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Declassified Case: NW# 78134 Date:
18-25-2025

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with President of Russia (U)

PARTICIPANTS: United States
The President
Bill Burns, U.S. Ambassador to Russia
Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State
Stephen Hadley, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Judy Ansley, Deputy Assistant to the
President and Deputy National Security
Advisor for Regional Affairs
Nik Sorokin, Interpreter

Russia
Vladimir Putin, President of Russia
Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister
Yuri Ushakov, Russian Ambassador to the
United States
Sergey Prikhodko, Foreign Policy Advisor
Igor Neverov, Notetaker
Yuriy Gariyev, Interpreter

DATE, TIME: April 6, 2008, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.
AND PLACE: State Residence of the President of Russia
Bocharov Ruchey, Round Room, Sochi Russia

President Putin: Once again I'd like to welcome you all here. We have been preparing for this meeting and your visit not only for a long time but quite intensively. And this work has been based on proposals from Condi on a strategic framework for our relations. I believe this is a good idea. Of course, certain differences exist between us. We know about them, but it's important to cement the positive achievements. This is the way to go. (X)

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Classified by: John I. Pray, Jr.
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CAUTION: A Memorandum of a Meeting Conversation (MEMCON) is not a verbatim transcript of a discussion. The text in this document records the notes and recollections of NSC policy staff who attended the meeting and memorialized the conversation in written form.

An interpreter facilitated this conversation. Differences in interpretation may result in subtle differences in the exact meaning of phrases..

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Back in 2002 we signed the Moscow Declaration, and if today we are able to submit a document for agreement, that is the right way to go. The document we're working on today sums up the positive achievements of the last few years. At the same time, the agreement reflects our disagreements but does so in an open and transparent manner and reaffirms our willingness to work out these differences. (S)

It is natural that one of the most difficult issues is missile defense. There hasn't been any major progress here, however I do take note that our American partners are frankly and openly looking at our concerns. We realize the most important thing is to ensure transparency and ongoing monitoring of sites in the Czech Republic and Poland. When Condi and Secretary Gates were in Moscow I told them it's very important for us to see what's going on in those sites every day and every moment. I've told that to the Czechs and Poles as well. It's not about any infringement on their sovereignty. It's natural that we see what's going on and whether it's targeted against us. It's that simple. The military shares this view, even the U.S. military. I won't go into details; let the experts go into that. The fundamental issue here is whether our experts have full access to the sites or are just stationed at the embassy and need permission to visit the sites from time to time. And what is also critically important is for our experts on both sides to expand exchanges and deepen their cooperation. I think we should not give up on this idea, especially since there's interest about this by the U.S. military. At the same time, we understand that elements of the third site have not just a regional but a global dimension. (S)

A couple of words on START; there is a section on START. We discussed this with our U.S. colleagues in detail, and I believe there should be a certain understanding of our concerns. It is clear that withdrawing from any kind of controls on nuclear warheads is a dangerous thing to do. (S)

The President: We need to work on that. I'm concerned about transparency on what looks like a nuclear launch and everyone panics. We need to work this out. Let me just say I understand your concerns. (S)

President Putin: I think this has advanced with us, but with the Chinese we have no such agreement. They refuse to agree on more notification of launches. (S)

(The President: Yes, they'll be dangerous in a few years. (S)

President Putin: Mr. Lavrov is working on this with them but there is no document yet. But it should be clear that in our relations with the U.S. the issue is quite clear too. A missile launch from a submarine in Northern Europe will only take six minutes to reach Moscow. (S)

The President: I understand. (U)

President Putin: And we have established a set of response measures -- there's nothing good about it. Within a few minutes our entire nuclear response capability will be in the sky. (S)

The President: I know. (U)

President Putin: And if we talk about launches from areas of other oceans, we have to calculate the trajectory of the missiles. It's a very complex thing. I realize there may be no other opportunity to destroy Bin Laden in Tora Bora, but we need to find a solution. (S)

(The President: Some think it's an important tool, but I understand your concerns about sending the wrong messages. I don't want to put someone in quick response moments where the whole system is to react. That creates the possibility for mistake. I agree with you on that. (S)

President Putin: I believe that in spite of all the difficulties experts can find an agreement, but it's a matter of trust. We also realize that some counterterrorism operations may be launched and the services don't disclose until the last moment, but something needs to be worked out. (S)

The President: I'm worried about the next ones who will come to power. We need to work something out while we have an open relationship so the next ones don't overreact. That's why this agreement is very important. Secondly, we got the 123 agreement; that's very good. (S)

