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Gore and US Foreign Policy: Conversation with Leon Fuerth

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Summary:

The document records a conversation with Leon Fuerth, Vice President Gore's National Security Adviser, discussing key issues in US foreign policy around March 2000. Topics included concerns about Northern Ireland, Russia's power under Putin, and tensions in Montenegro, China. Fuerth also expressed worries about campaign issues, particularly related to Gore's foreign policy priorities and his own potential future role as National Security Adviser.

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From: Ambassador
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cc: [...]

Minister

GORE AND US FOREIGN POLICY: CONVERSATION WITH LEON FUERTH

1. Fuerth, the Vice President's National Security Adviser, came to lunch today.

Northern Ireland

2. Fuerth was unaware of the Irish-American event in New York tomorrow and was not pleased to hear about it first from me. He called his office from the lunch table and asked to be briefed on what questions Gore was likely to face and the proposed answers. I went through the areas of concern to us. Fuerth appeared well-informed and claimed that Gore was also well-briefed on Northern Ireland matters. He said he would let me know if he needed further briefing. With his agreement, I have faxed him a copy of Peter Mandelson's speech last week. Fuerth appeared sound on the main issues.

Russia/NMD

3. We discussed Putin. He agreed that the reformer vs. non-reformer labels had outlived their usefulness in the analysis of Russian politicians. Fuerth thought Putin's principal objective would be the resurrection of Russian power. If we were looking for a historical model, Peter the Great was as good as anyone. He thought the Russians would decide after 26 March that it would be in their interest to do an NMD deal with this Administration. There was, of course, a risk that a Republican president might tear up what had been agreed. But this should be a lesser danger for the Russians than allowing a Republican administration to start with a blank sheet of paper. Fuerth expected the Russians to negotiate in their typical hardball style. But their interest in securing a Start III deal at levels they could afford would be a huge incentive to a negotiated outcome.

Montenegro

4. Fuerth said he had two worries. The first was Montenegro and the risk of Milosevic moving against Djukanovic. I said that we shared the concern, but for most of the allies, Montenegro seemed to fall into the too difficult box. Fuerth said that, in inter-agency discussion, his advice was to retaliate against any Milosevic move against Montenegro by "putting out the lights in Serbia" for the next three years. This could be done in one night and would be over before anyone had a chance to protest. We should have done this much earlier in the Kosovo campaign. He had had his heart attack after a day arguing for it. He agreed that it would be difficult to get inter-agency support for this option. I thought it fanciful that the allies would line up behind this, and God knew what the Russians would do. Fuerth did not demur.

Bosnia

5. I said that one way of restraining Milosevic would be to move against Karadzic.

China

6. Fuerth's other worry was China: getting the WTO agreement and Permanent Trading Nation status through Congress. I asked him whether he favored trying sooner or later to push these through on the Hill. The sooner the better, was the reply. The longer things were left, the more likely the Chinese would do or say something which inflamed Congressional opinion. I told Fuerth that Sweeney, head of the AFL-CIO, had told me at the end of last year that he did not want the President to go down to defeat and that there ought to be a way of working this which allowed Congress regularly to review Chinese performance. Fuerth noted this with interest and said that this was what the administration was working on.

Gore

7. I asked Fuerth about Gore's foreign policy priorities. He referred me to a speech on

12 January at the UN (which I have not read) that set out a mixture of new global themes alongside the traditional foreign policy concerns. Fuerth expected Gore to make a major foreign policy speech once Bradley had been driven out of the primary race. I asked Fuerth whether Gore had travel plans for the summer. Fuerth said that nothing was scheduled and that, unlike, say, Bush, the Vice President could not go abroad simply as a Presidential candidate. He would have to have a reason deriving from his office as Vice President. Otherwise, foreign travel would be prohibitively expensive. I got the impression from Fuerth that he did not see much benefit in the Vice President traveling outside the United States, given his known expertise in foreign policy.

8. We did not talk much about the campaign although Fuerth, like just about everybody else, expected Gore to knock out Bradley on 7 March. But Fuerth expressed himself very worried about the guilty verdict for Maria Hsia in the campaign finance trial. He doubted that Bradley would try to make use of the video footage showing Gore and Hsia at the Buddhist temple. But the Republicans would surely use it in the general election.

Fuerth

9. I asked Fuerth whether he expected to be Gore's National Security Adviser. After a long hesitation, Fuerth said he would wait and see what was offered to him. But he had, in a sense, been preparing for this job for the last seven years. He was all too aware of its crushing responsibility and, when thinking about it, always worried that he would make the right judgments. My impression from this exchange was that he really wanted the job, but wondered whether he was up to it and whether he would be offered it.

[handwritten signature] *C.R. Meyer*
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