

**March 26, 1993**

**Memorandum of Conversation: Meeting with  
German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, March 26, 1993,  
10:40 - 11:55 am**

**Citation:**

"Memorandum of Conversation: Meeting with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, March 26, 1993, 10:40 - 11:55 am", March 26, 1993, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Case Number 2015-0776-M, Clinton Presidential Library & Museum, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57651>.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/300249>

**Summary:**

Clinton and Kohl discuss German-American relations, the situation in Russia, the Russo-Japanese territorial dispute, and other international issues.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

1937

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

**DECLASSIFIED  
PER E.O. 13526**2015-0776-M (1.05)  
7/31/2018 KBH

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
 Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for  
 National Security Affairs  
 Jenonne Walker, Senior Director for Europe,  
 NSC, Notetaker  
 Gisela Marcuse, Interpreter

Chancellor Helmut Kohl  
 Dr. Peter Hartmann, Director-General for  
 Foreign Affairs, Security Policy and  
 Economic Cooperation  
 Interpreter

DATE, TIME March 26, 1993 10:40 - 11:55 am  
 AND PLACE: Oval Office

Chancellor Kohl began the private Oval Office session by encouraging the President not to pay too much attention to negative press treatment. ("You've been reading in the press for many years that I'm about to be toppled, and I'm still in power.") and comparing his meeting with the President with the Washington spring weather. No matter how many problems Germany and America face, he said, with their economies, Russia, and Bosnia, there are reasons to be optimistic. If the two do not make serious mistakes, chances of success are good. (C)

The Chancellor then offered a private view of Germany and Europe, noting that he has been in the forefront of good US-European relations and indeed sometimes is considered the American agent in Germany. Today, he said, good US-German relations are even more important than they had been thirty years ago when the division of Germany and the terrible fear of war had made things psychologically easier. People now have a different fear, and are asking whether their leaders can cope with new challenges or are drifting "like wood on the Potomac". This makes new German-American ties necessary. The military-security tie will remain important. American troops in Germany will be reduced, but so long as the numbers are sufficient to prove that "the Americans are still there," that is not a problem. Germany too is reducing its forces. It also will have to face new kinds of responsibilities in NATO and the UN. That is why Germany's Constitution will be amended, the Chancellor said, noting that "you may have heard of the coup I carried off in the last few days" to keep German crews with AWACS when enforcement of the no fly zone over Bosnia begins. He continued, however, that many

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Declassify on: OADR

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

2

Germans have "turned lazy". German unity means that the country must assume greater international responsibilities. (C)

Turning specifically to US-German relations, the Chancellor asked for the President's personal support for closer scientific and cultural cooperation, and specifically for the US-German Academic Council. The Chancellor then continued with personal memories of World War II and early post-war years. He had been 15 years old when the war ended, the child of a not very prosperous Catholic family. His parents had opposed Hitler, and his 19 year old brother had been killed in the war. He had been active in politics since his school days and had first run for office in 1949, when he was 19 years old. (U)

So, he continued, this is Helmut Kohl speaking to you, who wants friendly relations with the President of the United States because of an emotional stake in German-American relations. He remembered the devastation of the early post-war years when he was almost starving, and early each morning American soldiers drove up to the schools with food. He and his wife met in a dancing class in school, when Kohl was wearing a suit donated by American Quaker aid and his future wife was wearing a dress donated by another American organization. The Kohls never had forgotten that, the Chancellor said, and a whole generation of Germans had a similar experience. (U)

Once when meeting Ronald Reagan, Kohl had suggested that each of them write on a piece of paper who he believed had been the greatest American president of this century. When they exchanged papers, they discovered that each had written Harry S Truman. Kohl had chosen Truman because of the Marshall Plan, which he described as important morally as materially. Germans at the time saw it as help for self help, at a time when no one wanted to help Germany because of the horrible crimes of the Nazis. That, said the Chancellor, is what we now need to do for Russia. (C)

