State Jim Collins

Dec 16, 1994

Source

GARF Fond 10100, Opis 2

During the Gore mission to Moscow, Talbott visits the influential former ambassador to Washington, Vladimir Lukin, to clarify the misunderstanding that the U.S. leaders believe led to Yeltsin’s “cold peace” speech. He “emphasized that the decision to expand NATO was not taken at the expense of the relationship with Russia” and that all channels were used to keep Russia informed. Talbot assures Lukin that “the U.S. will adhere to the following principles: 1) no hasty decisions; 2) no surprises; 3) no exceptions” in formulating its NATO policy and calls NATO “a universal structure of European security.” In response, Lukin cautions against rapid expansion, mentioning the need to maintain a “delicate” balance in Europe and the “negative symbolic significance” of NATO’s moving toward the Russian borders. Instead, he proposes to convene an international conference on alternative solutions for European security that would focus on alternative ways to achieve security and cooperation, where the emphasis would be “not be on the timing parameters of NATO expansion, but on specific concerns of Eastern European countries in the sphere of security and ways to eliminate these concerns.”

Document-16-Talking-points-for-Gore-Yeltsin

Document 16

Talking points for Gore/Yeltsin meeting 12/16

Dec 16, 1994

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 07 JUL 2004 200000983

The most important meeting of Vice President Gore’s repair work in Moscow takes place in Boris Yeltsin’s hospital room, where the Russian president is recovering from what was officially described as a “nose operation” while Russian troops are pouring into Chechnya in the early stages of a brutal war. The talking points prepared for Gore explicitly say they “[h]ave only one issue to discuss – President’s wish that we overcome disagreement in Budapest.” Gore has two assurances to make, that Clinton is personally committed to partnership with Yeltsin, and that any NATO expansion would be “gradual, open” and not in 1995 “when you’ll have parliamentary elections.” The dates would subsequently include 1996, when both presidents would face re-election campaigns.

Document-17-December-21-NAC-Guidance-for

Document 17

December 21 NAC: Guidance for Discussion of the Vice President's Visit to Russia.

Dec 21, 1994

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 01 SEP 2010 201002312

This State Department cable provides briefing points to use with allies in describing Vice President Gore’s trip to Moscow, and contains several striking passages on what the Russians said to the Gore group about NATO expansion. The American message is that there was a misunderstanding about how rapid expansion would be, that it would not happen in 1995, that there was no timetable for new members, and so forth. “The Russians said they had interpreted pronouncements since the September Washington summit to mean that the United States and NATO were subordinating, if not abandoning, integration to NATO expansion.” The next sentence reverses the verbs, “abandoning, if not subordinating, integration to NATO expansion.” The cable goes on to report, “Russian leaders and officials … affirmed that NATO enlargement poses difficulties for them because NATO is still perceived in Russia as a military alliance system which is either directed at them, or is maintained and plans to expand pending the failure of Russian democracy and Russian economic reform” – a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Document-18-Information-Memorandum-on-the

Document 18

Information Memorandum on the results of the parliamentary hearing on the subject: "Russian-American relations"

Apr 25, 1995

Source

GARF Fond 10100, Opis 2, Delo 122

On the eve of the 50th anniversary celebrations of Victory in World War II, and Clinton’s coming to Moscow for V-Day, the Duma held hearings on U.S.-Russian relations at a time when the initial high expectations of strategic partnership had started to give way to disillusionment. Although defining cooperation with the United States as a high priority, the deputies express concern that the U.S. is taking advantage of Russian weakness and the changed balance of power in Europe. This summary (written by Chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the Duma and former Russian Ambassador to the United States Vladimir Lukin) labels U.S. willingness to take into account Russian interests in the area of European security as a test of the sincerity of American stated intentions to be a partner with Russia. NATO expansion is seen as the biggest area of disagreement. In the opinion of the hearings’ participants, Lukin writes, “U.S. actions to expand NATO […] directly contradict Russia’s national interests and are not in the interest of strengthening security and stability in Europe.” Ignoring these Russian interests shows the U.S. desire to isolate Russia and prevent its integration into the European space. The second major area of concern is U.S. efforts to weaken Russian influence in the CIS space and prevent its re-integration. The summary notes, “in its policies towards the post-Soviet states, the United States often departs from its declared priority for the principles of democracy and respect for human rights and openly puts its geopolitical goals first.”

Document-19-Summary-report-on-One-on-One-meeting

Document 19

Summary report on One-on-One meeting between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin, May 10, 1995, Kremlin

May 10, 1995

Source

William J. Clinton Presidential Library

Yeltsin is very appreciative that Clinton has come to Moscow to celebrate the 50th anniversary of victory in World War II. This long and wide-ranging conversation is remarkable as a glimpse into the Bill-Boris relationship. Here Yeltsin presents his real cri de coeur on NATO. He sees “nothing but humiliation” for Russia if NATO expands, calling it a “new encirclement.” He argues that what they need is a new European security system, not old blocs. He says emotionally, “for me to agree to the borders of NATO expanding toward those of Russia—that would constitute a betrayal on my part of the Russian people.”

