

March 21, 1990

Minutes of a Conversation of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki with US President George Bush

Citation:

"Minutes of a Conversation of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki with US President George Bush", March 21, 1990, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Personal papers of Ryszard Wojtkowski. Contributed by Tomasz Kozłowski and translated by Jerzy Giebułtowski. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/300000>

Summary:

Over two days of meetings, Bush and Mazowiecki discuss German reunification, the future of relations with the Soviet Union/Russia, and NATO.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Original Language:

Polish

Contents:

Original Scan
Translation - English

Strictly classified

Minutes of a conversation of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki with US President George Bush

Part I (Washington, 21 March 1990)

After the hosts' welcome, the Prime Minister thanked for a nice and open reception. "In recent months, history has accelerated in Europe", he said, "this pace of events has surprised everyone".

"Yes, it is amazing", the President said, "I have the intelligence services at my disposal, hundreds of officials, but no one could predict it.

As far as Poland is concerned, we had hopes. But predict? No!"

"The most pressing problem," the Prime Minister continued, is the German reunification. I would like to make it clear that reconciliation with Germany is a great historic task for us.

I am one of those people who have always acted in this direction. Let us do that. We will soon be a neighbor of a united Germany. I am talking about this because we believe that we are discussing things in a climate of historical resentment, but we are not looking into the future.

I would like to expand the word "reconciliation" geographically. We also want reconciliation with the Russian people. As Prime Minister, I have set myself the task of getting the Russians to understand that a non-communist government can also be the guarantor of normal relations. This is one of the essential elements of our policy - reconciliation with Germany and with the Russians. Poland can only play its role in Europe in such conditions.

Coming back to Germany - thank you for your statement during the Kohl visit, which echoed in Poland. We want to be present at these talks for many reasons. Among other things, because public opinion feels sensitive that there should be no deals above our heads. Memories of Yalta!"

"I understand this," said President Bush, "the same suspicion appeared after Kohl's visit. I was asked about a secret Bush-Kohl agreement."

"It is important for us," Prime Minister Mazowiecki continued, that the Polish western border should not be a gift from Stalin. To be guaranteed by the four powers, not just one.

We want to obtain a treaty-based recognition of this border. Of course, the declarations by the Bundestag and of the People's Chamber are important. We welcome this. But a declaration is a declaration, and a treaty has the force of international law.

We consider it possible to achieve this during the negotiations, so that both governments will initial it after the elections in the GDR and sign it after the reunification. Why just before? We are concerned that after reunification these talks will be held from a position of strength.

I had a number of conversations with Chancellor Kohl in Poland. I am convinced that his pursuit of reconciliation is sincere. But personally, I was very disappointed with his recent meanderings."

"There is a small difference between us," said President Bush, we don't have different positions regarding the inviolability of borders. But I am convinced that Kohl understands the need to consolidate the existing borders. I had many profound conversations with him about this. I do not think that a united Germany would be less prepared to negotiate in the future. In his efforts to unite Kohl is not interested in finding the guarantees you desire. This is not due to a lack of sense of gravity. I am convinced that the impression that this is dragging on in this matter is due to internal problems.

I sought positive elements in my notes - President Bush searched for a typed A-6 flash cards for a while, until he found a sentence underlined in red - and I found in his draft Bundestag declaration the words "Now and in the future".

What I am about to say now, Bush continued, please treat it as confidential. What would you say if we started working in secret on the text of the treaty? We are not naive. We helped Kohl in the process of reunification and would not have done so if

there were a misunderstanding between us about the borders."

"I am also convinced that this is not a ploy," Prime Minister T. Mazowiecki replied - but in recent times his words raised some doubts about the degree of submission to his own right. I do not accept the argument that I cannot say because I have domestic problems - because their Constitution is so constructed that there are still some elections there".

"The elections in the GDR," said Bush, we regard as a great Kohl's victory. Will this improve or make the treaty situation of Poland worse?

"It should improve - the Prime Minister said - because he has achieved victory and there should be no reasons for fear. But I am afraid that he will now bet on such a scenario for German unification which will use Article 23 of the Constitution. I believe that the powers should aim to have Germany remove this article from the Constitution in the future. Like Japan, the Constitution states that it will not be militarized - it is Germany that should give up its territorial claims."