Foreign Minister Lavrov: We don't have it yet; we will. (U)

(The President: I understood it would be signed by the end of April. On CFE, hopefully we can help you on the issue. I fully understand what you said at NATO. Your logic is very clear. We talked in the car about sending the treaty to the Senate and being the first to ratify. I don't want to drop it in the

(middle of a political firestorm with all the Presidential politics. I don't want Russia to become a campaign issue. The relationship is too important. (S)

On missile defense, I think the thing that will intrigue people is transparency and confidence building measures and the idea of exploring a regional missile defense system where Russia will benefit like everyone else. I think once the government becomes convinced the system isn't aimed at you, Russia will see a regional system can deal with some nut in the Middle East who might get a missile with a nuclear weapon. You'll see the system cannot possibly intercept more than one or two missiles. You have a lot more than that. Anyway, that's what confidence is all about. (S)

(I'll say to the press that you don't like the idea of the Czech and Polish sites. It's important people know there's still disagreement on that, but it's important for our people to see we're working through an agreement based on transparency and true confidence building measures. The reason I think it's important is it will cause a future U.S. President to have to work with Russia. We're setting the stage for creating the conditions that will cause people to work in the framework we've set up. There needs to be a path forward for better relations with Russia. I don't want a U.S. President to come along and say we don't need relations with Russia. I think we do, and that's really the reason why this is important and why I appreciate you meeting us. (S)

President Putin: What you've just said is very important. All the preceding decades the world was a safer place because there was a certain balance in place. And the military has come to me now, they tell me the following: "There was the balance and the threat of Mutual Assured Destruction. Now, the Americans are going to build a missile defense umbrella and have the feeling that they are invincible." What should we do? Either create the same umbrella or our own strike systems to neutralize their defenses. Creating a missile defense system is quite expensive. It's simpler and cheaper to create a new strike system which would overwhelm your defenses. And they're already coming to me with proposals that strike me as very barbaric. When I read them I'm horrified. And not building a platform for our cooperation on this front, we're forced with this type of arms race. (S)

(The President: That's why this is so important. You won't be comfortable until we can prove it to you. Our intention is one

or two single launches to counter a North Korean or Iranian or whatever threat emerges. We need to calm your experts down by showing them the truth. That's why transparency is important. My vision is a joint operation. That's what this starts hopefully. (e)

President Putin: Okay. Now I'd like to repeat what I said to Condi and Gates in Moscow on NATO enlargement. It won't be new to you, and I don't expect a response; I just want to say it out loud. I'd like to emphasize accession to NATO of a country like Ukraine will create for the long-term a field of conflict for you and us, long-term confrontation. (S)

The President: Why? (U)

President Putin: Seventeen million Russians live in Ukraine -- a third of the population. Ukraine is a very complex state. This is not a nation built in a natural manner. It's an artificial country created back in Soviet times. Following World War II Ukraine obtained territory from Poland, Romania and Hungary - that's pretty much all of western Ukraine. In the 1920s and 1930s Ukraine obtained territory from Russia -- that's the eastern part of the country. In 1956, the Crimean peninsula was transferred to Ukraine. It's a rather large European country built with a population of 45 million. It's populated by people with very different mindsets. If you go to western Ukraine you'll see villages where the only spoken language is Hungarian and people wear those bonnets. In the east, people are wearing suits, ties and big hats. NATO is perceived by a large part of the Ukrainian population as a hostile organization. (S)

This creates the following problems for Russia. This creates the threat of military bases and new military systems being deployed in the proximity of Russia. It created uncertainties and threats for us. And relying on the anti-NATO forces in Ukraine, Russia would be working on stripping NATO of the possibility of enlarging. Russia would be creating problems there all the time. What for? What is the meaning of Ukrainian membership in NATO? What benefit is there for NATO and the U.S.? There can be only one reason for it and that would be to cement Ukraine's status as in the Western world and that would be the logic. I don't think it's the right logic; I'm trying to comprehend. And given the divergent views of areas of the population on NATO membership, the country could just split apart. I always said there's a certain pro-Western part, and a certain pro-Russia part. Now the power there is held by the pro-Western leaders. As soon as they came to power they split

within themselves. The political activity there fully reflects the attitudes of the population. The issue there is not accession to NATO, but to ensure the self-sufficiency of Ukraine. Also, their economy should be strengthened. (S)

Seventy percent of the population is against NATO. Condi told me in Slovakia and Croatia the population was opposed at first and they're now in favor. What we are against is Ukraine's accession to NATO, but in any case we should wait until a majority of the population is in favor, then let them accede, not vice versa. (S)