In response, Clinton patiently and clearly explains the U.S. position on NATO expansion—it should be seen in the context of continuing U.S. involvement in European security and an effort to create a fully integrated Europe. He hints at trade-offs if Yeltsin accepts NATO expansion—Russia would be a founding member of the post-COCOM regime, join the G-7, have a special relationship with NATO—but only if Russia “walk[s] through the doors that we open for you.” Yeltsin’s urgent priority is the upcoming elections; he confides in the U.S. president that his “position heading into 1996 elections is not exactly brilliant.” He asks the president to postpone the expansion discussion at least until after the election. Clinton is very straightforward about his own electoral pressures with the Republicans and voters in Wisconsin, Illinois and Ohio pushing for NATO expansion. Yeltsin eventually agrees reluctantly to Clinton’s offer—no NATO decisions until after elections are over, only a study of expansion; but he also consents to no anti-NATO rhetoric from Russia, and that the Russians will sign the PFP before the end of May. Yeltsin needs Clinton’s support to win the 1996 elections and he sees no alternatives other than relying on the American’s assurances.

Document-20-Clinton-Yeltsin-Meeting-June-17-1995

Document 20

Clinton-Yeltsin Meeting, June 17, 1995, Citadel Inn, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Jun 17, 1995

Source

William J. Clinton Presidential Library (released by Department of State)

After the successful Moscow summit, as promised by Yeltsin, Kozyrev indeed signed the PFP documents and Russia officially joined the program. In his next meeting with the U.S. president, Yeltsin wants to return to the subject of NATO to emphasize Russian priorities. He wants a treaty or some special mechanism between NATO and Russia, but most importantly, he sees OSCE “as the principal mechanism to build new security order in Europe. NATO is a factor, too, of course, but NATO should evolve into a political organization.” He sees success in building the new European security order as the most important priority. Clinton does not directly respond to this, but talks about the importance of Russia’s and NATO’s militaries working together and engaging in peacekeeping.

The meeting is extremely laid-back and cordial, and the two leaders find understanding on other difficult issues such as sales of reactors to Iran, North Korea, nuclear testing, START and CFE—although these understandings are mostly on U.S. terms with Clinton proposing and Yeltsin accepting. Yeltsin believes that their personal partnership is crucial to their success: “We’ll build the partnership on the basis of our friendship, yours and mine, and we’ll do so for the sake of world peace.” At one point the Russian leader even reaches out and pats Clinton on his knee.

Document-21-Secretary-s-meeting-with-Russian-FM

Document 21

Secretary's meeting with Russian FM Kozyrev, December 6, 1995

Dec 11, 1995

Source

U.S. Department of State. Date/Case ID: 6 Mar 2003, 200001030

Secretary Christopher and Foreign Minister Kozyrev meet the day after the NAC meeting that discussed implementation of the Bosnia peace agreement and NATO expansion. The discussion centers on developing the NATO-Russia MOU that would specify and formalize NATO-Russian interaction in peacekeeping in Bosnia. Kozyrev suggests no additional paper is needed, they can rely on existing “beyond P4P” documents. On NATO expansion, Kozyrev describes the debate within the Russian government on how to approach NATO as consisting of three schools: one prepared to defend Russian interests through “activism and threats,” one that believes Russia should “ignore NATO,” and one, to which he and President Yeltsin belong, believing in cooperation with NATO even “while argument, dialogue and disagreement over enlargement continues.” Christopher asks Kozyrev to “make clear to President Yeltsin that President Clinton had been faithful to the promises he had made on this subject,” referring to what the two presidents agreed on during the May summit.

Document-22-Excerpt-from-Evgeny-Primakov-Memoir

Document 22

Excerpt from Evgeny Primakov Memoir on NATO Expansion

Jan 1, 1996

Source

Vstrechi na Perekrestkakh (Meetings at the Crossroads), Moscow 2015, pp. 209-212

When Evgeny Primakov becomes foreign minister in January 1996, one of the very first issues he has to deal with is NATO expansion. He requests documents from the Foreign Ministry archive mentioning assurances from Western leaders in 1990-1991 regarding non-expansion of NATO. Having established the documentary record, he often uses it in his memos to government officials, in his speeches, and in conversations. He later publishes excerpts and quotes from them in his 2015 memoir, listing assurances from Baker, Kohl, Major, and Mitterrand and speculates why those countries turned away from their opinions as expressed at the time by their leaders. Strikingly, he concludes that Russians also bear some of the blame for the Central and East Europeans turning away to the West.