"Does this not require a decision by a united Germany?", Bush asked"

"Yes, Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki continued - I do not evade talks, including confidential ones, about this treaty. My response is positive. But the point is to get the treaty finalized. What is the justification for not initialing this before reunification?"

"Because there's no partner! Bush explained".

"The point is not to start the entire discussion again. Sign after but initial before," Prime Minister Mazowiecki continued.

"Kohl proposes," said Bush, "that there should be a government statement and a signing after reunification."

"OK," said T. Mazowiecki - but let us not start this discussion again then."

"Consider," said G. Bush - starting talks.

I would like you to understand our position well. We have very good relations with Germany. I believe that Kohl can be very dependable. I have seen that he had never yielded to the pressure of the left regarding the storage of weapons on his territory. You can trust him. We are not building our foreign policy on our intuitions. But we don't have any grounds for mistrust.

Kohl is sensitive - how long will Germany be able to prostrate and endure humiliation?

On the other hand, we understand the position of Poland. From my visit in your country, I remember that the Solidarity and the communists were unified on this issue. I was also involved in this war. These emotions are not alien to me."

"As regards reunification," said T. Mazowiecki - "we do not share the point of view of neutrality. I believe that it will be better for Germany to remain within the structures."

"Our position is as follows," said Bush, united Germany should be a NATO member. I need to "sell" Gorbachev that NATO is not against the USSR. I see the need for continued presence of US troops in Europe. American mothers write to me to take their boys back to the United States. That would be short-sighted. I repeat - I see the need for continuity of this presence. This is also in the interest of Poland. The US can be a stabilizing factor in Europe. Gorbachev wants to trade - we pull out, they pull out. But that is not what it is about."

"I understand that," said T. Mazowiecki - but you need to give something to Gorbachev, because otherwise he will not survive."

"Yes," said G. Bush - and both you and we want him to survive?"

Yes, the Prime Minister replied, that is both armies must remain there. It is strange, but history knows such strange entities as West Berlin.

"Perhaps you are a better judge of the situation than me," said President Bush, "but his troops in Europe are not welcome." When he pulls them out of Czechoslovakia, there is no housing, no work for them. It is not clear what is happening in the USSR, or what kind of problems they are facing. I would like Gorbachev to restrain the course of events. It would be wrong if something forced his armies to remain in country A or B. Some parity is needed."

"195,000 each", T. Mazowiecki added.

"No - stated G. Bush - "I want his troops to withdraw, and our troops to remain as long as Europe wants them."

At this point, due to timeout, the call was interrupted. As the interlocutors agreed that some subjects were only frozen, it was agreed that another meeting would be set, not originally scheduled in the program.

(Part II, Washington, 22 March 1990)

After sharing the pleasant memories of the evening in the White House, President G. Bush said: "We talked yesterday about general security conditions. How do you see the general system of collective European security after German reunification?"

"I spoke yesterday," said Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, "in the presence of Gen. Scowcroft, about the institution we called the Council for European Cooperation, which would cover all the OSCE countries. History has taken on such a great momentum that we need this type of institution. If it were to be established before Helsinki, that would be very good. But we certainly should not leave Helsinki without it.

From the Polish point of view, it is essential that we found ourselves between a uniting Germany and the USSR, where difficult-to-judge processes are taking place. I would like US policy to see a role for Poland in this configuration. I understand that in American politics Poland cannot take place either of Russia or of Germany. But maybe it could hold an important place. This is important for Central Europe. It could be a stabilizing factor. Given our will to establish relations with Germany and Russia, Poland can be a stabilizing factor for democratic change in Europe. The United States should have an understanding of Poland's role so perceived."

"Will you allow" - asked President Bush - "that I tell the press that Poland is playing a stabilizing role that it is building democracy? That looking into the future we see Poland as a country playing a major role in Europe.

I would like to assure you that I will try to shape my relations with the USSR so as not to complicate the situation in Poland. We will be talking with Gorbachev to reduce tensions. It would have a bad impact on the situation in Poland. I think that Gorbachev is also aware of this. I have spoken to him several times over the telephone, most recently on Lithuania."

"We want," said Prime Minister T. Mazowiecki - "to build good relations with them, but we want to keep them as straight as possible at the same time.