The President thanked Chancellor Kohl for sharing his personal experiences, and noted that when he had been a student in England he had visited Germany as often as possible. At the time, he had been "almost conversational" in German and still could understand a lot. Truman had been the dominant political figure of his childhood, the President continued, in part because he came from just across the Arkansas state line in Missouri. (U)

Chancellor Kohl then asked how far by airplane Truman's house is from Washington, and suggested that on his next visit to the US he and the American President should visit it together. (U)

"I would love to do it", The President replied. (U)

The Chancellor then suggested that he and the President decide which subjects would be addressed in the private Oval Office meeting and which with the larger group, suggesting that he and the President concentrate on Russia and save the European Community and GATT for discussion with the larger group. (C)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

On Russia, the Chancellor said he had the impression that Yeltsin will win the game this time. The Chancellor expressed gratitude for the things President Clinton is doing to help Yeltsin and offered to make that point to the press later. Chancellor Kohl expressed the "simple philosophy" that if we do not assist Yeltsin then he has no chance. If we do assist him he has a chance, but his survival is not certain. If he is toppled then things will be much worse and more expensive for the West, which would have to re-arm. Two days earlier the Chancellor had spoken with the Czech Prime Minister, then that evening with the Prime Minister of Poland. Both are very concerned about the situation in Russia because the whole region could change again. Kohl was putting his stake on Yeltsin even if that involves a risk. There are situations in politics when one must stand by a person. (C)

The Chancellor disagreed with Kissinger's warning against backing Yeltsin. He said he would like to remind Kissinger that he had written a famous book on Metternich, and that his position now on Yeltsin is a "Metternich" reply, when what is needed is a "Truman" reply. If we do this together and fail, he continued, we can stand up and say that at least we tried. And if we try together to come to grips with what is happening and see what can be done, it won't be very expensive. For example, he had told a group of US Senators this morning that if 30 universities in the US, UK, and Germany developed relations with 30 universities in Russia, a program of exchanges for students and teachers would not cost much and would amount to "thirty embassies" for the West in Russia. The Russians are proud people, and even those who were not communists felt themselves to be part of a superpower. They now are down and demoralized. If they feel that nobody is paying attention to their plight, there will be a very negative effect. Thus, he said, he fully supported President Clinton's statements of the past few days. (C)

Kohl recounted the story of a member of Gorbachev's staff about the scene outside the White House in Moscow during the attempted coup in August 1992, and the enormous effect on the Russian soldiers gathered there when George Bush's voice was broadcast calling for the release of Gorbachev, and Kohl's voice was broadcast too. The things Germany and the US now want to do vis a vis Russia can have a clear impact. (C)

Perhaps German and American experts should meet to try to harmonize our assistance to Russia, he continued, and divide up the work that needs to be done. But Germany has reached the maximum of what it can do. 53% of the assistance to Russia so far has come from Germany (much of it to get former Soviet troops out of eastern Germany). Nevertheless, we must do something. (C)

Senator Nunn had told the Chancellor earlier that morning that perhaps some NATO infrastructure funds could be used. The Chancellor thought the best improvement in NATO's security would come from investing in democracy and market structures in Russia. (C)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

4

We also should support multilateral cooperation, the Chancellor continued. The G-7 meeting last year in Munich had been a disappointment because some countries "did not do a lot". Kohl had discussed this with Miyazawa in Tokyo, saying we cannot accept the present situation and Japan must show flexibility on the northern islands if it is to "act like a superpower". (S)

The President agreed that Russia cannot return the islands at this point; it would be too humiliating. (S)

The Chancellor agreed, saying Germany's attitude in 1988 and '89 had been different. Gorbachev had been in trouble economically, and Germany had assisted him, without bargaining over eastern Germany. The night the Berlin wall came down Kohl had been in Berlin. Gorbachev telephoned to ask if things were getting out of control, as they had in 1953. Today, the Chancellor said, we know that the KGB and the GDR's State Security Service had been willing to let the tanks out. That would have been a repeat of 1953. Kohl had given Gorbachev his word that things were not getting out of control. That, Kohl believed, had been the decisive moment. Now we must tell Japan that its position cannot be tolerated. (S)