Document-23-Russian-Assertions-about-Two-Plus

Document 23

"Russian Assertions about Two-Plus-Four Agreement"

Feb 23, 1996

Source

U.S. Department of State. Case N. F-2008-02356

The Primakov compilation of Western assurances to Gorbachev may have provided the catalyst for this forceful State Department rebuttal sent to all European posts, after Ambassador Collins reported that a “senior Kremlin official” was complaining that NATO expansion would violate the “spirit” of the German unification treaty (just as Yeltsin had argued in his September 15, 1993 letter to Clinton). This cable transmits a memo written by acting Assistant Secretary of State for Europe John Kornblum, together with John Herbst, then at State’s office on the Newly Independent States (NIS) and a future ambassador to Ukraine, characterizing the Russian claims about NATO as “specious” and “unfounded.” The Kornblum-Herbst memo focuses on the Two-Plus-Four negotiations that developed the German unification treaty, arguing that the treaty only applied to the territory of the former East Germany, and provided no precedent for limits on any new NATO members. The memo inaccurately describes one comment by Hans-Dietrich Genscher as “unilateral” and only applying to the former GDR, when in fact State Department and British diplomatic cables at the time (February 1990) show Genscher specifically and repeatedly referring both to the former GDR and to Poland and Hungary as countries that might want to join NATO.

But otherwise, the memo does not address the high-level assurances about Soviet security (such as “not one inch eastward”) provided to Gorbachev by a wide range of Western leaders (James Baker, Helmut Kohl, Douglas Hurd, John Major, and George H.W. Bush, among others). Instead, the memo digresses into a confusing consideration of alleged “legally binding declarations by Eastern European leaders” at the time. Even Vaclav Havel’s famous February 1990 speech to the U.S. Congress calling for all foreign troops to come home could hardly count as legally binding, so this will remain unclear until the underlying “reftels” are declassified.

Document-24-Excerpt-from-Memorandum-of

Document 24

Excerpt from Memorandum of Conversation between U.S. Congressional Delegation and Speaker of Russian Duma Gennady Seleznev

Oct 21, 1996

Source

GARF Fond 10100, opis 15, delo 2

In this excerpt, Senator Sam Nunn responds to Russian concerns about NATO expansion saying that in his view “expansion of NATO must follow, and not be ahead of, the process of expansion of the EU membership,” which corresponds to the Russian vision of a long-term horizon of expansion. He believes that at present Russia is not a threat to Eastern Europe and seconds Havel’s belief that CEE countries want to join NATO for different reasons—shared values and support for democratic development. But he also quotes Napoleon saying that “if you succeed in attracting the opponent to your side, that is already a guarantee of success,” which is what the Russians see happening in the geopolitical sense. Nunn tells Seleznev that the U.S. military is not excited about the prospect of NATO expansion either as it would not increase battle readiness. Importantly, the senator, whom the Russians hold in high regard, thinks that “our two countries should focus their attention on political and psychological aspects connected to the problems of NATO expansion."

Document-25-Excerpts-from-Evgeny-Primakov-Memo

Document 25

Excerpts from Evgeny Primakov Memo to Gennady Seleznev, "Materials on the Subject of NATO for Use in Conversations and Public Statements"

Jan 31, 1997

Source

GARF Fond 10100, opis 14, delo 89, p. 55

Now foreign minister, Evgeny Primakov prepares this memo for the speaker of the Duma in advance of the official announcement of the first round of NATO expansion at the Madrid Summit. The memo begins by stating Russia’s “invariably negative” position toward NATO expansion, especially to the extension of NATO’s military infrastructure to the East. He emphasizes that NATO expansion is not at the moment perceived as a military threat, but as an “establishment of new dividing lines in Europe,” which will inevitably lead to “ a slide into a new confrontation, undermining of trust between Russia and the Western States.” He disagrees with the rationale for expansion and refers to the assurances that were given to Soviet and Russian leaders in 1990-1991 that NATO would not expand “an inch to the East.” Primakov concludes rather forcefully: “We are talking about a decision, consequences of which will define the European configuration for decades in the future. Politicians who are in power today will bear historic responsibility [for that].”

Notes

[1] Warren Christopher, Chances of a Lifetime: A Memoir, p. 280, describes Yeltsin as “stiff, almost robotic” and “emanating heavy alcohol fumes.”

[2] James Goldgeier was the first to point out the contradiction between what Yeltsin heard and what the Americans actually had in mind, in his authoritative account of the U.S. decision to expand NATO, Not Whether But When, p. 59. His even more detailed analysis is in WarOnTheRocks, “Promises Made, Promises Broken: What Yeltsin Was Told About NATO in 1993 and Why It Matters,” July 12, 2016, Link. As Goldgeier wrote, “This was not a promise either, but it cemented for the Russians the narrative that regardless of what the United States claimed in conversations with their leaders, it would maximize the American position without regard for Russian interests.”