I want you, Mr. President, to understand my position with regard to the Soviet troops. We want them to leave Poland. Not ostentatiously, but pragmatically. I believe that if reduce the number to 195,000, it would be possible."

"I believe" - the President added - "that all the Soviet troops should leave. But we are not pressing because they don't know what to do with their soldiers. We do not want to combine this with the problem of the 195,000. I am not pressing you to change your position, but I would like you to understand that if the Soviet troops withdraw and we remain are (and we will), this will not be a threat to anyone."

"I have made a public statement" - said the Prime Minister - "that we will start talks about this. But I don't want to turn it into an instrument of pressure on Gorbachev."

"I understand," said President Bush, "I will not be talking about this, so that the press would not be looking for differences between us."

At this point, the President spent a few minutes on digressions about kale. That day, the issue of this vegetable had excited the press far more than political topics.

"The press is searching for differences regarding the German question," Prime Minister T. Mazowiecki returned to the main thread. You understand that this is important to us and that this must be solved by a treaty. We want this to happen before reunification. We want you to be our advocate with Kohl. So that he does not see this great problem, which I think he exaggerates. I see no difficulty for him to make a statement before reunification, and I think I will be able to convince him."

"I agree with you," said President Bush, "but there is no complete clarity between us. A treaty with two governments, one of which will not exist? Why? What I can do is tell

the press that I will be talking to Kohl about this. I will have nothing against this if you tell the press that he notify me of his position."

"We are not the only ones who are concerned about the future of Europe," said the Prime Minister.

"And not only in the East," President Bush added. One of those most concerned is Mitterand. It's strange, Mitterand had always been close to Kohl. Now this very wise politician has similar concerns as you. You are not isolated. Thatcher also has similar concerns."

"Also Andreotti, who recently visited this place," said the Prime Minister."

"Yes - the President wondered - how long will Germany suffer for what had happened 50 years ago. Kohl says that this fascism was evil, not we, i.e., modern Germans."

"This is not a problem of repentance," said the Prime Minister, "it is a problem of credibility that Germany had changed. I spoke frankly with Kohl during his stay in Warsaw. On the last day I said to him: Don't give up over the issue that concerns us, don't let the SPD upstage you. For the Polish ear, it sounds different when we hear that now and, in the future, we will advocate the durability of the border, and quite differently, that we cannot speak now on behalf of a united Germany, and then we will see what happens."

"But the Lord made him change his position", the President commented.

"But not without difficulty," the Prime Minister replied.

"I understand that," G. Bush said - but I also understand Kohl. People look at Germany not from today's perspective, but through history.

I will say in private to you that in Ottawa Genscher told the Italian Foreign Minister: there's no room for you at the table! This was a false signal to Germany's friends. I think Kohl is not playing a game, that he is honest."

"West Germany" - the Prime Minister said - "has undergone a process of democratization and East Germany - no! All their phraseology was very superficial. From one totalitarianism, they moved to another. I am afraid of the forces that would strengthen in the Federal Republic of Germany. I have a high confidence in the Federal Republic of Germany, not in the GDR. This is the case despite the fact that I have many personal friends in the GDR, but they were isolated. When they wanted to celebrate the victims of Auschwitz, they were told that this was a matter that had been dealt with at the level of the government. There has been no change."

"Are you afraid of the GDR," President Bush asked, "as far as borders are concerned? The Republicans? The revived ambitions regarding Polish territory?"

"I don't think", the Prime Minister said, "that we are in any danger now. But I don't want to leave behind something to which one could go back and question [later]."

"In the 2+4 process, Poland will be present as Polish matters will be discussed," said President Bush, "but I have a poor knowledge of the conference itself. Such specific problems such as West Berlin, flights, etc. will be discussed, but the conference will not cover the entire European situation. There is no mandate for this. We look very closely at this as a tool for Europe's salvation."

The conversation ended. After a short, social conversation, the two speakers said goodbye.

The meeting on 21 and 22 March 1990 took place in the Oval Office. Present recorders: US side Security Advisor, Gen. Scowcroft, Polish side: Cabinet Director, Wojtkowski. Translated by: Litwiński, and on the US side: on 21 March - Litwiński, on 22 March - Perzanowski.

81/W/rW