Now with Georgia, they believe with the shield of NATO they can restore their territorial integrity. Is this the right way to go, to spread NATO's military umbrella and let them start military operations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia? Guerilla warfare will start there as in Afghanistan. Will NATO go to war there? Of course not. The people in Georgia should be forced to resolve their internal problems by other means. They will do it if forced to. There are ethnic problems there that have lasted for centuries. We're ready to help them restore their territorial integrity, but in ways that make the small ethnic groups feel secure. But if they scare people with the threat of NATO coming there, it won't work. They won't be able to do it anyway. You'll see people coming down from the mountains and shooting in every direction. People dressed like those who danced for you last night. Russia knows this well and has been developing friends there. When war was here 10 years ago Chechens ceased their operations against Russia and came to fight there. They played soccer with the heads of Georgians. One of their leaders, two years ago we eliminated him, but there are many more there. We didn't send them there, but they were all here when the war started. (S)

Georgia should be caused to address this issue by peaceful means. Letting them into NATO will only encourage them to address this by military means; taking up arms. And for Russia there is always the threat of new military bases and weapon systems in the proximity of our borders. This is pretty much our argumentation against this development. I don't expect a reaction. (S)

The President: One of the things I admire about you is you weren't afraid to say it to NATO. That's very admirable. People listened carefully and had no doubt about your position. It was a good performance. (S)

(President Putin: I would add another thing now. I do not rule out that Russia-NATO relations could improve in the future, along with U.S.-Russia relations. (S)

The President: What I'm concerned about is U.S.-Russia relations won't get better than what you and I have. History will show it's very good. I'm not sure about the next group -- not Medvedev, but who follows me. I hope you and I can set the example for how to work through problems. (S)

President Putin: I agree.. What I mean is if there is such improvement then many of the problems we have concern with now will be perceived differently in the future. I think certain issues don't need to be rushed. (S)

Now a couple of words on the peaceful nuclear field. Here we need a framework; an inter-governmental agreement. You wrote in your letter that such an agreement will be signed. (S)

The President: It will get done before your presidency is up. (U)

(President Putin: Maybe on your side you could work with your Congress. (U)

The President: We want to do it now. I think it will be well-received. (S)

Secretary Rice: We needed to resolve an issue with Iran. I think we've resolved it. We were concerned we would have had problems with Congress. (S)

President Putin: Everything is under control there. Sometimes there are instances of cooperation they're trying to pursue in a clandestine manner that's not apparent to the government. We will find them and they will be punished. (S)

The President: Where is this being done? (U)

Secretary Rice: Arak. (U)

(President Putin: There are people willing to earn a bit of money on this, but we identify those cases. (S)

The President: I tell people on Iran, your plan was very ingenious. The leaders say they want civilian nuclear power, we say, "Fine, that's your right." Russia says, "Here's the fuel, therefore you don't need to enrich. If you do it shows you don't want civil nuclear power, you want more." People say, "Can you work with Putin?" I say, "Here's the example. He took the lead on Iran and I followed." It was the right thing to do. (S)

President Putin: That's what I told them in Iran when they said they were building a new nuclear power plant, and they needed fuel. I asked when would they complete the plant. It's a long-term project. We've been building Busher for 15 years. I said, "You won't complete a new plant for 15 years, so why are you building up enrichment now?" (S)

The President: You and I had a conversation about the S-300 and you said you'd wait to see how they behave -- a conditional sale, and I appreciate that. (S)

President Putin: We have a contract with them signed four years ago but not being implemented. (S)

The President: I appreciate that. They're nutty. (S)

President Putin: They're quite nuts. (S)

The President: Hopefully rational people will start showing up. You talk to them, we don't. We hope to have more rational people show up; we'd like to have a better relationship. (S)

2007, Putin's first visit to Iran

President Putin: What surprised me when I was there, they may be crazy in their ideology but they're intellectuals. They are educated in university, come from an academic environment -- including Amadinejad, his entourage, the Speaker of parliament. They are not primitive people. It was quite a surprise to me. (S)

The President: (To Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Lavrov) Do you have the language done on this thing yet? You two go and work on it. (U)

Secretary Rice: We're very close. (To Foreign Minister Lavrov) I have a proposal for you. (U)

The President: Will you be in the meeting with Medvedev? (U)

President Putin: No, I want you to talk to him personally. (U)

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The President: I won't need much time. (U)

Secretary Rice: So we use "assuage" and remove the brackets on
"cooperation." (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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