[3] Strobe Talbott, The Russia Hand, p. 101.

[4] For extensive detail on how the proponents of NATO expansion won the internal debate, see Goldgeier, Not Whether But When, pp. 57-58 and 62-76. See also the account by one of the leading “policy entrepreneurs,” Ronald D. Asmus, Opening NATO’s Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era (Columbia University Press, 2002).

[5] See Talbott, The Russia Hand, p. 136, for the extended quotation (Talbott was present). The not-yet-declassified Clinton-Yeltsin memcon from September 27 and the others from 1994 are the subject of pending declassification review requests at the Clinton Library.

[6] See Elaine Sciolino, “Yeltsin Says NATO Is Trying to Split Continent Again,” The New York Times, December 6, 1994.

[7] Amembassy Brussels to SecState WashDC, Brussels 02688, “Vice President Gore’s February 25 meeting with Belgian PM Dehaene covers NATO enlargement, Russia, NPT and bilateral issues,” March 6, 1995.

[8] See for example, Kristina Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-Setting: The ‘NATO Enlargement Question’ in the Triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow Diplomacy of 1990-1991,” Journal of Cold War Studies, Vol. 14, No. 4, especially pp. 53-54 on “memory politics.”

[9] See Mary Elise Sarotte, “Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to ‘Bribe the Soviets Out’ and Move NATO In,” International Security, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer 2010), pp. 110-137; and Sarotte, “Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990,” Diplomatic History, Vol. 34, No. 1 (January 2010), pp. 119-140. Sarotte combined primary sources from German, British, French, and Soviet files, together with the James Baker Papers at Princeton and documents released under the U.S. FOIA to the National Security Archive, to show the German unification discussions of NATO were not narrowly limited to the territory of the former East Germany, that highest-level head of state and foreign minister meetings were the main venue rather than the Two-Plus-Four negotiations for talks on the future European security system, and that the American “pre-fab” solution of maintaining NATO set the stage for longer term Russian resentments.

[10] See for example, the fact sheet on NATO’s Web site dated February 2018, listing as Myth 4 that “NATO promised Russia it would not expand after the Cold War,” Link. The fact sheet says “Personal assurances from individual leaders cannot replace Alliance consensus and do not constitute formal NATO agreement” (even when the leader is then-NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner, as in Document 1). Misstating the time of the “alleged promise” as 1989 rather than the actual 1990, the fact sheet concludes with a quote from a 2014 Mikhail Gorbachev interview that NATO expansion “wasn’t brought up in those years.” Omitted is Gorbachev’s additional statement in the same interview, “The decision for the U.S. and its allies to expand NATO into the east was decisively made in 1993. I called this a big mistake from the very beginning. It was definitely a violation of the spirit of the statements and assurances made to us in 1990. With regards to Germany, they were legally enshrined and are being observed,” Link.

[11] For the declassified record of Western assurances to Gorbachev, see Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” National Security Archive Briefing Book No. 613 posted December 12, 2017, Link. For the repeated Genscher quotations, see the first three documents, two from the State Department and one from the British record.

[12] See Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” op. cit., Documents 12-1 and 12-2, memcons between Havel and George H.W. Bush.

[13] See Jane Perlez, “Yeltsin ‘Understands’ Polish Bid for a Role in NATO,” The New York Times, August 26, 1993, p. A6, Link.

[14] The most detailed analysis of this meeting is by James Goldgeier in his article “Promised Made, Promised Broken? What Yeltsin was told about NATO in 1993 and Why It Matters,” Link.

In the News

When Washington Assured Russia NATO Would Not Expand

The American Conservative

December 20, 2017

The US ‘Betrayed’ Russia, but It Is Not ‘News That’s Fit to Print’

The Nation

January 10, 2018

What Gorbachev Did Not Hear

The American Interest

March 12, 2018

Related Links

NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard

December 12, 2017

Summits Book Wins Choice Award “Outstanding Academic Title 2017”

January 4, 2018

The Last Superpower Summits

January 23, 2017

"Рассекречивая тайны внешней политики США: Россия и Америка после окончания холодной войны".

PowerPoint presentation for lecture at Moscow State University (MGU)

by Tom Blanton and Svetlana Savranskaya

March 23, 2018

National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library

The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW

Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000

Fax: 202/994-7005

Contact by email

Join Our Mailing List 'Like' us on Facebook Follow us on Twitter Subscribe to our YouTube Channel

GWU logo​

Charity Navigator Four star charity

support our work - donate

The National Security Archive is committed to digital accessibility. If you experience a barrier that affects your ability to access content on this page, let us know via our Contact form.