The President noted that the Japanese have shown some movement in the last few days. He should have a talk with Miyazawa, he said, but had wanted to see the Chancellor first. (S)

The Chancellor encouraged him to do so, saying it is easier to get the Japanese to act multilaterally. He advised the President to ask Vice President Gore how often the Japanese have promised money to protect the rain forest, and how little they actually have given. A multilateral approach is easier, and also face saving for Tokyo. (S)

The President said that when Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev was here he said he wanted the West to provide people at all levels for extended periods, not just going to Russia to make speeches and attend seminars. They could work on a technical level without Russia's giving away its political integrity. (S)

The main thing about his own forthcoming meeting with Yeltsin, the President continued, was that after that he could announce some things the US could do. The US has not done enough and should do more. The President said he had talked to Miyazawa, Mitterrand, and Mulroney about having the G-7 announce some specific things that together might look like a lot, even though no one alone can do what Germany already has done. (S)

Then, he continued, there should be a multilateral initiative, perhaps a Foreign and Finance Ministers meeting in Tokyo about April 14, ten days before the Russian referendum. But all G-7 leaders would have to agree before the Tokyo meeting what will come out of it and how to announce it. These things together could have a big impact on Yeltsin's fortunes. (S)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

5

There had been problems in America's delivery of the aid it had promised and then in reaching the intended recipients in Russia. There also were problems between Russia and the World Bank and IMF and about debt rescheduling. (C)

The Chancellor said he now thought we are going to manage this. His Sherpa was with him in Washington, and perhaps some American official could go to Bonn, without waiting for April 14. We must do it before that. The Chancellor then noted his desire for close cooperation with the President, not just on this issue but across the board. Peter Hartmann and his predecessor had often been in Washington, and the Chancellor and President could talk on the telephone every few days, even if there were no urgent problems. It is very important, he continued, that the President take the leadership on Russia, for all the psychological reasons the two had discussed earlier. That will be important in Poland, the Czech and Slovak republics, and even affect the former Yugoslavia. (C)

Next, the Chancellor said he wanted to ask "a very primitive question:" do Americans still care about "us", or only about their own budget problems, health reform, etc? Aid to Russia may not be popular but it was important to try to make it popular. He referred again to Truman, saying that the Marshall Plan had not been popular with the American public. We must not, he said, allow the feeling to develop in Russia that they are victims. (C)

It is important that the President personally lead on this, the Chancellor said; there must be a face to politics. The Chancellor believed he had done this with Russia. German-Soviet relations had been very bad. Now the attitude in Russia has changed, and people feel "this guy has not written us off". In Western Europe people care too much about their own difficulties. That is the way it was in 1919 and 1938. Money counts, but so does psychology, and that must be tied to people. (C)

The President commented that he was having a group of Senators to dinner that evening, and had hosted members of the House of Representatives last night. All know the risk, but all are willing to take it. We have to, he said; we have no choice. It is far better to try and fail. If we do this right, then even if Yeltsin does not survive we will increase the chance of keeping democracy alive in Russia. The door will remain open to the West because we are involved. Even if Russians are mad at Yeltsin, they will know we are involved. (C)

The Chancellor said that he agreed completely. He had told Mitterrand that even if we fail, those who follow Yeltsin will have to live in the world with America, France, and Germany. Even the people in Beijing know that the world has changed. If it would be useful to the President, he said, the two of them could make that point very clear at their press conference. (C)

The President responded that the most important thing that can come out is that we are together in support of Yeltsin, not as a person but as the embodiment of our values. At the press

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

6

conference, they should say what Germany already has done for Russia and mention the Marshall Plan. Where, he asked, would America be today without a strong Europe? (S)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~~~CONFIDENTIAL~~